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From Community to Society: (Un)bound Pluralities in Eliot, Lewis, and Auden

De la comunidad a la sociedad: Pluralidades (des)limitadas en Eliot, Lewis y Auden

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Abstract: This article demonstrates how Ferdinand Tönnies's celebrated distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) resonates in the works of T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and W. H. Auden, who engage with the implications of rootedness, cosmopolitanism, and the erosion of traditional communities. These thinkers offer valuable insights into the ways in which the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* reshaped social life, cultural identity, and individual consciousness. The paper examines these perspectives, contrasting the virtues of localized, organic communities with the challenges and opportunities posed by modern, cosmopolitan societies. It highlights the ongoing struggle to balance unity and diversity in a rapidly evolving world, where the preservation of cultural identity often clashes with the demands of global interconnectedness. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the enduring relevance of Tönnies's framework and the continued search for meaning and community in the face of modernity's transformative pressures.

Keywords: organic community; society; cosmopolitanism; T. S. Eliot; W. Lewis; W. H. Auden.

Summary: Introduction. British Intellectuals in Debate about Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Conclusions.

Resumen: El artículo demuestra cómo la célebre distinción de Ferdinand Tönnies entre *Gemeinschaft* (comunidad) y *Gesellschaft* (sociedad) resuena en las obras de T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis y W. H. Auden, quienes abordan las implicaciones del arraigo, el cosmopolitismo y la erosión de las comunidades tradicionales. Estos pensadores ofrecen unas valiosas perspectivas sobre cómo la transición de *Gemeinschaft* a *Gesellschaft* transformó la vida social, la identidad cultural y la conciencia individual. Por esta razón, contrastamos las virtudes de comunidades localizadas y orgánicas con los desafíos y oportunidades que plantean las sociedades modernas y cosmopolitas. Además, destacamos la lucha continua por equilibrar la unidad y la diversidad en un mundo que evoluciona rápidamente, donde la preservación de la identidad cultural a menudo entra en conflicto con las exigencias de la interconexión global. Por último, este trabajo subraya la relevancia del marco de Tönnies y la búsqueda continua de significado y comunidad frente a las presiones transformadoras de la modernidad.
Palabras clave: comunidad orgánica; sociedad; cosmopolitismo; T. S. Eliot; W. Lewis; W. H. Auden.

INTRODUCTION

Modernity and technological progress in Western culture at the outset of the twentieth century significantly reshaped social organization and hierarchy, accelerating the transformation of traditional, small-scale, close-knit communities into larger social forms. The progressive growth in size and subsequent atomization of society, widely regarded as a natural concomitant of modernity, brought with it a new set of questions about the notions of diversity, social cohesion, and civic responsibility. In this context, the issue of (un)boundedness and (up)rooted existence emerges, indicating two sets of polarities. On one end of the spectrum lies a type of community that is enclosed, internally generated, orthodox, homogeneous, inherently protective, emphasizing autonomy, isolationism, and preservation of established norms (e.g., Hall 1995). Conversely, the opposing view conceptualizes a community that is porous, inclusive, internationally-minded, open to change and cosmopolitan pressures. This perspective embraces fluidity and interconnectedness, incorporating external influences (e.g., Massey 2005). The second polarity is based on the perception of boundedness in the sense of rooted existence. Rootedness implies permanence and stability forming a bulwark against ephemerality and chaos, fickleness, and opportunism springing from uprootedness. However, as evidenced by events in the first half of the twentieth century, the metaphor of rootedness understood as embeddedness and deep-rooted existence can also evoke parochialism, chauvinism, and, in its most extreme form, the venom of nationalistic propaganda. The following text

examines several approaches to (un)boundedness in the British interwar debates on the demise of traditional communities and the evolution of new social structures in the face of rapid technological and cultural shifts. Although the focus is on changes characterizing the early decades of the twentieth century, most of the issues discussed in the following text are resurfacing due to recent developments such as migration crisis and Brexit, and because of the current protective isolationist politics or the revival of mercantilism in the USA and some European countries.

One of the key features defining the Western world at the turn of the twentieth century is an urgent need to reconsider its past. Conflicting attitudes towards archetypal values and classical humanistic ideals, the transformation of the relationship between tradition and modernity, have been frequently interpreted as signs of existential anxiety inducing alienation and an identity crisis. Perhaps the most sensible prophet of this transformation, Friedrich Nietzsche, called for a total revaluation of all values (*Umwertung aller Werte*). This depletion of fundamental values, accompanied by an acceleration of international mobility, interconnectedness through media and the unprecedented rise of the mass man to social power, has also manifested itself in various considerations on a form of society that would reduce the feeling of alienation and impersonality and promote a responsible, caring, and critically aware relationship with the community.

Ferdinand Tönnies's *Community and Civil Society* was a seminal, authentic contribution to this discussion of the dichotomy between an organic, pre-industrial type of society and the modern one, dominated by mass culture and mass production. First published in 1887, this study on the clash between *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* plunges into the very core of modern aspects of living in society, shedding light on the tension between the different types of will that essentially affect the modes of living in a large-scale competitive market society (metropolis) and a small-scale, close-knit community. Tönnies arrived at a two-fold distinction between community and society. *Gemeinschaft* is a word that echoes personal attachment and interest instigated by internal correlation (*mein*), comradeship and affiliation (*-schaft*), as well as a sense of belonging (*ge-*). This type of social organization is built on boundedness, both material and spiritual. Traditionally, it stands for a small-scale neighborhood community, the establishment of which is solely determined by a natural will of men to live in polity. Life in this type of community is permanently shaped by an attachment to a field and a dwelling house:

"With the cultivated field, the dwelling house also becomes fixed…Man becomes doubly bound, both by the ploughed field and by the house in which he dwells – in other words, by the works of his hands" (Tönnies 37).

