15. Rhetoric and the (Re)Constitution of Collective Identity: The Example of Poland

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PART IV

Rhetoric and Politics
15 Rhetoric and the (Re)Constitution of Collective Identity: The Example of Poland

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15.1 Introduction
Concern with “identity” has become increasingly salient lately, in academic as well as in public discourse. The wave of democratic transformations in Central/Eastern Europe and Eurasia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, combined with the ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia and evidence of a resurgence of xenophobia and nationalism in many areas of the former Soviet Block, foregrounded issues of collective identity. In the wake of these transformations, scholars such as Noemi Marin and Vladimir Tismaneanu noted that in post-1989 Central/Eastern Europe the problematic of “democracy” has to a large extent been coextensive with the problematic of identity. The problematic of collective identity has also been central to the transformation in South Africa from an apartheid (racialist) state to a multi-ethnic and democratic “rainbow nation” (Salazar 2002). Finally, the current global situation related to the “war on terror” in the Middle East and elsewhere involves collective identity construction on the part of the various contesting religious, political and nationalist movements and in the context of the various “nation building” projects (for instance, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya and elsewhere). Construction of collective identities – whether racial, class, religious, group, national or transnational, has been central to ideological projects such as fascism, National Socialism or communism or to political projects such as the European Union or Islamic extremism.

Clearly, the problem of collective identity has not – as some had hoped in the 1950s and 1960s – disappeared with the retreat of colonialism, spread of democracy, development of technologies of communication, spread of “global culture”, regionalization or the creation of trans-national institutions. Rather the reverse. Just as in transformational contexts, the problematic iden-
tity seems to have moved to the forefront of political debates, the pressures of globalization, immigration, cultural diffusion and struggle over resources appear to lead to a resurgence of identity-dominated movements and discourses (witness the current debate over immigration in the US).

Although much work in political science, sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, and from other perspectives has focused on various aspects of collective identity construction, from national to social and ideological (Anderson 1991; Cohen 1985; Gillis 1994; Guibernau 2007; Hastings 1997; Laclau 1994; Llobera 2004; Smith 1991; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Rowland and Frank 2002; Taylor 2009; Verdery 1991), the problematic of collective identity has not been explored in a systematic way by rhetoricians, although it is taken up in various ways, explicitly or implicitly, in work concerned with post-colonialism, public memory or political transformation (for more explicit discussion of various rhetorical aspects of collective identity construction, see, for instance, Bruner 2002; Hauser 1999; Salazar 2002; White 1984). In all of this work, collective identity emerges as a rhetorical project, bearing out Kenneth Burke's insight that “identification” is one of the primary mechanisms of rhetoric.

There is no room here for a review of relevant contemporary perspectives on collective identity. Suffice to say that collective identities are generally approached as “imaginary constructions” (Anderson 1991; Bowman 1994), “countries of words,” in so far as “the rituals of inscribing borders, picturing territories and populations, and thematizing issues salient to those terrains and the communities believed to occupy them occur within discourse” (Bowman 1994, p. 140). Anthony Cohen has argued that community “exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of ‘fact’” (Cohen 1985, p. 98).

It is also widely accepted that identity is negative and relational. Identity is “negative” because it does not inhere in some intrinsic essence or positive “inner” core but rather depends on an establishment of contrasts and differences. Bowman, for instance, suggests that collective identity is “not a ‘thing’ in itself but a way of speaking, and thinking, about others who are ‘like us.’ People create communities rhetorically through thinking that some people are ‘like’ themselves while others are ‘unlike’ them” (Bowman 1994, p. 140). Similarly, according to Cohen the “quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally, or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further,
that they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere” (Cohen 1985, p. 16). Identity, as both Cohen and, more recently, Noelle McAfee (2002) point out, is thus relational, because it emerges as a function of relationships of affiliation and disaffiliation. If I were the only human left alive after a nuclear holocaust, my “identity” as I understand it now would cease to be functional; the fact of my being American, Catholic or a Democrat would be irrelevant in my relations with animals and rocks. If all other life forms were gone and I was surrounded only by the inorganic, my identity would probably boil down to simply being the only living being in my environment. It may even be that, as McAfee suggests in her concept of “relational subjectivity”, “individual” identity is a function of “community,” of a “congregation,” to use Kenneth Burke’s term (Burke 1984), rather than the other way around. In fact, Aristotle seems to suggest just that in the Politics:

the state is by nature prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is necessarily prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand . . .

