
Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

REFERRING to Theodor W. Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's study of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bauman points out that one of the major consequences of the Enlightenment and the modern spirit has been the emergence of a "culture of the universal taboo." In this culture, everything that shows deviation from or resistance to *naturalization*, routinization and schematization is repressed in practice and banned in theory.¹

4.1 THE REINCARNATION OF *HOMO SACER*

The advent of the modern state as a nationalistic gardening entity was accompanied with the re-emergence of the ancient institution of *homo sacer* ('the accursed man'). The latter refers metaphorically to an absolutely alien Other who can be stripped of all human rights, even the right to exist. Bauman maintains that the *homo sacer* as an alien Other has been usually associated with the

ultimate embodiment of the sovereign right to exempt and to exclude such human beings as has been cast off the limits of human and divine laws; to make it into a being that can be destroyed without punishment but whose destruction is devoid of all ethical or religious significance.²

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

According to Bauman, the advent of western modernity was conceived of as a “radical break in universal history.” The West, this abstract entity, viewed itself as the “reference point for the interpretation of the *telos* of history” giving itself the legitimacy and the right to colonize “the future in the same way it had colonized the surrounding space.” All other spaces and temporalities become mere objects to be moulded, shaped, educated and cultivated. This mission derives its force and continuity from the assumption the all other temporalities are “retarded, underdeveloped, immature, incomplete or deformed, maimed, distorted and otherwise inferior stages or versions of itself.”³

Bauman repudiates the western imperialistic vision that attempted to transform the “virgin lands” into a “dumping ground for those unwanted” and into a “promised land” for the proponents of progress. The populations of conquered, invaded and colonized lands were recasted as a “collective *homo sacer* of the metropolis.”⁴ Science and technology promoted a strong belief in the superiority of western modernity and its inevitable ascendancy i.e. a conception of modernity as the highest point of development as opposed to the idea of static cultures. This cognitive map made western modernity the transcendental locus of all authority i.e. it became autonomous, self-contained, self-referential and self-validating.⁵

One of the most devastating consequences of drawing this cognitive map is the emergence of a long list of structural binary oppositions, setting the superiority of Europe against the inferiority of the rest of the world. Bauman puts it this way:

Western civilization has articulated its struggle for domination in terms of the holy battle of humanity against barbarism, reason against ignorance, objectivity against prejudice, progress against degeneration, truth against superstition, science against magic, rationality against passion. It has interpreted the history of its ascendancy as the gradual yet relentless substitution of human mastery over nature for the mastery of nature over man.⁶

Within the imposition of an artificial dichotomous map, progress, development; science; reason; objectivity; truth; health; civilization;

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

and sanity are drawn into a sharp contrast with retardation, backwardness; religion; superstition; subjectivity; prejudice; illness; barbarism and insanity, respectively. The logical conclusion to be inferred from this set of binary oppositions is that the dominant paradigm in the West celebrates the “kingdom of Reason and rationality” whereas other temporalities and other ways of life are conceived of as “wanting in both respects.”⁷

In this process, the nation-state as a socio-political entity, according to Antony Giddens, played a very significant role because it possessed “specific forms of territoriality and surveillance capacities, and monopolises effective control over the means of violence.”⁸ This fact had been underlined by Bauman when he stated that the emergence of the nation-state as the new absolute power was expected to universalize the cognitive and behavioural patterns so as to create an imagined community that enforces ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Science and nationalism reinforced each other, and both of them aspired to put an end to ambivalence and indeterminacy.⁹

Bauman repudiates the ambitions of the nation-state, and he even compares its determination to impose uniformity to the dogmatism of the church which “forces the prospective flock to practice the cult.”¹⁰ In other words, secularism did not aim at replacing the state and the church but at the emergence of a central secular bureaucratic state that could replace the authority of the church and its monopoly of human existence. Bauman puts it this way:

What was truly new in the modern figuration was the secularization of the pastoral and proselytizing techniques, the techniques themselves were not new, but their emancipation from the hierarchical body of the Church and their redeployment in the service of the state was.¹¹

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 best quality of production:

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

The design, presumed to be dictated by the supreme and unquestionable authority of reason, supplied the criteria to evaluate the present-day reality. These criteria split the population into useful plants to be encouraged and tenderly propagated and weeds – to be removed and rooted out.¹²

Bauman's metaphoric mapping of modernity as a narrative category is not always an abstract representation of the Imaginary; it does not lose its intimate relation with reality. In order that Bauman explicitly uncovers the significance of these metaphors he refers not only to Jewish communities in Europe but also to all human beings who were regarded as sub-men and who were expelled from their land due to the emergence of a new power. In the following quotation Bauman does not refer explicitly to western imperialism and its support of Zionism; and therefore, some explanations within the quotation are required:

As it transpired, the admittedly unruly and anarchistic Jewry was one of the many weeds which inhabited the plot marked for the carefully designed garden of the future. But there were other weeds as well – carriers of congenital diseases, the mentally inferior, the bodily deformed. And there were also plants [perhaps the Palestinians?] which turned into weeds [now colonized Palestinians or Palestinian refugees and asylum seekers?] simply because a superior reason [perhaps Britain and the United States as well as other western imperial powers?] required that the land [Palestine?] they occupied should be transformed into someone else's garden [the Zionists' garden?]¹³

More explicit references to the gardener metaphor in relation to western imperialism become more obvious in Bauman's later writings but without much emphasis on Zionism. In *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure*, Bauman argues that the gardener metaphor was not restricted to the geographical contours of Europe, and therefore, the western adventure, at the zenith of its expansive imperialism, saw the whole globe as nothing but “vast lands...waiting to be discovered,” “an empty planet,” “an empty playground,” “an empty stage for countless heroic exploits and glorious unheard-of feats” and “no man's deserted, underpopulated, fallow and undercultivated land.” Thus under the