This dual "boundedness" clearly implies place as well as family affiliation (traditions and customs), and Tönnies argues that it allows individuals not only to understand their communities and associate with them, but also to anchor their search for personal identity. Through the soil, one becomes attached to the family and village life, both being shaped by the customs (traditional morality) and religion (*religare*—to bound fast). The three pillars of *Community* are blood, soil, and spirit: blood stands for kinship and soil highlights a sense of neighborhood (Tönnies 254). As the community is based on shared work or calling, it suggests shared beliefs and spiritual proximity (friendship). As for the economy, the core of the community is the domestic economy that promotes the idea of shared common good, rather than owned common good. It is this more or less covert Marxist aspect that forced Tönnies to associate with the style of Community positive values such as sympathy and mutual understanding, "the love of nurturing, creating and preserving" (258).

Similarly, the virtues and virility of a farmer, rooted to the soil, were celebrated by the theorists of the völkisch-nationalist narrative in the Weimar period and Nazi Germany in the 1920s and 1930s (mostly by Walter Darré, one of the leading Nazi ideologists, but also by popular German novelists such as Bertold Auerbach and Conrad Ferdinand Mayer). Apart from internal policy issues and racial purity doctrine, the Blood and Soil ideology (*Blut-und-Boden*) promoted völkish values and the myth of a stable, deep-rooted peasantry (*wurzelstark Bauerntum*) to counter internationalism and the melting-pot narrative of world culture. On the macro-scale, the rootless and nomadic mode of life came to be seen as "pure parasitism" (Lovin 283) and the exploitation of the German race. In this context, a return to the soil (rootedness) was viewed as a means to halt the deterioration of the German nation and fight against the ills of modern capitalist society.

Paraphrasing Karl Marx's view of the economic history of modern nations, Tönnies argues that "the whole process of historical evolution can be seen as a shift towards an increasingly *urbanised* style of life" (259), a shift from *Gemeinschaft* towards *Gesellschaft.* In this type of social organization, people also live peacefully alongside one another, they belong to one city, a district, or a guild. Despite sharing places, institutions and facilities, they remain, however, existentially atomized and

detached/dissevered. The crux of this condition lies in a fundamentally different *raison d'être* concerning actions, activities, and spheres of powers.

In this type of social organization, characterizing the modern urban space and culminating in mass commercial society, people share the same place, as in the case of *Gemeinschaft*, but the temporal, transcendental principle is irrelevant: instead of a bond and attachment derived from a long-term communal experience, the competitive urban environment tends to facilitate conditions for a mere temporary "contract" between citizens engaged in a commercial exchange. As a result, "there are no activities taking place which are derived from an *a priori* and predetermined unity and which therefore express the will and spirit of this unity through any individual who performs them" (Tönnies 52). In other words, services are exchanged solely on a transactional basis, and people are motivated, forced to do or give something to another person only when it brings benefits to themselves. Tönnies speaks of the fundamentally "egoistical," competitive ethos of big city life: "whatever anyone has and enjoys, he has or enjoys to the exclusion of all others" (53).

In opposition to the close-knit Community, the market-based civil Society implies, despite physical proximity, a fragmentary and dissevered mode of existence, with its members being reduced to "equal, simple, elementary units of labour" (Tönnies 57). Whereas the organic nature of Community suggests place-bound identity and, through an immediate bond with the soil, customs, and traditions, accentuates a strong sense of belonging and group attachment, Society is in essence preset to an urbane, uprooted, mobile, cosmopolitan, open attitude. Seen from this metaphoric perspective, a metropolis implies an opposing set of values and characteristics: an inorganic, mechanical, anonymous, and dissevered mode of living. At the same time, it promotes a progressive, pragmatic, utilitarian existence, albeit by the supporters of Community criticized for an inclination towards the "abandonment by Being" (*Seinsverlassenheit*), which M. Heidegger perceived as the primary cause of pervasive cynicism and nihilism in the modern world.[1]

[1] See Martin Heidegger's lecture *Die Frage nach der Technik* (1953). For further analysis and exposition of the connection between fundamental nihilism and a forgetting of the mystery or secret of Being see S. L. Bartky (1967).

1. British Intellectuals in Debate about *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*

In British intellectual debate, this nostalgic lost-cause attitude, based on the above outlined community/society dichotomy, has been voiced by the English literary and cultural critics F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson. In their study *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* the authors draw attention to the loss of organic, preindustrial community which they relate to the concept of Old England. For Leavis and Thompson, the organic community matches the Tönniesian small-scale, close-knit communities celebrating rural (village) life, household economy, and provincial craftsmen. Although this traditional concept has become old-fashioned, challenged by scientific and technological progress, and despite the fact that it has been deemed primitive, representing "animal naturalness," Leavis and Thompson find it "distinctively human" (91) and even claim that its destruction in the West is as irreversible a change as any geological change.

The transition from provincial and communal village life to an urban cosmopolitan existence, which is commonly described as a sign of modernity and progress, implies a departure from an authentic, immediate, more "primitive" mode of being in terms of intimacy or alienation. Leavis and Thompson argue that the villagers in an organic community struggle less with existential alienation than modern urban dwellers because they are in touch with the immediate environment. Similarly to the Marxist process of reification, issuing from the fact that modern alienation stems from production processes, making men into a thing (*Verdinglichung*) on account of mechanical, repetitive labor, the nature of cultural and existential alienation proceeds from losing touch with primary production. Leavis and Thompson claim that in the organic community, men lived in close contact with materials, environment, and the cycle of seasons. Through the insight gained from their predecessors, rooted in the same community, and because of their close, intimate connection with the soil and sources of sustenance, men in organic communities strengthen their attachment to the past and environment, making them feel "engaged" with their community. Moreover, unlike mass culture, the organic community encourages personal autonomy and fulfilment. While progress has raised the standard of living and increased efficiency, it has also violated this "natural" intimacy. Instead of deriving gratification from skilled work, modern manufacturing production requires man to participate only in a

meaningless part of the process with no need for skill or expertise. As a consequence of such an existence, "[t]he modern citizen," Leavis and Thompson point out, "no more knows how the necessaries of life come to him (he is quite out of touch, we say, with 'primary' production) than he can see his own work as a significant part in a human scheme (he is merely earning wages or making profits)" (92). Hence, the alienating and dehumanizing effects of modern production and society which Leavis correlates with the erosion of individuality and active, critical engagement.