But things are defined by their working and power … The proof that the state . . . is prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. (1253a, pp. 19-30)

“All identities emerge within a system of social relations and representations,” argues Montserrat Guibernau (Guibernau 2007, p. 10). To the extent that identity is a function of relationships, it potentially gets richer, more “dense”, the more relationships there are and thus the more salient distinctions (in terms of similarities and contrasts) can be drawn and the more potential choices are available in terms of affiliations, disaffiliations, positionalities and attitudes.

The distinctions and relationships that define collective identity are vested largely in symbols (Cohen 1985; McGee 1980). Cohen characterizes communities as “symbolic” because they cohere around networks of relevant symbols. “The reality of community in people’s experience,” Cohen suggests, “thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols” (Cohen 1985, p. 16). Symbols, however, “do not tell us what to mean, but give us the capacity to make meaning” (ibid.). Thus, individuals may differ in their specific interpretations of the meaning of the symbols. In fact, arguments about the meanings vested in symbols are, as I will argue below, one
of the major rhetorical mechanisms of collective identity formation and transformation.

In this chapter, I propose a rhetorical framework for looking at collective identity in terms of its major constitutive dimensions. I identify the constitutive dimensions of collective identity using, as my representative anecdote (in Kenneth Burke’s sense, see Burke 1969), two versions of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. These dimensions represent topoi of collective identity in the rhetorical sense of locis communis, places of argument concerning such questions as who “we” are, where we are, where we come from, how we relate to each other and to our others, what values, and what purposes we share. These topoi, analogous to Burke’s Pentad of Act, Agent, Agency, Scene, and Purpose, which represent a framework for analyzing human motives in discourse and symbolic action, offer, I suggest, a rhetorically productive way of examining the rhetorical mechanisms of collective identity formation and transformation (Burke 1969).

15.2 Topoi of identity in the political transformation of Poland
Let me now move to my representative anecdote, which, in the Burkean spirit, represents a reduction of complex subject matter, but which will allow me, within limited space, to evolve a “terminological structure” that represents a rhetorically productive perspective on collective identity formation and transformation (Burke 1969, p. 60). Following Burke, I begin this brief foray into the rhetorical nature of collective identity with constitutional relations (ibid. p. 323).

Kenneth Burke has referred to constitutions as proclaiming the “common substance” of community (ibid. p. 343). Let us examine the nature of this “common substance” as it was articulated in the Preamble to the 1952 so-called ‘Stalinist’ Constitution of the Polish People’s Republic (the name of the polity erased in the wake of the 1989 transformation). The Preamble states:

The Polish People’s Republic is a republic of working folk.

The Polish People’s Republic harks back to the most progressive traditions of the Polish Nation and realizes the liberatory ideas of the Polish working masses. The Polish working folk, under the leadership of the heroic working class, basing on the worker-peasant alliance, has struggled for decades for liberation from national en-

1 An earlier version of this proposal appears in Ornatowski (2008).
slavement imposed by Prussian, Austrian, and Russian conquerors-colonizers, just as it has struggled for the abolition of the exploitation of Polish capitalists and landowners.

During the period of [Nazi] occupation the Polish Nation waged an unyielding, heroic struggle with a bloody Hitlerite invasion. The historic victory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics over fascism liberated Polish lands, enabled the Polish working folk to win power and created the conditions for the national revival of Poland within new, just borders. The Recovered Territories returned to Poland for all time.

