

globally invigorated problems. The reunion of power and politics may be achieved, if at all, at the planetary level. As Benjamin R. Barber poignantly put it, 'no American child may feel safe in its bed if in Karachi or Baghdad children don't feel safe in theirs. Europeans won't boast long of their freedoms if people in other parts of the world remain deprived and humiliated.'<sup>19</sup> No longer can democracy and freedom be fully and truly secure in one country, or even in a group of countries; their defence in a world saturated with injustice and inhabited by billions of humans denied human dignity will inevitably corrupt the very values they are meant to defend. The future of democracy and freedom may be made secure on a planetary scale – or not at all.

Fear is arguably the most sinister of the demons nesting in the open societies of our time. But it is the insecurity of the present and uncertainty about the future that hatch and breed the most awesome and least bearable of our fears. That insecurity and that uncertainty, in their turn, are born of a sense of impotence: we seem to be no longer in control, whether singly, severally or collectively – and to make things still worse we lack the tools that would allow politics to be lifted to the level where power has already settled, so enabling us to recover and repossess control over the forces shaping our shared condition while setting the range of our possibilities and the limits to our freedom to choose: a control which has now slipped or has been torn out of our hands. The demon of fear won't be exorcized until we find (or more precisely *construct*) such tools.

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## *Humanity on the Move*

A hundred years ago, Rosa Luxemburg suggested that though capitalism 'needs non-capitalist social organizations as the setting for its development' 'it proceeds by assimilating the very condition which alone can ensure its own existence'.<sup>1</sup> Non-capitalist organizations provide a fertile soil for capitalism: capital feeds on the ruins of such organizations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up.

The inborn paradox of capitalism, and in the long run its doom: capitalism is like a snake that feeds on its own tail . . . Alternatively, we may say, using terms unknown to Luxemburg since they were invented only in the last decade or two, a time when the distance between the tail and the stomach was shrinking fast and the difference between the 'eater' and the 'eaten' was becoming ever less visible: capitalism draws its life-giving energy from 'asset stripping', a practice recently brought into the daylight by the common operation of 'hostile mergers', a practice needing ever new assets to be stripped – yet sooner or later, once it is applied globally, supplies are bound to be exhausted, or reduced below the level required for its sustenance. 'Assets' that are 'stripped' are the outcome of other producers' labour – but as those producers are deprived of their assets and so

gradually yet relentlessly eliminated, a point is bound to be reached when there are no assets left to be 'stripped'.

In other words, Rosa Luxemburg envisaged a capitalism dying for lack of food, starving to death because it had eaten up the last meadow of 'otherness' on which it grazed. But a hundred years later it seems that a fatal, possibly the most fatal result of modernity's global triumph, is the acute crisis of the 'human waste' disposal industry, as each new outpost conquered by capitalist markets adds new thousands or millions to the mass of men and women already deprived of their lands, workshops, and communal safety nets.

Jeremy Seabrook vividly describes the plight of the global poor these days, evicted from their land and forced to seek survival in the fast swelling slums of the nearest megalopolis:

Global poverty is in flight; not because it is chased away by wealth, but because it has been evicted from an exhausted, transformed hinterland . . .

The earth they farmed, addicted to fertiliser and pesticide, no longer yields a surplus to sell in the market. Water is contaminated, irrigation channels are silted up, well water polluted and undrinkable . . . Land was taken by government for a coastal resort, a golf course, or under pressure of structural adjustment plans to export more agricultural products . . . There had been no repairs to school building. The health centre had closed. Forests, where people had always gathered fuel, fruit and bamboo for house repairs, had become forbidden zones, guarded by men in the livery of some private semi-military company.<sup>2</sup>

The volume of humans made redundant by capitalism's global triumph grows unstoppably and comes close now to exceeding the managerial capacity of the planet; there is

a plausible prospect of capitalist modernity (or modern capitalism) *choking on its own waste products* which it can neither reassimilate or annihilate, nor detoxify (there are numerous signals of the fast rising toxicity of the rapidly accumulating waste).

Whereas the morbid consequences of industrial and household waste for the ecological balance and for the self-reproducing capacity of life on the planet have been a matter of intense concern for some time now (though far too little action has followed the debates), we have not as yet arrived anywhere near seeing through to and grasping in full the far-reaching effects of the growing masses of *wasted humans* on the political balance and social equilibrium of human planetary coexistence. It is high time, though, to start. In an essentially novel situation like ours neither the examination of the list of usual suspects, nor a resort to the habitual means of tackling them will be of much use in making sense of what is going on – affecting equally, though in a variety of ways, every resident of the planet.

The new 'fullness of the planet' – the global reach of the financial, commodity and labour markets, of capital-managed modernization, and so also of the modern mode of life – has two direct consequences.

The first consequence is the blockage of those outlets that in the past allowed for a regular and timely draining and cleansing of the relatively few modernized and modernizing enclaves of the planet of their 'human surplus', which the modern way of life was bound to produce on an ever rising scale: the superfluous, supernumerary and redundant population – the excess of the rejects of the labour market, and the refuse of the market-targeted economy, over the capacity of recycling arrangements. Once the modern mode of life had spread (or had been forcibly stretched) to encompass the whole of the globe,

and so had stopped being the privilege of a limited number of selected countries, the 'empty' or 'no man's' lands (more precisely, lands that thanks to the global power differential could be seen and treated as void and/or masterless by that sector of the planet that was already 'modern'), having served for several centuries as the primary outlet (principal dumping site) for human waste disposal, became thin on the ground and have come close to vanishing altogether. As for the 'redundant humans' who are currently being turned out on a massive scale in the lands that have only recently jumped under (or fallen under) the juggernaut of modernity, such outlets were never available; the need for them did not arise in the so-called 'premodern' societies, innocent of the problem of waste, human or inhuman alike.

