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English  
English Subtitles

A young man grows up in the mob and works very hard to advance himself through the ranks. He enjoys his life of money and luxury, but is oblivious to the horror that he causes. A drug addiction and a few mistakes ultimately unravel his climb to the top. Based on the book "Wiseguy" by Nicholas Pileggi.

## Feminism and the Politics of the Commons

Silvia Federici

Our perspective is that of the planet's commoners: human beings with bodies, needs, desires, whose most essential tradition is of cooperation in the making and maintenance of life; and yet have had to do so under conditions of suffering and separation from one another, from nature and from the common wealth we have created through generations.

— The Emergency Exit Collective, *The Great Eight Masters and the Six Billion Commoners*, 2008

The way in which women's subsistence work and the contribution of the commons to the concrete survival of local people are both made invisible through the idealizing of them are not only similar but have common roots. . . . In a way, women are treated like commons and commons are treated like women.

— Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy*, 1999

Reproduction precedes social production. Touch the women, touch the rock.

— Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, 2008

Silvia Federici *Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* in Former West: Art and The Contemporary after 1989, The MIT Press 2016  
p. 379—389

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## Introduction: Why Commons

At least since the Zapatistas took over the *zócalo* in San Cristobal de las Casas on 31 December 1993 to protest legislation dissolving the *ejidal* lands of Mexico, the concept of “the commons” has been gaining popularity among the radical left, internationally and in the United States, appearing as a basis for convergence among anarchists, Marxists, socialists, ecologists, and eco-feminists.<sup>1</sup>

There are important reasons why this apparently archaic idea has come to the center of political discussion in contemporary social movements. Two in particular stand out. On one side is the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades had sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash nexus. The “new enclosures” have also made visible a world of communal properties and relations that many had believed to be extinct or had not valued until threatened with privatization.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, the new enclosures have demonstrated not only that the common has not vanished, but also that new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced, including in areas of life where none previously existed, like, for example, the Internet.

The idea of the common/s, in this context, has offered a logical and historical alternative to both state and private property, the state and the market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities. It has also served an ideological function as a unifying concept prefiguring the cooperative society that the radical left is striving to create. Nevertheless, ambiguities as well as significant differences remain in the interpretations of this concept, which we need to clarify if we want the principle of the commons to translate into a coherent political project.<sup>3</sup>

What, for example, constitutes a common? We have land, water, air commons, digital commons; our acquired entitlements (e.g., social security pensions) are often described as commons, and so are languages, libraries, and the collective products of past cultures. But are all these commons equivalent from the viewpoint of their political potential? Are they all compatible? And how can we ensure that they do not project a unity that remains to be constructed? Finally, should we speak of “commons” in the plural, or “the common” as autonomist Marxists propose we do, this concept designating, in their view, the social relations characteristic of the dominant form of production in the post-Fordist era?

With these questions in mind, I look at the politics of the commons from a feminist perspective, in which “feminist” refers to a standpoint shaped by the struggle against sexual discrimination and over reproductive work, which, to paraphrase Marxist historian Peter Linebaugh’s comment

above, is the rock upon which society is built and by which every model of social organization must be tested. This intervention is necessary, in my view, to better define this politics and clarify the conditions under which the principle of the common/s can become the foundation of an anti-capitalist program. Two concerns make these tasks especially important.

## Global Commons, World Bank Commons

First, since at least the early 1990s, the language of the commons has been appropriated by the World Bank and the United Nations and put at the service of privatization. Under the guise of protecting biodiversity and conserving the global commons, the Bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves, has expelled the populations that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while ensuring access to those who can pay, for instance, through eco-tourism.<sup>4</sup> For its part, the UN has revised the international law governing access to the oceans in ways that enable governments to concentrate the use of seafarers in fewer hands, again in the name of preserving the common heritage of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

The World Bank and the UN are not alone in their adaptation of the idea of the commons to market interests. Responding to different motivations, a revalorization of the commons has become trendy among mainstream economists and capitalist planners; witness the growing academic literature on the subject and its cognates: social capital, gift economies, altruism. Witness also the official recognition of this trend through the conferral of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 to the leading voice in this field, the political scientist Elinor Ostrom.<sup>6</sup>

Development planners and policymakers have discovered that, under proper conditions, a collective management of natural resources can be more efficient and less prone to conflict than privatization, and that commons can be made to produce very well for the market.<sup>7</sup> They have also recognized that, carried to the extreme, the commodification of social relations has self-defeating consequences. The extension of the commodity form to every corner of the social factory, which neoliberalism has promoted, is an ideal limit for capitalist ideologues, but it is a project not only unrealizable, but undesirable from the viewpoint of long-term reproduction of the capitalist system. Capitalist accumulation is structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense quantities of labor and resources that must appear as externalities to the market, like the unpaid domestic work that women have provided, upon which employers have relied for the reproduction of the workforce.

It is no accident, then, that long before the Wall Street meltdown, a variety of economists and social theorists warned that the marketization of all spheres of life is detrimental to the market’s well-functioning, for markets, too, the argument goes, depend on the existence of non-monetary relations like confidence, trust, and gift giving.<sup>8</sup> In brief, capital is learning

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about the virtues of the common good. Even *The Economist*, the organ of capitalist free-market economics for more than 150 years, in its 31 July 2008 issue, cautiously joins the chorus:

The economies of the ‘new commons’ is still in its infancy. It is too soon to be confident about its hypotheses. But it may yet prove a useful way of thinking about problems, such as managing the internet, intellectual property or international pollution, on which policymakers need all the help they can get.<sup>9</sup>

We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet.

## What Commons?

A second concern is that, while international institutions have learned to make commons functional to the market, the question of how commons can become the foundation of a non-capitalist economy is still unanswered. From Linebaugh’s work, especially *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, we have learned that commons have been the thread that has connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and indeed, the fight for the commons is all around us.<sup>10</sup> Mainers are fighting to preserve access to their fisheries under attack by corporate fleets; residents of Appalachia are organizing to save their mountains threatened by strip mining; open source and free software movements are opposing the commodification of knowledge and opening new spaces for communications and cooperation. We also have many invisible commoning activities and communities that people are creating in North America, which writer Chris Carlsson has described in his book *Nowtopia*. As Carlsson shows, much creativity is invested in the production of “virtual commons” and forms of sociality that thrive under the radar of the money/market economy.<sup>11</sup>

Most important has been the creation of urban gardens, which have spread in the 1980s and 1990s across the United States, thanks mostly to the initiatives of immigrant communities from Africa, the Caribbean, or the south of the country. Their significance cannot be overestimated. Urban gardens have opened the way to a “rurbanization” process that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our food production, regenerate our environment, and provide for our subsistence. The gardens are far more than a source of food security; they are centers of sociality, knowledge production, and cultural and intergenerational exchange. As agroecologist Margarita Fernandez writes of urban gardens in New York, they “strengthen community cohesion” as places where people come together not just to work the land, but to play cards, hold weddings, and have baby showers or birthday parties.<sup>12</sup> Some have

partner relationships with local schools whereby they give children environmental education after school. Not least, gardens are “a medium for the transport and encounter of diverse cultural practices” so that African vegetables and farming practices, for example, mix with those of the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup>

Still, the most significant feature of urban gardens is that they produce for neighborhood consumption rather than for commercial purposes. This distinguishes them from other reproductive commons that either produce for the market, like the fisheries of Maine’s “Lobster Coast,”<sup>14</sup> or are bought on the market, like the land trusts that preserve open spaces. The problem, however, is that urban gardens have remained a spontaneous grassroots initiative and there have been few attempts by movements in the US to expand their presence and to make access to land a key terrain of struggle. More generally, the left has not posed the question of how to bring together the many proliferating commons that are being defended, developed, and fought for, so that they can form a cohesive whole and provide a foundation for a new mode of production.

An exception is the theory proposed by philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), which argues that a society built on the principle of “the common” is *already evolving* from the informatization and “cognitivization” of production.<sup>15</sup> According to this theory, as production presumably becomes production of knowledge, culture, and subjectivity, organized through the Internet, a common space and common wealth are created that escape the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion. For access and use multiply the resources available on the Internet rather than subtracting from them, thus signifying the possibility of a society built on abundance—the only remaining hurdle confronting the “multitude” being how to prevent the capitalist “capture” of the wealth produced.

The appeal of this theory is that it does not separate the formation of “the common” from the organization of work and production, but sees it as immanent to it. Its limit is that its picture of the common absolutizes the work of a minority possessing skills not available to most of the world population. It also ignores that this work produces commodities for the market, and it overlooks the fact that online communication/production depends on economic activities—mining, microchip, and rare earth production—that, as presently organized, are extremely destructive, socially and ecologically.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, with its emphasis on knowledge and information, this theory skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life. This, however, is true of the discourse on the commons as a whole, which is mostly concerned with the formal preconditions for the existence of commons, and less with the material requirements for the construction of a commons-based economy enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations.