Realizing in practice the historic directives of the Declaration of the Polish Committee of National Liberation on July 22, 1944 and extending its programmatic principles, the people's government – thanks to the self-sacrificing and creative efforts of the Polish working folk, through struggle against the bitter resistance of the stragglers of the old capitalist-landowner system – achieved great social transformations. As a result of revolutionary struggles and transformations the government of capitalists and landowners has been overthrown, the state of people's democracy has been consolidated, a new social system is taking shape and solidifying, one that corresponds to the interests and aspirations of broad masses. (…)

The foundation of the current people's government in Poland is the alliance of the working class with working peasantry. In this alliance, the leading role belongs to the working class as the vanguard social class, based on the revolutionary achievements of the Polish and international workers' movement, on the historic experiences of socialist construction in the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the first state of workers and peasants. (…) (Preamble to the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of July 22, 1952, author's translation)

As the Preamble articulates it, the Polish People's Republic was primarily a community of “working folk”. The origins of this community are traced to the “most progressive traditions of the Polish nation,” the “liberatory ideas of the Polish working masses,” the “achievements of the Polish and international workers’ movement” and the “experiences of socialist construction” in the Soviet Union, as represented in the programmatic principles set out in the Declaration of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of July 22, 1944; the latter, in effect, becomes the “constitutive” (I’m using the word in Maurice Charland’s sense) text of the new Polish republic (Charland 2001). The Preamble also offers a highly selective historical narrative of the emergence of this community, which connects in one chain of equivalencies the liberation
from national enslavement by Prussian, Austrian and Russian conquerors-colonizers, the abolition of the exploitation by Polish capitalists and landowners, the struggle against the Nazi occupation and the struggle against the “resistance of the stragglers of the old system.” It locates the community within “new, just borders” that include the Recovered Territories (the euphemism for lands taken from Germany and given to Poland in exchange for the eastern provinces taken from Poland by the Soviet Union). The foundation of the agreement, or social contract, that underpins this community is the “worker-peasant alliance”, subordinated to the principle of the “leadership of the heroic working class.” Finally, the Preamble names the “others”, the enemies, of the community (Prussian, Austrian and Russian “conquerors-colonizers” and Polish “capitalists and landowners”) as well as its allies (the Soviet Union and – in a paragraph omitted for the sake of space – other “peace-loving nations”).

Let me suggest that what we have here are the “constitutive” (in the sense developed by Maurice Charland) dimensions of the collective identity of the “community” of People’s Poland as it was officially articulated during the period of “real socialism”: membership (who belongs), origin and history (a narrative of the community’s genesis and provenience), location (both in a geographic and geopolitical, as well as symbolic sense) and key relationships, including relations between members (internal social and political relations) as well as relations with others (external relations, patterns of affiliation and disaffiliation, including the positing of the community’s “other” or “others”).

In social practice, each of these dimensions of collective identity was inscribed in and articulated through multiple symbols. According to Radcliffe and Westwood, “imaginary and embodied nations are lived through the discursive practices of everyday life.” (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996, p. 7) A denizen of People’s Poland in the 1970s, for example, experienced her membership in this “republic of working folk” through forced participation in organizations, ceremonies, outings or events such as the May Day parade or rituals such as the Harvest Festival, official observance of Miners’ or Steelworkers’ Days or hearing official rhetoric in which the expression “working people of towns and villages” functioned as the ritual invocation of the Polish people. Origin and history were figured forth through narratives, histories, films, portraits of leaders (including the ever-present duo of Marx and Lenin, typically flanking the current party general secretary), epics depicting the struggle for social and national liberation, and so on. Internal relations
were symbolized through portraits and statues of leaders. Artwork depicting social transactions in which those in uniform or wearing red ties (indicating party or Communist Youth League membership) were shown in positions of authority or leadership as were films depicting the socialist way of life and of dealing with people and situations.

