

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE VERY IDEA OF HISPANIC IDENTITY

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Hispanics, and similar ethnic groups, are socially and politically recognized in American society because belonging to such groups is often thought to be central to members' identities. But is "Hispanicity" central to members' identities? What is the significance of being a Hispanic? My general thesis is that contrary to the common assumption of governmental agencies, advocacy groups, policy-makers, and American society in general, belonging to the Hispanic group is not currently central to its members' identities.

I develop my thesis in two parts. In chapters two through four, I address philosophical questions about membership and groups. I argue that the sort of membership that is central to group members' identities is *basic*. Basic membership consists of traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding, making such a person a member of a particular group. Groups in which membership is basic generally satisfy three conditions: relevant identification, differentiation, and intrinsic identification.

In chapters five through seven, I then turn to Hispanic identity. I argue that given the national identities of Hispanics, membership in the Hispanic group is generally not basic. Hispanic membership is an epiphenomenon of national membership, and thus the latter is basic whereas the former is not. I also point out that Hispanic membership could be a tipping phenomenon. A process of Hispanic people-making, in which the American state plays a key role, could turn Hispanic membership into a basic one.

By way of conclusion, I discuss some possible implications of Hispanic identity for American national unity and for U.S.-Latin American relations.

THE VERY IDEA OF HISPANIC IDENTITY

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2005

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One ethnic category officially recognized by the American government through the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity is that of “Hispanic.”¹ Such an ethnic category stems, to a large extent, from the attempt of the government to identify and gather data on populations that have historically “experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity.”² The assumption underlying the category of Hispanic is that there is, in fact, an identifiable group whose ethnic identity is of paramount value and significance. Examining this assumption is the purpose of the present project.

The phenomenon of Hispanic identity raises the following questions: What is a Hispanic? Who classifies as Hispanic? How meaningful and valuable is it to be Hispanic? How different are Hispanics from other particular groups in American society? In probing these questions, my general thesis is that Hispanic identity does not always carry the weight that is commonly assumed by American governmental agencies and society in general. Nonetheless, Hispanicity could be on its way to becoming a significant identity.

¹ The definition was first issued by the Office of Management and Budget on May 12, 1977, in the “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting;” otherwise known as “Statistical Directive No. 15.” According to the latest revision, the definition remains the same, but the category is now “Hispanic” or “Latino,” and “Spanish Origin” could also be used. See “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 62, no. 210, Thursday, October 30, 1997, Notices, p. 58789.

² “Revisions to the Standards,” p. 58782.

I develop my thesis in two sections. In chapters two through four I focus on membership and groups. I begin in chapter two with a discussion of Will Kymlicka's multiculturalism.³ Kymlicka has brought the themes of membership and groups to the forefront of recent political philosophy discussions. So he provides a good starting point for my project. The framework and vocabulary used in subsequent chapters will be first brought up in a general discussion of Kymlicka's multiculturalism.

According to the kind of multiculturalism proposed by Will Kymlicka, membership in a national or ethnic minority is highly significant and valuable to group members. Membership in a nation such as Quebec or the Quechua is so significant that the group's culture should be protected for the sake of its members. Similarly, ethnic groups and identities are very significant and so they should receive public recognition in societies based on the principles of equality and justice.

The question that arises is whether membership in ethnic or national cultural groups is always highly significant and valuable to group members. I first argue that highly significant and valuable membership is not always confined to ethnocultural groups. My thesis here is that membership in different group-types, not just ethnocultural groups, could be a primary source of meaning and direction. Thus different group-types could have the function of endowing members with the relevant membership.

Note that I share with Kymlicka the assumption that membership in particular groups may be a primary source of meaning and direction. Thus, I do not share the

³ As developed primarily in *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

cosmopolitan assumption that group membership is less robust as a source of identity than people like Kymlicka have assumed.⁴ I part ways with Kymlicka, however, when it comes to the type of group in which membership is of the relevant kind. As mentioned, I wish to broaden the scope of group-types in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction.

If my thesis on membership and diverse group-types is correct, there are several consequences affecting Kymlicka's multicultural model. I examine these consequences in the second part of the chapter. One of the consequences is that different group-types, and not just ethnocultural ones, could be accorded group-specific rights. Another consequence that follows from the previous one is that given the variety of memberships that could potentially count as a primary source of meaning and direction and thus receive public recognition, it is difficult to speak of a multicultural "model."

My general conclusion in this chapter is that multiculturalism ought to be more diverse than Kymlicka's model of diversity. But this diversity requirement makes me skeptical about the coherence of certain multicultural policies, and leads me to suggest that the principle of neutrality is worth exploring further before adopting the ethno-conscious and group-rights paradigm proposed by Kymlicka and other multiculturalists.

As I said, chapter two provides the building blocks and working framework for the rest of the project. But although I address group-rights in chapter two, I will not have

⁴ For a statement of the cosmopolitan view, see Jeremy Waldron, "Cultural Identity and Civic Responsibility," in *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, eds. W. Kymlicka and W. Norman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also his "Multiculturalism and M \acute{e} lange," in *Public Education in a Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique*, ed. R. Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

much to say about this topic in subsequent chapters. My focus will be rather on the theme that membership in certain group-types is a primary source of meaning and direction. I then devote chapters three and four to a discussion of membership and groups.

In chapter three, I turn to membership. The question I address in this chapter is this: if different membership-types are a primary source of meaning and direction, when is membership of the relevant kind? The central thesis of this chapter is that membership is a primary source of meaning and direction when it is central to members' identities.

I begin with a general discussion of what it means to have an identity. Identity-bearing has two aspects: self-understanding and group membership. Someone is said to have an identity when she characterizes herself, and thus shows self-understanding, in a way that typically makes her a member of a particular group. Note that, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, I speak of identity as a public and not a strictly private phenomenon. I also speak of identity in a way that is broader than how proponents of the politics of difference and recognition normally use the term.

In order to explain the centrality of identity, I then introduce the notion of *basic membership*. In describing this new notion, I make a distinction between the types of traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding and the types of traits that are not. Typically, someone's membership is basic when a set of traits that are essential to her self-understanding are also the traits that make her a member in a particular group. It is worth highlighting that although I argue that certain traits are essential to someone's self-understanding, I also point out that some complexities are inevitable.

A question that arises in my discussion is this: what sorts of traits tend to be essential to people's self-understanding? In addressing this question, I make a distinction between inherent and accidental markers of personhood. The former are generally non-voluntarily acquired and the latter are rather voluntarily acquired. I argue that the sorts of traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding are often, as a matter of tendency, inherent markers of personhood, i.e., non-voluntarily acquired traits. Incidentally, I am also quick to point out that the claim must be qualified so as to open space for ambiguous and complex cases.

I close this chapter with a discussion on the value of membership. Here I return to Kymlicka and argue two points. First, membership is instrumentally valuable because it gives group members an identity. Second, the value of basic membership stems from the fact that it significantly contributes towards personal well-being. The type of membership that is central to someone's identity is an integral part of their human well-being.

Having focused primarily on membership as such, I turn my attention to groups in chapter four. What sorts of groups endow group members with the type of membership that is central to members' identities, i.e., basic membership? In chapter four I discuss three conditions that are generally satisfied by groups in which membership is central to members' identities.

The first condition is *relevant identification*. Group members interact with each other on the basis of properties of identification that make it possible for them to recognize group members and non-members. There are many types of groups that have identifiable properties by which one can recognize members. In some particular

instances, however, the identifiable properties by which a group member is recognized are also properties that happen to be essential to her self-understanding. When this is the case, the identifiable properties make her membership in the group basic. If a group is identifiable by virtue of properties that make membership in the group basic, the group is said to satisfy the condition of relevant identification.

Second, I consider the condition of *differentiation*. Here I argue that when membership in a particular group is basic, this membership is necessarily connected with the difference-sensitive attributes of the group. In other words, the properties that make a group distinguishable from other groups are also the properties that endow group members with basic membership.

I explain my point in the following manner. Groups that can be described on the basis of contrast and differences with other groups have what I call the “status of discernibility.” According to the status of discernibility, members in a particular group have a common identity such that the group is distinguishable from other groups. I then argue that, as a matter of fact, groups in which membership is basic are also groups that have the status of discernibility.

The third condition is *intrinsic identification*. Groups are sometimes identified in a way that does not reflect the sorts of properties that are essential to the self-understanding of group members. This could be the case when groups are identified from the outside, i.e., by non-group members. My point here is that in order to properly understand a group in which membership is basic, we must look at the way in which the group is identified from the inside, i.e., the way members identify their own group. I call intrinsic identification the act of identifying a group from the inside.

In dealing with the condition of intrinsic identification, I discuss part of the historical and sociological literature on the emergence of nations and national identity. This type of literature will be very helpful in attempting to understand the emergence of Hispanic identity.

With the previous chapters in mind, the project now transitions into the phenomenon of Hispanic identity. The rest of the project will build on the framework set out in chapters two through four.

It is important to point out that the U.S. is different from Canada and Australia in that its government does not have an official multicultural act or policy. The U.S. government, however, recognizes certain ethnic and racial groups outlined in the 1977 Statistical Policy Directive 15 from the Office of Management and Budget, and further specified (with some recent revisions) in the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. These groups are the beneficiaries of policies that seek to promote equality and end discrimination according to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which forbids all programs receiving federal financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin.

“Hispanic” is one of the groups included under the scheme of the Civil Rights Act and thus recognized by the U.S. government. In the context of governmental and social recognition, the general question I begin exploring in the next few chapters is this: what is the status of Hispanic identity? I argue that Hispanic identity is not a robust or meaningful identity. I also point out that Hispanics are the recipients of an identity in the making, due to Hispanic-building policies enacted by the U.S government.

More specifically, I explore the question of Hispanics and basic membership in chapter five. The reader will notice that chapters five and six mirror chapters three and four. In chapter three I discussed membership, and turned to groups in chapter four. Chapter five will now specifically discuss Hispanic membership and chapter six will have us discuss the Hispanic group.

I then focus on membership in chapter five and raise the following question: is Hispanic membership central to the identities of group members? In other words, is Hispanic membership basic?

I begin by establishing the fact that Hispanics have different nationalities. This is an obvious fact, but one that is often overlooked. Nationality has become such a pervasive condition in our world that it is easy to take this condition for granted. Virtually everyone has a nationality.

If by nationality, we understand citizenship, the vast majority of people in our planet are members of some nation-state. Similarly, if by nationality we understand national attachments (i.e., attachment to a national community) then—except for a cosmopolitan minority—most people on the planet have feelings of loyalty towards a particular national community. One might even venture to suggest that cosmopolitans do not often realize how deep the undercurrent of nationality is among themselves.

Next I proceed to suggest that the nationalities of Hispanics are generally basic. I use some illustrations to make the point that the traits which make Latin American nationals members in their respective nations are essential to their self-understandings. So, for instance, traits that make someone a member in the Colombian nation are also essential to the sense of who she is.

Now the question is whether Hispanic membership is also basic. I do not deal with this question in abstract terms, but rather by comparing Hispanic membership with a basic membership, namely, nationality. By comparing the two memberships, I highlight how robust national membership is, and, in contrast, how weak Hispanic membership is in comparison with nationality

I build my argument in the terms that follow. First, whereas nationality meets what I call the criterion of *pervasive basic membership*, Hispanic membership does not. What I mean by this claim is that, as mentioned, national membership is basic for most Hispanics—one might add: the vast majority.

Second, Hispanic membership only meets a much weaker criterion that I call *partial basic membership*. What I mean here is that the extension of basic membership in the Hispanic group is not pervasive, but rather partial. In short, Hispanic membership is basic for only some members of the Hispanic group. It is important to immediately add here that the possible basicness of Hispanic membership is a concession I make for the sake of argument. For reasons that I explain in chapter six, I do not believe that Hispanic membership can indeed be basic—since it is an epiphenomenon of nationality.

Third, there is the criterion of *robust membership*. A certain membership is robust with regard to another membership when the former has a higher degree of basicness than the latter. As I mentioned in chapter three, basic membership is a matter of degree. My point now is that when comparing national and Hispanic memberships, the former always has a higher degree of basicness. Hence, even if we grant that Hispanic membership is indeed basic, national membership is robust with regard to Hispanic membership.

After discussing membership, I begin to focus on groups. The question I raise is whether the Hispanic group satisfies the conditions of groups that have the function of endowing members with basic memberships. These are the three conditions discussed in chapter four: relevant identification, differentiation and intrinsic identification.

In chapter six, I discuss the first two conditions, relevant identification and differentiation. The third condition, intrinsic identification, will be the subject of the next chapter, seven. Intrinsic identification needs to be isolated because, as we will see, it provides the key for understanding Hispanic identity as a tipping phenomenon.

Does the Hispanic group then satisfy the condition of relevant identification? According to this condition, group members are identified based on properties that make membership in the group basic. I argue that Hispanic membership is not basic because it is an epiphenomenon of national membership. Hence, nationality may satisfy the condition of relevant identification. Nonetheless, since Hispanics cannot be identified according to properties that make membership in the group basic, the Hispanic group does not satisfy the condition at stake.

In terms of the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity and the U.S. Census Bureau, a Hispanic is someone who was born in, say, Mexico, or has a Mexican heritage. Note how the Hispanic category is defined and the criterion by which Hispanics are classified. The definition and criterion are essentially national: a Hispanic is a Mexican, Salvadorian, Argentinean, etc.

When we look for the traits that allow for basic membership among members of the Hispanic group, we always run into traits that are first and foremost national. Now consider that Hispanic membership is not separate from nationality. Rather, as

mentioned, Hispanic membership is defined by virtue of nationality. Given that nationality provides the basis for basic membership, and Hispanic membership is not a separate type of membership, it follows that Hispanic membership is an epiphenomenon of nationality. National membership is then basic. Hispanic membership may sometimes have the appearance of basicness, but the mirage disappears as soon as nationality comes into the picture.

The end result is that national groups satisfy the condition of relevant identification across the board. Nonetheless, since Hispanics cannot be identified according to properties of basic membership, the group does not satisfy the condition of relevant identification.

Now we turn to the second group condition, i.e., differentiation. The kernel of this condition is that basic membership is necessarily connected with the difference-sensitive attributes of groups. In other words, the traits of basic membership are precisely those traits that generally distinguish a particular group from other groups.

Groups that are different from each other have what I call the *status of discernibility*. The status simply means that these groups have a common identity that is unique to them—and thus provides the grounds for distinguishing and recognizing the group. In discussing the condition of differentiation for Hispanics, I concentrate on the question of common identity.

There have been two attempts, one by Jorge Gracia and another by Angelo Corlett, to argue that Hispanics do have a common identity in the relevant way. Essentially the argument is that there is a criterion according to which Hispanics can be classified in a way that provides them with a common identity.

I examine these two attempts and argue that they fail. I point out that there is no satisfactory criterion for classifying Hispanics in a relevant way. Hence, they cannot be said to have a common identity in the sense that matters. As a final consequence, Hispanics do not satisfy the condition of group differentiation.

In chapter seven, I turn to the third condition, intrinsic identification, and look at what Hispanic identity could become—and might be already becoming. I point out that since the Hispanic group does not satisfy the previous conditions, relevant identification and differentiation, it does not satisfy, *a fortiori*, the condition of intrinsic identification.

Intrinsic identification, however, is the key for understanding Hispanic identity as a tipping phenomenon. In this chapter, I advance the hypothesis that a process of external Hispanic identification brings about Hispanic identity-making. If identification and identity-making are internalized by the Hispanic group, Hispanics may become the sort of group that satisfies all relevant conditions. In short, Hispanic membership may become basic and thus be at the center of group members' identities.

Roughly speaking, national identities are the result of top-down identification and bottom-up building blocks. National identities generally emerge when there is a merger between the two elements. The same is true of Hispanic identity—and so in this way there is a parallel between the emergence of national and Hispanic identity.

Given the robustness of national identities among Hispanics, they are a fragmented and incoherent group. This is the picture we get when we look at the bottom-up. But the top-down gives us a different picture. Hispanics are identified as a people with a common identity and heritage. If the bottom-up and top-down merge, Hispanics may indeed become a people with a common identity and heritage.

In order to get an idea of how such a merger has happened historically and may occur again, I examine classical top-down nationalist statements by Jules Michelet and Giuseppe Mazzini. These top-down statements highlight certain themes that nationalists tend to have in common, namely, unity, destiny and sacredness.

Now, we see in the identification of the Hispanic group as a people glimpses of some of these nationalist themes. Hispanics ostensibly have a certain level of unity determined by a common destiny, which has some degree of sacredness. Hispanics then are—in terms of Ernest Renan, another famous nationalist—a *people* with a common *heritage*. All of these themes are the content of identity-making.

The interesting point is that one of the main agents in the process of Hispanic identification and identity-making is the American state. Here I look at how the Presidential Proclamations that open the Hispanic Heritage Month each year contain some of the elements of nationalist top-down identification. Hispanics are identified as a people with a heritage. And this sort of identification may indeed be one of the first steps for Hispanics to actually become a people with a common heritage.

If my observation is correct, it reframes certain questions and concerns regarding potential consequences derived from the presence of Hispanics in American society. I take issue with Samuel Huntington's views in his recent book, *Who are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*.⁵

I argue that despite the legitimacy of the questions he raises, the topic of Hispanic identity is more complex than he assumes. Examining the consequences of Hispanics for American national unity needs to take into account more than Latin American

⁵ (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

immigration. As mentioned, a crucial agent in Hispanic identity-making is the American state. Thus, the American state is the point of departure for examining the potential consequences of Hispanics and their identity for American society.

When one speaks of Hispanics, ostensibly the largest minority in American society, association with another large minority, African-Americans, is almost inevitable. The obvious question is: in what ways are the two groups similar, and in what ways are they different? Comparing these two groups is the subject-matter of chapter eight.

I frame the comparison in terms of what Horace Kallen called “cultural pluralism.” According to the pluralist view, American society consists of a variety of cultural minority groups who deserve public recognition. In other words, America is a federation of cultures, all of whom are equally entitled to having their voices heard in the public sphere.

I challenge the pluralist view. I argue that a comparison between Hispanics and African-Americans shows fundamental differences between the two groups and the significance of membership in each one of them. Essentially, African-American identity is central to members of this group, but the same is not true of Hispanics.

As a consequence, the two groups find themselves in dissimilar situations and so the question of public recognition is different for each one. If I am right, it is hard to see a clear analogy between Hispanics and African-Americans. Thus, not all cultural minorities are the same.

Since I have raised the question of whether Hispanic membership is basic, a fitting place to start the inquiry in this chapter is to raise the question of whether African-American membership is basic. I argue that given a historical process of racial exclusion,

African-American identity is indeed basic. In other words, “race” is one of the essential traits for the self-understanding of African-Americans.

African-Americans are also members of the American nation. I argue that their national membership is generally basic. So they have at least two basic memberships, racial and national.

It so happens, however, that given the same historical process of exclusion that makes African-American membership basic, there is also a tension between racial and national memberships. This tension is expressed in a famous passage by W.E.B. Du Bois as an irreconcilable “twoness.”⁶

We can then start to see the ways in which Hispanics and African-Americans are different. First, there is the matter of basic memberships. African-American membership is basic, whereas, as argued in chapters five and six, Hispanic membership is not. Moreover, African-Americans experience a tension between a racial and a national membership that finds no analogy in the Hispanic group. National membership is basic for Hispanics, but their Hispanic membership is not; and so there is no tension.

Second, we need to look at the topic of political membership. African-Americans are members of the American polity, although (historically speaking) not always full members. In contrast, examining the taxonomy of sub-groups within the Hispanic group shows that many are not members of the American polity.

Third, African-Americans, and their struggle for liberation is essential to the self-image of the American nation. Hispanics, however, are a group of immigrants instead and are thus not essential to the American self-image. It is true that immigration might

⁶ *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989 [1903]), p. 3.

be essential to the American experience, but many immigrant groups, and not only or even primarily Hispanics, are included.

Different situations raise different questions. African-American membership is basic and African-Americans are full members of the American polity. The question for them is whether, given the significance of African-American identity, such an identity ought to be publicly recognized.

Hispanic membership is not basic and not all Hispanics are members of the American polity. But we must also remember that Hispanics are the recipients of an identity in the making—brought about by public recognition. The question here is whether, given the potential consequence of a possible Hispanic membership, this identity ought to be publicly recognized.

I conclude the project in chapter nine with some thoughts on Hispanic identity, American national unity and some possible benefits derived from a potential Hispanic identity. Throughout the project, I speak about what Hispanic identity is and is not—and what it might become. In the final chapter, I take the opportunity to move beyond description and look at some additional questions. I make several tentative suggestions that will be hopefully developed in further projects.

I first look at the question of whether the prospect of Hispanic identity should indeed pose a threat to American national unity. I argue that there are good reasons to believe that national unity is a good on the grounds of efficiency and justice. Thus the weakening of nation-building policies and national unity ought to be a motive of concern.

Nonetheless, despite the possibility of Hispanic identity becoming robust and thus posing a potential threat to national unity, this identity will most likely be absorbed by the

American multicultural ethos. This soft multiculturalism is largely harmless to American national unity. Hence, if Hispanic identity is simply an addition to the melting pot, this identity should indeed be welcomed.

I then look at the question of whether the American nation derives any benefits from a new Hispanic identity. I suggest that ethnic identities may be an instrument of foreign relations and national security—a much ignored dimension that played a part in the Civil Rights movement.⁷ If the U.S. wants to engage Latin America more effectively, and enhance its influence in the continent, it behooves the American state to breed a homegrown identity that could tend an effective bridge towards Latin America.

Before closing this introductory chapter, let me finally say a word about terminology throughout the project. There is a debate on whether the group under consideration should go by the term “Latino” or “Hispanic.” It has become customary to use the two terms interchangeably—a practice adopted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The terminological debate is revealing and important, but it is for the most part ignored in this project. I have decided instead to use a single term, “Hispanic,” for the simple reason that it seems to be more widespread. Although I do not directly address the terminological debate, some of the tensions that such a dispute reflects are indirectly discussed in several sections.

Interestingly, Michael Barone believes that the term “Latino” is more commonly used than “Hispanic.”⁸ I have the opposite impression. But be that as it may, I am more

⁷ For an extended treatment of this dimension, see John Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁸ *The New Americans: How the Melting Pot Can Work Again* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2001), p. 4.

concerned with the phenomenon of group identity as such than with mere terminological tendencies.

Lastly, I use the term “America” to refer to the United States of America and not the whole continent named after Amerigo Vespuccio—which is now spoken of in the Anglo-American world as “the Americas.” When speaking of countries south of the United States, I usually use the term “Latin America”—not a good term, but a widespread one.

CHAPTER 2

MULTICULTURALISM, GROUP RIGHTS AND

THE VALUE OF MEMBERSHIP

According to the kind of multiculturalism proposed by Will Kymlicka, membership in a national or ethnic minority is highly significant and valuable to group members. Membership in a minority nation such as Quebec or the Quechua is so significant that the group's culture should be protected for the sake of its members. Similarly, ethnic groups and identities are very significant and so they should receive public recognition in societies based on the principles of equality and justice. Public recognition could generally take the form of according group-specific rights to certain groups—e.g., bilingual education for Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S.—and promoting social events and venues that make the heritage and values of a certain group visible to the rest of society—e.g., celebrating the Hispanic Heritage Month or building a museum devoted to American Indians.

Is membership, however, in ethnic or national minority groups always highly significant and valuable to group members? I will argue that highly significant and valuable membership is not always confined to national or ethnic minority groups. Membership in some types of groups is highly valuable to group members and is thus a primary source of meaning and direction to these members, but these are not always national or ethnic memberships. My thesis is that membership in different group-types, and not just in national or ethnic minority groups, could be a primary source of meaning

and direction. If my thesis is true, there are several implications, discussed at the end of this chapter, affecting Kymlicka's multicultural model.

1. CULTURAL GROUPS

Let me begin with a general discussion of Kymlicka's views. Kymlicka develops a "sort of 'multiculturalism' which arises from ethnic and national differences." In Kymlicka's multiculturalism, "culture" is used "as synonymous with 'a nation' or 'a people' —that is, as an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history."¹

The way in which Kymlicka uses the term "culture" precludes other usages of the term. One may speak of cultural groups "where 'culture' refers to the distinct customs, perspectives, or ethos of a group or association, as when we talk about 'gay culture' or even a 'bureaucratic culture.'" Similarly, one may speak of cultures in a broad sense and thus say "that all the Western democracies share a common 'culture' —that is, they all share a modern, urban, secular industrialized civilization, in contrast to the feudal, agricultural, and theocratic world of our ancestors."² Kymlicka constrains the usages of the term "culture" and makes it clear that he does not use the term in a non-ethnic sense. The implication is that, as already mentioned, Kymlicka uses "culture" and "multiculturalism" in the context of national and ethnic groups.

