The Seductions of Community

Reconsidering Community

Gerald W. Creed

This book is about an obsession—one with global reach that occupies politicians, activists, scholars, and laymen alike—the obsession with community. Whether we see it as the nostalgic desire for a lost past or the creative reformulation of a postmodern society, the focus on community has become ubiquitous in the way we talk and think about life in the twenty-first century. Political and economic projects, from rain forest conservation to urban empowerment zones, focus on "the community" as the appropriate vehicle and target of change. Social movements to resist these very efforts often constitute themselves around the same concept, as do others trying to assert a claim on the resources that community recognition promises. For many, social identities define communities (and vice versa), suggesting a proliferation of potentially overlapping entities, while others see a decline of community and predict dire social consequence (for example, R. Putnam 2000). The public currency of the concept has expanded its use in social analysis, provoking one political scientist to conclude that "interest in community is *a* major turn in current thinking, if not somehow *the* turn" (Fowler 1991:ix).

In all this talk and text, what actually defines a group of people as

a community is rarely, if ever, specified, and even when it is (for example, Calhoun 1980), the proffered definitions are rarely adopted by others. This is because the term has become part of the commonsensical way we understand and navigate the world. Community does not *need* defining, and this is precisely why scholars need to pay attention to it. Such common notions reveal the taken-for-granted understandings of the world that are so internalized or routinized as to escape comment and specification. It is essential, then, to look inside this seemingly transparent term and discover the associations that are, as it were, hidden in plain view. Moreover, when notions acquire such an aura of facticity, their uncritical use can actually reproduce the "reality" they supposedly just describe or, in the case of community, aspire to supersede. No matter how casually it is used, then, the notion of community may be doing sociological and ideological work—work that ranges from simply reinforcing the status quo to challenging systems of oppression to provoking communitarian violence and genocide. As these options imply, collectivity and exclusion are two sides of the same coin, and to understand either, we need to look at them together— community is the coinage.

While this concern is now critical, it is not novel. One of the most fascinating elements of the community notion is the repeated cross-examination it has sustained. For anthropologists, the most memorable instance is the scathing attack on the community study method popular in the 1950s. This critique challenged community assumptions and helped propel a paradigm shift to world systems models in the 1970s. Despite this and subsequent challenges, the term continued to expand in usage, and discredited assumptions reinsinuated themselves. A major barrier to fully and permanently reforming the community concept is its complex constitution, which includes at least three component meanings: a group of people, a quality of relationship (usually with a positive normative value), and a place/location. While each meaning represents a possible autonomous usage in contemporary English, a history of usage in which these multiple meanings were often combined diminishes the autonomy that usually pertains for multiple definitions of a word. As Raymond Williams explains, "the complexity of community thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the

historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this" (1976:76). Given the lack of referential discretion, people who deploy the term in one sense may unavoidably, if not intentionally, invoke the other qualities popularly associated with it. All references, then, may conjure to some degree qualities of harmony, homogeneity, autonomy, immediacy, locality, morality, solidarity, and identity, as well as the idea of shared knowledge, interests, and meanings. This situation accounts for why the term is loaded with affective power, or as Williams puts it, why it is always a "warmly persuasive word" and "unlike all other terms of social organisations (state, nation, society, and so on)…seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term" (1976:76). This is also why it is so powerful and important.

By the end of the 1990s, the growing popular and scholarly appeal to community had once again provoked reaction from a number of scholars. Nikolas Rose (1999) correlated the community obsession with the collapse of the socialist project and the global victory of capitalism. Drawing inspiration from Foucault, he saw community as a new means of governance in the changed geopolitics of the 1990s (think, for example, about "community policing" or "community liaison officers"). Miranda Joseph (2002) turned instead to Marx to explain the popularity of community by its imbrications with the economy—a two-way process in which community facilitates the flow of capital, while capital provides the very medium in which community is enacted. Interestingly, Joseph's conclusion would also articulate with Rose's attribution of community popularity to the post-1989 triumph of capitalism. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) draws upon other social dislocations and transformations to explain the appeal of community as a source of hope and security. For him, the concept encapsulates lost qualities of society that live on as goals for the future. While this spin is more positive, he also acknowledges that the embrace of community demands a sacrifice of freedom that merits caution.

