

COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

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“But man is by no means for the State.
The State is for man.”¹

The term ‘attribution error’ is used by psychologists to describe the fairly commonplace practice of attempting to explain behaviour without giving due consideration to situational factors. In this essay, I argue that political theory tends to commit a similar error when it fails to appreciate the psychological power of states to trap individual citizens in situations that leave them little real moral freedom. I will argue that this is not just a matter of under valuing the influence of the irrational on the conduct of human affairs but rather that it represents a weak appreciation of the central role states have in shaping self perception and in defining the set of self understandings that constitute our political identities. I shall attempt further to illustrate that the process of identity formation lends itself too easily to perversion by the many sources of authority that are integral to modern states. Finally, I will claim that though communities, in the special sense given that term in recent political debate, may indeed have many of the benign characteristics Maritain attributes to the *body politic*², states may not.

The United Nations has made some important steps in the last few years in its efforts to mute some of the evils of the “scourge of war.” One significant recent achievement was the institution of tribunals to try war criminals. But in both Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, tribunals are hampered by a theoretical difficulty that has been with us since the Nuremburg trials. Stated simply, the problem is to lay the blame for a mass undertaking at the feet of a few individuals

1. Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 13.

2. Ibid, pp 9-12. Maritain differentiates between *body politic* and *state* suggesting that the former is the whole and the latter is a part, albeit the top part.

without thereby denying the possibility of moral responsibility, so fundamental to our understanding of moral personhood, to the rest of the people who may have taken an active part in the killing. To select but a few from within a political dynamic that has generated a collective agency is, assuming that the international community is not involved in mere scapegoating, to impute to political leaders the power to manoeuvre the moral will of their citizens. Though, obviously, there are huge practical issues to be dealt with in any attempt to hold accountable a whole people, the idea that moral responsibility for collective action can be taken on by single individuals is problematic for our understanding of moral agency.³

In his concluding chapter of his lectures on human nature and conduct, John Dewey claimed that the effect of the efforts by some philosophers working to separate consciousness from its natural embedded context “was to isolate the individual from his connections both with his fellows and with nature, and thus to create an artificial human nature, one not capable of being understood and effectively directed on the basis of analytic understanding. It shut out from view, not to say from scientific examination, *the forces which really move human nature.*”⁴ Dewey argued that the effectiveness of social forces on the formation of moral character could be demonstrated scientifically. His fundamental argument was similar to the general thrust of arguments by recent political philosophers who claim that the essential motivation to live in relative harmony is the restraint, both affective and effective, arising out of the existence of others.⁵ The fact that liberals and communitarians may argue about whether this restraint is attributable to linguistic causes or more practical notions does not concern me here nor does the issue of the locus of rationality of common notions of right and wrong.⁶ I do not intend to dispute the fine distinctions possible within this general line of liberal reasoning but aim instead to point out that the rough equality between self and other that both sides to the debate take as basic does not in fact exist at a political level within contemporary states. I will argue that the game is fixed by the identity attributing power of contemporary states; a power derived from known common behavioural tendencies.

3. See Henry A. Kissinger, “Conditions of World Order” in *Daedalus*, XCV (Spring 1966), pp. 503-539, for a discussion of the dynamic interplay between structure and value in states.

4. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, New York: Random House, 1922, 1957, p. 294.

5. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981, 1984, and *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988.

6. See Will Kymlicka’s *Liberalism, Community and Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Identity Traps, Agency and Community

I use the term ‘identity’ to mean nothing more than the concept of self that manifests itself in political action. I acknowledge here a certain phenomenological bias in this definition but see no other way of avoiding reliance on Freudian or Jungian perspectives far beyond the scope of this paper. This somewhat vague notion will do for present purposes without committing us to either liberal or communitarian derivations. However, I take the central issue dividing the two views to be the question of whether consciousness of who one is and what one’s values are is derived from the community in which one grows or from subjective evaluation of same; whether one’s identity is in some sense ascribed or is taken on voluntarily.

