

Department of History and Civilization

Between Two Wars
Janina and Zygmunt Bauman's
Analyses of the Contemporary
Human Condition

PETER WAGNER and BO STRÅTH (eds)

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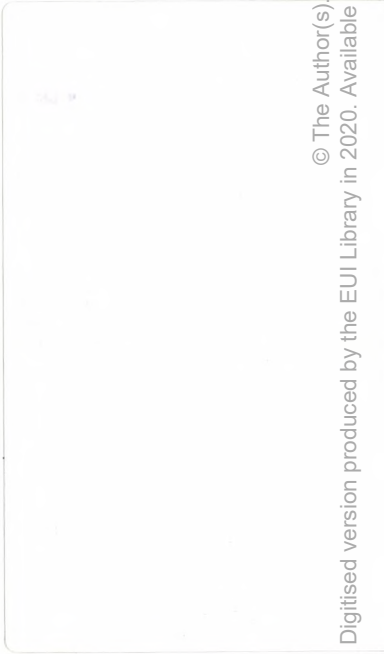
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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

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Edited by
PETER WAGNER and BO STRÅTH



BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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Between Two Wars

**Janina and Zygmunt Bauman's Analyses of the
Contemporary Human Condition**

Edited by Peter Wagner and Bo Stråth

The analyses by Janina and Zygmunt Bauman were presented on 9 and 10 October 2002 in seminars at the European University Institute within the framework of the research programme 'The Modernity of Europe – towards a comparative–historical and politico–philosophical re–assessment', directed by Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner. Further to Arfon Rees' comment on Janina Bauman, we add a short paper by Peter Wagner that also addresses the contemporary condition of modernity and was presented at the conference 'Rethinking Modernity. Turning Points of History and World Order', organized by the Russian Parliament and Moscow State University in Moscow on 25–28 October 2002. In many respects, this paper can be read as a comment on Zygmunt Bauman's analysis.

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Moral Choices in the Age of Gas Chambers

Janina Bauman (With an Introduction by Arfon Rees)

Introduction

Arfon Rees

In the summer of 1942 about 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. When reports of mass murder at the concentration camp leaked back to the Warsaw ghetto a group of mostly young people formed the Jewish Fighting Organisation (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa or ZOB). It was led by Mordecai Anielewicz, then 23 years of age. It issued a proclamation calling on the Jewish people to resist going to the railway cars. In January 1943 Warsaw ghetto fighters, using weapons smuggled into the ghetto, fired upon German troops as they tried to round up other inhabitants for deportation. After a few days the troops retreated. On 19 April 1943 the Warsaw ghetto uprising began after German troops and police entered the ghetto to deport its surviving inhabitants. Seven hundred and fifty fighters fought the heavily armed and well-trained Germans. The ghetto fighters held out until 16 May 1943 when the revolt ended. Of the more than 56,000 Jews captured about 7,000 were shot and the remainder were deported.

The ethical question of whether it is right to take up arms in this case seems clear cut. The right of a community to defend itself in such circumstances must be absolute. Faced with the likelihood of annihilation the resort to arms seems not only tactically justified but is driven by a moral imperative to act. The ultimate failure of the rising does not compromise that moral justification for revolt. But alongside the heroic example provided by Mordecai Anielewicz and other ghetto fighters there were other representatives of the Jewish ghetto, appointed by the Nazi authorities, who were in a much more ambivalent and compromised position. The study of the actions of two of those leaders, Adam Czerniakow and Chaim Rumkowski, respectively the leaders of the Jewish councils (Judenrat) in the Warsaw and Łódź ghettos, is the subject of Janina Bauman's paper.

The experience of the Jewish ghettos was somewhat different to that of other genocides. The Jewish community was not deprived of its leaders, it was not socially decapitated. Rather the leaders of the community were co-opted by the Nazi authorities as intermediaries. The position of the ghettos was also suspended in a certain ambiguity. Its leaders and its members could not foresee what was to transpire. There was no one irrevocable decision to exterminate the ghetto's inhabitants. Rather it was a series of decisions, salami style, whereby the evacuation of the ghetto's inhabitants to the camps was authorised. In this situation a tactic of negotiating and accommodation with the Nazi authorities was

not entirely unreasonable. At each stage, until the very end when it was too late, there was always something to be negotiated. The policy of "ethnic cleansing" or ethnic isolation was then transformed into a policy of genocide.

Czerniakow and Rumkowski both calculated that open resistance and defiance were either impossible or futile, and would bring retaliatory action that would bring large loss of life and would hasten the liquidation of the ghettos and the mass transfer of people to the camps. The circumstances, which confronted the leaders and members of the ghetto allowed of only a limited number of possible strategies. Firstly, the hope that the oppressor could be persuaded to relent, that it would be possible to find some common ground of humanity; some appeal to compassion, that might bring some alleviation of the situation. Secondly, the belief that it was possible to engage in bargaining and negotiations, to seek concessions on the way policy was administered and thus to delay its implementation. Thirdly, the hope that it was possible to appeal to the oppressor's own sense of self-interest to preserve the ghetto, in the case of Łódź through the economic efficiency of the ghetto's workshops.

Failing these three possibilities was the hope of outside intervention. In part hope was vested in the advancing Red Army. But this was a two edged sword; how would the Soviets treat those who had collaborated with the Nazis? In the end the halting of the Soviet advance before Łódź demonstrated that this was in any event a forlorn hope.

The plight of the Jews highlights in an extreme form a human dilemma, of what alternatives are available where resistance to the oppressor is impossible or threatens even grater dangers. The intentions of the oppressor can never be entirely comprehended, and they may change unpredictably. The outcome of the situation cannot be foreseen. In such circumstances the hope of the victim revolves around certain possibilities; that the oppressor can be persuaded, by some reason, to relent, that some outside force will intervene to save the situation, and lastly the hope of some miraculous transformation of the situation, that allows the victim to escape. The absence of the basis for collective action forces the individual to act alone, either pursuing egotistical objective of survival, if necessary at all costs, or in the abnegation of the self, and self sacrifice in alleviating the suffering of others or sharing their sufferings. Czerniakow himself turned down the miraculous possibility of an escape to Palestine out of a sense of duty to his community.

This may also have a wider logic that points to a more general aspect of the human predicament in general. Consciousness imbues us with an understanding of our own mortality. We strive tenaciously to avoid our own extinction. We may reflect philosophically on death, but for the most it is difficult to come to terms

with the reality of our own demise. We understand that it is inevitable, but not here, not now; preferably in private, peacefully, without pain and with dignity.

The difficulty of imagining one's extinction is a great strength of mankind but it is also a weakness. In extreme situations, such as that described in the paper, individuals clutch on to hope. The inhabitants of the ghettos clutched on to hope when faced with the awful prospect that threatened: "meaningless", "senseless" undignified death, death in great numbers, anonymous death by social categories, death shared with one's kin and neighbours, where the only crime was to have been born into the wrong ethnic or religious community. One can image this fate befalling others, it is almost impossible, because too terrible and too great an affront to one's sense of self, to imagine it befalling oneself. It is the shock of having our most basic illusions about ourselves, about our society and about our notions of civilization challenged or destroyed.

The ghetto brutalized and dehumanized the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed were also corrupted by the experience, they were drawn into collusion with their oppressors, and they were turned against their fellows in their search for survival. In the Warsaw ghetto Czerniakow reflects how the Jewish council was taken over increasingly by amoral, opportunistic elements. In his diary he confided that this might be a good thing, that they might be able to find a common language with the oppressor, that they could engage in the kind of deals and negotiations, that would preserve as many of the ghetto inhabitants for as long as possible, albeit with the recognition that some would have to be sacrificed. This in many ways is a shocking view. Whether Czerniakow really believed in this is, or took some solace from the situation is unclear. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this reflected a major turning point, a break down of any common moral bonds linking the community leadership and the ghetto population. With that break down went the possibility of any collective action.

Both the leaders here examined made decisions on the most "utilitarian" of calculations, stripped on any other moral imperatives, securing the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers, even if this meant that a large unknown proportion was sacrificed. For Czerniakow the calculation was that he would play this game to alleviate the situation of the Jews and to protect them from deportation. In this he strove to normalise life in the ghetto, to secure that life went on, to create activities, to keep hope alive, and to contain panic and disorder. In this he was caught between the demands of the Nazi authorities and the needs of this community. When this was no longer possible he killed himself.

Whilst Czerniakow's tactic was to act as a mediator, Rumkowski's tactics were different. He actively colluded with the Nazi authorities, in the belief that he could do so partly on his own terms, and thus make himself indispensable and at

the same time demonstrate to the Nazi authorities that their self-interest lay in maintaining the ghetto.

Neither Czerniakow nor Rumkowski could be said to have collaborated with the Nazi's in their genocidal aims. Both sought in their own ways to protect their communities. To argue that they failed to prepare their communities to resist the Nazis, that they fostered illusions about the possibility of working with their oppressors, that they acted to psychologically disarm their people has to be balanced against the calculation of hard practicalities; of how far resistance was possible or advisable. Rumkowski did everything he could to prevent organised resistance. Czerniakow allowed activities to go on which led to the preparations for armed resistance. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising precipitated the ghetto's eventual destruction. Łódź survived longer, but not long enough for it to be saved. Had Łódź been liberated with its depleted population of about 70,000 what would have been the fate of Rumkowski? We can only speculate. Would he have been torn to pieces by the survivors as a Nazi collaborator, or would he have been hailed as a hero who after all had saved the remnants of the ghetto?

Janina Bauman's paper raises questions about the nature of ethics and politics that have far reaching implications. The Holocaust and other genocides of modern times pose questions regarding the ethical basis of political actions by states and individuals. Where the appeal to any transcendental, religious authority has lost its force, the question arises as to whether it is possible to construct a rational, humanistic basis for ethics in politics that can withstand the assault of modern mass ideologies, fundamentalist creeds and racist doctrines. Without such a basis individuals and states are left on the slippery slopes either of pragmatism or "utilitarianism".

Janina Bauman was herself incarcerated in the Warsaw ghetto as a young girl. She has recounted her experiences in *Winter in the morning. A young girl's life in the Warsaw ghetto and beyond, 1939-1945* (London, Virago, 1986).

Moral Choices in the Age of Gas Chambers

Janina Bauman

Introduction

What are moral choices? Well, we make them every now and then even if we don't decide upon issues of great moral importance but only support or oppose them.