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## Women and the Commons

It is in this context that a feminist perspective on the commons is important. It begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work historically and in our time, women have depended on access to communal natural resources more than men, have been most penalized by their privatization, and most committed to their defense. As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), in the first phase of capitalist development, women were at the forefront of the struggle against land enclosures both in England and in the "New World," and they were the staunchest defenders of the communal cultures that European colonization attempted to destroy.<sup>17</sup> In Peru, when the Spanish *conquistadores* took control of their villages, women fled to the high mountains where they recreated forms of collective life that have survived to this day. Not surprisingly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the most violent attack on women in the history of the world: the persecution of women as witches. Today, in the face of a new process of primitive accumulation, women are the main social force standing in the way of a complete commercialization of nature, supporting a non-capitalist use of land and a subsistence-oriented agriculture. Women are the subsistence farmers of the world. In Africa, they produce 80 percent of the food people consume, despite the attempts made by the World Bank and other agencies to convince them to divert their activities to cash-cropping. In the 1990s, in many African towns, in the face of rising food prices, they have appropriated plots in public lands and planted corn, beans, cassava "along roadsides . . . in parks, along rail-lines," changing the urban landscape of African cities and breaking down the separation between town and country in the process.<sup>18</sup> In India, the Philippines, and across Latin America, women have replanted trees in degraded forests, joined hands to chase away loggers, made blockades against mining operations and the construction of dams, and led the revolt against the privatization of water.<sup>19</sup>

The other side of women's struggles for direct access to means of reproduction has been the formation across the Third World, from Cambodia to Senegal, of credit associations that function as money commons.<sup>20</sup> Differently named, the *tonines* (as they are called in parts of Africa) are autonomous, self-managed, women-made banking systems that provide cash to individuals or groups who have no access to banks, working purely on a basis of trust. In this, they are completely different from the microcredit systems promoted by the World Bank, which function on a basis of mutual policing and shame, reaching the extreme (e.g., in Niger) of posting pictures in public places of the women who fail to repay the loans, so that some women have been driven to suicide.<sup>21</sup>

Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor both as a means to economize the cost of reproduction and to protect each other from poverty, state violence, and the violence of individual men. An outstanding example is that of the *ollas comunes* (common cooking pots) that women in Chile and Peru set up in the 1980s when, due to stiff inflation, they could no longer afford to shop alone.<sup>22</sup> Like land reclamations or the formation of *tonines*, these practices are the expression of a world where communal bonds are still strong. But it would be a mistake to consider them something pre-political, "natural," or simply a product of "tradition."

After repeated phases of colonization, nature and customs no longer exist in any part of the world, except where people have struggled to preserve and reinvent them. As historian Leo Podlatchic has noted in "Saving Women: Saving the Commons," grassroots women's communalism today leads to the production of a new reality; it shapes a collective identity, it constitutes a counterpower in the home and the community, and it opens a process of self-valorization and self-determination from which there is much we can learn.<sup>23</sup>

The first lesson we can gain from these struggles is that the "communing" of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement and the condition for the construction of autonomous spaces undermining from within the hold that capitalism has on our lives. Undoubtedly, the experiences I have described are models that cannot be transplanted. For us in North America, the reclamation and communing of the means of reproduction must necessarily take different forms. But here, too, by pooling our resources and re-appropriating the wealth that we have produced, we can begin to delink our reproduction from the commodity flows that, through the world market, are responsible for the dispossession of millions across the world. We can begin to disentangle our livelihood not only from the world market, but also from the war machine and prison system on which the US economy now depends. Not last, we can move beyond the abstract solidarity that so often characterizes relations in the movement and which limits our commitment, our capacity to endure, and the risks we are willing to take.

In a country where private property is defended by the largest arsenal of weaponry in the world, and where three centuries of slavery have produced profound divisions in the social body, the re-creation of the common's appears as a formidable task that could only be accomplished through a long-term process of experimentation, coalition building, and reparations. Though this task may now seem more difficult than passing through the eye of a needle, it is also the only possibility we have for widening the space of our autonomy, and refusing to accept that our reproduction occurs at the expense of the world's other commoners and commons.

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## Feminist Reconstructions

What this task entails is powerfully expressed by feminist sociologist Maria Mies when she points out that the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life, in order to recombine what the social division of labor in capitalism has separated. For the distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded.<sup>24</sup> In other words, we need to overcome the state of irresponsibility concerning the consequences of our actions that results from the destructive ways in which the social division of labor is organized in capitalism; short of that, the production of our life inevitably becomes a production of death for others. As Mies points out, globalization has worsened this crisis, widening the distances between what is produced and what is consumed, thereby intensifying, despite the appearance of an increased global interconnectedness, our blindness to the blood in the food we eat, the petroleum we use, the clothes we wear, and the computers we communicate with.<sup>25</sup>

Overcoming this state of oblivion is where a feminist perspective teaches us to start in our reconstruction of the commons. No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. This is how we must understand the slogan “no commons without community.” But “community” has to be intended not as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with communities formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity, but rather as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and a responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals.

Certainly, the achievement of such community, like the collectivization of our everyday work of reproduction, can only be a beginning. It is no substitute for broader anti-privatization campaigns and the reclamation of our common wealth. But it is an essential part of our education in collective government and our recognition of history as a collective project, which is perhaps the main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism.

On this account, we, too, must include in our political agenda the communalization of housework, reviving that rich feminist tradition that in the US stretches from the utopian socialist experiments of the mid-nineteenth century to the attempts that “materialist feminists” made from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century to reorganize and socialize domestic work, and thereby the home and the neighborhood, through collective housekeeping—attempts that continued until the 1920s, when the Red Scare put an end to them.<sup>26</sup> These practices and,

most importantly, the ability of past feminists to look at reproductive labor as an important sphere of human activity not to be negated but to be revolutionized, must be revisited and revalorized.

One crucial reason for creating collective forms of living is that the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on Earth and, to a very large extent, it is work that is irreducible to mechanization. We cannot mechanize childcare, care for the ill, or the psychological work necessary to reintegrate our physical and emotional balance. Despite the efforts that futuristic industrialists are making, we cannot robotize care except at a terrible cost for the people involved. No one will accept nursebots as caregivers, especially for children and the ill. Shared responsibility and cooperative work, not given at the cost of the health of the providers, are the only guarantees of proper care. For centuries, the reproduction of human beings has been a collective process. It has been the work of extended families and communities on which people could rely, especially in proletarian neighborhoods, even when they lived alone, which meant that old age was not accompanied by the desolate loneliness and dependence, in which so many of our elderly live. It is only with the advent of capitalism that reproduction has been completely privatized, a process that is now carried out to a degree that it destroys our lives. This trend must be reversed, and the present time is propitious for such a project.

As the capitalist crisis destroys the basic elements of reproduction for millions of people across the world, including the US, the reconstruction of our everyday life is a possibility and a necessity. Like strikes, social/economic crises break the discipline of wage work, forcing new forms of sociality upon us. This is what occurred during the Great Depression, which produced a movement of hobos who turned the freight trains into their commons, seeking freedom in mobility and nomadism.<sup>27</sup> At the intersections of railroad lines, they organized *hobo jungles*, pre-figurations, with their self-governance rules and solidarity, of the communist world in which many of the hobos believed.<sup>28</sup> However, but for a few Boxcar Berthas,<sup>29</sup> this was predominantly a masculine world, a fraternity of men, and, in the long term, it could not be sustained. Once the economic crisis and the war came to an end, the hobos were domesticated by the two great engines of labor power fixation: the family and the house. Mindful of the threat of working class recomposition during the Depression, North American capital excelled in its application of the principle that has characterized the organization of economic life: cooperation at the point of production, separation, and atomization at the point of reproduction. The atomized, serialized family house that Levittown provided, compounded by its umbilical appendix, the car, not only sedentarized the worker but put an end to the type of autonomous workers’ commons that hobo jungles had represented.<sup>30</sup> Today, as millions of Americans’ houses and cars are being repossessed, as foreclosures, evictions, and massive loss of employment are again breaking down the pillars of the capitalist discipline of work, new common grounds are again

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taking shape, like the tent cities that are sprawling from coast to coast.

This time, however, it is women who must build the new commons so that they do not remain transient spaces, temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction.

If the house is the *oikos* on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the house workers and house prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and, above all, providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction. As has already been suggested, we can draw inspiration for this project from the programs of the nineteenth century materialist feminists who, convinced that the home is an important “spatial component of the oppression of women,” organized communal kitchens, cooperative households calling for workers’ control of reproduction.<sup>31</sup>

These objectives are crucial at present. Breaking down the isolation of life in the home is not only a precondition for meeting our most basic needs and increasing our power with regard to employers and the state. As political economist Massimo de Angelis has reminded us, it is also a protection from ecological disaster.<sup>32</sup> For there can be no doubt about the destructive consequences of the “un-economic” multiplication of reproductive assets and self-enclosed dwellings that we now call our homes, dissipating warmth into the atmosphere during the winter, exposing us to unmitigated heat in the summer. Most importantly, we cannot build an alternative society and a strong self-reproducing movement unless we redefine our reproduction in a more cooperative way and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political, and between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life.