A proper degree of unity and diversity, of local loyalties and transnational, cosmopolitan loyalties, became an important theme for T. S. Eliot and his theory of culture. Implicitly, it appears in his short response upon receiving the Emerson-Thoreau medal from the American Academy of Arts and Science in 1959. Although living in England at the time, in his ceremonial speech Eliot identified himself as "a New England poet," recognizing the influence of the New England environment upon his sensibility ("The Influence" 421). He believed that the traces of every environment in which the poet has lived in show in the poet's sensibility, forging a unique poetic voice. Similarly, although in a broader cultural context, Eliot discusses the importance of minor and local cultures and the desirability of cultural pluralism in his three radio talks entitled *The Unity of European Culture* (broadcast in 1946) and his book-length essay *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948, which originally appeared as a series of articles in *New England Weekly* in 1943). In this text, Eliot ruminates on the condition of culture and the debate that started in the aftermath of WWII on the need to create a world culture and government as a means to prevent any further conflicts between nations. Facing an increase in a nationalistic narrative that foregrounds national feeling and a sense of belonging to a national community, the identity of which has been imagined through communal remembrance of the past and invocation of a national symbol, Eliot points out that the diversity of a region should not be ignored and that contemporary culture should "grow from the old roots" (53). Calling it "a useful diversity," Eliot advocates a moderate approach. He is concerned about the negative consequences of both extremes, excessive uniformity and diversity, which ultimately corrupt and devastate the community. In both cases, the extreme position prevents further development of culture. Eliot proceeds from the basic premise—the absolute value—that "each area should have its characteristic culture, which should harmonise with, and enrich, the cultures of the neighbouring areas" (54). This assumption clearly defines itself against a nationalistic

mindset built on the belief that the national, or local, culture flourishes on the basis of "geography of rejection" (Jess and Massey 66), hence in complete isolation and differentiation from neighboring cultures. Eliot is convinced that a satellite culture, which he defines as a culture having, "for geographical and other reasons, … a permanent relation to a stronger one" (54), is an indispensable and necessary component that benefits the whole. Contrary to the nationalistic idea, and despite the risk of local fragmentation and incoherence of neighboring regions, he comes to the conclusion that a far greater danger lies in uniformity, be it on a national or world-wide scale. Eliot emphasizes diversity because the survival of a weaker culture proves to be essential to the existence and development of a stronger culture. Relating specifically to the British Isles, it would be no gain whatsoever for the dominant English culture if the Welsh, Scots and Irish became indistinguishable from Englishmen—what would happen, of course, is that they would all become indistinguishable featureless "Britons," at a lower level of culture than that of any of the separate regions. On the contrary, it is of great advantage for English culture to be constantly influenced from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales (Eliot, *Notes* 55).

If the satellite cultures were wholly assimilated to the dominant culture, if the regional loyalties were superseded by national ones, it would debase culture altogether and cause menace to other countries. Any society which lacks friction between its parts is, according to Eliot, more susceptible to the exercise of aggressiveness against another country. Although the greater the diversity, the greater the tension between different entities, Eliot perceives diversity in class and region as a way to cultivate a more pacific and tolerant nation: "[n]umerous cross-divisions favour peace within a nation, by dispersing and confusing animosities; they favour peace between nations, by giving every man enough antagonism at home to exercise all his aggressiveness" (*Notes* 59).

This reasoning led Eliot to skepticism about the idea of creating a world culture, precisely because its uniform quality would undermine the principle of respect for the diversity of human beings resulting in "humanity de-humanised" (*Notes* 62). In addition to his pessimistic view of the future of culture under capitalism, which, as David E. Chinitz puts it, "was intellectual gospel in both Britain and the United States" (*T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* 171), Eliot feared the fact that such a project would merely be a large-scale extension of dominant cultures (usually of those cultures from which the proponents of a world culture come) and that it is highly likely that if differences of cultures threaten the unity of

the world culture, they will simply be levelled. At the same time, however, Eliot realized that it is not possible to completely abandon this ideal of a world culture: to prevent local culture from becoming provincial, chauvinistic, and xenophobic, it also needs to be part of a larger whole. As paradoxical as it may sound, Eliot encourages a common world culture but at the same time warns that such an ideal is unimaginable and unrealizable. "We can only conceive it," says Eliot, "as the logical term of relations between cultures" (*Notes* 62). Consciousness of belonging to a higher sphere, a higher whole, may bring us closer to the ideal, yet we do not fully realize it. If realized, it would decrease the prosperity of the constituent cultures, which contradicts Eliot's basic thesis that any useful common culture is one "which is actual in diverse local manifestations" (*Notes* 62). It is on the basis of this thesis that Eliot opposes various schemes for the establishment of a world federation/culture, which have become very topical in the debate on the post-war order. Interestingly enough, as Bernard Bergonzi reminds us, although Eliot approaches the limits of cosmopolitanism from an idiosyncratically conservative position, his scheme of culture was also influential among left-wing writers such as Raymond Williams, who valued Eliot as "an impressive adversary" rescuing "from oblivion truths which Tories have forgotten" (Bergonzi 114).