- Is it right to wage war on Iraq risking the lives of thousands of innocent people, or is it better to let Saddam Hussein have his way unpunished?
- Should a teenage unemployed single mother give birth to a child doomed to live in abject poverty or should she rather have an abortion?
- Is cloning humans acceptable?

We are free people, we can choose. It is not what I'm going to speak about today. My story goes back 60 years, to the times of the Holocaust and tells about people deprived of freedom who – in the best case – could choose only between bad and worse. I believe the subject of struggling not only for survival but also to remain human in inhuman conditions can never be out of date.

In 1985 a French filmmaker, Claude Lanzman, produced a nine-hour documentary entitled SHOAH – The Holocaust. In this film he interviews Holocaust survivors – victims as well as perpetrators, and bystanders – uninvolved eye witnesses. One of the interviewed is a man who survived the Treblinka death camp as a member of Sondercommando – a special squad of the Jewish inmates forced to collaborate with the Nazis in the gassing and the disposal of the corpses. Their lives depended on the ever fresh transports of people to be gassed. So the man prayed for more and more transports to come knowing that once they stopped, he and his mates would be gassed themselves. And here is what he says:

'It's a hurricane' 'a raging sea. We are shipwrecked. And we are still alive. We must do nothing...but watch for every new wave, float on it, get ready for the next wave, and ride the wave at all costs'.

Interviewed by an American researcher, Sam Bankhalter, an Auschwitz survivor, says:

'Once you start fighting for your life, all the ethics are gone. You live by circumstances. There is no pity. You'r physically draw down to the point where you can't think anymore, where the only thing is survival... Don't trust anybody, don't trust your best friend. Look out for yourself. Be selfish to the point of obscenity. Try and stay alive from one minute to another. Don't let down for one second.'

These two men say the same: they both chose to survive at all costs. And so say most of those who experienced the extreme conditions of the death camps or in the ghettos. When ordered, they would carry to the crematorium people dying from typhus but still alive; they would steal the last potato or piece of bread from their starving mates; in the Łódź ghetto, a father kept his dead son in the cellar for weeks to collect the child's food rations; in a transport from Auschwitz to another camp, people locked in a boxcar for many days would eat the flesh of those who were already dead. The sense of guilt will come later, after the war, and it will haunt them throughout the rest of their seemingly peaceful lives. 'I survived, and I felt pretty good about it', says Sam Bankhalter, 'But then you feel guilty living!...Many nights I hear voices screaming in those first few minutes in the gas chamber, and I don't sleep'.

But were there other choices possible in the death camps, or at the time of forcible deportations from the ghettos? Many diaries of the dead found under the rubble after the war, as well as endless accounts of the survivors and eye-witnesses, sometimes even Nazi eye-witnesses, testify to the existence of such alternative choices.

One of them was to strive for survival still, but not at all costs – an attempt to remain human in inhuman conditions. The examples abound. Primo Levi, who sees Auschwitz as a battlefield – everyone fighting everyone else – often offers evidence to the contrary while recalling some of his fellow-prisoners: "Alberto entered the Lager with his head high, and lives in here unscathed and uncorrupted...He fights for his life but still remains everybody's friend..." And there is Little Jean who "tries to remain alive and yet shows human concern for his less privileged fellow-inmates." And Lorenzo, about whom Primo Levi says: Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated...Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man".

Anna Pawelczynska, a Polish scholar who survived Auschwitz, claims that the ten commandments were not forgotten in the camp – only reinterpreted: killing or giving false testimony became highly moral acts if they helped to save human lives. Germaine Tillion, a survivor of the Ravensbrück concentration camp discovered that though the threads of friendship, submerged under the bare brutality of rampant egoism, became invisible – they ran nevertheless, throughout the camp. Even if the majority of the inmates opted for life at all costs and people like Alberto, Jean or Lorenzo or – for that matter – Primo Levi himself – were but glorious exceptions, their very existence shows that putting self-preservation above moral values was not inevitable. It does not matter how many people chose to remain human – what does matter is that some did. Evil was not all-powerful; if not defeated, at least it could be resisted.

This was one alternative choice; another one was opting consciously for death in order to avoid the loss of humanity.

Wladyslaw Szlengel, the poet of the Warsaw Ghetto, who shared its ordeal till the very end, in one of his poems spoke with profound bitterness about Jewish death comparing it with Polish death, death with dignity. I quote it in my own rough translation:

Two ways of dying
Your death and our death
Are not equal ways of dying.

Your death – strong death
In the fields fed with sweat and blood,
Death from bullets, death for a purpose –
For fatherland.

Our death – a senseless death
In a loft or in a cellar,
Creeping like a dirty beast
From dark nooks and holes.

Your death meets you half-way,
Openly, face to face.
Ours comes stealthily, with dread,
In filth, in humiliation.

To escape humiliation, many people chose their own way of dying. It meant imposing one's own free will upon the will of the almighty oppressor. It meant dying with dignity. Suicides abounded both in the ghettos and in the concentration camps. People took their own lives so that they would not be brought to the slaughter by force. Some opted for death with a purpose. Of her own free will a young woman joins a column on its way to a gas chamber in order to die together with her mother; Dr. Janusz Korczak, the founder of an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto, rejects a chance to save his life and leads his orphans to the train bound for Treblinka because he knows that the children will be less frightened if he goes with them. A group of people hidden in a bunker after the fall of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising could only expect to die soon. But one of them, Abraham Gepner, an ex-member of the Judenrat known for his integrity, was offered a chance to escape to the Aryan side. He rejected the offer and stayed with the others to the very end.

To die on order, or to exert one's free will by choosing the kind of one's death, makes all the difference between an animal and a human being. The insurgents of Auschwitz and Sobibor camps and those of the Warsaw ghetto

stood no chance of saving their lives. They rebelled without hope and with no other purpose than to die with dignity.

Thus far I have reflected upon the moral stands of the Holocaust victims whose choices were restricted to choosing the way of their own survival or death. Now I want to look at the “victims with a difference” described by Primo Levi as people of the grey zone – those endowed by the Nazi authorities with a degree of power to decide upon the fate of their fellow-victims – like Kapos in the concentration camps, or members of the Judenrats in the ghettos. I want to present and compare the stories of two prominent members of that category – Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Judenrat in Warsaw Ghetto and Chaim Rumkowski, the head of the Judenrat in Łódź.

I have chosen my examples from the two biggest and best documented ghettos in Poland in an attempt to investigate the beneficence of the activities of their leaders for the people of the ghettos, and what, if anything, they did contribute to the success of the Nazi plan of total extermination of the Jews?

The Judenrats were established by the Nazis for one purpose only: to see that German orders were carried out with dispatch. Whatever else the Judenrat did was of no importance to the German authorities as long as its undertakings did not interfere with prompt execution of official commands. Those other undertakings were often encouraged because they helped to build up illusions and to conceal from the Jews the already decided “final solution”.

The ghettos in the big cities and in the small towns of Poland were formed during the first year of German occupation. Under the pretext of Jews being the carriers of typhus, the Nazis separated the Jews from the rest of Polish population by walls and barbed wire.

In Warsaw, 400.000 people were packed into the small northern area of the city. Later, Jews from small towns and villages were herded into the Warsaw Ghetto, too, and its population increased rapidly to half-a-million. High walls topped with barbed wire were built on Nazi order by Jewish hands. The gates were strictly guarded. There was the death penalty for trying to leave the Ghetto without a special permit.

The Ghetto population received a food allocation amounting to 184 calories per person per day. It suffered from mass unemployment. There was an acute shortage of dwellings; thousands of people lived in the streets and died on the pavements of starvation and infectious diseases. Homeless children roamed the streets in search of food. On the other hand, those who had some income or – more often – savings or valuables left from before the War did not starve as long

as they could afford to buy food from the thriving black market regularly supplied by smugglers. This led to a sharp social polarization: the divide between the haves and have-nots meant divide between life and death. The living and the dying literally rubbed shoulders in the overcrowded streets. At the top of the social ladder was a thin higher strata of those who were getting rich due to some shady deals with Germans or Poles. During the first twenty months that passed from sealing of the Ghetto in November 1940 till 22 July 1942, which marked the beginning of mass deportations to the death camp of Treblinka, one hundred thousand people died in the Warsaw Ghetto due to starvation, epidemics, random shooting in the streets, and suicide.

This was the picture of the community over which Adam Czerniakow presided. The chairman of the Warsaw Judenrat kept a diary. Day in, day out, he made notes about the current events as well as of his small successes and big failures. This diary, found and published only in the '70s, combined with the testimonies of other people from the Warsaw Ghetto, is a rich source of knowledge about Czerniakow's actions and character.

Who was this man? Almost 60 years old at the outbreak of the war, he had earlier been an activist of the Union of the Jewish craftsmen and a member of the Jewish Advisory Council. In October 1939, when the German army entered Warsaw, the Nazis forced him to replace the elected head of the Jewish Council, who had fled, and to form a new council of 24 members. On the first day of the Judenrat's existence Czerniakow showed the councillors a drawer with 24 cyanide tablets and told them where to find the key.

With the sealing of the Ghetto, the Judenrat obtained extensive powers and sole authority over the Jewish community. At the beginning it was composed of people of good will, but with the time its composition changed and it grew ever more remote from the people it was supposed to serve. In the end it turned into a tool of the Nazis, a collective executioner of the wishes of the true ruler. Due to their social composition – the member of the Judenrat cared most about the interests of the affluent strata, trying to protect it's members from hard labour or deportations. As among the German administrators, corruption and blackmail thrived among the Jewish officials. The Judenrat exerted a severe social oppression upon the Ghetto population. Their terrible policy of indirect taxes primarily shifted the burden to the exhausted and starving ; the rich were virtually tax-exempt.

Czerniakow, a man of strong moral principles, did all he could to resist what he saw to be injustice. He vigorously opposed imposition of bread-tax, suggested taking food coupons from the rich and giving them to the poor, ordered Jewish police to search restaurants, confiscate luxury food and distribute it to orphanages

and old people's homes. But other members of the Judenrat protested and the Germans backed their protests. However strongly Czerniakow deplored the corruption of his associates, he was too weak to fight it with any success. He comforted himself that only such scum could be successful in negotiations with the oppressors because of the common language. "They are capable of more than others...They will succeed better than others in getting us out of the trouble", he notes in his diary.

