"Community - arianism"

Chapter One:Community; ideology and utopia

Meanings of community

Community is a common concept, a word with multiple meanings. It has a common ownership and is surrounded by "common-sense" assumptions. Everyone uses the word, and most people seem to like the idea. Therein lies the danger, for it is a plastic word, fresh out of Wonderland, where any word can mean what you want it to mean. It is a spray can word, useful to graffiti artists and slogan writers in politics, the media and the professions. It is also a contested concept in that it is used ideologically with different connotations by people with contrasting underlying philosophies. The definition is also contested at the applied level in that the definition or boundaries of particular "communities" are often the focus of conflict in the world of politics and social life. For social scientists, philosophers, policy planners and managers, and for anyone who seeks to be a responsible and thoughtful member of society, the discourse of community warrants closer scrutiny.

Definitions of community according to Butcher et. al (1993) can be grouped into three types, which might be better described as three perspectives on community. Descriptive definitions are typically those of social scientists giving an account (however abstract) of social forms, structures, interactions or relationships which can be observed in the world as it is. Secondly there are value descriptions of community; statements from philosophers, politicians and ordinary people about the way people ought to relate to each other. These are often normative or ideological propositions, for example the communitarian claim that the essential nature of humankind is to be in social relationship with other human beings, which implies responsible and neighbourly behaviour as a moral imperative. Butcher et al's. third grouping is perhaps less clear and sustainable, but focuses on the notion of active community and the process of community development. The focus here is on participation in the networks and interactions of civil society, and the perspective is that of policy makers and representatives of state institutions in their need to work alongside voluntary and community sector organisations. Although the perspective of this book is that of social science, and therefore needs to concentrate on descriptive definitions of the concept of community, it will inevitably need to deal with value positions, particularly in the discussion of communitarianism, and with the perspective of active community when dealing with issues of policy and community development. It is to be hoped that by bringing greater clarity to the description of community the philosophical and policy debates will be better grounded than they often have been.

As long ago as 1955 George Hillery listed some 94 definitions of community he had found in the social science literature, and concluded that the only thing they all held in common was a reference to people. It was possible to arrange them in groupings such as those that were closely related to neighbourhood or territory, those that focused on social interaction and those that highlighted feelings of belonging and

solidarity, and to detect differences between definitions based on rural and urban experience. However, where sociologists cannot supply a single clear definition, (and the diversity would be even greater today among those who have not totally discarded the term) the range of usage by ordinary speakers of the English language is even wider. For a taste of what is on offer the reader is referred to the anthology compiled by Pereira (1993). It would be unwise therefore at the start of this book to add yet another definition of our own to the surfeit already available, or even to catalogue and criticise the definitions in the literature.

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Common themes in the discourse about community

Although the term community arises from sociology, its enthusiastic adoption by the wider public operates as a feedback loop into society itself, the term shaping and being re-shaped by social reality. As such the word itself is an important piece of sociological data. There are, therefore a number of common themes or connotations in the language of community in everyday speech, which it is necessary to consider. It is possible to do this from a variety of angles; for example Raymond Plant's essay (1974) on community and ideology in the context of the politics and practice of community development contrasts with the anthropological approach to the symbolic construction of community developed and illustrated by Cohen (1985). Both Plant and Cohen note that philosophers since Wittgenstein moved from providing us with normative definitions of concepts to describing and exploring the way in which terms are used. Plant advises against attempts such as Hillery's to pin the notion down empirically, but to recognize that value judgements and ideologies are implicit in every use of the word.

The first theme in everyday speech is the reification of the notion of community. By this we mean that most people talk as if there is a real entity corresponding to the label "the community". There is an inbuilt assumption that the drawing of boundaries is both possible and desirable. Sometimes these boundaries are to be drawn on the map, in other cases they are categories of people or characteristics of members. There is in this view little doubt about where the community begins or ends, be it at the borough boundary, or at a physical boundary such as a canal or railway line, or at a social boundary as for example in the case of ethnic communities or the "gay community". As Cohen (op cit.) suggests boundary marking processes and rituals are a vital tool for defining community, identity, belonging and exclusion, and give a sense of reality to specific communities, although in fact they are merely mental or social constructs of insiders and outsiders. As we shall see later in our discussions of ethnicity and social network analysis the reality is often more flexible and ambiguous still. It may be far more helpful to see community as a process, with changing patterns of conflict and collaboration, openness and closure, free action and structural constraint.

