

Pour formuler autrement et clarifier cette problématique, qui nous paraît essentielle, nous nous référons à Giorgio Agamben qui, reprenant la définition de l'État d'Alain Badiou (Agamben 1990:89), notait que celui-ci, loin d'être l'union d'une volonté commune ou un réalignement des intérêts disparates liés contractuellement, se voulait d'abord et avant tout édifié sur l'interdit de la *dé-liaison*. Il suffit de généraliser cette piste pour saisir l'ampleur de la tâche incessante qui est celle de comprendre les modalités et les moyens dont les dispositifs rendent sinon interdite, du moins difficile, toute forme de dé-liaison (dans laquelle peut s'insérer par ailleurs le phénomène de la prolifération même des usages du concept de communauté).

Roberto Esposito (2000:16-20) nous lance sur une piste similaire, en s'attardant à l'étymologie du concept de communauté, à l'instar d'Amit (citant ici Marietta Baba). La dimension du *commun* qu'il lie également au champ sémantique du public et de l'impropriété (ce qui est commun est donc *partagé* et *n'est pas propre* à) doit être complétée par l'appréhension de la racine *munus* qui surajoute une toute autre dimension à ce premier sens bien connu. Ici, c'est la logique du devoir (obligation, charge, office, fonction) qui prévaut et cette précision d'Esposito nous permet de mettre en relief la problématique de la *dépendance impersonnelle* qui n'est certes pas absente des formes de communalisations contemporaines. Cette logique du devoir permet surtout de garder bien en vue les obligations communautaires qui découlent de la vie sous le régime du *common wealth*.

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## Notes

- 1 Notons également au passage les nombreux débats chez les penseurs libéraux autour des problématiques liées à la gestion des cultures face au droit et à l'équité (nous pensons notamment ici aux débats incessants entre les allégeances communautaristes et libertariennes). Leur penchant pour la gestion du divers (la place des cultures dans l'État et les constantes remises en question opérées les unes envers les autres) nous paraît tout à fait lié à la prolifération du concept de communauté et ses multiples usages. En d'autres termes, il s'agit d'une véritable quête de l'accommodement *raisonnable*.
- 2 Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), préfaçant la traduction française du livre d'Esposito, y allait d'une mise en garde à ce sujet : « Il est évident que *nous* existons indissociables de notre société, si l'on entend par là non pas nos organisations ni nos institutions, mais notre *sociation*, qui est bien plus et

surtout bien autre chose qu'une association (un contrat, une convention, un groupement, un collectif, une collection), mais une condition coexistante qui *nous* est coessentielle (Nancy 2000:6) ».

- 3 Le rêve de la *communauté* internationale étant bien de dépasser les intérêts des *communautés nationales* établies. Seule une communauté, en ce sens, est susceptible de fonder l'au-delà et de dépasser celles qui lui préexistent (surtout après l'échec de la *Société* des nations au cours de l'entre-deux guerres).
- 4 Nous reprendrons ici la relecture que nous offre Agamben de la piste foucauldienne : « En donnant une généralité encore plus grande à la classe déjà très vaste des dispositifs de Foucault, j'appelle dispositif tout ce qui a, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la capacité de capturer, d'orienter, de déterminer, d'intercepter, de modeler, de contrôler et d'assurer les gestes, les conduites, les opinions et les discours des êtres vivants (Agamben 2007:31) ». Rappelons également que le sujet étant, chez Agamben (2007:32), ce qui découle du corps à corps entre le vivant et les dispositifs.

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## Response to "Community as 'Good to Think With'"

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Few concepts have drawn the critical attention of social scientists as has community. Given its centrality to the theoretical and methodological core of anthropological inquiry, it has been an ongoing focus of inquiry, discussion and debate. Its reputation as a notoriously open-ended concept has often meant that the invocation of community runs the risk of meaning something or nothing at all. *Community* can be used to mean an all-embracing totalistic and unified entity (sometimes geographically bounded) that obliterates difference, or it can signify looser forms of association such as "aesthetic communi-

ties” or “epistemic communities” which depend on superficial and transient bonds (Baumann 2001:65). Thus, a generally frustrated tone has come to pervade efforts to understand, define and otherwise cope with a term that refuses to be supplanted by others or to simply go away.