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

pretext of the “civilizing mission” and the meta-narratives of the Enlightenment, the rest of the world was transformed into a “vacuum” that should be “discovered” and then designed in the best way.¹⁴ With these facts in mind, Bauman describes modernity as an “intrinsically expansive and transgressive civilization” in search of new adventures:

On the map of the modern world, there was profusion of blank spots marked (provisionally, of course!) ‘ubi leones,’ and waiting to be spattered with new towns and crisscrossed with new road networks. For almost two centuries, those distant blank spots were safety valves letting out the steam and protecting the metropolis from overheating. There were a lot of places for the adventurous to seek adventure, for the gamblers to try their luck and for the defeated to attempt reversal of bad fortune.¹⁵

Here it is clearly obvious that Bauman’s critique is very comprehensive, and his ethnic background as a Jewish intellectual does not stand between him and a serious, yet implicit, critique of western imperialism and atrocities inside and outside Europe.

4.2 MODERNITY, THE JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST

In order that Bauman supports this metaphorical interpretation of the consequences of modernity, he uses the Jews as the group whose modern historical conditions can best reflect the tendencies and consequences of secular modernity.

As we mentioned in the first chapter, most of the Jews in the Western world had been living in Poland; and therefore, the understanding of conditions of the Jews in Poland can help us understand the Jewish Question and its relevance to the consequences of modernity. Bauman uses two major studies to analyze this crucial point: (1) Anna Zuk’s “A mobile Class. The Subjective Element in the Social Perception of Jews: The Example of Eighteenth-century Poland” (1987), and (2) Joseph Marcus’s *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919-1939* (1983). As we will see under the last heading of this chapter, Elmessiri’s formulation of the paradigm of the “functional

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

group” can be understood in view of these studies and Bauman’s analysis of their arguments.

In eighteenth-century Poland, Polish Jews were “servants of nobility and gentry,” since they performed all sorts of functions that the political and economic domination of landed nobility required. In other words, Polish Jews served as a “middle man” and as a “shield, for the real lords of the land.” The nobility saw them as social inferiors and as uncivilized, dirty, ignorant and greedy people who should be kept at a distance. Lower and oppressed classes, on the other hand, saw them as the enemies, the ruthless exploiters and the ruling classes. Not surprisingly, Polish Jews were the objects of two contradictory class antagonisms.¹⁶

With the advent of modernity and the prominence of Polish Jews on both the economic and social levels, an anti-liberal and anti-capitalist impulse among the established classes and nobility emerged. The Jews were thus seen as groups that undermined the dominant order and the once close co-ordination between the scale of prestige and that of influence. The established classes were surprised that a “servant group” could reach positions of power “while climbing a ladder it picked from the junk-heap of discarded values.” There was also, according to Bauman, an endemic tendency in the socialist movements of Europe to conflate Judaism with money and power and with the ills of capitalism. The Jewish attachment to the liberal heritage of the Enlightenment was also seen in these terms; the Jews were the most prominent group that benefited from the citizenship that liberalism promoted. As a “non-national nation,” the Jews mitigated the distinction between hosts and guests, natives and the foreigners, thus reinforcing the opacity of the world fighting for clarity and the ambiguity of the world lusting for certainty. It is in this sense that racism against the Jews was in perfect harmony with the worldview and practice of modernity. And it is also in this sense that the Holocaust is consistent with modernity and its tendencies.¹⁷

The term “Holocaust” was not used in the different expulsions that Jewish communities faced in Europe, whether the expulsion from England in 1290, from France in 1340 or from Spain in 1492. Those

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

expulsions were seen only as a disaster of oppression that could be avoided by converting to Christianity. In *Theoretical Interpretations of the Holocaust* (2001), Dan Stone points out that since the 1960s, the term Holocaust became the most widely used name to refer to the genocide of the Jews. The use of the term began in the late 1950s, displacing such terms as “catastrophe,” “disaster” and even “genocide.” The meaning of the Holocaust, however, differs from one writer to another because “all writing on the Holocaust is unavoidably an instrumentalization of it.”¹⁸

Though Jewish assimilatory problems were obvious all over Europe, the pressure exercised on German Jews is always emphasized. The history of German Jewish communities, in Bauman’s view, is conceived as the focal case in the exploration of Jewish assimilation for a number of reasons: (1) All Jewish heroes of modern culture wrote their seminal contributions to modern consciousness in German; and therefore, their biographical experience throws light on Jewish experience in Germany; (2) German-speaking Jewish communities occupied a pivotal position in the economy, culture and ideology (Moses Mendelssohn’s match-making between Judaism and Enlightenment as well as Theodor Herzl’s marriage between Jewishness and modern nationalism); (3) German Jewry occupied a borderline position between the affluent Jewish communities of the West and the vast expanses of impoverished East-European Jewry; and (4) It was in Germany and the German speaking lands that modernization was first lived as a conscious and motivated process.¹⁹

Bauman, however, argues that the significance of the Holocaust for sociology will be belittled, misjudged, and thus instrumentalized, if the Holocaust is seen as “something that happened to the Jews,” as “an event in Jewish History” or as one of the “many similar cases of conflict or prejudice or aggression.”²⁰ More importantly, Bauman underlines the fact that German anti-semitism alone cannot be a sufficient explanation of the Holocaust. According to Bauman, the term anti-Semitism, which was coined and came into general use toward the end of the nineteenth-century, cannot provide a complex explanation of the Holocaust; it lacks historical or contemporary evidence:

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

Long before the Weimar Republic put the finishing touches to the long process of Jewish emancipation, Germany was widely conceived by international Jewry as the haven of religious and national equality and tolerance. Germany entered this century with many more Jewish academics and professionals than contemporary America or Britain. Popular resentment of Jews was neither deep-seated nor widespread. Hardly ever did it manifest itself in outbursts of public violence, so common in other parts of Europe. Nazi attempts to bring popular anti-Semitism to the surface by staging public spectacles of anti-Jewish violence proved counter-productive and had to be foiled.²¹