The idea for this book began as a seminar proposal with objectives similar to these efforts. By the time of the actual seminar in April 2003, the aforementioned publications and a few others (Amit 2002; Kelly

and Kaplan 2001) had confirmed the importance of our motivating concerns and significantly informed our discussions in Santa Fe. These works allowed us to push further than we originally aspired. We were able to spend more time assessing the consequences of community in empirically grounded and culturally nuanced contexts. In addition to cases where community is used generally and generically, we purposefully included comparative contexts where the notion of community was less pervasive (even nonexistent), as well as cases where it was an official legal category of administration. This approach allowed us to correlate the deployment of community with other qualities and characteristics. We were also able to integrate the foci of earlier critiques and extract new insight from the articulation of previously distinctive explanations. Thus we examine not just how community facilitates governance or capital accumulation but also how community articulates these two forces in local and translocal contexts. Finally, prior efforts allowed us to take the reflexive enterprise to another level and to consider not just the unintended consequences of deploying community but also the potential consequences of criticizing that very fascination, as some of the dangers of challenging community were already apparent (Brosius, this volume). In sum, we are not interested in refining the community notion or in reaching an evaluative assessment as to its value, either analytically or sociopolitically. Rather, we aspire to understand the various ways community is deployed and what work it does in different contexts. In so doing, the essays demonstrate the critical value of using community as the focus of analysis rather than simply an empty category of heuristic or descriptive convenience.

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE AHEAD

On one level, the sighting of a community obsession is somewhat illusionary, as it is based on simple lexical usage rather than meaning, which remains so diverse and contested that David Kirp (2000:6) characterizes the word as a "Rorschach blot upon which myriad hopes and fears are projected." In fact, a range of meanings has characterized the word community from its early usage in the fourteenth century. But as Williams (1976:75) points out, from the seventeenth century, and especially during the nineteenth century in the context of larger and more industrial societies, the term acquired a sense of immediacy and local-

ity. "Society," a term that had been used to distinguish the body of direct relationships from that of the state, came increasingly to signify larger encompassing categories, and community more narrow direct relations. This distinction informed the prospect of "community studies" in the twentieth century but still failed to generate a precise consensus. By 1955 a survey identified more than ninety definitions of community (Hillery 1955) with very little in common. In the decades that followed, observers recognized that the term had acquired so many meanings as to be meaningless (Plant 1978:79–80). Extensive use without shared meaning turned the word into an empty, although inherently positive, signifier available to any petitioner, which in turn assured that it would be used even more extensively, adding more divergent meanings. Community became the default term whenever "group" seemed inadequate.

This situation developed almost imperceptibly as a rather generic notion was used in more and more contexts, but the critique of culture as a uniform, homogenous, and discrete (that is, essentialized) category, beginning in the 1980s, catapulted community to the forefront as a stand-in for the popular but troubled notion of culture. This process helps account for the expansion of community in scholarly discourse around the same time others (Bauman 2001; Joseph 2002; N. Rose 1999) see political and economic explanations for its popular expansion—that is, in addition to being an analytic response to the expanding popularity of the term, its scholarly expansion has its own dynamic. The dangerous potential of the culture concept was exposed in the emergence of culturally defined racisms (Balibar and Wallerstein 1992; Stolcke 1995) and ideas about the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1998). Community seemed a safe generic alternative. This volume confirms that it is an alternative, but not always or altogether a safe one; many uses reproduce the problematic qualities and dangers of culture.

One response to the plethora of meanings of community might be to insist on distinguishing different uses of the term, such as "geographical communities" and "political communities," but since these dimensions often overlap, such distinctions could hardly be sustained. Instead, we endeavor to retain the concept's inherent obscurity and to make the user more aware of its uncertainty so that it does not automatically evoke any preconceived ideas but rather requires

specification. Whether preconceived qualities haunt all invocations of community; if so, to what effect; and whether they can or should be exorcized are at the core of the community dilemma and this volume. Clearly, many people use community as a heuristic designation of convenience with no particular qualitative intentions. But can such uses completely escape the associations listed above? My framing essay, which follows, sees a romantic doppelgänger wherever community is invoked. The subsequent essays complicate this claim by showing how different historical contexts condition these elements in very distinctive ways with different consequences, often animating them but sometimes overwhelming them. Together they confirm a broader lesson: the terms used to delineate, describe, and motivate associations, relations, and identifications are neither coincidental nor inconsequential.