Yet out of this reification fallacy a number of political consequences flow. The first is that of representation in that one person or a small elite are taken to speak for the community as a whole. Even in cases where representation is based on widely participatory democratic elections the possibility of speaking on behalf of a whole community is questionable. This is a particular problem when white academics or politicians seek to define the boundaries of "the black" or other ethnic minority communities, and deal with "community leaders" whom they choose or who are self appointed. Secondly the reification of communities can lead to "turf wars" over the allocation of resources, for example where a facility is provided to serve the needs of a single electoral ward, or where a grant is given to an organization serving only one religious or ethnic community.

A second common feature of talk about community is that it is often seen as a small scale collectivity, occupying the semantic space between household or family and city or nation. In sociology it falls in the middle of the continuum between small or primary group and society as a whole. However as Scherer

(1972 p34-35) points out "the concept of community (in contrast to group) implies inherently the intention of longevity and permanence" There are, inevitably a few exceptional usages such as the "community of nations" or the "world community". Generally, however, a community is small and specific enough to evoke a sense of identity and personal belonging, a sense that one is part of a meaningful web of face to face relationships. This sense of the word is especially potent in a world where markets for consumer products are global, and where the penetration of the mass media ensures a universally shared diet of news and popular culture.

Thirdly community is almost always portrayed as morally good. It elevates the speaker to the moral high ground, and as a "purr" word or "motherhood" concept produces a warm glow in the listener. (Donnison 1993). That the concept is "sacred" and beyond contradiction resonates with the etymologically linked concept of "communion" in the Christian tradition. In the Mass, Eucharist or Lord's Supper the breaking of bread symbolizes a mystic union of the believer with Christ, and the sharing of a meal at a common table speaks of a united fellowship that transcends social divisions on earth and even includes the "communion of saints" in the world to come. The metaphor of the body of Christ, applied both to the communion bread and to the church as company of believers, speaks of community as an organism. The Islamic tradition of the "ummah" and the Sikh brotherhood of the "khalsa" carry some similar connotations, although the frequent association of "caste" with communal conflict and discrimination has placed Hindu notions of community in an unfavourable light. Despite occasional critiques by radical individualists, including those writers within the Christian church (Norman, 1995), even among unbelievers the organic life motif remains important in discussions of community. Community is a living breathing and self sustaining being. To destroy it would be tantamount to taking life.

The metaphor of organism leads to the portrayal of community as intrinsically and normatively harmonious. Community is seen as a unifying entity in which men and women, old and young, black and white, rich and poor have a common purpose and unproblematic relationship. Power differentials and conflicts of interest are set aside, or more likely covered over. The marginalisation, exclusion or persecution of minorities, or of individuals who are considered "abnormal" through disability, mental illness or eccentricity is ignored. The coercive nature of communities, where mechanisms of social control ensure a grudging compliance with cultural norms is rarely admitted.

A final inescapable connotation of the concept of "community" is the aura of nostalgia. Even though nostalgia "ain't what it used to be", people look back to images and stories of a golden age, when everybody helped each other, and when front doors were left open without fear of crime. In Britain a common variant is the image of the terraced streets of Northern mill towns and mining villages, in the USA the urban equivalent often has an ethnic dimension, such as Chicago's Italian quarter or New York's Jewish ghetto. On both sides of the Atlantic rural images are also common, Merrie England or Hardy's Wessex, alongside the Pilgrims in Massachussets or communal barn-raisings. In a mass media culture where these nostalgic images are common place, and where history and the natural world are often packaged by theme parks and museums as consumer products, the longing for escape to another lifestyle is widespread. As increasing numbers of people relocate to find their rural tranquillity, or historic urban neighbourhood, the very process of gentrification tends to transform the traditional modes of community into something more transitory and fragmented.