Guibernau suggests that the two fundamental elements of national identity are continuity over time and differentiation from others. Historical continuity of People’s Poland was symbolized through working class and revolutionary heroes, the official calendar of state holidays commemorating occasions important to the regime and commemorating the “achievements of the Polish and international workers’ movement” and the “experiences of socialist construction” in Poland and elsewhere, as well as through histories of liberatory struggles against various external and internal enemies. Of course, another history existed side-by-side in private memory (see Hauser 1999) as well as in the various symbols extent in the urban and symbolic landscape, but not emphasized in official discourse. During his history-making visits to Poland between 1979 and 1987, Pope John Paul II successfully deployed such symbols to activate a different narrative of national history and a different sense of collective identity (see Ornatowski 2008). Communist Poland’s “others” included the “West”, especially “Western imperialism”, most prominently represented by the U.S. and West Germany and their allies, as well as spies, saboteurs and various “criminals,” such as, for instance, possessors or traders of western currencies or gold, as well as ideological enemies. These were depicted through a variety of images, narratives and discourses.

The dimensions of membership (who are “we”?), origin and history (how did we become who we are?), location (where are “we”? what is the “scene” – to use Kenneth Burke’s generative term – on which we are constituted as agents?), internal relations (how are we organized? how do we relate to each other?), and external relations (who are our others? What are our relations of affiliation and disaffiliation?) are topon in a rhetorical sense; they represent constitutive and “strategic” dimensions of collective identity (locis communis) within which collective identities are articulated, debated and transformed.

As an example of such a re-articulation, consider the Preamble to the Constitution of the Polish Republic of April 2, 1997 (the post-transitional constitution that replaced the 1952 constitution). The Preamble states:
Having regard for the existence and future of our Homeland, Which recovered, in 1989, the possibility of a sovereign and democratic determination of its fate, We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic, Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources, Equal in rights and obligations towards the common good – Poland, Beholden to our ancestors for their labours, their struggle for independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human values, Recalling the best traditions of the First and the Second Republic, Obliged to bequeath to future generations all that is valuable from our over one thousand years' heritage, Bound in community with our compatriots dispersed throughout the world, Aware of the need for cooperation with all countries for the good of the Human Family, Mindful of the bitter experiences of the times when fundamental freedoms and human rights were violated in our Homeland, desiring to guarantee the rights of the citizens for all time, and to ensure diligence and efficiency in the work of public bodies, Recognizing our responsibility before God or our own consciences, Hereby establish this Constitution of the Republic of Poland as the basic law for the State, based on respect for freedom and justice, cooperation between the public powers, social dialogue as well as on the principle of subsidiarity in the strengthening the powers of citizens and their communities.

We call upon all those who will apply this Constitution for the good of the Third Republic to do so paying respect to the inherent dignity of the person, his or her right to freedom, the obligation of solidarity with others, and respect for these principles as the unshakeable foundation of the Republic of Poland. (Preamble to the Constitution of the Polish Republic of April 2, 1997)

One can readily identify the same general dimensions of collective identity as in the Preamble to the 1952 Constitution, except articulated differently. In terms of the topos of membership, the community of the Republic of Poland includes “all citizens of the Republic.” In addition, in deliberate contrast to the 1952 text, the Preamble opens with the plural pronoun “we”, symbolizing the “authentic” voice of the political community (the 1952 constitution was written in Moscow and, following a review in Warsaw, was hand-edited by Stalin and handed to the Polish parliament for endorsement). The community of the new Republic further characterizes its members as both believers and non-believers, although the former appear to be privileged, at least by syntax. Membership is also extended to Poles living
elsewhere (who were not considered legitimate members under the previous dispensation).