Prejudice and hatred cannot explain modern genocide; irrational and barbaric emotions were neither the major causes nor the means of the Holocaust. The ultimate aim of Nazism was a utopian world and a perfect design. The perfect society or design in the case of the Holocaust was the thousand-year Reich or the kingdom of the liberated German Spirit.²² Modern science, technology and bureaucracy, rather than irrational emotions, were all employed to realize this goal:

The Hobbesian world of the Holocaust did not surface from its too-shallow grave, resurrected by the tumult of irrational emotions. It arrived (in a formidable shape Hobbes would certainly disown) in factory-produced vehicle, wielding weapons only the most advanced science could supply, and following an itinerary designed by the scientifically managed organization. Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition, most certainly its necessary condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable.²³

Drawing on Max Weber's analysis of bureaucratic and rationalized culture, Bauman underlined the "bureaucratic rationalization" of the Holocaust; the official name of the Department in the SS headquarters in charge of the destruction of the Jews was "the Section of Administration and Economy." The very idea of the Final Solution (*Endlösung*) was "an outcome of the bureaucratic culture;" the Nazis thought of exterminating the Jews only when they failed to find a "dumping ground for the Jewry" inhabiting Europe, whether in Nisko, Madagascar or beyond the Archangel-Astrakhan line. Bauman repudiates

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

the notion that the Holocaust was an “irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residue of pre-modern barbarity,” arguing instead that it was a “legitimate resident in the house of modernity.” To support this argument, he refers to the line of defence adopted by Dr. Servatius who was Adolf Eichmann’s counsel in Jerusalem during his trial in 1961: “Eichmann committed acts for which one is decorated if one wins, and goes to the gallows if one loses.” In other words, bureaucratic and rational actions in the map of the modern world “have no intrinsic moral value,” and moral evaluation is something “external to the action itself.”²⁴

The very myth of the European civilizing mission is based on the emancipation of rationality from ethical norms or moral inhibitions; and therefore, all human beings can be victims of this worldview: “it is therefore possible to be a pilot delivering a bomb to Hiroshima or to Dresden, to excel in the duties assigned at a guided missile base, to design ever more devastating specimens of nuclear warheads – all this without detracting from one’s moral integrity and coming anywhere near moral collapse.”²⁵

Scientific institutes under Nazism were established to investigate the ‘Jewish question’ and to provide rationally designed solutions. The elimination of the Jews was referred to as *Gesundung* (healing) of Europe, *Selbstreinigung* (self-cleansing), *Judensäuberung* (cleansing-of-Jews), hygienic prophylactic, and *eine Frage der politischen Hygiene* (a question of the political hygiene). The murder of the Jews was thus portrayed as an “exercise in the rational management of society” and a “systematic attempt to deploy in its service the stance, the philosophy and precepts of applied science.”²⁶ The authority of science, however, was not confined to Germany. German universities, in Bauman’s view, were like their counterparts in other modern countries, all of them “carefully cultivated the ideal of science as an emphatically value-free activity.”²⁷ Science as a body of ideas and a network of institutions “cleared the way to genocide through sapping the authority, and questioning the binding force, of all normative thinking, particularly that of religion and ethics.”²⁸

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

According to Anna Harrington, the authority of metaphor reached its climax when European Jews were viewed as the ultimate form of inauthenticity, chaos and mechanicism (liberalism, fragmentation, chaos and revolution) in contrast to the German organismic world-view that places a great emphasis on unity, wholeness, pacification and life.²⁹

In order that Bauman establishes the development of the metaphors of chaos and inauthenticity, particularly in relation to the ideology of the modern state in the 1930s, he traces its manifestations in the writings of the Nazi Minister of Agriculture R.W. Darre, the world-famous biologist Erwin Bauer and his colleague Martin Stämmeler. What is common among these figures and scientists is the use of a basic organismic metaphor that compares society to a garden; individuals to plants, weeds and animals; the state and the scientists to gardeners and breeders. These organismic tropes are not explored to uncover the scientists' ideological conceptions but to emphasize determination of modernity to fight what was regarded as "inherently chaotic natural forces" and "dangerous weeds" that threaten the "carefully designed garden of the future."³⁰ It is precisely for this reason that Bauman refuses to attribute modern genocide and atrocities to barbarism or irrationalism, and he always emphasizes that they are "legitimate offspring of the modern spirit, of that urge to assist and speed up progress of mankind towards perfection."³¹

However, Bauman's thesis repudiates the perception of the Holocaust as a purely German problem. Eugenics and its ambitions were pioneered simultaneously in several European countries, and English scholars, like their German colleagues, strived for superiority and success. British scholars and politicians celebrated the racist discourse of eugenics, particularly its fierce drive to eliminate "genetical deficiency," "degenerate stock," "submen," "low-grade types" and the "biologically unfit." The United States was no exception. Between 1907 and 1928, twenty-one states, in the name of progress and the elimination of genetical deficiency, enacted eugenic sterilization laws, covering "criminals, rapists, idiots, feeble-minded, imbeciles,

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

lunatics, drunkards, drug fiends, epileptics, syphilitics, moral and sexual perverts, and diseased and degenerate persons.”³²

According to Sabine Maasen and Peter Weingart, this worldview cannot be regarded as a German invention, since its epistemological foundations can be traced back to a major English biological metaphor (the struggle metaphor in Thomas Hobbes and Charles Darwin) that was later transferred to different European territories including Germany (the *Kampf ums Dasein* metaphor). Seen from the perspective of a metaphor-based interpretation, the entire history of the notions of “the struggle for survival” and the “survival of the fittest” can be traced back to the Hobbesian theory of *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all) as well as the Hobbesian statement *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to his fellow man). In other words, the genocidal tendency of modernity was not a German monopoly or invention.³³