The common connotations of community sit alongside a rich diversity of applications of the term. At one end of the spectrum are types of community that are clearly intentional. People join of their own free will and covenant themselves to an intense life together, for example in a monastic order or hippy commune. At the other extreme on this dimension are communities of limited liability (Janowitz 1967), neighbourhoods where the threads of common life rarely extend beyond using the same post box or paying local taxes for the municipal refuse collection service. Rather more common are neighbourhoods or localities, which for a sizeable proportion of the residents do provide functions of loyalty, belonging and identity, a locale in which the delivery of consumer services takes place and in which significant networks of social relationships are made and maintained. Willmott (1989) speaks of these as communities of attachment and documents research which shows the types of people and neighbourhood

where localism rather than dispersed community is more likely to be the norm. Population stability, local employment, isolation, homogeneity, high proportions of young families and active community organisations maintained by educated middle class residents are likely to strengthen local attachments.

The term is also applied to non-residential communities, focussed on a school or work-place, best described as institutional or organisational communities. A further variation is community based on a social club or sports group, on a religious meeting place or an ethnic minority group. Loosely these can be called communities of interest, in the sense that members find some topic interesting and organise around it. There are also communities of interest in the stronger sense, which often only emerge as a result of an outside threat to territory or property (e.g.. Neighbourhood against the Motorway). In the absence of an external threat many communities of interest would remain latent unless pro-actively organized. For example women victims of domestic violence, or disabled people and their carers or homeworkers in the garment industry would find privatised isolation a more common experience than organised networks of solidarity.

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The context of Communitarianism

It is out of this sea of meanings plus a specific political context that communitarianism as a popular idea is born. In very broad brush terms the Western world in recent decades has seen large pendulum swings in the field of social policy. The 1960s and early 1970s was the era of radical liberalism, of anti-war protest of the Civil Rights movement and of Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty. In the U.K. similar trends could also be observed, if in a minor key, as the Welfare State flourished and urban renewal and community development was sponsored by the state. Global economic restructuring, triggered by the oil crises of the 1970s, coupled with the emerging hegemony of New Right economic and political ideas made the 1980s the decade of the free market, and the rolling back of the "nanny" state. In the USA it was the decade of Reaganomics and Star Wars, while on this side of the Atlantic Margaret Thatcher led nationalist rejoicing at the recapture of a distant island colony, subdued the "enemy within" after the year long miners' strike and declared that "there is no such thing as society". The intellectual underpinnings of these policies were found in the work of "New Right" academics and Think Tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute. Their philosophy was one which saw men (sic.) as individuals making rational choices according to the economic laws of the market place, and which had little place for government regulation or moral constraints. (Frazer & Lacey, 1993). Throughout the western world the rich got richer, and the poor struggled to survive as welfare provision was cut and inequality grew. By the end of the decade the Berlin wall had fallen and the Soviet Empire had dissolved, and petty nationalisms were on the march across Europe. Capitalism, it was alledged, had won.

For the Left at this point there were two key problems. First the hegemony of the Right and the irreversible changes of economic restructuring and global competition, meant that traditional welfarist policies and state ownership could no longer be expected to deliver economic growth or political power. Secondly the collapse of communism ensured that no version of Marxist ideology, however democratic and contemporary, was likely to be taken seriously by the electorates of Europe, still less in North America where socialism had never taken root. For the Right the triumph was short-lived. A sharp recession set in the early 1990s and it became clear that unregulated market forces had some dysfunctional effects. Instead of wealth trickling down to the poor, inequalities widened, and social polarization was evident, with the risk of uprisings especially by unemployed youth in ethnically divided cities. The global scale of economic forces meant that national governments seemed out of control, while some localities, even whole regions were in inexorable economic decline. Statistics for violent crime and drug misuse were rising and repressive law enforcement measures were proving ineffective. Despite commitments to public expenditure cuts, budgets for social and national security continued to rise. And despite the

emphasis on deregulation and subsidiarity, the philosophy that decisions should be taken at the most local level possible, there was clear evidence of growing bureaucracy and of a centralization of power at the national and supra-national level.

