

INTRODUCTION – RETURNING (TO) COMMUNITIES

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Qui peut jamais oser un “nous” sans trembler? (Derrida, 2001: 169)

There is a price to be paid for the privilege of “being in a community” – and it is inoffensive or even invisible only as long as the community stays in the dream. The price is paid in the currency of freedom, variously called “autonomy,” “right to self-assertion,” “right to be yourself.” (Bauman, 2001: 4)

In the precarious equilibrium between particularism and universalism, (individual) freedom and (collective) security, it seems inevitable that in our “age of uncertainty,” the desire for community “returns.” The return to community in its many guises – in its irreducibly plural or singular manifestations (always as “communities”) – consists both of a recalling the communal as a site of resistance and critique, and of a re-membering, re-assembling a quite different sense of community (turning community inside-out, a community of singularities). In the face of such a return, the challenge for thinking the communal is not to relinquish the achievements of more than thirty years’ of scepticism about everything “common” (common sense, being and having in common, commonwealth, etc.).

This volume assumes the ambiguity Zygmunt Bauman finds in community, as something that is always already lost, and sees it as an opportunity for a critical return to and of community. Together, these essays might be seen as an instance of what Bill Readings called “community of dissensus” (1996) – an intellectual community that “dwells in the ruins” of the “post-historical university” or “global(ised) culture” – a thinking community that does not already presuppose that one speak the same language or that agreement lies at some kind of “origin” of a community. The essays constitute “singularities;” they are speaking and listening to each other, are “indebted” to each other without being aimed at a consensus – a community that does not presuppose anything that may be in common. Rather than “being together” these essays are merely “thinking together.”

That community is returning can be seen in the proliferation of its current “postmodern” or “posthumanist” conceptualisations: phantom communities, deterritorialised communities, virtual communities, communities without unity, communities of strangers, imagined and imaginary communities, etc. It is clear that the norms and practices of living together, addressed through the rhetoric and allegories of community, have become an issue again in cultural theory. Whatever the period, it seems that ideas of some greater good must invest into some form of the communal. Whether liberal or Marxist, conservative, radical or progressive, the inevitable theoretical confrontation is between the individual and society, between the subject and its ideology, identity, difference and their interdependence.

From Raymond Williams’ “knowable” to Stanley Fish’s “interpretive” community, Jacques Derrida’s “community without community,” Jean-Luc Nancy’s “inoperative” and Blanchot’s “unavowable” community, Giorgio Agamben’s “coming community,” being together (Heidegger’s *Mitsein*) remains an idea as monstrous as it is desirable or inevitable, but always in crisis. As new cultural, social, political, legal and ethical models of solidarity are being sought to serve planetary “risk societies,” this volume investigates communal issues as diverse as communitarianism and the irreducibly political nature of community; globalised, virtual and cyber-communities; identity politics and community (communities of ethnicity, gender, race, etc.); community of and in the media; questions of ethics, justice and community; communities of knowledge and tradition; and the problem of integration, inclusion, cohesion for “multicultural” communities.

The first section of chapters offers a number of diverse engagements with the central notion of community. Richard Tyler discusses how we set about defining the term in the opening chapter “Comprehending Community.” He tracks its eighteenth-century convergence around the immediacy of the local and familiar – “community” as a warming counter balance to the cold force of state – before he settles on a discussion of the multiple relationships of support and power that run through community’s contemporary employment. Against this background of contradictory histories and a disputed present, Tyler shares Wittgenstein’s view that, as with any other word, the definition of community depends upon the period and circumstances of its use. Alongside their other concerns, our contributors have sought to explore the indeterminacy that characterises the use of community in general. Yet, although often implicitly, much of the collection is in sympathy with Tyler’s appeal to Foucault in demanding we engage with the matter in hand with one eye to the movement and exchange of power.

Ivan Callus examines the contrast between the ideality and the realities of community in relation to the “European Community.” His essay directly engages with the central ambiguity of the concept of community, namely to what extent can community practicably contain *and* transcend the qualities of the particular and the singular. The relation between the singular and the universal is one of the central levers for Derridean deconstruction. In following Derrida’s *The Other Heading* Callus’s paper investigates the positioning of Europe and the rhetoric of Europe’s “responsibility” as “exemplary” instances of the promise and the failure of the spirit of community. It anchors this discussion to the context of Malta’s recent accession to the European Union.