An opposing view to those of Tönnies's and Leavis's trust in the merit of (organic) community as well to Eliot's advocacy of the diversity of local cultures is held by Wyndham Lewis, a significant, although among prominent Modernists such as Eliot, Ezra Pound, or James Joyce, a lesser-known novelist and essayist. Lewis touches upon the above-mentioned notions of rootedness and of the clash between a local/national and cosmopolitan/world-federationist mindset in two book-length essays: *Paleface: The Philosophy of the 'Melting Pot'* (1923) and *America and Cosmic Man* (1948), which display Lewis's take on this topic and strategies for dealing with the complexities and challenges of a dynamic interplay between individual identity and collective belonging at the beginning of the atomic age.

In general, *Paleface* is a critique of the idealization of "primitive" consciousness and of the flagellation of white civilization. While focusing on the limitations and pitfalls of white civilization,[2] Lewis is not subject to

[2] "There is the contradictory spectacle, which we all can observe, of our institutions, as they dehumanize themselves, clothing themselves more and more, and with a hideous

the then popular intellectual fascination with "primitive" races and cultures, be it Afro-Americans or indigenous Indian civilizations in America. Although he accepts that the white man enslaved and subjugated other civilizations and cultures, it is still "the paleface" whose achievements in many fields, be it art, science, architecture, or social organization, show signs of a more developed and progressive civilization. Despite the fact that Lewis, as Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell remind us, through his readings of the inter-war period, anticipated an early stage of the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School and other social theorists who drew attention to the negative consequences of Enlightenment rationality ("Wyndham Lewis, Evelyn Waugh and Inter-war British Youth" 163–84), he still believed that white civilization might offer a potential model for a universal and all-inclusive way of life. The issue of rootedness is approached from the perspective of the melting pot model and the radical contradiction between European and American ways of regarding the assimilation of various nationalities (dissimilar racial stock). Lewis is wholeheartedly on the side of the melting pot and calls for its immediate implementation in Europe, suggesting that the idyllic portrayal of local or national loyalties (*Gemeinschaft*) will most likely result in parochialism, chauvinism, and more wars in Europe. The other option, Lewis warns, is "that of the Barbed Wire" (*Paleface* 276). Rootedness in a local soil and community is a hindrance for Europeans to live peacefully and respond adequately to the demands of Modernity since he believes European countries form a relatively uniform cultural region: "only five centuries ago the whole Europe possessed one soul in a more fundamental way than America can be said to at this moment" (Lewis, *Paleface* 277). Ignoring the Asiatic elements in southern and eastern parts of Europe, Lewis claims that "the European is as much of one blood as are the inhabitants of the British Isles, and in many instances more so—for instance, the Bavarian and the lowland Scotch are man for man as nearly one race (to look at them, as well as in their character) as you could find anywhere at all" (*Paleface* 279). Finally, Lewis pleads for the mass adoption of Volapuc, a construed international language that could solve

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pomposity, with the stuff of morals—that stuff of which the pagan world was healthily ignorant, in its physical expansiveness and instinct for a concrete truth, and which, for the greatest peoples of the East, has never existed except as a purely political systematization of something irretrievably inferior, a sentimental annexe of a metaphysical truth" (Lewis, *Paleface* 273).

the problem of Babel in Europe. Unlike Eliot, who believed that without Welsh, Irish, or Scottish tributaries, the great river of English language and culture would dry out, Lewis argues that it is this international language that will help embrace universal identity and abolish "the fiction of our frontiers and the fiction of the 'necessity' of war" (*Paleface* 270).

Twenty-five years later, Lewis returned to the idea of the melting pot in his study "America and Cosmic Man," his vision becoming more radical and more convinced in favor of the cosmopolitan cause. Once again, the focus is on the notion of rootedness and a vision of one great cosmic society, which shall replace a plurality of competitive nationalist societies. In this text, Lewis challenges the notion of rootedness as something intrinsically positive, arguing that "to be rooted like a tree to one spot, or at best to be tethered like a goat to one small area, is not a destiny in itself all desirable" ("America" 132). Lewis completely reverses the traditionally accepted positive connotations of the "roots" metaphor. Similarly, words such as "vacuum" or "rootlessness" that generally suggest a less desirable condition are charged with positive meaning—best demonstrated by the phrase "rootless Elysium" ("America" 132). Lewis' original view is partly based on his own immigrant experience in North America—Lewis spent the war years in the USA and Canada—as well as on his unfailing trust in the American Way as a new way of life, "universal and all-inclusive in its very postulates" ("America" 132). Not only are immigrants to the USA seeking better conditions of life, better wages, or less war, but they also believe that they can co-create a new type of man, rootless and ahistoric, not determined by race, caste, and nationality. He therefore perceives the acquisition of American citizenship as something more than a mere pledge of allegiance to a new government or an adoption of social and cultural standards. Thinking about the nature of this attachment to the new way of life, Lewis comes to the conclusion that it stems from paradigms different from those in force in Europe. It is very different from a pious attachment to the soil, which scarcely exists in America, or to historic tradition. "No," he argues,

> it is attachment to the *absence* of these things. It is attachment, I should say, to a slightly happy-go-lucky vacuum, in which the ego feels itself free. It is, it seems to me, something like refreshing anonymity of a great city, compared with the oppressive opposite of that, invariably to be found in the village." (Lewis, "America" 133)

Lewis promotes the absence of attachment to the soil and the historic tradition of the organic community, which Tönnies and Leavis and Thompson considered to be the cause of alienation, as a way to break free from oppressive communal obligations and the constraints of tradition. It is this absence, Lewis believed, that allows a man to be "*in the world*, instead of just in a nation" ("America" 134). More importantly, it is a rootless, constantly evolving city, the dynamic *Gesellschaft* where "the spirit is released from all too-close contacts with other people" (Lewis, "America" 134) that will most effectively allow a new type of man—a cosmic man—to realize the potential of Modernity to foster a universal, all-inclusive world culture.[3]