The Communitarian platform

The time was right for some new ideas in politics and it was around Amitai Etzioni and his colleagues in the Communitarian Network based in Washington DC that the movement came together and drew up a manifesto, the Communitarian Platform. Etzioni is a keen publicist, writing in popular as well as academic journals, speaking in public and on the mass media, as well as ensuring that the communitarian documents were available electronically on the Internet. (Etzioni 1994). The ideas were introduced to the U.K. by the slightly Left of Centre think tank Demos who sponsored a London lecture by Etzioni in the spring of 1995, which received full coverage in the Times (Etzioni 1995) and published other titles such as Atkinson's "The Common Sense of Community" (1994). In the UK there has been one attempt to replicate the Communitarian Network in the USA, as yet without much impact by Henry Tam (1995). More significantly, many key principles have been endorsed by the Labour Party's new leader Tony Blair and his colleague Jack Straw (Times 8/11/95) and have been more radically expressed by Boswell (1995). For the Liberal Democrats in Britain the communitarian emphasis in politics was already familiar. But surprisingly, these ideas also found favour in certain sections of the Conservative Party, for example in Green's attempt to supersede the individualism of the 1980's by a welfare regime based on a "reinvented civil society" (1993). In the USA likewise they have been received with interest in both Democratic and Republican circles, and are clearly influential in the policies of the Clinton administration.

However it would be wrong to suggest that all the ideas of communitarianism are completely new; as Etzioni himself write they are as old as the Old Testament. Ed Schwarz (1991 WWW) traces some of the debates back to Plato and Aristotle claiming the latter as a proto-communitarian, as well as citing St. Augustine and Toqueville. Plant (1974) traces the development of communitarian thinking in the German and British philosophers and sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mentioning for example Hegel, Marx, Tonnies, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Eliot, Leavis and Lawrence. Plant's book is particularly useful in focussing the philosophical issues in the area of community work, albeit a style of community work that now seems rather dated. In more modern political philosophy references to Macintrye's "After Virtue" (1981) often feature in the literature along with Sandel (1982) and Bell (1993), although it should be pointed out that Macintyre explicitly denies being a communitarian. The debate between liberalism and communitarianism is extensively covered from a sympathetically critical feminist perspective in Frazer & Lacey (1993).

It would also be misleading to attribute the impact of communitarianism to Etzioni and his group alone. A number of similar streams of thought and policy development are observable on both sides of the Atlantic. In Philadelphia the Institute for Civic Values headed by Ed Schwarz is developing thought and practice in community development in Urban Renewal, and as an Internet mailing list and Web page which is far more active than the Communitarian Network in Washington. There are also some interesting links to be made with the debate about "Asian values", which has been triggered recently by the evident economic growth in Asia, and the introduction of "Japanese work practices" into Western industry. It has been argued by Dr. Matathir, the prime minister of Malaysia (in a BBC TV interview with Julian Pettifer broadcast on 18.11.95) that the traditional communitarian values of Asia are superior to the individualism of the West in producing team-work, sacrificial commitment to the common good, and well ordered societies all of which promote economic prosperity. The questions, which were voiced by Pettifer remain important. Can the Asian achievement be sustained without political repression, and does it actually work or are Asian societies also suffering the anomie so easily recognized in the West, as they too are affected

by drug abuse, HIV/AIDS and family break up?.

In Britain too there are a number of well established streams of independent communitarian thought and action. The whole project of community development launched in the 1960's remains significant in some parts of academia, in local government, in thousands of neighbourhood projects and in the social interventions of the major churches. Following the Faith in the City Report (ACUPA 1985), attempts have been made to develop a theology of community work (British Council of Churches 1989). The work of the Jubilee Centre on the importance of sound relationships in family and community life is another Christian initiative which ventures into similar territory (Schluter &. Lee 1993). A radical Christian Socialist version of communitarianism centred on themes of equality and mutuality is represented by the life and writings of Bob Holman (1993). Holman critiques the top down think tank approach in social policy development, and points out the irony that "since the London Think Tanks have discovered community, policy ideas about the community are voiced by unrepresentative intellectuals, who are far removed from the hard end.... ... the essence of community must be local residents, taking control over services and suggesting policies for society". (personal communication 1995).