In sum, it is clear that Rose has targeted an important element of community—its engagement with modern governance. The success of modern rule owes much to its articulation of an expansive authority (in both degree and distance) in a language of community; states traffic in the emotional elements of community to establish consent. This emotionalism clearly informed Benedict Anderson's choice of the term community to understand the attachment of nationalism, but his association of community with nation obscures a quality that makes communities so useful for governance—that they usually remain subordinate to the state. Certainly, the definition of community allows for its use at the state/societal level, but that is usually not the implication, which is why Anderson must qualify the nation as an "imagined" community. Reversing Anderson, one may posit that the hegemony of the nation-state (which traffics in the notion of community) as the only imaginable form of political organization has contributed to the emotive resonance of the community notion, which then paradoxically makes his formulation so resonant.[1] Regardless, the fact that communities carry such emotion while remaining subordinate to the state makes them particularly useful as a mechanism of governance.

But modern rule is not possible without access to economic resources. Following Joseph's analysis of community's imbrication with capital accumulation, we might suspect that community attains some of its emotional resonance and significance for rule through its role in a system of resource extraction and mobilization. The contemporary study of consumption supports this conclusion, showing how many of

the vectors defining communities (race, class, ethnicity, gender, urbanity) are articulated in consumption practices, which in turn provide a motor for capitalist growth (Davila 2001; Halter 2000; Miller and Carter 2001). The degree to which consumption practices correlate with the boundaries of communities cannot be coincidental. The implication of communities in the economic operations of capitalism then materializes the notion of community for members in a visceral way. Embodied through consumption, this emotional experience translates into the utility of the term for political mobilization by the state.

The association of community with contemporary statecraft and capitalism might seem at odds with the earliest theorists who blamed these same forces of modernity for eradicating community (for example, Durkheim, Tönnies, and Weber). In this model, traditional community ties were undermined by the commercialization and bureaucratization of social relations. Actually, however, these two views reinforce each other. Community becomes more central to state governance as its political and economic power is displaced. Put more directly, communities become useful and central for the state after they have been politically eviscerated and transformed into mere units of consumption and representation. The role of communities in this modern political economy then reinforces unidimensional understandings of community. James Scott (1998) points out that states can administer effectively only by simplifying and homogenizing the local context so as to make it legible to the state. To the degree that community is promoted by modern statecraft, then, it is likely to be a problematic idea of community as uniform and homogenous. Hence, some categories of political significance, notably religious and ethnic/racial ones, are hard to imagine as not communities. Communities that do not fit such images are abandoned by the state (Brosius, this volume), discredited as antimodern (R. Rose 1999), or defined by terms other than community (Khan, this volume). For example, even though the attraction of youth gangs in the United States is often explained by teenage desire for belonging, gangs are more commonly cast as family surrogates and blamed on family failures. Likewise, certain manifestations of capitalism (Watts, this volume) operate in ways that seem anathema to the positive image of like-minded consumers, and the community notion is noticeable by its absence.

Of course, community also allows for contrary mobilizations

against state and corporate interests (Weismantel, this volume). Still, the very notion of community may be self-limiting as a revolutionary force because it is defined by (and acquires emotional valence from) its subordination to the state. Can global and virtual mobilization of community challenge this quality? On the one hand, internationalization of community as a focus of NGO and IO activity clearly articulates with and reinforces the notion of community as subordinate to the state, as communities are often the focus of aid projects expressly to circumvent state/political barriers.[2] On the other hand, some global mobilizations and movements appear to be creating effective communities of interest that supersede states and influence state and international policies (Edelman 1999). These changes may authorize new images of community no longer subordinate to states. However, their ultimate success may connect to other components of the community notion. Unrealistic expectations of community may preordain disappointment, in which case supra-state communities will also fail to sustain a challenge to state power.

