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## Modernity as a Gnostic Narrative

FREDRIC Jameson stated four key maxims or theses of modernity: (1) one cannot periodize; (2) modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category; (3) subjectivity is unrepresentable and thus only situations of modernity can be narrated and (4) no ‘theory’ of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.<sup>1</sup>

The four maxims stated by Jameson summarize the mechanism of cognitive mapping and its relationship with metaphorical paradigms. These maxims are very crucial to the metaphorical representation of the two major narratives of secular modernity as mapped by Bauman and Elmessiri: (1) gnosis and salvation, and (2) gnosis and utopia.

### 3.1 GNOSIS AND SALVATION

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt points out that the dominant paradigm of academic philosophy has been celebrating the “never-ending reversals of idealism and materialism, of transcendentalism and immanentism, of realism and nominalism, of hedonism and asceticism.”<sup>2</sup> Idealism and transcendentalism, as opposed to materialism and immanentism, have a long history in European and American philosophies. According to *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), transcendentalism is often conceived of as the most remarkable American

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intellectual movement of the nineteenth-century and Ralph Waldo Emerson is regarded as one of its most influential advocates. The proponents of the movement were extremely influenced and inspired by Platonism, Indian mysticism and the writings of many romantic idealists like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Schelling. The movement repudiated 'psychological subjectivity' and placed a great emphasis on Reason as a form of conscience, subjective intuition and personal insight in establishing a rational system of moral idealism. Materialism and immanentism, on the other hand, do not refer to a psychological disposition to pursue money and private property but rather to a family of theories that give 'matter' a primary position. In their extreme versions, they assert that the world consists of material things; and therefore, it is seen as an attempt to create "metaphysics without ontology" with the "omnicompetence of natural science" in place of the "omnipotence of God."<sup>3</sup>

The metaphors of transcendence and immanence have been also a recurrent motif in the writings of influential twentieth-century figures. In *The Idea of the Postmodern* (1995) Hans Bertens stresses that these metaphors are central to the thought of Eric Voegelin who conceived modernity as a form of secular Gnosticism, and Ihab Hassan who depicted postmodern literature as Neo-Gnosticism.<sup>4</sup> The metaphors of immanence and transcendence, according to George Siedel, have also been one of the major preoccupations of influential feminists, especially Simone De Beauvoir who attempted in *Le Deuxième Sexe* to introduce a "feminist epistemology" in which transcendence becomes simply the phallus, and immanence becomes nothing but the passive female virgin who is ready to be penetrated.<sup>5</sup> So while Hassan's and Beauvoir's bipolar metaphors of transcendence and immanence are very limited in their scope, (postmodern literature and feminist epistemology respectively), Voegelin's philosophy has a broader perspective. It is precisely for this reason that the best angle from which we can approach Bauman's and Elmessiri's interpretation of modernity as a Gnostic narrative is the bipolar metaphors of immanence and transcendence as interpreted by Voegelin.

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Voegelin's understanding of gnosticism and/or immanence as the essence of modernity was first introduced in his book *The New Science of Politics* (1952) and was later deepened and extended in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, which first appeared in German in 1959, and was later translated by Henry Regnery in 1968. In the introduction to a new edition of *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (1997), Ellis Sandoz states the two leading features of modern Gnosticism as understood by Voegelin: (1) immanentist programs to transform the world; and (2) the deification of man as superman, master of nature, and maker of history in the wake of the death of God. Voegelin's major argument, according to Sandoz, is that modernity did not do without the metaphor of transcendence but reversed its direction instead, thus transforming transcendence into gnosticism (the worship of knowledge). Vertical or otherworldly transcendence is renounced whereas horizontal transcendence or worldly salvific doctrines are proclaimed as the ultimate truth.<sup>6</sup>

Gnosis or knowledge becomes the only instrument of salvation and the establishment of a perfect earthly paradise. Unlike ancient gnosticism, in which deliverance is accomplished through faith in an alien and hidden God, modern gnosticism sees gnosis itself as the instrument of salvation and escape from the sickness and confusion of the world. Our understanding of modernity, according to Voegelin, will gain a new depth, if we can understand the contemporary critical struggle between modern ideologies and Christianity not as a struggle between 'modern' ideas and Christianity but as a renewal of the old struggle between Christianity and heretical Gnosis.<sup>7</sup>