Ian Varcoe holds that Bauman’s major argument is set in sharp contrast with the *Sonderweg* thesis which cites and asserts that Germany underwent “a series of structural and cultural factors for a divergence from the western European path of development.”³⁴ Bauman, on the other hand, rejects the assumption that the history of Germany constitutes a deviation from the normal liberal, humanistic and enlightened European civilization. What is at stake here is that the ambitions of eugenics were not a German monopoly, since they were born in many western countries before Hitler and his vision of the Thousand-Year Reich. Bauman’s position is of great significance because it comes from a Jewish thinker who affirms that the Holocaust is neither an absolutely incomparable crime nor a result of the particularities of German history.³⁵

The significance of Bauman’s argument lies in the fact that it repudiates the assumption that the Holocaust is a Jewish affair, a German problem, a Nazi invention or a product of National Socialism. Rather, it is one of the possibilities of the instrumental rationality of modernity; one which is politically and morally neutral. In “Sociology after the Holocaust” (1988), an early version of the introduction to *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Bauman argues that the Holocaust is a rationally calculated activity that cannot be reduced to a merely

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

uncontrolled outburst of passions. Modernity, in Bauman's view, aspired for a state of ultimate and stable perfection, even though this aspiration might entail the suppression or neutralization of individual action as well as the universal domination of system and the absence of man. It comes as no surprise then that Bauman also repudiates the interpretation of the Holocaust as the culmination of European-Christian anti-semitism or as an interruption caused in the normal flow of history by German anti-Semitism and Nazi bestiality. Bauman's humanistic vision reaches its climax when he repudiates Israel's abuse of the Holocaust and its tragic memories as a certificate of Israeli political legitimacy and as an advance payment for the injustices it might itself commit against Palestinians in particular and the Arabs in general. The Holocaust, in Bauman's view, was not the result of irrational Hobbesian emotions but the product of the most scientifically advanced and sophisticated weapons and the most scientifically managed organization. It is true that instrumental rationality cannot be regarded as the Holocaust's major cause but it was a necessary condition.³⁶ Bauman, however, conceives of the Holocaust neither as the normal state of modernity nor as its paradigmatic moment. Rather, he represents it as one of the possibilities of modernity, a window to modernity and more generally the test of modernity that the West avoids to confront:

The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust... is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from an otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything... it stands for. We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body. What we perhaps fear most, is that each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the two sides of a coin.³⁷

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

4.3 UNWERTES LEBEN, VAGABONDS AND STRANGERS

The metaphor of the *unwertes Leben* (useless being) is prominent not only in the European discourse of eugenics but also in the American popular imagery that depicted the Japanese as “diseased organisms,” “submen,” “little yellow beasts,” “lice,” “rats,” “bats,” “vipers,” “dogs” and “monkeys.” Bauman holds that the modern role of racism is the “forceful removal of the *unwertes Leben*,” scientific racism, of eugenics, phrenology and physiognomy, informed the Nazi worldview and helped the Nazi designers of the perfect society to split human life into worthy and unworthy; “the first to be lovingly cultivated and given *Lebensraum*, the other to be ‘distanced,’ or – if the distancing proved unfeasible – exterminated.”³⁸ Hitler himself embraced the same orientation in dealing with the Jewish question when he declared that his mission was the extermination of the pest. Stripped of his humanity and redefined as a vermin, the Jew is no more an object of moral evaluation.³⁹

As these examples clearly show, human beings – not only the Jews – can be easily dehumanized and exterminated under the pretext that they are mere animals or objects that disturb the harmony of human existence. The Jews were equated figuratively with the *Ungeziefer* (insects, pests and vermin). The motif of this organismic metaphor is also underlined when Bauman draws readers’ attention to the biological origin of the term “assimilation,” which was first used in the sixteenth century in reference to the processes of absorption and incorporation performed by living organisms. The term was then used metaphorically in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries to refer to the processes of “making like,” and “becoming like.” Bauman believes that the metaphorical use of this term has a new social function as it reflects a “comprehensive cultural crusade.” Bauman’s thesis is that assimilation was an integral part of the liberal process and it came in the disguise of such humanistic ideals as tolerance, enlightenment and progress. Hence while the modern “civilized state” was setting the rules of the game and the “measures of progress,” strangers and minority groups had nothing to do but to “wash off the stigma of foreignness”

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

otherwise they would be accused of backwardness, inferiority and illegitimacy.⁴⁰

With the advent of modernity, the annihilation of vagabonds and strangers, according to Bauman, was seen as a process of “creative destruction” because they did not fit the “cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world.”⁴¹ Vagabonds were people who “appeared and disappeared from sight without warning; they stubbornly remained strangers and vanished before the community could absorb them by subjecting them to its all-penetrating gaze.”⁴² Dangerous, masterless and rootless are the frequent epithets used in connection with vagabonds and strangers. More importantly, any reference to these groups was usually associated with an organismic metaphor; and therefore, they were, more often than not, compared to parasitic insects such as cockroaches, flies, spiders, mice, carpet mites, bacteria and viruses. What is common among these nominations is an organismic metaphor that represents strangers as parasitic organisms or carriers of disease; and therefore, it reflects a growing atmosphere of insecurity and fear that haunt “purity seekers” in the presence of strangers and foreigners.⁴³

The dynamics of metaphor were not played only on the intellectual stage, they also found their way to the realms of legislation and practice. The Enlightenment, in Bauman’s view, was not “a collection of ideas” but “a mode of life.”⁴⁴ Two important acts are cited by Bauman to underline the exclusivist tendency of western modernity. First, the act of 1531 defined the vagabond as “any man or woman being whole and mighty in body and able to labour, having no land, master or using any lawful merchandise, craft or mystery whereby he might get his living.” Second, the act of 1604 instructed that the mark be “so thoroughly burned and set on upon the skin and flesh, that the letter ‘R’ be seen and remain for a perpetual mark upon such [a] rogue during his or her life.”⁴⁵ Modern order-building under the aegis of the modern state is represented by Bauman as a war of attrition waged against the strangers and the strange. Not surprisingly, modern society conceived cultural and/or physical annihilation of strangers and of the strange as a creative destruction. Typical modern strangers were regarded as the waste of the State’s ordering zeal.⁴⁶