In their attempt to highlight confusions about individual identity that they attribute to communitarian philosophers, Amélie Rorty and David Wong assert that personality traits may influence identity in a number of interesting ways not captured in the works of either MacIntyre or Sandel.⁷ They list seven significant factors affecting the way in which a given trait might be central to a person’s identity (20) all having to do with the relative importance given to the trait according to somatic, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic dispositions or to situational factors. They rightly point out that “central traits (as deft or awkward, excitable or calm, muscularly strong or weak, active or passive, quick or sluggish, slender or heavy, flexible or stiff) are prelinguistic” (21) and go on to claim that some central traits that contribute importantly to identity may be unacknowledged by the subject. Each of these factors may have an influence on the relative importance of a particular trait in determining the behaviour of any individual. “A trait can be accorded a high degree of centrality by an individual’s culture without its having a correspondingly high degree of either subjective or objective centrality in the configuration of her character.” (21) Of particular significance to what I shall have to say further on is that one of the important trait factors, for them, is the “extent to which it is dominant in situations that require coping with stress or conflict” (20).

Of rather greater interest for the moment is the suggestion that the communitarian argument towards socially ascribed identities is not descriptively adequate. In Rorty and Wong’s view, psychological research indicates that individuals stand in ambiguous relationships to their social environments and that the behavioural adaptations they evince tend to be mediated by a number of non-cognitive elements in their deep psychology. The self they describe carries not just a bundle of impressions or normative assumptions as part of her linguistic baggage but also a full range of pre-linguistic vulnerabilities and a complicated,

7. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty and David Wong, “Aspects of Identity and Agency” in *Identity, Character and Morality*, Owen Flanagan and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (eds); Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 19-36.

flexible “configuration of identity—the relative centrality allocated to different aspects of identity” (32) As they put it, “If Sandel and Taylor are interpreted as presenting straightforward reports about the unqualified centrality of the social and ideal aspects of identity, their claims are surely radically oversimplified.” (33) They go on to acknowledge that both make important normative claims in suggesting the direction that cognitive control, such as it is, ought to nudge us⁸. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that the way in which identity is conditioned by experience is problematic, in their view, but is agreed to be of critical importance to the self understanding of socially embedded beings.

In trying to account for my own identity as a social being, I might begin with an attempt to understand how my own experiences may have worked to produce the person that I am.⁹ I cannot get very far without considering the immediate context in which I exist. Whatever else I might think myself to be, I must include in my self definition that I am the father of Graham, Devon and d’Arcy, the husband of Lorrie, the son of Graham and Margaret. Each of these connections imposes interpretative obligations on my concept of self, each of them shapes my understanding of who I am and what my place is in relation to those with whom I have intimate connections.¹⁰ My understanding of this connection draws both from my understanding of the ideal concepts of father, of son, of husband and of family and from my direct experience acting on the family stage.¹¹ Though each of these ideal notions is mediated by language, each is also conditioned in mysterious but banal ways by non-linguistic events that, in the context of family, need affective interpretation in addition to what is gained with the aid of the formal language. Intimate relations allow for direct reciprocity of action that is not generally possible in relationships within larger groups where the meaning of actions relies more on formal structure and symbology.¹² The

8. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *op.cit.*, Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982 and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. For a rather interesting discussion of Wittgenstein’s position on this issue, see Anthony Holiday, *Normative Powers: Normative Necessity and Language in History*, London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

9. See L. Kohlberg, “Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Development Approach to Socialization,” in *Moral Development and Behaviour: Theory Research and Social Issues*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976, pp. 31-53.

10. I refer here to a concept that Owen Flanagan labels the *intersubjective conception of the self*. See “Identity and Strong and Weak Evaluation,” in Owen Flanagan and Amélie Okensberg Rorty (eds), *Identity, Character and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 43.

11. Reference is to Charles Taylor’s account of strong evaluation in *Sources of the Self*.

12. See Martin Hoffman, “Empathy, Social Cognition and Moral Action,” in W. Kurtines and J.L. Gewirtz (eds), *Handbook of Moral Behaviour and Development*,

similarities of the description of family above and the abstract idea of community outlined by Alasdair MacIntyre are quite strong. But as a context for social learning there are two distinguishing features about family *qua* community that are important. First, except in extreme cases, the family tends to constitute a benign environment for the emergence of individual identity. Second, and most important, families today do not normally constitute competitive collectivities.