While in the course of time the Judenrat, increasingly infected with corruption, came to be universally hated and alienated from the community, Czerniakow did all he could to get closer to his people. His life in the office was filled with daily efforts to save as many as he could by petitioning on behalf of forced labourers, homeless families, clamouring for more rations to feed the starving, for more shelters for homeless. Usually he failed. But sometimes he succeeded: Public kitchens for orphaned children were organised in the Ghetto, 19 primary schools opened, over 50 vocational training courses were established, scientific research on starvation and typhus were launched. He also promoted cultural life in the Ghetto by helping actors, musicians and artists. Such small triumphs gave the Ghetto community a feeling, however fragile, of stability and boosted the hope for survival. All the same, public opinion blamed him for the corrupted Judenrat. He was hated as much as the rest.

As his diary shows, Czerniakow did not feel himself to be a tool manipulated by the Nazis. He assumed the role of mediator between the population of the Ghetto and their oppressors, a role well known in the history of the Jews throughout the ages. He believed that pleading to the authorities on behalf of the whole community or individuals could bring improvement in their conditions. So from the very beginning till the end of his chairmanship he did his best to negotiate all sorts of concessions like reductions of the daily quotas of people demanded for forced labour; increase in food rations, financial allowances and permission to open a park in the Ghetto. The Nazis constantly frustrated his attempts, humiliated him, arrested and tortured him; but they also – cleverly – threw him from time to time some crumbs so that the cat-and-mouse game could go on.

Still in 1940, a few months after being appointed the chairman, Czerniakow had tried to resign but was not allowed to. Later he changed his mind feeling that it was his duty to stay. So, when offered a visa to Palestine, he refused to accept it. And yet many entries in his diary speak of a desperate desire to be delivered from his duties. Two months before his death he writes "Will my strength serve me so as to maintain a stance of dignity?"

It is not quite clear when Czerniskow learned the truth about the first death camps. He constantly dismissed the rumours about the Nazi plan to transfer the Warsaw Jews to the east of Poland. "We must continue, for this is the only strategy that is left", he writes at the beginning of July 1942 in response to the rumours that the so-called "resettlement" is bound to start any time now. And so "It's a business as usual". On 12th July – ten days before the disaster – Czerniakow opens a playground for children. He compares himself with a captain of a sinking ship who gave the orchestra an order to play jazz. On 14th July he applies to the authorities for permission to start rabbit breeding in the Ghetto.

On 19th July – three days before the beginning of the Aktion – panic breaks out in the Ghetto after the news that trains are already waiting in the Umschlagplatz. Czerniakow still deludes himself that the rumour is false and that it is still possible to avert the evil. He tries to assure the population that there is no need to fear. "Because of the panic I drove through the streets of the entire (Jewish-J:B.) Quarter. I visited three playgrounds. I do not know whether I managed to calm the population but I did my best. I try to reassure the delegations which come to see me. What it costs me they do not see".

The following day Czerniakow asks one Nazi after another about the "resettlement". They all flatly deny knowing anything about it and so he orders the Jewish police to make a public announcement through the Ghetto that the rumours are groundless.

Twenty-four hours later all members of the Judenrat except the chairman were arrested. The Nazi officers of the Extermination Brigade told Czerniakow that 8,000 Jews would be daily deported during the next ten days. The Judenrat could select who was to go. If they refused to do so, the Germans would take over. The officers told Czerniakow to sign a petition asking them to remove all non-productive Jews from the Ghetto. Czerniakow refused but other members of the Judenrat signed the petition and were released from arrest.

Czerniakow called an emergency meeting of all organisations in the Ghetto. He warned them that if the Germans were provoked to enter the Ghetto a slaughter would take place. He asked for full cooperation in filling the daily quotas of deportees.

On 22 July placards announcing the resettlement were posted. All Jews in Warsaw regardless of age and sex, with the exception of "productive Jews", were to be "resettled" in the east. The penalty for resistance to the order was execution on the spot. The order was signed by the "The Judenrat of Warsaw" not by Czerniakow, though he was warned by the Germans that his wife would be shot dead were there any resistance to the resettlement.

The last entry in Czerniakow's diary was made the following day, on 23 July 1942. It reads: "It is now three o'clock p.m. So far 4,000 have been taken to the trains. By 4 o'clock 4,000 more will go..."

A few hours later Czerniakow swallowed the cyanide tablet he had always carried with him. He left a brief note saying that he had been ordered to include children in the quotas for deportation, but he could not possibly hand over the helpless children for destruction so he decided to put an end to his life. "I am powerless. My heart trembles in sorrow and pity. I can no longer bear all this. My act will prove to everyone what is the right thing to do".

They say that Chaim Rumkowski, a merchant of Łódź, the second most populous Polish city a hundred miles west of Warsaw, was chosen by the Nazis as the Eldest of the Jews only due to his strikingly distinguished appearance: - a head of snow-white hair and an upright posture. A man, whose rampant ambitions had been frustrated throughout his long life because of his poor education, at the age of 62 was suddenly offered an absolute power over 140,000 Jews to see that the orders of the German administration were carried out. He embraced this offer with enthusiasm, adopting immediately and with pleasure the German Führer-Prinzip. He began with an arbitrary appointment of the councillors, who had in the past been elected. His rule was to be exercised in a dictatorial manner.

Rumkowski welcomed the Ghetto as a miniature state. He did not consult the elders, seeing himself as the only spokesman for the 'Chosen People'. At first the people in the Ghetto were willing to collaborate with their leader; soon, however, they began to grumble against the dictator who called them, patronisingly, 'my Jews'.

Rumkowski's concept of the Ghetto was: autonomy and justice – all were to share in suffering equally. He dreamt of a model ghetto, a paragon for the New Jerusalem of the future. He felt himself to be destined to be the saviour of the Jews who would lead them out of the second Egyptian slavery.

Reality was not as pliable as Rumkowski wished. True – there were no classes in the Łódź Ghetto (the upper class was gone: rich people fled before the sealing of the Ghetto, lost their fortunes, or had their incomes cut off). All were workers – in a common cause to survive. Unlike in Warsaw – the general poverty was so great that the spread between the top and the bottom was small. But around Rumkowski grew an ever-increasing circle of bureaucrats with special privileges dependent on his favours. He gave high posts in the police force to underworld figures. He also organised a Court of Justice. From the judges he sometimes

demanded death sentences for criminals such as, for example, those who listened to the radio. (Although he threatened to deprive them of their food rations, the judges never complied with such orders).

His programme was work: the Ghetto was to be made self-sufficient. The only way was to produce goods that the Germans would value. Rumkowski found the right German partner in a merchant from Bremen – Biebow – to set up factories and solicit orders. It was a success. The Nazis' intention was to make Łódź judenrein, and fast – but when they saw that the Ghetto brought the Third Reich considerable profits, they changed their mind. They insisted, though, that sick and unemployable Jews should be deported. Rumkowski approved of the idea. Apparently, he thought that the deported might be exterminated never crossed his mind.

Soon, low food rations and epidemics, mainly typhus, brought the mortality rate in the Ghetto to staggering heights. Strikes and demonstrations broke out against the pay which was too low even to buy rationed food and against corruption amongst officials. Rumkowski ordered the arrest of the culprits and put them on the list for work in labour camps – practically the death sentence. In 1941, to prevent a general strike, he ordered a lockout, closing all factories. This meant no pay or food rations, so the strike collapsed. By disbanding the trade unions he put an end to the long tradition of the strong Jewish worker movement in Łódź. Also all attempts to smuggle food into the Ghetto- so succesful in Warsaw - were harshly repressed. Rumkowski saw smugglers who did not depend on him as threat to his power. Like the rebellious workers, he sent them to the German labour camps.

Rumkowski introduced the Ghetto's own currency, quickly dubbed Rumkes. The banknotes bore his likeness. They proved a potent force against the survival of the Łódź Jews: worthless outside the ghetto walls, they put an end to any remaining chance of smuggling food or weapons into the Ghetto and to all other contacts with the world beyond the walls.

In the beginning of 1942, 85 per cent of the Ghetto population worked in industry. More than 50 per cent had active tuberculosis, but productivity rose to new heights. German commissions often visited the Ghetto and expressed satisfaction at the good work the Jews were doing for the Third Reich. They recommended that other Ghettos send delegations to have a look and follow its example.

All was quiet in the Łódź Ghetto, the Nazis had no need to interfere. There was no street shooting like in Warsaw, no naked dead bodies on the pavements. This was a “productive ghetto”.

In January 1942 the Nazis ordered Rumkowski to select 10,000 Jews for “resettlement elsewhere”. He knew the conditions in the camps would be very hard, but evidently still did not know about the death camp in Chelmo that by then had already claimed many thousands of lives. This time he looked for advice from the councillors, but no one was willing to consult him on the matter. So he made his own decisions on who should be deported, choosing the refugees from provincial towns, families of those sent earlier to labour camps, the “criminals” from a special list (e.g. those who stole a piece of wood for fuel) and his personal enemies.

When the lists of people to be deported were completed, the selection and filling of railway carriages went smoothly. Bribes were accepted, though, to remove some names from the list.

Six months of further deterioration of life in the Ghetto followed. In September the Nazis emptied out the Ghetto hospitals of all the sick including children. Rumkowski was ordered to provide a further 21,000 people for deportation: all children under ten, all adults over 65 and all unemployed. He was told: “If you don’t do it, we will”. He made a speech announcing the decree. I quote some fragments:

“Yesterday I received an order to send 21,000 Jews out of the Ghetto...We, myself and my closest associates, have come to the conclusion that despite the horrible responsibility, we have to accept the evil order. I have to perform this bloody operation myself; I have to cut off limbs to save the body! I have to take away the children, because otherwise others will also be taken...Brothers and sisters, give them to me! Father and mothers, give me your children! – (I have recently met a man, who, at the age of 19 was there, at this big square crowded with people listening to Rumkowski’s speech. When he spoke about the deportation of children, the crowd shouted: Rumkowski, take from the families who have more than one child”.) Then Rumkowski continued:...”Deliver to me sick people and maybe I’ll be able to save the healthy...We’ll feed the swine with the sick...”

Owing to the resistance of the families, the Nazis eventually intervened. Within 7 days 16,000 were deported and 600 were shot dead. Rumkowski’s German partner, the merchant from Bremen, Biebow, was in charge of the action.