It remains to be clarified that assigning women this task of commoning/collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of femininity. Undeniably, many feminists view this possibility as a fate worse than death. It is deeply scripted in our collective consciousness that women have been designated as men’s common, a natural source of wealth and services to be as freely appropriated by them as the capitalists have appropriated the wealth of nature. But to paraphrase urban historian Dolores Hayden, the reorganization of reproductive work, and therefore the reorganization of housing and public space, is not a question of identity; it is a question of labor and, we can add, a question of power and safety.<sup>33</sup> I am reminded here of the experience of the women members of the Landless Workers’ Movement of Brazil, or *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* who, after their communities won the right to maintain in the land that they had occupied, insisted that the new houses be built to form one compound so that they could continue to communalize their housework, wash together, cook together, take turns with men as they had done in the course of the struggle, and be ready to run to give each other support when abused by men. Arguing that women should take

the lead in the collectivization of reproductive work and housing is not to naturalize housework as a female vocation. It is rather to refuse to obliterate the collective experiences, the knowledge, and the struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, a history that has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism. Reconnecting with this history is a crucial step for women and men today both to undo the gendered architecture of our lives and to reconstruct our homes and lives as commons.

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1. A key source on the politics of the commons and its theoretical foundations is the United Kingdom-based electronic journal *The Commoner*, now entering its fourteenth year of publication. Online at: <http://www.commoner.org.uk>.
2. A case in point is the struggle that is taking place in many communities in Maine against Nestlé’s appropriation of Maine’s waters to bottle Poland Spring. Nestlé’s theft has made people aware of the vital importance of these waters and the supporting aquifers and has truly reconstituted them as a common. See Food and Water Watch, “Fact Sheet,” July 2009, online at: [http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/nestle\\_bottle\\_community\\_water\\_fs\\_july\\_2009\\_1.pdf](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/nestle_bottle_community_water_fs_july_2009_1.pdf).
3. For debates on the commons, see the journal/newspaper *Turbulence: Ideas For Movement*, online at: <http://turbulence.org.uk>.
4. For more on this subject, see Ana Isla, “Who Pays for the Kyoto Protocol?”, in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, ed. Ariel Salish (London: Pluto Press, 2009). The author describes how the conservation of biodiversity has provided the World Bank and other international agencies with the pretext to enclose rain forests on the grounds that they represent “carbon sinks” and “oxygen generators.”
5. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in November 1994, establishes a 200-mile offshore limit, defining an exclusive economic zone in which nations can exploit, manage, and protect the resources contained, from fisheries to natural gas. The convention also regulates deep-sea mining and the use of the resulting revenues. On the development of the concept of the “common heritage of
6. As described by Wikipedia, Ostrom’s work focuses on common pool resources and “emphasizes how humans interact with ecosystems to maintain long-term sustainable resource yields.” See “Elinor Ostrom,” online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elinor\\_Ostrom&oldid=9191010](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elinor_Ostrom&oldid=9191010).
7. For more on this topic, see *In Land We Trust: Environment, Private Property and Constitutional Change*, Calestous Juma and J. B. Olwanga, eds. (London: Zed Books, 1996). This is an early treatise on the effectiveness of communal property relations in the context of capitalist development and efforts.
8. David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 36–39.
9. Data Team, “Commons sense,” *The Economist*, 31 July 2008, online at: <http://www.economist.com/node/11848182>.
10. See Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
11. See Chris Carissimo, *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today!* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2008).
12. Margarita Fernandez, “Cultivating Community, Food, and Empowerment: Urban Gardens in New York City,” Project Course Paper, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Hixon Center for Urban Ecology, Fall 2003, online at: [http://hixon.yale.edu/sites/default/files/fellow/paper/fernandez\\_margarita\\_2008\\_report.pdf](http://hixon.yale.edu/sites/default/files/fellow/paper/fernandez_margarita_2008_report.pdf).
13. Ibid.

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14. The fishing commons of Maine are presently threatened with a new privatization policy justified on the name of preservation and ironically labeled "catch shares." This is a system, already applied in Canada and Alaska, where local governments set limits on the amount of fish that can be caught by allocating individual shares on the basis of the amount of fishing that boats have done in the past. This system has proven to be disastrous for small, independent fishermen who are forced to sell their share to the highest bidders. Protest against its implementation has mounted in the fishing communities of Maine. Laurie Schreiber, "Cash Shares or Share-Croppers?," *Fishermen's Voice*, vol. 14, no. 12 (December 2009).
15. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Hardt and Negri, *Multitudes: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
16. It has been calculated, for example, that 33,000 liters of water and 15–19 tons of material are required just to produce a personal computer. See Saro Sarkar, *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism?: A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices* (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 126; and Elizabeth Dias, "First Blood Diamonds, Now Blood Computers?," *Time Magazine*, 24 July 2008, online at <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1912594,00.html>. Dias cites claims made by Global Witness—an organization campaigning to prevent resource-related conflicts—that the trade in the minerals at the heart of the electronic industry feeds the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
17. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).
18. Donald B. Freeman, "Survival Strategy or Business Training Ground? The Significance of Urban Agriculture for the Advancement of Women in African Cities," *African Studies Review*, vol. 36, issue 3 (December 1993), pp. 1–22; and Silvia Federici, "Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 10 (October 2008), pp. 28–35.
19. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); Vandana Shiva, *Ecology, and The Politics of Survival:*
20. Leo Podlatchuk, "Saving Women: Saving the Commons," in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, ed. Ariel Salleh (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 268–290.
21. I owe this information to Ousseina Alidou, former Director of the Center for African Studies and Professor in the Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures, and the Graduate Program in Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, New Jersey.
22. See Jo Fisher, *Out of the Shadows: Women, Resistance and Politics in South America* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1989); and Carol Andreas, *When Women Rebel: The Rise of Popular Feminism in Peru* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1985).
23. Podlatchuk, "Saving Women."
24. Maria Miles and Veronika Benholt-Thomsen, "Defending, Reclaiming, and Reinventing the Commons," in *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 153.
25. Ibid.
26. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs For American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); and Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: Norton and Company, 1986).
27. Lecture by George Caffentzis, "Three Temporal Dimensions of Class Struggle" (ISA Annual Meeting, San Diego, March 2006).
28. See Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Caffentzis, "Three Temporal Dimensions of Class Struggle."
29. Boxcar Bertha (1972) is Martin Scorsese's adaptation of Ben Reitman's Sister of the Road: *The Autobiography of Boxcar Bertha* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002).
30. See Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream.*
31. See Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
32. See Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*, p. 230.

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE GRADES OF ITALO-AMERICAN AND YANKEE BOYS<sup>1</sup>

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SINCE AMERICANS of Italian background form a considerable segment of the American population, the performance of Italo-American youngsters in the American public school deserves study. This area, however, is as yet a relatively unexplored one. Tait (13) has made a closely confined statistical study of the effects on Italo-American school children of some aspects of American culture. Child's Italian or American (1) is a penetrating analysis of second-generation New Haven Italians. In his Street Corner Society (16) Whyte has described the social structure and leadership patterns operative among Italo-Americans in Boston's depressed North End. Covello (3) has outlined the problems of educating Italo-American children in a New York slum area. These observers and others have made important contributions in the general field, but as yet none has dealt directly with the actual performance of today's Italo-American youngster in a suburban American public school.

## PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

To this end the investigator has made an analysis of the performance of Italo-American boys in the 900 pupil high school of a fairly typical middle class suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. Subjects of his study were 41 Italo-American and 141 Yankee boys in the town's one high school. Second and third-generation Italo-Americans and third-generation Yankees, the boys ranged in age from 14 to 19 and were enrolled in all curricula of the school. Italo-American subjects traced their antecedents with few impurities to the provinces of Southern Italy. So-called Yankee boys were what are sometimes referred to as "non-ethnics", those to whom no nationality label is ordinarily applied. They were at least third-generation white, Protestant "Old Americans" who perceived themselves as "Yankee", an opinion of themselves which was shared by their neighbors.

Over a period of three years, through interviews, observational techniques, an examination of school

records, and the use of two questionnaires expressly designed for the purpose, the author was in a position to define the school achievement of his Italo-American subjects, contrast it with that of 141 so-called Yankee students, and then suggest some of the factors which contribute to the difference.

## Italo-American and Yankee Grade Differences

First, to establish a convenient index of scholastic achievement, the investigator converted the grade indices of all his subjects to single-digit, normalized, standardized scores of the stanine variety (8). As he had hypothesized, the scholastic achievement of Italo-American students showed itself to be a considerable cut below that of Yankee students. The mean Italo-American scholastic stanine score (3.85) fell short of the mean Yankee score (5.26) by 1.41 stanines. The difference between these two means proved statistically significant ( $t = 5.04$   $p < .0001$ ). As tested by chi square, subjects divided into a) those in Stanines 1-5, and b) those in Stanines 6-9, the significance of this difference was further confirmed (chi square = 9.2  $p < .005$ ).

## Italo-American - Yankee Grades

	Low Grades Stanines 1-5	High Grades Stanines 6-9
Italo-American	32	8
Yankees	79	69

It should be remembered that teachers' classroom grades are, in large part, subjective. In assigning any student a course mark, a teacher ordinarily has in mind not only a) some absolute standard of accomplishment, but also b) the relative accomplishment of the student vis-a-vis all students in the school, c) his relative achievement vis-a-vis other students in his particular class, and d) the

student's achievement relative to his own potential. What weight a teacher assigns each of these four factors in his grading is a matter of his own personal predilection.