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

The friends/enemies dichotomy, according to Bauman, is always expected to separate “truth from falsity, good from evil, beauty from ugliness.” And thus friends are called into being by the “pragmatics of co-operation” whereas enemies are called into being by the “pragmatics of struggle.” The strangers, however, refused to split neatly into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘friends’ and ‘foes.’⁴⁷ They bring “the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos.”⁴⁸ Modern society had two solutions to the problem posed by strangers: the anthropophagic and the anthropoemic. Bauman puts it this way:

The first solution boiled down to ‘eating the strangers up.’ Either literally, in flesh – like in cannibalism allegedly practiced by certain ancient tribes, or in a more sublime, modern metaphorical re-make, spiritually – as in the power-assisted assimilation practiced almost universally by nation-states so that the strangers are ingested into the national body and cease to exist as strangers. The second solution meant ‘vomiting the strangers’ instead of devouring them: rounding them up and expelling...either from the realm of the state power or from the world of the living.⁴⁹

Using post-structuralist terminology, Bauman describes strangers as one member of the family of the undecidables; it is like a *pharmakon* (remedy and poison), *hymen* (fusion of self and other) and *supplement* (neither a plus nor minus). In short, they stand for the “horror of indeterminateness and uncertainty” and the lack of “cognitive clarity.”⁵⁰

Bauman’s analysis of “strangerhood” is indebted to Georg Simmel’s “The Stranger.” According to Simmel, the trader epitomizes the stranger *par excellence*, since he can be represented as the “potential wanderer” known usually for his “mobility,” “objectivity” and “estrangement.” In European history, the Jew represents the classical example of the stranger who had his social position “as a Jew, not as the individual bearer of certain objective contents.” Simmel states that strangers represent an awful “synthesis of proximity and remoteness” as well as a synthesis of moral and contractual relationships, participation and detachment, involvement and indifference.⁵¹ The Jews, in Bauman’s view, were “the very epitome of Simmel’s strangers – always

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

on the outside even when inside, examining the familiar as if it was a foreign object of study, asking questions no one else asked, questioning the unquestionable and challenging the unchallengeable.”⁵²

Bauman describes the stranger as “the bane of modernity,” “the archetypal example of Sartre’s *le visqueux* or Mary Douglas’s the slimy,” the “embodiment and the incurable sickness” of “multiple incongruity.”⁵³ This is due to the fact that he is an ambivalent entity and a tempting object of stigma, permanent exclusion, cultural isolation or even genocide. It comes as no surprise that strangers often suppress their identity; otherwise they will be regarded as “cultural inferiors,” “eternal wanderers,” “homeless adventurers” and “natural nomads.” Thus the existential situation of the stranger was almost reduced to a “nomadic existence.”⁵⁴ And because the Jews were always on the move, they became a figure of strangeness, separation and exile. Not surprisingly, the comprehensive segregation and isolation of the Jews reached its climax when the Jew was transformed into an eternal symbol of the failure of any German attempt at a unified national culture and a German collective identity; he was conceived of as a vermin feeding upon the German organism.⁵⁵

According to Bauman, the universalizing, absolutist, all penetrating and monopolistic ambitions and tendencies of the “high-handed” nationalist state power are the most prominent features of all modernization. The rational thrust of modernity was set in sharp contrast to the irrational and “unscathed ghetto conditions” of the Jews. The Jews did not adhere to the “new universal codes” and thus their communal and juridical autonomy was seen as deviation from the norm. Hence in the name of equality, rationality and universalism, legal privileges were abolished and their identity was suppressed and de-legitimized. Here Bauman stresses the “illiberalisms of the Liberal era”:

Modernization was also a cultural crusade; a powerful and relentless drive to extirpate differences in values and life-styles, customs and speech, beliefs and public demeanour. It was, first and foremost, a drive to redefine all cultural values and styles except those endorsed by the modernizing elite (and particularly the values and styles that resisted the *Gleichschaltung* process) as inferior: signs or

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

stigmas of backwardness, retardation, mental impairment or, in extreme cases of insanity.⁵⁶

It is true that the Jews tried to assimilate into the fabrics of modern life, yet their attempts at assimilation could be compared to a “Sisyphean labour.”⁵⁷ Even in communist Eastern Europe, and in spite of the comprehensive assimilation in language, customs and life-styles as well as the tremendous success in commerce, banking, the press, liberal professions and politics, the Jews were regarded as subordinated nations that have “no territorial claims” and as the archetypal case of the denial of “all and any national self-assertion.”⁵⁸

Since the advent of modernity, the existential situation of human beings in general and the Jews in particular has been oscillating between the metaphors of the pariah and the parvenu or the victim and the hero with no chance to overcome his growing sense of existential fear and anxiety for a single moment:

Modernity was...the hope of the pariah. But the pariah could stop being a pariah only by becoming – struggling to become – a parvenu. And the parvenu, having never washed out the stain of his origin, laboured under a constant threat of deportation back to the land he tried to escape. Deportation in case he failed; deportation in case he succeeded too spectacularly for the comfort of those around. Not for a moment did the hero stop being a potential victim. Hero today, victim tomorrow – the dividing wall between the two conditions was but paper-thin. Being on the move meant belonging nowhere.⁵⁹

Though Bauman focuses on the Holocaust, his vision is more comprehensive and humanistic. He repudiates the abuse of the Holocaust by Israeli politicians to legitimize the atrocities they commit against the Palestinians. Bauman refers *en passant* to the catastrophic presence of thirteen to eighteen million refugees, of them three million Palestinians in the Middle East.⁶⁰