Among the most significant movements that Voegelin labelled as gnostic are progressivism, positivism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, communism, fascism and National Socialism. Voegelin avoided the trap of tracing the origins of gnosticism and sought instead to explore its most decisive features: (1) a state of dissatisfaction with one's situation, (2) a belief in the poor or even wicked organization of the world; (3) a belief in the possibility of salvation from the evil of the world; (4) a belief in human action as the vehicle of change in the order of being and (5) the construction of a formula for self and world salvation. Voegelin's

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contribution lies in his attempt to trace this motif in the writings of major western philosophers, arguing that this aspiration for a final perfect world shows in the philosophy of Thomas More (1478-1535) and the ideal design for perfection; Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and the idea of the *Leviathan*; Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the unending progress of history; Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) and the immediate progress through a directorate of intellectuals; Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and the revelation of God in History; Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and the dominance of the positivist man; and finally Karl Marx (1818-1883) and the emergence of the communist superman.<sup>8</sup>

As Gerard Delanty points out in his unique study *Modernity and Postmodernity* (2000), a close examination of Bauman's critique of modernity shows clearly that it has much in common with that of Voegelin who saw modernity as the growth of gnosticism, a process or an orientation that necessarily deifies man and leads to the "immanentization of the Christian eschaton," giving rise to every modern movement from the Reformation to German National Socialism and even communism.<sup>9</sup> Modernity is seen by Bauman as an act of ontological separation, or rather an ontologically inauthentic escape from our worldliness or *Dasein* (being-there), that has led, in the final analysis, to the indifference to the sacred and more generally to our concern with other-worldly eternity.<sup>10</sup> This may seem to be a trivial and irrelevant indulgence in a theological dispute but it is actually the starting point of what Elmessiri also refers to as "immanentization" (God being incarnate in human beings, in one man, in an idea, in *einem Volk* or in an interpretation). Bauman refers to this idea of immanence as the celebration of the 'one and onliness,' affirming that the death of God thesis has given rise to new secular Gods, such as Nature, Laws of History, Reason and Progress.<sup>11</sup> Human beings as moral subjects, according to Bauman, are expected to play a positive role against these notions: "It is solely in the struggle against such one and onliness that the human individual, and the human individual as a moral subject, a responsible subject and a subject taking responsibility for his responsibility, may be born."<sup>12</sup>

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Though aware of the fact that the invention of new secular Gods aimed at constructing a utopian vision, Bauman never abandoned his belief in utopia as a dynamic force that enables us to go beyond the harsh realities of the human condition. Bauman views utopianism as the fountain of transformation, transcendence, and critical activity as opposed to the celebration of order, rigidity and structure that western modernity has been striving to achieve.<sup>13</sup> Aware of the consequences of modernity, Bauman criticizes the modern utopian project as it has reversed the direction of transcendence and thus transformed the metaphor of transcendence into a metaphor of transgression. Like Voegelin, Bauman sees this reversal as one of the central ambitions of the modern project, namely, the realization of self-transcendence and self-perfection in human beings. Bauman determines two closely related features of the modern spirit: (1) the urge to transcend and (2) the concern with the ability to act, even if this transcendence is transformed into a form of gnostic immanence or an act of transgression.<sup>14</sup>

This vigorous task of transformation is set in a sharp contrast with what Bauman refers to metaphorically as the traditional role of the “gamekeeper,” one who stands for the fierce defence against human interference and all attempts at violating or disturbing God’s perfect design. Due to traditions and a wide range of beliefs, human beings, especially within the framework of religious and theological paradigms, conceived of the end of history in the form of apocalypses and the last judgment. Tradition, according to Anthony Giddens, played a key role in “articulating action and ontological frameworks” and in creating a “sense of firmness of things that typically mixes cognitive and moral elements;” and therefore, there was an obvious lack of obsession with replacing the existing forms of life and people. Modernity, on the other hand, is a “post-traditional order” in which self-identity becomes a “reflexively organized endeavour” within impersonal organizations.<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to the foundations of modernity, the existence and the task of the “gamekeeper,” in Bauman’s view, derived their *telos* from God as the transcendental locus of all authority on the ground that the world is a “divine chain of being.” Bauman uncovers the significance