What then are the key ideas in the Communitarian Platform? A document with this title, endorsed by a large number of a academics and politicians (available as the appendix to Etzioni 1994) appears to be the foundation statement of the movement. A similar British charter statement is the Citizens Agenda. (Tam, 1995). The key ideas centre around the relationship between citizens the wider society and the state. They are presented below together with an initial critique and setting of questions which will be the focus of more considered evaluation in the final chapter.

Communitarianism seeks to promote a healthy balance of rights and responsibilities and to suggest that the state and the citizen have mutual obligations. Since they see the pendulum to have swung too far in the direction of rights rather than responsibilities, they mount a critique of over zealous legislation for individual civil rights. Naturally this issue is more salient in the USA with its written constitution cast in Enlightenment thinking about the rights of man, than in the UK. For example says Etzioni, if we want the protection of the courts we should be willing to give our time to serve on juries when required. Civic participation is seen as essential for a healthy democratic society; citizens should vote, lobby their elected representatives, run for office, get involved in local organizations, become school governors and take responsibility for their community instead of just blaming the government or the Council, or pursuing litigation over violation of personal rights.

Underlying the communitarian platform is a strong concern for values and morality. This emerges in several areas, in the call for integrity and honesty among politicians and public servants and in generalized concern for social justice. There is a moral tone too, in the insistence on democratic persuasion and freedom of speech. Communitarians do not wish to impose their values or policies on others, but they are zealous to convince others in the battle for hearts and minds. There is therefore a strong emphasis on education for citizenship, and a wish to identify shared core values which can be taught, and caught, in schools from a very early age. In the USA where the tradition of separation of church and state has traditionally kept religion out of the education system and where prayer in schools is a keynote issue for the religious Right, the issue of moral education has particular salience.

Etzioni makes much of this notion of underlying common core values which are (to be) shared by everyone within the national polity. In the American context these centre on personal responsibility, democracy, and respect for the constitution. (One is tempted to add, motherhood, apple pie and the American way of life!). Although Etzioni denies that he is majoritarian, and claims to accept pluralism, there is an obvious problem in a diverse and plural society. With a normative view of mainstream values and harmonious and homogeneous local communities, it is hard to see how groups with marginal or divergent value systems can be given space to participate in the "community of communities" which is national life. Can "fundamentalist" Islamic or Christian groups, other religious sectarian groups, New Age travellers, or homeless street dwellers be given equal human dignity, let alone equal economic, political and social rights?

It is in the area of family values that the moral tone of communitarianism is most evident, and despite all the qualifications made by Etzioni (1994) it is here that controversy has been sharpest as many feminists and others on the left have made a knee jerk reaction to such terms as "the parenting deficit". The assertion that children benefit from growing up in a secure and stable family environment where there are two caring parents who have a quantity of quality time to spend with their offspring is unlikely to be controversial to the majority of people in Middle America or Middle England. After all it is still a lifestyle that many people aspire to, and many couples with small children stand in awe and amazement that single parents, especially those on a low income and without strong extended family or friendship networks, even survive. Etzioni has expressed his sadness at what he sees as the hostile misinterpretation of his ideas by some feminists. The family values he advocates are not those of the conservative Christian right and the domestic oppression of women, but support the notion of serious responsibility in parenting equally shared between father and mother.

However three objections still need to be answered and worked out in policy proposals that enhance families without oppressing women. Family life in Western society no longer conforms to the norm of Dad, Mum, 2.4, children and granny living round the corner. Increasing proportions of people live alone, in lone parent families, as gay or lesbian couples and in extended families or shared households, and most mothers go out to work at least part time. We may bemoan rising divorce rates and family breakdown, but there is no simple policy, or moral revival that can turn back the clock. Secondly feminists would argue that the traditional family is inevitably a setting for the oppression of women, that unpaid domestic and caring labour is exploitation, and that domestic violence needs to be addressed politically and culturally rather than treated as a private matter. In contrast alternative forms of family life and child rearing may have liberating potential. Thirdly, the poverty lobby would be suspicious that the moral panic about single parents, especially about young single mothers with absent fathers, is based not so much on concern for their welfare as on the imperative to reduce taxes by cutting back on welfare payments.