In terms of origin and history, the new Republic traces its origins to the Christian tradition and the thousand-year history of Poland (the coming of Christianity in the 10th century coincided with the appearance of Poland as a recognizable geopolitical entity). It also pointedly erases the communist republic from its antecedents. The Preamble posits internal relations based on human dignity, solidarity, social dialog, freedom, justice, and subsidiarity. “Solidarity” implies a fundamental “horizontality” of the national community in contrast to the class-based foundations of the socialist republic, while subsidiarity contrasts with the former centralization and hierarchization of political authority. In terms of the community’s external relations, the 1997 text refrains from naming its political “others” (although it may be read as implying moral “others”, those who do not share the “universal human values”). By explicitly calling for the “cooperation of all countries”, the text distances itself from the affiliations and divisions (symbolized most emphatically by the Iron Curtain) that defined the geo-political positioning and thus collective identity of socialist People’s Poland.

Both preambles “constitute” the collective identity of (the two different Republics of) Poland along the same five fundamental dimensions. These dimensions functioned (and some of them continue to function) as major “places” of argument during the political transition.

As one example, one may consider the debates concerning Poland’s geopolitical “location”: whether Poland after 1989 was part of “Eastern” or “Central” Europe, whether it should be closer – politically and economically – to Russia or the West, or whether it should form a “bridge” between “East” and “West.” Unlike the debates on “location” after 1945, when Poland was literally shifted territorially to the West and lost territory in the East, the transition after 1989 did not involve territorial changes; still, the memories of the “lost lands” in the East constituted a part of the discussions of post-1989 collective identity.

The symbolic resources of the topos of “location” are revealed especially clearly in the strategic deployments of rival symbolic geographies over the period of the political transition. During communist times, the ritual peregrinations of the First Secretary of the ruling party (and sometimes other officials) to key industrial enterprises, collective farms, and “great construction sites of socialism” mapped out a specific symbolic geography of Poland. Each newly
appointed First Secretary, along with other major officials, also made a routine pilgrimage to Moscow to “confer” with Soviet leaders, along with periodic visits to “fraternal parties.” These peregrinations, like medieval religious pilgrimages, endowed space with meaning by mapping its symbolic center, its key compass points and axis. The peregrinations of the First Secretary (which involved the key “building sites” and symbolic places of socialism) contrasted with Pope John Paul II’s peregrinations around the country during the latter’s dramatic visits between 1979 and 1987, which mapped out an alternative symbolic geography: a spiritual one (involving a variety of historical and religious sites associated with Poland’s pre-socialist and non-socialist existence) (see Ornatowski 2009). The two itineraries, the First Secretary’s and the Pope’s, activated two visions of collective identity implicit in the symbolic resources of the topos of “location”. I want to emphasize three important moments here. One is that these alternative versions of collective identity existed, as it were, side by side as interpretive possibilities implicit in the resources of place. Another is that these possibilities existed in a dialectical tension, which enhanced their dramatic and transformative potential. Still another is that these symbolic geographies continue to be implicit in the political “landscape” (a uniquely appropriate metaphor) in Poland today and continue to be activated, as rhetorical needs dictate, by various political actors and parties, especially in regard to Poland’s presumed “subservience” to the European Union; in the discourse of the populist right wing, “Brussels” had taken the former place of “Moscow” as a symbolic compass point and place of political “pilgrimage”, a symbol of Poland being subsumed in a larger, and alien, collective identity.

As a final example, one may consider the post-1989 debates within the topos of “membership”. During the 1970s and 1980s, Polish society was basically divided, in popular perception and discourse, between “us” (ordinary people) and “them” (the rulers). When Poland started to change toward the end of the 1980s, the identity of the “we” became an issue. Once the transition returned the country to “us,” made the country “our own”, it turned out that “we” are no longer monolithic, since the “other” that united and defined “us” had disappeared. That is why the political scene quickly fragmented after the June 4, 1989 transitional parliamentary elections. In fact, both the opposition and the heretofore ruling party quickly differentiated along a range of new dividing lines in respect to the problems facing the changing country.