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of the metaphor of the “gamekeeper,” stressing that the services of the gamekeeper

rest on the belief that things are at their best when not tinkered with; that the world is a divine chain of being in which every creature has its rightful and useful place, even if human mental abilities are too limited to comprehend the wisdom, harmony and orderliness of God’s design.<sup>16</sup>

Bauman’s metaphor of the “gamekeeper” echoes Hannah Arendt’s elaborations on the old interpretations of the term *vita activa* and its negative connotations of complete human stillness and contemplation, whose justification rested on the conviction that no work of human hands can equate in beauty and truth to the physical cosmos. With the advent of modernity, according to Arendt, this term acquired new positive connotations or a “Promethean revolt,” since it came to refer to the transformation of man from a mere *animal laboran* to a *homo faber* who conducts himself as “lord and master of the whole earth.”<sup>17</sup>

Elmessiri, like Bauman, repudiates the ambitions as well as the consequences of the search for exclusive interpretation, absolute certainty and universal homogeneity, all of which are obvious manifestations of reductionist and monistic paradigms that attribute the movement and the end of history to only one force, whether spiritual (God-the *Führer*-the revolutionary mind-the greatest conspiracy) or materialist (the laws of dynamics-economy-body-sex). In short, Elmessiri, like Bauman, repudiates all worldviews that either reduce human reality to “nature/matter” or ignore the multiplicity and variety of our modes of being-in-the-world. This critical stance shows that Elmessiri’s perception of modernity as a Gnostic narrative has striking similarities with Bauman’s mapping of modernity as the monopolization of power, truth and existence within the “death of God” thesis.

Elmessiri’s understanding of western modernity as almost synonymous with materialism in the philosophical sense is based on his celebration of the distinction between the metaphors of transcendence and immanence. This distinction is intimately tied to the former Muslim Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović’s critique of western

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modernity. Izetbegović approaches western modernity as a monistic philosophy that takes the existence of matter as its starting point. This conception is set in a sharp contrast with the most central feature of Islam i.e. “bi-polarity”: spirit/body, religion/science and culture/civilization.<sup>18</sup>

Elmessiri uses the term “duality” to refer to the same conception of “bi-polarity,” and he tries to introduce a new critique of western modernity on the assumption that western civilization lacks this aspect of bi-polarity or duality i.e. it is governed by a one-dimensional and one-sided materialist paradigm that gives priority to the triangle: body/science/civilization. Elmessiri calls this orientation “monistic materialism,” a vision that ignores the distance between the two main bi-polarities, namely, the Creator and the created, man and nature. It is precisely for this reason that Elmessiri always emphasizes in all of his writings that the dissolution of the distance between these bi-polarities leads ultimately to the emergence of “the natural man” or what Herbert Marcuse refers to as the “one-dimensional man.”<sup>19</sup>

In *Al-Hadāthah wa mā Baʿda al-Hadāthah* [Modernity and Post-modernity], Elmessiri points out that the dominant western paradigm celebrates nature/matter as the moving force of history and the universe. This materialist paradigm has been dominating not only the public and the private spheres but also almost the “entire cognitive map” through which western man perceives the world and his salvation. Elmessiri, however, does not deny the existence of alternative paradigms but he always emphasizes that they fail to pose a challenge to the dominant paradigm because they lack the same centrality and effectiveness in society.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.2 GNOSIS AND UTOPIA

In his childhood, Elmessiri used to go to the library, and he first saw the word “Gnosticism” in one of Abdul Rahman Badawi’s books. The tone and strangeness of the word made him tremble to the extent that he kept thinking of it throughout his life. In the second volume of *Mawsūʿat al-Falsafah* [The Encyclopedia of Philosophy], Badawi

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included entries on monism and pantheism and devoted a four-page entry on Gnosticism, which he defines as a “mystic religious and philosophical orientation.... Gnosis of God is the way to salvation because God is man; the basis of gnosis is man’s realization of himself as God; this knowledge leads to man’s salvation.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this definition helped Elmessiri distance the Islamic worldview from Gnosticism, throwing modernity and secularism back to the legacy of heresiology in ancient Christianity.