In his chapter “Heterogeneous Community: Beyond New Traditionalism,” Thomas A. Lewis begins to unpick the version of community that invokes a collective set of traditions. He argues against a form of “new traditionalism” that rejects ideas of proximity and common interest for a composite of post-Enlightenment narratives around virtue and righteousness. In the place of this new traditionalism, Lewis argues for a way of seeing communities that defines them by their shared systems of practice, thereby enabling us to exploit “the commonalities in our understanding” of such universally desirable visions as social justice. The next chapter, too, is keen to resolve the conceptual difficulties with the way community has come to be used, although Lou Caton’s concentration is on “multiculturalism,” and in particular Stanley Fish’s attack on the coherence of multiculturalism, where Fish presents it as strewn with irresolvable difference. For the resolution of such difference, Caton makes the case for a redeployment of Sartre’s cogito, but in a manner that recognises the potential in the transculturalism of the existential subject.

Ipek Demir’s essay assesses the contribution of philosopher and historian of science Thomas S. Kuhn to our understanding of community. Demir confronts Kuhn’s idea of a self-interested scientific community, entrenched around a given paradigm of knowledge, and asks whether this accounts for the development and change that is generated within these communities. In an assessment that offers lessons for the internal dynamic of communities in general, she shows how Kuhn paid insufficient attention to the necessity of an internal process of concession, recasting and negotiation, and tells us how a revision of the work of Kuhn will reaffirm his overall usefulness in critical community studies. Oleg Domanov also seeks to deepen our understanding of community by rethinking the work of another of the main theoretical contributors to the field, Nancy. Like Caton, Domanov also suggests a greater prominence for the individual subject, but bases this on what he sees as

Nancy's difficulty in articulating community with an event-based ontology, such that account is taken of the seemingly irreconcilable unfolding of Being.

David Bell's chapter then argues that it has been a systemic misreading of the limits of community in some quarters that leads to the continual restatement of what he sees as the badly conceived "bowling alone" thesis; the suggestion that traditional forms of community are in decline. In his discussion, Bell's attention is focussed on the role of the technologies of the World Wide Web in the maintenance of community. Drawing upon and critiquing the metaphor that the Web might offer a ready-made "peg" upon which one might hang one's jacket, Bell is keen to dispute the position of Bauman and a number of others that the Web fosters a peculiarly artificial and transitory form of communal engagement. Yet while the temptation might be to discard the tricky term community altogether, Bell considers it crucial to harness its complex and productive force in the discussion of technology, and concludes by suggesting that the attention to degree and context accorded to discussion of "real life" communities be extended to their Web based counterparts.

The second section of chapters is gathered around an exploration of the culture of communities. As we will go on to see, this does not imply either that the conceptual foundations of community were settled in the last section, or that its role in political practice is to be left until the next. Rather we join with the critical tradition that sees all forms of cultural engagement as having profound cultural and political consequences in exploring complex ideas and practices of community.

Antony Adolf's chapter, firstly, encourages us to critically reconsider the role of language in undergirding community, pointing to those circumstances in which linguistic practice limits the terms within which a given community is permitted to operate. Adolf argues that the dominant theories of community have had at their heart an assumption of "homolingualism," thereby setting themselves and the communities they describe within expressive boundaries. Drawing upon a number of online examples, Adolf tries to demonstrate how a new mode of "hetero-lingualism" widens the scope of community and offers an inclusive and multilingual mode of engagement.

Elizabeth Coleman then turns to the role of cultural property in the formation and maintenance of collective identity. Her approach to "cultural property" is informed by the 1954 Hague Convention's definition of objects central to communal heritage; an emphasis on preservation of what are taken to be significant artefacts later confirmed by UNESCO. Both of these bodies were dedicated to the preservation of cultural property, and Coleman sees the success of this as of key importance. She argues firstly against a widespread

distraction with the cultural and contextual contingencies involved in attaching significance to cultural artefacts, and uses the rest of her chapter to make the case for a renewed concern with the role of significant cultural property in understanding the institutional and social characteristics of community.