¹ *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 18.

² *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 18.

It is important to emphasize, however, that Kymlicka is indeed sensitive to terminological differences and distinctions between specific circumstances. He notes, for example, that “cultural groups” are different from “racial groups.”³ He makes a distinction between the situation and sets of questions that arise from the African-American group in the United States and the aboriginal people in Canada.⁴ I will, in fact, follow Kymlicka’s distinction between racial and cultural groups and focus solely on the latter.⁵

Kymlicka also makes an important distinction between “national minorities” and immigrant or “ethnic” groups.⁶ National minorities are cultural groups that have a “societal culture.”⁷ Societal cultures generally have a concentrated territory, a shared language, and a set of public institutions. Quebec, for instance, is a national minority within Canada because it has a societal culture—a common territory, language, and public culture reflected in governmental institutions, the school system and media. National minorities are generally societal cultures that have been colonized by another group, i.e., a larger nation.

³ *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 22-23.

⁴ *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 135-157.

⁵ I elaborate on the differences between African-Americans, a racial group, and Hispanics, an immigrant group, in chapter eight.

⁶ *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 19. For a discussion on the different kinds of “minority groups,” see Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Citizenship in Culturally Diverse Societies: Issues, Contexts, Concepts,” in *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, eds. W. Kymlicka and W. Norman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 18-24.

⁷ The meaning of “societal cultures” is explained in *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 75-94.

Immigrant or ethnic groups, in contrast, are cultural groups that do not have a societal culture. Since immigrants leave their country of origin and move to a different country, they do not live in a concentrated territory of their own or have a set of public institutions reflecting their own culture. In other words, immigrants do not have a societal culture because they are part of a different society. In the new society, they become an ethnic minority.

Since a national minority such as Quebec is institutionally complete, i.e., has a societal culture, it is entitled to self-government rights. Immigrants, in contrast, leave their societal cultures behind and become part of a new societal culture. By leaving their own societal culture behind, immigrants waive their right to self-government. Nevertheless, since the cultural identity of immigrants is important, they are entitled to recognition in the host society. Immigrants integrate into a new societal culture, but the host societal culture must make an effort to accommodate the cultural expression of immigrants. National and ethnic minorities are then entitled to different group-specific rights. National minorities are entitled to self-government rights, whereas ethnic groups are entitled to what Kymlicka has called “polyethnic” rights.⁸

Despite the differences in circumstances between national and ethnic minorities and the sorts of rights to which they are entitled, the two groups have an important attribute in common. National and ethnic minorities are each *cultural* groups. We must then think of cultural groups as a group-type that encompasses groups in different conditions.

⁸ He later calls them “accommodation rights.” *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 51.

It is hard to individuate cultural groups, but they are generally intergenerational groups that have a cluster of properties in common. I have already noted the way in which Kymlicka uses the term “culture.” A cultural group is an intergenerational community, institutionally complete, which shares a common territory, language and history. As indicated above, not all cultural groups are institutionally complete or have a common territory—these are, in fact, the traits that distinguish national and ethnic minorities. Cultural groups, however, are intergenerational communities that share some relevant features, e.g., language and history. We should then think of cultures as groups with a cluster of properties. Some cultures are institutionally complete and some are not. Cultural groups might have a common territory, but this is not always the case. It might even be pointed out that cultural groups such as Hispanics or Asian-Americans—if they are indeed cultural groups in the relevant sense—do not have a common language. Nevertheless, Hispanics and Asian-Americans could presumably be intergenerational communities that have a common origin and history.

Kymlicka claims that cultural groups are very important. The significance of cultural groups derives from the fact that they give group members meaning and direction. Cultural attachments give people a set of values and a sense of the world. Kymlicka sustains that “the causes of this [cultural] attachment lie deep in the human condition, tied up with the way humans as cultural creatures need to make sense of their world....”⁹ Note that human beings make sense of the world by virtue of their cultural attachments.

⁹ *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 90.

Cultural attachments also provide a framework for making meaningful decisions. The importance of cultural membership lies in the following: “we decide how to live our lives by situating ourselves in [certain] cultural narratives.” Similarly, “cultural structures” are important “because it’s only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value.”¹⁰ The upshot is that membership in a certain type of group is a precondition for making significant and worthwhile choices. Cultural attachments, which must be understood ethnically or nationally, are then significant because they endow group members with maps of meaning and direction.

Cultural attachments are so significant that they ought to be publicly recognized and respected. According to Kymlicka, there seems to be a dilemma between two different principles: “people are owed respect as citizens and as members of cultural communities.”¹¹ The problem is that upholding citizens’ rights sometimes seems to violate the recognition of membership in a cultural community—and thus the apparent conflict between individual rights and group rights.¹² Part of Kymlicka’s project is minimally to show that these two principles do not preclude each other—as liberals sometimes have assumed. There is yet a more robust claim in Kymlicka’s project: respect towards people qua citizens often *requires* respect towards their cultural membership.

¹⁰ *Liberalism*, p. 165.

¹¹ *Liberalism*, p. 151.

¹² Kymlicka discusses this dilemma in *Liberalism*, pp. 151-157.

One of Kymlicka's discussions helps us to further understand the significance of the groups he and similar multiculturalists have in mind. In discussing recent literature on multiculturalism and minority rights, Kymlicka identifies a position that goes under the name of "liberal culturalism." Liberal culturalism encompasses "liberal nationalism" and "liberal multiculturalism." There are relevant differences between liberal nationalism and multiculturalism, but for our purposes, the point of concern is the way in which liberal culturalism is characterized.

Liberal culturalism is the view that liberal democratic states should not only uphold the familiar set of common civil and political rights of citizenship which are protected in all liberal democracies; they must also adopt various group-specific rights or policies which are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and needs of *ethnocultural* groups [my emphasis].¹³

We note in this passage that group-specific rights are intended to recognize and accommodate the identities and needs of a particular type of group: ethnocultural. The obvious question is, why this particular type of group? Kymlicka himself raises the following questions: "but why is it important to recognize and accommodate ethnocultural identities and practices? Why does it matter whether society is multiculturalist?"¹⁴

Three types of positions are then described. First, there is the "identity" view. "On this view, there is a deep human need to have one's identity recognized and

¹³ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 42.

¹⁴ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 47.

respected by others. To have one's identity ignored or misrecognized by society is a profound harm to one's sense of self-respect." Second, there is the "freedom," "autonomy," or "context of choice" view.¹⁵ "On this view, one's culture determines the boundaries of the imaginable, so that if the options available in one's culture diminish, so too does one's autonomy."¹⁶ The last position is that of "intrinsically valuable diverse cultures." "Different cultures are seen as the repository of unique forms of human creativity and accomplishment, and to let cultures die out is to lose something of intrinsic value."¹⁷

It is important to highlight that the point of departure for all three positions—"identity," "context of choice" and "intrinsic cultural value"—is that ethnocultural membership has a degree of significance that other types of memberships do not generally have.

2. THE CLAIMS OF MULTICULTURALISM

The sort of multiculturalism I have been discussing makes two claims. The first claim is that cultural membership—in some particular instances, at least—ought to be publicly recognized by means of, say, group-specific rights, whether self-government rights or polyethnic rights. The second claim is that cultural membership has a degree of significance that other types of memberships generally do not have—which is one of the reasons why cultural membership ought to be publicly recognized. In what follows, I

¹⁵ Presumably, Kymlicka's own position, although he also seems to endorse the "identity" view.

¹⁶ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 47.

¹⁷ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 48.

will first focus on the second claim, i.e., the value of cultural membership. Then I will examine some of the implications affecting the first claim, i.e., group-specific rights.

The multiculturalist claim on the value of cultural membership entails two points. First, cultural membership is a primary source of meaning and direction in the lives of group members. Note that in the multiculturalist outlook under consideration cultural membership is not only a *significant* but also a *primary* source of meaning and direction. Many memberships might be highly significant. For example, someone's membership in the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Rifle Association, a Mason Lodge or the Eastern Orthodox Church might be highly significant. The type of cultural membership, however, the multiculturalist has in mind is different from these other memberships. This particular cultural membership has a degree of significance that other memberships generally do not have. Thus the type of membership the multiculturalist has in mind is a primary source of meaning and direction for group members.

The second point is that cultural groups are national or ethnic minority groups—a cluster of groups Kymlicka refers to as “ethnocultural” groups. It is necessary always to bear in mind that in the multiculturalist outlook under consideration “culture” is understood in terms of “national” or “ethnic” minorities. The sorts of groups that come to mind are those that generally have a common history, set of beliefs and customs, and language. As noted earlier, these groups might be territorially concentrated, but they may not have a homeland. They might also have a set of public institutions, e.g., school system, but not necessarily. So the cluster of groups under description includes groups like the Basque in Spain, which has a homeland and a set of public institutions—albeit not having a state of its own. Also included are groups such as immigrants in the United

States, Canada or Australia who do not have a homeland or public institutions, not even perhaps a common language; but they have a common history, beliefs and customs.

Given these two points, the multiculturalist view under examination is that membership in an ethnic or national minority is a primary source of meaning and direction for group members. The multiculturalist reasons thus: (a) membership in certain groups is a primary source of meaning and direction; (b) these groups are generally ethnic or national minorities—henceforth “ethnocultural” groups for short; lastly it follows then that (c) membership in ethnocultural groups is a primary source of meaning and direction.

I now wish to raise the following question: should we single out ethnocultural membership as the preferred type of group membership representing a primary source of meaning and direction? In examining this question, I will suggest that the claims of multiculturalism must not be conflated. I agree with the claim that membership in certain groups is a primary source of meaning and direction. Nonetheless, the claim that *ethnocultural* membership must be singled out as a primary source of meaning and direction is sometimes hard to justify. For my suggestion to be sound, I would have to show that (i) there are types of groups in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction for group members, but (ii) the groups at stake are not necessarily ethnocultural groups.

3. GROUP-TYPES AND THE VALUE OF MEMBERSHIP

The case against privileging ethnocultural membership as a primary source of meaning and direction has been made against Kymlicka and the multicultural outlook in

general. Brian Walker, for example, identifies two non-ethnocultural groups in which membership has presumably been a primary source of meaning and direction for some people: the “family farm” and the “urban neighborhood.”

He points out that “for millennia, most people lived an agricultural life, which had its own folklore and culture, with knowledge and narratives passed down from generation to generation.” With the development of agricultural technology, rendering family farming untenable, farmers were forced to assimilate themselves into the urban lifestyle. The result is that urbanization “marked the loss of a rich culture, and generations of people were cast adrift in a foreign world. The disappearance of the family farm marked the death of a lifeway and of a structure of sensibility.”¹⁸

Similarly, Walker uses the disappearance of “urban neighborhoods” as “another example of a swift change in institutional structure that has devastating effects on cultural membership and on the life-chances of the people who rely on it.” The reason for such a consequence is that “neighborhoods play a crucial role as carriers of culture. They solidify a sense of identity and they serve as a site for groups to create a sense of community and security in a frequently hostile environment.”¹⁹

The first point in these examples is that the decline of certain groups has grievous consequences for group members because the flourishing of group members is bound with the flourishing of the group itself. Note that group flourishing is essential for members’ flourishing, but why so? Presumably, the answer is because group

¹⁸ “Modernity and Cultural Vulnerability: Should Ethnicity Be Privileged,” in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. R. Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 145-146.

¹⁹ “Modernity and Cultural Vulnerability,” p. 146.

membership endows members with maps of meaning and direction. If membership in group G is essential for members' flourishing, then membership in G is most likely more significant than other memberships. Membership in G is then a primary source of meaning and direction.

Note, however, a second point in the examples above: family farms and urban farms are non-ethnocultural groups. If membership in family farms and urban farms could indeed be a primary source of meaning and direction, it follows that non-ethnocultural memberships could be a primary source of meaning and direction.

The observation I have just made suggests the view that we should be impartial towards the *types* of identity groups that are worthy of recognition and protection. The implication is that different types of groups may be equally valuable—or more precisely, membership in different types of groups may be a primary source of meaning and direction. So Thomas Pogge observes that

whatever we demand from a just and fair political process for ethnic minorities, we should also demand for any other minorities: if enough citizens share a certain identification and are willing to form a coalition for the sake of securing representation for themselves in the legislature, then they should be able to gain such representation, *irrespective of the type of their identification* [my emphasis].²⁰

The claim in the passage just quoted is concerned with the recognition of minority rights for non-ethnocultural groups in a fair and equal system—a thesis that is defended

²⁰ Thomas Pogge, "Group Rights and Ethnicity," in *Ethnicity and Group Rights*, eds. I. Shapiro and W. Kymlicka (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 200.

in explicit contrast with Kymlicka's view. What I wish to emphasize, however, is the assumption that whatever the merits of ethnocultural groups, these groups *per se* should not be privileged before the law. The relevant implication for our purposes is that ethnocultural groups should not be necessarily privileged because membership in ethnocultural groups might be valuable just as membership in other types of groups might be valuable as well.

The point to be highlighted in the discussion so far is that we should not necessarily think of ethnocultural groups as a *special type* of group because membership in groups other than ethnocultural ones might also be a primary source of meaning and direction.

4. MEMBERSHIP AND GROUP FUNCTION

Membership in ethnocultural groups is not the only primary source of meaning and direction. The question then is: how could we think of the relevant kind of membership without necessarily linking such memberships with ethnocultural groups? My suggestion is that a modal framework pointing to the functional quality of groups will help achieve two purposes. First, we could preserve the view that membership in certain groups is a primary source of meaning and direction. And second, we could also move away from categories such as "ethnicity" and "nationality," namely, the vocabulary of ethnocultural groups and multiculturalism. It is my view that such a language ends up creating more confusion, instead of contributing to an understanding of what highly valuable membership entails.

The guiding idea of the framework in mind is that highly valuable membership is based on the function that a group has in the lives of group members. As a result, we must think of groups in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction not as group-*types*, e.g., religious, national, ethnic, racial, etc, but rather as groups that have a certain *function* in the lives of group members, i.e., the function of endowing members with relevant memberships.²¹

Think of group-type A in a possible scenario PS1. Membership in A is a primary source of meaning and direction since membership in A will tend to be more valuable than other memberships. Now imagine that, in possible scenario PS2, membership in group-type B—and not membership in A—is, in fact, a primary source of meaning and direction. A in PS1 has the function of endowing group members with the relevant membership, whereas B in PS2 has the same function.

To illustrate the point just made with social categories, consider an instance in which membership in a national minority group, e.g., Quebec, is a primary source of meaning and direction for some group member. In this case, Quebecois membership has a degree of significance that other memberships generally do not have. Now imagine another instance in which membership in a religious group, e.g., Muslim, is a primary source of meaning and direction for some group member who also happens to be a Quebecois. In this second instance, the significance of Muslim membership is higher than the significance of other types of memberships, e.g., Quebecois membership. Membership in two different types of groups, national and religious, might be a primary source of meaning and direction for two different people. The two group-types, national

²¹ I will turn to a characterization of groups that have this function in chapter four.

and religious, might then have the function of endowing group members with the relevant membership in different scenarios.

It is indeed true that religious impulses are often connected with nationalism. The people of a nation can also be the people of a deity or a set of deities.²² That groups of people belong to deities has been an old theme in human history. There is, for example, a Sumerian poem from 2000 BC expressing grief because the city of Ur has been conquered by the Amorites and Elamites. The poem cries out to the god of the city, *Nanna*: “As for me, the woman, the city has been destroyed, my house too has been destroyed; O Nanna, Ur has been destroyed, its people have been dispersed.”²³ Using more modern examples, we can think of the American “city on a hill,” or movements such as the Afrikaans or Zionism. Truly, nations are often sacred or chosen communities and one can sometimes see how religious metaphors are connected with national identities, e.g., the Virgin of Guadalupe is a crucial element of Mexican “national identity.”

By the same token, however, religious affiliation can be trans-ethnic or trans-national, or independent from someone’s current ethnic affiliation or nationality. Religion could help us to understand modern nationalism, but religion is also an older phenomenon than modern nationalism. The point is that religious affiliation and national membership do not always overlap. We can then think of situations in which religious

²² For an interesting and helpful discussion on the inter-relation between religion and nationality, see Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²³ *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*, eds. B. Arnold and B. Beyer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 225.

membership is a primary source of meaning and direction, whereas ethnocultural membership is not.²⁴ Consider a Dominican monk in California who happens to be a member of the Hispanic group; or a Buddhist monk in Tibet—a minority nation within China. It is quite possible that membership in the Dominican or Buddhist communities is a primary source of meaning and direction. It is also quite possible that the Hispanic or Tibetan memberships of these monks—or other ethnocultural memberships—will be of relatively little importance.

Imagine also a Jehovah's Witness for whom her Kingdom membership is preeminent in comparison with her worldly ethnocultural membership. Ethnocultural membership for a Jehovah's Witness could not only be relatively unimportant, but certain views and practices linked with ethnocultural identities, e.g., saluting or pledging allegiance to a particular symbol, rituals that entail dancing or intoxication, may be associated with idolatry—a grievous sin.

Turning now to other group-types, consider a situation in which the identity of a certain small group does not coincide with the larger national identity of the state that the smaller group inhabits. Think of a Yanomami in "Venezuelan" or "Brazilian" territory. The Yanomami will presumably see her place in the world through the lens of her

²⁴ For purposes of analytical consideration one can tend to be emphatic when distinguishing different types of groups, e.g., "national," "religious," "social class," etc. In reality, however, groups in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction are generally highly complex and often difficult to categorize. I then agree with Steven Grosby when he points out that we may distinguish nationality from religion; but he then observes that these distinctions "vary historically and by civilization." "Nationality and Religion," in *Understanding Nationalism*, eds. M. Guibernau and J. Hutchinson (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), p. 104.

Yanomami membership. The meaning of the term “Yanomami” and what membership in the group entails is explained by the anthropologist Jacques Lizot:

We can better understand the tendency of ethnic groups to call themselves by a name that, in their language, means simply ‘man,’ ‘folk,’ or something to that effect. That is very precisely the meaning of the word *yanomami*. The ethnic group is the central focus of the human universe; it is humanity par excellence, around which everything must necessarily converge or gravitate. For a Yanomami, anything that doesn’t belong to his own sociocultural world is necessarily alien, *nab?*. The words *yanomami* and *nab?* form both a pair and an opposition.²⁵

The Yanomami would certainly qualify as an “ethnocultural” group. In fact, these are the sorts of groups Kymlicka often has in mind.²⁶ Imagine, however, someone who is born from Yanomami parents but is brought up in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, or Sao Paulo, Brazil. The person in mind attends the public school system in Caracas and one of the national universities, Universidad Simón Bolívar.²⁷

What is her *primary* source of meaning and direction: her *Yanomami* or her *Venezuelan* membership? The multiculturalist will be inclined to say that her Yanomami membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. My view, however, is that

²⁵ *Tales of the Yanomami: Daily Life in the Venezuelan Forest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 2-3.

²⁶ See *Liberalism*, p. 136.

²⁷ The two groups being compared in this example—Venezuela, a nation-state, and the Yanomami, an ethnic minority—are in some sense “cultural” groups. But we must remember that when multiculturalists speak of cultural groups, they often refer to minorities and not nation-states.

either group membership—or another group-type membership—might be a primary source of meaning and direction.

At least four scenarios are possible. First, her Yanomami membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. Second, her Venezuelan membership is a primary source. In the third scenario, her Yanomami and Venezuelan memberships are competing and conflicting primary sources of meaning and direction. In the fourth scenario, neither her Yanomami nor her Venezuelan memberships are primary sources because a different group-type membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. The point is that different groups might have the function of endowing this person with the relevant membership.

I have so far mentioned “national,” “religious” and “ethnic” groups as types of groups in which membership might be a primary source of meaning and direction. Other groups one might consider include “political parties,” “continental groups,” or “social classes.” Imagine someone growing up in a communist family in Latin America around 1958 strongly influenced by the Pan-American ideology characteristic of authors such as José Martí and Ernesto “Che” Guevara. In the latter scenario, we must bear in mind that events such as the Cuban Revolution created an atmosphere of “commonality,” “unity” and “solidarity” in the struggle for liberation across the *Latin American* continent. In this circumstance, it is plausible to believe that the struggle for liberation is associated with a large continental group in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. Thus, in words of José Martí: “*our America* is to show itself as it is, *one in spirit and intent*, swift conqueror of a suffocating past, stained only by the enriching

blood drawn from hands that struggle to clear away the ruins, and from the scars left upon us by our masters [my emphasis].”²⁸

Much to the disappointment of Marxists in the Second International, “social class” did not have the strength to pull the proletariat of different nationalities together.²⁹ During the sixties however, the “social class” factor did seem to play an important role in Latin America—although perhaps still not strong enough to override the “national” factor. But recent conflicts between the “rich” and the “poor” in Venezuela, and other Latin American countries, seem to be showing that membership in a “social class” could be a primary source of meaning and direction for class members.

The purpose of my discussion is to highlight the fact that membership in different group-types, in different scenarios, could be a primary source of meaning and direction. Thus different group-types might have the function of endowing group members with the relevant membership. As a result, the value and significance of group membership is not based on the type of group *per se*, but rather the function of the group in the lives of members.

In order to avoid giving what might seem like an oversimplified account, let me now make some clarifications. If different types of groups in different scenarios might potentially have memberships that are a primary source of meaning and direction for members, then two questions arise: (a) is there an unlimited range of such groups?; and

²⁸ “Our America,” in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values and the Search for Identity*, eds. J. Gracia and E. Millán-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 251.

²⁹ In other words, communism did not fulfill its 1848 prediction that the common interests of the proletariat would supersede regional or national interests. See Karl Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York, Penguin Books, 1983), p. 218.

(b) how do we recognize groups in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction?

With regard to (a), different group-types, hypothetically speaking, could have the function of endowing members with the relevant membership. We could imagine any group-type from nations to aficionado clubs. But we know that membership in some groups tends to be a primary source of meaning and direction, whereas membership in other groups does not. We know that national memberships tend to be very significant, whereas membership in aficionado clubs does not often have the same degree of significance as national memberships. How do we know about these tendencies?

With regard to (b), suppose that someone might be a member in two or more groups in which membership tends to be a primary source of meaning and direction, e.g., a religious group and a nation. How do we know whether those memberships are competing and conflicting sources of meaning and direction, or whether one of the memberships is indeed more significant than the other?

The answer to these two questions is a matter of *empirical evidence*. If we want to inquire, for example, whether a particular membership is a primary source of meaning and direction, we must not begin by looking at the traits of the group or the group-type *per se*. We must look at the function the group has in the lives of its members.

Consider, for instance, the “Asian-American” group and identity. If we want to know the status of Asian-American membership, we will not get very far by looking at the group-type—which could be thought of as an “ethnocultural” type. We must consider instead whether the group endows group members with the relevant membership or not.

Accordingly, we will be able to find out whether membership in the Asian-American group is a primary source of meaning and direction or not.

5. WHY MULTICULTURALISM?

I have challenged the notion that ethnocultural groups should be singled out as the preferred group-type in which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. I have suggested instead that different group-types, in different possible scenarios, might have the function of endowing members with such a membership.

Now, if the claim is right that membership in different types of groups, and not just ethnocultural ones, can be a primary source of meaning and direction, there are three implications for Kymlicka's multicultural theory of group recognition. The implications I discuss are based on the premise that when membership in a certain group is a primary source of meaning and direction, the group, under some conditions, could potentially be accorded group-specific rights by the state. This premise is one that I have borrowed from Kymlicka himself.

The first implication is that different group-types ought to be the potential recipients of public recognition, i.e., different group-types could be potentially accorded group-specific rights. As we will see, however, the notion of publicly recognizing different group-types is contrary to Kymlicka's theory.

We must remember at this point that the primacy of ethnocultural membership is not in Kymlicka's view the only rationale for group recognition. Certain disadvantaged groups ought to be recognized and be granted rights because a society is based on principles of justice. But group recognition on grounds of justice assumes that

membership in these groups has a special status—for why recognize disadvantaged groups unless membership in these groups is of a special kind?³⁰ Kymlicka does not believe that *all* disadvantaged groups should receive recognition. Take, for example, two groups: lawyers and musicians. Lawyers generally have greater access to a distributional good such as salaries than musicians do. So in a certain sense musicians are disadvantaged with regard to lawyers. Nonetheless, Kymlicka’s multiculturalism does not contemplate musicians—presumably because membership in the group of musicians is not generally thought to be a primary source of meaning and direction.³¹

Let us grant that if membership in a disadvantaged ethnocultural group is indeed of the relevant kind, then it might be necessary to recognize the group and accommodate its needs. But now suppose that membership in a religious community, e.g., Muslims, is a primary source of meaning and direction for some group of Middle-Eastern immigrants to the U.S.³² Let us also point out that the Muslim faith is indeed disadvantaged in

³⁰ According to Kymlicka, “if state institutions fail to recognize and respect people’s culture and identity, the result can be serious damage to people’s self-respect and sense of agency.” Then he adds: “if we accept either or both of these points, then we can see minority rights not as unfair privileges or invidious forms of discrimination, but as compensation for unfair disadvantages, and so consistent with, and even required by, justice.” *Politics in the Vernacular*, pp. 32-33. Note that minority rights are necessary not only because they compensate for certain disadvantages. They are rather necessary because they compensate for disadvantages that arise when people’s self-respect and sense of agency are damaged.