One learns to feel what it means to live withing a family from the reflective experience of being in one. The range of identities that actually exist within the close intimacy of the family are privately arrived at through the subtle communication of a meaningful glance across a busy kitchen, a communicative gesture as the toast is passed, an eloquent set of shoulders that speaks only within the most intimate context. One comes to an understanding of the desires and needs of one's family members through empathic communication, through the give and take of mutual affective dependency. One develops an ability to live in close proximity with one's siblings through the rough and tumble of childhood with bruises and hugs as one gropes towards understanding of self and other. The whole process is a matter of direct daily interaction between parents and children, husband and wife, brother and sister. This is, in the truest sense, the realm of moral freedom insofar as the identity that one acquires is defined by intersubjective factors that leave one free to change and adapt one's self concept, along with one's behaviour, in order to achieve and maintain familial harmony. The only rule is that of musical measure, of preventing discordance. One can improvise so long as the result works and one is not overly constrained by externally ascribed instrumental roles.

Now in this sense, the Deweyan version of rational and affective anticipation of approval or disapproval functions well to explain the identity frameworks allowable within a family structure.¹³ The father may be an autocrat, the mother domineering or the children rebellious but each functions in direct relation to the other and therefore retains some direct affective power in relation to the other. In a contemporary family setting, that is one in which outright physical terror is restrained by social custom and law, the possibility that emotional interdependencies will serve to provide the setting of rough equality necessary for the kind of flexible identity adaptation envisaged by Dewey and indeed, contemporary psychologists, is good.¹⁴ It would be consistent with such a conception of family to argue for a capacity to conform to the expectations of other family members that is based on empathy.

In this context, identity is a matter of give and take, of active participation in the process of identity formation in which reciprocity has a more than even

Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991, Vol 1, pp. 275-301.

13. Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-302.

14. Hoffman, *op.cit.*

chance. I do not mean by this to claim for social interaction a monopoly on the process of identity construction but only that the family structure allows the kind of loose identity formation in which the self is more than an object determined by external forces, that there is a plausible Hegelian character to the emergence of self understanding that allows for the full range of pre-linguistic influences suggested by Rorty and Wong. In such a setting, the salience of identity traits has a certain plasticity not affected greatly by factors external to the family. One fills family roles according to the internal rules of a particular family. The identities manifested within such an environment tend to be relatively free from external constraint.

Political identity is much more complex and opens up the possibility of a whole range of manipulative uses of identity attribution arising out of formalized social structure. For du Preez, the distinction between self as person and self as a set of socially constituted roles is fundamental—and problematic. “Generally, identity is a broader concept than role, just as person is a broader concept than identity.” and there is, in his view, a constant “tension between persona and person, between man as an identity mobilized in a particular, stylized political role and man as a system of many identities, including political identities, mobilized in many roles.”(5) He goes on to say that “Locutions such as ‘the role of a woman’ or ‘the role of a Basque are usually attempts to pre-empt the implications of womanhood or ‘Basqueness’ for a particular purpose....Questions such as: ‘Is that the way a woman (or Basque) behaves?’ are identity traps [...] Identity is appearance-for-self-and-others; person is a system of identities.”(6) The basic problem, for du Preez, is that individual identities need to be coordinated in order to achieve some sort of collective agency and the ways in which this is done usually entail hardening of social identity systems into ascriptive devices serving the interests of power. The individual has a function within such a setting that reflects his obligation to the social whole.

The critical point seems to me not so much the question of whether one’s “narrative sense of self” is necessarily embedded in the history of a particular community so much as whether one can escape the less savoury implications of such embeddedness. The communitarian claim seems to me to be descriptively sound from a social learning perspective despite what Rorty and Wong have to say about the indeterminacy of trait salience. The trouble is that the kinds of historical narrative that set one’s ontological bounds can, and too often are, obscured by the identity attribution of political systems that are both coercive and far too complex for most individuals to sort out. One’s cognitive growth within a modern state follows a path of successive encounters with authority figures, be they parents, elder siblings, school teachers or experts of some kind. But where authority within a family may be construed as essentially loving such is not necessarily the case outside of the home. The empathy learned in the family helps one to learn above all else the value of obedience, of deferral to the

authority of others. By the time that most of us reach the age of political majority within our various states, we tend to have been so well conditioned to obedience that it seems both natural and right to obey. In this sense, our identity as citizens derives from our understanding of the roles that citizens play.