Institutional factors have a significant role in Di Drummond's chapter too, although her concern is a specifically historical one. Drummond examines how British railway workers of the nineteenth century coupled communication technologies and the migratory possibilities of international commerce, and in so doing developed a global "virtual community." It is Drummond's central contention that the roots of the "virtual community" are more deeply entwined with the development of nineteenth century multinational capitalism – and the working class experience of this – than the accounts of Rheingold and others would have us believe.

Both Eva Kingsepp and Jackie McMillan look at specific instances of cultural practice, and explore formations of community in contexts of alternative identity formation. Kingsepp looks at the interest of a fan community of World War II enthusiasts in the Nazis and Nazism. She highlights the extent of this community's appreciation of the stigma that attaches to their interests and activities, and reflects upon the intellectual labour they employ in constructing a form of "shadow cultural economy" that structures their consumption practices while countering the accompanying potential for shame. McMillan also picks up the issues around how certain communities come to be stigmatised in her chapter on rescuing "cults" as communities. She posits that cults do not differ markedly from other forms of community. In support of this, she deploys notions of subjectivity to show that the drive to form communities has much in common with a need to subscribe to a cult. Furthermore, McMillan argues, the most compelling evidence that cults offer an insight into dominant social mores is offered by the rabid enthusiasm with which they are kept apart and marked off from mainstream communal activity.

The next two chapters offer different ways of looking at the expression and reproduction of communities in the media. Renée Dickason examines the way community has been mobilised in British television advertising. Her analysis, which looks at material from the 1950s onward, finds that community is used as a means of promoting the dual values of consumerism and citizenship. As well as selling goods or – in the case of government advertising, endorsing or prohibiting certain activities – British television advertising is the business of promoting modes of conduct. Accordingly, concludes Dickason, examining the treatment of communities in advertisements offers another useful handle on establishing and critiquing

those modes of conduct in a position of dominance. Nancy Thumim's chapter is the second to be concerned with communities in the media, where she discusses forms of public participation television. For Thumim, though, public participation television presents a more explicit means by which the media tries to reflect everyday life. She argues that while the ostensible purpose for such productions as *Capture Wales* and *London's Voices* is the granting of "ordinary" individuals a particular kind of public voice, the central discourse of "ordinariness" is assembled from discourses of community. Thus, what is presented as television's moment for the individual is in constant submission to the allure of the communal.

The symbolic emphasis on community that we see in the titles of these public participation programmes applies also to Bano Murtuja's discussion, although her concern is with how the symbolic enactment of community works within lived environments. Murtuja explores how discourses of community shape the identification of the diasporic Pakistanis in Britain and Germany. Significant for her is the confidence with which the signifiers of unity and identity are brandished within these communities as evidence of their internal coherence. For all the appearance of an outward assuredness of belonging, Murtuja shows us that community boundaries and the layers of symbolism through which they are maintained are subject to processes of continual renegotiation and threat.

The third section looks at how community operates as an element of political praxis, both in terms of engagement and of policy. It is first to the capacity for collective political action – added to the need for a forum of interpersonal engagement and support – Tammy Grimshaw turns in her discussion of the gay community. Yet, for all its necessity, Grimshaw's focus is on the gay community's dual role as a regime of power and control. While she acknowledges that these misgivings are actively expressed as part of the intellectual discourse within the gay community, she outlines the dilemmas of the Foucauldian approach that such communities limit and regulate activity, and enforce difference and exclusion. Pointing to and explaining the importance of narratives in communal strategies of liberation and advancement, Grimshaw presents a call for a more inclusive gay community, built more explicitly around broader humanist values.

As much as any other, Sam Hillyard's chapter – "Cull Maff: The Mobilisation of the Farming Community" – places in relief the interconnectedness of the cultural and political elements of community. Hillyard looks at the UK farmers' response to an epidemic of foot and mouth disease (FMD) amongst their livestock, and the attendant communal isolation. In her chapter, she talks both of the necessity of such communities of shared interest as that constructed by the farmers, and of the technologies

by which such collectives are gathered and sustained. Hillyard shows how the farming community occupied their familiar role of the “other” to the more dominant urban body, while demonstrating how FMD added to this sense of otherness the qualities of blight, subjection and infestation. Yet she seeks to venerate neither the farmers themselves nor the notion of community they help exemplify. For even as they united around common cause, the farming community fragmented from within, yielding forth internal divisions of finance, policy and strategies of engagement.