In the effect of that double process – of the blocking of the old and the non-provision of new external outlets for human waste disposal – both the 'old moderns' and the newcomers to modernity turn the sharp edge of exclusionary practices increasingly against themselves. Nothing else is to be expected, because the 'difference' that has been encountered/produced in the course of the global expansion of the modern way of life – but could be treated for several centuries as a vexing yet temporary and curable irritant, and handled more or less effectively with the help of 'anthropophagic' or 'anthropoemic' strategies (Claude Lévi-Strauss's terms) – has come home to roost. But at home the customary stratagems tried and tested in faraway lands are not realistic, and all attempts to apply them domestically carry untested, unforeseeable and so terrifying risks.

As Clifford Geertz observed in his trenchant critique of the current choice between the alternatives of the 'application of force to secure conformity to the values of those who possess the force' and 'a vacuous tolerance that, engaging nothing, changes nothing',<sup>3</sup> the power to enforce conformity is no longer available, while 'tolerance' has

ceased to be a lofty gesture with which the high and mighty might placate, simultaneously, their own embarrassment and the offence taken by those who felt patronized and insulted by their assumed benevolence. In our times, Geertz points out, 'moral issues stemming from cultural diversity . . . that used to arise . . . mainly between societies . . . now increasingly arise within them. Social and cultural boundaries coincide less and less closely.'

The day when the American city was the main model of cultural fragmentation and ethnic tumbling is quite gone; the Paris of *nos ancêtres les gaulois* is getting to be about as polyglot, and as polychrome, as Manhattan, and Paris may yet have a North African mayor (or so, anyway, many of the *gaulois* fear) before New York has a Hispanic one . . .

(T)he world is coming at each of its local points to look more like a Kuwaiti bazaar than like an English gentlemen's club . . . *Les milieux* are all *mixtes*. They don't make *Umwelte* like they used to do.

If the excess of population (the part that cannot be reasimilated into 'normal' life patterns and reprocessed back into the category of 'useful' members of society) can be routinely removed and transported beyond the boundaries of the enclosure inside which an economic balance and social equilibrium are sought, people who have escaped transportation and remain inside the enclosure, even if they are momentarily redundant, are earmarked for 'recycling' or 'rehabilitation'. They are 'out' only for the time being, their state of exclusion is an abnormality which commands a cure and musters a therapy; they clearly need to be helped 'back in' as soon as possible. They are the 'reserve army of labour' and must be put into and kept in a decent shape that will allow them to return to active service at the first opportunity.

All that changes, however, once the conduits for draining off the surplus of humans are blocked. The longer the 'redundant' population stays inside and rubs shoulders with the 'useful' and 'legitimate' rest, the less the lines separating 'normality' from 'abnormality', temporary incapacitation from final consignment to waste, appear reassuringly unambiguous. Rather than remaining a misery confined to a relatively small part of the population, as it used to be perceived, assignment to 'waste' becomes everybody's potential prospect – one of the two poles between which everybody's present and future social standing oscillates. The habitual tools and stratagems of intervention that were worked out to deal with an abnormality seen as temporary and as affecting a minority do not suffice to deal with the 'problem of waste' in this new form; nor are they particularly adequate to the task.

Awesome as they may be, all these and similar setbacks and quandaries tend to be magnified and become yet more acute in those parts of the globe that have been only recently confronted with the phenomenon of 'surplus population', previously unknown to them, and so with the problem of its disposal. 'Recently' in this case means *belatedly*, at a time when the planet is already full, when no 'empty lands' are left to serve as waste disposal sites and when all asymmetries of boundaries are turned firmly against newcomers to the family of moderns. Other lands will not invite other peoples' surpluses, nor can they, as they themselves were in the past, be forced to accommodate them. In opposition to the waste producers of yore, who used to seek and find *global* solutions to problems they produced *locally*, those 'latecomers to modernity' are obliged to seek *local* solutions to *globally* caused problems – with at best meagre, but more often than not non-existent chances of success.

Whether voluntary or enforced, their surrender to global pressures, and the consequent opening of their own territory

to the unfettered circulation of capital and commodities, put at risk most of the family and communal businesses which once were able and willing to absorb, employ and support all newly born humans and at most times assured their survival. It is only now that the newcomers to the world of the 'moderns' experience that 'separation of the business from the household', with all its attendant social upheavals and human misery, a process through which the pioneers of modernity went hundreds of years ago and in a form somewhat mitigated by the availability of global solutions to their problems: the abundance of 'empty' and 'no man's lands' that could easily be used to deposit the surplus population that could no longer be absorbed by an economy emancipated from familial and communal constraints. Such a luxury is, emphatically, not available to the latecomers.