Now MacIntyre emphasises that growing up as a full fledged member of one's community in no way prevents one from choosing to reject its ethos. "Notice also that the fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighbourhood, the city and the tribe does not entail that the self has to accept the moral *limitations* of the particularity of those forms of community."¹⁵ He goes on to argue that belonging to some particular community just is a necessary start point towards the universal, that one can begin to grasp wider possibilities only if one has some sort of grounded perspective to begin with. While this seems to take much the same view as Rorty and Wong, the psychological impediments to beginning the search for a way out of one's community seem almost overwhelming. In fact, if history, or for that matter, psychology experiments of the like of Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment or Stanley Milgram's famous experiment with manipulated obedience have anything to teach us, it is that the vast majority of humans are only too happy to accept ascribed identities without question.¹⁶

Identity, Community And The State

The challenge presented by the structure of states and their various devices for identity attribution constitute significant psychological hurdles to individuals wishing to understand themselves as fully human rather than as role determined beings. The problem is that the primary functions of state require levels of obedience in the performance of social roles that make the emergence of a sense of freedom and individual responsibility problematic. From a behavioural perspective, many state institutions seem expressly designed to shape identity by encouraging and rewarding behaviours that stand in stark contrast to those praised by liberal theory.

Max Weber defines the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" and politics as the activity of "striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power."¹⁷ The state, for Weber, "is a relation of men

15. MacIntyre, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

16. See Don Mixon, *Obedience and Civilization: Authorized Crime and the Normality of Evil*, London and Winchester, Mass: Pluto Press, 1989, for a penetrating critique of Milgram's conclusions. Chapter 5 is particularly enlightening on the subject of authoritarian hierarchies and the ease with which they are established.

17. Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, H.H. Gerth and C.

dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence.”¹⁸ He cites three justifications for systems of domination: tradition, charisma and legal; i.e., “by virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statute and functional ‘competence’ based on rationally created rules.”¹⁹ Now the interesting thing for liberals is that the third category of justification, to which liberal theory quite clearly pays heavy tribute, generates, in Weber’s view, a need for obedience “in discharging statutory obligations.”²⁰ Rules must be obeyed consistently or they simply fail to work to constrain behaviour rationally. The primary value required for the efficient functioning of various departments of state, from all but a very few who occupy top posts, is obedience. Rationality of the whole administration is achieved by careful definition of functions and behaviours required to carry them out as efficiently as possible. The underlying idea is that order is required to generate power and power is needed to protect the context of a legal system from external threat; and therefore, the state has a legitimacy arising from its capacity to protect its citizens.

While it may be observed that “the institutions of the state comprise the entire machinery of government ...[and] in many countries, this machinery represents a very substantial proportion of the national substance”, it is the sum effect of this administrative structure itself that imposes its authority on the activities of state.²¹ The effectiveness of state apparatus in assigning identities, usually in the interests of administrative efficiency, limits the freedom of citizens to determine the political scope of their own identity. As du Preez states, “in any given society there is a relation between social identity and access to social positions.”²² The state structure operates to establish clear lines of authority in the interests of order. The trouble is that control of the order thus created is a matter of political struggle in which the aim of the game is to win and maintain power which is then exercised through the establishment of identity frames; for example, when the ascribed identity as patriotic citizen is used as grounds for conscription.

The shaping process is insidious and woven into the fabric of states. Consider for instance the effect on the self identity of young people of their first encounters with a state run school system. The need for classroom control legitimates the exercise of authority of the teacher as it does the authority of the principal for school control, of the bus driver for bus control; even the crossing

Wright Mills (trans, eds), New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, 1958, p. 78.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 79.

20. Ibid.

21. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, p. 82.

22. Du Preez, op. cit. p 69.

guard on the corner exercises some sort of control. A child learns early the wisdom of obedience. Rebellion and independent thought have little scope in the face of rational requirements for order or safety. Even more telling is the prevalence of so called experts in the upper echelons of most school systems with power to establish curricula and thus determine what is important in the intellectual life of the student²³.

The process of early identity formation prioritizes obedience as one of the key ingredients of public identity, as a central behavioural trait. There are those in control, whether because of expert knowledge of some kind, specialist ability or a functional role entitling the exercise of authority in the interests of social order; and there are those who are controlled. Again, this is not necessarily inconsistent with either liberal or communitarian theory provided only that the call for obedience stands in reasonable relation with goals that have been arrived at through legitimate political process. To take a banal example, the need for obedience of traffic laws is a reasonable demand in the interests of all citizens arrived at through a political process in which laws are agreed to be necessary for public safety. The state in this case is agent for the collective will of its citizens acting to regulate internal behaviour in a relatively unproblematic situation. Of more interest might be the case of our accepting the expert agency of other bureaucracies, such as the military, whose authority derives from a combination of perceived functional need and special knowledge.