By the end of 1943 less than 80,000 people were left in the ghetto, almost all working for German industry and producing goods of great value. By then rumours of mass-killings in Chelmo, Treblinka and Auschwitz were frequently heard but people refused to believe. By now, the Łódź Ghetto was the only one still in existence. It was tightly isolated from the rest of the world.

When at the beginning of 1944 Rumkowski got an order to close down some factories and deliver workers for deportation, he encouraged the police to search

for those who failed to show up and take their wives instead. He cut off food rations in the factories. Hunger put an end to some passive resistance: substitutes for deportation could be easily bought for two loaves of bread and a kilogram of sugar. Rumkowski urged people to volunteer for deportation, warning that the Russians – who were steadily advancing – would not forgive the Jews who had worked for the Germans for five years.

Now the Ghetto was greatly reduced in size. A rising conviction of imminent German defeat made the remaining people hope for survival. Nobody listened to Rumkowski any longer – neither Jews nor Germans. But the orders for deportations continued, and Rumkowski – as before – tried to persuade ‘his Jews’ to obey. In August 1944 he received the final order to liquidate the remaining Ghetto factories and send all the workers “elsewhere”, this time wholesale, without selection. He still cooperated, telling the workers to go peacefully since otherwise the Nazis would use force.

Seven hundred men and women were left behind to clean up what used to be the Łódź Ghetto. Soon they were rescued by the Red Army. Rumkowski could have stayed with them but he volunteered to go; maybe he feared the Russians more than the Nazis whom he still trusted. It is not quite clear how he died.

Can one pass a moral judgement on Czerniakow and Rumkowski? And what the sentence would be?

After the War, with the knowledge of how it all ended, Hannah Arendt and many others claimed that it would have been better for the Jews never to have come into contact with the authorities and to have refrained from any deals with the Nazis. But then, in the ghettos nobody could imagine what was to come, an idea of total extermination was outside of all human experience. Even when told in vivid detail, the Jews refused to believe in mechanised, methodical annihilation. It was the main reason why millions walked to the gas chambers without protest, but also the main reason why those put in charge believed that not everything was lost and that much could still be improved. Rumkowski expected that the conditions of the deportees would be terrible, but hoped that some still stood a chance of survival. Czerniakow saw in the systematic starvation of the Ghetto the evidence of the Nazis’ attempt to weaken - not to exterminate – the Jewish population. When he finally understood the truth he killed himself.

Both men wanted to save the Jews although each of them saw his own role differently. Rumkowski’s ambition was to be the Saviour of the Jews through merciless and despotic rule. Czerniakow tried to lighten the burdens of the Ghetto

by adopting an attitude of accommodation: "I'll bend my head before the storm. I'll obey the evil decrees so as not to anger the enemy".

While Rumkowski destroyed all chances of resistance by punishing the worker militants – in fact condemning them to death, Czerniakow closed his eyes to the feverish activities of many underground organisations in the Warsaw Ghetto. On the other hand, he did not support them, either, since he believed that under the circumstances resistance was hopeless.

Rumkowski who at the beginning resolved to follow the ethics of redistributive justice, soon lost all interest in moral principles, when as a self-proclaimed deputy of God he made the choices between life and death; Czerniakow stopped short of moral surrender by killing himself. And yet his suicide was often commented upon as an act of weakness, unworthy of a public leader. Many survivors claim that it was his duty to warn others before he died, to tell the truth, even call for an active resistance. Suicide, they say, meant escape abandonment of the struggle, betrayal.

Czerniakow, when compared with Rumkowski, comes out as a high-minded man, who did only what he believed was his ethical duty, who did not care for power, money or privileges, and certainly not for saving his own life. But it was Rumkowski not Czerniakow who thanks to his mad, inhuman vision of a productive Ghetto would have saved about 70,000 people if only the Red Army did not unexpectedly stop some 120 km from Łódź. Although he would have probably been torn to pieces by the survivors, he would have still fulfilled his dream of being the Saviour of the Jews... Well, of some Jews, at any rate.

Neither of the two starkly different choices emerged from the trial of history as morally blameless. On the other hand, neither of them can be totally condemned. Should we say of Czerniakow and Rumkowski: "They both meant well and did what they could" and thus justify their deeds? Or should we condemn them as Nazi collaborators? I think we can do neither. We – who have never experienced the choices they faced – have no right to judge them because we do not know and we shall never learn how we would have behaved under the circumstances.

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Between Two Wars

Janina and Zygmunt Bauman's analyses of the contemporary human condition

Peter Wagner

The beginning of the third millennium would have given rise to reflections on the state of humanity under any circumstances. As it turned out, though, that purely chronometrical occurrence was punctuated by two events, one of which has assured significance in the political history of modernity, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the other of which, the destruction of the New York World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, is currently being awarded greater significance in the course of the ongoing Anglo–American war against Iraq.

In this light, what one used to call the post–Second World War period has become the major point of reference for understanding the present, and it can provide this reference precisely as an era that is considered to be over. The post-war era may by now have become an inter-war era, the era between the last war in the post–Westphalian world of territorial nation–states and the first full-fledged war in what Zygmunt Bauman calls the ‘long intermezzo’ towards, possibly, a ‘post–trinitarian world’. Janina Bauman, as discussed by Arfon Rees in this working paper, demonstrates how the most ruthless and at the same time most systematic application of the homogenizing principles of exclusion that could be derived from the cultural, ethnic and linguistic foundations of the modern polity, the annihilation of the European Jewry through the Nazi regime, led to ethical dilemmas that transcended the capability for sound moral action of any human being, if thrown into the situation of the camp.

Zygmunt Bauman, in turn, draws on Giorgio Agamben’s recent attempt, in *Homo sacer*, to analyze the camp as the root principle, or hidden matrix, of political modernity. The site where human beings are thrown back to their existence as bare life is produced by the radicalization of the individualizing and atomizing logic of political modernity, through which any concept of the common beyond bare life becomes questionable. At the same time, the camp resembles uncannily the state of nature as described by Thomas Hobbes, in which human beings are driven en masse towards a regulation of their life by sheer fear. Between Hobbes and the camps, there is the giant historical attempt at organizing collective life in the form of territorial polities, an attempt that, however, never found a way to consciously and ethically regulate its own principles of inclusion and exclusion.

While the post-Westphalian political order was meant to end warfare by drawing boundaries and securing homogeneity inside those boundaries, the full application of this principle has consistently exacerbated conflicts. Liberal interpreters of modernity often point to the internal pluralization and liberalization of the nation-state, beginning with democratic revolutions more than two centuries ago and accelerating after the disastrous experience of Nazism and World War. They also point to the pacification of external relations, of relations between states, at least under conditions of democracy. However, these optimistic readings are yet again unaware of their own principles of exclusion. Their narrative of progress is not only marked by the fact that it at best can only refer to the so-called Western world of the past half-century; it also ignores that it can by no historical or conceptual means separate this 'West' from so-called non-Western societies.

The history of the West has been a history of globalization since the age of discoveries. The move of Europeans into other parts of the world, the displacement or enslavement of non-European populations, and the more recent large-scale movement of non-Europeans into Europe are part of the same history of political modernity. The refugees all over the world, *homini sacer* of our time, as Bauman points out, cannot be seen as those few exceptions of people without a home in their own nation that do not undermine the rule of ordering the world according to a 'trinitarian' principle of territory, nation and state. Rather, they are the living evidence of the disastrous application of this principle. The same is true for the victims of wars led by the West against the non-West, as again in these days, the neglect of whose plight is nothing short of racist. It remains to be seen when and how humankind exits from the self-created state of 'mutually assured vulnerability' that is the mark of the 'long intermezzo' towards a 'post-trinitarian' condition, an intermezzo during which, if I read Zygmunt Bauman correct, the limits of viability of the modern-state system have long been transcended, but no new order has yet been constructed.

The Fate of Humanity in the Post-Trinitarian World

Zygmunt Bauman

Habent sua fata libelli... The fate of Kant's IDEEN ZU EINER ALLGEMEINEN GESCHICHTE IN WELTBÜRGERLICHER ABSICHT is as thought-provoking and illuminating as it has been peculiar. Conceived in 1784 in Kant's tranquil, off-the-beaten-track Königsberg seclusion, the little book quietly gathered dust, for two centuries, in academic libraries. If read, it was only by a few dedicated archivists of ideas, without much excitement, as a historic curiosity and a trace of a lighter moment in the great philosopher's life of scholarly pedantry. But after two centuries of exile to the footnotes and bibliographies of scholarly monographs, the little book burst all of a sudden into the very centre of the *Jetztzeitgeschichte*. In the stark opposition to the recent past, it would be a tall order to find these days a learned study of the convolutions and challenges our currently lived-through shared history that would not quote Kant's HISTOIRE UVIVERSELLE as a supreme authority and source of inspiration for all debate of 'human rights' – itself an issue that made a stunning come-back from the small print of footnotes to the main, bold-letter text of the narrative to land, noisily, in the very centre of public attention.

The *fatum* of this particular *libellae* may seem strange and baffling, but it holds in fact little mystery. Its secret is simple: it took the world two hundred years to reach the limits of a tendency that guided it since the beginning of modern times - but which Kant, having put it to a philosophical test, would have found in advance contrary to *was die Natur zur höchsten Absicht hat*. Kant observed that the planet we inhabit is a sphere – and thought through the consequences of that admittedly banal fact. And the consequences he explored were that we all stay and move on the surface of that sphere, have nowhere else to go and hence are bound to live forever in each others neighbourhood and company. Moving on the spherical surface, you cannot but shorten the distance whenever you try to stretch it – all effort to lengthen a distance and to keep it cannot but be ultimately self-defeating. And so *die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung* is the destiny Nature has chosen for us - the ultimate horizon of our *allgemeine Geschichte* that, prompted and guided by reason and the instinct of self-preservation, we are bound to pursue and in the fullness of time reach. This is what Kant found out – but it took the world two more centuries to find out how right he was.