Tribal wars and massacres, the proliferation of 'guerrilla armies' or bandit gangs and drug traffickers masquerading as freedom fighters, busy decimating each other's ranks yet absorbing and in due course annihilating the 'population surplus' in the process (mostly the youth, unemployable at home and denied all prospects); this is one of the twisted and perverse 'local quasi-solutions to global problems' to which latecomers to modernity are forced to resort, or rather find themselves resorting. Hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of people are chased away from their homes, murdered or forced to run for their lives outside the borders of their country. Perhaps the sole thriving industry in the lands of the latecomers (deviously and often deceitfully dubbed 'developing countries') is the *mass production of refugees*.

The ever more prolific products of that industry were what the British prime minister proposed to sweep under other people's carpets by unloading them 'near their home countries', in permanently temporary camps (deviously and often deceitfully dubbed 'safe havens') in order to keep

their local problems local – and so as to nip in the bud all attempts of the latecomers to follow the example of the pioneers of modernity by seeking global (and the only effective) solutions to locally manufactured problems. What he proposed in fact (though not in so many words) was to preserve the well-being of his country at the expense of exacerbating the already unmanageable ‘surplus population’ problems of the immediate neighbours of the latecomers where there is willy-nilly a similar mass production of refugees . . .

Let us note as well that while refusing to share in the effort of ‘waste disposal’ and ‘waste-recycling’, the affluent West does a lot to invigorate waste *production*; not just indirectly, by dismantling one by one and eliminating as ‘unproductive’ or ‘economically unviable’ all past arrangements of anti-waste prophylactics, but directly, through waging globalizing wars and destabilizing ever larger numbers of societies. On the eve of the invasion of Iraq, NATO was asked to mobilize its armies to help Turkey to seal its border with Iraq in view of the impending assault on the country. Many a statesperson of the NATO countries objected, raising many imaginative reservations – but none mentioned publicly that the danger against which Turkey needed (or so it was thought) to be protected was the influx of Iraqi refugees made homeless by the American invasion – not against the invasion of Turkey by an Iraqi army which the American invasion of Iraq was sure to batter and pulverize.<sup>4</sup>

However earnest, the efforts to stem the tide of ‘economic migration’ are not and probably cannot be made a hundred per cent successful. Protracted misery makes millions desperate, and in an era of the global frontier-land and globalized crime one can hardly expect a shortage of ‘businesses’ eager to make a buck or a few billion bucks from capitalizing on that desperation. Hence the second

formidable consequence of the current great transformation: millions of migrants wandering the routes once trodden by the ‘surplus population’ discharged by the greenhouses of modernity – only this time in a reverse direction, and unassisted by the armies of conquistadores, tradesmen and missionaries. The full dimensions of that consequence and its repercussions are yet to unravel and be grasped in all their many ramifications.

In a brief but sharp exchange of views that took place in 2001 in connection with the war on Afghanistan, Garry Younge mused on the condition of the planet one day *before* 11 September. He recalled ‘a boatload of Afghan refugees floating off Australia’ (to the applause of 90 per cent of Australians), to be in the end marooned on an uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean:

It is interesting now that they should have been Afghans, given that Australia is very involved in the coalition now, and thinks there is nothing better than a liberated Afghanistan and is prepared to send its bombs to liberate Afghanistan . . . Interesting also that we have now a Foreign Secretary who compares Afghanistan to the Nazis, but who, when he was Home Secretary and a group of Afghans landed at Stansted, said that there was no fear of persecution and sent them back.<sup>5</sup>

Younge concludes that on 10 September the world was ‘a lawless place’ of which the rich and the poor alike knew that ‘might is right’, that the high and mighty can ignore and bypass international law (or whatever they choose to call by that name) whenever they find such law inconvenient, and that wealth and power determine not just economics but the morality and politics of the global space, and for that matter everything else concerning the life conditions on the planet.

Somewhat later a case was held before a High Court judge in London to test the legality of the treatment accorded by British authorities to six asylum seekers who were fleeing regimes officially recognized as 'evil', or at least as routinely violating or negligent of human rights – like Iraq, Angola, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Iran.<sup>6</sup> Keir Starmer QC acting on behalf of the six told the judge, Mr Justice Collins, that the new rules introduced in Britain have left hundreds of asylum seekers 'so destitute that they could not pursue their cases'. They slept rough in the streets, were cold, hungry, scared and sick; some were 'reduced to living in telephone boxes and car parks'. They were allowed 'no funds, no accommodation and no food', prohibited to seek paid work while denied access to social benefits. And they had no control whatsoever over when, where (and if) their applications for asylum would be processed. A woman who escaped Rwanda after being repeatedly raped and beaten ended up spending the night on a chair at Croydon police station – allowed to stay on the condition that she would not fall asleep. A man from Angola, who found his father shot and his mother and sister left naked in the street after a multiple rape, ended up denied all support and sleeping rough. In the case presented by Keir Starmer QC, the judge proclaimed the refusal of social assistance unlawful. But the Home Secretary reacted to the verdict angrily: 'Frankly, I am personally fed up with having to deal with a situation where parliament debates issues and the judges then overturn them . . . We don't accept what Mr Justice Collins has said. We will seek to overturn it.'<sup>7</sup> At the same time 200 similar cases were waiting for a court decision.

The plight of the six whose case Keir Starmer QC presented was probably a side-effect of overcrowding and overflowing in the camps, designed or improvised, into which asylum seekers are routinely transported in Britain

the moment they land. The numbers of homeless and stateless victims of globalization grow too fast for the planning, location and construction of camps to keep up with them.