However, one could argue that this may not be such a bad thing. This is the spirit of inquiry that informs Vered Amit’s commentary. It builds on the author’s seminal contributions to the critique of the concept of community in anthropological thought (*Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments* [2002] and *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity* [Amit and Rapport 2000]). Amit begins with an entreaty, albeit that of a “contrarian,” to consider the possibilities of community in spite of its flabbiness as an analytical concept. In thinking about community as a “genus of concepts” rather than as a term increasingly devoid of substance, it is, according to Amit, possible to think more productively about community as different “classes of sociation.” In this way, Amit echoes the concerns of anthropologists who, for the past few decades, have called into question the usefulness of traditional categories and practices and the assumptions that support them (see also Amit’s *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World* [2000]). Time-honoured tropes in the analysis of culture and society have increasingly become the subject of debate. Classic holistic concepts have been flagged in particular for their inability to effectively explain contemporary social processes, for example, those involving the politicization of identity through social movements such as feminism and other activisms. The reflexive turn coupled with moral and ethical concerns, initiated by Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973), Marcus and Fischer’s *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986), Clifford and Marcus’ *Writing Culture* (1986), and followed by Gupta and Ferguson’s (1997) problematization of the foundational concepts of “field” and “culture,” helped to solidify anthropology’s disciplinary distinction as primarily a form of cultural critique. Attention, for example, to the relationships between politics, power and knowledge, influenced by the work of Foucault, de Certeau and others, exposed the discipline to challenges that served in many ways to radically transform anthropological sensibilities, if not the project itself.

Critical reflections on community emerged at roughly the same time as other concepts and analytical categories came under scrutiny. Community, as it has been traditionally understood, that is in the service of conventional ethnographic work in specific locales, has increasingly faced the predicament of its methodological and analyti-

cal relevance in a world defined by concerns of globalization, transnationalism, migration and movement. The resulting anxiety of anthropologists trying to cope with an ever-changing ethnographic, conceptual and theoretical terrain has resulted in, I would argue, an over-reliance on terms such as diaspora, exile, assorted “scapes” (Appadurai 1996), cosmopolitanism(s), and clumsy terms like glocal. It is also possible to imagine that this refreshed lexicon has helped to ease the pressure that many anthropologists have felt to remain relevant as a field of inquiry.

And yet, for example, those working in the area loosely defined as diaspora studies, as I am, at times still get mired in endless definitional exercises. Indeed, there is almost as much critical scholarship on the analytical utility of the concept of diaspora as there are ethnographic studies of the same. However, what has been learned over the course of the last few decades of its broad but contentiously debated use, is that it is perhaps not so prudent to throw out the categorical baby with the bathwater. This does not so much reflect the grumblings of traditionalists anxious to preserve the integrity of the discipline, but rather as Gupta and Ferguson (1997) point out, the need to re-evaluate the organizing concepts of the discipline, rather than simply to deconstruct or dispense with them. Amit’s contribution reflects this perspective well.

Amit finds the philosopher Kenneth Burke’s work on ambiguity useful in her efforts to repurpose community as a conceptual tool. The point here is not simply to debate whether community as a category matters, but enquire as to how it can help us to think more nimbly about the processes which continue to give it meaning in scholarship and in the lives of those who make use of it. Community is then a “titular concept”; one that Amit argues is “productively ambiguous.” That is to say that it is in the contexts of its use where meaning is found and these arise in moments of ambiguity. It is at these “strategic points of ambiguity that conceptual transformation occur.” Here Amit draws on the contributions of scholars such as Charles Taylor, Margaret Gilbert, Benedict Anderson, Ulf Hannerz and others to illustrate the contingent nature of associational bonds and what animates them. Gilbert, for example, in her discussion of plural subjects, asserts that common knowledge as a form of sociality does not imply the existence of a bond between those who share this knowledge. As the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested, community is in existence as much as it is in common. However, being in common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body (1991:xxxviii). Overt expressions of commonality then do not mean that groups see themselves as part of a bounded entity, or

necessarily even linked in any way. Gilbert's analysis of the family of concepts that constitute the "the plural subject" and joint commitment in particular (one which avoids any stipulation of willingness to commit) informs Amit's thinking about the necessary and sufficient conditions for the expression or formation of community. Joint commitment has the potential to generate as much conflict and tension as it does interdependence. By freeing ourselves from identifying attributes "in common," in favour of "coordination and interdependence," Amit sees renewed possibility for thinking about community devoid of the need for references to personal or collective intentionality.