In relation to the state and international arenas, the notion of community clearly connects to issues of rights, which provides further explanation for community obsessions. Because of their role in governance, communities may also make claims on rights at state and international levels, which renders the definition of community a highly contentious issue. This situation is most explicit in cases where communities constitute an official unit of administration (usually found in terms of "indigenous communities"). These special cases, however, should sensitize us to the way more informal notions of community may also be implicated with struggles over rights. How communities are defined and who gets designated or recognized as a community is determinant of political rights of representation precisely because community is central to governance. When this factor is taken into consideration, arguments about inclusion and exclusion can be appreciated as more than just issues of prejudice and culture clash. They are contests over power and the resources such power affords. The emotive nature of community, however, cannot be ignored here as it contributes to the reaction and affront that people feel when political designations fail to mesh with emotive ones. Some community crises, then, may be redefined as a clash between different definitions of com-

munity (Lees, this volume), in which case simply promoting the idea of community may exacerbate the conflict. Here we can see that notions of community are at the crux of the tension between individual and collective rights. The resonance of community blurs the distinction between these arenas precisely because community attains a more emotive connotation simpatico with the individual, even though it references a collective.

Clearly part of the problem with the community concept is the complex relationship between academic and popular uses of the term, which has heretofore not been closely examined. There is a disjuncture between scholarly uses of community, which are assumed to be free of erroneous assumptions, and popular uses, which traffic explicitly in the emotive conceptions purportedly purged from academic discourse. However, those popular images can often be traced to scholarly (even anthropological) sources (Weismantel, this volume), and many scholarly analyses of community are actually interested in the term's popularity. The latter reintroduces unreformed images of community into scholarly discourse by default. In addition, some scholars traffic knowingly in stereotypical images of community in the hopes of having more political or social influence with the politicians and bureaucrats who operate with similar ideas. This situation maintains an image of community consistent with that implicated in governance and corporate accumulation despite quite contrary objectives. Activists are especially important as interlocutors between scholarly and popular fora, and their extensive use of the community notion facilitates a continual cross-fertilization of scholarly and popular images. This complex relationship helps explain why repeated critiques of community in the scholarly arena, including the most recent, have not had popular impact, and why they have even failed to completely reform notions of community among scholars. The scholarly engagement with community provides numerous openings for popular influence. For these reasons we cannot assume that current deployments of community have been inoculated by previous criticisms.

PROVOCATIONS

Our project, then, recognizes that community is not a thing, or simply a concept, but rather a moment in modern rule, a moment

saturated with affective power. While articulating discipline and accumulation, it nevertheless holds the promise of escape from the conditions of its own constitution. The question of whether this promise can ever be achieved, or whether inherent expectations of community inevitably hamstring such efforts, fueled seminar discussion, and we did not reach consensus. We did, however, agree that the greater actualization of such potential depends upon a thorough interrogation of the term and a detailed specification of what the notion conveys, explicitly and implicitly, empirically and conceptually. We also agreed on three reactive strategies to achieve this goal.

Against the fetishization of community, we insist on examining the making (and unmaking) of communities. Marx used the term "fetishism" to convey how the products of human labor were seemingly removed from the social relations of their production. Just as Marx traced the perpetuity of exploitative productive relations to an ignorance about the nature of these social relations, we suspect that the disciplining and accumulative work of community hinges on the unreflective assumption of community as natural, organic, and perhaps sui generis. Such assumptions, for example, seem to authorize the conceptual possibility of a "crisis of community," which might seem nonsensical if the term were simply heuristic. Thus a powerful step is to look at the history of particular collectivities, to examine when they began to acquire an identity (internally and externally) that merits the community appellation. What are the qualities and relations that justify this specification, and what forces generated them? Of course, just as important, are examinations of parallel contexts or forces that fail to generate such labels. We then have to follow through to see the degree to which the constitution of community perpetuates itself quite apart from the forces that brought it into being, or how changes in those forces challenge and redefine communities. Violence, for example, seems particularly effective at constituting opposing communities. If violence defines communities vis-à-vis each other, does internal violence inevitably mark/invoke community decline and redefinition? Put more broadly, do the historical forces that constitute communities continue to shape their destiny, or does the notion of community itself establish expectations that shift subsequent developments?