The reference to the Jews and their centrality in the interpretation of modernity is not made as an attempt to glorify the Jews or to stress the “privilege” of Jewishness. Bauman puts it this way:

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

It is not a specifically Jewish phenomenon, this elective affinity.... To emphasize: I am not ascribing a special mission to Jewishness – I am simply saying that, by accident of history, it so happened that the Jewish experience had a special significance for understanding the logic of modern culture.⁶¹

The existential mode created by modernity can be rendered in the metaphors of the *homo sacer*, *unwertes Leben* and the *Muselmann* (Muslim; pl., *Muselmänner*, a slang used in Auschwitz for a prisoner in starvation and near death). These metaphors, or rather real collective entities, are not to be regarded as the most truly original contribution of the Third Reich but as products of western civilization and its monopolistic vision of existence. They epitomize the real essence of strangerhood, exclusion and the justification of genocide. As Simon Clarke argues, the stranger becomes a psychic entity or a construction that stands for our fears and anxieties; he is the one who has been persecuted as Jew, as a Gypsy, as a Muslim, as a victim and as a potential victimizer.⁶²

Victimization gives rise to what Nietzsche calls the slave morality, he associates its origins with the Jews and describes its driving force as the feeling of *ressentiment*.⁶³ The irony is that the experience of injustice does not give rise to the aspiration for justice but to the morality of vengefulness, even though it is directed into the wrong direction and the false enemy. As Bauman suggests, the ethical code of the defeated who went through a long process of suffering and misery remains so low that he cannot differentiate between punishability and immorality:

The memories of the Holocaust firm the hand of the Israeli occupiers of the Arab lands: mass deportations, roundings-up, hostage-taking and concentration camps are well-remembered as cost-effective. As history progresses, injustice tends to be compensated for by injustice with-role-reversal. It is only the victors, as long as their victory stays unchallenged, who mistake, or misrepresent, that compensation as the triumph of justice. Superior morality is always the morality of the superior.⁶⁴

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

4.4 SUPERMEN, SUB-MEN AND FUNCTIONAL GROUPS

Bauman's exploration of the metaphors of the *homo sacer*, *unwertes Leben*, strangers and vagabonds had a great impact on Abdelwahab Elmessiri's mapping of the consequences of modernity. Elmessiri argues that the early phase of modernity may be represented as a heroic or promethean secular project that started with the deification of both man and nature yet ended, paradoxically, with man's tragic alienation and defeat.⁶⁵ With the advent of heroic or promethean modernity, God disappeared, or at least was marginalized whereas man and nature come into centre stage as the ultimate source of meaning and truth. This phase of western modernization may be referred to as the time of "imperialist accumulation" and "heroic materialism." The devastating consequences of modernization and rationalism led to the rise of Romanticism. Also the abuse of science and technology gave rise to 'absurdist modernism' which protested against the alienation of modern man and the disappearance of solid logo-centric human potential for transcendence. However, the protest of modernism, according to Elmessiri, remained marginal, transient, and insignificant.⁶⁶ This idea is eloquently explained by Georg Lukács when he stresses that the protest of modernism against modern reality ignores the corrupt society of capitalism and presents the escape into psychopathology as a mere abstract representation:

The rejection of modern reality is purely subjective. Considered in terms of man's relation with his environment, it lacks both content and direction. And this lack is exaggerated still further by the character of the *terminus ad quem*. For the protest is an empty gesture, expressing nausea, or discomfort, or longing.... These [modernist] writers are not wholly wrong in believing that psychopathology is their surest refuge; it is the ideological complement of their historical position.⁶⁷

Neither Romanticism nor absurdist modernism can claim a central or an effective role in the confrontation with the dominance of the materialist paradigm. This view has been embraced and advocated by many western scholars. It is argued that the ambivalence of many

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

western intellectuals towards modernity and modernization was reflected in a nostalgic sense of “paradise lost” but by the mid-twentieth century this ambivalence had dissipated.⁶⁸

Elmessiri’s main argument is that the original western project of humanism has proved to be a form of “naturalistic anti-humanism” or “materialist monism.” The anti-humanistic tendencies of materialism have become the “epistemological basis for a process of deconstruction, neutralization, depersonalization and desanctification not only of nature but also of man.”⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Elmessiri places a great emphasis on the same argument and attempts to trace the lost expectations of humanism, particularly the attempt to construct a new *logos* and *telos* i.e. the establishment of absolute secular ethical systems that emphasize man’s uniqueness from the world of nature/matter.⁷⁰ Elmessiri does not hesitate to refer to western civilization in its phase of “solid materialism” as nothing but a tragic and imperialist worldview governed only by the Nietzschean “will to power,” the Freudian pleasure principle epitomized by Dr. Faustus, Macbeth, Don Juan and Casanova.⁷¹

As Elmessiri suggests, the devastating consequences of the rationalistic and mechanistic paradigm gave rise to Romanticism which celebrated an organismic paradigm based on the immanent unity, order, and wholeness of living organisms which have an intrinsic order, a self organizing potential or inherent design to reproduce life. Romanticism informed many nationalisms with ‘unscientific’ ideologies that eventually gave rise to racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular. This point is stressed in Elmessiri’s writings, especially when he argues that organismic metaphors had been extended by Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) to a metaphysical concept of *Volkgeist* which was employed in part to promote a totalitarian nationalism. Based upon the pantheistic implications of God as a cosmic *Geist* (spirit) that must embody itself in nature and human history as an evidence of moral and cultural progress of human existence, Hegel’s philosophy, according to Elmessiri, is based on an illusory dialectic that aspires to unite the subject and the object, the absolute and the relative i.e. the comprehensive totalitarian organic point where materialistic pantheism meets with spiritual pantheism. The immanent organic trinity (God, territory