Elmessiri saw Gnosticism as the most prominent form of both immanentism and pantheism; both of which are represented as inconsistent with a purely monotheistic worldview. Elmessiri puts it this way:

‘Immanent’ means ‘indwelling,’ ‘inherent,’ ‘operating from within.’ Therefore, anything that is said to be self-contained, self-operating, self-activating, self-explanatory could be described as ‘immanent,’ since its laws are inherent to it and its operating force is internal. The world of immanence, therefore, is a highly unified organic world, with no space separating one of its constituent parts from the others.<sup>22</sup>

Immanence is almost synonymous with pantheism, and Elmessiri sees no fundamental difference between them, yet he opts for each word according to the context:

Despite the near synonymy, I prefer to use the term ‘pantheism’ when the organizing principle dwelling in man and/or nature assumes the name of God, or any variations thereon, since it contains the suffix ‘theism’ from theos, meaning ‘God.’ I use the term ‘immanence’ when the organizing principle assumes a materialist or a quasi-spiritual name.<sup>23</sup>

Gnosticism, in Elmessiri’s view, started as a form of spiritual pantheism till the eighteenth century and then transformed into materialist pantheism in the Kabbalah, the philosophy of both Spinoza and Hegel and contemporary comprehensive materialist secularism. In the early stages of writing his *Mawsū‘at*, Elmessiri devoted only a few lines to the

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Spinoza entry, but when the paradigm of immanentism was crystallized in Elmessiri's mind in the 1990s, the Spinoza entry was enlarged and extended into many pages. "Gnostic heresies" in ancient Christianity, according to Elmessiri, were resurrected with the Reformation and the rise of extremist Protestants along with the spread of Kabbalah. This argument is very close to that of Voegelin who launched his attack against the proponents of the Reformation and prominent protestant figures such as Luther and Calvin. Unlike Voegelin, who referred *en passant* to the Israeli idea of the chosen people, Elmessiri stressed the role of the Kabbalah and argued that it transformed Judaism from a monotheistic into a Gnostic and immanentistic system that puts an end to the distance between God and nature, signaling the end of history and the immanence of God in the Jews as the chosen people. Even Jewish mysticism is said to have been transformed into a Gnostic and immanentistic aspiration to be one with God.<sup>24</sup>

Elmessiri's argument and terminology, except for the part on Judaism, are very close to Voegelin's general revolt against modernity in the early 1950s. Elmessiri seems to side with Voegelin in his approval of the role of the Catholic Church in the battle against its enemies when it realized the danger of "heretic Gnosticism," especially against pagan and Jewish doctrines of millenarianism. Like Voegelin, Elmessiri usually refers to Saint Augustine and his fight against such immanentistic perceptions of history, though introducing a temporary immanentistic moment (the coming of Christ, his crucifixion, his rise to Heaven, and the emergence of the Catholic Church as the spiritual Kingdom of Christ but within a normal, undetermined track of history till the second coming).<sup>25</sup>

One can also argue that Voegelin had much sway on Bauman's cognitive mapping of modernity as a Gnostic worldview. As mentioned above, this fact has been underlined by Gerard Delanty who stresses that Bauman's critique has much in common with that of Voegelin who saw modernity as a process or an orientation that necessarily deifies man and leads to the "immanentization of the Christian eschaton," giving rise to every modern movement from the Reformation to Nazism and communism.<sup>26</sup> The death of God thesis and the

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“so-called secularization” have given rise to new secular gods, including not only the Nietzschean superman but also Nature, Laws of History, Reason and Progress. The signifier “God” acquired new implications and connotations that go beyond the theological dispute on the existence or non-existence of God. God has not been secularized, and he has incarnated in such non-personal categories as Reason, the laws of History, the invisible hand or Historical Inevitability.<sup>27</sup> Monism and monopoly of Truth have never left the scene:

God stands for the idea of the ‘one and only,’ for the ‘thou shalt have no other gods before me’ idea in all its countless renditions and costumes: of ein *Volk*, ein Reich, ein *Führer*, of one party, one verdict of history, one line of progress, one way of being human, one (scientific) ideology, one true meaning, one proper philosophy. In all such cases ‘one and only’ conveys the one and only message: the right to the monopoly of power for some, the duty of total disobedience for others.<sup>28</sup>

Like Voegelin and Bauman, Elmessiri saw modernity as a paradigmatic sequence that starts with partial immanentism (partial secularism) and culminates with comprehensive immanentism (comprehensive secularism). He repudiated all reductionist and monistic paradigms that attribute the movement and the end of History to only one force, whether spiritual or materialistic. Elmessiri saw the whole process of immanentization/modernization/secularization in terms of secular incarnations of God in mankind as a whole (humanism and the solipsistic subject); in one people (racism and imperialism); in one leader (fascism); and in nature (pantheism), affirming that there is no lack of other incarnations and signifiers.<sup>29</sup>