Sooner or later, Kant warned, there will be no empty space left into which those of us who have found the already populated places too cramped or too inhospitable, awkward or otherwise uncongenial for comfort, could venture. And so Nature commands us to view (reciprocal) hospitality as the supreme precept which we need – and eventually will have to – embrace in order to seek the end

to the long chain of trials and errors, of the catastrophes the errors caused and of the ruins left in the wake of the catastrophes. As Jacques Derrida would observe two hundred years later ⁽¹⁾, the Kant's propositions would easily expose the present-day buzz-words like 'culture of hospitality' or 'ethics of hospitality' as mere tautologies: 'L'hospitalité, c'est la culture même et s'est n'est pas une éthique parmi d'autres... *L'éthique est hospitalité*'. Indeed, if ethics, as Kant wished, is a work of reason, then hospitality is – must be or sooner or later become, the ethically-guided mankind's first rule of conduct.

The world, though, took little notice; it seems that the world prefers to honour its philosophers by memorial plaques than by listening to them, let alone by following their advice. Philosophers might have been the main heroes of the Enlightenment lyrical drama, but the post-Enlightenment epic tragedy all but neglected its script. Busy with equating the nations and the states, states with sovereignty, and sovereignty with a territory with tightly sealed and controlled borders, the world seemed to pursue a horizon quite different from the one Kant had drawn. For two hundred years the world was occupied with making the control of human movements the sole prerogative of state powers, with erecting barriers to all the other, uncontrolled human movements, and manning the barriers with vigilant and heavily armed guards. Passports, visas, custom and immigration controls were among the major inventions of the art of modern government.

The advent of the modern state coincided with the emergence of the 'Stateless person', the *sans papiers*, and the idea of *unwertes Leben*, the later-day reincarnation ⁽²⁾ of the ancient institution of *homo sacer*, that ultimate embodiment of the sovereign right to exempt and to exclude such human being as has been cast off the limits of human and divine laws; to make it into a being that can be destroyed without punishment - but whose destruction is devoid of all ethical or religious significance.

Man and Citizen

Five years after Kant sent the brief results of his ruminations to the printers, another, even shorter document was published – one that was to weigh on the next two centuries of history much more heavily than Kant's little book. That other document was *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, of which Giorgio Agamben would observe, with the benefit of long hindsight, that it did not specify whether the two terms [*man and citizen*] distinguished two distinct realities' or if, instead, 'the first term is always already contained in the second'. ⁱⁱⁱ

That ambivalence, with all its gruesome consequences, had been noted in a world suddenly filling up with 'displaced persons', according to Hannah Arendt. She recalls the old and genuinely prophetic Edmund Burke's premonition ^{iv} that the abstract nakedness of 'being nothing but human' was the humanity's greatest danger. Human rights, Burke noted, were an abstraction, and humans can expect little protection from abstraction of 'human rights' unless it is filled with the flesh

of the Englishman's or, Frenchman's rights. 'The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human' – Arendt sums up the experience of the centuries that followed Burke's observations. 'The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable... whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state'.^v

Indeed, human beings endowed with 'human rights' and no more than that - no other rights to contain and hold them in place - were nowhere to be found and for all practical intents un-imaginable. A social, all-too-social potenza, puissance or Macht was obviously needed to endorse the humanity of humans. And throughout the modern era, such 'potency' happened to be always a potency to select: to draw a boundary between human and inhuman. On a planet sliced without residue into land properties of sovereign states, the homeless are rightless, and they suffer not because they are not equal before law - but because there is no law that applies to them and to which they could refer or whose protection they could claim.

In her essay on Karl Jaspers penned down a few years after the Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt observed that though human rights? for all the preceding generations were but a concept or an ideal (we may add: a philosophical postulate, humanists' dream, sometimes a war-cry, but hardly ever an organizing principle of political action), it 'has become something of an urgent reality'. And if it has - it was because of the impact of the West, that had saturated the rest of the world with the products of its technological development, but which also exported to the rest of the world 'its processes of disintegration' - among which the breakdown of metaphysical and religious beliefs, awesome advances of natural sciences and the ultimate triumph of the nation-state as virtually the sole form of government figured most prominently. The forces which required long centuries to 'undermine the ancient beliefs and political ways of life' in the West, 'took only a few decades to break down...beliefs and ways of life in all other parts of the world'.

Such kind of unification could not but produce a 'solidarity of mankind' that is 'entirely negative'. Each part of human population of the earth is made vulnerable by all other parts and each of the other parts. This is, we may say, 'solidarity' of dangers, risks and fears. For most of the time and in most thoughts, 'unity of the planet' boils down to the horror of threats gestating or incubated in distant parts of the world – the world 'reaching out yet itself out of reach'. John Donne of our days would perhaps modify the admonition contained in his *Devotions* : 'never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee – the death knell'... But he would it seems hold to the observation that 'no man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of Continent, a part of the main' – only it would mean now, first and foremost, that one can no longer count on the secure shelter islands used to provide in simpler and poorer times. On a continent, crisscrossed - as all continents nowadays are, by rail- and motor-ways - there is nowhere to hide. There is no place left 'away from beaten tracks', nor 'far from

madding crowds' – however passionate and hectic are the efforts to keep the crowds away from the gates and fences and make the tracks accessible for selected users only and selected use.

The (Un)holy Trinity

For two hundred years or so after the publication of Kant's musings, the progressive 'filling of the world' (and so, consequently, the urge to admit that the fullness of the planet Kant thought to be an unavoidable and no-appeal-allowed verdict of Reason and Nature rolled into one, was indeed eminent) was fought back with the help of the (un)holy trinity of territory, nation, and state.

Nation-state, as Giorgio Agamben observes, means a state that makes 'nativity or birth' the 'foundation of its own sovereignty.' 'The fiction that is implicit here', Agamben points out, 'is that *birth [nascita]* comes into being immediately as *nation*, so that there may not be any difference between the two moments.'^{vi} One is, so to speak, born into the 'citizenship of the state'; this nakedness of the newly born child yet un-dressed in the legal/judicial trappings provides the site on which the sovereignty of the state power is established and perpetually re-born through the inclusive/exclusive practices aimed at all other claimants of citizenship that fell into the reach of the state's sovereignty. We may hypothesize that the reduction of *bios* to *zoë* that Agamben takes for the essence of modern sovereignty (or, we may say as well, the reduction of the *Leib*, the living-acting body, to the *Körper*, a body that can be acted upon but cannot act) is unavoidable once birth is selected as the sole no-question-asked entry into the nation. All others who may knock to the door of the sovereign state asking to be admitted may first be submitted to the de-robing ritual. As Victor Turner suggested following Van Gennep three-stages scheme of *rite de passage*, before the newcomers who apply for admission to another social site are given access (if access is given) to a new wardrobe where the dresses appropriate to the new site and for that site reserved are stocked, they need to be bared (metaphorically as well as literally) of all and any trappings of their previous belonging; a quarantine is needed in the space-not-space of 'betwixt and between', where no socially forged and approved weapons are on offer and none is permitted. In the purgatory of the intermediate 'nowhere space' that separates the plots in the world sliced into plots and conceived as aggregation of spatially separate plots, the site is cleaned for the construction of a new belonging.

According to Turner, the stopover in the site denuded of all socially supplied jacks that lift the incumbents from the level of *zoë* or *Körper* to that of *bios* or *Leib*, 'the social significance of rendering them [individuals 'on the way' from the lost social denomination to another- not-yet acquired one – Z.B.] down into some kind of human *primo materia*, divested of specific form and reduced to a condition that, although it is still social, is without or beneath all accepted forms of status is that there is no direct way leading from one to another socially approved status. Before one can pass from one status to another, one needs to

immerse in 'an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*...' ^{vii} Hannah Arendt had situated the phenomenon later explored by Turner in the power-operated realm of expulsion, exile, exclusion and exemption. Humanity that takes 'the form of fraternity', she implied, 'is the great privilege of pariah peoples' (wandering through public debates of the eighteenth century under the generic name of *les malheureux*, in those of the nineteenth century of *les misérables*, today perhaps (and for the last half century) gathering under the umbrella of 'the refugees' - but at all times deprived of a place of their own on the mental map of the world drawn by people who invented/deployed their names). As if under the pressure of persecution, 'the persecuted have moved so closely together that the interspace which we have called world (and which of course existed between them before the persecution, keeping them at a distance from one another) has simply disappeared.' ^{viii} For all practical intents and purposes they were *out of the world*: the world of categories and fine distinctions that the powers that be have spawn and made known under the name of 'society' - the only world humans were supposed to inhabit and the only world that could re-forge its inhabitants into citizens, the bearers and practitioners of rights. They were *uniform* - in their common lack of such attributes as vernacular speakers would be able to note, grasp, name and comprehend; or uniform they seemed to be - due to the alliance between the poverty of the vernacular and the power-assisted homogenization-through-expropriation-of rights.

Indeed, if birth and nation are one, than all others who enter or wish to enter must mimic, or are compelled to mimic, the nakedness of the newborn's non-status. The state - the guardian and prison guard, the spokesman and the censor-in-chief of the nation - would see to it that the condition is met.

As Carl Schmitt, arguably the most clear-headed, illusion-free anatomist of the modern state, avers: 'He who determines a value, *eo ipso* always fixes a nonvalue. The sense of this determination of a nonvalue is the annihilation of the nonvalue.' ^{ix} Determining the value draws the limits of the normal, the ordinary, the orderly; nonvalue is an exception that marks this boundary.

The exception is that which cannot be subsumed; it defies general codification, but it simultaneously reveals a specifically juridical formal element: the decision in absolute purity... There is no rule that is applicable to chaos. Order must be established for juridical order to make sense. A regular situation must be created, and sovereign is he who definitely decides if this situation is actually effective...

The exception does not only confirm the rule; the rule as such lives off the exception alone. ^x

Giorgio Agamben comments: 'The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it. The state of exception is thus not the chaos that preceded order but rather the situation that results from its suspension. In this sense, the exception is truly, according to its etymological root, *taken outside (ex-capere)*, and not simply excluded.' ^{xi} Let me observe that this is the very

circumstance which the rule-making sovereigns, to legitimize their action, tend to occlude. Order-making is undertaken in the name of fighting the chaos. But there would be no chaos were there no ordering intention already in place and the 'regular situation' has not been conceived and promoted. Chaos is born as a non-value, an exception; ordering bustle is its birthplace and it has no other legitimate (sic!) parents nor family home.