The two constitutional Preambles cited here in effect mark out a space of transformation of the collective identity of the Republic of Poland. In so-
cial practice, this space was, and continues to be, elaborated and mediated through a multitude of discourses and symbolic practices: changes in national and local symbols, signs, place names, monuments, spatial and architectural designs (i.e., taking down border posts, extending streets), and even rerouting the entire national communication grid: from the East-West orientation – the primary orientation of all major routes and rail lines during communist times, when Poland was regarded as the route of possible Soviet attack against Western Europe – to the North-South orientation, the orientation conducive to Poland’s new economic orientation. Collective identity is a space of contestation and such contestation forms the constant undercurrent of public discourse. For instance, the current anxieties about immigration in the US imply the *topos* of “membership”: who, or what, is an “American” and what it means to be “American.”

What I called here “*topoi* of identity” represent constitutive dimensions of collective identity; their rhetorical sense lies in the fact that they are, to adapt Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood’s words, “key sites” in which collective identities are “generated and sustained,” as well as transformed. The list of such *topoi* may be extended through further examination of how various kinds of collective identities are rhetorically and symbolically constituted, debated, and transformed. For instance, in the case of the United States, the dimension of “shared purpose” or “shared fate” was an important constitutive dimension of collective identity from the beginning of the Republic (since the new Republic did not have much historical continuity behind it and since it was, and continues to be, a community of immigrants with diverse histories and points of origin). Part 1 of the Constitution of the European Union, a transnational collective identity, also contains the dimension of *shared objectives*, in addition to another constitutive dimension: *shared values* (http://www.europeanconstitution.ie/constitution/en/part1_en.asp).

The “*topoi* of identity” are analogous to Kenneth Burke’s Pentad (Act, Agent, Agency, Scene and Purpose) (Burke 1969). However, whereas Burke’s Pentad enables a “dramatistic” analysis of human motives and actions, the *topoi* of membership, origin and history, location, internal relations, external relations, shared values, and shared purpose offer a framework for examining how collective identities are constituted and reconstituted in a variety of discourses and practices, from public rhetoric to films, rituals, events, and other communicative activities. I have found them useful in examining the practices of identity-building in the case of various political or religious groups or move-
ments (for instance, www.palestine-info.co.uk or www.kavkaz.org.uk/eng) or virtual “nations” such as the Kingdom of Talossa www.kingdomoftalossa.net/index.cgi) or the Republic of Talossa (www.talossa.com).

As in the case of Burke’s Pentad, what is most important analytically are not so much the topoi themselves, but their “ratios”: the shifts in relative emphases within and between them. For instance, while possession and justification for newly acquired territories (taken from Germany after world War II in lieu of territories lost to the Soviet Union in the east) constituted an important aspect of the topoi of “location” in communist post-war Polish propaganda (according to which Poland had “returned” to ancient Polish lands in the west), and an important constituent in national and ideological “identification”, after 1989 the topoi of location was dominated by the shift in geopolitical affiliation (articulated as Poland’s “return” to its “European home” and to Western civilization, symbolized by membership in NATO and the European Union – themselves “imaginary” communities). In the speeches of Polish prime ministers between 1989 and 1990 one can see the shift in emphasis toward relations with the West (with the addition of the United States as a major “partner” – a new “imaginary” relationship) as opposed to communist-era primary emphasis on relations with the Soviet Union and other “socialist” countries. In terms of rhetorical arrangement, this shift was accompanied by a switch in order (relations with the West began to be mentioned before relations with Russia and the “East”).