Elmessiri, Voegelin and Bauman repudiated all nationalistic and ideological movements as forms of immanentization and organismic/mechanistic paradigms. Elmessiri’s position and analysis, however, are more explicit, decisive and comprehensive when he affirms that such movements promise their adherents the “end of struggle and the establishment of a technocratic utopia, whether in Zion, the Third Reich, the Welfare society or the communist society.”<sup>30</sup> Modern ideologies are depicted as expressing nothing but the “realm of human action”

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and “will to immanentization” because all gnostic movements attempt to abolish the constitution of being, with its origin in the divine, transcendent being, and to replace it with a world-immanent order of being.<sup>31</sup>

Elmessiri’s and Bauman’s positions are close to that of Voegelin who understood the modern age as the definite breakdown of imperial Christianity and the rise of national states. The domination of the organic metaphor reached its climax by the end of the eighteenth century when the concept of the natural organism could be applied to the state which could be seen, in Voegelin’s view, as “bearing its formative principle within itself just like a living being, and thus the state was completely detached from the unity of the *corpus mysticum*.” Solidarity among members of the Christian community was thus perceived only within the secular context of the nation.<sup>32</sup>

The secular modern, in Voegelin’s view, is not a single sudden explosion that led to the separation of state and religion but a long process that developed from the “partial immanentism” of the fifteenth humanism to the “total immanentism” of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Immanentism is set in a sharp contrast with the emphasis on transcendence, that is, the relevance of a transcendent ground of being. Profane history, according to Voegelin, does not have an essence or direction; it is a “waiting for the end; its present mode of being is that... of an age that grows old.”<sup>34</sup>

This perception of history is very close to the Islamic worldview, and it anticipates a convergence of the Islamic and Christian view of the modest role of man on Earth. Voegelin was impressed by St. Augustine’s theoretical distinction between transcendental history and profane history. This distinction kept human beings, to borrow Bauman’s metaphor, “gamekeepers” rather than “gardeners and legislators.” Eschatological fulfillment is confined to the transcendental history whereas profane history lacks such a direction. The projection of a radically immanent fulfillment, in Voegelin’s view, grew slowly, in a long process roughly called “from humanism to enlightenment.” This process reached its radical point in the nineteenth century; Feuerbach and Marx interpreted the transcendent God as “the projection of what

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is best in man into a hypostatic beyond; for them the great turning point of history, therefore, would come when man draws his projection back into himself, when he becomes conscious that he himself is God, when as a consequence man is transfigured into a superman.”<sup>35</sup>

Voegelin rejected all biological and organic doctrines of community and opposed it to the *Corpus mysticum* or the mystical body in Christianity. The idea of the mystical body is “not simply a metaphor, not merely a symbol, but a real idea.”<sup>36</sup> If Christ is the head, Christians are the members of the body. The members are the church, thus Christ and Church are one and the same thing. *Corpus mysticum* is also a “comprehensive organism [that] has a rank for the rich and the poor, for the priest and the layman, for the prince and the subject, for the educated and the uneducated, for the heroic ascetic and the weak sinner, for the warrior, the tradesman, and the peasant. By virtue of this comprehensiveness the church could penetrate a civilization with its spirit.”<sup>37</sup> All modern post-Christian community development, in Voegelin’s view, followed the schema of particularist community, a chosen community, possessing not just blind faith but also all scientific insight to launch its ‘just’ and ‘true’ war against the evil enemies, spirits and criminals who fail to adapt to its norms or those who show resistance.<sup>38</sup>

Elmessiri’s understanding of western modernity, as well as his dualistic understanding of the distinction between immanence and transcendence, is based on his repudiation of pantheism, which appears in different names in Arabic and Islamic lexicon, including *wihdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), *ḥulūl* (indwelling) and *fanā’* (literally annihilation), all of which aim at the “complete absorption of the human into the divine,” a stage that Elmessiri describes as the “embryonic state” and the ultimate “organic monism” as opposed to the state of full and complex humanity.<sup>39</sup> Elmessiri refers to these variations as the unconscious, yet pleasurable mode of being, which stands for the biological and utopian comfort of the mother’s womb. The problem is that the contours between the microcosm (fetus-placenta) and the macrocosm (political structures) are blurred. Elmessiri does