The Weberian notion of state used above suggests that the geo-strategic situation that a state finds itself in constitutes the external necessity it must face.²⁴ In order to exist at all, a state must be able to project physical force relatively superior to the forces that might threaten its capacity to administer effectively the people occupying the territory the state controls. The particular ways in which this might be done respond to both internal and external factors but usually entail a necessity to conform to the actions of neighbouring states. External threats impose necessities that range over internal identities; indeed, at the extreme, state boundaries tend to be set by the limits of the power of each to organize its population for defence relative to the power of others.²⁵ As Machiavelli argued, a state's power ultimately depends on its ability to field cohesive, effective,

23. Mixon, *op.cit.*, p. 35. “[W]e also learn that increasingly large chunks of the social and physical world can only be understood by experts and that we are dependent on experts”

24. Buzan, *op. cit.*, makes a distinction between the state as idea, as physical base and as institutional expression. I have collapsed this distinction in this work in the interests of concentrating on a single problem.

25. Mixon, *op.cit.*, quotes Andrew Schmookler's *Parable of the Tribes* in which ‘no one is free to choose peace, but anyone can impose upon all the necessity for power’.

fighting forces.²⁶ A state that is able to project force successfully must be able to generate both will and means and the main component of both is a collective identity adequate to active collective agency.

Nations and States

Hobsbawm, during his lengthy discussion of the idea of nationhood, quotes Colonel Pilsudski to the effect that “It is the state that creates the nation, not the nation the state.”²⁷ Hobsbawm goes on to argue that the process of state invention that occurred in lock step with the modernization of technology, administration and war requires us to consider the phenomenon from the both ends of the social ladder. The crux of the argument is that if states are the concrete expression of some sort of political will and if that will is grounded on a set of beliefs shared among the active agents of a particular historical community, then a satisfactory understanding requires investigation of the reasons for the effectiveness of those beliefs that goes beyond the fact that they might have been decreed by an elite at the top of the social pile. He acknowledges the role of administration in facilitating the achievement of common goals, such as the creation of a state language through selective use of one dialect for all administrative functions, but suggests that the reason that this is accepted by the population is as important as the apparent nation-building strategies of particular governments.²⁸ The gist of the argument is that nationhood may help in providing an ideological entree for identity frame construction through which states gain the power to act as effective agents of collective will.

It seems to me that if nations hold a capacity to legitimate the existence of states that rests on their prior existence as historical communities then virtually anything goes in the game of states. To say that an historical nation has a common will that endows it with moral justification whether or not that will has been expressed in the establishment of a particular state is to say that the existence of any type of national community, no matter how internally coercive, has a moral right against the states around it irrespective of its capacity to become

26. “*Mais par dessus tout, on doit porter la plus grande attention aux moeurs du soldat..... jamais il ne faut espérer de vertus d’un homme privé de tout éducation et abruti par le vice.*” Machiavelli, *L’art de la guerre*; Paris: Flammarion, 1991 p. 84.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

28. One of the important elements of the capacity to project a credible defence is the capacity to unite in a common cause. Pilsudski’s claim cited above can be interpreted to mean that the state has a duty to defend itself by creating the possibility of internal cohesion. As the Greeks understood, internal disputes take second place to survival. Given the value heteronomy that is a feature of liberalism, the task of protecting the state can be understood as derivative of the desire to protect the context of value freedom; freedom is set aside only long enough to protect its domain.

a state itself. Conversely, if Pilsudski is correct in saying that the character of nations is determined by particular states, and if we understand nations to be exemplary historical instances of community, then, if we follow communitarian logic, we are left with morality being shaped by the demands of state administrative and military efficiency. In this case, the moral right of nation-communities within multinational states would be subject to the administrative will that established the state in the first place. While this may not seem to clarify the problem much, it does help to expose the arbitrary nature of states. For, if nations hold a status very like the moral communities alluded to by contemporary communitarian theorists and, if we believe, with Pilsudski, that states affect the development of those communities by means of structuring activities, then we need to acknowledge the power of the machinery of state structures to operate on the identity of citizens. If it turns out that state endowed identity frames are then taken as moral grounds for communal understanding of justice then we have a conceptual problem with blood soaked potential.