³¹ Kymlicka would also probably point out that the group of musicians does not have a societal culture or that being a musician is not a precondition for making meaningful choices.

³² According to Yvonne Haddad, “for Christians, Muslims, and Jews from the Middle East, one’s religious affiliation determines one’s identity. A person is born, grows up, and dies in a specific religious community.” “Maintaining the Faith of our Fathers: Dilemmas of Religious Identity in the Christian and

comparison with the Anglo-Protestant majority in American society. Should the American state then specifically accommodate Muslims by recognizing group-specific rights in public life (e.g., celebrate Muslim holidays and allocate public funds for Muslim schools)? Given the presumed religious neutrality of the American state, the answer is negative. Kymlicka's answer is also negative.³³

If the criteria for public recognition and minority-group rights are relevant membership and disadvantage with regard to a majority group, then Kymlicka's theory is not wholly consistent. According to Kymlicka, ethnocultural membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. Additionally, when an ethnocultural minority is vulnerable to a majority society, the minority group ought to be recognized and protected by means of group-specific rights. Recognition and protection require the state to put aside any ethnocultural neutrality pretensions, and be in some measure "ethno-conscious."³⁴ But why should the state be ethno-conscious and not religious-conscious or social class-conscious—assuming that all these groups satisfy the criteria for public recognition and protection? It would seem that different group-types, and not just ethnocultural ones, ought to be the potential recipients of public recognition.

Muslim Arab-American Communities," in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. E. McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 65.

³³ Kymlicka claims that the idea that liberal-democratic states "are ethnoculturally neutral is manifestly false." But "the religion model is altogether misleading as an account of the relationship between the liberal-democratic state and ethnocultural groups." The reason is presumably because the state should be neutral with regard to religion, but not with regard to ethnocultural groups. *Politics in the Vernacular*, pp. 23-25.

³⁴ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 32.

Second, the view that ethnocultural groups always ought to be publicly recognized is put into question. Group-types other than ethnocultural ones merit recognition. But now a different question arises. Regardless of the merits of other group-types, do ethnocultural groups *always* have merits for public recognition? Kymlicka's answer is presumably positive. Membership in ethnocultural groups is a precondition for self-respect, identity, and being able to make meaningful choices. Thus in the case of immigrant groups, for instance, Kymlicka's view is that

we need to ensure that the common institutions in which immigrants are pressured to integrate provide the same degree of respect, recognition and accommodation of the identities and practices of immigrants as they traditionally have of the identities and practices of the majority group.³⁵

Now, drawing on our earlier example, suppose that for a group of Middle Eastern immigrants to the U.S., membership in a religious group is a primary source of meaning and direction. The situation I have in mind requires that the state recognizes the Muslim identity of group members, which, as we saw, is not really contemplated in Kymlicka's view. Should the state, however, recognize the *Arab* identity of group members? A positive answer would seem to be plausible if "Arab" is construed ethnoculturally. But suppose that the Arab identity of the group at stake is of lesser value than its Muslim identity. If this is the case, the type of membership the state intends to recognize and protect, i.e., Arab, is not a primary source of meaning and direction for group members. And if membership is not of the relevant kind, this seems to be a case in which the ethnocultural identity of a group does not have enough merits for public recognition.

³⁵ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 30.

One might object that the religious identity of Arab immigrants is interwoven with their ethnocultural identity. Thus, recognition of ethnocultural identity requires admitting overtly religious elements.³⁶ The observation, however, ignores the fact that the group of Arabs is not coextensive with the group of Muslims—not all Arabs, for instance are Muslims and the group of Muslims is greater than the group of Arabs.

Suppose the state recognizes the religious practices of Arabs on the basis that these practices are part of their ethnocultural identity. Still, non-Arabs who happen to profess the Muslim faith are not entitled to public recognition because their religious identity is *not* attached to an ethnocultural membership. Note, however, that the last claim seems quite odd—for we would expect that if the state recognizes the religious practices of some Muslims it should then recognize the practices of all Muslims.

Let me explain the point differently. Two sets of people share the attribute of relevant membership in a religious group. The two sets, however, have a differential attribute: ethnocultural membership, i.e., one set is Arabic and the other is Anglo-American. Given that the two sets have relevant memberships in a religious group, why then should recognition be extended to a certain set and not to the other one on the grounds of ethnocultural membership? If it is not clear that ethnocultural membership is

³⁶ I am not sure if Kymlicka would endorse this connection or not. He takes pains to point out that societal cultures are not distinguished by religious elements. He says, for instance: “I call it a *societal* culture to emphasize that it involves a common language and social institutions, rather than common religious beliefs, family customs, or personal lifestyles.” *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 25.

a primary source of meaning and direction for the set of Arabs, as opposed to Anglo-Americans, I do not think there is a good way to answer the question.³⁷

The third implication, and perhaps the most important one, is that given the variety of memberships that could potentially count as a primary source of meaning and direction, it is difficult to speak of a multicultural “model.” Kymlicka’s aim is to “clarify the basic building blocks of a liberal approach to minority rights.”³⁸ These building blocks consist of cultural diversity *patterns* in Western liberal democracies. The patterns Kymlicka has in mind are minority nations and immigrants, which give rise to multinational or polyethnic states.³⁹ Although Kymlicka makes special mention of the Canadian case, e.g., aboriginal groups and the Quebecois, it is clear that his project is to develop a general multicultural theory for liberal democracies. One of the major themes in *Politics in the Vernacular*, for instance, is the general success of certain minority-rights patterns in multicultural societies.⁴⁰

³⁷ The state could also find itself in the dangerous business of judging and creating group-type hierarchies. On this point, see Thomas Pogge’s helpful discussion about equality and group value. “Accommodation Rights for Hispanics in the United States,” in *Language Rights and Political Theory*, eds. W. Kymlicka and A. Patten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 109.

³⁸ *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 2.

³⁹ *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 11-17.

⁴⁰ See p. 3. The aim to provide a general theory becomes evident in Kymlicka’s attempt to answer his critics. One of the criticisms against Kymlicka’s minority rights theory is that too much weight is put on two paradigmatic cases: minority nations and immigrants—who are generally legal immigrants. Kymlicka acknowledges that several groups are left out in his theory, most notably African-Americans, because they do not fit any of the paradigmatic cases (see *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 24, and *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 56). Nonetheless, he points out that “the fact remains that immigrants and national

I suggested earlier that distinguishing groups and memberships that count as a primary source of meaning and direction is a matter of empirical evidence. Based on my previous discussion, I suspect that the empirical evidence in different societies is mixed—we could minimally count three group-types: ethnocultural, religious, and social class. It seems to me that this observation casts doubts on Kymlicka’s multicultural *model* for Western countries. If membership in different group-types is a primary source of meaning and direction, different groups should ostensibly be recognized because of the value such groups have for their members. In other words, different group-types should potentially be accorded group-specific rights. It is then difficult to speak of a uniform multicultural model across Western societies.

I have assumed for each of the implications above that groups could potentially be accorded group-specific rights by the state, under some conditions, when membership in these groups is a primary source of meaning and direction. If we take the assumption seriously, it would seem that we need a model of diversity that is more diverse than Kymlicka’s model. But what if the assumption I have taken for granted is not entirely sound?

Let us think for a moment what a more diverse model of diversity would entail. First, policy-makers would need to determine the group-types in which membership is of

minorities form the most common types of ethnocultural pluralism in Western democracies.” *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 57. Moreover, “insofar as secure membership in a viable societal culture is a precondition for the sort of freedom and equality that liberalism aspires to, then the immigrant/national minority models are worth considering, even if this would require both the majority and minority to rethink their self-identities.” *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 58.

the relevant kind.⁴¹ Second, the degree of disadvantage of each group with regard to other groups will have to be determined. Third, assuming that there are several disadvantaged groups with relevant memberships, which ones should be accorded group-specific rights? Not all of groups could be publicly recognized because then nation-building policies would not have much coherence, so some groups will be accorded rights whereas others will be left out.

These considerations would seem to make the task of the state very complicated. Is it really practical to expect for policy-makers to determine the group-types in which membership is of the relevant kind? Should we expect them to also determine which groups ought to be accorded group-specific rights? Additionally, do we want policy-makers to make determinations about the value of group membership? Questions of this sort make me somewhat skeptical about group rights.

Kymlicka believes there is a growing consensus regarding group rights. According to Kymlicka, “liberal culturalism has arguably become the dominant position in the literature today, and most debates are about how to develop and refine the liberal culturalist position, rather than whether to accept it in the first place.” Liberal culturalists believe that the state “must also adopt various group-specific rights or policies [in addition to individual civil and political rights] which are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and needs of ethnocultural groups.”⁴²

⁴¹ I am assuming for the sake of argument that there are group-types such that membership is a primary source of meaning and direction for most group members. But this picture can get somewhat complicated. Is Jewish membership, for instance, of the relevant kind? The answer will vary for different people.

⁴² *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 42.

But I am not entirely convinced that we should accept multiculturalism and the group-rights paradigm instead of, say, the principle of neutrality. Given the skepticism I have expressed about the exclusive value of membership in ethnocultural groups, I believe that the matter is, to say the least, still an open one.

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I argued two points. First, ethnocultural membership should not be privileged as a primary source of meaning and direction. I accept Kymlicka's thesis that membership in some group-type is a primary source of meaning and direction. But then I argue against Kymlicka that the type of membership that constitutes a primary source of meaning and direction is not always or necessarily confined to ethnocultural groups.

Based on the first point, I also argued a second point. Kymlicka's model of group rights and diversity is not diverse enough for the sake of recognizing group-types other than ethnocultural ones. If the rationale for the public recognition of groups hinges on the fact that membership in a group-type is of a special kind, then the spectrum of group-types that merit public recognition should be broader and include more than just ethnocultural groups. The corollary, as mentioned, is that Kymlicka's model of diversity ought to be more diverse than what he contemplates. I incidentally suggested that the necessity for more diversity makes me skeptical about the prospects for coherent multicultural policies.

In the remainder of this project, I will not have much to say about group-rights or multicultural policies as such. In other words, I will not pursue the second point any further. My attention will rather focus on the claims made with regard to first point, i.e.,

membership as a primary source of meaning and direction and group-types. I will then turn to a discussion of membership and relevant groups in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 3

BASIC MEMBERSHIP AND THE CENTRALITY OF IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, I suggested that membership could be a primary source of meaning and direction in different group-types. The question that arises now is this: if membership in different group-types could be a primary source of meaning and direction, when is membership of the relevant kind? In other words, under what conditions is membership a primary source of meaning and direction?

In this chapter, I will discuss membership. I wish to suggest that membership is a primary source of meaning and direction when it is central to members' identities. I will begin in the first section with a discussion on the general meaning of identity. In the second section, I will introduce and discuss the notion of *basic membership*; and then finally, in the third section, a few remarks about the value of membership will be made.

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE AN IDENTITY?

In order to speak of "identity," we must know what is meant by the term. We speak of our identities as something highly significant for personhood, but what does it mean for a person to have an identity?

Let me first suggest that having an identity means to possess a certain understanding of who I am, which entails a certain grasp of the traits that characterize me as a human being. I may characterize myself as a baseball fan, a clever person, a Jamaican, an opera lover, a Muslim, or a high school student; and in such an act of characterization, I am articulating self-understanding. When I am able to characterize

who I am, and thus show a degree of self-understanding, I may be said to have an identity to myself.¹

My first point implies a second characteristic of identity that must be made explicit. We have seen that I show self-understanding by characterizing myself: I am an opera lover, a Buddhist, an office manager, a sad person, an athlete, etc. Note that characterization mostly entails association with and membership in a group.

The understanding of who I am is often relational, namely, connected with a set of people.² For instance, in characterizing myself as an athlete I am saying that I belong to the set of athletes, which means that I have certain features in common with other athletes.³ Within the set of athletes, I may in turn be a member of the subset of soccer players. Even as a soccer player, I could be a member of the subset of goalkeepers, etc. What I wish to illustrate is that the characterization of who I am, i.e., self-understanding, generally entails group membership.

¹ Human beings are capable of self-understanding because of their level of cognitive complexity. I take it then that trees, ants, and dogs do not have identities to themselves. Since they do not possess the cognitive complexity necessary for developing self-understanding, it is not possible to say that they have identities in the same sense that human beings do.

² For relevant literature on the connection between self-understanding and self-knowledge with groups, see Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 205-220; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 41-92; and G.H. Mead *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

³ Properly speaking, identity consists of having traits in common with other members of the group. I belong to a group and thus derive an identity from such a group because of traits that, in some respects, make me identical with other members.

Descriptions of who I am will commonly join me to a set or class of people,⁴ and thus the understanding of who I am is often coupled with membership. The main point is that self-understanding is tied with groups. Such a connection highlights the fact that the collective dimension is an integral part of the human experience.

What does it mean then for a person to have an identity? I have so far pointed out two aspects of identity-bearing: *self-understanding* and *group membership*. To have an identity is to possess an understanding of who I am, indicated by characterization, that makes me a member of a group.

In order to clarify my view of identity, let me make a distinction between the *phenomenon* and the *vocabulary* of identity. Truly, the vocabulary of “identity” is relatively new in human history and seemingly unique to the modern world. The ways in which modern people are able to think in and formulate detailed accounts of who they are and how they view themselves, seem to be absent in, for example, some pre-modern societies.⁵ One might therefore be inclined to suggest that the phenomenon of identity is a modern one. I wish to suggest, however, that it is possible to speak of identities in pre-

⁴ The exception, of course, is belonging to a set with only one member: the father of Mary, or the Fire Chief of Boston. But even in this case one may point out that the connection is with a broader set, i.e., the set of fathers or Fire Chiefs.

⁵ For an interesting discussion of this point, see Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 26-31.

modern and non-modern societies, which is why it is essential to draw a distinction between the phenomenon and the vocabulary.⁶

It may be the case that a member of the Yanomami⁷ tribe in the Amazon, a non-modern community, does not readily give an account of his or her identity as a Yanomami. It would be wrong to say, however, that the Yanomami does not possess a certain degree or capacity for self-understanding that makes her a member of a group.

Suppose that I, a Yanomami, am able to characterize myself as someone who believes in certain myths and carries out tasks such as parenting, fishing, and providing for my community, in a way that is similar to what other people around me do. Imagine, for instance, that my name is *Ebr?w?*, living in a community by the name of “Yanomami” which is surrounded by objects described as *waima*, *tokori*, *shitibori*, *hoko* (types of trees) and *kirakirami*, *kōbari*, *kreōmri* (types of birds), etc. There are also other types of invisible objects that go by names such as *hekura*, *bore koko* and *hera*.⁸ I, along with other men of my group, hunt wild pigs according to certain rituals and customs.⁹ Like other people in my group, I believe that our ancestors were at one time immortal,

⁶ I follow Taylor’s insight when he says that “in premodern times, people didn’t speak of ‘identity’ and ‘recognition’ —not because people didn’t have (what we call) identities, or because these didn’t depend on recognition, but rather because there were then too unproblematic to be thematized as such.” “Politics of Recognition,” p. 35.

⁷ In using this example, I draw from Jacques Lizot’s well-known ethnographic study, presented in a narrative form, first published in 1976, *Tales of the Yanomami: Daily Life in the Venezuelan Forest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸ For a glossary of words and proper pronunciation for the transliteration, see *Tales of the Yanomami*, pp. 190-196.

⁹ See *Tales of the Yanomami*, pp. 144-152.

but because they stole the fire from Caiman, we ceased to be immortal. Now after death my *bei kë mi amo* (soul) will leave my body and “rise along the ropes of the hammocks and climb up the supporting posts of the shelter to go to live on the celestial disk.”¹⁰

In characterizing myself, I show an understanding of who I am. My community is known as the “Yanomami” and so my self-understanding entails being a member of the Yanomami. I presumably view myself and the world through the lens of my membership in the Yanomami community. Note that, in our example, I characterize myself and thus show self-understanding, which connects me with the Yanomamis. I may not possess the vocabulary of “identity,” but according to the phenomenon described I may be said to have an identity.

The phenomenon of identity I have described must also be distinguished from the vocabulary of identity in another respect. The phenomenon I have in mind is different from what goes on in identity politics or the politics of difference and recognition. On my view, identity simply means that I see who I am, the world and my place in it, through the lens of a worldview that makes me a member of a group. This phenomenon is to be distinguished from the vocabulary of identity in identity politics.

In the framework of the politics of difference, identity means that I—as, say, a member of an “ethnic” group in modern American society—am fully aware of certain features that distinguish me and the group to which I belong, and am hence able, for example, to demand political recognition for those features. The vocabulary of “identity-value” and “distinctiveness” is conducive to demands of difference-recognition. Here,

¹⁰ *Tales of the Yanomami*, p. 26.

one sees group members “insisting on their value as a group and on the solidarity of its members” and thus demanding “some form of public recognition.”¹¹

The phenomenon of identity I have described, however, is not necessarily related with the politics of difference and recognition. In order to distinguish the phenomenon from the vocabulary of identity politics, let us make a distinction between *identity as self-understanding* and *identity-awareness*. The first type of identity requires self-understanding, nothing else. The second type of identity entails a strong awareness of the distinctiveness of my features, which may lead to the demand of public recognition.

The Yanomami has an identity, in that he or she possesses self understanding; but the Yanomami may not necessarily have an identity if we require that he or she be strongly aware of his or her Yanomami distinctiveness and thus be in a position to demand public recognition. The point is that self-understanding is different from a deep consciousness and articulation of “Yanomami identity.”¹²

In conclusion, human beings, given their cognitive complexity, are able to characterize themselves and as such show self-understanding. Such a self-understanding makes them members of a group. People may not be deeply aware of their identity—in the way that many modern citizens are—but they possess *self-understanding* and group membership, which is all that is required for my view of identity.

¹¹ Michael Walzer, *What it Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996), p. 4.

¹² On this point, see Jeremy Waldron’s interesting discussion about cultural identity and the requirements of authenticity and self-consciousness. “Cultural Identity and Civic Responsibility,” in *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, eds. W. Kymlicka and W. Norman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 168-169.

2. MEMBERSHIP'S CENTRALITY TO IDENTITY

a. Basic Membership

Now that we have discussed identity we can move on to examining the conditions under which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. My thesis is that membership is a primary source of meaning and direction when such a membership is central to members' identities.

The first question that arises is this: when is membership central to members' identities? In order to answer this question, I wish to introduce the notion of *basic membership*. Membership is basic when certain group traits are essential to a member's self-understanding.

Suppose it were virtually impossible for me to characterize myself as anything other than an Irishman, a Roman Catholic or a Communist because the traits that are essential to my own self-understanding make me an Irishman, a Roman Catholic or a Communist. Then my membership in the Irish nation, the Catholic Church and the Communist Party is said to be basic.

Notice that basic membership has two components: (a) certain traits are essential to my own self-understanding and (b) these traits make me a member of a particular group. Keeping these two components together is important because otherwise we will not be clear about the notion of basic membership. If we isolate these two elements from each other, we will end up with two incomplete pictures.

First, one might simply think of traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding. It is necessary to see, however, that these traits derive from and are associated with a particular group. And so the traits that are essential to someone's self-

understanding are generally traits that presumably make her a member of such a particular group.

It is important to incidentally mention the following point: the insistence that someone is a member of *particular* group is not innocent. A trait that is essential to someone's self-understanding could potentially make her a member of a very general group, e.g., the group of English speakers or human beings. But this is not basic membership. Membership is basic when certain essential traits make someone a member of a particular group, e.g., Americans or Australians. I will turn to the discussion of relevant groups in the following chapter.

Second, one might think that being a member in a particular group might be essential to a member's self-understanding. But this is not always the case. Think, for example, of nationality. In many situations, nationality will be the type of membership containing traits that are essential to a member's self-understanding. Imagine a case, however, in which someone is born in France, but is brought up in a very strong Muslim setting, which isolates her to a significant extent from French mainstream society. In this case, most of the traits that are essential to her self-understanding derive from and are associated with the Muslim faith and not the French nation. So despite being a French citizen, one can assume that her national membership is not basic, for the traits that are essential to her self-understanding are not the ones that make her a member of the French nation. Another way of expressing the point is this: membership is basic if and only if group traits are essential to a member's self-understanding.

Now that I have explained basic membership, I will flesh out the notion with some examples. Let me begin by mentioning two traits that are likely, as a matter of

factual tendency, to be essential to someone's self-understanding: language and birthplace.

First, consider language. The language I speak (with a certain accent) as my native tongue must generally be one of the core properties for the depiction of who I am. If I did not speak the language I do, I would probably not be the same person I am now. Imagine I spoke Italian or English—as my first and native language—instead of, say, Spanish. My self-understanding would be different than what it currently is. Native language then is a trait that is likely to be essential to someone's self-understanding.

In order to reinforce the claim that language is generally essential to self-understanding, let me turn for a moment to a discussion about the relationship between language and culture. In making a case for linguistic self-defense, George Fletcher points out that language is closely related with culture.¹³ I am not concerned with his case for linguistic self-defense or the direction in which he takes his discussion. I simply want to use one of his arguments in order to highlight the significance of language for cultures, and more specifically the self-understandings of culture's members.

Fletcher devices a thought-experiment in which Germans during World War II initiate a campaign called "operation Babelosa." The idea is that Germans abandon their efforts to physically conquer England and instead design a strategy whereby the English language is transformed into German. Accordingly, all means of communication, telephone, radio, typesetters, etc., are programmed so that when ideas are expressed in English the output is changed into German. The end result is that this subterfuge will

¹³ "The Case for Linguistic Self-Defense," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, eds. R. McKim and J.

McMahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 326

force the English-speaking culture to adopt the German language in order to make communication possible.

If the English language is not essential to the maintenance of English culture, the linguistic transformation described in the thought-experiment will not be a *casus belli*. If, in contrast, the English language is essential to the maintenance of English culture, “then the imagined substitution of German for English would arguably be as serious a form of aggression as a physical invasion.” And as a result, the English will have as much of a right to go to war for their language as they would “for the flowered fields of Wiltshire or the white Cliffs of Dover.”¹⁴

The conclusion in this thought-experiment is that, given the violation of linguistic sovereignty, the English presumably have a right to self-defense. And the reason why the English have such a right to self-defense is because language is indeed essential to the maintenance of English culture.

The insight in the thought-experiment that interests us at this point has to do with language being essential to the maintenance of a culture. If English culture were not, for example, English-speaking (it would be German-speaking instead), it would not be English culture. This is presumably true of many cultures: language is essential to their collective self-understanding. It is also generally true of individuals. Everyone speaks a language as a native-speaker. These languages make us who we are. If we spoke a

¹⁴ “The Case for Linguistic Self-Defense,” p. 326. Further on, he expresses the point this way: “The history of any people is tied to its language. The narrative of the people unfolds in legends, historical events, poetic renditions of key moments, slogans that never die, great oratory, and, of course, legal phrases that define a culture’s sense of justice.” p. 332.

different native language than the one we do, we would probably be a different person. Thus native languages are an essential trait of who we are.

Consider, likewise, a trait such as birthplace. For example, one of the traits by which I characterize myself is that of being born in a particular place. Here we must remember that birthplaces are often “homelands.” Birthplaces are not only the place where someone is born, but they are also places representing a sense of belonging. Imagine, for instance, that I was born in India or Australia, instead of my homeland. In this case, the course of events would have made my self-understanding different than what it currently is and thus I would be a different person.

Homelands are significant because of a phenomenon that Anthony Smith describes as the “territorialization of memory.” The term refers “to a process by which particular places evoke a series of memories, handed down through the generations, and it summarizes a tendency to root memories in persons and events in particular places and through them create a field or zone of powerful and peculiar attachments.”¹⁵ In short, homelands are symbolic territories that create strong attachments.

Another thought-experiment will help us see the significance of homelands. Suppose that we take two cultures, American and English, and exchange their respective territories. In such an exchange, the key symbols and events of American culture become the House of Parliament, the Tower of London, the Battle of Hastings, etc. Similarly, the key symbols and events of English culture become the Capitol and White House, the Washington Memorial, the Civil War, etc. But there is something odd about such an exchange, for all these symbols and events (which are territorially confined) are

¹⁵ *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 134.

associated with a particular culture. So American and English cultures would not be what they are if they did not have their respective symbols and events in their own territories.