Other concerns of the communitarian movement include community safety and public health. Rising crime statistics across the Western world seem to produce a disproportionate sense of panic. But in some North American inner cities violent crime linked with drug trafficking results in a situation where young men are more likely to be murdered than survive into old age. Communitarians are anxious to address this issue and work for legislation to restrict firearms, to mobilize local communities against drug dealers, and to change the moral climate. Generally they would be in favour of more pro-active police measures, favouring random stop and search, or breathalyser tests to detect drunken drivers and would argue against the civil liberties lobby that such minor inconveniences for the law abiding citizen, and the risk of abuse of power are a price worth paying for public safety. In public health they would argue that known carriers of disease, such as those who are HIV positive, have a responsibility to disclose their condition and to take precautions to prevent transmission, and would probably advocate a programme of voluntary screening for those in high risk groups. On the other hand they would want to ensure that people with HIV/AIDS are not discriminated against in terms of housing or employment.

Communitarians claim to have a concern for social justice including minority rights, but the working out of these principles appear to be sketchy, especially when set against other contemporary documents such as the Borrie commission report on social justice (Borrie 1994). In particular there appears to be little discussion of the economic aspects of social justice, and the Communitarian Platform is almost devoid of any reference to economic policy and the just distribution of resources. There is little trace in the document of a serious grappling with class analysis. One suspects that the American antipathy to anything other than free enterprise prevents any serious analysis of the causes of and remedies for poverty. Certainly redistribution of wealth through tax and welfare policies is not on their agenda. One suspects a similar fudge over minority rights, resulting from the current hostility in the USA to the affirmative action legislation introduced in the 1970s. It is possible that communitarians in the UK with our stronger socialist tradition, and greater open-ness to Marxist ideas may give issues of social justice greater prominence, although the work still remains to be done.

Communitarianism also places an emphasis on the notion of subsidiarity, a doctrine originating in Catholic Social teaching, and appropriated in recent years to defend perceived national interests in arguments within the European Union. No social task should be assigned to an institution that is larger than necessary to do the job. Only when an individual and family cannot do something should a local group, a school or church take responsibility. Only if it is beyond the local group should responsibility be passed up to city, state or federal government. While for communitarians there is an empowering role for the higher levels of government, and some recognition that vulnerable local communities might be helped out by more affluent ones on a one to one relationship basis, it is at this point of inequality between localities that the communitarian position is at its weakest.

Furthermore there seems to be little recognition of the global nature of economic forces, and the way that local communities may be devastated by fluctuations on a futures market on the other side of the world. While it is recognized that no person is an island and that at the personal level we are responsible for each other, it is not so clear in communitarianism that no city or country is an island either. Etzioni's picture of a nation or even the world as a pluralist "community of communities" does not seem adequate to deal with the complex conflicts, interconnections and interdependencies of the contemporary world. One waits for example to see a communitarian analysis of the global pressures which bring economic migrants to the cities of Europe, where they settle in model communities of mutual responsibility.

The communitarians also make some well meaning noises on environmental issues and ecology. However the focus on the local seems to limit the action to the citizen's responsibility not to drop litter and the city's responsibility to provide recycling banks. One waits for discussion of the pollution caused by motorways for commuters from suburban communities who bring breathing difficulties to fellow citizens in inner city neighbourhoods, and depletion of the ozone layer which may bring climate change and starvation to the people of Africa. A green critique of communitarianism might have much to offer by way of refinement, as the philosophy of small is beautiful already seems implicit in Etzioni. However there might be a more radical challenge to be met on key issues such as the global limits to economic growth.

The discussion of communitarianism set out above has been critical, and perhaps too harsh. As a relatively new school of thought, or rather a network for discussion, communitarianism can be forgiven for not having all the answers. There are many attractive ideas which appeal to people across the political spectrum. At the local level there have been some real achievements, although it should be pointed out that these are often the result of previous community work, or a culture where community spirit is already important, rather than of communitarianism as a philosophy, or the adoption of its manifesto. An example often quoted by Etzioni is the training programme in first aid for a large proportion of the citizens of Seattle. As a result of widely available new medical skills, resuscitation and survival rates of heart attack patients in that city have improved beyond recognition. Such initiatives at the community level are self-evidently a good thing, and there are thousands of other examples of community development, empowerment and participation that have proved beneficial in neighbourhoods across the world. One can only argue about priorities, relevance, style and cost effectiveness of individual schemes.