To the extent that teachers in the school are guided by c and d, students who have low IQ's or who are in classes with other low achievers have an advantage in grades. Since compared with Yankees, these Italo-American students do have low IQ's and congregate in classes populated by low achievers, their accomplishment brings them higher grades than the same level of accomplishment brings Yankee students, who, by comparison, have high capacity and congregate in fast moving classes. Therefore, the discrepancy between the mean Italo-American and Yankee stanines may actually be, if anything, greater than that shown by the figures.

#### ANALYSIS OF DATA

##### Italo-American - Yankee Intelligence Differences

To explain similarities in or differences between Italo-American and Yankee school children, one turns naturally to available measures of intelligence. Most subjects had taken at least the Otis Gamma and a few also the Otis Beta. In these latter instances, the investigator averaged the two scores in arriving at the boys' IQ's. All were then converted to stanine scores. The following table shows their frequency pattern:

<u>Frequency</u>				
		Italo-American	Yankee	
Stanine	IQ Range			
Low	1	73-87	2	1
	2	88-92	7	3
	3	93-99	5	9
	4	100-106	6	16
	5	107-112	11	31
	6	113-118	3	34
	7	119-123	1	18
	8	124-129	1	17
High	9	130-144	0	9

When the Otis IQ scores were averaged, the mean Italo-American IQ (96.2) proved 12.3 points below the mean Yankee IQ (108.5). A similar discrepancy appears when the Otis IQ scores are converted to stanine scores: the mean Yankee stanine score (6.52) outdistances the mean Italo-American stanine score (3.97) by a considerable degree. A t-test shows this difference to be one of pronounced statistical significance ( $t = 9.1 p < .0005$ ). When the subjects are dichotomized into a) those falling in Stanines 1-5, and b) those in Stanines 6-9, chi square confirms the significance of this difference (chi square = 20.9  $p < .001$ ).

Thus far no account has been taken of socio-economic status. However, one of the most clear-cut pictures to emerge from the author's Personal Data Questionnaire was the decisive difference between the socio-economic levels of Italo-American and Yankee subjects. In a six-category scheme similar to those used by the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1938 (14) and the Harvard University Mobility Study (9), all of the subjects' families were ranked by three independent judges according to father's occupation. Then on the basis of further inquiry, the investigator made adjustments in ratings in those cases where such factors as the size and nature of family income, type and location of residence, and the education and community standing of parents indicated that the father's occupational group did not accurately reflect the family's socio-economic status.

The mean SES (socio-economic status) of the Italo-American boys equalled 4.05, of Yankee boys 1.88, the gap between them on the six-category scale being 2.17. T-test analysis shows this difference significant at the .0005 level. Both Italo-American and Yankee families ran the gamut from occupational Group 1 to 6, but whereas 82 percent of the Yankee families fell in the top two categories, only 24 percent of the Italo-American families did likewise. While 45 percent of the Italo-American families fell in the two lowest brackets, only three percent of the Yankee families did so. The Yankee position in the community "pecking order" obviously comes well in advance of that of the town's Italo-American residents. The cleavage between Italo-American and Yankee socio-economic status, therefore, is clear cut, and as later evidence indicates, it constitutes the most outstanding characteristic differentiating the two groups.

Once the effects of SES are neutralized, in fact, it is found that IQ ceases to be a significant ethnic predictor. With SES held constant, the zero-order correlation between IQ and Ethnicity drops from a highly significant -.40 to a non-significant -.11. Independent of SES, therefore, the IQ has little power to distinguish between the Italo-American and Yankee students. It may be said that equated for socio-economic status, Italo-American boys are not significantly different from Yankee boys in intelligence, at least as intelligence is ordinarily measured by school IQ tests. What little residual bias remains in favor of Yankee IQ's may be attributable to the verbal and abstract nature of the tests, as Davis (5), Hess (11), Eels (6), and others have suggested.

##### Grades - Socio-Economic Status

The strength of the socio-economic factor as a differentiator between Italo-American and Yankee boys led to the hypothesis that SES alone might be enough to account for the difference between Italo-American and Yankee academic performance.

A number of competent researchers, including Coleman (2), Davis (4), Gough (7), Heintz (10), Shaw (12), and Warner (15), have demonstrated the strong connection between school achievement and socio-economic background. Consonant with the findings of these studies, the present investigation shows that SES can be labelled the major contributing factor. But the data at hand also show that SES alone is not enough to account for all the significant variance in the grades made by the two ethnic groups. When SES is held constant, the correlation between Ethnicity and Grades falls from .32 to .18. True, the decline is sharp, but the .18 correlation remains a significant one at the .05 level. While SES, therefore, can be held accountable for a major share of the variance, the residual variance is still significant. Thus it may be said that even when the effects of SES are neutralized, Italo-American boys continue to get grades which are significantly lower than those made by their Yankee classmates.

#### DISCUSSION

Evidently other factors are involved. These factors, the investigator hypothesizes, are contained in the variant value-structures adhered to by Italo-American and Yankee boys. It may be assumed that, other things being equal, people normally follow their interests, apply effort, and do relatively well in areas and activities which they consider important. Conversely, they can be expected to avoid, exert little effort, and do poorly in areas and activities which they consider relatively unimportant. While little empirical work has as yet been done directly on the values of high school students, on the basis of his own experience, as a secondary school teacher, this investigator strongly suspects that that non-intellectual, motivational factors play a decisive role in academic success. Therefore, in work to follow up the analysis here described the investigator plans to turn his attention to the value-structures of Yankee and Italo-American boys as possible predictors of their grades.

#### FOOTNOTE

1. This article is based on research done in connection with the author's unpublished doctoral dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Ed. D. degree at Harvard University in 1958, as well as on research supported by Public Health Service Research Grants M-3785(A), M-4713(A), and MH-06902-01, from the National Institute of Mental Health, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

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## **Illicit Networks: Mafia States, Nonstate Actors**

Roundtable in New York, NY

April 27, 2012

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Rapporteur: Emma Welch, IIGG Research Associate

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, reduced trade barriers and technological innovations led to an unprecedented expansion of transnational organized crime in size, scope, and influence. The proliferation of illicit networks has exacted enormous economic and human costs. Although data is murky, transnational crime is estimated to account for over 3 percent of global gross domestic product. As crime has flourished, law enforcement has failed to keep pace.

The conventional narrative is of the victimized state exploited by sophisticated, ruthless, and technologically savvy nonstate actors. Reality, however, is not so straightforward. Criminal organizations are inherently attracted to states or regions where there are market opportunities, governance is limited, institutions are weak, corruption is pervasive, and rule of law is absent or limited in scope. But illicit networks have also been harnessed by elements of the state—such as institutions, officials, or elites—to advance their own interests and reap profits. In some extreme cases, there is no daylight between the state and organized crime. If left unchecked, this political-criminal nexus poses a serious and destabilizing threat to international security, as illicit networks operate with near-impunity under the sponsorship and legal protection of the state.

To understand the nexus between states and organized crime, and to explore new ways to harness and leverage technology to map, expose, and disrupt illicit networks, Google Ideas and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) have launched the Illicit Networks Roundtable Series. The second roundtable in the series, “Illicit Networks: Mafia States, Nonstate Actors,” took place on April 27, 2012, at the Google office in New York. The meeting convened fifteen experts across the field of transnational organized crime. The initiative will culminate in a July 2012 summit, “Illicit Networks: Forces in Opposition,” convened by Google Ideas, which will assess the potential of technology to address and combat the most egregious forms of transnational crime.

The discussion began by breaking down the terminology used to describe the variable relationship between states and nonstate actors. The concept of a ‘mafia state’ is used to describe collusion between states and criminal groups. Under this definition, the state refers to government institutions and officials involved in a range of criminal activities, from drug, arms, and human trafficking to money laundering. In such states, executive bodies, legislatures, intelligence services, central banks, police and military forces, or courts may be involved in illicit activities. Many countries such as North Korea, Guinea-Bissau, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Myanmar rely heavily on profits from crime, “blurring the conceptual line” between the licit and illicit worlds.

There was broad agreement, however, that the term “mafia states” could also be misleading and oversimplified, since it does not reflect the broad spectrum of criminal-state relationships, or “ecologies,” that exist in the real world. For instance, one can distinguish among weak and failing states that are inherently susceptible to organized criminal organizations; states that (like “swiss cheese”) have pockets of integrity and holes of criminality; and states that have become fully functioning criminal enterprises.

At the same time, some analysts argued that the supposedly “new” threat of mafia states lacks historical perspective, since states have long been engaged in, or complicit with, illicit activity. For centuries, states engaged in smuggling to evade taxes and tariffs, which made up the bulk of transnational crime at the time, although other forms thrived as well. Charles Dickens, for example, famously complained that American publishers were stealing and selling his books, because British copyright laws did not extend beyond national borders. And no contemporary criminal organization rivals the power, influence, and global reach of the British East India Company, which monopolized the global opium trade in the nineteenth century.

Seeking a consensual definition of a mafia state, some experts advocated distinguishing between two general categories—criminalized states and captured states—on the basis of causality. Criminalized states have institutionalized, state-sponsored criminal networks, which are either actively or passively supported by the highest levels of leadership. At the other end of the spectrum, captured states are coopted or directly challenged by criminal organizations that largely function outside of state auspices. Although there are overlaps in terms of illicit activities, tactics, and networks, criminalized and captured states differ dramatically in their operational and transactional relationship with criminal elements.