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

and the people) became the most fundamental element in secular organic nationalisms.⁷² In a private conversation with the author of this book, Elmessiri pointed out one of the most remarkable ironies of Hegelianism:

[T]he Absolute Mind will be embodied, and even incarnated, in nature and the general law is realized in history, a time which will mark the end of dialectics and of human suffering, when man will find final solutions to all his problems and fully control all things. However, one of the ironies of this situation is that the moment of total control is itself the moment that will mark the victory of simplism over complexity, of one-dimensionality over multi dimensionality, and of the natural over the human.⁷³

According to Elmessiri, the promethean heroic phase of solid materialism witnessed the emergence of secular nationalisms and absolutist centralised nation-states that placed great emphasis on the notions of national past, identity, common good and good society. The saddest irony, however, is that this phase ended with Nazi tyranny, Stalinist terrorism, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war in Vietnam and the establishment of the Zionist State in Palestine. In the phase of solid rational materialism, western global imperialism, according to Elmessiri, has transformed the entire world into “utilizable matter” in the name of “the white man’s burden,” “the *mission civilatrice*,” and “the manifest destiny.”⁷⁴

In mapping the consequences of modernity, Elmessiri is critical of all closed systems that seek full control and absolute perfection: Marxism and its call for a communist society devoid of any manifestations of conflict and contradiction; liberalism and its desire to employ science and technology in gratifying people’s desires; Nazism and its dream of full control and perfect rationalization; the New World Order and its ambitions of reaching a universal natural law that ignores the differences among cultures; and finally Zionism and its deification, like Nazism, of *Blunt, Boden und Volk*. Here the Zionist vision and praxis are always perceived within the context of western materialism and imperialism. Elmessiri’s cognitive map always associates Israel with

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

western imperialism because he belongs to geographical, historical and cultural circumstances that witnessed the British support of Jewish communities at the expense of Palestinian and Arab interests (the Balfour Declaration of 1917), the Anglo-French support to Israel in the 1956 aggression on Egypt and the current American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the blind support of Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Elmessiri, like Bauman, emphasizes that a modern absolute nation-state does not simply mean a totalitarian and authoritarian state. Rather, it refers to the monopoly of truth and interpretation as it becomes the “only ultimate point of reference,” “the *telos* of human existence” and the “ultimate point of freedom.” The deification of the state reaches its climatic moment when Hegel emphasized and even justified the necessity of wars as a means of maintaining state sovereignty and *raison d’etat*, rejecting the Kantian notion of perpetual peace and celebrating instead the absolute sovereignty of the state. As for the deification of man, Elmessiri holds that Hitler can be regarded as the paradigmatic figure of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (superman) who epitomizes the will of the absolute state i.e. a self-sufficient, self-referential superman bounded by no historical, social, ethical or aesthetic constraints. Elmessiri, however, stresses that the emergence of the superman went hand in hand with the creation of *Untermenschen* (sub-men governed by organismic laws or civil servants governed by bureaucratic orders) like Adolf Eichmann, who represents the “paradigmatic civil servant;” one who believes blindly in the authority of the state and faithfully carries out the *Führer’s* orders.⁷⁵

Like Bauman, Elmessiri focused on the Holocaust as the “paradigmatic moment” of solid rational materialism which has given rise to a universal human condition that can be grasped in Elmessiri’s metaphor of the “functional group.” This metaphor is very close to Bauman’s metaphors of strangehood and vagabondage. Elmessiri refers to key Western figures and their influence on his understanding of the role of functional groups; among them are Georg Simmel, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Werner Sombart.⁷⁶ Elmessiri, however, criticized western scholarship for its failure to incorporate the stranger metaphor into a

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

more comprehensive interpretative paradigm. Replacing the stranger metaphor with the metaphor of “functional group,” Elmessiri attempts to introduce a more comprehensive paradigm that can cover a wide range of people who are either imported from outside society or recruited from within its ranks and who are generally defined in terms of a definite function rather than their complex humanity.

Among the major characteristics of functional groups are utility, neutrality; rationalization; instrumentalization; isolation; alienation; powerlessness; double standards; and mobility. According to Elmessiri, this new metaphor as well as its relevant connotations are applicable to a wide range of groups in history, including, to mention but a few, the Gypsies in Europe and in Egypt; Armenian merchants in the Ottoman Empire; Mamluks in Egypt and the Samurai in pre-modern Japan. Elmessiri, however, holds that the Jews are the prime example of functional groups throughout history. This metaphor, however, is not a unique product of modernity, but it is modernity that makes it a universal human condition.⁷⁷

The highly loaded metaphor of the stranger with its humanistic implications of misery and suffering, fear and anxiety is now replaced by a more comprehensive metaphor that attempts to map one of the major consequences of modernity i.e. the transformation of community into a purely functional and bureaucratic society i.e. a society of civil servants who lack any human bonds. The functional group metaphor, however, lacks the humanistic aura of strangers as *heimatlos Dasein* (diasporic being) and not only as *obdachlos Menschen* (homeless people) i.e. as human beings who are forced to play this role while yearning for their true humanity wherever they are forced to go, though Elmessiri had these connotations in mind when he theorized the paradigm of the functional groups.