One of the most sinister effects of globalization is the deregulation of wars. Most present-day war-like actions, and the most cruel and gory ones among them, are conducted by non-state entities, subject to no state or quasi-state laws and no international conventions. They are simultaneously the outcome, and auxiliary but powerful causes, of the continuous erosion of state sovereignty and continuing frontier-land conditions in 'suprastate' global space. Intertribal antagonisms break out into the open thanks to a weakening of the arms of the state; in the case of the 'new states', of arms that have never been given time (or allowed) to grow muscle. Once let loose, the hostilities render the inchoate or entrenched state-legislated laws unenforceable and for all practical intents and purposes null and void.

The general population of such a state then finds itself in a lawless space; the part of the population that decides to flee the battlefield and manages to escape finds itself in another type of lawlessness, that of the global frontier-land. Once outside the borders of their native country, escapees are in addition deprived of the backing of a recognized state authority that can take them under its protection, vindicate their rights and intercede on their behalf with foreign powers. Refugees are stateless, but stateless in a new sense: their statelessness is raised to an entirely new level by the non-existence or mere ghost-like presence of a state authority to which their statehood could be referred. They are, as Michel Agier put it in his insightful study of refugees in the era of globalization, *hors du nomos* – outside law;<sup>8</sup> not this or that law of this or that country, but *law as such*. They are outcasts and outlaws of a novel kind, the products of

globalization and the fullest epitome and incarnation of its frontier-land spirit. To quote Agier again, they have been cast in to a condition of 'liminal drift', and they don't know and cannot know whether it is transitory or permanent. Even if they are stationary for a time, they are on a journey never completed since its destination (whether arrival or return) remains forever unclear, while a place they could call 'final' stays forever inaccessible. They will never be free from a gnawing sense of the transience, indefiniteness and provisional nature of any settlement.

The plight of the Palestinian refugees, many of whom have never experienced life outside the improvised camps hastily patched together more than fifty years ago, has been well documented. As globalization takes its toll, though, new camps (less notorious and largely unnoticed or forgotten) mushroom around the spots of conflagration, prefiguring the model which Tony Blair wished the UN High Commission for Refugees to render obligatory. For instance, the three camps of Dabaab, populated by as many people as the rest of the Kenyan Garissa province in which they were located in 1991-2, show no signs of imminent closure, but more than a decade later they had still failed to appear on a map of the country - still evidently conceived of as temporary features despite their obvious permanence. The same applies to the camps of Ilfo (opened in September 1991), Dagahaley (opened in March 1992) and Hagadera (opened in June 1992).<sup>9</sup>

Once a refugee, forever a refugee. Roads back to the lost (or rather no longer existing) home paradise have been all but cut, and all exits from the purgatory of the camp lead to hell . . . The prospectless succession of empty days inside the perimeter of the camp may be tough to endure, but God forbid that the appointed or voluntary plenipotentiaries of humanity, whose job it is to keep the refugees inside the camp but away from perdition, pull the plug.

And yet they do, time and again, whenever the powers-that-be decide that the exiles are no longer refugees, since ostensibly 'it is safe to return' to that homeland that has long ceased to be their homeland and has nothing that could be offered or that is desired.

There are, for instance, about 900,000 refugees from the intertribal massacres and the battlefields of the uncivil wars waged for decades in Ethiopia and Eritrea, scattered over the northern regions of Sudan (including the ill-famed Darfur), itself an impoverished, war-devastated country, and mingled with other refugees who recall with horror the killing fields of southern Sudan.<sup>10</sup> By a decision of the UN agency endorsed by the non-governmental charities, they are no longer refugees and so are no longer entitled to humanitarian aid. They have refused to go, however; apparently they do not believe that there is 'a home' to which they could 'return', since the homes they remember have been either gutted or stolen. The new task of their humanitarian wardens became therefore to *make* them go . . . In Kassala camp, first the water supplies were cut and then the inmates were forcibly removed beyond the perimeter of the camp, which, just like their homes in Ethiopia, was razed to the ground to bar all thought of return. The same lot was visited on the inmates of Um Gulsam Laffa and Newshagarab camps. According to the testimony of local villagers, about 8,000 inmates perished when the camp hospitals were closed, water wells dismantled and food delivery abandoned. True, it is difficult to verify that story; though what one can be certain of is that hundreds of thousands have already disappeared and continue to disappear from refugee registers and statistics, even if they did not manage to escape from the nowhere-land of non-humanity.

On the way to the camps, their future inmates are stripped of every single element of their identities except one: that of

a stateless, placeless, functionless and 'papers-less' refugee. Inside the fences of the camp, they are pulped into a faceless mass, having been denied access to the elementary amenities from which identities are drawn and the usual yarns from which identities are woven. Becoming 'a refugee' means to lose

the media on which social existence rests, that is a set of ordinary things and persons that carry meanings – land, house, village, city, parents, possessions, jobs and other daily landmarks. These creatures in drift and waiting have nothing but their 'naked life', whose continuation depends on humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup>

As to the latter point, apprehensions abound. Is not the figure of a humanitarian assistant, whether hired or voluntary, itself an important link in the chain of exclusion? There are doubts whether the caring agencies, while doing their best to move people away from danger, do not inadvertently assist the 'ethnic cleansers'. Agier muses on whether the humanitarian worker is not an 'agent of exclusion at a lesser cost', and (more importantly still) a device designed to unload and dissipate the anxiety of the rest of the world, to absolve the guilty and placate the scruples of bystanders, as well as to defuse the sense of urgency and the fear of contingency. Indeed, putting the refugees in the hands of 'humanitarian workers' (and closing one's eyes to the armed guards in the background) seems to be the ideal way to reconcile the irreconcilable: the overwhelming wish to dispose of the noxious human waste while gratifying one's own poignant desire for moral righteousness.