15.3 Conclusion: Communication as the making of community

In biological terms, a community is a group of interacting organisms sharing an environment (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community). In human communities, both “interacting” and “sharing” may take a wide variety of forms and meanings, some of which are implicit in the etymology of “common” and “community”.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “community” derives from Latin communis: com = together, munis = bound, under obligation, also in early Latin “ready to serve” (thus Lat. immunis, English immunity = under no obligation, not bound) (“Common”). The second element (munis) is also the source of Latin munia, “duties, public duties, functions” related to munia, “office.” One early meaning of the root “com” in English was “public,” “shared,” “belonging to more than one” (the Cursor Mundi of 1300 speaks of the “commun pasture”). Another early meaning was “belonging to humankind
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alike,” a possession of the human race as a possession or attribute (for instance, death as our “common” fate). The sense of “common” as “belonging to humankind alike” contains an implicit contrast with non-humans, as well as with those considered not fully “human”. The latter underlies the expression “common sense,” which originated in the 14th century to designate the ordinary power of uniting mentally the impressions conveyed by the five senses, which became synonymous with ordinary understanding, without which one is foolish or insane. Still other historical senses of “common” included “belonging to the community at large” (thus something shared by all members of a community as opposed to those who are non-members) and something “general,” shared by all, with an attached implication of lowliness (as in “a common man, or “common intelligence”). This last meaning included connotations of lack of distinction, secularity (as opposed to holiness), and membership in the general populace, the “commons”; it is these connotations that underwrote the political sense of the British “House of Commons” (“Common”).

An important distinction that emerges from the foregoing is that between “commonness” as vested in something “given” (such as land, pasture, or mental or physical attributes), as opposed to something that represents a more “abstract” achievement, a result of cooperation, action, or decision (such as arriving at an agreement or “making common cause”). We see here that the etymological senses of “community” suggest a spectrum of potential foundations for human association, from a shared possession or attribute (territory, mental attribute, or a marker such as skin color – all of which, in social and political practice, may be, and usually are, heavily over-interpreted), to more specifically “rhetorical” products of deliberation, negotiation, or agreement (such as “common” fate, understanding, values, or cause). Hence, “communing,” or the making of community, involves both putative “givens” (i.e., possession of shared territory) along with acts of interpretation and “making” that together constitute what Kenneth Burke has referred to as a “congregation” (1984).

These are not merely philological exercises. “Community,” we are reminded by such reflections, is implicit in “com-muni-cation,” which denotes, literally, the “making of the common.” Such making implies both com (that which is shared, whether a thing, property, attribute, symbol, interpretation, understanding, or agreement) and munia (obligations, thus some form of reciprocity, if only “symbolic”, as, for instance, being part of the Catholic Church involves periodic acts of confession and participation in “holy com-
munion”, or begin part of a terrorist organization involves committing act of violence). We arrive here, albeit by a somewhat roundabout route, at fundamentally rhetorical territory.

A “community” may be based on a shared attribute or territory (although both may, and usually are, heavily over-interpreted), but it has to reach an agreement; in this sense, the “makedness” of community implies a range of “com-muni-cative” actions, from creation and/or representation of the putative givens (territory, attribute) to creation of relatively more abstract and “imaginary” outcomes and (sometimes enforced) rituals of participation. For instance, the “volksisch” community of German National Socialism was based on a (heavily mediated and over-interpreted) “natural” attribute (“Aryan” racial origin) and possession, or conquest, of a territory (both invoked in the Nazi slogan of “blood and soil”), along with a specific interpretation of shared fate (defeat in World War I, economic misery presumably caused by the Treaty of Versailles, and so on). The obligations of participation for the ordinary German involved donating to the “Winter Aid” and joining one of innumerable official organizations for every profession and age group. More symbolic rituals of participation were also represented in propaganda films such as Leni Riefenstahl’s famous Triumph of the Will.

Topoi of identity such as of membership (who are we?), origin and history (how did we become who we are?), location (where are we?), internal relations (how are we organized? how do we relate to each other?), external relations (who are our others?), shared values (what things do we hold in common?), and shared purpose (what are we striving for?) are loci of invention of collective identity, in effect, of community. Together, they offer a productive lens for analysis of how human communities are constituted and reconstituted through a variety of “com-muni-cative” activities.

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