In our thought-experiment, territory is essential to collective self-understanding. Something similar occurs with individuals. Everyone has a certain birthplace and homeland. We generally have strong attachments to these places because they make us who we are. If we had a different birthplace and homeland, we would probably be a different person. Thus birthplace and homeland are generally an essential trait of who we are.

Notice now that the two traits I have discussed so far, language and birthplace, derive from and are associated with a particular group. So if I possess traits of this sort, they will make me a member of a particular group. Take, for example, Argentina: it is a group that speaks Spanish and comprises a geographical region in the South Cone. It is then the case that the property of speaking Spanish (with an Argentinean accent) and being born in the territory known as “Argentina,” make me a member in the Argentinean group.

In my example, membership in the Argentinean group is basic for two reasons. The first reason is that for me to be the person I am, I must be someone who speaks a certain language and has a certain birthplace. In other words, these traits are essential to my self-understanding. Second, the traits that are essential to my self-understanding derive from and are associated with the Argentinean group, making me a member of this group. Putting these two reasons together, we can see that Argentinean traits are essential to my self-understanding and thus my Argentinean membership is basic.

Basic membership can be contrasted with the kind of membership entailing traits that are not essential to someone's self-understanding. This contrast will help us to understand more clearly what basic membership is.

Suppose I characterize myself as someone who enjoys reading history, is a practicing psychologist and votes Democratic on every election. Suppose further that the traits I have just mentioned might obtain or not without significantly affecting the sense of who I am. These traits may change—I may stop reading history, change careers, or vote Republican—without significantly altering my self-understanding. The traits I have in mind may be very significant to me, but they are not essential to my self-understanding.

Given that these traits are not essential to my self-understanding, I may lose my membership in the History Book Club, the American Psychological Association or the Democratic Party without significantly altering the sense of who I am. So the memberships just mentioned may indeed fluctuate without a significant impact on my self-understanding. This kind of membership is non-basic.

My discussion so far might make it seem like there are clear-cut categories and distinctions: essential and non-essential traits; basic and non-basic memberships. This is true in a sense, but it can also be misleading. At this point, two complexities in the notion of basic membership are worth highlighting.

First, a point underlying my discussion (one that I will bring up in other occasions) is that the traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding are often imprecise. It is often very hard to be precise about which traits are essential to someone's self-understanding and which are not.

All that must be granted in my discussion, however, is that some traits are indeed essential for defining who I am, whereas others are not. I think that there are significant generalities with regard to essential traits (e.g., non-voluntarily acquired traits such as language and birthplace), but I do not wish to focus on traits per se. What I wish to focus on is the fact that there are essential and non-essential traits—whatever they may be—for someone’s self-understanding. I will return to this point below when I discuss non-voluntarily acquired traits.

The second complexity is that basic membership admits of degrees. Some of my examples may have sounded like people generally have *one* basic membership. The fact of the matter, however, is that people have essential traits of self-understanding that make them members in different groups. Among the traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding, one may find traits that make her a member in three different groups: an Argentinean, a Jew, and a Communist. All three memberships are basic.

Nonetheless, despite the variety of basic memberships, one of these memberships may have a higher degree of significance. In other words, several memberships may be basic; but among these, one membership may have a higher degree of basicness than the other basic memberships. Suppose that three different memberships are basic, which means that certain traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding make her a member in these three groups. The person has nine essential traits that make her a member of the first group. She has seven essential traits making her a member of the second group; and, finally, six essential traits for the third group. All three memberships are basic, but the first membership is more basic than the second and third one. Basic membership then, when compared with other basic memberships, may have degrees of

basicness. Another way of stating the point is by saying that basic memberships can be ranked. I will come back to this point in chapter five when we compare national and Hispanic memberships.

b. Inherent Markers of Personhood

I said above that the traits which are essential to someone's self-understanding are often imprecise. I also suggested, however, that certain types of traits are, as a matter of general tendency, essential to people's self-understanding (e.g., language and homeland). If this is right, the question is: what types of traits are generally essential to group members' self-understanding?

Let us make a distinction between *inherent* and *accidental* markers of personhood. Inherent markers are, generally speaking, non-voluntarily acquired traits. The reason these markers are inherent is because they cannot be changed; and they cannot be changed because I did not have an initial choice as to whether I should acquire a certain marker or not.¹⁶

I am born and raised in a milieu, non-voluntarily absorbing a set of traits that are very hard to change and that also essentially define who I am. By way of illustration we could think of someone who is born and brought up in England, and thus acquires a series of traits and attachments that essentially define who she is. She is someone whose native tongue is English, has British citizenship and is subject to British government and law, and participates in the English way of life. These non-voluntarily acquired and thus

¹⁶ Not all unalterable markers are non-voluntarily acquired. I can, for instance, choose to put a tattoo on my arm: a situation that then becomes unalterable, despite being a matter of choice.

inherent markers will presumably be essential to her self-understanding. So she will view herself as an Englishwoman in a way that makes her English membership basic.

Inherent markers are different from accidental ones. Accidental markers are generally the result of choice. I may decide to learn a new language, become a Buddhist, learn to play football, and identify myself with my Irish grand-parents. Strictly speaking, I did not decide to have Irish grand-parents, but neither did I have a choice when they decided to migrate to the U.S., where I was born and raised. So, in this case my American membership is non-voluntary, whereas identifying with my Irish background is optional.

The main point about accidental markers is that they can be altered without significantly modifying the sense of who I am. So, many accidental markers are non-essential traits of self-understanding. The reason why accidental markers may vary without significantly altering my essential traits of self-understanding has to do with the fact that these markers are the result of choice.

My last point needs to be explained further. Think about the complexities of basic membership I mentioned earlier. Consider how memberships that are acquired voluntarily become very important to some people. My suggestion, however, is that non-voluntarily acquired traits are more stable because they are harder (and sometimes impossible) to change, and thus these traits tend to be essential for defining who I am.

I can convert to Hinduism (or any other religion), but also in the midst of a disappointment, stop professing Hinduism and go back to “who I was before.” Let me incidentally mention that using religious examples can be misleading, for religion is not always a matter of choice. Religion may, as a matter of fact, be in some sense non-

voluntarily absorbed. Religion is a matter of conscious decision, but I did not decide to be born in a Jewish family. So if my family practices the rituals and teachings of the Jewish religion, the world-view conveyed by such rituals and teachings will be absorbed non-voluntarily. When religion is in some sense non-voluntarily absorbed—meaning that one grows up within a certain religious environment—it often becomes a very powerful source for self-understanding.

Returning to voluntary memberships, I can choose, for example, to describe myself as an “Italian-American.” But I could also drop the label without much impact on the features that are generally indispensable for my self-understanding. In contrast, my first language, family members and birthplace are traits I did not choose and, moreover, I cannot alter. Accordingly, any definition describing the essentially constitutive elements of who I am would generally include traits such as language, kinship and birthplace. In other words, my self-understanding is often bound with the elements I cannot alter; and thus those elements are essential to the definition of who I am.

It is important to emphasize here a point that was made earlier. We must be careful and avoid making clear-cut distinctions because the categories are not always clear. Note that I speak in terms of tendencies and generalities, for the distinction between non-voluntarily acquired traits and those memberships that are voluntarily acquired is not always easy to point out in precise terms. Donald Horowitz reminds us that it is true that certain memberships (e.g., ethnic) are not chosen but given. Nonetheless, the two “principles of membership—birth and choice—are capable of fictive elements.”¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 55-56.

It is also important to emphasize that I am not implying any type of determinism when I speak about non-voluntarily acquired traits and inherent markers of personhood. If such was the implication, I would be committing what might be described as the “culturalist fallacy.” This fallacy consists in the belief that a group *determines* who we are, and thus precludes the possibility of significant personal change.¹⁸ I am only speaking here about general tendencies with regard to necessary traits for self-understanding—not cultural determinism.

Let me go back at this time to an earlier point about identity groups, since a discussion on this topic will shed light on my understanding about the significance of non-voluntarily acquired traits. One might think that inherent markers of personhood make people members of the identity groups in a multicultural society. This could indeed be the case, but not necessarily. Discussing the relationship between certain types of identity groups and inherent markers will help us to see more clearly what inherent markers are and how they are related to basic membership.

The sorts of traits we sometimes associate with “ethnic groups” are not always inherent markers. Think for example of “Irish-American identity” in the multicultural context of American society. In a study on the dynamics of “ethnic” identity within groups of European extraction in America, Mary Waters describes a kind of identity that is voluntary and thus selective. So, for instance, “you can choose those aspects of being Irish that appeal to you and discard those that do not.”¹⁹ As Waters observes, Irish-

¹⁸ See the discussion by Bhikhu Parekh for a description of this fallacy. *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 76-79.

¹⁹ *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 115.

American identity (or identities like Polish-American and Italian-American) may be, and is in fact, meaningful to people. Nevertheless, despite being valuable, the identities she describes are not (for the most part), due to their voluntary and selective nature, the basis for inherent markers of personhood.

Not surprisingly, the identities Waters describes are not, generally speaking, essential to someone's self-understanding. I can choose to apply the label of "Irish-American" (with its selective characteristics) to portray myself, but I could also choose to discard the label. In this sense, my Irish-American identity, despite its potential personal significance, is not essential for characterizing who I am.²⁰ In other words, my Irish-American membership may be put aside without significantly altering the essential traits for personal self-understanding. As a consequence, Irish-American traits are non-essential and thus Irish-American membership is non-basic.

3. THE VALUE OF BASIC MEMBERSHIP

When membership is basic it is presumably valuable. Here the following two questions arise. First, in what ways is membership valuable? And second, why is basic membership valuable?

²⁰ The type of "ethnic" identity Waters examines, apart from being a matter of choice, does not have much relevance for everyday life: "it does not, for the most part, limit choice of marriage partner.... It does not determine where you will live, who your friends will be, what job you will have...." *Ethnic Options*, p. 147. Inherent markers of personhood, in contrast, will presumably determine to a larger extent where I work or who I marry. For instance, I would not ordinarily work in a particular setting or marry someone without knowing the language in which business is conducted or my spouse speaks.

In order to address the first question, I will turn to a discussion of Will Kymlicka and suggest that membership is, first, instrumentally valuable and, second, the value of membership derives from identity.

One of Kymlicka's contributions to contemporary political thought has been to establish the connection, which John Rawls and the liberal tradition do not deal with in detail, between group membership and the primary goods of people.²¹ According to Kymlicka, "if we view cultural membership as a primary good within Rawl's scheme of justice, then it is important to remember that it is a good in its capacity of providing meaningful options for us, and aiding our ability to judge for ourselves the value of our life-plans."²² Note that, for Kymlicka, cultural membership is important because it provides individuals with a "context of choice."

In establishing a warranted relationship between group membership and individual choice, Kymlicka also reacts against Michael Walzer's view of group membership. According to Walzer "the primary good that we distribute to one another is membership in some human community."²³ Note that for Walzer membership is a good in itself, or in the words of Kymlicka: "the theoretical framework Walzer employs seems to make cultural membership the foundational value."²⁴ Whereas for Walzer cultural membership seems to have some sort of *intrinsic* value, Kymlicka believes that cultural membership is *instrumentally* valuable because it points to a context of choice.

²¹ See chapters 7, 8, and 9 of *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²² *Liberalism*, p.166.

²³ *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 31.

²⁴ *Liberalism*, p. 221.

Walzer claims, for instance, that “the survival and flourishing of the groups depends largely upon the vitality of their centers,”²⁵ but one is left wondering why such is the case. What is the group’s “center” and what is so important about it? Why should we think that certain groups ought to survive or flourish? Why is group membership highly significant? It seems to me that groups or cultures are not intrinsically valuable. If that is indeed Walzer’s suggestion, he does not seem to go far enough. Cultures and groups might be highly valuable, but we must go further than Walzer in inquiring about the value of groups and membership.

Kymlicka’s instrumental approach seems more promising. But here we must point out two different strands in Kymlicka’s view. I already mentioned the first strand: the value of group membership is connected with the “context of choice.” Thus group membership is valuable because our “range of options is determined by our cultural heritage.”²⁶ The second strand has to do with “identity,” or a sense of who I am. Accordingly, “someone’s upbringing isn’t something that can just be erased; it is, and will remain, a constitutive part of who that person is. Cultural membership affects our very sense of personal identity and capacity.”²⁷ This type of membership is what I have described as basic membership.

It is not always clear how the two strands affect each other in Kymlicka’s view of membership. Regardless of the interconnection between the two strands, I think that the importance of the context of choice must certainly be acknowledged. Nonetheless,

²⁵ *What it means to be an American*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Liberalism*, p. 165.

²⁷ *Liberalism*, p. 175.

understanding who we are seems to be a more fundamental matter than having choices. The reason for this last point is that self-understanding is a *precondition* for the possibility of making choices.

We can indeed imagine coercive situations, legitimate or not, in which self-understanding is not conducive to choices. Coercive circumstances could arise when the expression of values and beliefs is legally forbidden. These circumstances could also be more subtle. Think of a situation in which the coercive mechanisms of family upbringing, deeply and successfully internalized, preclude the possibility of marrying someone who is not from the same culture. The point is that there seem to be circumstances in which self-understanding is not conducive to choices—whether these circumstances are legitimate or not is beside my current point.

The insights just mentioned lead me to think that the value of membership derives from group members having a sense of who they are—namely, an identity. I would then suggest that the instrumental case for the value of membership is better made when emphasizing “identity”—which, again, does not necessarily mean that “choice” is not important, but the emphasis should lie on “identity.”

I will now turn to the second question. I have made the claim that certain types of memberships are a primary source of meaning and direction. These memberships are central to members’ identities, which is also to say that they are basic. These memberships are presumably highly significant and so I have also made claims about the value of membership. I have argued that the case for the value of membership is best made when looking at membership instrumentally and emphasizing identity.

But we have still not answered a more fundamental question: why is membership valuable? Now, we clearly do not have just any type of membership in mind. We have in mind the type of membership that is central to someone's identity, i.e., basic membership. So the question we need to address is really this one: why is basic membership, the type of membership that is central to someone's identity, valuable?

Basic membership is often highly valuable to group members because it significantly contributes towards members' well-being. The essential traits by which group members characterize themselves give each individual a sense of who he or she is. Such a sense is often a vital condition for personal well-being. If we posit that conditions of this sort are highly valuable because they contribute towards well-being, we can then say that basic membership is highly valuable.

Given the value of basic membership, it is no surprise that situations of tyranny often entail attacking the characteristic traits of basic membership in the oppressed group. Consider measures such as forbidding the religious or social practices of enslaved or oppressed groups. For instance, African slaves brought to America were not allowed to practice their ancestral religions. In another example, the Turkish government banned the use of Kurdish until 1991—although expressions of Kurdish culture are still deemed to have a separatist purpose. These kinds of measures typically have the effect of subjugating a particular group by curtailing expressions of basic membership and hampering the well-being of oppressed group members.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on membership. I raised the question about the conditions under which membership is a primary source of meaning and direction. My thesis is that membership is a primary source of meaning and direction when it is central to members' identities.

My thesis immediately raises two questions. First, what is identity? I characterized the phenomenon of identity on the basis of two components: self-understanding and group membership. According to my account, to have an identity is to possess self-understanding, which generally makes someone a member of a group.

Second, when is membership central to members' identities? This question gets to the heart of the matter. My answer has been that membership is central to members' identities when it is basic. Here I argued that some traits are essential to someone's self-understanding, and these essential traits make her a member of a group. When this is the case, membership in a group is said to be basic. I furthermore suggested that the traits which are essential to someone's self-understanding are oftentimes non-voluntarily acquired. So, non-voluntary memberships will generally have a propensity to be basic.

The type of membership I discussed is presumably very significant. Thus my discussion of membership would not be complete without addressing the importance of membership. In the final section of the chapter I made two points. First, in the context of Kymlicka's views, membership is valuable because it gives members an identity, which means that the value of membership is instrumental. Second, Basic membership is highly valuable because it significantly contributes towards well-being.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONDITIONS OF RELEVANT GROUPS

I have discussed membership. In this chapter, I will turn to groups. I have claimed that certain groups have the function of endowing group members with the type of membership that is central to members' identities, i.e., basic membership. The question I now wish to address is this: how do we characterize groups that have the function at stake? I wish to suggest that these groups generally satisfy three conditions: first, the condition of relevant identification; second, the condition of differentiation; and, third, the condition of intrinsic identification.

1. THE CONDITION OF RELEVANT IDENTIFICATION

a. Interaction

Let us begin with a basic fact about groups and societies: they are first and foremost interactive. People belonging to the same group interact with one another. There is a process of socialization by which people develop and learn languages, habits, myths, values, and maps of meaning. These elements are not absorbed in a solitary way, but rather in the context of social interaction.

In groups such as nations, for example, the process of socialization does not mean that I necessarily interact with *all* the members of the group, since the size of the group may make it literally impossible to even personally *see* all other co-members. Nations, for example, are kinds of groups that Benedict Anderson describes as “imagined communities.” Communities of this sort are imagined because group members “will

never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion.”¹

We have then two levels of membership in groups such as nations: *immediate* and *extended*. I am an immediate member of a given group, e.g., a family, and also an extended member of another group, e.g., a nation. I grow up in the setting of a given family and circle of friends and acquaintances most of whom are presumably members of a larger group. There is an immediate sphere of interaction that is part of a larger and indirect sphere of interaction.

Now, it is important to highlight that the former is oftentimes part of the latter. So, for instance, my family is, in fact, part of a nation, and thus being a member of my family also makes me a member of such a nation. One could also put the matter in terms of coextensive membership. I am part of a subset of the whole set. Being a member of the subset is generally coextensive with being a member of the whole set. Thus if I immediately interact with people in subset *a*, which would make me a member of such a subset, I will also be a member of the larger set *A*.

Note that the group in which I interact as an immediate and also an extended member generally has a limited number of members. What I mean by limited membership is that not every single human being is, in fact, a member of my extended group. So, for instance, not every human being living at the present moment is a fellow national. The sort of imagined community I am now describing is then a partial portion of the whole living human community at a certain point in time.

¹ *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2002 [1983]), p. 6.

The set to which I belong is a community with a limited number of members drawn from the universe of “humanity.” In other words, I am a member of a group that comprises only *some* human beings who presumably have a great deal in common. So some people will be members of my group, whereas others will not be members. I will have a great deal in common with, say, fellow nationals, whereas other people who are not members of my same nation will be foreign to me.

b. Recognition

Given that group members interact with one another, they will learn to recognize fellow-members. Similarly, mutual recognition between group members is what often makes interaction possible. Interaction between group members is both a cause and a consequence of recognition. So when we think of interaction between group members we must also think of recognition.

Recognition of fellow members, of course, makes it possible to also recognize non-members of a group. If I can recognize those who belong to my group, it is because I can also recognize those who do not. At the moment, however, I am not concerned with recognition of non-members, but rather recognition of fellow members.

When fellow members of a group recognize each other, what is it that they are able to recognize? It is generally the markers of the social settings to which all members of the same group belong. When coming across a fellow member of my group, I can recognize such a member because of the social markers she displays.

My point is best illustrated with an example of two tourists in a foreign land. If I am a Spanish citizen from Madrid on vacation in Hawaii and come across a fellow

Spanish citizen from Madrid, I will most likely be able to recognize her due to a set of social markers. Suppose I see her wearing a *Real Madrid* jersey, and immediately wonder about the reason why she would want to wear the jersey. I engage her in a conversation and immediately detect a *Madrileño* accent, pretty much like mine. I learn that she was brought up in Madrid under a school system that I can immediately recognize—presumably she has read excerpts of the Spanish classics, Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco de Quevedo, Pio Baroja, etc., played games that are also familiar to me, and has gone on field trips to places that I know.² I notice we communicate using similar jargon and have a peculiar picaresque sense of humor that we can both understand. Someone who is not acquainted with our realm of references could probably not understand our jokes (even if such a person spoke our language).

c. Relevant Identification

I have so far made the following points: (a) human beings interact with people in their groups; (b) these groups generally have a limited number of members; (c) human beings interact with people in their groups because they can recognize each other; and (d) recognition is based on social markers.

From these four points, it follows that groups and members are *identifiable*. In the process of interaction, group members can discriminate members from non-members by recognizing certain social markers in fellow-members. This process of discrimination

² An important assumption in the illustration is that there is no “generational gap.” Experiences for people belonging to different generations can vary, but there would still have to be enough elements in common between people from different generations for them to recognize each other as fellow-nationals.

by recognition means that groups and their members are identifiable.

Note first that groups are identifiable by virtue of their particular properties. I can say, for example, that the American group is distinguished by certain properties such as a tradition of liberty and democracy, the practice of certain sports such as baseball and football, a geo-political affiliation, and a language, i.e., American English. What we need to see is that a set of particular properties make it possible for us to speak of a group that can be identified as “American.”

Note also, in the second place, that group members can be identified according to properties. Think, for instance, of the fact that a graduate from a certain college can be identified by a graduation ring on her finger or by expressing her preferences on basketball college teams. I can also recognize someone who shops in the same grocery store where I do by noticing the bags he happens to use for his garbage. There are equally a huge number of markers that would allow me to potentially recognize people who drink coffee in the same coffee shop where I do, support the same political party I do, share my musical preferences for a particular band and use the same company I do for their cell phone service.

We are not concerned, however, with the possibility of identification through all those kinds of properties. We are concerned instead with identification under some condition, i.e., by virtue of a certain kind of properties. If such is the case, what is then the specific condition of identification?

Let us think here of two different situations. In the first situation, mentioned above, I come across a fellow Spanish citizen while on vacation that I am able to recognize because of her jersey, accent, school education and characteristic sense of

humor. In the second situation, I recognize someone who graduated from my same college, e.g., University of Maryland, by detecting the ring on his finger and his basketball college team preferences.

Now combine the properties in each situation. These are all the properties from the two examples combined: (i) possessing Spanish citizenship (ii) wearing a jersey; (iii) speaking a language (with a certain accent); (iv) attending a particular school; (v) having a characteristic sense of humor; (vi) wearing a ring; and (vii) preferring a specific basketball team.

Note that a distinction between properties can be made. Some properties are more significant to someone's identity than others. In fact, some properties will be essential to someone's self-understanding, whereas others will not. Let us say that there is a continuum in which one end represents "essential properties for self-understanding," and the other end "non-essential properties for self-understanding." Along the continuum, we can place all the properties mentioned above.

Property (i) is essential to the self-understanding of most people. Having a particular citizenship often defines where we come from, who we are and what we believe. Property (ii) does not strike me as the kind of property that would be essential to someone's self-understanding. The sense of who I am is not linked in any significant sense to whether I wear a particular jersey or not. Property (iii) does often seem to be essential to someone's self-understanding. As we saw in the previous chapter, native-languages often define who we are, for we would probably be different people if we did not speak our native language.

Property (iv) could be very significant and even perhaps essential to someone's

self-understanding. Nonetheless, I do not think it has, generally speaking, the same level of significance as property (i) or (iii). Property (v) is a difficult one. I do not think that having a characteristic sense of humor is essential to someone's self-understanding, but it could be for some people. Property (vi) is non-essential. Wearing a ring is like wearing a jersey: the property can be altered without significantly altering our self-understanding. Finally, property (vii) may be very significant to some people, but I doubt that the preference of sports teams is essential to the self-understanding of many people. Preference of sports teams can indeed be a manifestation of national or regional attachments. If this is the case, then we must look not at the preference of a team as such, but rather the attachment underlying such a preference.

Four elements in our discussion must now be highlighted. First, as we just saw, there are different kinds of properties. An inventory of the properties in our examples shows that some are generally essential to someone's self-understanding, whereas others are not. The purpose is not to classify all the properties in a clear manner, but rather to show that different properties have degrees of significance for self-understanding ranging from essential to non-essential.

Second, the properties we have surveyed are properties that make someone a member of a particular group. In our examples, those groups were the Spanish nation and the group of Maryland graduates.

Third, members of each group can be identified on the basis of the properties we discussed. The point, which should be obvious by now, is that I recognize a fellow national or graduate on the basis of identifiable properties.

Fourth, the balance of properties in the situations we discussed is asymmetrical.

As a matter of tendency, we notice that there are more properties closer to the end of “essential for self-understanding” in the national group than in the group of college graduates.

We now have all the elements for arguing two points. First, since properties make identification possible, group members can be identified according to different types of properties. More specifically, we can identify members of two different groups on the basis of two types of properties: those that are essential to self-understanding and those that are not. As we saw in our examples, the balance of properties shows that national members are identified according to properties that tend to be essential for self-understanding. In contrast, graduates are identified according to properties that, on balance, are not essential for self-understanding.