According to experts, the two quintessential examples of contemporary criminalized and captured states are North Korea and Somalia, respectively. The North Korean government is directly involved in myriad forms of illicit trade, largely to evade economic sanctions imposed by the international community. Its criminal operations became so notorious that U.S. officials nicknamed North Korea the “Soprano state.” Somalia, meanwhile, in the absence of any legitimate governing authority, has been overrun by pirates and other criminals (as well as by Islamic militants that claim allegiance to al-Qaeda).

However, the vast majority of states are neither wholly criminalized nor captured; instead, they fall somewhere in between the two extremes of the spectrum. Political patronage and bribery, for

instance, are routine in many developing countries. Governments also hire nonstate actors to carry out unsavory operations, such as the recent plot hatched by the Iranian government to assassinate a Saudi Arabian ambassador, Adel al-Jubeir, by hiring Mexican drug traffickers. But illicit activity is not confined solely to weak or rogue states. In China, the production and shipment of counterfeit and pirated commodities is not only a hugely profitable industry, but also employs millions of local workers. And several high-ranking officials in Venezuela, including the minister of defense, are officially labeled as “drug kingpins” by the U.S. government.

In addition, emerging democracies, which have relatively weak institutions and rule of law, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic liberalization, for example, fledgling successor governments were unable to cope with or manage the massive influx of capital and trade. Pell-mell privatization, unregulated financial liberalization, and weak rule of law opened up vast new opportunities for alliances between corrupt officials and criminal organizations that persist to this day.

Efforts to understand and combat transnational crime must take into account the interaction between the unique ecologies of states and illicit networks. Nonstate actors seek to exploit “soft spots” or “dangerous spaces,” such as geographical, functional, social, economic, and legal gaps. At the same time, the strengths and weaknesses of the state greatly impact the form, function, and strategy of its illicit counterpart. Some criminal organizations need territory and state collusion, such as the large-scale opium trade operating out of Afghanistan, whereas others require minimum levels of security and economic development, such as racketeering in Russia. Some groups operate exclusively in local markets, while others forge strategic alliances across borders. Identifying and mapping the ecologies of illicit networks are a critical precondition to formulating effective law enforcement and other policy responses.

Furthermore, there are great disparities among states’ criminal justice systems and their enforcement capabilities, as well as in what is considered legal and illegal. Many countries do not have laws criminalizing human trafficking, for instance, and, in those that do, definitions of the crime vary widely. In countries such as Guatemala with an impunity rate of 98 percent, criminals are likely to never see the inside of a jail cell.

Another conceptual framework divides states into three categories based on their position in the pipeline of illicit networks: home, market, and transshipment. Home states produce, cultivate, or collect the illicit commodities; market states sell them; and transshipment states serve as the critical links between the production and consumption. However, states often serve more than one role, particularly when the government is a complicit partner or unable to stem the illicit flows. These distribution channels and strategic chokepoints are relatively similar across illicit markets. For example, the main drug trafficking routes that carry cocaine and migrants northward into the United States also serve as pipelines for illegal arms moving south. Similar to licit commodities, illicit networks are based on supply and demand, and will follow the path of least resistance to increase flows and maximize profits.

Moreover, some experts contend that the increase in illicit trade is partly self-inflicted. The establishment of global prohibition regimes covering a wider array of activities, particularly over the

past several decades, dramatically increased the number of illicit commodities such as pharmaceutical drugs, counterfeit products, and trafficking of endangered species, which were all previously unregulated. Technology also opened up new product pipelines and portals for transnational crime, such as pirated DVDs and cybercrime. As the booming international narcotics trade demonstrates, prohibition regimes can create enormous incentives for criminal actors, by increasing prices—and thus the profits generated from—black market trade in illegal commodities.

State involvement in transnational crime amplifies law enforcement challenges for several reasons. First, states are sovereign entities, and are thus afforded a degree of protection and noninterference in internal affairs. State officials, for example, are granted diplomatic immunity, and are virtually immune from arrest and prosecution. Second, the activities of the state apparatus are very difficult—and in some cases impossible—to monitor externally. Thanks to the explicit or implicit protection of states, criminal groups are able to operate in a more stable and secure environment, and amplify their powers in ways that might not otherwise be possible without state alliances or assistance. In both Africa and Latin America, for instance, corrupt officials often sell travel documents, such as passports and shipping registries, to ease the passage of illicit networks. Charles Taylor's Liberia offers one of the clearest historical examples of such collusion.

There are few existing multilateral diplomatic, law enforcement, and other legal tools to counter the threat of mafia states. The strongest international treaty, the United Nations (UN) Convention against Transnational Crime, primarily addresses nonstate actors, and relies on national institutions and agencies to comply with and implement the recommended policies. Obviously, these approaches are undercut when the states themselves are involved in illicit activities. However, recent success in combating piracy off the coast of Somalia shows that a simple policing regime is capable of delivering results, particularly when it involves cooperation with the private sector (in this case major shipping companies). But experts caution that successes in law enforcement cooperation are often difficult to sustain. Criminal networks adapt and shift networks in response to enhanced policing and enforcement; for example, the crackdown on drug trafficking in Colombia displaced, rather than eliminated, the problem, as witnessed by spikes in coca production in Peru and Bolivia as well as drug-related violence in Guatemala and Honduras.

Despite efforts to better understand the role of states in illicit networks, progress is impeded by critical information gaps. Illicit networks, rooted in secrecy and evasion, are inherently difficult to track, quantify, and measure. Official statistics from international institutions and organizations are often based on estimates provided by states, which often have a stake in the outcome—whether it is to increase financial assistance or obscure the depth of the problem (or official involvement). In addition, there is no single institution or organization that collects, houses, and monitors data on illicit networks, as well as facilitates information sharing. Without solid data, anticrime initiatives are shooting in the dark.

In order to promote a clearer understanding of illicit networks, technology should be leveraged to identify strategic chokepoints, map patterns of economic growth and illicit flows, and follow the money. An online platform where data could be organized, visualized, and made available on the public domain would raise awareness, enhance transparency, and foster greater accountability. Furthermore, user-generated content, compiled through cell phones and the Internet, is an untapped

and potentially explosive resource. Recent initiatives such as I Paid a Bribe, an online portal where citizens report incidences of bribery, are promising models that could be expanded to the international stage. However, such a platform would have to walk a fine line to avoid labels of “hacktivism.” The whistleblowing organization WikiLeaks exposed and published records of government misconduct, but also received sharp backlash and condemnation. In addition, the use of social media and crowdsourcing to expose illicit activity can sometimes expose participants to retaliation by powerful criminal actors, as has occurred in Mexico in gruesome fashion in recent months.

One promising approach to international cooperation against mafia states, as author Moisés Naím suggests, would be to mobilize “coalitions of the honest” (or “white lists”) among countries that fulfill certain standards of conduct and behavior, much as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) helped to create new norms for anti-money laundering and force greater transparency of offshore financial havens. By setting high standards, such ad hoc coalitions could name and shame noncooperative jurisdictions and work toward a more integrated, cohesive, and coordinated approach to combating transnational crime.

Based on the discussion, the group arrived at three main conclusions. First, when it comes to the illicit, the traditional dichotomy between states and nonstate actors is no longer applicable, and is in fact counterproductive to anticrime efforts. Second, states and illicit networks have a complex and variable relationship that defies the current piecemeal, cookie-cutter approach to combating transnational crime. Last, in order to craft more effective policies, and to better understand the role of the state in illicit networks, innovative frameworks, platforms, and processes for data collection and information sharing must be established.

GIORGIO AGAMBEN

WE REFUGEES

1. IN 1943, IN A SMALL JEWISH PERIODICAL, *The Menorah Journal*, Hannah Arendt published an article titled “We Refugees.” In this brief but important essay, after sketching a polemical portrait of Mr. Cohn, the assimilated Jew who had been 150 percent German, 150 percent Viennese, and 150 percent French but finally realizes bitterly that “on ne parvient pas deux fois,” Arendt overturns the condition of refugee and person without a country—in which she herself was living—in order to propose this condition as the paradigm of a new historical consciousness. The refugee who has lost all rights, yet stops wanting to be assimilated at any cost to a new national identity so as to contemplate his condition lucidly, receives, in exchange for certain unpopularity, an inestimable advantage: “For him history is no longer a closed book, and politics ceases to be the privilege of the Gentiles. He knows that the banishment of the Jewish people in Europe was followed immediately by that of the majority of the European peoples. Refugees expelled from one country to the next represent the avant-garde of their people.”

It is worth reflecting on the sense of this analysis, which today, precisely fifty years later, has not lost any of its currency. Not only does the problem arise with the same urgency, both in Europe and elsewhere, but also, in the context of the inexorable decline of the nation-state and the general corrosion of traditional legal-political categories, the refugee is perhaps the only imaginable figure of the people in our day. At least until the process of the dissolution of the nation-state and its sovereignty has come to an end, the refugee is the sole category in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community to come. Indeed, it may be that if we want to be equal to the absolutely novel tasks that face us, we will have to abandon without misgivings the basic concepts in which we have represented political subjects up to now (man and citizen with their rights, but also the sovereign people, the worker, etc.) and to reconstruct our political philosophy beginning with this unique figure.