It may be that the guilty conscience caused by the plight of the damned part of humanity can be healed. To achieve that effect, it will suffice to allow the process of biosegregation, of

conjuring up and fixing identities stained by wars, violence, exodus, diseases, misery and inequality – a process already in full swing – to take its course. The carriers of stigma will be definitely kept at a distance by reason of their lesser humanity, that is their physical as well as moral dehumanization.<sup>12</sup>

Refugees are the very embodiment of 'human waste', with no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay, and with neither an intention nor a realistic prospect that they will be assimilated and incorporated into the new social body. From their present dumping site there is no return and no road forward (unless it is a road towards yet more distant places, as in the case of the Afghan refugees escorted by Australian warships to an island far away from all beaten or even unbeaten tracks). A distance large enough to prevent the poisonous effluvia of social decomposition from reaching places inhabited by the natives is the main criterion by which the location of their permanently temporary camps are selected. Out of that place, refugees would be viewed as an obstacle and a trouble; inside that place, they are forgotten. In keeping them there and barring all spilling out, in making the separation final and irreversible, 'the compassion of some and the hatred of others' cooperate in producing the same effect of taking distance and staying at a distance.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing is left but the walls, the barbed wire, the controlled gates, the armed guards. Between them they define the refugees identity – or rather put paid to their right to self-definition, let alone to self-assertion. All waste, including wasted humans, tends to be piled up indiscriminately on the same refuse tip. The act of the assignment to waste puts an end to differences, individualities, idiosyncrasies. Waste has no need of fine distinctions and subtle nuances, unless it is earmarked for recycling; but the refugees?



prospects of being recycled into legitimate and acknowledged members of human society are, to say the least, dim and infinitely remote. All measures have been taken to assure the permanence of their exclusion. People without qualities have been deposited in a territory without denomination, while all roads leading back or forward to meaningful places and to the spots where socially legible meanings can be and are forged daily have been blocked for good.

Wherever they go, refugees are unwanted and left in no doubt that they are. The admittedly 'economic migrants' (that is people who follow the precept of 'rational choice' eulogized by the neoliberal chorus, and so try to find a livelihood where it can be found, rather than staying where there is none) are openly condemned by the same governments that try hard to make 'flexibility of labour' the prime virtue of their electorate and that exhort their native unemployed 'to get on their bikes' and go where the buyers of labour are. But the suspicion of economic motives also spills over to those newcomers who not so long ago were seen as exercising their human rights in seeking asylum from discrimination and persecution. Through repeated association, the term 'asylum seeker' has acquired a derogatory flavour. The statesmen of the 'European Union' deploy most of their time and their brain capacity in designing ever more sophisticated ways of fortifying borders and the most expedient procedures for getting rid of seekers after bread and shelter who have managed to cross the borders nevertheless.

David Blunkett, as British Home secretary, not to be outdone, once proposed to blackmail the countries of origin of refugees into taking back 'disqualified asylum seekers' by cutting financial aid to those countries that didn't.<sup>14</sup> This was not his only new idea; Blunkett wished

to 'force the pace of change', complaining that due to the lack of verve among other European leaders 'progress has still been too slow'. He wanted the creation of an all-European 'rapid joint operations force' and 'a taskforce of national experts' to 'draw up common risk assessments identifying weak points in the EU . . . external borders, addressing the issue of seaborne illegal migration and tackling human trafficking' (the new term designed to replace, and defame, the once noble concept of 'passage').

With the active cooperation of governments and other public figures who find in the aiding and abetting of popular prejudices the sole available substitute for facing up to the genuine sources of the existential uncertainty which haunts their electors, 'asylum seekers' have now replaced the evil-eyed witches and other unrepentant evil-doers, the malignant spooks and hobgoblins of former urban legends. The new and rapidly swelling urban folklore puts the victims of the planetary outcasting in the role of the principal 'villains of the piece' – while collecting, collating and recycling the transmitted lore of hair-raising horror stories, for which the insecurities of city life have generated, now and in the past, a constant and ever more avid demand. As Martin Bright has suggested, the infamous anti-immigrant riots in the British town of Wrexham 'were not an isolated event. Attacks on asylum seekers are becoming the norm in the UK.'<sup>15</sup> In Plymouth, for instance, such attacks became routine. 'Sonam, a 23-year-old farmer from Nepal, arrived in Plymouth eight months ago. His cautious smile reveals two missing teeth he lost, not in the violent conflicts in his own country, but coming back from the corner shop in Davenport.'