From this first point derives a second one. We can identify members according to properties that make their membership basic and properties that do not tend to make their membership basic. If we posit that membership is basic when properties are essential to members’ self-understanding, we can see that membership in the national group is basic whereas membership in the group of graduates is not.

One might object that the two memberships could be basic given that traits from each one of the memberships may be essential to someone’s self-understanding. Even if this is true, note that according to the balance of essential properties in our examples, national membership will be more basic than membership in the group of college graduates. For the sake of clarity in the argument, let us then say that one membership is basic, whereas the other is not.

I began my discussion by saying that we are not concerned with identification of

groups and memberships as such. Instead, we are interested in identification under some relevant condition. The question is: when are group and membership identification relevant?

We can now answer this question. Identification is relevant when we are able to distinguish the sorts of properties that make membership in a particular group basic. In other words, relevant identification is done on the basis of properties that are essential to the self-understanding of members in a particular group.

2. THE CONDITION OF DIFFERENTIATION

We now know that relevant identification singles out properties that constitute basic membership in particular groups. Attention now needs to be drawn to the fact that groups are different from each other, which is what makes identification of groups and members possible. Highlighting this fact, I will now argue that basic membership is necessarily connected with the difference-sensitive attributes of groups.

I will begin the discussion with some general remarks about group description. Imagine three groups of people, farmers, Jews and Argentineans. In attempting to describe farmers we can say that they are people who normally have families, believe in a deity, and ingest food. Likewise, we describe Jews as people who normally have families, believe in a deity, and ingest food. Lastly, we describe Argentineans in the same manner.

This mode of describing has two characteristics. First, the descriptions are so broad that *differences* among groups are not evident. Second, the description of these three groups is probably accurate, but it is so broad that it does not really say much about

the *meaningful* features of groups or group members. One could, however, describe, say, Argentines by pointing to features that make them different from other groups and are also meaningful to Argentines.

Let us say that Argentines are the people living in a particular geo-political sector. They have a history and a culture. They generally accept the institution of monogamous marriage, mostly profess the Roman Catholic or Lutheran faiths, like to eat beef and *churrasco*, speak Spanish (with a certain accent) and like to watch soccer.

Argentines will perhaps have some of these elements in common with the group of Jews and farmers; for example, monogamous marriage and Spanish. We can perhaps also think of someone who is a member in all three groups, i.e., a Jewish farmer who is also Argentinean. But despite the fact that all three groups might have features in common or that someone might be a member in all three groups, note the following: all three groups are *different* from each other. The group of Argentines is not the group of Jews or farmers.

Note also that some of the properties by virtue of which Argentines will characterize themselves are meaningful to the point of being properties which are essential to their self-understanding. An Argentinean will probably characterize herself as someone who was born in Argentina, speaks Spanish, has certain dietary customs (e.g., eats beef and *churrasco*), professes or has an affinity with a certain monotheistic religion (Christianity) and the moral outlook that originates from that religion, etc. We can reasonably think of these traits as being essential to her self-understanding, and thus making her Argentinean membership basic.

What I wish to propose now is that there is a necessary connection between

differences among groups and properties that are essential for the self-understandings of group members. Put differently, only groups that are distinguished by way of exclusion and contrast are likely to be the kind of group in which basic membership is possible.

Let me explain my thesis more formally. Imagine a group G_a impossible to distinguish from groups G_b , G_c , or G_d . G_a is so broad that it would be impossible to indicate the exclusive traits that all the members of G_a have in common, and that distinguish G_a from G_b , G_c , or G_d . In other words, G_a would be indiscernible. Now suppose that we are able to characterize G_a according to traits that all members of G_a have in common and separate the group from G_b , G_c , or G_d . In this case, G_a would be discernible.

Note that for a group to have the status of discernibility two circumstances must be true. First, group members have traits in common. Second, the traits that group members have in common are such that they make the group distinguishable from other groups.

My contention is now the following. If G_a is indiscernible, it is not likely to be the kind of group that endows members with basic membership, i.e., according to properties that are essential to the self-understandings of group members. If, in contrast, G_a is discernible, it could possibly be the kind of group that endows members with basic membership.

I have said that discernible groups may endow members with basic membership. Let me be more precise with regard to this statement. Not all discernible groups give rise to basic memberships, but all basic memberships tend to stem from discernible groups. In other words, the status of discernibility is a necessary, yet not a sufficient, condition

for basic membership.

The reason for the necessary connection between discernibility and basic membership is ultimately a factual one. As a matter of fact, particular groups have a sense of “us” based on difference-sensitive attributes. This means that groups can be divided between *us-type* and *them-type* groups. The properties that are essential for the self-understanding of group members are evidently not properties of them-type groups, but rather properties of us-type groups. In other words, the properties that create the sense of “us” in a particular group are also the ones that could possibly make membership in the group basic.

Note first that human beings are members of groups that give them a sense of “us.” The substance of the “us” is what Harold Isaacs, paraphrasing a term by Francis Bacon, describes as the “idols of the tribe.” Different groups have different idols and so humanity consists of a composite of us-type groups, which are always set in contrast with other them-type groups. Isaacs expresses his view by discussing the idols (or what he also calls “holdings”) that shape human identity—namely, birthplace, names, languages, history and origins, religion, and nationality. He comments that:

How [the holdings] are seen and celebrated has provided the substance of most of what we know as history, mythology, folklore, art, literature, religious beliefs and practices. How the holdings of others are seen has provided most of the unending grimness of the we-they confrontation in human experience. Raised high or held low, these are the idols of all our

tribes.³

These groups might also be thought of as what Michael Walzer calls “thick cultures.” He observes, for instance, that “the crucial commonality of the human race is particularism: we participate, all of us, in thick cultures that are our own.”⁴ Thick cultures are particular. Thus these cultures are distinguishable from and contrasted with cultures that are not “our own.” Not everybody has the same set of properties: not everyone is born in the same place, speaks the same language, and shares the same social practices and worldview. Accordingly, people belong to different groups they call “their own.”

The point about the quality of contrast between groups is a clear one. If I am born and raised a Protestant in Northern Ireland I will then be distinguishable by a set of recognizable group markers that separate me from a foreign group, namely, Catholics. Similarly, if I am born and reared in Quebec I will also possess recognizable traits that differentiate me from other Anglo-Canadians. In another instance, I am born an African-American and so given a set of markers, I will be a member of particular group, which separates me from other “racial” groups in American society. What we see in these

³ *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1975]), p. 40.

⁴ *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 83. For a similar view, see also Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

situations is that there are us-type groups that are different from other them-type groups.⁵

Also note, in the second place, that given the quality of contrast, the properties that are essential for the self-understanding of group members are not properties of them-type groups, but rather properties of us-type groups, of groups they call “their own.” The properties that will be essential to the self-understanding of the Protestant in Northern Ireland will be those of his group and not those of the Catholic group. Something similar occurs with Quebecois and Anglo-Canadians, and African-Americans and other racial groups.

These facts about groups create a necessary connection between the discernibility of groups and basic membership. Certain groups are different from and contrast with other groups. Given such a differentiation and contrast, I can only find properties that will be essential to my self-understanding in the particular group in which I happen to be placed.

By way of afterthought, let me remind us of a point that was made in the previous chapter with regard to clear-cut distinctions. What I wish to highlight now is that us-type groups are not always easy to distinguish from them-type groups. I will mention two complexities here. First, groups are not easy to individuate. Second, all groups are generally an overlapping structure of many other us-type groups.

⁵ Incidentally, one might add that groups are different from each other due not only to social markers, but also norms of exclusion. For a discussion on exclusionary group norms, see Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 72-106.

With regard to the first point, attention must be drawn to an assumption that underlies the way in which we commonly refer to some types of groups. Such an assumption is pervasive in our ordinary language or common speech.

In speaking about groups, or a particular group, it may sound like one might be referring to group *units*. Such an impression is in fact misleading because groups are not always easy to *individuate* or even characterize. Groups are indeed not only dynamic, but also complex phenomena.

Nevertheless, as suggested above there are, in fact, properties that make it possible to identify groups at a certain point in time and thus differentiate them from other groups. We see then that, on the one hand, groups are difficult to individuate, i.e., to single out as precise units. On the other hand, however, groups can indeed be identified—namely, particular groups can be distinguished from other groups due to a cluster of properties that group members have in common.

The distinction I am making is between *individuating* and *identifying* groups. The upshot is that groups are often complex phenomena and are thus difficult to individuate. Groups are not always distinguishable *units*. By the same token, however, one may say that there are a number of traits and properties that presumably allow us to identify certain types of groups. Otherwise, the notions of “group” and “group identity” would not make much sense.

Let me turn here to the second complexity about groups mentioned above. Groups tend to consist of an overlapping structure of many other us-type groups. Consider, for example, a nation as an instance of an us-type group. But here we think immediately of regional and cultural groups within nations.

Think, for example, of the fact that there are several us-type groups within a nation and these groups can be construed in different ways. An instance of what I have in mind now is expressed by Neal Ascherson by raising the question about European unity. He asks: how European can or will we be? And he comments that:

to reach any answers several assumptions have to be made about this question. And the first assumption is that 'we' can be interpreted in several ways, leading to several divergent conclusions. 'We' may denote the inhabitants of Britain, or of the United Kingdom. On the other hand, it could also stand for the English, the Scots, the Welsh, the people of Northern Ireland and the populations of the various autonomous small islands in the archipelago.⁶

But let me now stick to a more simple point: us-type groups are overlapping structures of other us-type groups. Think again of a nation as an us-type group and all other us-type groups within the national group.

By way of illustration, in the Venezuelan nation there are several distinct groups, e.g., *Costeño* (born on the coast), *Maracucho* (born in Maracaibo), *Andino* (born in the Andes), *Isleño* (born in one of the islands). Members of those groups can usually be identified by different accents and regional idioms, food habits, personality traits (*Maracuchos* are extrovert and *Andinos* are introvert), skin complexion (those born on the coast tend to have a darker complexion than those born in the Andes), etc. These regional groups are all us-type groups within an overarching national us-type group.

⁶ "How European Can We/Will We Be?," in *Citizens: Towards a Citizenship Culture*, ed. B. Crick (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 57.

Given this complex structure of embedded us-type groups an interesting question arises. Despite their differences, do all these groups have a strong enough sense of national commonality to bind them together? There is obviously an us-type national group and an us-type regional group. But imagine that the *Maracuchos* attempted to secede from the rest of the country—a theme expressed in popular jokes due to the fact that Maracaibo has the largest oil reserve in the country. Or suppose that tension between regional groups began to escalate beyond the point of reconciliation. In such instances of conflict, one can often see one of the us-type groups prevailing over the others.

We can think of conflict with regard to many us-type groups embedded in other us-type groups. Using the Venezuelan example again, one could think of social classes—the “rich” and the “poor”—instead of thinking about regional groups. One can see in a country such as Venezuela, as well as other Latin American countries, how the tension between these two us-type groups is always on the verge of exploding.

My general point is that people belong to several us-type groups—e.g., nations, fraternities, alliances, social classes, families, etc.—and all these us-type groups are often embedded within each other. Us-type membership is then multi-dimensional.

Now, this general point has important implications for the significance of groups and memberships. Given the reality of embedded us-type groups, when we look at the significance of us-type groups, what we need to examine is not so much the different us-type groups to which someone belongs. We know for a fact that people have different layers of membership in different (and sometimes conflicting) us-type groups.

The question is rather this: at what level do we generally find the *primary* sense of “us” —the one that tends to override and overpower all other us-type group

memberships? Given my discussion in chapter two, I suspect that the answer to that question will vary for different groups and circumstances. For some people the primary us-type group might be the nation; for others a religious us-type group; yet others will find their primary sense of “us” in their tribal group or clan. The overlaying dimensions of membership are highly complex. What does seem to be the case in many instances, however, is that one of the us-type memberships is a primary source of meaning and direction, and thus could have the potential for overriding other memberships.

3. THE CONDITION OF INTRINSIC IDENTIFICATION

When we think of groups and identification several questions arise: How are groups identified? Who or what defines and determines the cluster of properties that distinguishes a certain group? In other words, how does group identity emerge? Is such a process a fortuitous and spontaneous one, or is it primarily intentional? Is it possible to misidentify a group, i.e., furnish properties that a group does not really possess? Groups can presumably be identified in different ways. We can speak for example of people coming from the Asian continent as “Asians.” But is the identification of people from Asia as “Asians” necessarily relevant *to them*?

a. Inside and Outside the Group

I can presumably characterize groups from two points of views. I can characterize my own group, the one to which I belong, and I can also characterize other groups, those groups to which I do not belong. When I characterize my own group I will express those properties that are meaningful to me and other members of the group.

Hence my characterization of the group will be meaningful. In contrast, when I characterize other groups, without much knowledge of the group, I may do it in a way that is either irrelevant or meaningless *to them*.

An example will help us to appreciate the contrast I have just described. The description and studies of Bali culture by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz are well known.⁷ Geertz's sense of cultural practices, as an observer who identifies and codifies the way of life of the Bali people, is different from the sense such practices might have from the perspective of a Bali native. The native, who is the object of study, may not necessarily be interested in identifying or codifying his or her culture in the same way as Geertz. In fact, Geertz's identification of Bali culture may be utterly irrelevant and meaningless to the native, who would perhaps identify his or her culture in a different way.

Notice in our example how there are two possible ways in which the Bali culture may be identified: from the *inside* and from the *outside*. A group is identified from the inside when the person who identifies the culture is deeply immersed in the cluster of experiences, narratives and myths of such a group. In contrast a group is identified from the outside when one is not an agent, but rather an observer, attempting to identify the group; or rather someone who is not deeply immersed in the cluster of experiences, narratives and myths of such a group.

My contention is that the identification of groups is meaningful when it is done by its members, i.e., from the inside. Members of groups can characterize the narratives, myths, values and practices that give meaning and direction to their lives. They are able

⁷ *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

to characterize these traits because they are immersed in them. Since members are embedded in the properties that are essential to their self-understanding, they are in a position to identify those properties in a meaningful way.

But when is one immersed in a group in a significant manner? Presumably, an anthropologist can study and observe a culture as much as he can and in this sense be immersed in it. He can even live within the culture for a number of years and behave as if he were a member.

Such an immersion would not be relevant, since the traits of the culture would presumably not be the ones that are essential to his self-understanding. Suppose, however, that the traits of the culture he studies are indeed essential to his self-understanding. In this case he would be inside the culture. He may be studying his own culture or perhaps becomes “adopted” and “naturalized” in a different culture. When the latter situation is the case, the anthropologist or anyone who might have been formerly in the outside could be said to be immersed within the group in a significant manner.

The upshot of the discussion is that the act of identifying a particular group is generally meaningful when it is done by people whose membership in the group is basic. In other words, group identification is meaningful and relevant when it is done from inside the group.

b. The Historical Emergence of National Identity

Nonetheless, a question now arises: can identification from outside a group ever be meaningful and relevant? The question is an important one because that has often been the case with regard to the historical origin of national identities.

States, in conjunction with nationalists, have been one of the factors shaping and codifying cultural groups in terms of national identities. The process of national identification has not generally been a spontaneous one, but rather one that stems from states and nationalist ideologists. It is then the case that nationalities consist of groups whose identities have been formed and defined from the outside. National identities have not been generally characterized—at least initially—by members of cultural groups, but rather by states and nationalist ideologues. As an instance of what I am now describing, we can think of Eugen Weber’s examination of the historical process that turned “peasants” into “French citizens.”⁸

I have suggested above that group identification is meaningful and relevant when it is done from inside a group, i.e., by group members. Does that mean then that national identity, a kind of identity shaped by states and nationalists, who could very well be shaping the identity of the group from the outside, is meaningless or irrelevant? In order to properly answer this question we must very briefly examine the process by which national identities have historically emerged.

There is a debate among historians regarding the historical emergence of the nation. The question is whether the nation is a feature of the modern era or if there are important antecedents that would allow us to speak of “nations” before the birth of the modern world.

There are roughly two camps on the topic. The *modernists*⁹ believe that the

⁸ *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁹ This seems to be the predominant approach. For authors in this camp, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994

nation could only arise in the social and cultural configuration of modernity. The modernists characterize the nation as an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm), an “imagined community” (Anderson), or a phenomenon that arises due to the operation of intellectual elites (Kedourie) or the needs of industrial society (Gellner).

The problem for the modernists is that nations seem to be more than fabrications or conceptual constructions of elites or political systems.¹⁰ Some elite leaders might declare that a people now become a “nation,” but that does not mean that the newly prescribed “national identity” becomes a reality for everyone. As an illustration of this type of situation, consider the numerous groups in the African continent that can hardly identify themselves with the “national” structures set up by former colonial powers. If nations are not merely the fabrication of elites or political units, what is it that makes nations and national identity possible? Likewise, how do we describe the notions,

[1982]); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1990]); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (New York: Vintage Books 1996 [1975]), pp. 82-97; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage Books 1996 [1962]), pp. 132-145; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1961).

¹⁰ John Hutchinson remarks the following: “It is implausible [...] to conceive of modernizing nationalists as outside their society mobilizing it from above. It implies that invoked ethnic memories have an independent force with which they have to negotiate. What modernists have failed to explore is the relationship of nationalism to other belief systems and the complex symbolic mediations by which nationalists are able to canalize the past for their purposes.” “Nations and Culture,” in *Understanding Nationalism*, eds. M. Guibernau & J. Hutchinson (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), p. 77.

sentiments and collective symbols by which masses that identify themselves with a particular nation are mobilized?

In addressing the latter question, we find the second camp in the debate on the emergence of nations. *Ethno-symbolists* or *pre-modernists*¹¹ claim that modern nations have an “ethnic core.” Given such a core, nations are, in fact, very old communities. Hence the modern nation is simply the development of political institutions that entail a pre-existing element, i.e., an ethnic core.¹² The ethno-symbolists, however, often seem not to take fully into account the major political dimension of ethnic and national

¹¹ The most prominent author within this approach is Anthony Smith. See “The Origins of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12, 3 (July 1989), pp. 341-367; “State-Making and Nation-Building,” in *States in History*, ed. John Hall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Likewise, Smith offers a useful discussion on the topics and issues at stake in the current literature: *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, and History* (Malden: Polity Press, 2001). There is also a useful review on the different types of approaches and authors who have studied the origins of nations in Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen and Michel Seymour, “Introduction: Questioning the Ethnic/Civic Dichotomy,” in *Rethinking Nationalism*, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Volume 22, eds. J. Couture, K. Nielsen and M. Seymour (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996), pp. 10-23.

¹² It is important to point out that the notion of ethnicity is a problematic one. Smith believes, for example, that ethnic groups may be characterized in a more or less clear way. See “The Origins of Nations,” pp. 345-345. Others believe that the notion of ethnicity confuses more than it clarifies things, specially in the study of nations and nationalism. For this view, See Walker Connor, “A Nation Is a Nation, Is a State, is an Ethnic Group, Is a...,” in *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 100-103. And yet others, like Jorge Gracia, believe that ethnicity may be characterized in terms of clusters of properties (a position that seeks to avoid the pitfalls of other misleading characterizations, but does not do away with the notion completely). See “The Nature of Ethnicity with Special Reference to Hispanic/Latino Identity,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 13, 1 (January 1999), pp. 25-42.

identity.¹³ If political units (e.g., states) do, in fact, play a role in the formation of national and ethnic identity, then the ethno-symbolists need to explain how such identities are possible before the emergence of the modern nation-state.

An interesting notion proposed by Eric Hobsbawm in an attempt to address the complexity of national identity, in some sense “invented” and yet in a different sense “preexistent,” is that of *proto-nation*.¹⁴ A proto-nation is a pre-political community bound by feelings of collective belonging. One of the benefits of the notion just mentioned is that we are able to make a distinction between *nations* and *proto-nations*. *Nations* are the phenomena modernists attempt to describe. *Proto-nations*, in contrast, are the phenomena described by ethno-symbolists.

The distinction would make it possible to acknowledge that modern nations are the result of a process that goes in two directions. On the one hand, the *top-down* represents the role of political units and elites in developing national identities. On the other hand, the *bottom-up* captures the collective forms of identity that serve as building blocks for national identity.¹⁵ States or elites, by themselves, do not “create” nations and national identity. But neither do communities, for the most part, spontaneously become full-blown nations or develop strong nationalist feelings without the intervention of either states or ideological elites. Nations are often the result of proto-nations that have been mobilized by political units and also nationalist intellectuals.

¹³ In fact, nations have to be analyzed in terms of “political, technical, administrative, economic and other conditions and requirements.” Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 10.

¹⁴ For this notion, see *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Hobsbawm expresses this point in *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 10-11.

c. The Internalization of Identity

In some sense, nations could be identified in a way that does not immediately portray the properties that are essential to the self-understanding of a given people. Political units and nationalist intellectuals are not always in touch with the meaningful features of the people they wish to portray—imagine the Peruvian state speaking about the “Peruvian national identity” of the Quechuas. Or also think of the fact that states and nationalist intellectuals have often preceded the “nation.”

But when do states and nationalist ideology reach the point in which they become meaningful for the proto-nations they represent? This is a complex matter, but for our purposes we simply need to see that national identities can be *internalized* by a group and hence become meaningful. So, for instance, members of cultural groups, that have internalized the national identities often engineered and managed by states and nationalists, can identify their cultural groups in terms of such national identities. But note that this is possible because the group has appropriated and internalized features, symbols, narratives, and practices that then become essential to the self-understanding of group members.

An example will help us to illustrate the point at stake. When I characterize myself as a “Mexican,” I may be describing experiences and properties that are essential to my self-understanding—in this way I identify my culture from the inside. Since I am a member, in a significant manner, of the culture I am identifying, then my identification is meaningful. But the category “Mexican” would be unintelligible without a nation-state and certain nationalist principles. Thus my characterization of Mexican culture coincides with certain nationalist notions of Mexicanness.

This example shows that meaningful identification, from inside the culture, has effectively merged with a type of identification that might have been historically external. The latter, however, is possible because external identification has been internalized by members of the culture. We can say then that identification from outside a culture could be meaningful when such a form of identification is internalized by the culture at stake. Drawing on Weber's illustration, we could say that peasants can identify themselves as French citizens, in a meaningful and relevant sense, when they have internalized Frenchness.

4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I raised the following question: how do we characterize groups that have the function of endowing members with the type of membership that is central to members' identities?

The groups that have the function at stake generally satisfy three conditions. First, there is the condition of relevant identification. This condition sustains that group members are identified according to properties that are essential to their self-understanding, i.e., properties that make their membership basic.

The second condition is that of differentiation. Here, basic membership is necessarily connected with groups that have difference-sensitive attributes—what I called us-type groups, which contrast with them-type groups. Groups with difference-sensitive attributes possess what I called the status of discernibility. This status entails two circumstances: group members have traits in common; and these common traits are such that they generally make the group distinguishable from other groups.

The third and last condition I discussed is that of intrinsic identification. Under this condition, groups and members are identified from what was described as the “inside” of a group and not the “outside.” Two important elements discussed within this condition are group identification and national identity formation. We will see at a later point the significance of these two elements for understanding Hispanic identity-formation.

I have now completed my discussion of membership and groups. With this framework in mind, I will now turn to the discussion of the Hispanic group and membership. The general question guiding subsequent chapters is this: does the Hispanic group, and its corresponding membership, satisfy the conditions discussed so far?

CHAPTER 5

NATIONALITY AND HISPANIC MEMBERSHIP

The American Federal Government officially recognizes certain groups by means of the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. One of the reasons for such recognition is a governmental attempt to identify and gather data on populations that have historically “experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity.”¹ But the purpose behind the recognition of racial and ethnic groups is not only to identify groups that have experienced discrimination. These groups are also recognized by governmental agencies, policy-makers and society in general because membership in racial or ethnic groups is often thought to be central to members’ identities.

“Hispanic” is one of the groups recognized by the Federal Government, policy-makers and society. A Hispanic in American society is someone who has a particular cultural or national origin. According to the official definition of the Federal Standards, a Hispanic or Latino is a “person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”²

¹ See “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 62, no. 210, Thursday, October 30, 1997, Notices, p. 58782.

² The definition was officially issued by the Office of Management and Budget on May 12, 1977, in the “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” otherwise known as “Statistical Directive No. 15.” According to the latest revision, the definition remains the same, but the category is now “Hispanic” or “Latino,” and “Spanish Origin” could also be used. See “Revisions to the

In focusing on this group, the question that arises is whether membership in the Hispanic group is indeed central to members' identities. Another way of formulating the question is this: is Hispanic membership basic? In order to shed light on the basicness of Hispanic membership, I will compare this membership with another membership, i.e., nationality. I will argue that national membership is basic for most members of the Hispanic group; but, in contrast, Hispanic membership is not basic for most members of the Hispanic group.