Historical Examples

If we follow communitarian logic, then it would seem that we need to respect the sanctity of communally derived systems of right and wrong. But this is precisely where trouble begins. There are two separate cases to consider that have bearing on this issue. First, the classic case of a state at war conjures up many images of citizens caught by the identity trap of citizenship and fed into the maw of trench warfare during World War I or, though perhaps more reluctantly, into the jungles of Vietnam. The transition from the notion of self as law abiding citizen living at peace within the logical legal structure of a benign state to the idea of self as soldier doing his best to defend the state from attack is fairly clear and relatively unproblematic; if we extend the Machiavellian argument but a little. The trouble comes when the consistent identity of self as member of a group consenting to defend one's country entraps one in the role of mass murderer. Markusen and Kopf make some very telling arguments in this regard explaining how very similar the deliberate logic of terror bombings of known civilian targets in both Europe and Japan was to the logic deployed to support the deliberate elimination of a racial group.²⁹ They offer a gruesome account of the calculation of bomb payloads carried out by normal citizens who somehow had accepted the necessity of murdering large groups of civilians from the air in order to achieve state objectives. The logic at work to create this determination of trait salience is indeed interesting. Suffice to say for present purposes that states possess within them a remarkable capacity to structure identity frames in ways that render mass murder entirely consistent with citizenship. Given the history

29. Eric Markusen and David Kopf, *The Holocaust and Strategic Bombing*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

of states over the past few centuries, one is forced to consider the possibility that citizenship in a modern state entails the acceptance of a narrow role that is inconsistent with the wide concept of human identity espoused by Maritain and indeed of most contemporary liberals.

The second problematic instance is that posed by the existence of a divided state composed of two communities whose identities arise out of an exaggerated sense of mutual vulnerability. In Rwanda, this was the condition that obtained prior to the outbreak of the 1994 genocide. Though the history is somewhat complex, it illustrates the point I wish to make so well that I feel the excursion is worth the trouble.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Rwanda contained three ethnic groups living in relative harmony. Although Rwanda had been discovered by Europeans in the mid-1800s, the tiny region was left largely to itself until near the end of the 19th Century.³⁰ Interestingly, its distance from the slave trading coasts and its military capacity preserved it from the kinds of predation that affected less fortunate African nations in the days of slavery. Prior to the period of active colonization, Rwandan society comprised two main elements which functioned on the basis a rough balance between its two major ethnic groups; the Tutsi, who owned and grazed cattle and the Hutu, who farmed. While there was a definite class division apparent to the eyes of the first rapporteurs, it would appear that the lines of separation were porous.³¹ A Hutu could become a Tutsi either through marriage or trade and a Tutsi could regress into the ranks of the Hutu through misfortune. The two groups had developed a symbiosis in which the Tutsi provided leadership in war, contributed meat and milk to the economy and, perhaps most importantly to a farming community, fertilizer. The Hutu filled out the fighting battalions in war, provided farm produce and labour. The former held power over the raising of cattle while the latter had dominion over the growing of crops. While the Tutsi tended to be more martial than the Hutu, the latter had numbers on their side and could not therefore be dealt with arbitrarily. Though there must certainly have been abuses, the relationship was not that of Spartan to Helot. There were also areas of what is now Rwanda that remained under the dominion of Hutu leadership.³² Prunier reports that the entire

30. Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis 1959-1994: History of a Genocide*; London: Hurst & Company, 1995, p. 7. Alain Destexhe (*Rwanda: Essai sur le génocide*, Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1994, p. 109) claims that, although Rwanda had been awarded to the Germans by the Conference of Berlin, 1885, they did not make a serious attempt at colonial occupation until 1908.

31. "Twa were marginalised and often mistreated by the others. Hutu and Tutsi were less sharply distinct, and individuals could and did move between the categories as their fortunes rose and fell." *Danish Government After Action Report on Rwanda*, Copenhagen: Government Press, September 1996, p. 22.