The hostility of the natives, combined with the authorities' refusal of state benefits to newcomers who fail to claim asylum upon arrival, with funds available for 'humanitarian protection' being trimmed, and with the

tough deportation policy aimed at 'unwanted' refugees (10,740 deported in 2002, 1,300 detained pending their deportation in June 2003), have resulted in a sharp drop in asylum applications – from 8,900 in October 2002 to 3,600 in June 2003. The data were triumphantly interpreted by David Blunkett as evidence of the laudable success of the government's policy and clinching proof that 'tough' measures 'were working'. Indeed they were 'working', though the Refugee Council pointed out that 'simply preventing people from entering the UK' can hardly be advertised as a 'success', considering that 'some of these people may be in desperate need of our help'.<sup>16</sup>

Those migrants who, despite the most ingenious of stratagems, could not be expeditiously deported the government proposed to confine to camps possibly to be built in remote and isolated parts of the country (a step transforming the widespread belief that 'the migrants do not want to be or cannot be assimilated into the economic life of the country' into a self-fulfilling prophecy). The government has been busy, as Gary Younge has observed, 'effectively erecting Bantustans around the British countryside, corralling refugees in ways that will leave them isolated and vulnerable'.<sup>17</sup> Asylum seekers, Younge concludes, 'are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators'.

Of those on the register of the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 83.2 per cent are placed in camps in Africa, and 95.9 per cent in Asia. In Europe, so far only 14.3 per cent of the refugees have been locked in camps. But there is little hope so far that the difference in favour of Europe will be upheld for long.

Refugees find themselves in a cross-fire; more exactly, in a double bind.

They are expelled by force or frightened into fleeing their native countries, but refused entry to any other. They

do not *change* places; they *lose* their place on earth and are catapulted into a nowhere, into Augé's 'non-lieux' or Garreau's 'nowherevilles', or loaded into Michel Foucault's 'Narrenschiffen', 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'<sup>18</sup> – or (as Michel Agier suggests) into a desert, by definition an uninhabited land, a land resentful of humans and seldom visited by them.

The camps of refugees or asylum seekers are artifices of temporary installation made permanent through a blocking of their exits. Let me repeat: the inmates of refugee or 'asylum seeker' camps cannot go back 'where they came from', since the countries they left do not want them back, their livelihoods have been destroyed, their homes gutted, razed or stolen – but there is no road forward either, because no government will gladly see an influx of homeless millions, and any government would do its best to prevent the newcomers from settling.

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 whose territory their cabins have been assembled or their tents pitched. They are separated from the rest of the host country by an invisible, but all the same thick and impenetrable veil of suspicion and resentment. They are suspended in a spatial void where time has ground to a halt. They have neither settled nor are on the move; they are neither sedentary nor nomadic.

In the habitual terms in which human identities are narrated, they are *ineffable*. They are Jacques Derrida's 'undecidables' made flesh. Among people like us, praised by others and priding ourselves on arts of reflection and self-reflection, they are not only *untouchables*, but *unthinkable*s. In a world-filled to the brim with imagined communities, they are the *unimaginables*. And it is by refusing them the

right to be imagined that the others, assembled in genuine or hoping-to-become-genuine communities, seek credibility for their own labours of imagination.

Refugee camps boast a new quality: a 'frozen transience', an ongoing, lasting state of temporaryness, a duration patched together of moments of which none is lived through as an element of, let alone a contribution to, perpetuity. For the inmates of refugee camps, the prospect of long-term sequels and their consequences is not part of the experience. The inmates of refugee camps live, literally, from day to day – and the contents of daily life are unaffected by the knowledge that days combine into months and years. As in the prisons and 'hyperghettos' scrutinized and vividly described by Loïc Wacquant, encamped refugees 'learn to live, or rather survive [(sur)vivre] from day to day in the immediacy of the moment, bathing in . . . the despair brewing inside the walls'.<sup>19</sup>

Using the terms derived from Loïc Wacquant's analyses,<sup>20</sup> we may say that the refugee camps mix, blend and gel together the distinctive features of both the 'community ghetto' of the Ford–Keynes era and the 'hyperghetto' of our post-Fordist and post-Keynesian times. If 'community ghettos' were relatively self-sustaining and self-reproducing 'mini societies', complete with miniature replicas of the wider society's stratification, functional divisions and the institutions required to serve the complete inventory of communal life's needs, 'hyperghettos' are anything but self-sustaining communities. They are, we may say, piles of 'cut-off string ends' – artificial and blatantly incomplete collections of the rejected; aggregates, but not communities; topographical condensations unable to survive on their own. Once the elites of the 'community ghettos' managed to leave and stopped feeding the network of economic ventures that sustained (however precariously) the

livelihood of the rest of the ghetto population, the agencies of state-managed care and control (the two functions, as a rule, closely intertwined) moved in. The inmates of the 'hyperghetto' are suspended on strings that originate beyond its boundaries and most certainly beyond its control.

Michel Agier found in the refugee camps some features of 'community ghettos', but intertwined with the attributes of the 'hyperghetto'.<sup>21</sup> We may surmise that such a combination makes the bond tying the inmates to the camp still stronger. The pull holding together the denizens of the 'community ghetto' and the push condensing the outcasts into a 'hyperghetto', each a powerful force in its own right, here overlap, are superimposed and mutually reinforce each other. In combination with the seething and festering hostility of the outside environment, they jointly generate an overwhelming centripetal force which it is difficult to resist, making all but redundant the infamous techniques of enclosure and isolation developed by the managers and supervisors of Auschwitzes or Gulags. More than any other contrived social microworlds, refugee camps come close to Erving Goffman's ideal type of the 'total institution': they offer, by commission or omission, a 'total life' from which there is no escape, and thereby effectively bar access to any other form of life.

The permanence of transitoriness; the durability of the transient; the objective determination unreflected in the subjective consequentiality of actions; the perpetually underdefined social role, or more correctly an insertion in the life flow without the anchor of a social role; all these and related features of liquid modern life have been exposed and documented in Agier's findings.