Penetrating and insightful as he is when scrutinizing the bizarre, paradoxical logic of *Ordnung*, Carl Schmitt endorses the fiction cultivated by the guardians/promoters of order, the wielders of the sovereign power of exception, on one crucial point. Just like in the sovereigns' body of practice, so in Schmitt's theoretical model the boundaries of the territory over which the work of *Ordnung* is conducted are presumed to constitute the outer limits of the world bestowed with the topical relevance for the ordering intentions and efforts. The sum total or resources required if the ordering job is to be done, as well as the totality of factors necessary to account for its operation and effects, are contained inside that world. Sovereignty produces the distinction between the value and non-value, the rule and exception – but it is preceded by the distinction between the inside and the outside of the sovereign realm, without which the sovereign prerogatives could be neither claimed nor obtained. Sovereignty as practiced by the modern nation-state and as theorized by Schmitt is inextricably bound to a territory; sovereignty is unthinkable without an 'outside', and it is inconceivable in any form but a *localized* entity. Schmitt's vision is as 'localized' as the sovereignty whose mystery it tries to unravel. It does not step beyond the practice and cognitive horizon of the made-in-heaven wedlock of territory and power.

As the 'state of law' was gradually, but irresistibly (because it was under constant legitimacy-building and ideological mobilization pressures) evolving into the 'nation's state', the wedlock has grown into a trinity – of territory, state and nation. One may suppose that the advent of that trinity was a historical accident that occurred in one, relatively small part of the globe; but since that part, however small, happened to claim the position of metropolis resourceful enough to transform the rest of the globe into periphery and arrogant enough to denigrate its peculiarities accordingly, and since it is the prerogative of the metropolis to set the rules by which periphery should live and since it is in its power to enforce the observance of the rules – the overlap/blend of the nation, state and territory has become the norm, and any of the three un-allied with and unsupported by the other two has been turned into anomaly; a monstrous mutation to undergo a drastic surgery or to be delivered a *coup de grace* in case of being found beyond redemption. Territory with no nation-state had become a no-man's land; nation without a state had become a noxious, obstreperous and obtrusive alien body given the choice of surrender or annihilation, state without a nation or more than one nation a constant product of time pasts facing an urgent demand of modernization. Behind the new normality, loomed the sense-giving and unquestionable principle of the inalienable territoriality of any power bidding

for sovereignty and all power standing the chance of the bid being granted or won.

All bids for purity deposit dirt, all bids for order create monsters. The dirty monsters of the promotion-of-the-territory/nation/state-trinity era were nations without states, states with more than one nation and territory without nation-state. It was thanks to those monsters that the sovereign power could claim and acquire the rights to deny rights and set conditions for humanity that most of the humanity could not meet.

In 1920, a booklet had been published under the title *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben*, authored by the penal law expert Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, medicine professor, and commonly credited with the introduction of the *lebensunwertes Leben*, ('life unworthy of living'), concept, and for the suggestion that such life is unduly and unjustly protected at the expense of the fully-fledged life that should command attention and loving care owed to humanity. The learned expert saw no reason (juridical social or religious) why extermination of *unwertes Leben* should be seen as a crime and punished accordingly. Agamben discerns in Binding/Hoche's conception the modern rendition of the ancient category of *homo sacer* – a human being that can be killed without punishment yet whose murder is devoid of both social and religious significance, and observes that the concept of 'life unworthy of being lived' is as the concept of *homo sacer* has always been, non-ethical; but that in its modern wrapping it acquires profound political significance of a category 'on which sovereign power is founded'.

In modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the nonvalue of life as such. Life – which with the declaration of rights, had as such been invested with the principle of sovereignty – now itself becomes the place of a sovereign decision.^{xii}

This seems to be, indeed the case. But it could be a case in as far as the territory/state/nation trinity has been lifted to the rank of universal principle of human cohabitation, planted and promoted in every nook and cranny of the planet, including areas which for centuries failed to produce elementary conditions of such trinity – that is, homogeneity of the population and/or permanent settlement resulting in the 'rootedness in the soil'. It is because of that contrived universality of the Trinitarian principle that, as Hannah Arendt points out, 'whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized communities found himself *thrown* out of the family of nations altogether'^{xiii} – and so from the realm of humanity into the nowhere-land of *homini sacri*, since human species has become identical with the 'family of nations'.

The Long Intermezzo

It was thanks to the territory/nation/state trinity that Kant's warning/premonition could gather dust for two centuries – and, if read by the few dedicated archivists/collectors of curiosities, aberrations and paradoxes known as

'historians of philosophy', explained away by the momentary lapse of the scientific rigour in the otherwise exemplarily disciplined life of the pioneer and life-long advocate of modern reason. With the trinity in its full command, the roundness of the globe seemed of no consequence and the prediction of the imminent fullness of the planet was taken to be, if treated leniently, the stuff of which the science-fiction fairy tales are made.

Despite its magnitude and the depth of its suffering, the human detritus sedimented in ever rising volume by the including/excluding zeal and bustle triggered and continuously energized by the territory/nation/state trinity, seemed to carry the marks of a transient and essentially removable irritant than to be portent of the catastrophe to come. Dark clouds seemed lighter and dark premonition could be laughed away as 'prophecies of doom' thanks mostly to another modern enterprise that went down in history under the names of 'imperialism' and 'colonization' serving, alongside its other functions, as the disposal and recycling plant for the growing outlay of human waste. The breathtakingly vast expanses of the 'virgin land' that the imperialist invading/conquering drive had laid open for colonization could be used as a dumping ground for those unwanted, and act as a promised land for those who fell by, or were thrown over the board as the vehicle of progress picked up speed and gained ground.

No land of course *was* really 'virgin' at the time Kant's ALLGEMEINE GESCHICHTE was sent to printers; but plenty of lands had been already *made* virgin and many more were to be recast as 'virgin' in the following decades thanks to the enormous and still rapidly widening power differential between the fast industrializing center and deteriorating periphery. That power of metropolis was so overwhelming that it could declare the extant human habitation of the 'primitive', 'backward' and 'savage' lands null and void, and summarily recast the population of such lands as a collective 'homo sacer' of the metropolis – thereby offering the metropolitan population a license to kill. When somewhat later the technique of summary exclusion from the human race developed during the conquest of distant lands was to be ricocheted on Europe, Aimé Césaire pointed out (in 1955^{xiv}) that what the Christian bourgeois (of Europe and its extensions) could not really forgive Hitler was not the crime of genocide as such (by then it was an acknowledged, legitimate method of dealing with the presence of undesirables), but the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions as were borne up till now by the Arabs, the coolies of India and the Negroes...

Colonisation allowed Kant's premonitions to gather dust. However, it also made them look, when finally dusted off, as a prophecy of apocalypses instead of as the cheerful utopia Kant intended them to be. Kant's vision looks now that way because – due to misleading abundance of 'no man's land' nothing needed to be done and so nothing has been done in these two centuries to prepare humanity for the revelation of the ultimate fullness of the world.

To get rid of the domestic European homini sacri, the lands decreed as virgin provided the Devil Islands, Botany Bays and other similar dumping grounds for European governments envious of the Russian Empire that ruling over the infinite permafrost expanses of Siberia. For the Europeans fearing the outcasts' lot, the 'virginised lands' offered a promising alternative - a hide-out and a chance to 'start a new life'. Irish villagers sought there salvation from potato-blight famine at home, German, Swedish and Polish peasants run there from overcrowded villages and decaying townships with no jobs and no prospects, Jews sought there safety from Russian pogroms. The untitled offspring of titled families traveled to the 'frontiers of civilization' hoping to restore their power and wealth in military service, colonial administration or business ventures, having first built a new world – a world needing to replace the indolent and somnolent native nobility with brand new elites, and so fit to provide the incomers with brand new career tracks. For many years, modernity, that intrinsically expansive and transgressive civilization, had no reason to worry: the civilization made of the urge of expansion and transgression had seemingly infinite space to expand and could look forward to endless new barriers waiting to be transgressed. On the map of the modern world, there was profusion of blank spots marked (provisionally, of course!) 'ubi leones', and waiting to be spattered with new towns and crisscrossed with new road networks. Those distant blank spots were safety valves letting out the steam and protecting the metropolis from overheating. There were a lot of places for the adventurous to seek adventure, for the gamblers to try their luck and for the defeated to attempt reversal of bad fortune. The world was anything but full.

Well – it is now. No more Statues of Liberty promising to huddle the downtrodden and abandoned masses. No more escape tracks and hideouts for anyone but the few misfits and criminals. But (this being, arguably, the most striking effect of the world's newly revealed fullness) - no more the safe and cozy *chez soi* either, as the events of the 11th September have proven dramatically and beyond reasonable doubt.

As the last spots bearing 'ubi leones' tags are vanishing from the world map and the last among the many distant frontier-lands have been claimed by powers potent to man the seal borders and issue entry visas – the world in its entirety is turning into a planetary frontier-land... According to Eric le Boucher's summary of the new wisdom that has been forced upon us on 11th September (in *Le Monde* of 25 October 2001, p.17) – 'the world cannot divide itself into two separate parts – one rich and secure behind its modern anti-missile system, the other left... to its wars and "archaisms"' After 11th September, It has become clear that the 'far-away countries can no more be left to their anarchy' – that is, if the rich and allegedly secure want to stay rich and be secure indeed. Ask no more where the 'frontier-land' can be found; it is *here*, all around you, all around your city and in the city itself, in the city centre as much as in the *banlieues* notorious as they are as places in which everything can happen but little can be done, any action being

but an experiment that can proceed solely only through risk-infested trials and errors.

In the frontier-land, it is guns and slyness that count, but agility and cunning count more than the largest stack of guns. In the frontier-land, fences and stockades mark the intentions rather than realities. In a frontier-land, the efforts to give conflicts territorial dimensions and to keep the differences apart and at a safe distance from each other by dividing the ground, seldom bring results. Suspected from the start to be ultimately ineffective, such efforts tend to be half-hearted anyway - wooden stakes signal the lack of self-assurance that stone walls would manifest. In the course of interminable frontier-land warfare, trenches are seldom dug. The adversaries are known to be constantly on the move. Their might and the nuisance-making ability lie in the speed, inconspicuousness and randomness of their moves. For all practical intents and purposes, in a frontier-land adversaries are *extraterritorial*.