2. The first appearance of refugees as a mass phenomenon occurred at the end of World War I, when the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires, and the new order created by the peace treaties, profoundly upset the demographic and territorial structure of Central and Eastern Europe. In just a short time, a million and a half White Russians, seven hundred thousand Armenians, five hundred thousand Bulgarians, a million Greeks, and hundreds of thousands of Germans, Hungarians, and Romanians

left their countries and moved elsewhere. To these masses in motion should be added the explosive situation determined by the fact that in the new states created by the peace treaties on the model of the nation-state (for example, in Yugoslavia and in Czechoslovakia), some 30 percent of the populations comprised minorities that had to be protected through a series of international treaties (the so-called Minority Treaties), which very often remained a dead letter. A few years later, the racial laws in Germany and the Civil War in Spain disseminated a new and substantial contingent of refugees throughout Europe.

We are accustomed to distinguishing between stateless persons and refugees, but this distinction, now as then, is not as simple as it might at first glance appear. From the beginning, many refugees who technically were not stateless preferred to become so rather than to return to their homeland (this is the case of Polish and Romanian Jews who were in France or Germany at the end of the war, or today of victims of political persecution as well as of those for whom returning to their homeland would mean the impossibility of survival). On the other hand, the Russian, Armenian and Hungarian refugees were promptly denationalized by the new Soviet or Turkish governments, etc. It is important to note that starting with the period of World War I, many European states began to introduce laws which permitted their own citizens to be denaturalized and denationalized. The first was France, in 1915, with regard to naturalized citizens of "enemy" origins; in 1922 the example was followed by Belgium, which revoked the naturalization of citizens who had committed "anti-national" acts during the war; in 1926 the Fascist regime in Italy passed a similar law concerning citizens who had shown themselves to be "unworthy of Italian citizenship"; in 1933 it was Austria's turn, and so forth, until in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws divided German citizens into full citizens and citizens without political rights. These laws—and the mass statelessness that resulted—mark a decisive turning point in the life of the modern nation-state and its definitive emancipation from the naïve notions of "people" and "citizen."

This is not the place to review the history of the various international commissions through which the states, the League of Nations, and later, the United Nations attempted to deal with the problem of refugees—from the Nansen Bureau for Russian and Armenian refugees (1921), to the High Commission for Refugees from Germany (1936), the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees (1938), and the International Refugee Organization of the United Nations (1946), up to the present High Commission for Refugees (1951)—whose activity, according to its statute, has only a "humanitarian and social," not political, character. The basic point is that every time refugees no longer represent individual cases but rather a mass phenomenon (as happened between the two wars, and has happened again now), both these organizations and the single states have proven, despite the solemn evocations of the inalienable rights of man, to be absolutely incapable not only of resolving the problem but also simply of dealing with it adequately. In this way the entire ques-

tion was transferred into the hands of the police and of humanitarian organizations.

3. The reasons for this impotence lie not only in the selfishness and blindness of bureaucratic machines, but in the basic notions themselves that regulate the inscription of the *native* (that is, of life) in the legal order of the nation-state. Hannah Arendt titled chapter 5 of her book *Imperialism*, dedicated to the problem of refugees, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man." This formulation—which inextricably links the fates of the rights of man and the modern national state, such that the end of the latter necessarily implies the obsolescence of the former—should be taken seriously. The paradox here is that precisely the figure that should have incarnated the rights of man *par excellence*, the refugee, constitutes instead the radical crisis of this concept. "The concept of the Rights of man," Arendt writes, "based on the supposed existence of a human being as such, collapsed in ruins as soon as those who professed it found themselves for the first time before men who had truly lost every other specific quality and connection except for the mere fact of being humans." In the nation-state system, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterize them as rights of the citizens of a state. This is implicit, if one thinks about it, in the ambiguity of the very title of the Declaration of 1789, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, in which it is unclear whether the two terms name two realities, or whether instead they form a hendiadys, in which the second term is, in reality, already contained in the first.

That there is no autonomous space within the political order of the nation-state for something like the pure man in himself is evident at least in the fact that, even in the best of cases, the status of the refugee is always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalization or to repatriation. A permanent status of man in himself is inconceivable for the law of the nation-state.

4. It is time to stop looking at the Declarations of Rights from 1789 to the present as if they were proclamations of eternal, metajuridical values that bind legislators to respect them, and to consider them instead according to their real function in the modern state. In fact, the Rights of Man represent above all the original figure of the inscription of bare natural life in the legal-political order of the nation-state. That bare life (the human creature) which in the *ancien régime* belonged to God, and in the classical world was clearly distinct (as *zoe*) from political life (*bios*), now takes center stage in the state's concerns and becomes, so to speak, its terrestrial foundation. Nation-state means a state that makes nativity or birth (that is, of the bare human life) the foundation of its own sovereignty. This is the (not even very obscure) sense of the first three articles of the Declaration of 1789: only because it wrote the native element into the core of any political association (arts. 1 and 2) could it firmly tie (in

art. 3) the principle of sovereignty to the nation (in accordance with its etymon, *natio* originally meant simply “birth”). The fiction implicit here is that *birth* immediately becomes *nation*, such that there can be no distinction between the two moments. Rights, that is, are attributable to *man* only in the degree to which he is the immediately vanishing presupposition (indeed, he must never appear simply as man) of the *citizen*.

5. If in the system of the nation-state the refugee represents such a disquieting element, it is above all because by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty. Single exceptions to this principle have always existed, of course; the novelty of our era, which threatens the very foundations of the nation-state, is that growing portions of humanity can no longer be represented within it. For this reason—that is, inasmuch as the refugee unhinges the old trinity of state/nation/territory—this apparently marginal figure deserves rather to be considered the central figure of our political history. It would be well not to forget that the first camps in Europe were built as places to control refugees, and that the progression—internment camps, concentration camps, extermination camps—represents a perfectly real filiation. One of the few rules the Nazis faithfully observed in the course of the “final solution” was that only after the Jews and gypsies were completely denationalized (even of that second-class citizenship that belonged to them after the Nuremberg laws) could they be sent to the extermination camps. When the rights of man are no longer the rights of the citizen, then he is truly *sacred*, in the sense that this term had in archaic Roman law: destined to die.

6. It is necessary resolutely to separate the concept of the refugee from that of the “Rights of man,” and to cease considering the right of asylum (which in any case is being drastically restricted in the legislation of the European states) as the conceptual category in which the phenomenon should be impressed (a glance at the recent *Tesi sul diritto d'asilo* by A. Heller shows that today this can lead only to nauseating confusion). The refugee should be considered for what he is, that is, nothing less than a border concept that radically calls into question the principles of the nation-state and, at the same time, helps clear the field for a no-longer-delayable renewal of categories.

In the meantime, the phenomenon of so-called illegal immigration into the countries of the European Community has assumed (and will increasingly assume in coming years, with a foreseen 20 million immigrants from the countries of central Europe) features and proportions such as to fully justify this revolution in perspective. What the industrialized states are faced with today is a *permanently resident mass of noncitizens*, who neither can nor want to be naturalized or repatriated. Often these noncitizens have a nationality of origin, but inasmuch as they prefer not to make use of their state's protection they are, like refugees, “stateless *de facto*.” For these noncitizen residents, T. Hammar created the neologism *denizens*, which has the merit of

showing that the concept *citizen* is no longer adequate to describe the socio-political reality of modern states. On the other hand, citizens of the advanced industrialized states (both in the United States and in Europe) manifest, by their growing desertion of the codified instances of political participation, an evident tendency to transform themselves into *denizens*, into conformity with the well-known principle that substantial assimilation in the presence of formal differences exasperates hatred and intolerance, xenophobic reactions and defensive mobilizations will increase.

7. Before the extermination camps are reopened in Europe (which is already starting to happen), nation-states must find the courage to call into question the very principle of the inscription of nativity and the trinity of state/nation/territory which is based on it. It is sufficient here to suggest one possible direction. As is well known, one of the options considered for the problem of Jerusalem is that it become the capital, contemporaneously and without territorial divisions, of two different states. The paradoxical condition of reciprocal extraterritoriality (or, better, aterritoriality) that this would imply could be generalized as a model of new international relations. Instead of two national states separated by uncertain and threatening boundaries, one could imagine two political communities dwelling in the same region and in exodus one into the other, divided from each other by a series of reciprocal extraterritorialities, in which the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* of the citizen, but rather the *refugium* of the individual. In a similar sense, we could look to Europe not as an impossible "Europe of nations," whose catastrophic results can already be perceived in the short term, but as an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which all the residents of the European states (citizens and noncitizens) would be in a position of exodus or refuge, and the status of European would mean the citizen's being-in-exodus (obviously also immobile). The European space would thus represent an unbridgeable gap between birth and nation, in which the old concept of people (which, as is well known, is always a minority) could again find a political sense by decisively opposing the concept of nation (which until now has unduly usurped it).

This space would not coincide with any homogeneous national territory, nor with their *topographical* sum, but would act on these territories, making holes in them and dividing them *topologically* like in a Leiden jar or in a Möbius strip, where exterior and interior are indeterminate. In this new space, the European cities, entering into a relationship of reciprocal extraterritoriality, would rediscover their ancient vocation as cities of the world.