1. THE NATIONALITY OF HISPANICS

When we think of Hispanic membership, what type of membership is it? The question is whether Hispanic membership can be thought of as basic. The first step for examining the basic membership of Hispanics is to take a closer look at the *nationality* of Hispanics. After all, Hispanics are characterized in terms of national groups, i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Colombian—or any other Latin American nation—culture or origin.

I will begin by highlighting the fact that people included in the category of “Hispanic” generally have different nationalities. By nationality, in this specific context, I mean (a) feelings of loyalty towards a nation, i.e., national identity, or (b) citizenship, i.e., the formal acknowledgment of a state that someone is a member of such a state. Taking into account the national identities and citizenships of Hispanics we find at least four different groups.

Standards,” p. 58789. I use the term “Hispanic” throughout the next few chapters because it seems to be the one most widely used in media and policy circles.

The first group of Hispanics is composed of American citizens who identify themselves with the American nation. These citizens might be either born in the United States or naturalized. We can think here of second-generation Mexican or Cuban-Americans or someone who was born in Latin America, but then becomes a U.S. citizen and pledges allegiance to the American nation.

A second group is composed of American citizens who identify themselves with their nation of origin in Latin America. In this second group, people are nominal members of the American nation since despite their American citizenship their feelings of loyalty are primarily oriented towards a Latin American nation. As an example, let us think of a Cuban exile who immigrates to the United States and becomes a naturalized American citizen; and yet his or her national allegiance remains in the former birthplace and homeland. According to the 2002 National Survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, “Hispanics who are American citizens are still more likely to identify themselves primarily by country of origin (44%) than to identify primarily as an ‘American’ (33%)....”³ It is reasonable to expect that at least some of those who identify themselves by country of origin do indeed have feelings of loyalty towards their nations.

One could contend at this point that someone from Colombia, who then becomes an American citizen, might have mixed allegiances. She could have, say, both a Colombian and an American national identity. This might indeed be true. Suppose,

³ Mollyann Brodie, Annie Steffenson, Jaime Valdez, Rebecca Levin, and Roberto Suro, *2002 National Survey of Latinos*. Report prepared by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2002, p. 29.

however, that there were a highly conflictive situation, e.g., a war, between the United States and Colombia. In a conflictive situation someone with a mixed identity is likely to be partial to either one side or the other. Considerations such as a sense of justice might determine the choice of partiality. But a crucial element in taking sides will be the person's national identity. Conflict might make the person realize that despite a mixed identity, one of her identities is *dominant*.⁴ Thus, given that her dominant identity is being threatened, she will probably feel compelled to be partial and defend her dominant identity. I will return to this point below since it is important for understanding the basicness of Hispanic membership.

It is important to incidentally point out that there are significant incentives for group partiality in cases of conflict. This is one of the reasons why conflict is so revealing in analyses of group membership and thus figures prominently in my understanding of the contrast between members and non-members. Given a situation of conflict, group member will benefit from strict partiality.

Let us continue with the third group of Hispanics: those who are not American citizens and do not identify themselves with the American nation. We could think, for instance, of a migrant worker from Mexico who crosses the border purely for the purpose of obtaining a particular job. Accordingly, there is no interest in the American nation as such; but rather the interest is oriented towards an economic opportunity that as a matter of contingency happens to be found in American territory. The worker presumably

⁴ This interesting point is one of the premises underlying Russell Hardin's analysis of group membership and conflict. See *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), particularly chapter six.

continues to identify herself with her nation of origin, i.e., Mexico, and has no interest in American citizenship.

The fourth and last group consists of those who are not American citizens, but identify themselves with the American nation. In this category, we might think of someone who was born in Panama and has the citizenship of her birthplace, but then comes to the United States as a child. The parents of the child are not American citizens and thus the child, who was not born on American soil, is not an American citizen either. Since the person in mind grows up in American society, it is possible that she feels identified with the American nation. As she becomes an adult, it would be quite natural to have feelings of loyalty and an identity related to the United States, despite not being an American citizen.

In the four groups I have outlined, two points must be highlighted. First, all Hispanics have a nationality. Here we must remember that the Hispanic category is defined and understood in terms of nationality. This is a very important point and one that we will return to in the next chapter. A Hispanic is a “person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”⁵ It is worth pointing out that the nations mentioned in the definition are from Latin America, but there is also an implied nation, i.e., the United States of America. The category “Hispanic” does not attempt to define Mexicans in Mexico, or Colombians in Europe. The category attempts to define Mexicans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Cubans, etc., who are now in American territory. As pointed out, a Hispanic might be an

⁵ See “Revisions to the Standards,” p. 58789.

American citizen or not, but must now be residing, whether legally or not, in the United States.

The second point is that Hispanics have a variety of nationalities. I mentioned earlier that when speaking of nationality I had two variables in mind: (a) national identity, and (b) citizenship. In accordance with the four groups I described, it is fair to say that Hispanics have both a variety of national identities and citizenships. But one of the complications when looking at Hispanics is that, as we saw, national identity does not always overlap with citizenship. Such a complication is an important one, but since it is not crucial for my argument, I will ignore it in much of the discussion. I will speak of nationality focusing primarily on national identity, namely, feelings of loyalty towards a nation. Hispanics have different nationalities—by which I mean that they have different national identities. Some Hispanics have feelings of loyalty towards Mexico, others towards Cuba or Venezuela, and yet others towards the United States of America. The latter observation is in line with the way different Hispanics identify themselves: “Foreign-born Latinos (the first generation) have a powerful preference for identification by their country of origin. Indeed, that is usually not only the country of their birth but also where some spent their childhood years.” Also, “over half (57%) of Latinos with U.S.-born parents (the third generation and beyond) identify themselves first and foremost as an American.”⁶

⁶2002 *National Survey*, p. 28.

2. NATIONALITY AND BASIC MEMBERSHIP

How significant are the national identities of most Hispanics? I wish to suggest, first, that the national identities of Hispanics actually matter to a significantly large extent. And, second, the reason why the national identities of Hispanics matter to such a large extent is because their national identities are a type of basic membership. I will begin with some illustrations.

Imagine a Hispanic family in which the mother, Claudia, is not an American citizen and does not feel identified with the American nation. Despite the fact that she has lived in the United States for many years and is a U.S. permanent resident, she retains strong feelings towards her native country Mexico, and particularly towards her native town, Tijuana. Her daughter, Maria, was born and raised in the United States and is a U.S. citizen. Maria has a vague memory of a visit to Mexico as a child, but Mexico does not represent much to her because she was born and raised in America, and feels identified with the American nation.

Now suppose a war broke out between the United States and Mexico. The war is characterized—as wars normally are—by particularly bitter sentiments against the other side. Stories that Claudia, from Mexico, heard in her childhood come to her memory: stories, imaginary or real, about the heroic resistance against an establishment largely sponsored by the *gringos*. Life on the border for her, like many others, kept alive the largely historical bitter-sweet feelings that many Mexicans on the border feel towards the rich and sometimes “kind neighbor” who is also the “suspicious enemy.” Now that the war breaks out, all these memories come to mind and Claudia finds it impossible to avoid strongly bitter feelings against Americans. Her daughter, however, is in a different

position since she is a member of the American nation. Maria would naturally tend to side with the United States. Her patriotism is aroused by what she sees as an essentially just war against Mexico.

In a situation like this, mother and daughter would perhaps find themselves divided by national loyalties. Even if not completely alienated from each other, the affinity of mother and daughter would at least be seriously tested. The situation I am describing now is not wholly inconceivable. It has, in fact, occurred before throughout history. Think, for example, of the families that were divided over loyalties to the Empire or the Colonies in the context of the American Revolution. Likewise, families in Latin America were divided in the XIX century over support to the cause of the Realists, Spaniards, or the cause of Independence led by the Creoles, natives of the colonies. Illustrations of this sort show the power of regional sentiments and loyalties, which are sufficiently manifest in nationalities.

Consider now an important soccer game between Mexico and Costa Rica, or Colombia and Argentina, games that will determine the classification to the World Cup. It is likely that these games will draw a high number of nationals that will support their team, and in many instances show antagonism, even if in a “friendly” way, towards the opposite team. Why are these national sporting events so important? What do they reveal about the supporters that fervently cheer for their national teams? A victory of the national team is a source of collective pride and a defeat is a source of collective humiliation. National teams are generally positive representations of “wide selves.” And as David Copp puts it: “when we have wide selves, the accomplishments and failures of certain other people, groups, or entities are important to us emotionally, for their

accomplishments and failures can ground emotions of esteem.”⁷ In the context of sport teams, we find that if they triumph, we all triumph; if they lose, we all lose. These sorts of feelings are true of sports teams in general, but tend to be particularly true of *national* teams.

Eric Hobsbawm, in discussing the consolidation of nationhood between 1915 and 1950, highlights the role of sports in national feelings. He comments that national sports became for national members “...an expression of national struggle, and sportsmen representing their nation or state, primary expressions of their imagined communities.” Similarly,

what has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings (...) is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at what practically every man wants, or at one time in life has wanted, to be good at. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself.⁸

The feelings expressed in the latter paragraph can be witnessed in—to use examples only limited to Latin America—the classificatory rounds for the Soccer World Cup; say, for example, a game between Uruguay and Argentina. Other events, such as the Panamerican Games, the South American Games, the Cup of Liberators and the

⁷ “Social Unity and the Identity of Persons,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, 4 (2002), p. 383.

⁸ *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1990]), p. 143.

Caribbean Series, may also be the occasion for nationalist feelings to emerge in the benign context of sports.

According to Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, “patriotism [in Latin America] is often sharpened by periodic revivals of conflict with a neighboring Latin nation. Thus, Colombians and Venezuelans, Ecuadorians and Peruvians, Chileans and Argentines have traditionally reaffirmed their sense of national pride in actual or symbolic confrontations with each other.”⁹ The sporting events I have in mind could be seen as symbolic confrontations between Latin American nations.

Given the confrontation between nations, whether actual or symbolic, the question that arises is this: what is so special about nations? This is a difficult question, but we know indeed that there is something about nations that arouses deep passions and feelings of loyalty. Someone growing up in Venezuela, or any nation in Latin America or North America, most likely has a national identity. Having a national identity means that one has feelings of loyalty towards one’s nation and these feelings often matter to a significantly large extent. But why do these feelings matter to a significantly large extent?

Nations give people a sense of commonality. In a way nations are a community bound together by a dynamic that was discussed earlier: a strong sense of *we* that separates people from *them*. More specifically, when I speak of “we” and “they” here, I am indirectly alluding to the condition of differentiation described in chapter four. Let me

⁹ *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 2nd. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 135.

suggest that membership among Latin Americans and Americans in this national “we” is generally basic.

Suppose we asked a Venezuelan, an American, or a Peruvian to characterize herself according to those traits that are essential to her own self-understanding. Among those traits, she could most likely count her language, her birthplace, the people to whom she is related, certain tastes, habits, beliefs, etc. It is likely that many of the essential traits she uses to characterize herself are the traits that make her a member of a national group. Let us recall that these were precisely the two characteristics of basic membership discussed in chapter three: (a) certain traits are essential to someone’s self-understanding; and (b) those traits make the person a member of a particular group.

Let me now refine the point about nationality as a type of basic membership. Take, for example, the language of the person just mentioned. Suppose an essential trait of her self-understanding is the language she speaks, e.g., Spanish. If she did not speak the language she currently does, she would not be the person she is. But consider that it is not only Spanish; it is rather the kind of Spanish that makes her sound like a Venezuelan, a Mexican, an Argentinean, a Puerto Rican or a Peruvian; thus making her a member in one of those national groups.

Think also of another possible essential trait: her sense of “home.” We can picture asking her: “where is home for you?” It is quite possible to imagine her, and a good number of people from Latin America and the United States of America, answering this question in national terms. Home is Chile, San Salvador, Cuba, etc.¹⁰ We can

¹⁰ According to the *2002 National Survey*, “foreign-born Latinos’ attachment to their country of origin emerges from their choice of the nation they consider their real homeland, in Spanish ‘patria,’” p. 34.

imagine people answering this question in more specific regional terms—this is particularly true of Americans. Home is Boston, Texas, Chihuahua, Maracaibo, or Buenos Aires. But even in these instances, we must bear in mind that these regions are part of an overarching national community. Without this sense of homeland, the person in our example would perhaps not be who she currently is. Thus, a birthplace and sense of homeland, which makes her a member of a national group, is essential to her self-understanding.

What I have said about the specific person in our example will tend to be true for many people in Latin American nations. Latin American nationals tend to identify themselves with their nation of origin. The point I wish to make, at any rate, is that many of the essential traits people from Latin America (and also the United States of America) will use to characterize themselves are precisely those traits that often make them members of their respective nations. If this is correct, it is possible to say that national membership is generally a basic type of membership for Latin American nationals.

To see the collective strength of national identities among Latin American nationals, due to national basic memberships, let us compare nations with an us-type group such as “Latin America.” One could say, for instance, that Latin Americans—according to José Vasconcelos, a “cosmic race”¹¹—have a strong sense of solidarity as a group.

¹¹ See “The Cosmic Race,” in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values and the Search for Identity*, eds. J. Gracia and E. Millán-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), pp. 269-278.

We could, in fact, think of Latin America as a large and overarching community. Ernesto “Che” Guevara speaks, for example, about “we” who are in constant confrontation with “them.” The “we” Guevara has in mind is at times quite broad: it consists of those people who have been born not only in Latin America, but more widely in poor countries. In a famous speech delivered on February 26, 1965, at the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Algiers, he speaks about the Latin American, Asian, and African peoples as a “family” with a common aspiration that unites every one of them. One of his opening sentences is: “*Our* common aspiration, the defeat of imperialism, unites us in *our* march toward the future; *our* common history of struggle against the same enemy has united *us* along that road” (my italics).¹² The sort of we-versus-them rhetoric, as evinced in Guevara himself, has certainly served to mobilize Latin American (and so called “third world”) countries against imperialist powers, which happen to be “foreign.”¹³

Note, however, that the sense of “us” among those born in poor or Latin American countries has often been superseded by a stronger sense of “us”, e.g., national groups. Guevara himself ended some of his speeches with a slogan that became one of the trademarks of the Cuban Revolution: *Patria o Muerte!* (roughly translated as “country or death!”). “Patria” (*patrie* in French or *das Heimatland* in German) conveys the idea of a “homeland” or “birth soil” to which one is inalienably bound by virtue of being born in

¹² “Our Common Aspiration: The Death of Imperialism and the Birth of a Moral World,” in *Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto Che Guevara*, ed. J. Gerassi (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). Guevara is an icon often displayed, but seldom read. In my view, his writings are worthwhile reading, for they give us valuable insights into the “us-type” mentality.

¹³ Hugo Chavez, current president in Venezuela, is a recent example of how effective a political weapon the we-versus-them rhetoric could be.

such soil. This “patria” is a national community. The observation shows the strength of national memberships among Latin Americans.

Consider some historical examples in support of my previous point. Let us think, for instance, of the War of the Pacific between Bolivia and Chile (1879-1884) after which Bolivia became a land-locked country; or the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia (1932-1935) with the latter seeking to gain access to the Atlantic Ocean. Also, think of the peculiar conflict known as the Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras (1969) in which armed confrontations broke out after a series of preliminary soccer games for the World Cup.¹⁴ Examining the history of war and conflict between Latin American *nations*, one can see the power of nationality, which is often stronger than the Latin American “we.”

But let us also remember that bellicose confrontations are not the only kind of events showing the differences that separate Latin American nationals. We need to bear in mind here our earlier comment about symbolic confrontations reflected in sporting events. At any rate, a Colombian is not to be confused with a Venezuelan, an Argentinean with a Chilean, or a Mexican with a Salvadorian. All these nations have a set of symbols and rituals that give expression to an exclusive national “us.”

Let me mention at this point that nationality remains strong even when Latin American immigrants become Hispanics in the U.S, a point that I will continue to elaborate in subsequent discussions. Contrasting national and Hispanic memberships, this is how Portes and Rumbaut describe the situation of Hispanics in the U.S.:

¹⁴ See my example above regarding the manifestation of national feelings in sporting events.

Colombian immigrants certainly know that they are Colombian and Mexicans that they are Mexican; what they probably do not know when they arrive in the United States is that they belong to a larger ethnic category called Hispanics. Colombians, Mexicans, Cubans, and other immigrant groups from Latin America are generally aware that they share common linguistic and cultural roots, but this fact seldom suffices to produce a strong overarching solidarity. National experiences are too divergent and national loyalties too deeply embedded to yield to this supranational logic.¹⁵

By way of conclusion here, let me make a clarification. I am not suggesting that nationality is the only type of basic membership among Latin Americans. In line with what I suggested in chapter three, we can think of transnational basic memberships, e.g., membership in a religious community. I am rather suggesting that national membership is generally basic because many of the essential traits Latin Americans (and Americans) use to characterize themselves are precisely the traits that make them members of a national group. The distinction is important because it allows us to see that national membership is basic, but it is not the only type of basic membership.

I began the current section with illustrations showing the intensity of national feelings. Illustrations of this sort raise questions about the significance of nationality. Why is nationality so significant among Latin Americans and Americans? I suggested that nations are communities with a strong sense of “we” and membership in this national “we” is generally basic. Once we see that national membership is generally basic, we can

¹⁵ *Immigrant America*, p. 135.

also begin to see what is so significant about nations and why they draw intense feelings of loyalty.

3. HISPANICITY AND BASIC MEMBERSHIP

We set out to inquire about the status of Hispanic membership. Can Hispanic membership be thought of as basic? We have seen that Hispanics do, as a matter of fact, have different national identities. Furthermore, I have suggested that the national memberships of people included in the category of “Hispanic”—whether American or Latin American—are generally basic. But even if we acknowledge that nationalities among Hispanics are a type of basic membership, the question that must be raised is whether Hispanic membership can also be thought of as basic. For reasons that I will explain in the next chapter, I think that the answer is negative. But for the sake of discussion, let us grant for now that the answer to the possibility of Hispanic basic membership seems to be, at least in part, affirmative.

Think of someone born in the United States under the name of Maria Alonzo in a family of Salvadorian immigrants. Such a person will most likely possess traits—many of them perhaps non-voluntarily acquired—that are essential to her own self-understanding. Some of the traits that are essential to Maria Alonzo’s self-understanding—her parent’s homeland and history, and her physical traits—will perhaps make her think of herself as a Hispanic. But we must also remember that Maria Alonzo has a nationality, which is a type of basic membership. Maria Alonzo was born in the United States and presumably has an American national identity. We could imagine that this national identity is highly significant for her because her membership in this national

“we,” like the membership of other Americans, is generally basic. Maria Alonzo has both a Hispanic and a national membership, and the two memberships seem to be basic. Comparing these two memberships will help us to understand the status of Hispanic membership.

I wish to suggest that Hispanic membership might have some degree of basicness for some of the people included in the category of “Hispanic,” but the degree of national basicness among Hispanics is pervasive and higher than Hispanic membership. My suggestion entails three claims. First, national membership is basic for all Hispanics—or at least a vast majority of them. I will call this the criterion of *pervasive basic membership*. A second claim is that Hispanic membership is basic for some, but not all Hispanics. Let me mention here again that speaking about the basicness of Hispanic membership is an overstatement, for reasons that will be explained in the next chapter. But I grant, for the time being, the possibility of basic Hispanic membership for the sake of discussion. Call this the criterion of *partial basic membership*. Third, even when Hispanic membership has a certain degree of basicness, e.g., as with Maria Alonzo, national membership has a higher degree of basicness. I understand by “robust membership” a type of membership that has a higher degree of basicness than other memberships. According to the third claim then we have the criterion of *robust membership*. I will now turn to a discussion of the three criteria.

I have already pointed out that all (or almost all) Hispanics have a nationality, by which I primarily understand “national identity” or “feelings of loyalty towards a nation.” It is very hard to imagine a Hispanic without a nationality, i.e., someone who has a Hispanic identity, but not a national identity. Here we must remember that Hispanics

have an American or a Latin American nationality since Hispanics are second-generation Americans or originally from Latin American nations. As we saw in the four groups discussed above, some Hispanics have an American national identity, whereas others have national identities from Latin American nations—regardless of whether national identity coincides with citizenship or not. The point now is that despite differences in national identities, all (or almost all) Hispanics do in fact have national identities.

I also argued above that national identities are very powerful for people from Latin America (and America) because nationality is a type of basic membership among them. If I am right so far, we can then see that all (or almost all) Hispanics have national identities, and these national identities derive from a type of basic membership in a national community. The corollary is that national membership among Hispanics is pervasive, i.e., national membership is basic for all (or almost all) Hispanics. In sum, the criterion of pervasive basic membership among Hispanics is met by the attribute of nationality.

Let us now assume for a moment that Hispanic membership is also basic. The question then is whether Hispanic membership is basic for all (or almost all) Hispanics. I have granted that Hispanic membership might be basic for some Hispanics, e.g., Maria Alonzo. But are all other Hispanics in the same position? Consider one of the groups we discussed above, i.e., those who are not American citizens and do not identify themselves with the American nation. I used the example of a Mexican migrant worker from Mexico who crosses the border purely for the purpose of obtaining a particular job. Such a migrant has no interest in the American nation as such, but rather a particular economic opportunity that happens to be found in American territory.

Once the migrant crosses the American border he will become a Hispanic. The migrant presumably has a Mexican identity, but how significant is his “Hispanic” membership? One could imagine that it is probably not very significant. In fact, one could easily imagine his Hispanic membership not being basic. Suppose we asked the migrant to characterize himself according to those traits that are essential to his own self-understanding. He mentions, for instance, language and homeland, which make him a member of the Mexican nation. One could point out that the Spanish language and Mexican origin also make him a member of the Hispanic group. It does not mean, however, that his Hispanic membership is then basic. The migrant’s essential traits make him view himself primarily as a Mexican and not necessarily as a Hispanic. Whereas his Mexican membership contains traits that are essential to his own self-understanding, his Hispanic membership does not. My point is that the migrant’s membership in the Mexican nation is basic, but his membership in the Hispanic group is not.

Let us recall a point that was made in chapter three with regard to the characteristics of basic membership. The two components of basic membership are (a) certain traits are essential to my own self-understanding and (b) these traits make me a member of a particular group. Keeping these two components together is important because, if isolated from each other, we will have two misleading pictures. First, one might simply think of traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding, but these traits usually derive from and are associated with a particular group. Second, one might think that being a member in a particular group might be essential to a member’s self-understanding. But this is not always the case because membership does not always entail the sorts of traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding. The upshot is

that membership is basic if and only if group traits are essential to a member's self-understanding.

Now let us think again of the Mexican migrant who becomes a Hispanic in the U.S. by virtue of the fact that he speaks Spanish and has a Mexican homeland. But note that these traits, which are essential to his own self-understanding, make him a member of a particular group, the Mexican nation. This particular group is an us-type group because, among other reasons, membership in the group is basic and the group is identified from the inside—two of the conditions discussed in chapter four with regard to relevant groups.

When it comes to Hispanic membership, however, it cannot be said that the traits that are essential to the migrant's self-understanding make his membership in the Hispanic group similar to national membership. He may indeed be, in some sense, a member in the Hispanic group, but this group *per se* is not characterized exclusively or primarily by the Spanish language and Mexican homeland (the traits that are essential to the migrant's self-understanding).¹⁶ Now recall that membership is basic if and only if group traits are essential to a member's self-understanding. Whereas this condition can be applied to the particular group, Mexican, it cannot be applied to the Hispanic group. So despite the fact that the migrant is, in some sense, a member of the Hispanic group, this membership is non-basic.

Another brief example will also make the point of the non-basiness of Hispanic membership. One might think of someone who has a Cuban relative three generations back, e.g., her grandfather. But other than a relative the person has no ties with Cuba.

¹⁶ This point will be developed in more detail in the next chapter.

She considers herself an American and many of the features that are essential to her own self-understanding are the ones that make her a member in the American nation, and thus her American membership is basic. She might additionally consider herself a Hispanic, but her Hispanic membership is not basic because none of the traits that are essential to her own self-understanding are also the sorts of traits that make her a member in the Hispanic group. The person I have in mind might have a Hispanic membership, but such a membership will not be basic for her.

One could go even further. Since Hispanicity does not have much relevance for her identity, she might also choose not to consider herself a Hispanic. We could perhaps imagine someone choosing not to view herself as a Hispanic because the essential traits of her own-self-understanding make her an American, but not necessarily a Hispanic. She might choose to think of herself as a Hispanic-American, but she might also choose to think of herself as an American *simpliciter*.

If my observations are correct, Hispanic membership as a type of basic membership seems to have a partial extension. Hispanic membership is basic for some, but not all Hispanics.