Although Lewis clearly rejected nationalist impulses and isolationist tendencies, which are on the rise again in contemporary America, he does not offer any specific delineation of the attitudes and aspirations of the cosmic man; the man who shall implement his ideal of the future post-national society. Therefore, a characteristic spirit of cosmic man, a cosmic ethos can be understood more on the basis of Lewis' turn of opinion on a given matter. As late as the mid-1930s, Lewis supported the idea of sovereign nationhood, preferring decentralized to centralized government. Retaining the maximum freedom for the sovereign state is preferable because any model of some super-state of internationalism means, after all, a government by a handful of individuals due to oppression and discrimination against less powerful groups. However, based on his long-term observation of the political scene in England, Lewis comes to the conclusion that it is better not to vest power in the hands of the people of a local community, since "the Parliament that sits in London is so peculiarly unrepresentative of the real interest of England that 'a motley collection of gentlemen' in Geneva could not be any worse" ("Hitler Cult" 128). Moreover, Lewis disputes the existence of a genuine, pure, completely isolated soul of a nation that has to be preserved: such an idea is outdated, a relic of the past. Thus, it makes no sense to fight for a nationalist cause if there are no true, by the spirit of their neighbors unaffected nations (Lewis, "Hitler Cult" 129). The inevitable course of

[3] Seen from the contemporary perspective, Lewis' vision of a cosmopolitan, interconnected world seems at odds with the resurgence of isolationist policies and the revival of mercantilisms in contemporary America. The current shift towards protectionist ideology suggests a return to rootedness and national exclusivity, undermining the aspirations to his cosmic man.

history proves the rigid isolationism and nationalism unfeasible and irrational. For this reason, Lewis turns to the idea of the United States when searching for an ideal model for a future cosmic society. It is in the USA where he finds "the requisite raw material, namely the great variety of races," unburdened by previous duties and prejudices, by obligations and responsibilities towards a family, a community (tradition) or a nation—the material from which it is possible to prepare the way for a cosmic man, "a perfectly eclectic, non-national, internationally-minded creature, whose blood is drawn—more or less—from all corners of the earth, with no more geographical or cultural roots than a chameleon" (Lewis, "America" 147). This cosmic man can then provide solid ground for a World Government, a true Cosmopolis as envisioned by the Greeks, which Lewis sees as a way to reduce the incidence of warfare between nations.

From the moment of his arrival on the interwar intellectual scene, Wystan Hugh Auden also knew he was witnessing "one of the great historical periods, when the whole structure of our society and its cultural and metaphysical values [was] undergoing a radical change" (*Prose I* 486), which was causing, as he added on the eve of WWII, the "collapse of all previous standards" (*Prose II* 38). Like others, Auden too debated the repercussions of such a transformative process for forms of social organization. Auden's views of the traditional community clearly issue from Tönnies and Leavis. At the same time, he refrains from nostalgia and accepts the transformation of social forms in evolutionary terms as a natural inevitable process. Approaching the fascination of Wyndham Lewis with a rootless, free-floating existence devoid of local attachments, Auden embraces the transformation of communities into a large-scale open society while conscious of its potential undesirable dissolution into gullible and mechanical crowds.

Although there seems to be no direct reference to Tönnies in Auden's work, his sense of community shows a clear familiarity with the work of the German sociologist. In his definition of faith, for example, Auden noted that it declines in four stages, "each corresponding to a stage of advance or social differentiation from primitive community (*gemeinschaft*) toward civilized society (*gesellschaft*)" (*Prose II* 164). Like Tönnies, Auden also viewed community as a natural type of social form in which one "can feel at home" not only because man "has always been a social animal living in communities" (*Prose I* 436, 479), but also because it is a social manifestation of a universal principle of reciprocity and mutual dependence of parts and the whole. In "Writing" (1932), one

of his earliest critical essays, Auden proposed the existence of an essential interdependence of different levels of social organization—individuals, families, neighbors, nations and the whole world: "the whole cannot exist without the part, nor the part without the whole; and each whole is more than just the sum of its parts, it is a new thing." Each individual part, he continues, lacks "meaning except in its connection with other things" (Auden, *Prose I* 13).

This organic and inherent quality recalls Tönnies's assertion that "the whole is not merely the sum of its parts; on the contrary, the parts are dependent on and conditioned by the whole, so that the whole itself possesses intrinsic reality and substance" (Tönnies 21). Moreover, it alludes to the agreement and oneness that Auden associated with community. In the 1930s, Auden found the bonding agent in a "unity of interests" (*Prose I* 24) and belief (*Prose II* 51). "A true community," he added in 1949, is "a group of rational beings associated on the basis of a common love" (Auden, *Enchafèd* 30). Such common goals, values, "mutual understanding and consensus" amass in what Tönnies calls the "will of the community" (32) arising spontaneously because "in the original or natural state there is a complete unity of human wills" (22). This causes, as Cleanth Brooks once suggested, that being a member of a community feels "like the air we breathe. One simply takes it for granted" (Brooks 5). Such an instinctive, natural and organic network of relationships can emerge, Auden claimed, only when an "individual and community are hardly distinct" (*Prose II* 52), when the common interest and the will of the community are stronger than the will of an individual, when the welfare of the whole is above that of an individual. In his writing, Auden captured his personal sense of such an associational homogeneous community based on the simple, direct and cooperative interaction of its members. In 1939, only one year after suggesting that the only remaining "real social unit" in the contemporary world was "the family" (*Prose I* 435), Auden recalled his own provincial Anglo-Catholic childhood to describe the undisputed set of shared activities and interests that kept his family bound together: "The study was full of books on medicine, archaeology, the classics. There was a rain-gauge on the lawn and a family dog. There were family prayers before breakfast, bi-cycle rides to collect fossils or rub church brasses, reading aloud in the evenings. We kept pretty much to ourselves" (*Prose II* 414). This was the Tönniesian world of a secluded and bounded "blood" community kept stable through tradition and firmly rooted in the provincial England of the early twentieth century,