Today, in a sort of no-man's-land between Lebanon and Israel, there are four hundred and twenty-five Palestinians who were expelled by the state of Israel. According to Hannah Arendt's suggestion, these men constitute "the *avant-garde* of their people." But this does not necessarily or only mean that they might form the original nucleus of a future national state, which would probably resolve the Palestinian problem just as inadequately as Israel has

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resolved the Jewish question. Rather, the no-man's-land where they have found refuge has retroacted on the territory of the state of Israel, making holes in it and altering it in such a way that the image of that snow-covered hill has become more an internal part of that territory than any other region of Heretz Israel. It is only in a land where the spaces of states will have been perforated and topologically deformed, and the citizen will have learned to acknowledge the refugee that he himself is, that man's political survival today is imaginable.

*Translated by Michael Rocke*

## We Refugees

Hannah Arendt

IN THE FIRST PLACE, we don't like to be called "refugees." We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants." Our newspapers are papers for "Americans of German language"; and, as far as I know, there is not and never was any club founded by Hitler-persecuted people whose name indicated that its members were refugees.

A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge; but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical opinion. With us the meaning of the term "refugee" has changed. Now "refugees" are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by Refugee Committees.

Before this war broke out we were even more sensitive about being called refugees. We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice, and we denied that our situation had anything to do with "so-called Jewish problems." Yes, we were "immigrants" or "newcomers" who had left our country because, one fine day, it no longer suited us to stay, or for purely economic reasons. We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic.

Our optimism, indeed, is admirable, even if we say so ourselves. The story of our struggle has finally become known. We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.

Nevertheless, as soon as we were saved—and most of us had to be saved several times—we started our new lives and tried to follow as closely as possible all the good advice our saviors passed on to us. We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine. In a

friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans. The more optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like. It is true we sometimes raise objections when we are told to forget about our former work; and our former ideals are usually hard to throw over if our social standard is at stake. With the language, however, we find no difficulties: after a single year optimists are convinced they speak English as well as their mother tongue; and after two years they swear solemnly that they speak English better than any other language—their German is a language they hardly remember.

In order to forget more efficiently we rather avoid any allusion to concentration or internment camps we experienced in nearly all European countries—it might be interpreted as pessimism or lack of confidence in the new homeland. Besides, how often have we been told that nobody likes to listen to all that; hell is no longer a religious belief or a fantasy, but something as real as houses and stones and trees. Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are pure in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.

Even among ourselves we don't speak about this past. Instead, we have found our own way of mastering an uncertain future. Since everybody plans and wishes and hopes, so do we. Apart from these general human attitudes, however, we try to clear up the future more scientifically. After so much bad luck we want a course as sure as a gun. Therefore, we leave the earth with all its uncertainties behind and we cast our eyes up to the sky. The stars tell us—rather than the newspapers—when Hitler will be defeated and when we shall become American citizens. We think the stars more reliable advisers than all our friends; we learn from the stars when we should have lunch with our benefactors and on what day we have the best chances of filling out one of these countless questionnaires which accompany our present lives. Sometimes we don't rely even on the stars but rather on the lines of our hand or the signs of our handwriting. Thus we learn less about political events but more about our own dear selves, even though somehow psychoanalysis has gone out of fashion. Those happier times are past when bored ladies and gentlemen of high society conversed about the genial misdeemeanors of their early childhood. They don't want ghost-stories any more; it is real experiences that make their flesh creep. There is no longer any need of bewitching the past; it is spellbound

Haanah Arendt, We Refugees in Marc Robison  
*Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*, , Faber  
and Faber, 1994 p. 110—119

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enough in reality. Thus, in spite of our outspoken optimism, we use all sorts of magical tricks to conjure up the spirits of the future.

I don't know which memories and which thoughts nightly dwell in our dreams. I dare not ask for information, since I, too, had rather be an optimist. But sometimes I imagine that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved. I could even understand how our friends of the West coast, during the curfew, should have had such curious notions as to believe that we are not only "prospective citizens" but present "enemy aliens." In daylight, of course, we become only "technically" enemy aliens—all refugees know this. But when technical reasons prevented you from leaving your home during the dark hours, it certainly was not easy to avoid some dark speculations about the relation between technicality and reality.

No, there is something wrong with our optimism. There are those odd optimists among us who, having made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way. They seem to prove that our proclaimed cheerfulness is based on a dangerous readiness for death. Brought up in the conviction that life is the highest good and death the greatest dismay, we became witnesses and victims of worse terrors than death—without having been able to discover a higher ideal than life. Thus, although death lost its horror for us, we became neither willing nor capable to risk our lives for a cause. Instead of fighting—or thinking about how to become able to fight back—refugees have got used to wishing death to friends or relatives; if somebody dies, we cheerfully imagine all the trouble he has been saved. Finally many of us end by wishing that we, too, could be saved some trouble, and act accordingly.

Since 1938—since Hitler's invasion of Austria—we have seen how quickly eloquent optimism could change to speechless pessimism. As time went on, we got worse—even more optimistic and even more inclined to suicide. Austrian Jews under Schuschnigg were such a cheerful people—all impartial observers admired them. It was quite wonderful how deeply convinced they were that nothing could happen to them. But when German troops invaded the country and Gentile neighbors started riots at Jewish homes, Austrian Jews began to commit suicide.

Unlike other suicides, our friends leave no explanation of their deed, no indictment, no charge against a world that had forced a desperate man to talk and to behave cheerfully to his very last day. Letters left by them are conventional, meaningless documents. Thus, funeral orations we make at

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their open graves are brief, embarrassed and very hopeful. Nobody cares about motives, they seem to be clear to all of us.

I speak of unpopular facts; and it makes things worse that in order to prove my point I do not even dispose of the sole arguments which impress modern people—figures. Even those Jews who furiously deny the existence of the Jewish people give us a fair chance of survival as far as figures are concerned—how else could they prove that only a few Jews are criminals and that many Jews are being killed as good patriots in wartime? Through their effort to save the statistical life of the Jewish people we know that Jews had the lowest suicide rate among all civilized nations. I am quite sure those figures are no longer correct, but I cannot prove it with new figures, though I can certainly with new experiences. This might be sufficient for those skeptical souls who never were quite convinced that the measure of one's skull gives the exact idea of its content, or that statistics of crime show the exact level of national ethics. Anyhow, wherever European Jews are living today, they no longer behave according to statistical laws. Suicides occur not only among the panic-stricken people in Berlin and Vienna, in Bucharest or Paris, but in New York and Los Angeles, in Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

On the other hand, there has been little reported about suicides in the ghettos and concentration camps themselves. True, we had very few reports at all from Poland, but we have been fairly well informed about German and French concentration camps.

At the camp of Gurs, for instance, where I had the opportunity of spending some time, I heard only once about suicide, and that was the suggestion of a collective action, apparently a kind of protest in order to vex the French. When some of us remarked that we had been shipped there "*pour crever*" in any case, the general mood turned suddenly into a violent courage of life. The general opinion held that one had to be abnormally asocial and unconcerned about general events if one was still able to interpret the whole accident as personal and individual bad luck and, accordingly, ended one's life personally and individually. But the same people, as soon as they returned to their own individual lives, being faced with seemingly individual problems, changed once more to this insane optimism which is next door to despair.

We are the first non-religious Jews persecuted—and we are the first ones who, not only *in extremis*, answer with suicide. Perhaps the philosophers are right who teach that suicide is the last and supreme guarantee of human freedom: not being free to create our lives or the world in which we

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live, we nevertheless are free to throw life away and to leave the world. Pious Jews, certainly, cannot realize this negative liberty; they perceive murder in suicide, that is, destruction of what man never is able to make, interference with the rights of the Creator. *Adonai nathan veadonai lakach* ("The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away"); and they would add: *baruch shem adonai* ("blessed be the name of the Lord"). For them suicide, like murder, means a blasphemous attack on creation as a whole. The man who kills himself asserts that life is not worth living and the world not worth sheltering him.

Yet our suicides are no mad rebels who hurl defiance at life and the world, who try to kill in themselves the whole universe. Theirs is a quiet and modest way of vanishing; they seem to apologize for the violent solution they have found for their personal problems. In their opinion, generally, political events had nothing to do with their individual fate; in good or bad times they would believe solely in their personality. Now they find some mysterious shortcomings in themselves which prevent them from getting along. Having felt entitled from their earliest childhood to a certain social standard, they are failures in their own eyes if this standard cannot be kept any longer. Their optimism is the vain attempt to keep head above water. Behind this front of cheerfulness, they constantly struggle with despair of themselves. Finally, they die of a kind of selfishness.

If we are saved we feel humiliated, and if we are helped we feel degraded. We fight like madmen for private existences with individual destinies, since we are afraid of becoming part of that miserable lot of *schnorrer* whom we, many of us former philanthropists, remember only too well. Just as once we failed to understand that the so-called *schnorrer* was a symbol of Jewish destiny and not a *shlemiel*, so today we don't feel entitled to Jewish solidarity; we cannot realize that we by ourselves are not so much concerned as the whole Jewish people. Sometimes this lack of comprehension has been strongly supported by our protectors. Thus, I remember a director of a great charity concern in Paris who, whenever he received the card of a German-Jewish intellectual with the inevitable "Dr." on it, used to exclaim at the top of his voice, "Herr Doktor, Herr Doktor, Herr Schnorrer, Herr Schnorrer!"