One wonders, though, to what extent the refugee camps can be seen as laboratories where (unwittingly perhaps, but

no less forcefully for that reason) the new liquid modern 'permanently transient' pattern of life is put to the test and rehearsed . . .

Refugees and immigrants, coming from the 'far away' yet bidding to settle in the neighbourhood, are uniquely suitable for the role of an effigy through which the spectre of 'global forces', feared and resented for doing their job without consulting those whom its outcome is bound to affect, can be burnt. After all, asylum seekers and 'economic migrants' are collective replicas (an alter ego? fellow travellers? mirror images? caricatures?) of the new power elite of the globalized world, widely (and with reason) suspected to be the true villain of the piece. Like that elite, they have no tie to any place, are shifty and unpredictable. Like that elite, they epitomize the unfathomable 'space of flows' where the roots of the present-day precariousness of the human condition are sunk. Seeking other, more adequate outlets in vain, fears and anxieties slide off targets close to hand and re-emerge as popular resentment and fear of the 'aliens nearby'. Uncertainty 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. That elite is much too powerful to be confronted and challenged point blank, even if its exact location were known (which it is not). Refugees, on the other hand, hapless and helpless, are a clearly visible, sitting and easy target for unloading the surplus anger, even if they are totally irrelevant to the miseries and fears of more miseries which caused that anger.

Let me add that when faced with an influx of 'outsiders', 'the established' (to deploy Norbert Elias's memorable terms) have every reason to feel threatened. In addition to representing the 'great unknown' which all 'strangers in our midst' embody, these particular outsiders, the refugees, bring home distant noises of war and the stench

of gutted homes and scorched villages that cannot but remind the settled how easily the cocoon of their safe and familiar (safe *because* familiar) routine may be pierced or crushed and how deceptive the security of their settlement must be. The refugee, as Bertold Brecht pointed out in *Die Landschaft des Exils*, is 'ein Bote des Unglücks' ('a harbinger of ill tidings').

The 1970s was the decade when the 'glorious thirty years' of postwar reconstruction, social compact and the developmental optimism that accompanied the dismantling of the colonial system and the mushrooming of 'new nations' was falling into the past, opening up the brave new world of erased or punctured boundaries, information deluge, rampant globalization, consumer feasting in the affluent North and a 'deepening sense of desperation and exclusion in a large part of the rest of the world' arising from 'the spectacle of wealth on the one hand and destitution on the other'.<sup>22</sup> We may see it now, with the benefit of hindsight, as a genuine watershed in modern history. By the end of that decade the setting in which men and women faced up to life challenges had been surreptitiously yet radically transformed, invalidating the extant life wisdoms and calling for a thorough revision and overhaul of life strategies.

The blocking of 'global solutions to locally produced problems', and more exactly the present-day crisis of the 'human waste disposal industry', rebounds on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers by the countries to which the global migrants look in their search for safety from violence, for bread and drinking water; it is also radically changing the plight of the 'internally excluded' inside those countries.

One of the most fateful aspects of change in the treatment accorded to the 'internally excluded' (now renamed

'underclass') was revealed relatively early and has since been thoroughly documented: namely, the passage from a 'social state' model of inclusive community to a 'criminal justice', 'penal', 'crime control' or 'exclusionary' state. David Garland, for instance, observes that

there has been a marked shift of emphasis from the welfare to the penal modality . . . The penal mode, as well as becoming more prominent, has become more punitive, more expressive, more security-minded . . . The welfare mode, as well as becoming more muted, has become more conditional, more offence-centred, more risk conscious . . .

The offenders . . . are now less likely to be represented in official discourse as socially deprived citizens in need of support. They are depicted instead as culpable, undeserving and somewhat dangerous individuals.<sup>23</sup>

Loïc Wacquant notes a 'redefinition of the state's mission';<sup>24</sup> the state 'retreats from the economic arena, asserting the necessity to reduce its social role to a widening and strengthening of its penal intervention'.

Ulf Hedetoft describes the same aspect of the thirty-year-old transformation from the other (but intimately related) side aimed at the 'externally excluded', the potential immigrants.<sup>25</sup> He notes that 'borders are being redrawn between Us and Them more rigidly' than ever before. Following Andreas and Snyder,<sup>26</sup> Hedetoft suggests that in addition to becoming more selective and diversified in the forms they have assumed, borders have turned into what might be called 'asymmetric membranes': they allow exit, but 'protect against unwanted entrance of units from the other side'. For this purpose, faraway outposts, like controls at other countries' ports of departure by sea and air, have been added to the orthodox immigration checkpoints kept along the territorial frontier line:

stepping up control measures at the external borders, but just as importantly a tighter visa-issuing regime in countries of emigration in 'the South' . . . [Borders] have diversified, as have border controls, taking place not just at the conventional places . . . but in airports, at embassies and consulates, at asylum centres, and in virtual space in the form of stepped-up collaboration between police and immigration authorities in different countries.

As if to supply immediate evidence for Hedetoft's thesis, the British Prime Minister met Ruud Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to suggest the establishment of 'safe havens' for prospective asylum seekers *near their homes*, that is at a safe distance from Britain and other well-off countries that were until recently their natural destinations. In the typical newspeak of the post-Great Transformation era, the Home Secretary David Blunkett described the topic of the Blair/Lubbers conversation as 'new challenges for developed countries posed by those who used the asylum system as a route to the West' (using that newspeak, one could complain, for instance, of the challenge for the settled people posed by shipwrecked sailors who used the rescue system as a route to dry land).