Incidentally, I suspect that many Hispanics will see their Hispanic membership as a matter of choice. Thus they might choose to pick out some traits that will be considered “Hispanic,” but they may also choose not to pick out those traits. As we saw earlier, Mary Waters describes a kind of identity that is voluntary and thus selective. So, for instance, “you can choose those aspects of being Irish that appeal to you and discard

those that do not.”¹⁷ Hispanics might choose some traits of Hispanicity that they find appealing and also discard the unappealing traits. Once choice is introduced, i.e., you choose and discard traits, then questions about basicness emerge. Are voluntary traits essential to someone’s self-understanding? If I can discard certain traits at will, are they really essential to my own self-understanding?

I will ignore the questions having to do with choice in the present context and simply assume that, whether a matter of choice or not, Hispanic membership is basic for some but not all group members. Even if that is the case, the crucial point is that Hispanic membership as a type of basic membership has a partial extension. My conclusion then is that whereas, as we saw before, nationality meets the criterion of pervasive basic membership, Hispanic membership does not meet this criterion. Hispanic membership meets, at best, the criterion of partial basic membership.

In our previous examples, I have compared national and Hispanic memberships. We must now make this comparison explicit and turn to the degrees of basicness between national and Hispanic membership. I will now discuss the third criterion mentioned above, robust membership.

I mentioned before the way in which Portes and Rumbaut describe Hispanics and their national memberships. Among Latin American nationals and Hispanics, national experiences “are too divergent and national loyalties too deeply embedded to yield to this supranational logic [i.e., Hispanic identity].”¹⁸

¹⁷ *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 115.

¹⁸ *Immigrant America*, p. 135.

The idea described here is that the national membership of Hispanics is robust, i.e., national membership has a higher degree of basicness than Hispanic membership. I suggested above that nations are communities with a strong sense of “we” and membership in this national “we” is generally basic, which is one of the reasons why nations draw intense feelings of loyalty. I now wish to develop this notion further and argue that national membership when compared with Hispanic membership is robust.

Let us begin with an observation about robust membership and conflict. Robust membership does not exclude other basic memberships. As suggested, one might be both a Hispanic and an American, and the two memberships might be basic. But robust membership does often exclude other memberships that might have a similar degree of basicness. What I mean is that robust membership is often exclusive, i.e., it does not allow for other memberships with a similar degree of basicness. Robust membership is one of the reasons why in a situation of conflict we are likely to see people taking sides and defending those groups with traits that are most essential to their own self-understandings—Serbs and Croats, Hutus and Tutsis, Catholics and Protestants, Mexicans and Americans.

As mentioned in chapter four and in our previous discussion, it is certainly true that people usually have different layers of membership in different (and sometimes conflicting) us-type groups. It does seem to be the case, however, that in certain instances one of the basic memberships in an us-type group could have the potential for overriding other basic memberships. One can particularly see one membership prevailing over others in situations of conflict.

If the observation is right, then it is possible to anticipate that in the case of a confrontation between the nationalities of Hispanics, Hispanic membership will subside and national membership will prevail. The reason why national membership prevails over Hispanic membership is because national membership is much stronger than Hispanic membership. If membership x overrides membership y , membership x is robust with regard to membership y . National membership overrides Hispanic membership and hence the former is robust with regard to the latter.

An analogy between the Latin American and Hispanic groups will support my claim. One of the points I made in our earlier discussion is that national membership is robust with regard to Latin American membership. Being a Hispanic is akin with being a Latin American in that each category encompasses different national memberships. If it is true that national membership is robust with regard to Latin American membership, one could say *a fortiori* that national membership is robust with regard to Hispanic membership. My claim then is that the criterion of robust membership is met by national membership and not Hispanic membership.

Let me now summarize, by way of conclusion, the tenets of my discussion. First, I argued that nationality meets the criterion of pervasive basic membership. Second, whereas nationality meets the criterion of pervasive basic membership, Hispanic membership does not meet this criterion because Hispanic membership meets, at best, the criterion of partial basic membership. Third, even if one grants the possibility that Hispanic membership could be basic, national membership is robust with regard to Hispanic membership, which means that only national membership meets the criterion of robust membership.

4. CONCLUSION

I set out to inquire whether membership in the Hispanic group is central to members' identities. In order to understand the identity of Hispanics, I raised the question of whether Hispanic membership is basic.

I attempted to answer this question by exploring national membership and comparing national membership with Hispanic membership. I suggested that national membership is basic for all (or almost all) Hispanics, but Hispanic membership is basic for only some Hispanics. Additionally, national membership is more robust than Hispanic membership.

Three points follow from my line of thought. First, if national membership is a type of basic membership for most Hispanics, national membership is likely to be highly significant for them. Thus for most Hispanics, national membership is at the center of their identity.

Second, granting that Hispanic membership is actually basic for some Hispanics, Hispanic membership could be said to be highly significant for them. Hispanic membership would then seem to be central to the identity of some Hispanics.

But here we must also remember that national membership is generally more robust than Hispanic membership. Hence, my third point, if national membership is more robust than Hispanic membership, national membership is likely to be more significant to more people than Hispanic membership; and also more significant as a type of membership. Given that nationality is more significant, it has a greater claim to being at the center of someone's identity. Even in cases in which Hispanic membership might

indeed seem to be central to someone's identity, the situation for most Hispanics is that national membership is at the center of their identities.

CHAPTER 6

HISPANIC IDENTIFICATION AND COMMON IDENTITY

I have looked at Hispanic membership in comparison with national membership. In this chapter, I wish to examine the Hispanic group and query whether this group as such satisfies the conditions of groups that have the function of endowing members with basic memberships. I will concentrate on the first two conditions formulated in chapter four—the conditions of relevant identification and differentiation—and leave the third condition, intrinsic identification, for the next chapter. The general question to be addressed now is this: does the Hispanic group satisfy the conditions of relevant groups discussed in chapter four?

1. RELEVANT IDENTIFICATION

We know that according to the first condition outlined in chapter four, the condition of relevant identification, groups are identified according to properties that tend to make membership in a group basic.

Is the Hispanic group identified according to properties that make Hispanic membership basic? The answer to this question, I will argue, is negative. Let us look at two components in the question being raised: (a) is the Hispanic group identifiable, and (b) is it possible to single out the relevant properties of Hispanic membership? I will address these two questions in turn and make two points. First, there is a difficulty lying in the fact that Hispanics are not a clearly identifiable group. Second, the reason why Hispanics are not clearly identifiable is because Hispanic membership is an

epiphenomenon of national membership—a type of membership that is currently more robust than Hispanic membership.

I will now begin with the point on whether Hispanics are identifiable. Let us here recall that the sorts of groups we are concerned with are identifiable. A group is identifiable when given a process of interaction, group members can discriminate members from non-members by recognizing certain social markers in fellow-members. The question that now arises is this: are members of the Hispanic group able to recognize each other as fellow-members (and discriminate those members from non-members)? In order to address this question, let me begin with another one: what are the criteria according to which Hispanics are classified?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the criteria for classifying Hispanics is either birth or heritage. So, for example, “...people of Mexican origin [i.e., a Hispanic] may be either born in Mexico or of Mexican *heritage* [my emphasis].”¹ So, in other words, “Hispanic” may refer to at least three possibilities. First, a Hispanic is someone who is born in Mexico (or more generally, Latin America) and migrates to the U.S. Second, a Hispanic is someone who is born in the U.S. from Mexican, or Latin American, parents, and thus presumably has a Mexican (or Latin American) heritage. Lastly, since

¹ Roberto Ramirez and Patricia de la Cruz, *The Hispanics Population in the United States: March 2002*, United States Census Bureau, June 2003, p. 1. The meaning of the word *heritage*, or what it means to have a certain *heritage*, is not made clear in the report. The report is alluding to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. See “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 62, no. 210, Thursday, October 30, 1997, Notices, p. 58789.

there are no constraints upon the idea of “Mexican heritage” one could perhaps include a third possibility: people who believe they have enough affinity with Mexican or Latin American “heritage” and are thus entitled to be classified as Hispanics.

The first criterion for classification posits that a Hispanic is someone who was born in a certain place. But note that it is not just any place; it is rather a *nation*. One clearly sees in this criterion that some Hispanics are first-generation immigrants who were born in Latin America, whereas other Hispanics are born and reared in the U.S. So a first group of Hispanics consists of people born in Latin American nations, whereas the second one consists of American nationals.

For the first group, those born in Latin America, the criterion of birth would be enough to make them classify as Hispanics. But for the second group, those born in the U.S., the criterion of birth is not enough for classifying as Hispanics, since many non-Hispanics are born in the U.S.

Now let us look more closely at the group of those that classify as Hispanics under the birth criterion. A Hispanic is someone who was born in Mexico, Honduras, Venezuela, etc. But here we must bear in mind that all those national places are different from each other. The result is that we are attempting to subsume a set of different national identities under an overarching category. So the Hispanic category consists of Mexican-Venezuelan-Honduran-Chilean-Argentinean-Colombian-Bolivian-Ecuadorian-Peruvian-Uruguayan-Paraguayan identities—and we haven’t finished mentioning all the possibilities.

We must here remember that Hispanics may be classified under a second criterion, namely, heritage—which includes those born in the U.S. This, I think, makes

the situation more complicated. Under this criterion, those born in Latin American countries and the U.S. are supposed to have a common heritage that makes them identifiable. Here we must bear in mind that, as already mentioned, all the national places at stake are different from each other. Thus, we are attempting to subsume under a single category a set of different national identities, or rather, “heritages.”

Let me now return to the original question about whether the Hispanic group is identifiable. I said above that (based on the condition of relevant identification formulated in chapter four) a group is identifiable when, given a process of interaction, group members can discriminate members from non-members by recognizing certain social markers in fellow-members.

The question that arises is this: could one say that the Hispanic group is identifiable according to a set of social markers that makes recognition among fellow-members of the group possible? Given the differences in identities among members of the Hispanic group, I doubt that the answer to the question is affirmative. The answer to this question would be affirmative if either national identities were weaker than what they currently are, or Hispanic identity was stronger than what it is. But given the current state of affairs, members of the Hispanic group would probably not recognize each other as fellow-members—meaning that the group is not identifiable in the sense that interests us. I have not yet said everything I intend to say about the criteria for Hispanic classification, Hispanic common identity and the process of Hispanic identification. I will return to these topics below.

I will now turn to the reason why the Hispanic group is not properly identifiable. Let me begin my argument by emphasizing the fact that, as we have seen, national

memberships tend to be different from each other and also exclusive. So a Mexican is not an Argentinean or a Chilean. Similarly, a Colombian is not a Venezuelan or a Salvadorian.

Now, let us note that categorizing different and exclusive memberships is not the problem as such. After all, we do this when we speak of Mexicans, Venezuelans and Bolivians as Latin Americans, or, say, Roman Catholics. In these instances, we could even acknowledge that there are cases in which a Bolivian and a Paraguayan are united by their Catholic membership in a way that takes precedence over their national differences. In such a situation, it could be the case that their religious membership competes with or is even more basic than their national memberships.

Nonetheless, the problem with the notion and phenomenon of Hispanicity begins when exclusive national memberships are categorized as a single group in which membership is supposed to have a certain degree of basicness. We must remember that the importance of being a Hispanic presumably lies in that Hispanicity is very important to someone's identity. For if Hispanic membership is simply nominal (without a high degree of significance for someone's identity), then it would be irrelevant (from the government's perspective) whether someone classifies as a Hispanic or not.

Given the presumed value of membership in the Hispanic category and the way the category is defined, the following dilemma arises. Either membership in the single Hispanic category is more robust than the national and exclusive memberships it entails, or the exclusive memberships are more robust than membership in the single category. I argued in the previous chapter that the latter is the case, i.e., national memberships are robust with regard to Hispanic membership.

Let me now pause for a moment and, before moving on, summarize some of the elements that have come up to this point. In my discussion so far, we see that the following is the case: (a) Hispanics are classified by virtue of national memberships, (b) Hispanic membership is presumably basic, and (c) national memberships are more basic than Hispanic membership.

Now note that Hispanics are classified by virtue of memberships that are more basic than Hispanic membership itself. The problem here lies in the attempt to subsume under a single categorial membership a set of national memberships that is robust with regard to the categorial membership. What this attempt shows is that the apparent basicness of Hispanic membership is an epiphenomenon of national membership. National membership is basic. Hispanic membership might have the appearance of basic membership, but the apparent basicness of Hispanic membership really derives from national memberships.

For the sake of clarity, let me explain the argument in more detail and also more formally. I will begin by thinking of a person P, whose Hispanic membership is presumably basic. Let us remember that if P has a basic membership, she has a set of traits that are essential to her self-understanding and make her a member of a particular group. In this case, the particular group would be the Hispanic group.

Suppose we tried to identify the traits that are essential to P's self-understanding and that also make her a member in the Hispanic group. P, for instance, has two traits that are essential to her self-understanding: she speaks Spanish and she was born in Ecuador.

But now consider two points. First, Hispanic membership is characterized by Latin American national traits. A Hispanic, for instance, is someone who speaks Spanish, was born in Colombia (or from Colombian parents) or has a Mexican heritage. Thinking of P, the reason why she is considered to be a Hispanic is because she speaks Spanish and was born in Ecuador. Formally speaking, we say that:
Nationality=Hispanicity.

The second point moves us to a crucial step in the argument. Let us recall that national membership is robust with regard to Hispanic membership. What this means is that nationality has a higher degree of basicness than Hispanicity. More precisely, there are more traits that are essential to P and make her a member in a national group than traits that are essential to P and make her a member in the Hispanic group. The latter statement assumes, of course, that there are certain traits that could be essential to P's self-understanding and make her a member in the Hispanic group. I make this concession for the sake of argument, but we will see that such a concession is not entirely true. According to this second point, let us say formally that: Nationality=Basic > Hispanicity=Basic

Given the two points I have just mentioned, consider that it would be counterintuitive to say that:

- (i) Nationality=Hispanicity
- (ii) Nationality=Basic > Hispanicity=Basic
- (iii) Hispanicity=Basic

Given that Hispanicity is defined by virtue of nationality, and nationality has a higher degree of basicness than Hispanicity, it does not follow that Hispanicity is basic. It rather follows that nationality is basic.

The argument is confirmed in practice. Think of P again. The traits that are essential to P's self-understanding are traits that probably make her a member in a national group, e.g., Ecuador. Thus her Ecuadorian membership is basic. We might think that the two traits that are essential to P's self-understanding also make her a Hispanic (in a way that makes her Hispanic membership basic). But the seemingly Hispanic traits (language and birthplace) are really traits of a particular national group, i.e., Ecuador. We can then see that the Hispanic traits are epiphenomena of Ecuadorian traits. When we attempt to identify the traits that are presumably essential to P and make her a member in the Hispanic group, we are really identifying national traits. If I am right, it would then make sense to say that P's Ecuadorian membership is basic. But it would not make sense to say that P's Hispanic membership is basic.

It is important to clarify what I am saying. I am not saying that P could not be considered a Hispanic. For purposes of census classification, to mention just one example, she would certainly be seen as a Hispanic. She could also even view and think of herself this way. But the fundamental question is whether her Hispanic membership is basic. My point is that given the robustness of national membership, and the way Hispanicity is defined, Hispanic membership is non-basic.

The immediate question that comes to mind here is whether Hispanic membership could indeed become basic. I will deal with this possible transformation in the next chapter. Let me just mention here that Hispanic membership could indeed become a type

of basic membership. But I think that two conditions would need to be the case. First, Hispanicity would have to become an identity in itself and not simply a category or identity defined by virtue of other national memberships. A second condition is closely related to the first one. The nationalities that are currently included in the Hispanic category will need to lose their strength and cease to have the high degree of basicness that they currently have.

Let me briefly deal here with a possible objection that might be raised. I said that P has two traits that are essential to her self-understanding and make her a member of the Ecuadorian nation. But P has now migrated to the U.S., has become an American citizen and has renounced Ecuadorian citizenship. In fact, she no longer considers herself Ecuadorian. So, it would be more precise to say that the traits that are essential to P's self-understanding formerly made her a member of the Ecuadorian nation. Would it not follow that P's Hispanic membership in the U.S. is then basic?

Two observations are in place. First, bear in mind that basic membership entails (a) traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding and (b) make her a member in a particular group. P renouncing a particular group does not automatically make her a member in another particular group. Note that P has voluntarily renounced a group to presumably become a member, out of her own choice, in another group. But we have now introduced the element of voluntary membership, which I explicitly contrasted with basic membership in chapter three. P might renounce her Ecuadorian membership in order to voluntarily become an American. She even perhaps now considers herself a Hispanic. But this has been a matter of choice, and so her Hispanic membership (and American membership for that matter) is non-basic.

Second, let me point out here that the Hispanic group is not a particular group because members of the group do not recognize each other as fellow-members. The reader might have thought of this point already, but I have avoided making the claim explicit because it would make my argument circular. I would be saying that Hispanic membership is non-basic because the Hispanic group is not particular and the reason why the Hispanic group is not particular (and hence properly identifiable) is because membership is non-basic. My claim that the Hispanic group is not properly identifiable because Hispanic membership is non-basic is made on different grounds (i.e., Hispanicity is an epiphenomenon of nationality). But the fact of the matter is that Hispanics cannot be considered a particular (and properly identifiable) group because the group does not have a common identity. I will return to the topic of common identity in the next section.

At this point, we can then finally return to the question guiding our current discussion: what is the reason why Hispanics are not identified in the sense that interests us? If my argument is correct, we can see the reason why the Hispanic group is not properly identifiable. According to the condition of relevant identification, groups are identified according to properties that tend to make membership in a group basic. But if we look for these properties among Hispanics, we will find that these kinds of properties are the ones that make Hispanics members of their respective nations. Properties of basic membership are primarily national, and only epiphenomenally Hispanic. Thus when we attempt to identify the properties of basic membership among Hispanics, we are really turning to national properties. The end result is that nations satisfy the condition of relevant identification across the board. Hispanicity, in contrast, borrows from national capital, but does not generally satisfy the condition of relevant identification.

2. DIFFERENTIATION AND COMMON IDENTITY

I will now turn to the condition of differentiation. According to this condition, basic membership is necessarily connected with the difference-sensitive attributes of groups. In chapter four, I argued that there is a necessary connection between group differences and the properties that are essential for the self-understandings of group members. The way I put it was this: groups in which basic membership is possible tend to be those groups that can be distinguished by way of exclusion. These groups have what I called the status of discernibility.

Much of what was said in the previous section can be applied here as well. We could virtually paraphrase the previous argument and see why the Hispanic group does not satisfy the condition of differentiation. I will not, however, proceed this way.

What I will do here is raise the question about whether the Hispanic group possesses the status of discernibility and suggest that the group does not have such a status. The discussion in this section will draw from previous arguments and return to some earlier points. But the present discussion will also add additional elements to my previous arguments. Additionally, I will also engage two prominent theoreticians of Hispanic identity, namely, Jorge Gracia and Angelo Corlett.

Let us recall that groups have the status of discernibility when two circumstances are the case. The first one is that group members have traits in common. And, second, these common traits are such that they make the group distinguishable from other groups. Another way of formulating these circumstances is by saying that groups have a “common identity” that is unique to such a group.

I now wish to focus on this notion of common identity. The question is: do Hispanics have a common identity? Gracia and Corlett have argued that this is certainly the case. By examining their arguments, I will contend that the Hispanic group does not have a common identity in the sense that matters.

a. Jorge Gracia and Hispanic Common Identity

Jorge Gracia adopts a historical-family view according to which the category of “Hispanic” reflects a “common identity” and thus the category is useful for the self-understanding and empowerment of Hispanics.² He claims, for instance, that “to adopt a name and define one’s identity is...an act of empowerment because it limits the power of others to name and identify us.”³ Elsewhere, he says that “the category ‘Hispanic’ is useful to describe and understand ourselves. It also serves to describe much of what we produce and do, for this product and these actions are precisely the results of who we are....”⁴

To grasp the way Gracia believes we should use the category of “Hispanic,” a way that allows us to acknowledge the unity and yet diversity of the group, we must look at his conception of ethnic names. In Gracia’s view, ethnic labels can be misleading because of their ambiguity and yet we should be able to retain those labels because they play a crucial role in the groups they name. Accordingly, a satisfactory conception of

² *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). And also “The Nature of Ethnicity with Special Reference to Hispanic/Latino Identity,” *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 13, 1 (January 1999), pp. 25-42.

³ *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, p. 46.

⁴ *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, p. 66.

ethnicity must account for the unity and also diversity of ethnic groups. The parameters of ethnic explanation should be: “first, the unity of ethnic groups and their difference from other groups; second, the diversity found within ethnic groups themselves.”⁵

Part of the confusion about ethnic groups and the reason why ethnic labels run the risk of becoming too broad and thus useless, is that we use the wrong criteria for ethnic identification. Gracia examines five criteria for the identification of ethnic groups—political, linguistic, cultural, racial and genetic—and contends that the criteria must be abandoned because they do not provide necessary or sufficient conditions for ethnic identification. Gracia’s purpose then is to propose a criterion of ethnic identification that does not necessarily entail political units, language, culture, race or genetic relations; so that we can still identify ethnic groups but not have to link them to traits such as race, language, etc.

According to Gracia, we can successfully identify ethnic groups, acknowledging their unity and yet diversity, by implementing a *historical* criterion: “What ties the membership of an ethnic group together, and separates them from others, is history and the particular events of that history; a unique web of changing historical events supplies their unity.”⁶

The historical understanding of ethnic groups allows for a cluster of properties that makes ethnic groups unique without requiring that every single member of the group possesses the same exact properties. A cluster of properties distinguishes ethnic groups by virtue of relationships that vary at times, but yet make the group distinguishable.

⁵ “The Nature of Ethnicity,” p. 33.

⁶ “The Nature of Ethnicity,” p. 34.

Gracia explains the point this way: a group of members ABCD is identifiable due to the relationship (aRb) between A and B; (bRc) between B and C; and (cRd) between C and D. Now is A necessarily related to D or C? Maybe or maybe not, but those specific relationships are not crucial. What matters is that there is a cluster of historically relational properties within the set ABCD; and such a historically relational cluster of properties is enough for making the group identifiable.⁷

Gracia's argument can now be illustrated with respect to the ethnic understanding of Hispanics. We assume that Hispanics constitute an ethnic group, but then wonder about the criterion by which we can determine whether they are an identifiable ethnic group or not. Can we distinguish Hispanics by virtue of their nationalities? The answer is obviously negative because some are Chilean, whereas others are Mexicans, Paraguayans, etc. How about language? The answer is once again negative because some Hispanics speak Spanish, but not all do. The same goes for culture, race, and genetic relationships among Hispanics. It would then seem highly unlikely to identify Hispanics as an ethnic group, unless we turn to Gracia's historical criterion for ethnic identification. Gracia points out that:

....the concept of Hispanic should be understood historically, that is, as a concept that involves historical relations. Hispanics are the group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian peninsula after 1492 and what were to become the colonies of those countries after the encounter between Iberia and America took place, and

⁷ "The Nature of Ethnicity," pp. 33-36; and *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, pp. 47-55.

by descendants of these people who live in other countries (e.g. the United States) but preserve some link to those people.⁸

So Hispanics may have different races and come from various linguistic groups, cultural backgrounds and national communities. But if someone is historically related to some segment of the group stemming from a specific region, i.e., the continent known as Latin America, after a particular date, i.e., 1492, he or she belongs to the ethnic group known by the term of “Hispanic.” In short, Hispanics are an identifiable ethnic group because of a historical criterion.

I will now raise two objections to Gracia’s account on the ethnic identification of Hispanics. My first objection is directly related to Gracia’s notion of historical relations as the criterion for ethnic identification. The second objection goes against Gracia’s claim that Hispanics have a common identity and such an identity is a source for the self-understanding and empowerment of Hispanics.

In Gracia’s account, Hispanics are an identifiable and distinguishable ethnic group because they possess a cluster of properties. Were we to raise the question about the origins of the cluster of properties that distinguish Hispanics, Gracia’s account will point towards historical relations. But let us now raise another question: where do the historical relations that form the basis for the cluster of properties of ethnic groups come from? When raising the question about the origin of historical relations, I am assuming three elements: (a) history consists of narratives about certain events; (b) those narratives

⁸ *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, p. 48.

are shaped by those who tell the narratives; and (c) a way in which narratives are shaped by those who tell them is by means of categories.⁹

The bottom line with regard to the last element is that we cannot think of historical relations or narratives without using categories and those categories shape the content of the story. A quick example will illustrate the point. Fifty years ago the 1492 event between Columbus and indigenous people in the now “Latin American continent” would have been classified under the category of “discovery.” Given a change in social sensibility and the need to use a different designation, the same event now goes under the category of “encounter.”¹⁰

So my specific question now is this: what is the origin of the categories used in telling the historical narrative that describes and characterizes Hispanics? In other words, who defines the categories that shape the narrative of Hispanic identity? The question I have posed requires a complex and multifaceted answer that would need to take into account shifting social sensibilities. I would like to focus, however, on an important generator for the categories used in the historical narrative of Hispanic identity: the state.