a world "which had nothing to do with London, the stage, or French literature" (Auden, *Prose II* 45) signaling changes and the pressure of cosmopolitan influences. However, unlike their shared emphasis on boundedness and collective interest, Auden also differs from Tönnies and Eliot, who accepted the Platonic idea of hierarchy in community. Auden conceived community as a form with no social stratification. In 1936, Auden rejoiced to have found in Iceland a communal, rooted, and "the only really classless society" (*Prose I* 801), which later allowed him to call it a "Fortunate island,/Where all men are equal" (*Poems I* 538).

Boundedness and continuity allow Tönnies to liken community to a "self-sufficient household" which, "with its language, its customs, its beliefs, as well as its land, buildings and treasures" creates "a permanent entity that outlives the changes of many generations" (48–49). In his recollections of his own childhood and the life of Icelanders, Auden also emphasized the role of tradition in the sustenance of transgenerational cohesion. In "a traditional closed community," he argued in 1949, an individual accepts the tradition—common truth, values and judgements—unwittingly because "unconscious of any alternative to his belief" (Auden, *Enchafèd* 30). Tradition is consequently "really binding" and becomes the source of "cohesion of an undifferentiated and segregated [i.e. enclosed]" community (Auden, *Prose II* 52; 102–03). Prioritization of the communal over the individual guarantees continuity and Auden suggested about a community that is bounded and rooted "generation after generation in one place" (*Prose I* 17).

Auden defined community in such detail in order to be able to contemplate changes and contemporary forms of social organization and predict its further development. He argued that the concord, unity, and mutual dependence characteristic of community can prevail only in small-scale and bounded social groups. He viewed the size as crucial for the sustenance of the communal will: "only in a group of very moderate size, probably not larger than twelve, is it possible for the individual under normal circumstances to lose himself" (Auden, *Prose I* 53). Hence, Auden located the existence of communal societies in tribal history and, like Tönnies and Leavis, in a preindustrial rural and small-town environment. Urbanization, resulting from the industrial revolution, weakened traditional bonds within community, Auden argued, and spurred the transition from the *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. "It was in the Victorian age," he remarked in 1938, "that the atomisation of society into solitary individuals, which is one of the effects of laissez-faire capitalism, first

began to be felt actively" (Auden, *Prose I* 467). As Benedict Anderson famously demonstrated, the growth of urban societies and nation states that comprise large numbers of people decreases the chances of maintaining a unifying framework of ideas. The scale of modern social formations thus erodes the viability of shared interests, creating a porous aggregate of loose individuals who reside in the same place but lack a cohesion of beliefs. In modern large-scale society, concord and mutual sharing are displaced by the importance of personal interests and the individual will, which is contradictory to the idea of community in which the welfare of the whole, cooperation, and "social duties prevail over individual rights" (Mijuskovic 150).

Auden viewed as crucial the deterioration of communal formations and their replacement with mass society in technological progress and economic changes. He claimed that atomistic society is characteristic of liberal capitalist democracy, producing "a multiplicity of unrelated special individuals pursuing special unrelated occupations." The complexity and advance of technology "obliges us to remain differentiated" (Auden, *Prose II* 101–02), spawning individuals segregated from others because of their specialized professions and interests and unaware of the bearing of their work on the whole (Auden, *Prose I* 18; 25). Auden found little cohesion in modern "contract society," characterized by the economic and pragmatic self-interest of its members, except in groups united by their specialization: "the Maichine [*sic*] has deprived even words like society and class of any real meaning. Instead, there are only small groups, each united by a common specialization which dictates economic interest" (*Prose II* 52). A cello player who joins a string quartet for the pragmatic reason of earning a living is "a member of a society" but not "community of music lovers" (Auden, *Enchafèd* 30) united by their appreciation of music. Because Auden thought of community in classless terms, their growth in size, culminating in the disintegration of unity and cohesive values, also brought about social stratification and fragmentation of communities into "classes, sects, townspeople and peasants, rich and poor" (*Prose I* 24).

Auden pondered the costs of social atomization and stratification. His prose shows that, unlike Eliot who trusted the benefits of disunity and mutual friction, he sided with Leavis and associated the erosion of cohesion with negative consequences, mainly with an unprecedented sense of individual alienation and loneliness. With communal bonds weakened, modern man lives in proximity to large groups of people, yet experiences

isolation. In "The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats" Auden has the counsel for the defense provide more detail and argue that liberal capitalist society ignores the "social nature of personality." Instead, it has created "the most impersonal, the most mechanical and the most unequal civilisation the world has ever seen, a civilisation in which the only emotion common to all classes is a feeling of individual isolation from everyone else" (Auden, *Prose II* 6–7), the result of which is that communal cohesion has withered. People in modern society either live as "dispersed units connected by electrical wires" or inhabit the same place but still experience an increasing "sense of loneliness" (Auden, *Prose I* 100; 16). Auden also related the isolation and the wane of common interest in a large-scale society to the consequences of its openness to change. He viewed large societies as porous assemblages of anonymous individuals lacking rootedness. "Men," Auden wrote in New York in 1940, "no longer have neighbors tied to them by geography, only far-flung association of personal friends kept in touch with by machinery" (*Prose II* 52). Technology enables contact over long distances and makes man experience "the detachment of community from locality" (Auden, *Prose II* 87). Clearly, Auden posited community and rootedness in place as isomorphic concepts. His own memory of public-school days was that of boys brought to one place from various directions but, with no attempt by the teachers to graft them onto local people, who experienced no "natural community spirit." Instead, the school was forced to "manufacture an artificial one" (Auden, *Prose I* 421). Auden also related the artificiality stemming from uprootedness and lack of shared values to the demise of tradition. While in a community, tradition provides one of the cementing agents, in the anonymous and atomized society made up of self-centered individuals and characterized by rapid social changes and porousness, its bonding potential recedes. "The development of industrial civilization," Auden summed up, "has already destroyed tradition. The life of each individual is becoming increasingly unique" (*Prose II* 19).