Against the normative presumption of community as positive, we acknow-

ledge diverse and often unintended consequences generated by invocations of community. As already mentioned, Williams (1976:76) recognized that the term community seems never to be used unfavorably. While this idea might be challenged by bringing his historical method forward to include subsequent developments, such as communitarianism (Pandey, this volume), we accept that a positive valence is common-sensical and part of the popularity and utility of the community concept. Any effort to understand the dynamic of community must challenge this evaluation. This means examining diverse invocations and subjecting progressive projects to the same deconstructive efforts directed at essentializing ones. The invocation of community for any objective may be affected by the term's baggage. In fact, the same positive valence that makes community attractive may provoke discontent and dissatisfaction when such ideals are not realized. The same sentiments that generate community attachments clearly authorize exclusivity on the part of communities. This process may not be inherently negative, but it certainly has negative potential and clearly limits the flexibility of such units under changing circumstances such as increasing globalization. This quality helps explain why we can have both a profusion of community discourse and laments of community crisis. The fascination with, and desire for, community may be inadvertently generating disappointment, alienation, fragmentation, and segregation.

Against the objectification of communities, we maintain that communities are constituted by and constitutive of different regimes of knowledge. Communities are not things. Community is a loaded term for designating groups of people, and the designation is realized by different constituencies. It is not exclusively a term of self-ascription, and even if it were, the popularity of the choice clearly relates to the lack of satisfactory alternatives (at least in English). This situation demands that we be sensitive to how community fits within the authorized forms of knowledge that shape how we understand and experience the world. Following Foucault, we recognize that these regimes of knowledge are tied to vested interests and configurations of power so that the deployment of community, or an alternative designation, has ideological significance. The question remains as to whether we have reached the point of a "community discourse" tied to a current hegemonic project, or whether we are dealing with distinctive invocations of community

from very different and contrary discourses. Perhaps more significant, can community provide a counter-hegemonic discourse without serving the interests of a hegemonic one that draws heavily on the same lexical tool? Drawing on different historical and geographical contexts, the essays in this volume carry through these interrogations of community with different assessments and conclusions.

FROM ROMANCE TO REALPOLITIK

Realizing the intentions set out above requires strategies of inquiry that can circumvent the snares of community. We developed a collection of important questions (not all useful in every case, obviously) to help get at the content and impact of community without reifying it. First, it is crucial to discern who is deploying the term and with what objective (if any). What do people who identify themselves as a community think the concept implies? Are there disjunctures of meaning and intent between actors using the term in the same place and time (for example, the anthropologist, local activists, state representatives, NGO/IO workers, and local residents)? How do such conceptualizations differ over time? Is community the translation of an indigenous term? If so, why exactly is community used as the English equivalent? Are communities constituted by the research techniques used to study them? What are the relationships between concepts of community and identity vectors such as race, class, gender, family, and nation? Do communities fulfill particular roles in political organization or the mobilization and distribution of resources? Do violence and conflict help constitute, destroy, or redefine notions of community? Is community implicated with other complex notions such as culture, minority, diaspora, authenticity, or development? If so, how?

Miranda Joseph builds upon her earlier interrogation of community and capitalism (Joseph 2002) by examining connections between ideas of community, debt, and incarceration. In this model, the discourse of community crisis, with its associated disappearance of trust, operates as performance aimed at encouraging people to establish creditworthiness (which requires debt). The connection of debt to the expansion/infiltration of capitalism is obvious. Historically, as credit/debt became a way to constitute the individual liberal subject, default on debt stopped being redressed by incarceration, but the notion of

prison as payment for debt continued in the popular belief that criminals owe a debt to society, paid in time, because after all, time is money. Efforts to reform and redress the excesses of the criminal justice system in the United States now explicitly employ ideas of community. But romantic assumptions in the program of these "restorative justice" efforts can conceal the structural relations and causes of high incarceration rates, with the dangerous prospect of actually reinforcing the structures of power they protest. The point is that romantic aspects of community are dangerous, but their ultimate impact depends upon other factors surrounding their deployment.

These "other factors" are central to the chapter on Nigeria in which Michael Watts offers a direct attack on idealized notions of community by considering the possibility of violent communities. There is nothing romantic or "warmly persuasive" here (except perhaps the dream of oil riches), yet the results are more fractious than those driven by the search for harmony or unity. He shows how the political economy of oil prevents the constitution of communities that could facilitate governance and capitalism. If communities are central to these modern processes, then the impossibility of such communities may explain why Nigeria has been unable to constitute an effective modern state. Watts demonstrates clearly, however, that the failure is not due to the lack of potential community entities, which have in fact proliferated, but the inability of these fractious violent units to be integrated into a single national community due to the role of indigenous ethnic groups in the political structure and the nature of oil-claims-making. While romantic expectations of community may be a force of fragmentation and political disappointment in some contexts, in Nigeria the overwhelming forces of political economy explain similar, but more severe, outcomes. At the same time, the oxymoronic feel to the notion of "communities of violence" confirms the presence of quite different expectations for the term.