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Community, Right, Left and Centre

With the notion of community so universally praised, and with the ideas of communitarianism firmly on the political agenda we shall conclude this chapter by sketching the attraction of the idea for a number of different political groups. David Lyon pointed out some years ago (1984) some of the ways in which the term community was used in both ideological and utopian ways. Community has much invested in it by policy makers, and therefore needs to be discussed in a spirit of (de)constructive critique, and ideological suspicion.

Even if we accept the sincerity of those who espouse the tradition of civic conservatism, the "one nation" Tories for whom communitarianism is attractive, it is still obvious that governments of the Right have used "community" ideologically to soften welfare budget reductions. This effectively masks the harsh reality of growing inequality in fragmented societies where there is little sense of solidarity, belonging or mutual care. Right wing politicians have made populist statements coded in communitarian terms, maximizing the political advantage of prejudice against welfare scroungers, single parents, ethnic minorities, drug pushers and criminals. They have often spoken of moral responsibility and family values, while in many cases leading personal lives not marked by financial probity and sexual fidelity. They have set up schemes to "involve the community and the voluntary sector" in partnerships for urban regeneration and social welfare, while at the same time ensuring that the dominating forces are those of capital, central government or unelected quasi-governmental agencies, rather than those of local residents or democratically elected local authorities. Elements in the communitarian platform are easily co-opted for these purposes, and the absence of concern for economic justice is very convenient.

Public expenditure restraint and in particular welfare cutbacks have been high on the Right's agenda. By pushing responsibility for social care back into the "community", and in practice onto unpaid family members, capital, the state, and the tax payer can save money in a politically acceptable way. The notion of "community" was even used to sanitize the most unpopular most individualized local taxation scheme that Britain had seen for centuries. However, in this case the ideology was unmasked as the "community charge" became almost universally known as the "poll tax", provoked massive unrest and non payment, and became a nail in the coffin of Margaret Thatcher's political career.

At the other end of the political spectrum community is also used as an ideological weapon. Community can easily (and in many cases correctly) be defined and mobilized as the opposite to the coercive state, or exploitative big business. Community or neighbourhood resistance to major planning decisions about the siting of new roads or industrial plants is often self organizing, but is frequently supported by left wing politicians, as well as extreme Greens and anarchists. More strategically Leftist Labour Councils in Britain in the earlier 1980s consciously used community development strategies and funding for radical and minority community groups in an attempt to further equal opportunities practice, anti-poverty schemes and empowerment of inner city residents. The British coal strike of 1984 was seen in many quarters as an attack by the state and capital on the traditional mining "communities" (Gemeinschaft ; sic!). The solidarity and support networks it generated in the coalfields was portrayed by many as a triumph for community development, despite the eventual defeat of the strike and the annihilation of the industry.

Lyon (op cit.) comments that the warm liberal collectivist glow of "community" is powerful enough to be used by radicals on the left to justify almost ANY form of local political action. But it is also useful beyond the confines of the Right/Left divide to underpin the attempt to build almost any type of alternative, utopian collective life. From the medieval Franciscans, through the Amish and Hutterite Brethren, to the Hippies and New Age travellers of today, utopian alternative communities abound. They are perhaps especially attractive to the new social movements of our times, to new religious movements, Green activists, feminist collectives and the peace movement. Many of these streams coalesced for example in the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. (Dominelli 1995). Of course for every utopian example of community one could collect matching examples of the failure of the community ideal, of communes which dissolved in bickering, of religious communes such as Jonestown and Waco where people crossed the boundaries of sanity and tragedy ensued. Nonetheless "community" remains a powerful utopian ideal, especially for people who feel psychologically ill at ease within mainstream capitalist society.

However, it is among the poor and oppressed that community becomes a necessity rather than a luxury, as group solidarity and mutual help are one of the few resources they possess in the battle for survival. Many of the traditional nostalgic images of community are drawn from this source, in what has been described as "the mutuality of the oppressed". Early Trade unions, retail co-operatives, building societies, friendly

societies and funeral clubs represent the organizing of this impulse in Victorian Britain (Green 1994). The traditional Cockney East End and the spirit of the Blitz evoke the back to the wall communitarianism of a more recent period. The myth of Bethnal Green (Young & Willmott 1957, Cornwell 1984) also dates from the immediate post war period of austerity.