Auden related this development to the changing position of an artist in society. In a close-knit community, the artist is "rooted in the life of his age to feel in common with his audience" and can act not as a prophetic guide or mentor but as a communal spokesman articulating common interests and values. In a stratified and fragmented society, however, an artist becomes a loose individual. As long as a community "changed slowly" and its members were united by faith, a set of values, beliefs, and worldview, the "audience and artists alike tended to have much the same

interests and to see much the same things" because there was no barrier between the public and the artist: "the more homogeneous a society, the closer the artist is to the everyday life of his time, the easier it is for him to communicate what he perceives" (Auden, *Prose I* 432). Disunity, social hierarchy, and changingness characterize, however, an open large-scale society and complicate the synergy and communication among its members, including the artist and their audience. When community "breaks up" into units and individuals, Auden argued already in 1932, "literature suffers" because a variety of writing appears for different social groups, individuals with diverse interests, and "the highbrow and the lowbrow" (*Prose I* 24). The writer must take sides, choose an audience and ask: "What has value" (Auden, *Prose II* 51)? Rather than creating a productive environment, these gaps, differences and variety also complicate communication, making the writer, like anyone else in the social aggregate, feel isolated: "the lack of communication between artist and audience proves the lack of communication between all men" who are "now only individuals who can form collective masses but not communities" (Auden, *Prose II* 93).

Despite such consequences, Auden was convinced that the transformation of community into society was a natural and unstoppable process. Auden's fondness for anthropology might have prevented him from nostalgia and allowed him to realize that "all ages are ages of transition" (*Prose II* 93). In connection with social forms, for instance, he criticized Matthew Arnold and his "idealist theory of the State." Auden chides the Victorian critic for "assum[ing] a unity of feeling and interest in the community which no longer existed" (*Prose II* 12). It is also a mark of Auden's family background in natural sciences, whereby he viewed evolution unromantically as an irreversible process. This included the historical development of social formations reflecting "life's attempt to organize itself so as to meet the demands of an ever-changing environment" (*Prose I* 734). As for the current social system, he claimed already in 1932, that it is not satisfactory but "we can't stop the boat" (Auden, *Prose I* 25) and revive a former state of civilization: "The old pre-industrial community and culture are gone and cannot be brought back" (Auden, *Prose I* 436).

His down-to-earth approach became more prominent in the mid-1930s, as the political developments in Germany came to the foreground and after his settlement in the USA in 1939. Auden repeatedly stressed that because unity in large social forms cannot exist naturally, the idea of a

large community and yearning for a "universally valid faith" as a cement for unity is an untenable ideological "orthodoxy" (*Prose II* 33). While "by nature, man seems adapted to live in communities of a very moderate size," the modern social system and capitalist economy has compelled people to live in "ever-enlarging ones" in which "there is no such thing as a general will of society" (*Prose I* 483). Therefore, Auden suggested, politicians tempted to implement unity must use force. Examining the causes that vitiate political systems, he argued in 1935 that theories of the State resting on the metaphor of society as a biological organism, in which individual parts strive for the welfare of the whole, are a fallacy. "The unity of will is a fiction," which causes that the politician striving for it cannot "afford to wait until this unity is voluntarily reached" and he "must coerce [it] either physically, or by propagandist organisation of public opinion" (Auden, *Prose I* 118).

An alternative to coerced unity was, in Auden's view, the diversity characterizing open society. Because he understood social evolution as a process in which human societies always start as closed and rather inert homogeneous communities that evolve into porous and changing societies, he accepted atomization as a natural stage in the history of social organization: "we have either to adapt to an open society or perish" (Auden, *Prose II* 65). This became explicit after Auden's arrival in New York. Exhausted by more than just his search for an adequate relation of an artist to the audience, its cosmopolitan atmosphere charmed him. Like Wyndham Lewis, he began to praise the USA for embodying the prime example of a modern, open society respecting variety and allowing for a rootless, ahistoric and individualistic existence. As Aidan Wasley eloquently shows, America helped Auden root himself out of the English intellectual circles and Europe, where "the forces of history, class, religion and region combine to dictate from birth a sense of a self already implicated in a preexisting cultural narrative that tells you who you are." Contrary to this, in the USA, Auden found a climate allowing him and everyone else to join numerous other "solitary questers each in search of their own identities" (Wasley 50), which was a crucial aspect of his understanding of an absorbent and atomized open society. Auden translated the "historical discontinuity" and "mixed population," inhabiting an environment where the industrial revolution coincided with an open geographical frontier, into "one the most significant experiences of [his] life" (*Prose II* 66). A few months after arrival, he could write: "I welcome the atomization of society, and I look forward to a socialism