The chapter by Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain looks at the conduct and subsequent coverage and discussion of another direct form of community action, focussing on a period of civil unrest in 2001 and the constructed role of a UK urban community. Bagguley and Hussain show how what were presented as a series of “riots” offered the background for a construction of “community” designed to operate with and give foundation to a racialised discourse of governmental control. To a great extent, then, they show how the rhetoric of community is here turned against the very people it pretends to serve.

George Morgan’s analysis of the political appropriation of community sees it emerge not from the civic authorities, as with Bagguley and Hussain, but rather from the marginalized groupings themselves; although the form of “community” to surface is problematic nonetheless. Morgan’s chapter looks at the discourse of community employed by clusters of Australian Aboriginal people moving from their traditional, less-populated centres to urban areas, offering a focus on particular areas of Sydney. Morgan argues that the disadvantage that greeted them encouraged the construction of a rhetoric of community as a means of establishing a symbolic identity and fostering an internal support system within a racially hostile environment. Yet, Morgan presents the form of community that emerged as dependent upon mythologised notions of pastness and ethnic authenticity that serve only to pass over the post-colonial circumstances of the Aboriginal population, obscure the diversity contained within that population, and remove any impetus of communal action on the basis of the political and cultural terrain as it develops.

In the final chapter of the collection, Marjorie Mayo provides a range of the dominant ways of looking at community, whether it be the terms of a particular sort of cultural belonging, the organising framework of political action, or the rhetorical basis for the exercise of governmental control. She reminds us of the fears of Sennett and others that the balm of community makes tolerable the excesses of capitalist-driven modernisation, so that the symbolic power of community becomes complicit in the destruction of localised forms of belonging. Of course, in terms of how it ought to inform

political policy, a stress on community offers the means to focus on the marginalized and deprived areas. Yet, as Mayo and her fellow contributors have shown, this aid can bring a significant cost in submission to political control, even as other, parallel discourses of community offer a means by which local activists can organise and maintain a watch on the organisation of central power. Taking the US case as her focus, and steering between the pragmatics of political power negotiation and the renewed emphasis on the local, Mayo outlines the case for our maintaining a watching brief over the political influence of the neo-liberal strand to the current Washington consensus, offering a reminder of the range of political articulations available to those powers that would use community to serve their own interests.

Running through all of these chapters we can detect the movement and exchange of power, manifest in and set against activities of identity formation on the one hand and practices of distinction and exclusion on the other. Yet, in addition, it is necessary to point out that these issues also predominate in a series of debates that our contributors do not address head on, in particular around the matter of gender. Although from this collection alone Kingsepp, McMillan, Grimshaw and Murtuja all touch either on gender roles or on the maintenance of sexual identity, it remains generally the case that the community in its “unmarked” form still tends to lean towards the patriarchal. This has long been a concern for feminists in particular, and there has developed a tradition in feminist thought of remobilising the terminology of “community” to describe the gathering together and mutual discourse of those women situated in the outer reaches of the formal civil realm.

At times, this feminist use of community has been explicit, such as with Coates and Cameron’s (1988) series of essays looking at women in “speech communities”, or Radway’s (1987) study of the reading practices of the women of a small US town, whereas on other occasions it has remained implicit, as with Clarissa Smith’s (2002) study of a community of women formed around the consumption of erotic entertainment. Responses motivated by the issue of gender also differ. They sometimes operate at the level of direct engagement, as with Prokhovnik’s (1998) examination of the place of women as citizens, where she looks at how to secure the inclusion of women within the political community. Alternatively, responses might reappraise how events are rendered, as when Spence (1998) highlights the role of women within a community based political struggle. All in all, though, an appreciation of the role of gender should be one of the matters to inform our reading of community as we move through the chapters to come.

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