For the time being, Europe and its overseas outposts (like the United States or Australia) seem to look for an answer to their unfamiliar problems in similarly unfamiliar policies hardly ever practised in European history; policies that are inward rather than outward looking, centripetal rather than centrifugal, implosive rather than explosive — such as retrenchment, falling back upon themselves, building fences topped with a network of X-ray machines and closed circuit television cameras, putting more officials inside the immigration booths and more border guards outside, tightening the nets of immigration and naturalization law, keeping refugees in closely-guarded and isolated

camps and stopping the others on the approaches to the country well before the migrants reach its borders and had a chance of claiming a refugee or asylum-seeker status – in short, sealing their domain against the crowds knocking on their doors while doing pretty little, if anything at all, to relieve such pressure by removing its causes.

Naomi Klein has noted an ever stronger and more widespread tendency (pioneered by the EU but quickly followed by the US) towards a 'multi-tiered regional stronghold':

→ A fortress continent is a bloc of nations that joins forces to extract favourable trade terms from other countries, while patrolling their shared external borders to keep people from those countries out. But if a continent is serious about being a fortress, it also has to invite one or two poor countries within its walls, because somebody has to do the dirty work and heavy lifting.<sup>27</sup>

NAFTA, the US internal market extended to incorporate Canada and Mexico ('after oil,' Naomi Klein points out, 'immigrant labour is the fuel driving the southwest economy' of the US), was supplemented in July 2001 by 'Plan Sur', according to which the Mexican government took responsibility for the massive policing of its southern boundary, effectively stopping the tide of impoverished human waste flowing to the US from Latin American countries. Since then, hundreds of thousands of migrants have been stopped, incarcerated and deported by Mexican police before reaching US borders. As to Fortress Europe, Naomi Klein suggests that 'Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Czech Republic are the postmodern serfs, providing the low-wage factories where clothes, electronics and cars are produced for 20–25 per cent of the cost to make them in Western Europe'. Inside fortress continents, 'a new

social hierarchy' has been put in place in an attempt to square the circle, to find a balance between blatantly contradictory yet equally vital postulates: of airtight borders and of easy access to cheap, undemanding, docile labour ready to accept and do whatever is on offer; of free trade and of pandering to anti-immigrant sentiments, that straw at which the governments in charge of the sinking sovereignty of nation-states are clutching to try to salvage their fast crumbling legitimation. 'How do you stay open to business and closed to people?' asks Klein. And answers: 'Easy. First you expand the perimeter. Then you lock down.'

The funds which the European Union transferred most willingly and without haggling to the East and Central European countries even before they were granted membership of the Union were those earmarked for state-of-the-art technology intended to make their eastern borders, shortly to become the eastern borders of 'Fortress Europe', impermeable to outsiders . . .

Perhaps the two trends signalled here are simply two related manifestations of the same enhanced, well-nigh obsessive concerns with security; perhaps they can both be explained by the shift in the balance between the perpetually present inclusivist and exclusionary tendencies; or perhaps they are mutually unrelated phenomena, each subject to its own logic. It can be shown however that whatever their immediate causes, both trends derive from the same root: *the global-spread of the modern way of life which by now has reached the furthest limits of the planet*, cancelling the division between 'centre' and 'periphery', or more correctly between 'modern' (or 'developed') and 'premodern' (or 'underdeveloped' or 'backward') forms of life – a division that accompanied the greater part of modern history, when the modern overhaul of received ways was confined to a relatively narrow, though constantly expanding sector

of the globe. As long as it remained relatively narrow, that sector could use the resulting power differential as a safety valve to protect itself from overheating, and the rest of the planet as a dumping site for the toxic waste of its own continuous modernization.

The planet, however, is now full; that means, among other things, that typically modern processes like the building of order and economic progress take place everywhere – and so also that ‘human waste’ is everywhere produced and turned out in an ever rising volume; this time, however, the ‘natural’ refuse tips suitable for its storage and potential recycling are absent. The process first anticipated by Rosa Luxemburg a century ago (though described by her in mainly economic, rather than explicitly social terms) has reached its ultimate limit.

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## *State, Democracy and the Management of Fears*

It has been mostly in Europe and its former dominions, overseas offshoots, branches and sedimentations (as well as in a few other ‘developed countries’ with a European connection of a *Wahlverwandschaft* rather than *Verwandschaft* kind) that the ambient fears and securitarian obsessions have made the most spectacular career in recent years.

When looked at in separation from other seminal departures occurring in those ‘recent years’, this appears to be a mystery. After all, as Robert Castel rightly points out in his incisive analysis of the current insecurity-fed anxieties, ‘we – at least in the developed countries – live undoubtedly in some of the most secure (*sûres*) societies that ever existed.’<sup>1</sup> And yet, contrary to the ‘objective evidence’, it is precisely the cosseted and pampered ‘we’ of all people who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened, more inclined to panic, and more passionate about everything related to security and safety than people of most other societies on record.

Sigmund Freud confronted the puzzle of apparently unwarranted fears point blank and suggested that its solution should be sought in the human psyche’s staunch defiance of the dry ‘logic of facts’.<sup>2</sup> Human suffering (and so also the fear of suffering, that most vexatious and arguably the most aggravating specimen of suffering) arises