The threats of terrorist attacks the 11th September style were on the cards for a long time, as they should have been under increasingly frontier-land's conditions. The threats emanated from existential insecurity, massively generated inside the un-colonised, politically un-controlled, thoroughly de-regulated and extraterritorial 'space of flows' (to use Manuel Castells' terms). But the materialisation of such threats in the dramatic and exquisitely spectacular form they took on 11th September has re-forged the premonitions onto tangible reality, drawn the invisible within sight and the distant within the neighbourhood. It thereby allowed to translate the threat from the arousing little emotions, opaque and seldom resorted to language of *global* security (a bland and semantically impoverished language with few if any syntactic rules) into the all-too-familiar, daily used and easily understood language of *personal* safety. The good news is that in a longer run that translation may assist the comprehension of the link between the two, and even enable the reverse translation - of local safety concerns into global security issues. The bad news is that for the time being one thing that has been made crystal clear is but the present-day *mutually assured vulnerability* of all politically separated parts of the globe.

That manifestation of the changed existential condition took us unawares - as the change itself took us unprepared. The sacrosanct division between *dedans* and *dehors*, that charted the realm of existential security and set the itinerary for future transcendence, has been all but obliterated. *Il n'y a pas le 'dehors'* any more... We are all 'in', with nothing left outside. Or, rather, what used to be 'outside' entered the 'inside' - without knocking; and settled there - without asking permission. The bluff of local solutions to planetary problems has been called, the sham of territorial isolation has been exposed.

Frontier-lands of all times have been known as, simultaneously, factories of displacement and recycling plants for the displaced. Nothing else can be expected from their new, global variety - except of course the new, planetary scale of the production and recycling problems. Let me repeat: there are no local solutions to

global problems - although it is precisely the local solutions that are avidly, though in vain, sought by the extant political institutions, the sole political institutions that we have collectively invented thus far and the only we have. And no wonder – since all such institutions are local, and their sovereign power of feasible (or for that matter legitimate) action is locally circumscribed.

For the two hundred years of modern history, the refugees, the voluntary and involuntary migrants, the ‘displaced persons’ *tout court*, were naturally assumed to be the host country affair and handled as such. Few if any of the nation-states that filled the modern map of the world were as local as their sovereign prerogatives. Sometimes willingly, some other times reluctantly, all of them had to accept the presence of aliens inside the appropriated territory, and all had to admit in the successive waves of immigrants escaping or chased away from the realms of other sovereign nation-state powers. Once inside, the settled or fresh aliens fell under exclusive and undivided jurisdiction of the host country. That country was free to deploy the updated, modernised versions of the two strategies which have been described in *Tristes tropiques* by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the alternative ways of dealing with the presence of strangers.

The available choice was between the anthropophagic and the anthropoemic solutions to the strangers’ problem. The first solution boiled down to ‘eating the strangers up’. Either literally, in flesh - like in cannibalism allegedly practiced by certain ancient tribes, or in a more sublime, modern metaphorical re-make, spiritually - as in the power-assisted assimilation practiced almost universally by nation-states so that the strangers are ingested into the national body and cease to exist as strangers. The second solution meant ‘vomiting the strangers’ instead of devouring them: rounding them up and expelling (just what Oriana Fallaci suggested we should do with people who adore other gods and display baffling toilet habits) either from the realm of the state power or from the world of the living.

Let us note however that pursuing either of the two solutions made sense only on the twin assumptions: of a clean-cut territorial division between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, and of the completeness and indivisibility of sovereignty of the strategy-selecting power inside its realm. None of the two assumptions commands much credibility today, in our liquid-modern global world; and so the chances of deploying either of the two orthodox strategies are, to say the least, slim.

The tested ways of acting no more available, we seem to be left with no good strategy to handle the newcomers. Since in the times when no cultural model can authoritatively and effectively claim its superiority over competitive models and when nation-building and patriotic mobilisation ceased to be the principal instrument of social integration and state’s self-assertion, cultural assimilation is no more in the cards. Since deportations and expulsion make dramatic television and are likely to trigger public outcry and tarnish the international credentials of

the perpetrators, the governments prefer to steer clear of the trouble by locking the doors to all who knock asking for shelter.

The present trend to drastically reduce the right to political asylum, accompanied by the stout refusal of entry to 'economic immigrants', signal no new strategy regarding the refugee phenomenon – but the absence of strategy, and the wish to avoid a situation in which that absence causes political embarrassment. Under the circumstances, the terrorist assault of 11th September was a God-send gift to the politicians. In addition to the usually brandished charges of sponging on the nation's welfare and stealing the jobs¹, refugees stand now accused of playing a 'fifth column' role on behalf of the global terrorist network. At long last, there is a 'rational' and morally unassailable reason to round up, incarcerate and deport people whom one does not know any more how to handle and does not want to take trouble to find out. In the US, and soon after in Britain, under the banner of 'anti-terrorist campaign' foreigners have been promptly deprived of the essential human rights that until now have withstood all vicissitudes of history since Magna Carta and Habeas Corpus. Foreigners can be now indefinitely detained on charges against which they cannot defend themselves since they are not told what they are. As Martin Thomas acidly observes (^{xv}), from now on, in a dramatic reversal of the basic principle of civilised law, the 'proof of a criminal charge is a redundant complication' – at least as far as the foreign refugees are concerned.

The doors may be locked; but the problem won't go away, however tight the locks. Locks do nothing to tame or weaken the forces that cause displacement. The locks may help to keep the problem out of sight and out of mind, but not to force it out of existence.

And so, increasingly, refugees find themselves in a cross-fire; more exactly, in a double bind. They are expelled by force or frightened into flying out of their native countries, but refused entry to any other. They do not *change* places; they *lose* place on earth, they are catapulted into a nowhere, into Augé's 'non-lieux' or Garreau's 'nowherevilles', into Michel Foucault's 'Narrenschiffen', into a drifting 'place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea' (^{xvi}) – or (as Michel Agier suggests in a forthcoming article in *Ethnography*) in a desert, that by definition *un*-inhabited land, the land resentful of humans and seldom visited by them.

Refugees have become, in a caricatured likeness of the new power elite of the globalised world, the epitome of that extraterritoriality where the roots of the present-day precarité of human condition, that foremost of present-day human fears and anxieties, are sunk. Those fears and anxieties, seeking other outlets in vain, have rubbed off on the popular resentment and fear of refugees. They

¹ A charge eagerly resorted to, with great profit, by ever widening range of contemporary politicians across the political spectrum, from LePen, Pia Kjersgaard or *Vlaam* Bloc on the far right to the growing number of such as define themselves as 'left of centre'.

cannot be defused nor dispersed in a direct confrontation with the other embodiment of extraterritoriality - the global elite drifting beyond the reach of human control, too powerful to be confronted. Refugees, on the other hand, are a sitting target for unloading the surplus anguish...

According to the *Haut Commissariat des Nation Unies pour les Réfugiés* (UNHCR) there are between thirteen and eighteen millions 'victims of enforced displacement' struggling for survival beyond the boundaries of their countries of origin (not counting the millions of 'internal' refugees in Burundi and Sri Lanka, Columbia and Angola, Sudan and Afghanistan, condemned to vagrancy by endless tribal wars). Of those, more than six million are in Asia, seven to eight million in Africa; there are three million of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. This is, to be sure, a conservative estimate. Not all refugees have been recognised (or claimed to be recognised) as such; only a part of the displaced persons were lucky enough to find themselves on UNHCR register and under their care. Of those on the UNHCR register, 83.2% are placed in camps in Africa, and 95.9% in Asia (in Europe, so far only 14.3% of the refugees have been locked in the camps).

The camps are artifices made permanent through blocking the exits. The inmates cannot go back 'where they came from' - the countries they left do not want them back, their livelihoods have been destroyed, their homes burned or stolen. But there is no road forward either: no government would see gladly an influx of homeless millions. As to their new 'permanently temporary' location, the refugees are 'in it, but not of it'. They do not truly belong to the country on which territory their huts are assembled and the tents pitched. From the rest of the host country, they are separated by the invisible, but thick and impenetrable veil of suspicion and resentment. They are suspended in a spatial void in which time has ground to a halt. They neither have settled nor are on the move, they are neither sedentary nor nomads. In the terms in which humanity of the humans is narrated, they are ineffable. They are Jacques Derrida's 'undecidables' made flesh. Among people like us, praised by others and priding ourselves for the skills of self-reflection, they are not only the un-touchables, but *un-think-ables*. In our world of imagined communities, they are the *un-imaginables*. And it is by refusing them the right to be imagined that other - genuine or hoping to be genuine - communities seek credibility for their own labours of imagination. Only a community frequently appearing these days in political discourse but otherwise nowhere to be seen in real life and real time, the *global* community, an inclusive yet not exclusive community, a community matching Kant's vision of *vereinigung in der Menschengattung*, may lift the present-day refugees out of the 'non-lieu' in which they have been cast.

All communities are imagined. Global community is no exception from that rule. But imagination turns into a tangible, potent and integrating force when sustained by socially produced and socially sustained institutions of collective self-identification and self-government, like in the case of modern nations

wedded for better or worse and till-death-do-them-part to modern sovereign states. As far as the imagined global community is concerned, similar institutional network (woven of global agencies of democratic control, globally binding legal system and globally upheld ethical principles) is largely absent. And this is, I suggest, the major cause of what is being called, euphemistically, the ‘refugee problem’, and the major obstacle to its resolution.

The unity of the human species that Kant postulated may be, as he suggested, resonant with Nature’s intention – but it certainly does not seem ‘historically determined’. The continuing uncontrollability of the already global network of mutual dependence and ‘mutually assured vulnerability’ most certainly does not increase the chance of such unity. This only means, however, that at no other time has the keen search for common humanity, and the practice that follows such an assumption, been as urgent and imperative as it is now. In the era of globalization, the cause and the politics of shared humanity face the most fateful steps they have made in their long history.

ⁱ In *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*, Galilée 1997, p.42.

ⁱⁱⁱ As Giorgio Agamben discovered – see his *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Einaudi 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ Giorgio Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine* (1996); here quoted after Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino translation, *Means without Ends; Notes on Politics*, University of Minnesota Press 2000, p.20.

^{iv} Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), quoted by Arnedt after Wveryman’s Library version edited by E.J.Payne.

^v Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Andre Deutsch 1986, pp. 300, 293.

^{vi} *Means without Ends*, p.21.

^{vii} Victor W.Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Rotledge 1969, pp.170, 96.

^{viii} Hannah Arendt, ‘On humanity in Dark Times, in *Men in Dark times*, p.15.