Kate Crehan, who has also written about fractured communities in Africa (1997) as well as the problematic notions of community held by aid workers there (2002a), turns to the inner city of London and finds uncanny parallels in the community rhetoric of urban regeneration. Focusing on a community arts project—the construction of a large mural in a public housing estate—she highlights the role of material

expressions and representations for people in identifying community. Initiated by despair over the decline of community, the project mobilized people (and a moment of community) to produce a mural that is now, ironically, permanent evidence of subsequent community decline. As Crehan notes, the home of community is often the past, but the same romantic nostalgia we might easily refute with historical facts provides the basis of efforts that actually produce moments of community experientially. This idea should give us pause about dismissing nostalgia as historical fiction, as it has its own generative power, and not only with conservative or nationalist results.

Aisha Khan shows how particular assumptions about community led researchers to conclude that Afro-Caribbean populations lacked communities, while Indo-Caribbean peoples had them by default (and perhaps to a fault, albeit a faulty version). In short, preconceptions about community interacted with assumptions about different cultures of origin and the differential impact of slavery and indenture to shape the scholarly profile and social policy of the area. Through synecdochical reasoning, the dominance of Afro-Caribbeans determined the characterization of the region as lacking community, while the exception of Indo-Caribbean communities operated to fit Indians into a governable slot within the hegemonic social structure of a purported mixed ("callaloo") nation. The latter could then easily accept other communities once new analytical models of transnationalism and diaspora began to redefine the notion of community around political resistance and justice, which opened up the Caribbean to being full of communities. But Khan finds continuities even in such radical rethinking. Assumptions people have about community lead them to emphasize particular aspects and elements of their new or innovative community experience. Diaspora seems to break with territorialized notions of community, but instead those expectations operate to redefine diasporic communities in terms of a territory—the homeland. Here we find not a wholesale shift in the notion of community but a shift in some qualities of community, while other ideas persist and actually influence the outcome of innovation.

Khan's formula for the importance of homeland may also shed light on the role of Zionism in the Jewish diaspora, where different attitudes toward Israel differentiate Jewish communities. Susan Lees, how-

ever, takes a different tack and shows how Jews living in the town of Tenafly, New Jersey, come to loggerheads precisely over their different ideas of community. A conflict over the public posting of religious symbols pitted Orthodox Jews against an alliance of assimilated Jews and gentiles in the town. The latter interpreted the public symbols of the Orthodox (and the public presence they facilitated) as a ghetto-like disruption to their image of the town as a single, integrated community. Assumptions of what a community should be led the multiculturalists to view the Orthodox not as a diverse component in the Tenafly mosaic but as a separate, autonomous community, which actually reflected Orthodox desires for their own community. The presence of assimilated Jews (and their somewhat deracialized status as "white") prevented many residents and leaders from interpreting their opposition to Orthodox symbols as cultural or ethnic intolerance. Here, notions of community are clearly more than just derivative outcomes of political struggles—they provoke the conflict, illustrating exactly why the simple appeal to community is not the solution to contemporary troubles.

Mary Weismantel provides an example where the idea of community has a more explicit structural history—the indigenous Andean *ayllu*. Even here, though, the term's flexibility operates against the clarity and precision such formalities might seem to promise. Moreover, the history of the term in Andean studies mirrors the reification of "community" as recounted by Creed (this volume). Weismantel uses the ayllu to track the theoretical shifts in Andean anthropology and political activism over the last fifty years, a history she divides into three moments: the modern, the postmodern, and the antimodern. These moments, however, are not linear, autonomous, or exclusive. In short, it is the romantic image of the ayllu reified by modernist anthropologists in the twentieth century that provides the inspiration for twenty-first-century antimodern struggles by Andean activists (as well as a collection of new age enterprises!). The activists find the essentialized ayllu of modern anthropology, which was rightly criticized by postmodern critics, to be a useful symbol of the future they seek to (re)establish. Like Crehan's community nostalgia, the value of the ayllu is its ability to will itself into being as a political project.