Joint commitment for Amit, then, represents one of the intrinsic qualities of sociation and, more importantly a space in which ambiguity arises. The powerful affective nature of community, most commonly expressed in sentiments of belonging, is also identified as a significant point of intersection in her analysis. Here Amit turns her critical attention to Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, Anthony Cohen's work on community as boundary making, and on Benedict Anderson's influential work on "imagined" communities. What unites these thinkers, according to Amit though, is their focus on the extraordinary contexts that elicit expressions or senses of community and this, she argues, poses a problem for analysis. Although the insights of these foundational thinkers have led to the most commonly cited sociological insights into community, their contributions exclude consideration of the mundane and the everyday. Alternatively, Amit introduces the notion of "distributed affect-belonging," modelled on the work of Frederik Barth and Ulf Hannerz, an approach which she argues avoids common analytical misapprehensions concerning the degree to which people are presumed to share equally a sense of belonging by virtue of their affiliations and affinities which may lead to extraordinary expressions of community, peoplehood, nation, et cetera.

In identifying the relationships between joint commitment and distributed affect-belonging as a preferred way of modelling forms of sociation, Amit hopes to provide an analytical framework for thinking beyond commonly accepted but nonetheless limiting and "categorical" notions of community. The question that comes to mind, though, is do we need another framework for thinking about community? Amit masterfully demonstrates *how* community may be good to think with, but not necessarily *why*. The ubiquity of community both in the academic and day-to-day senses of the term does not necessarily signal the need to qualify it further as an analytical tool. The past two or more decades of literature on citizenship, nationalism, globalization (and even on the Internet, "vir-

tual communities"), have all either tacitly or explicitly contemplated the presence or absence of something approximating community. Community is often presented as a pastiche of elements and entailments that ostensibly signify processes defined by principles of association and commonality, and this diminishes its analytical value. For this reason, Amit's efforts to disentangle the components of community into a "genus of concepts" related to "classes of sociation," has tremendous analytical value, particularly in its emphasis on processes rather than forms. Whether we want to think about these as expressions or manifestations of "community" per say, is up for debate.

Amit's analysis finds common purpose with anthropologists committed to reinvigorating core concepts or developing new ones suitable to emerging fields of inquiry. Anthropologists have recently come to embrace a conceptual repertoire that includes terms such as "assemblage" and "entanglement" further signalling the movement away from holistic and totalizing categories and models (including community) to those that embody the contemporary concerns and contexts to which anthropologists are drawn or find themselves (see Rabinow 2008). The resurrection of social network theory, begun with the work of Barnes (1968) and Mitchell (1969) and followed by countless others inspired by its promise and potential both as an analytical and methodological tool, has grown immensely in popularity. Most recently, the sociologist Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (2005) has garnered the attention of anthropologists working in non-traditional research settings. The attraction of approaches like Latour's for anthropologists seems to reside in a relational epistemology that assumes the mutual imbrications of humans and material nature in a process that is always ongoing, unfolding and never complete. Hence its popularity, not only for those working in science and technology studies, but for anthropologists interested in processes always in the making and, in particular, how "aggregates thus assembled...are connected to each other" (2005:22).

The most productive moments in the development of the discipline have been in the problematics that have arisen or have been identified in their use: hence, the precipitous decline in adherence to the methodological imperatives of structural-functionalism and ethnographic preoccupations with the foreign. These have been supplanted to a certain extent by multi-sited ethnography, the erosion of anthropological sensibilities based on notions of emplacement and locale, and greater attention to contingency than to natural development. The term *community*, as is the case with other anthropological concepts, is best understood as provisional and flexible, and therein

lies its analytical value and, more importantly, its power and importance in the realm of everyday life. If it continues to provoke the kinds of productive, insightful and challenging contributions as those embodied in Amit's commentary, then community will most certainly remain a concept that is "good to think with."

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