^{ix} Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen, Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen*, Duncker & Humboldt 1963, p.80. See the discussion in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press 1998, p.137.

^x Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel sur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Doncker & Humboldt 1922, pp.19-21. See discussion in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp.15ff.

^{xi} *Homo Sacer*, p.18.

^{xii} *Homo Sacer*, p.142.

^{xiii} *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.204.

^{xiv} Quoted in *Histoire des colonisations* by Marc Ferro, Seuil 1994.

^{xv} *The Guardian* of 26 November 2001.

^{xvi} See Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, in *Diacritics*, I. 1986, p.26.

Rethinking Modernity

Turning points of history and world order

Peter Wagner

Since the 11th of September 2001, ‘nothing will be the same as before’, has been repeated ad infinitum. To me, it seems as yet quite uncertain whether the occurrences of that day mark a major world-political transformation. In many respects, it is just too early to tell. If it indeed turns out that the world has decisively changed in relation to that event, however, then this will not be due to the event of that day, but the world’s reactions to the event. The event was and is in need of interpretation, the struggle over its correct – or most appropriate – interpretation continues.

Let me take a step back and pose the question in somewhat broader terms. I believe that we are witness to a major transformation of the world, some ‘turning-point of history and world order’, but I also think that it is a highly complex transformation the origins of which lie much before the year 2001 and the end of which – some kind of new global societal constellation of a certain stability, if it all will come to pass – is not near enough to see precisely its contours.

What I will try to do in these remarks is to sketch the broad contours of this longer-term transformation, and then come back to the question about where we are now, at the beginning of the third millennium and after the 11th of September. But as I will develop this brief sketch with the help of a specific understanding of modernity, I will need to start by saying something about this concept and about how it informs our social and political world.

Rethinking modernity

The sociological and philosophical debate over ‘modernity’ often appears both confused and confusing. This confusion is mostly due to an unacknowledged, yet important equivocation. On the one hand, the term is used to refer to a deep normative, politico-cultural commitment, most importantly to freedom and autonomy, but also to rationality and conscious control. On the other hand, most clearly in sociological theories of ‘modernization’ and now of ‘neo-modernization’, ‘modernity’ is used to refer to Western societies, in particular the US, and their historical trajectories. We find such view, for instance, in the thinking about the ‘end of history’ (Francis Fukuyama) and in the reading of this history as the one about the ‘rise of liberal institutions and customs’ (Richard Rorty). From this perspective, the hope and promise of combining an emphasis on free human action with the achievement of greater mastery over the natural

and social world is seen as realized in the differentiation of functions and their separate institutionalization in Western societies. In other words, such view provided a sociologized version of the Enlightenment combination of freedom and reason, or of subjectivity and rationality.

Things are certainly more complicated than that. However, it has been notoriously difficult to elaborate a critical perspective on the contemporary Western world without appearing to abandon the normative commitment to freedom and reason. The accusation of being anti-modern emerges easily enough. It is possible, though, to use the reference to autonomy and mastery in the conceptualization of modernity *beyond* the standard and often self-laudatory sociology of modern societies. Following Cornelius Castoriadis, modernity can be considered a situation in which the reference to autonomy and mastery provides for a double 'imaginary signification' of social life. By this term, Castoriadis refers to what more conventionally would be called a generally held belief or an 'interpretative pattern' (Johann Arnason). More precisely, the two components of this signification are the idea of the autonomy of the human being as the knowing and acting subject, on the one hand, and on the other, the idea of the rationality of the world, i.e. its principled intelligibility. Conceptually, therefore, modernity refers to a situation in which human beings do not accept any external guarantors, i.e. guarantors that they do not themselves posit, of their knowledge, of their political orders or of their selfhood.

The difference between this interpretative approach to modernity and former sociological analyses is as follows. The sociology of modern society thought to derive a particular institutional structure from this double imaginary signification. Thus, the social sciences during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were often inclined to consider a historically specific interpretation of a *problématique* as a general trait of modernity. Sociology, for instance, tended to conflate the historical form of the European nation-state with the solution to, as it was often called, the problem of social order, which was expressed in the concept 'society' (Neil Smelser).

When assuming, however, that a modern set of institutions can be derived from the imaginary signification of modernity, it is overlooked that the two elements of this signification are ambivalent each one on its own and tension-ridden between them. Therefore, the recent rethinking takes such tensions to open an *interpretative space* that is consistent with a *variety of institutional forms*. The relation between autonomy and mastery institutes an interpretative space that is to be specifically filled in each socio-historic situation through struggles over the situation-grounded appropriate meaning. Theoretically, at least, there is always a plurality and diversity of interpretations of this space.

The commitment to modernity is, thus, in need of interpretation and of specification with regard to time and place. This opens a route to thought about plural forms of modernity. This insight can be employed to read the history of the twentieth century in new ways. One could say, for instance, that the secular, civic-minded French Republic and the more culturally oriented German nation-state were two institutional forms of European modernity. Or one could distinguish in general more individualistic and more collectivistic interpretations of the claim to autonomy – as individual or collective self-determination. The history of the US and the history of Soviet socialism would provide major institutional expressions. Or more recently, we have witnessed a more globally oriented discussion about forms of modernity, triggered certainly by the economic success of Japan.

A recent transformation of modernity and its impact on the world order

Not being able to go into much historical detail, permit me now to discuss certain recent turning points of history that have reshaped the worldwide debate - and struggle - over viable interpretations of modernity. I would argue that there was indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century a major rupture in the self-understandings of modernity, more precisely between the years 1968 and 1989. This transformation can be disaggregated into three components and roughly distinguished chronologically:

– The first period, from *1968 to 1973/4*, witnessed, on the one hand, student revolts in the West and the Prague Spring, and on the other, the world-economic crisis following the first oil price hike. Taken together these occurrences mark a profound rupture, in politico-cultural and in economic terms, in the relatively smooth path of post-Second World War development. They upset the relatively stabilized states in both Western Europe and the US and in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the major difference being the stronger – more forceful, in any sense of the term – attempts in the East to contain the impact of these upsetting events.

Economically speaking, the decline in the ability of states and governments to control and channel economic change starts in this period. This is the beginning of the current form of economic globalization, even though governments tried to resist the challenge. In political and cultural terms, one may want to describe the developments in quite similar ways. The period marks the beginning of a declining control of reigning ideologies over the population. In many respects, these are liberating movements, liberations from the institutional arrangements of a rather highly organized form of modernity. During the 1970s, though, the dynamics that was started with these occurrences was barely recognizable.

– Secondly, the biennium 1979/80 brings a first moment of culmination, in three different respects. With Margaret Thatcher and then Ronald Reagan coming to power in two important Western states, the year marks the onset of neo-liberalism as a government creed. Thus, what started as a challenge to government control of the national economy was now embraced as official doctrine. Deregulation meant to speed up the liberation of economic forces from political constraints. With the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern condition* something similar happened in the politico-cultural field. The withering of apparently secure ground and boundaries in intellectual work was not only diagnosed but also embraced, it seemed. Finally, the Iranian Revolution brought the end of a quasi-colonial regime and the assertion of a non-Western political project that, in as traditional a guise it may have appeared, was thoroughly modern at least in one important sense: it was created in a collective action of radical societal transformation. Taken together, these events can be seen as marking the struggle about different exits from the transformation that began a decade earlier.

– Thirdly, and maybe most importantly, the years 1989 to 1991 brought a second major moment of culmination. With *perestrojka* in the Soviet Union and the stepping up of regional integration in Western and Central Europe, now more clearly perceived in political, not merely economic terms, two attempts were started that significantly differed from the proposals of the 1980s. At least initially, both projects were attempts at a conscious political reconstruction, thus they operated neither by proposing just the abandoning of all or most of the existing rules, as in different ways both neo-liberalism and postmodernism do, nor the radical reversal of societal development, as the Iranian Revolution did. Both projects are unfinished and are and were exposed to major obstacles, many of which come from the external world, but some of which are also produced by uncertainty about the appropriate path to take. If they were successful, each in their own way or in some articulated form, they would give testimony to the persistent possibility of plural interpretations of the commitment to modernity.

Plural forms of modernity – a persistent possibility?

And this is precisely the question on which I would like to conclude. Trying to assess the combined outcome of the transformative events of the past three decades, we may – and should – ask whether under the new global condition a plurality of forms of modernity remains possible and, if so, what their likely contours and normative stakes are.

The assessment cannot but be mixed. On the one hand, the melting of the frozen socio-political constellation of the post-Second World War period has unleashed political and cultural creativity that could be brought to fruition and could crystallize in new forms of modern polities. There are, however, two major

requirements for the possibility of a plural modernity to become real that would need to be, but currently are not sufficiently, fulfilled.

First of all, one needs to recognize that many of the developments over the past two decades took place under the hegemony of an economic doctrine that did not allow for much plurality, namely neo-liberalism. Overall, the insight was too little widespread that one can accept a version of economic freedom, while at the same time allowing for and safeguarding political choices. The modern commitment to autonomy does not only mean individual freedom, it also means collective self-determination, democracy. And democracy, in turn, needs political forms in which deliberation about the common takes place with a variety of possible outcomes. With hindsight, one needs to say that the liberating movements between 1968 and 1989 may have somewhat neglected the significance and the complexity of this question.

Secondly, a plurality of modernity requires the building and maintenance of international regimes that enhance justice, freedom (in a comprehensive sense, not merely economic freedom) and security in the world. This would be the framework, the umbrella so to say, in which (or: under which) a plurality of interpretations of modernity could unfold. In the early 1990s, the chances for such a framework to be built did not look too slim. To enumerate briefly the elements:

- the commitment to reform in the Soviet Union would lead to a more viable and a normatively more defensible interpretation of modernity in Russia, the other states of the federation, and in East and Central Europe;
- there were serious steps towards turning Europe into a political entity, with its specific commitment to freedom, social justice, dignity, lawfulness etc.;
- there were similarly serious moves to end unjust, oppressive and violent situations in Palestine, South Africa, Northern Ireland
- activities were increased that were meant to lead towards globally accepted international agreements on the environment, on crime, ...

By the early third millennium almost all of this has changed, and the 11th of September was certainly a part of this change, but just as certainly it was not its cause. And my short enumeration of the positive developments during the 1990s demonstrate the direction in which energies need to be concentrated to make the year 2001 a relatively insignificant one in world-history.



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