based on it, to the day when the disintegration of tradition will be as final and universal for the masses as it already is for the artist, because it will be only when they fully realize their 'aloneness' and accept it, that men will be able to achieve a real unity through a common recognition of their diversity" (Auden, *Prose II* 53). His emphasis on diversity recalls his long-term belief in human exceptionalism resulting from a unique human ability to continue evolution because of the mind, the development of which is "one more and more of differentiation, individualistic, away from nature" (Auden, *English* 298). Auden's early assessment of American society was exuberant. He found a pluralist society in which "the concept of normality disappears." It is an open country that "exchanges freely with all other countries." Its economy offers a sufficient variety of occupations so that everyone can find "a genuine vocation." It is a society that "finds every kind of person useful, and its individuals are socially responsible because they are conscious of being needed." This respect for individuality cultivates a person who "is open to the degree in which he knows who he is and what he really wants." These aspects of openness and heterogeneity make Auden conclude that "physically, economically, and culturally it knows no frontier" (Auden, *Prose II* 66–67) which, as he later added, is a feature of "the ideal open society" (Auden, *Prose II* 91). Clearly, Auden uses his experience of American society to foreground individuality and diversity as staple features of modern atomized society. Unlike a closed small-scale community, where cohesion results from tradition, in open societies that emphasize individuality, he assumed, conditions for the sustenance of cohesion must be reformulated. It "can only be secured through a common agreement upon a small number of carefully defined general presuppositions, from which each individual can deduce the right behavior in a particular instance" (Auden, *Prose II* 102).

Auden's optimistic Hegelian view of society as "a unity through multiplicity" (Mijuskovic 163), in which individuals and diversity thrive, wavered as he became concerned about the potential "annihilation of personality" (Auden, *Enchafèd* 31) in large-scale collectivities. What seeped into his writing, alongside ruminations on community and society, was a conviction that mechanical production and mass society erode the natural human drive towards individuality. He wrote of mass production in Leavisite terms as a monotonous activity that employs the body but not the mind, providing one with no sense of gratification or pride (Auden, *Prose I* 36). Modern mass society, as a large, complex, and cumbersome system, foregrounds the indistinctive and uniform, obfuscating the nurture

of one's growth towards individuation. Instead of living "as we will" and wish, we have become "content masochistically *to be lived*" (Auden, *Prose II* 38). Auden often used metaphors drawn from mechanics to describe the devastating effects of modern social formations on the individual and open society. Man becomes "a cypher of the crowd, or a mechanical cogwheel in an impersonal machine" (Auden, *Enchafèd* 26), producing large formations of dehumanized "behaviorist automatons" (Auden, *Prose I* 31). Feeling that they cannot influence the collectivity (Auden, *Prose I* 25), individuals are more easily driven to isolation and self-interest. In 1949, Auden quoted Melville to suggest that like work in manufacturing, such a modern society is "mechanical" and its members passive "Ishmaels," cocooned "isolatoes, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each isolatoe living in a separate continent of his own" (*Enchafèd* 34). For Auden, this was the moment when society transforms into the ultimate form of "human pluralities"—the crowd. It consists of individuals passive towards others and devoid of care for the welfare of the whole group. As Bonnie Costello reminds us, Auden famously illustrated the nature of the crowd at the end of his lecture "Poetry and Freedom" (1948) with his interpretation of a cartoon by Charles Addams (154–56). It shows an octopus eating New Yorkers while other passers-by form a crowd of passive onlookers whose individuality dissipates and horizon of care shrinks. Regardless of its size, a new social form arises as "a collection of people whose sole common bond is that they are together. There is a *we*, but there are no separate *I's*" (Auden, *Prose II* 492). In an open society, in which individuals are aware of options, while at the same time facing forces that work against the development of and respect for their personal will and individuality, Auden predicted two possible lines of development: "either personal choice and through the sum of such choices an actual community *or* the annihilation of personality and the dissolution of community into crowds" (*Enchafèd* 31). The latter was Auden's vision of the ultimate phase in the evolution of social formations: the crowd as a state in which human individuality dissipates and faceless gullible multitudes emerge.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper shows the extent to which the notion of human collectivities resonated in the thought and writing of interwar intellectuals. The sense of an erosion of traditional values and beliefs, to which the modernists felt

compelled to respond, included their thorough scrutiny of a transformation of the weakening traditional small-scale communities into the newly emerging large pluralities. At the same time, this case study intimates that the intellectual debate was marked with heteroglossia. Eliot, Lewis, and Auden adopted a distinctive approach *vis a vis* the same notions, relating community, society, rootedness, and cosmopolitanism to often contrasting meanings. Moreover, the analysis of their concern with such ideas, explored in light of the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, might offer valuable insights for understanding contemporary cultural tensions. As contemporary societies grapple with migration, technological transformation, and the growing urban-rural divide, the balance between local identity and global interconnectedness remains a central, still unresolved concern. The erosion of traditional communities and the rise of cosmopolitan and transnational networks continue challenging individuals' sense of belonging and cultural coherence. Ultimately, the ideas explored by Eliot, Lewis, and Auden serve as a lens through which to examine how the shift from localized, organic communities to more abstract, market-driven, and pluralistic societies have reshaped cultural identities and what the possible pitfalls associated with this development are. Their prose shows the merits as well as limitations of both types of pluralities. One the one hand, the merits of bounded pluralities, the intellectuals in focus suggest, are a sense of belonging stimulating care for others and social cohesion. These are juxtaposed with isolationism, exclusionism, and ethnocentric chauvinism based on the "us" against "them" principle. Simultaneously, the prose showcases that large unbound pluralities promote the inclusion of marginalized groups and openness to cosmopolitan influences stimulating innovation. At the same time, such large and porous collectivities encourage passivity leading the dissolution of one's commitment to public affairs. Their perspectives resonate with current debates over the ambivalence of glocalization, (up)rooted existence, and the difficult search for a balance between unity and diversity in constantly changing liquid modernity. Be it Eliot's call for a "useful diversity," Lewis's vision of a "rootless Elysium," or Auden's focus on "social atomization" causing the isolation of individuals, this case study underscores the enduring relevance of these notions, inviting us to reconsider the merits of fealty to community and freedom in society stemming from uprooted individualism without succumbing to parochialism or xenophobia.

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