The conclusion we drew from such unpleasant experiences was simple enough. To be a doctor of philosophy no longer satisfied us; and we learnt that in order to build a new life, one has first to improve on the old one. A nice little fairytale has been invented to describe our behavior: a forlorn émigré dachshund, in his grief, begins to speak: "Once, when I was a St. Bernard . . ."

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Our new friends, rather overwhelmed by so many stars and famous men, hardly understand that at the basis of all our descriptions of past splendors lies one human truth: once we were sombodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends, and even known by landlords as paying our rent regularly. Once we could buy our food and ride in the subway without being told we were undesirable. We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done; we already are so damnable careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have, where our birth certificates were filled out—and that Hitler didn't like us. We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food.

Under such circumstances, St. Bernard grows bigger and bigger. I never can forget that young man who, when expected to accept a certain kind of work, sighed out, "You don't know to whom you speak; I was Section-manager in Karsadt's [A great department store in Berlin]." But there is also the deep despair of that middle-aged man who, going through countless shifts of different committees in order to be saved, finally exclaimed, "And nobody here knows who I am!" Since nobody would treat him as a dignified human being, he began sending cables to great personalities and his big relations. He learnt quickly that in this mad world it is much easier to be accepted as a "great man" than as a human being.

The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews. But having hardly crossed the French borderline, we were changed into "boches." We were even told that we had to accept this designation if we really were against Hitler's racial theories. During seven years we played the ridiculous role of trying to be Frenchmen—at least, prospective citizens; but at the beginning of the war we were interned as "boches" all the same. In the meantime, however, most of us had indeed become such loyal Frenchmen that we could not even criticize a French governmental order; thus we declared it was all right to be interned. We were the first "*Prisonniers volontaires*" history has ever seen. After the Germans invaded the country, the French Government had only to change the name of the firm; having been jailed because we were Germans, we were not freed because we were Jews.

It is the same story all over the world, repeated again and again. In Europe the Nazis confiscated our property; but in Brazil we have to pay

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30% of our wealth, like the most loyal member of the *Bund der Auslandsdeutschen*. In Paris we could not leave our homes after eight o'clock because we were Jews; but in Los Angeles we are restricted because we are "enemy aliens." Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are.

Unfortunately, things don't look any better when we meet with Jews. French Jewry was absolutely convinced that all Jews coming from beyond the Rhine were what they called *Polaks*—what German Jewry called *Ostjuden*. But those Jews who really came from eastern Europe could not agree with their French brethren and called us *Jaecker*. The sons of these *Jaecker*-haters—the second generation born in France and already duly assimilated—shared the opinion of the French Jewish upper classes. Thus, in the very same family, you could be called a *Jaecker* by the father and a *Polak* by the son.

Since the outbreak of the war and the catastrophe that has befallen European Jewry, the mere fact of being a refugee has prevented our mingling with native Jewish society, some exceptions only proving the rule. These unwritten social laws, though never publicly admitted, have the great force of public opinion. And such a silent opinion and practice is more important for our daily lives than all official proclamations of hospitality and good will.

Man is a social animal and life is not easy for him when social ties are cut off. Moral standards are much easier kept in the texture of a society. Very few individuals have the strength to conserve their own integrity if their social, political and legal status is completely confused. Lacking the courage to fight for a change of our social and legal status, we have decided instead, so many of us, to try a change of identity. And this curious behavior makes matters much worse. The confusion in which we live is partly our own work.

Some day somebody will write the true story of this Jewish emigration from Germany; and he will have to start with a description of that Mr. Cohn from Berlin who had always been a 150% German, a German super-patriot. In 1933 that Mr. Cohn found refuge in Prague and very quickly became a convinced Czech patriot—as true and as loyal a Czech patriot as he had been a German one. Time went on and about 1937 the Czech Government, already under some Nazi pressure, began to expel its Jewish refugees, disregarding the fact that they felt so strongly as prospective Czech citizens. Our Mr. Cohn then went to Vienna; to adjust oneself there a definite Austrian patriotism was required. The German invasion forced Mr. Cohn out of that country. He arrived in Paris at a bad moment

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and he never did receive a regular residence-permit. Having already acquired a great skill in wishful thinking, he refused to take mere administrative measures seriously, convinced that he would spend his future life in France. Therefore, he prepared his adjustment to the French nation by identifying himself with "our" ancestor Vercingetorix. I think I had better not dilate on the further adventures of Mr. Cohn. As long as Mr. Cohn can't make up his mind to be what he actually is, a Jew, nobody can foretell all the mad changes he will still have to go through.

A man who wants to lose his self discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as creation. But the recovering of a new personality is as difficult—and as hopeless—as a new creation of the world. Whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews. All our activities are directed to attain this aim: we don't want to be refugees, since we don't want to be Jews; we pretend to be English-speaking people, since German-speaking immigrants of recent years are marked as Jews; we don't call ourselves stateless, since the majority of stateless people in the world are Jews; we are willing to become loyal Hotentots, only to hide the fact that we are Jews. We don't succeed and we can't succeed; under the cover of our "optimism" you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists.

With us from Germany the word assimilation received a "deep" philosophical meaning. You can hardly realize how serious we were about it. Assimilation did not mean the necessary adjustment to the country where we happened to be born and to the people whose language we happened to speak. We adjust in principle to everything and everybody. This attitude became quite clear to me once by the words of one of my compatriots who, apparently, knew how to express his feelings. Having just arrived in France, he founded one of these societies of adjustment in which German Jews asserted to each other that they were already Frenchmen. In his first speech he said: "We have been good Germans in Germany and therefore we shall be good Frenchmen in France." The public applauded enthusiastically and nobody laughed; we were happy to have learnt how to prove our loyalty.

If patriotism were a matter of routine or practice, we should be the most patriotic people in the world. Let us go back to our Mr. Cohn; he certainly has beaten all records. He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains. But since patriotism is not yet believed to be a matter of practice, it is hard to convince people of the sincerity of our repeated transformations. This struggle makes our own society so intoler-

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ant; we demand full affirmation without our own group because we are not in the position to obtain it from the natives. The natives, confronted with such strange beings as we are, become suspicious; from their point of view, as a rule, only a loyalty to our old countries is understandable. That makes life very bitter for us. We might overcome this suspicion if we would explain that, being Jews, our patriotism in our original countries had rather a peculiar aspect. Though it was indeed sincere and deep-rooted. We wrote big volumes to prove it; paid an entire bureaucracy to explore its antiquity and to explain it statistically. We had scholars write philosophical dissertations on the predestined harmony between Jews and Frenchmen, Jews and Germans, Jews and Hungarians, Jews and . . . Our so frequently suspected loyalty of today has a long history. It is the history of a hundred and fifty years of assimilated Jewry who performed an unprecedented feat: though proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same.

The desperate confusion of these Ulysses-wanders who, unlike their great prototype, don't know who they are is easily explained by their perfect mania for refusing to keep their identity. This mania is much older than the last ten years which revealed the profound absurdity of our existence. We are like people with a fixed idea who can't help trying continually to disguise an imaginary stigma. Thus we are enthusiastically fond of every new possibility which, being new, seems able to work miracles. We are fascinated by every new nationality in the same way as a woman of tidy size is delighted with every new dress which promises to give her the desired waistline. But she likes the new dress only as long as she believes in its miraculous qualities, and she will throw it away as soon as she discovers that it does not change her stature—or, for that matter, her status.

One may be surprised that the apparent uselessness of all our odd disguises has not yet been able to discourage us. If it is true that men seldom learn from history, it is also true that they may learn from personal experiences which, as in our case, are repeated time and again. But before you cast the first stone at us, remember that being a Jew does not give any legal status in this world. If we should start telling the truth that we are nothing but Jews, it would mean that we expose ourselves to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while; since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax

receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction. It is true that most of us depend entirely upon social standards; we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us; we are—and always were—ready to pay any price in order to be accepted by society. But it is equally true that the very few among us who have tried to get along without all these tricks and jokes of adjustment and assimilation have paid a much higher price than they could afford: they jeopardized the few chances even outlaws are given in a topsy-turvy world.

The attitude of these few whom, following Bernard Lazare, one may call "conscious pariahs," can as little be explained by recent events alone as the attitude of our Mr. Cohn who tried by every means to become an upstart. Both are sons of the nineteenth century which, not knowing legal or political outlaws, knew only too well social pariahs and their counterpart, social parvenus. Modern Jewish history, having started with court Jews and continuing with Jewish millionaires and philanthropists, is apt to forget about this other trend of Jewish tradition—the tradition of Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Sholom Aleichem, of Bernard Lazare, Franz Kafka or even Charlie Chaplin. It is the tradition of a minority of Jews who have not wanted to become upstarts, who preferred the status of "conscious pariah." All vaunted Jewish qualities—the "Jewish heart," humanity, humor, disinterested intelligence—are pariah qualities. All Jewish shortcomings—tactlessness, political stupidity, inferiority complexes and money-grubbing—are characteristic of upstarts. There have always been Jews who did not think it worth while to change their humane attitude and their natural insight into reality for the narrowness of caste spirit or the essential unreality of financial transactions.

History has forced the status of outlaws upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. The latter have not yet accepted the great wisdom of Balzac's "*On ne parvient pas deux fois*"; thus they don't understand the wild dreams of the former and feel humiliated in sharing their fate. Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indelicacy," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.