32. Ruhengeri region of Rwanda (north west highlands) retained its Hutu

population cooperated in its own defence against external foes.³³ It is perhaps the great misfortune of Rwandan history that the first observers simplified the divisions and hardened them in ways that were to have horrifying results.³⁴

Returning to the idiom of psychology that I have been using all along, we could say that the identity frames of the two major groups were soft when the colonial powers arrived. The initial effect of colonization was to create a separate class of the Tutsi who were then used as trustee for colonial power. This began the myth of racial superiority that was then used as a basis for the destruction of the delicate balance of identity frames that had worked as a basis for common understanding for centuries. To describe what then happened in so few words is far from satisfactory; however, suffice to say that the Tutsi grew arrogant in their enjoyment of colonial support. Over time, the myth of Tutsi superiority came to dominate the imaginations of both ethnies. It was strong enough by the time the colonial power left to provide grounds for communal paranoia on the part of the Hutu with the subsequent slaughter or expulsion of a large percentage of the Tutsi population. Ultimately, it was clever manipulation of this paranoia by a weakening Hutu power elite, coupled with an actual armed attempt to return home by Tutsi expatriates and buttressed by the slaughter of some 300,000 Hutus in neighbouring Burundi, that led to the genocide of 1994. "Ideas and myths can kill, and their manipulation by elite leaders for their own material benefit does not change the fact that in order to operate they first have to be implanted in the souls of men."³⁵

Though I have skipped over a number of historical details in the interests of brevity, the point I wish to draw out here is that the salience of identity traits was affected deeply by the stress of intercommunity rivalry and the administrative structuring of important aspects of state ideology. The state, in this instance, helped to organize identity frames into two opposing sets in the interests of successive power elites; first colonial and then indigenous. Once the frames were

independence until subdued by combined German, Tutsi and southern Hutu (*Banyanduga*) forces in the early part of this century. The Kiga, as the northern Hutu were known, considered themselves distinct from the southerners. (Danish Report, p.22) This region became known as the Hutu homeland under the Habyarimana regime and was the centre of the most militant Hutuism.

33. Prunier, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

34. There is beginning to emerge sound scholarly work on the effects of European world views had on African existence. See, for instance, Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (London: James Currey Ltd., 1992) and Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996). Both works argue that there existed a number of complex fully functioning societies in place when the colonial period began. See, particularly, p. 64 in Davidson's work.

35. Prunier, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

established, there was little choice between accepting an imposed identity as either defender of the Hutu homeland against a putative tyrant class—or traitor. From this it can be observed that where identity frames arising out of social conditioning are affected by a state structure overwhelmed by power interests, the social environment is no longer benign and thus the process of identity development is corrupted.

My thesis is simply this: that the description of community provided by both communitarian theorists and social psychologists is too close to historical experience to be ignored. Identity does, in fact, appear to be socially conditioned. Both historical experience and psychology experiments seem to confirm this. When the identities taken on in opposition to other identities are affected by power interests, the potential for identity traps is alarmingly large. States exist as exemplary vehicles for the expression of power interests; if only as an accidental bi-product of the concept of Weber's notion of state as monopolizer of violence. It follows that states constitute a significant challenge to the possibility of the emergence of the kind of self possessed identity commonly thought necessary to a meaningful liberal concept of humanity.

Conclusion

I had begun this essay with the aim of showing how cramped a context for moral freedom is the state. I did not want to argue the relative merits of various normative implications attributable to communitarians nor did I wish to dispute the central claims of social psychology. I wanted merely to demonstrate that communities constituted within state structures are inherently vulnerable to political influence and that, as a consequence, debates over the ontological status of individual lives within such structures ought to consider how this influence might play out in the actual lives of citizens. The game which citizens may find themselves caught up in is one whose rules are determined by power interests. I have not made a strong link between unintentional identity attribution arising out of community existence nor have I fully explicated a theory of personhood sufficient to the demands of a satisfactory account of moral freedom. All I have accomplished, I hope, is to imply that moral freedom in a contemporary state context is a matter of individual heroism in which the identity of single agents wishing to preserve for themselves the power of decision over their own action is vulnerable to the unequal distribution of identity making power between individual and state.

If, as du Preez argues, "The identity of I is taken from the relations I have with others and the set of reciprocal roles that I may have ...[and if]... identity is negotiated and then monitored to determine its continued validity in relation to those who have a role in forming one's notion of self ...[and if]... I must be

embedded to have a notion of [my]self as apart from and a part of”³⁶ then it matters very much what sort of community I am embedded in. Yet our most recent deliberations about how best to arrange our political lives have been conducted almost entirely without reference to the effectiveness of states in determining the character of communities. If psychology tells us that social conditioning is a critical part of the development of identity and if history tells us that identity traits lend themselves easily to situational manoeuvring then the process that determines the nature of structures that initiate and control important parts of collective response to situational factors ought to be of critical interest.

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36. Du Preez, *op cit.*, p. 17.