The utility of a romantic community for Andean activists, and

the possibility of achieving it for even a fleeting moment in a London housing project, should certainly give us pause regarding the critique of the community concept. Peter Brosius provides us with another warning from the world of conservation. He examines the recent shift from a community-based model of resource management to a regional one. The former emerged in recognition of the need to engage local populations in the protection of their own environments. However laudable, the assumptions conservationists held about "communities" produced programs that could never work. Many scholars (including Brosius himself) rightly castigated this model for mythic, unrealistic assumptions about community. Unfortunately, practitioners responded by moving to a higher level of abstraction—the region—and redefining their focus as "natural" communities. Not only are people rather irrelevant here, but the qualifier "natural" also implies a subjective evaluation. Natural communities are basically those that do not refute or contradict the assumptions about community held by the conservationists who identify them and, not coincidentally, work with the new technologies for monitoring conservation. The communities defined and delineated by community-based conservation programs did not facilitate governance or capital productivity (via the accounting demands of conservation funders), so they were redefined into units both more compatible with statecraft and more amenable to financial regulation.

Gyanendra Pandey notes the recurrent evaluation of community according to natural and unnatural criteria. In India, as elsewhere, the "natural" came to be defined as the "national" through the naturalization of the nation-state political form. The idea of the nation as the paradigmatic natural community sets the framework for how other communities are evaluated (see also Kelly and Kaplan 2001). Thus the contemporary notion of community has become essentially political in aspiration or potential. But to be effective in this political action, communities need to be recognized as "natural units." It is this tension between natural and political that marks the discourse of community for Pandey. His contribution then looks at this tension in relation to the politics of gender, caste, and communalism.

The essential political dimension to community that Pandey underlines is evident in each of the chapters. The question remains as to whether these efforts facilitate modern governance or not, and if

not, with what consequence? Clearly Nigeria's proliferating "violent communities" do not constitute avenues of modern governance, but they hardly present a desirable alternative to it. The Andean ayllu may offer such promise, but we should not lose sight of the difference between actual relations on the ground and the ideal images of community. The utility of the latter must ultimately be evaluated by their products, and the weight of history does not suggest optimism. Still, it is important to remember, as the examples described by Watts and Lees illustrate, that behind the failure of one community is often the success of another.

From most of these discussions, it is clear that the political role of community cannot be understood apart from considerations of scale— that is, how units conceived of as communities articulate with smaller and larger units of identification and analysis. To be simple, the cases confirm that the positive and unproblematic image of community seems to be essentially bound to hierarchical organization. Communities must nest into each other and then into larger units such as society and nation.[3] It is this nested hierarchy that allows a "debt to society" to be paid with "community service." A nested hierarchy allows for differently identified communities to constitute part of a single tolerant Tenafly community, itself a microcosm of the American national community. This also explains why the notion of ghetto is anathema. Similarly, when residents of a public housing estate are forced to represent what it is that makes them a community in their mural, they settle on their pride as Londoners! The focus on family disruption among Afro-Caribbeans made it hard to imagine them as communities precisely because communities were assumed to be constructed of families. The lack of communities, in turn, made it impossible to see Caribbean countries as "societies." The possibility of Indo-Caribbean communities, however, could nest within a "callaloo" or composite nation, although their possible affiliation and allegiance to another nation/homeland, into which they also nest as nationals abroad, causes hesitations and political problems. The possibility of hierarchical nesting verifies the contribution of the community to the nation-state, itself then imagined as a community writ large. The bigger picture of the nested and segmentary nature of communities explains why it is easy to have multiple and overlapping community memberships,

because they are ultimately components of a single larger community. The communities that are problematic, then, are the ones that defy such nesting or segmentary integration and thereby interfere with fidelity to larger communities. This is where the notion of communalism is invoked and where, as Pandey and Watts point out, community finally loses its "warmly persuasive" connotation.

While each of the papers reveals something about community that is rarely recognized or specified in contemporary community discourses, they also show us how treating community critically opens up new *empirical* insights. By focusing on community, we gain insight into the limitation of Gandhi's politics. We learn why petro-capitalism produces particular social dysfunctions. We gain new appreciation for why notions of homeland figure so centrally for diasporic communities. We begin to appreciate the different political prospects of related social movements such as "restorative justice" and "transformative justice," or more generally why projects with very similar complaints and objectives can produce different impacts. In other words, while we may begin with the community as subject, by cross-examining it we gain unexpected insights into the contexts where it is (or is not) deployed. This may be the most compelling case for redeeming the term.