Elmessiri's use of the functional group metaphor echoes Ernest Gellner's celebration of the *Mamluk* as the best metaphor to describe the universal existential consequences of the emergence of modernity and rational bureaucracy:

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

When everyone has become a *Mamluk*, no special mamluk class predominates in the bureaucracy. At long last the bureaucracy can recruit from the population at large, without needing to fear the arrival of dozens of cousins as unwanted attachments of each single new entrant.⁷⁸

Elmessiri sees this universal situation as a result of a long process of secular rationalization that sets a wide range of binary oppositions: traditional versus complex and rational societies; community (*Gemeinschaft*) versus society (*Gesellschaft*); and affective versus contractual relationships. This issue of the isolated modern individual is as old as history and it takes roots in classical sociology, most memorably in Ferdinand Tönnies's famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. According to Karel Dobbelaere's analysis of secularization, it is the rationalization process in the economic order that has brought about huge bureaucracies resting on mechanistic foundations in which individuals are reduced to being role players in *gesellschaftliche* relationships.⁷⁹

Here it is extremely important to contrast the metaphor of the stranger as introduced by Bauman and Elmessiri in relation to modernity and the Jewish communities. Bauman argues that the best image that can be used to describe the existential nature of the Jews is that of the "prismatic group":

Depending on the side from which the Jews were looked at, they – like all prisms – unwittingly refracted altogether different sights; one of the crude, unrefined and brutal lower classes, another of ruthless and haughty social superiors.⁸⁰

Unlike Bauman, Elmessiri opts for the metaphor 'functional group' as a more explanatory paradigm of the existential nature of the Jews. Instead of seeing the Jews as *heimatlos Dasein* or even Jewish communities, Elmessiri argues that modernity has reduced them to functional groups, not only in modern liberal society but also within western feudal system. As Elmessiri points out, the Jews were landless, and by the 13th century they became intermediary groups to their Christian hosts who used them in the military, commercial and financial sectors.

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

Elmessiri affirms that the Jews in pre-modern Europe were part of the King's property and were not a force of production, but rather a means of production.⁸¹ This point is also emphasized by Bauman when he refers to the fact that both the position and definition of the Jews throughout the pre-modern history of Europe were determined by the body politic: "The Jews were *König jüden*, property and wards of the King, of the Prince, or the local warlord, depending on the stage or variety of the feudal order. Their status was politically born and politically sustained."⁸²

The metaphor of functional group, in Elmessiri's view, finds its best expression in anti-Jewish discourses through the use of other sub-metaphors and terms, all of which belong to almost the same semantic field. Parasitism, abnormality, slime fungus, vampires and *Luftmenschen* were usually used in connection with the Jews in general and *Ostjuden* in particular. The image of parasitism has a long history and it refers to the thesis that Jews threaten the moral and economic order and that they pursue wealth at the expense of all moral obligation.⁸³

As Bauman suggests, the proponents of National Socialism identified modernity as the "rule of economic and monetary values," and they assumed that Jewish racial characteristics were the major reason behind the disappearance of "the *volkisch* mode of life and standards of human worth."⁸⁴ It is precisely for this reason that they were conceived of as leeches and vampires, sucking the lifeblood from others; and therefore, they deserve death without redemption. The saddest irony, according to Elmessiri, is that the abstraction of the Jew into a permanent victim or a permanent parasite in Zionist discourse is countered by an equal, and even unjust, abstraction of the gentile into a "permanent wolf."⁸⁵

Like Bauman, Elmessiri repudiates the notion that the Holocaust is a deviation from western modernity. He also rejects the theological interpretations that attempt to explain the Holocaust in metaphysical terms that ignore the complexity of human reality. It is precisely for this reason that Elmessiri rejects all manifestations of what he calls "iconization," a method that strips a human phenomenon of its historical nature and presents it as *sui generis*, a *mysterium tremendum* to be

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

discussed, if at all, only in the most sophisticated forms of eschatological discourse.⁸⁶

In an attempt to create a more comprehensive paradigm that goes beyond the Holocaust as a paradigmatic moment in the history of modernity, Elmessiri argues that western civilization as a whole, including Nazism, can be viewed as “the civilization of transfer” on all levels. “Transfer,” in Elmessiri’s view, is not just a political concept but also an “essential and structural component of comprehensive secularism and value-free modernity.”⁸⁷ According to Elmessiri, the earliest transfer was the linguistic transfer that took place in the Reformation era when Protestant Reformists transferred the religious concepts from the metaphorical level to the literal level, thus transforming the signifier “Zion” into a geographical land called Palestine and the religious love of Zion into a movement towards settling in it. The same process shows in the transfer of the signifier “Jerusalem,” the heavenly city of God, which has been transformed into the worldly Jerusalem.⁸⁸

As for political transfer, Elmessiri refers to the emergence of nineteenth-century “Darwinian utilitarianism” which celebrated racist and imperialist terminology, including “human material,” “human surplus,” and “useful matter.”⁸⁹ Elmessiri argues that the earliest historical transfer was the deportation of political opponents, religious extremists and criminals to North America and the extermination of American Indians. This process was followed by other, yet more violent, transfers, including the transfer of the European armies to the whole world to transform it into a “utilizable matter;” the transfer of western human surplus to western settlement enclaves (as was the case in Algeria, South Africa and Palestine); the transfer of minority groups to other countries (the Chinese to Malaysia and the Jews to Argentina); the transfer of Asians and Africans to the Americas; and last, but not least, the transfer of the Jewish question from Europe to the Middle East. Elmessiri cites the Balfour Declaration as an example of political transfer as it aimed at transferring the remaining Jews from Europe to Palestine “in a bid to employ them in the service of the interests and the ends of western civilization.”⁹⁰

Mapping the Consequences of Modernity

In all these examples human beings are viewed as utilizable, transferable and disposable matter. It is precisely for this reason that Elmessiri insists that the Nazi genocide was not a mere aberration of the history of neither Germany nor the modern West.⁹¹ Nazism, according to Elmessiri, represents the paradigmatic moment of western civilization. The Nazis, as always, Elmessiri suggests, were keen on using such objective and neutral terms as transfer, resettlement, final solution, racial hygiene and euthanasia, all of which led to the neutralization of perception, particularly the perpetrator's perception of the victim as an object or utilized matter.⁹² The Holocaust, however, did not only target the Jews but also other human beings, including the mentally retarded, old people, Slavs, communists, criminals and drug addicts, all of whom were viewed as "transferable and disposable matter."⁹³