It is not insignificant from a policy perspective that community development initiatives of recent years have been concentrated in neighbourhoods of urban deprivation (Miller 1989; Halsey 1989). However when observed from the grass roots it is not so clear that community life, as opposed to community work, flourishes or withers in such localities. One hypothesis is that in the midst of growing inequality it is among the poorest sections of society, among single parents, disabled people and refugees that mutual help flourishes. In contrast more affluent, busy people lead more privatized lives, and relate to others mainly as consumers, even buying the services which in poorer communities would be exchanged outside the money economy. However there is another hypothesis that the poor are less able to maintain support networks than the affluent, that poverty or social exclusion is the denial of the possibility of social participation and that a compounding factor in deprivation is the absence of community. The empirical evidence is ambivalent as we shall discover in a later chapter.

A special case of the necessity of community is that of ethnic minorities. The language of community, ethnicity and nationalism is often employed by the Left, both to describe the pluralism of multi-ethnic societies, and in mobilizing excluded groups of people from below, in their struggles for social and economic justice. For the people within these groups community does often play a poverty alleviation or politically mobilizing role, but it can also be important as a conservative cultural defense strategy, in helping to maintain the traditions, language, religion and social structures of the homeland. Recently the ideology of community has emerged to bolster far right nationalism in Europe, and to attack the liberal individualism which usually forms the philosophical underpining of Western Capitalism (De Benoist & Sunic, 1994). The potential value of the language of community, for a sociobiological, genetically determined racist ideology is yet to been seen, but the prospect is alarming, not only in Eastern Europe, but in ethnically diverse urban areas in the UK, and across the world. Recent political events and conflicts in the Isle of Dogs, East London show the outworkings of racialised notions of local community. (Keith; 1995, Cohen, Quereshi & Toon 1995) There are already similar discourses to be found in the emerging debate about the racialized "underclass" of the USA. One's worst fear about communitarianism is that it could be highjacked by a white male backlash movement.

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Structure of the book

It is clear from the preceding discussion that "community-arianism" is far from a common-sense notion. It is neither easy to define nor self evidently good. However, the notion is far from vacuous, and does have the potential to offer some useful guidance for social and political life in the post-modern Western world. It is an important problematic, a sensitizing concept on which to build our subsequent discussion. It is therefore as a problematic rather than as a manifesto that we shall consider and evaluate it.

Having introduced the key issues it is now time to lay out in more detail what this book seeks to do. Chapter 2 introduces the notions of community development and community action and describes and critiques the policy and practices of various institutions that bear the label "community". Chapter 3 looks at neighbourhood and community life, ways of describing and understanding localities, and at the role of voluntary sector and community groups in shaping civil society. Chapter 4 seeks to locate our understanding of community within the major traditions of sociological theory. Chapter 5 considers what we can learn from the tradition of community studies, and the reasons that sociologists rejected the genre. Chapter 6 tackles head on the assertion that community spirit has been lost, and that people today live

isolated privatized lives. The method of social network analysis is introduced as a way of exploring a much more complex reality, which communitarianism must take into account. Chapter 7 considers in greater depth the notion of fragmentation and multiple identities, looking at questions of ethnicity and pluralism in a post-modern world. Chapter 8 brings us back to the global scene, where telematics technologies are said to have potential for building "communities without propinquity". But is such virtual reality leading us to anywhere but Disneyland? The final chapter returns to the philosophy and policy of community. Is there a solid basis for building community in a post-modern world? What are the steps that policy makers and citizens need to take if they are seriously committed to developing community in the next millenium?

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Key books for Chapter One

Etzioni A (1994) , "The Spirit of Community; the reinvention of American society" New York Touchstone/ Simon & Schuster"

Frazer E. & Lacey N., (1993), "The Politics of Community; a feminist critique of the Liberal-Communitarian debate" Hemel Hempstead Harvester Wheatsheaf

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