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not hesitate to describe political and technocratic utopias as a “real and sincere desire to find final solutions to all problems, to create a worldly paradise and put an end to history.”<sup>40</sup>

The devastating consequences of modernization and rationalism, according to Elmessiri, have given rise to Romanticism and absurdist modernism. The latter protested against the alienation of modern man and the disappearance of a solid logo-centric human potential for transcendence. However, the protest of romanticism and modernism remained marginal, transient, and insignificant. Romanticism, on the contrary, celebrated an organismic paradigm and informed many racist nationalistic movements with ideologies that celebrate an immanent organic trinity (God, territory and the people), which became the most fundamental element in secular organic nationalisms.<sup>41</sup>

In his critique of the modern absolute state, Elmessiri sometimes refers to Bauman who described it as a gardening state, a therapeutic/surgical state, a space-managing state.<sup>42</sup> Elmessiri has devoted almost two pages to illustrate how Bauman’s metaphors map very well the nature of modern secular states, and how modern man has been submitted to such secular absolutes as “*raison d’etat*,” “the interest of the state” and “the will of the *Volk*.”<sup>43</sup> The state became the “secular absolute itself in both the literal and the metaphorical sense.”<sup>44</sup> This point is also underlined by Bauman who suggested that the advent of modernity witnessed the “birth of the (un) holy trinity” (territory, nation and state). These three allies, in Bauman’s view, had to be seen as one organic unit, or one God, so as to achieve the “arrogant” ambitions of modernity.<sup>45</sup> Like Bauman, Elmessiri holds that the emphasis on the notions of *Blut, Boden und Volk* as sacred and absolute facts is a good example of immanent materialist monism, one which is reminiscent of the pantheistic immanent trinity: God-Nature-Man. One of the most devastating consequences of this worldview is that non-national nations or nations without a state are viewed as strangers, vagabonds, pariahs and even sub-men.<sup>46</sup>

The absolute state is conceived metaphorically as a gardener who gives only useful plants the chance to thrive and condemns harmful weeds to death so as to guarantee the highest degree of order and the

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best quality of production. Unlike Bauman who argues that the best image that can be used to describe the existential nature of Jewish communities within modernity in both capitalist and communist societies is that of the “prismatic group,”<sup>47</sup> Elmessiri opts for the metaphor “functional group” as a more explanatory paradigm of the emergence of non-national nations. In the Third Reich, Jewish communities were described by both the Nazis and Zionists as pests, bacteria and pariah *Volk*. Zionist literature itself is loaded with metaphors intended to “productivize” the Jews in order to make them “less parasitical,” “less marginal” or “less dependent.”<sup>48</sup> Both Nazism and Zionism seek to make Europe *Judenfrei* (having no Jews). The only difference, however, is that Zionists prefer Balfour-like solutions to the Hitler-like final solution for the Jewish question.<sup>49</sup>

Science played its role in the aspiration for a utopian world. Indeed, the determinism that dominates phrenology and physiognomy, according to Bauman, gave rise to scientific racism.<sup>50</sup> It was aggravated by the advent of the modern nationalistic state and the emergence of the “stateless person,” the *sans papiers*, the idea of *unwertes Leben* (useless life or being), and the later-day reincarnation of the ancient institution of *homo sacer* (Latin for ‘the accursed man’), whose destruction is devoid of all ethical or religious significance.<sup>51</sup>

As designers of the perfect society, the Nazis conceived of ‘*unwertes Leben*’ as the fundamental target that had to be distanced from the *lebensraum* or even exterminated.<sup>52</sup> *Unwertes Leben* included the Gypsies, communists, the mentally-retarded and all those who were perceived as harmful weeds threatening the harmony of the garden of modernity; the six million Jews were among the more than twenty million people annihilated at Hitler’s behest. Not surprisingly, Bauman does not conceive of the Holocaust as a Jewish affair or a German problem but as one of the possibilities of modernity at large; it is more than a “cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society.”<sup>53</sup> Other victims of the Holocaust, according to Janina Bauman, are thrown into oblivion simply because they lack the means to publicize their cause. The Gypsies, unlike the Jews, did not have many professors, writers and journalists to highlight their suffering and advocate their rights.<sup>54</sup>