NO SOLUTIONS

Any effort to reexamine the notion of community must justify itself not only in relation to current community enthrallments but vis-à-vis previous efforts. To some extent, this project is motivated by the juxtaposition of these two considerations. We recognize and appreciate the numerous prior challenges and corrections to the community notion (many of which are reviewed in the next chapter). However, it is equally clear that this attention has ironically contributed to the uncritical embrace and use of the term in contemporary research and politics. Repeated critiques have created a perception that everyone is fully aware of the problems of the community concept, and this perception authorizes its continued uncritical use, even when this use retains assumptions supposedly left behind. In a way then, the perception that this critique is "old hat" is part of the very dynamic we attempt to understand—it has become part of the problem. Another problem is the way prior critique has removed noncompliant work from serious consideration among those who might challenge it. For example, when

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I cite the work of Robert Putnam (2000) or Amitai Etzioni (1998) as evidence of unreformed idealized notions of community, cognoscenti respond by dismissing these works as naive and beneath serious consideration, even though they are extremely popular and influential among political leaders designing social policy (*including those in the White House*). Those of us who have internalized prior community critiques cannot afford to simply dismiss those who have not, especially given the sociopolitical resonance of the community notion in the contemporary world.

Obviously, this project follows from a belief that current circumstances render the community issue more significant than ever. We see a critical conjuncture in which liberal, progressive projects are proliferating the notion of community as a means of staking claims and expanding rights, at the same time a more traditional movement of civic republicanism, which fails to recognize these as community efforts, diagnoses a crisis of community and advocates community resuscitation in different terms. There is a confluence of community adulation from diverse agendas and objectives, and one could end up inadvertently supporting the other. At the same time there is a shift created by the current neoliberal context that designs to devolve responsibilities to communities but also explains the status quo as the successful product of social Darwinism. In this context, the proliferation of communities creates its own competitive antagonism rather than a common project. In other words, the changed social context of the twenty-first century may reshape the impact or consequences of community proliferations, even those driven by very progressive objectives. Clearly, the current forces of globalization and "deterritorialization," driven by capitalisms and imperialisms, have contributed greatly to people's desire for the moorings and attachments offered by community. If these same communities are mechanisms of governance and capital growth, then we are in a terrible dilemma. Our own efforts at redress underwrite the very system and forces that generate our discontent. This is why the current fascination with community is more significant than earlier ones and why more attention must be paid to ensure that efforts in the name of community are moving toward the objectives to which they aspire. We cannot simply rely on earlier exhortations—they need updating and rehearsing.

Given the pervasive and ever-increasing investment in community

(both politically and socially), this collection makes no pretension toward resolving the problems it depicts. The term is far too popular and powerful to be completely redeemed or displaced, as multiple efforts have shown. Indeed, we could not even agree among ourselves about the ultimate political (f)utility of the community project. The objective is rather to expose the diverse work that the notion does, often imperceptibly and unintentionally, and thereby instill a sense of caution and reflection. The difficulty of our project is captured by two divergent metaphors used in the following two chapters. My review of community critics equates the notion to a tar baby that can absorb all assaults, while Crehan pictures it instead as an illusive unicorn. The dilemma lies is this potentially dangerous combination: a self-sustaining and binding term employed to convey illusive and uncertain objectives. *Community is an aspiration envisioned as an entity*. If we're not careful, the entity can tie us down even when the desires that conjure it are soaring and ethereal. The essays here aim to loosen the strictures of community so that we can get closer to its lofty ideals.

Notes

1. It is no coincidence, then, that Anderson's use of community has provoked several recent efforts to reconsider the term (see Amit 2002; Creed 2004; Kelly and Kaplan 2001).

2. Although the fact that such efforts rarely succeed underlines just how implicated communities are in state governance despite images of depoliticization (Ferguson 1994).

3. C. J. Calhoun (1980:124) appeals to the breach of this quality—"the breakdown of the structure of hierarchical incorporation"—to explain why English communities shifted toward class-based connections in the nineteenth century.