⁹ The elements I mention do not mean, however, that historical descriptions are “subjective” or that that descriptions do not have truth-conditions. For a discussion on these matters, see Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 13-61. For interesting discussions on the role of historical narratives in group identity, see Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 51-77. See also Robert Fullinwider, “Patriotic History,” in *Public Education in a Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique*, ed. R. Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ The attribution of racial categories, for example, also provides a good example of different social sensibilities. On this point, see a helpful discussion by Lawrence Blum, *I’m Not a Racist, But...: The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 98-108.

We could naturally turn to Latin American states, except that the phenomenon of Hispanic identity is primarily an American phenomenon and thus we must turn to the American state.

The Proclamation of George W. Bush inaugurating the 2001 National Hispanic Heritage Month gives us an interesting example of what I have in mind. Quoting different examples and pointing out how Hispanics “have played an integral role in our country’s exceptional story of success,”¹¹ the Proclamation classifies Hispanics under the category of “contributors to the American experience.” We can now think of a contrasting example. People of Mexican origin would have hardly been classified under the just mentioned category by the American state, approximately a hundred years ago, in the context of the Mexican-American war.

We could use illustrations of several shifting categories, but I want to now address the category of “Hispanic” itself. According to the American government, a “Hispanic” is a “person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”¹² Let us note several elements in this definition. First, a Hispanic is a person with a particular origin. Not any kind of origin would do, since the person under description originates from one of the national frameworks delimited in the category.

¹¹ George W. Bush. “Proclamation 7471 of September 28, 2001,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 66, no. 191, Tuesday, October 2, 2001, Presidential Documents, p. 50097.

¹² “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting;” otherwise known as “Statistical Directive No. 15,” Office of Management and Budget, May 12, 1977. As mentioned in previous footnotes, the definition remains the same, but the category is now “Hispanic” or “Latino,” and “Spanish Origin” could also be used. See “Revisions to the Standards,” p. 58789.

There is now a very important second element strongly implied in the category: a Hispanic is a person of a national origin who is presumably *now a member of the American nation*.¹³ Without this qualification, the category would not make sense—since the category is not trying to capture Mexicans who are now living in Mexico, but rather Mexicans who now live in the U.S.—and presumably pledge allegiance to the U.S. as well. There is a diachronic change in membership: a person was, in the past tense, a member of the Mexican nation, and is now, present tense, a member of the American nation.

Now let us compare the Mexican who is a member of the Mexican nation and the person of Mexican origin who is currently a member of the American nation, and raise the following question: what do they have in common? Or let us pose the question this way: is there enough affinity between the two people (the Mexican in Mexico and the American of Mexican origin) to subsume them under the same category? According to Gracia, the two people in our comparison are connected with one another by means of historical relationships and thus they both can be justifiably subsumed under the category of “Hispanic.”

Several interesting points arise in our example and in Gracia’s reply, but let me focus on the starting point of the category “Hispanic.” The category as it is being used in the current context, and indeed as it is used by Gracia, originates with the American government. Were it not for Statistical Directive No. 15 released in 1977 by the Office of

¹³ I say presumably because this condition is not always true. Not all the people that classify as “Hispanics” are always, in fact, members of the American nation. We will see this point in more detail in chapter eight

Management and Budget, the term “Hispanic” would probably not have the same relevance it has now in our vocabulary and understanding of American society. The category originally arises due to an effort of the American state to identify a segment of the American population who happen to have a particular background. The attempt to identify people by means of the category “Hispanic,” has had as a result an increasing awareness in American society about the existence of “Hispanics.” I will return to the significance of identification in the next chapter.

The upshot of the present discussion is that the identification of Hispanics as an ethnic group cannot only be understood in terms of historical relations. The identification of Hispanics has to be understood within the context of the needs and policies of the American state. If the latter claim is true, there is a political dimension in the understanding of Hispanics as an ethnic group. The result, in fact, is that Gracia can speak of historical relations as the criterion for ethnic identification only because there is a previous political criterion that makes identification possible. So the very criterion for ethnic identification that Gracia has rejected, the political unit, is the one that makes it possible for us to speak of Hispanics as an identifiable ethnic group.

In conclusion, the understanding of Hispanics as an ethnic group is not only historical; the understanding is also to a very large extent political. My observation does not necessarily undermine the thrust of Gracia’s view, but I think that the observation does force him to rethink his justification for the criteria of ethnic identification.

Let me now move on to a second objection, which I believe is more crucial. In Gracia’s view, Hispanics have a common identity and this form of identity is a source for the self-understanding and empowerment of Hispanics. The claim has two components:

(a) Hispanics have a common identity and (b) this identity is a source of self-understanding and empowerment.

In looking at (a), we must ask ourselves: what do we mean when we say that Hispanics have a “common identity”? There is a sense in which we might identify Hispanics as people who have a Latin American origin, which is, as we have seen, the way the category is defined by the American state. But if “origin” is the principle of identification, why not do the same with other groups like the Irish, Germans, French, Finnish, or for that matter the English who traveled to American soil from Boston, England? We could propose, for example, that “the set of people in the now American nation who can trace their origins to the group of Boston travelers form a distinct and identifiable group.” The latter is certainly possible: one could gather the group of people who trace their genealogical background to one of the members of the Boston group. The group would indeed be identifiable in accordance with a principle of “origin.”

Compare then two groups that are identified on the basis of the principle of “origin:” “Hispanics” and “descendants of the Boston group.” We must wonder whether we are talking about identification with respect to each group in the same sense. Or more precisely: are the implications for identifying Hispanics the same as the implications for identifying descendants of the Boston group?

The answer to these questions is negative due to the following presupposition: there is a degree of significance in the identification of Hispanics that is absent in the identification of the Boston group descendants. In other words, there is presumably something extremely relevant about being a Hispanic, so relevant that it demands public recognition from the American state. Such a relevance and need for public recognition

does not apply to other types of groups that could conceivably be identified in some sense—as, for example, the descendants of the Boston group.

My comparison raises the following point: what do we mean by “common identity”? The question is not so much whether Hispanics have a common identity. Clearly, in some sense they do, just as many other groups do. The question is rather whether Hispanics have a common identity in the sense that matters. I believe the questions that need to be asked are these: is the common identity of Hispanics such that it reflects how meaningful it is to be a Hispanic? Are the elements that unite Hispanics robust enough to give them meaning and direction? Are the properties that seem to make Hispanics identifiable in some sense such that they endow Hispanics with basic membership?

I believe that the answer to these questions tends to be negative due to the property of nationality among Hispanics. As I suggested earlier the notion that Hispanics have a relevantly distinctive cluster of properties is falsified because of the one property that pulls them apart, namely, nationality. Identifying Hispanics, in the relevant sense, is not generally possible because of two reasons. First, there is the fragmentation caused by national identities. And second, there is the fact that properties of basic membership are primarily national, and only epiphenomenally Hispanic. Thus it is difficult to identify Hispanics in the relevant sense as a distinct group of people that are unified by and have a common identity due to a cluster of properties.

If I am right so far, we can see not only why the thesis on the common identity of Hispanics in the pertinent context is put into question, but also why the second half of Gracia’s claim, i.e., (b) Hispanic identity is a source of self-understanding and

empowerment, is doubtful. For given the robustness of national identities, people subsumed under the category of “Hispanic” tend to find the primary source of self-understanding and empowerment in their nationalities, and not their Hispanicity. The bottom line, once more, is that the significance and robustness of nationality tends to overshadow the thinness of Hispanicity.

I have then raised two objections against Gracia’s view on the ethnic identification of Hispanics. First, I pointed out that Gracia’s notion of historical relations as the criterion for ethnic identification cannot be understood independently from the political criterion. As a matter of fact, the category “Hispanic” stems from and is defined by the administrative apparatus of the American state. The second point was related with Gracia’s claim that Hispanics have a common identity and such an identity is a source for the self-understanding and empowerment of Hispanics. I have pointed out that the question we are asking is whether the common identity of Hispanics is robust enough to represent a primary source of meaning and direction. My answer to this question tends to be negative because the primary sources of meaning and direction among Hispanics are generally associated with the robustness of their nationalities.

b. Angelo Corlett and the Genealogical Criterion

Angelo Corlett presents us with another attempt to depict Hispanics as a group with a “common identity.”¹⁴ The general concern for Corlett has to do with ethnic classification for the purposes of civil rights policies.

¹⁴ *Race, Racism and Reparations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

Given Corlett's concern, it helps to distinguish between two different issues at stake. First, Corlett claims that ethnic classification serves the interests of justice. Certain groups of people in the United States have been discriminated against based on the racial or ethnic group to which they belong. Identifying groups that have suffered discrimination is then extremely important. Such is, incidentally, part of the rationale behind the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. The government attempts to identify and gather data on populations that have historically "experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity."¹⁵ The requirements of justice entail distinguishing and classifying those individuals for the purposes of retribution. According to Corlett, we distinguish those individuals by means of a necessary and sufficient condition for ethnic classification: genealogical ties.¹⁶ I will not have much to say, in this context, about the issue of ethnic classification for the purposes of justice and retribution.¹⁷

My interest is in the second issue underlying Corlett's account: the presumed claim that ethnic identity, and particularly Hispanic identity, is essential for defining personhood. If one wants to argue, for example, that Hispanics have certain civil rights, and a violation of those civil rights is a wrongdoing, one ought to be able to identify and classify Hispanics. The latter observation is true because considerations of justice "are

¹⁵ "Revisions to the Standards," p. 58782.

¹⁶ *Race, Racism and Reparations*, p. 129.

¹⁷ For an interesting discussion on the issue of Hispanics and affirmative action, see Jorge Gracia "Affirmative Action for Hispanics? Yes and No," in *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race and Rights*, eds. J. Gracia and P. De Greiff (New York: Routledge, 2000).

based on assumptions that certain names have referents,”¹⁸ and so the name “Hispanic” refers to members of the Hispanic group who are genealogically related to one another. When we identify Hispanics we assume that they have properties in common or a “common identity,” for “if there are no properties that are shared in common by all Latinos and if we cannot know what they are, then this poses a fundamental difficulty for the understanding of who we are....”¹⁹

Now, why is the presumed fact that Hispanics have a common identity for the sake of justice so important? Here I return to my previous example about the members of the group that can trace their ancestors to a traveler of the Boston group. Let us compare “Hispanics” with a group whose common identity consists in being the genealogical “descendants of the Boston group,” and ask ourselves whether the common identity of Hispanics is equally important in comparison with the common identity of the Boston group descendants. The answer is negative because there is a degree of significance in the common identity of Hispanics that is absent in the common identity of the Boston group descendants. The implication is that there is something extremely relevant about being a Hispanic.

Another illustration will help us to see the point. Suppose I am applying for a job in a field in which I have no previous professional experience. I am applying for a job as a publisher, but have no previous experience as one. Given my circumstance, I could be said to be a member of the group known as the “publishing novices,” and have some properties in common with other members of the group. I am turned down for the job

¹⁸ *Race, Racism and Reparations*, p. 41.

¹⁹ *Race, Racism and Reparations*, p. 41.

and have grounds to believe that the reason for my rejection lies in the fact that I am a member of the “publishing novices,” and the hiring committee strongly preferred a member of the “publishing experts.”

Now suppose instead that I have grounds to believe that the reason why I was turned down for the job is because I am a Hispanic, African-American or Native-American. Whereas the rejection for being a member of the “publishing novices” would not count as legal discrimination, the rejection for being a “Hispanic” certainly would be discriminatory.

The illustration allows us to see that the issue at stake is not simply the common properties of groups. Many groups have common properties, but this is irrelevant for public justice. There is something particularly vicious about discriminating against Hispanics because there is something particularly relevant about being a Hispanic. The issue is that the “common properties” of Hispanics are such that they say something extremely important about who Hispanics are. In short, Hispanic identity is essential for defining personhood.

Corlett fleshes out the assumption this way: “the problems of Latino and ethnic identities fall under the more general problems of personal and/or group identity. That is, whatever turns out to make me a Latino, for instance, is part of what turns out to make me who and what I am more generally, for example, as a person.”²⁰ So Latino identity is essential for defining personhood. Elsewhere, quoting Walzer, he sustains that “ethnic identity is important because it enables us to relate to and connect with others who are

²⁰ *Race, Racism and Reparations*, p. 46.

like ourselves in both experience and circumstance.”²¹ The implication in the latter statement is that since Latino identity is essential for defining personhood, the properties that Latinos have in common are extremely relevant.

In Corlett’s view then: (i) Hispanic identity is essential for defining personhood, and thus (ii) the common identity of Hispanics is relevant. But I believe this view to be flawed. The first claim says that Hispanic identity is extremely relevant because it expresses who I am. In this context, Hispanic membership presumably classifies as what I have characterized as basic membership. But the question here is whether Hispanic membership is indeed basic. My answer to this question tends to be negative, for the national identities of Hispanics are far more significant than their Hispanic membership. In fact, as I argued earlier, the apparent basicness of Hispanic membership is an epiphenomenon of national membership.

If Hispanic identity is not essential for defining personhood, then claim (ii), on the relevance of Hispanic common identity, hardly follows. The implication of Hispanic membership not being basic is that it is then not possible to speak of the common identity of Hispanics in the relevant sense. The notion that Hispanics have a relevantly distinctive cluster of properties that creates a common identity in the relevant sense is false.

3. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that the Hispanic group does not satisfy two of the conditions of groups that endow members with basic memberships. The conditions I focused on were “relevant identification” and “differentiation.”

²¹ *Race, Racism and Reparations*, p. 128.

The Hispanic group does not satisfy the condition of relevant identification because the properties by which the group is identified are not those that make membership in the group basic. Members of the Hispanic group may be identified according to certain properties, but those are not properties that constitute basic membership.

I argued that the latter circumstance is the case because the properties of basic membership among Hispanics are really national properties. Hence, I made the point that the apparent basicness of Hispanic membership is an epiphenomenon of national membership.

In turning to the second condition, differentiation, I raised the question of whether Hispanics have the status of discernibility. Groups that satisfy the condition of differentiation are those that have the status of discernibility, i.e., a common identity by which the group can be distinguished from other groups.

Much of the discussion here focused on the views of Hispanic common identity advanced by Jorge Gracia and Angelo Corlett. I argued that Hispanics do not have the status of discernibility because they cannot be said to have a common identity that distinguishes them from other groups. Thus the conclusion is that the condition of differentiation is not satisfied by the Hispanic group.

CHAPTER 7

HISPANIC IDENTITY-MAKING

In the previous chapter I argued that the Hispanic group does not satisfy two of the conditions, relevant identification and differentiation, of groups in which membership tends to be a primary source of meaning and direction. There is yet a third condition, intrinsic identification, according to which groups are identified from the inside. I have saved the discussion on the condition of intrinsic identification until now because this condition might be the key for understanding the potential future of the Hispanic group.

It is reasonable to say that Hispanics do not currently satisfy the condition of intrinsic identification. Given that the group cannot be identified in the relevant sense and does not have the type of difference-sensitive attributes that matter, one can expect that the question of intrinsic identification is an irrelevant one. The reason for the latter claim is that the condition of intrinsic identification builds on the other two conditions. If the two first conditions are not satisfied, then *a fortiori* the third one will not be satisfied either. If a group cannot be identified according to properties that make membership in such a group basic, and the group does not have the type of difference-sensitive attributes necessarily connected with basic membership, it is worthless to raise the question of whether the group can be identified from the inside. Accordingly, Hispanics cannot be said to satisfy the condition of intrinsic identification.

Nonetheless, discussing this condition is very important because, as I mentioned, such a discussion could provide one of the keys for understanding what the direction of

Hispanic identity might be. The discussion might help us see how Hispanicity could become a “tipping phenomenon.”

In the context of this discussion, I wish to advance the following hypothesis: a process of identification and identity-making could turn the Hispanic group into the type of group that satisfies the three conditions of relevant groups. Thus, the Hispanic group could, in effect, become the type of group that endows members with basic membership.

Put differently, my conjecture is that the attempt to identify Hispanics from the outside prescribes a set of beliefs, principles and customs that may be internalized by the Hispanic group. In this process of internalization, the group could acquire the kinds of properties that endow members with basic membership. Succinctly, Hispanic identification could foster and strengthen Hispanic identity.

In formulating my hypothesis, I will make two points. First, there is a parallel between national identity-formation and Hispanic identity-formation. Second, the American state is one of the most significant agents in the process of Hispanic identity-formation. Throughout the discussion of these two points, we will see that the notion of “heritage” in historical cases of national identity-formation is a crucial one. I will end this chapter with a discussion addressing Samuel Huntington’s views on Hispanics in American society.

1. NATIONAL AND HISPANIC IDENTIFICATION

A certain group of people are ostensibly identified as “Hispanics.” But how is Hispanicity identified? My suggestion is that there are some very important parallels

between the process by which national identities have been shaped and the way in which Hispanic identity is also being shaped.

Incidentally, part of the reason why the phenomenon of Hispanic identity is so interesting is because it represents a laboratory for exploring nationalism. John Hutchinson remarks that “the European Union offers scholars of nationalism a fascinating experiment in progress.”¹ The same is true about Hispanic identity.

Like national identity, Hispanic identity is the result of a process that has at least two core elements: first, a political unit (e.g., a state); and second, basic forms of collective identity, e.g., language, myths, rituals, religion, social practices, etc.²

The state represents a *top-down* direction in the emergence of Hispanic identity.³ As we have seen in earlier discussions, there is a significant public policy dimension in the identification of Hispanics. The notion of “Hispanic” makes an appearance in the context of policies designed and enacted by the American state. We see an example of these policies in documents such as the Office of Management and Budget Statistical Directive No. 15 released in 1977. The category originally arises due to an effort of the American state to identify a segment of the American population that happens to have a particular background or origin.

¹ “Nations and Culture,” in *Understanding Nationalism*, eds. M. Guibernau & J. Hutchinson (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), p. 93.

² This is what Eric Hobsbawm calls a “proto-nation.” *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1990]), p. 46.

³ The state is not the only crucial component of the top-down dimension. One could also include media, lobbying organizations, intellectuals, religious organizations and the school system.

But census categories, by themselves, would not be sufficient for the emergence of Hispanic identity. Thus we must turn to the other direction of the process, i.e., *bottom-up*. Certain linguistic and cultural traits represent the basis on which Hispanic identity is built. These are the “building blocks” of identity. Without such prior collective forms of membership, it would be impossible to have Hispanic identity as such. Thus, there are presumably certain features, e.g., language, customs, shared histories and event—and particularly for Hispanics, national origin—that serve as the building blocks for Hispanic identity.

A careful look at this process of identity-formation will reveal that from the top-down direction, there is apparently a somewhat clear and distinguishable Hispanic identity. But the situation from the bottom-up direction is different. As I have insisted, Hispanics are not identifiable in the relevant sense because their identities are anchored in the robustness of nationality. If we look at the bottom-up direction of identity formation, we will realize that Hispanicity attempts to capture a set of different national identities. I have suggested that those national identities, and not Hispanicity, are the source of meaning and direction among members of the group known as “Hispanic.”

The important point in the dynamic of top-down identification, however, is that a process of identification is underway. The fact seems to be that such a process of identification has not completely penetrated the bottom-up, and thus Hispanics are not relevantly identifiable, but top-down identification might very well lay its roots at the bottom. This situation would represent a typical case of peasants turned into Frenchmen.

To restate the point in a slightly different manner, Hispanicity is currently identified from the *outside* by the American state and political agencies. Nonetheless,

could this form of identification be assimilated and internalized by a group of people and thus become relevant and meaningful to them? Such could certainly be the case. If this were the case, Hispanicity could then come closer to representing a primary source of meaning and direction, and being the sort of group in which membership is basic.

a. Unity, Destiny and Sacred Community

To imagine how the top and the bottom, or the outside and the inside, might merge, let us look at two typically nationalist statements that have had historical consequences.⁴ The first was written by Jules Michelet in the wake of the 1789 French Revolution; the second was written by Giuseppe Mazzini in 1861. The two statements emphasize a typically nationalist motif, i.e., *unity*.

The first statement goes like this:

Like children gone stray, and lost till then, they have at length found a mother; they had been so humble as to imagine themselves Bretons, Provencaux. No, children know well that you are the sons of France; she herself tells you so; the sons of that great mother, of her who is destined, in equality, to bring forth nations.⁵

The second statement is this:

⁴ The meaning of nationality and nationalism is not always clear. Although a problematic one, we could make a distinction between “ethnic” and “civic” forms of nationalism. In this context, when I speak of nations and nationalism, it is mostly the ethnic variant that I have in mind.

⁵ “On the Unity of the Fatherland,” in *Nationalism: its Meaning and History*, ed. Hans Kohn (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1965), p. 98.

[Mazzini speaking of the person who is called to write the national history of Italy]the writer will then proceed to trace the origin of our nationality from those Sabellian tribes, dwelling, as I have said, round the ancient Amiternus; who, along with the Osque, Siculians, and Umbrians, first assumed the sacred name of Italy, and initiated the fusion of the different elements spread over the Peninsula, by planting their lance—the symbol of authority—in the valley of the Tibur, in the Campagna, and beyond.⁶

The first element to be highlighted in these two passages is that several groups are merged into one large overarching entity. So people who are formerly known as “Bretons” and “Provencaux” are now the children of *France*. Similarly, people from the former “Sabellian” tribes along with the “Osque,” “Siculians,” and “Umbrians” are fused into a single group comprising the people of *Italy*.

Note also that there is a strong rationale for such a merger of groups. For Michelet, groups are like “children gone astray.” These children have finally “found a mother” with the advent of France. The quasi-religious motive—one might think of a sentence in a famous hymn, “I once was lost, but now am found”⁷—has to do with *destiny*. The lost children find themselves in that “great mother” who has a certain destiny: “in equality, to bring forth nations.” One is left wondering about what is meant by “bring forth nations,” but for our present purposes what needs to be highlighted is the fact that France is supposed to fulfill some sort of destiny. A quick glance at the way in

⁶ “On the Unity of Italy,” in *Nationalism: its Meaning and History*, p. 119.

⁷ These are words from the famous 1779 hymn by Isaac Watts, “Amazing Grace.”

which the French have conducted themselves in world affairs since the XVIII century, would certainly seem to confirm the directive of “destiny” —one may, for instance, think of the so called First (1804-1814) and Second (1852-1879) French Empires.⁸

Similarly, Mazzini believes that writing the national history of Italy entails tracing the moment in which diverse groups “first assumed the *sacred* name of Italy” (my italics). Mazzini is not only concerned with the possibility of different groups coming together and forming a species of alliance or consortium. It is rather that those groups altogether assume a “sacred” name. The sacredness of the name presumably stems from the fact that the community represented by the name is also sacred. In the sacred character of the community, we find the rationale for the merger. Formerly different groups are fused together because they are supposed to be a sacred community —namely the community has the quality of being something like a “chosen people.”

Admittedly, the path towards national unity in Italy has been slower when compared with the French—we do not, for instance, find a unified “Italy” until the XX century. Nevertheless, the statements of two of their respective nationalist ideologues, Michelet and Mazzini, have yielded the intended result in each group, since the two groups are currently stable nations.

What I have considered so far is a typical cluster of themes characteristic of nationalism.⁹ First, we have the normative principle of unity: national groups ought to

⁸ This view seems to be echoed by Ernest Renan in his 1882 lecture in the Sorbonne, “What is a Nation?:” “It is to France’s glory to have proclaimed, through the French Revolution, that a nation exists of itself. We should not take it ill that others imitate us. The principle of nations is ours.” *Qu’est-ce Qu’une Nation?/What is a Nation?* (Toronto: Tapir Press, 1996), p. 23.

have a common unity. Such a common unity often stems from the fusion of several formerly different groups—which has been, historically, the case in the emergence of many nations.

But the fusion of groups as such is not necessarily a nationalist theme. Many groups might, after all, mingle with each other by means of, say, intermarriage, conquest and coercion. Similarly, one may think of unity in terms of a common alliance. But mingling or creating alliances are not necessarily the result of nationalist themes. Renan puts it this way: “Common interests bring about trade agreements. But nationality is also partly a matter of conscious feeling; it is simultaneously body and soul; a customs union is not a homeland [une patrie].”¹⁰

In the nationalist framework, the fusion, alliance and unification of groups is intended to produce strong bonds of solidarity. Now, if a nation is more than a trade union or a common alliance, these feelings of solidarity must be justified in a certain way. Justification might be either retrospective or prospective. It is retrospective when the fusion of groups in the past is explained. Such an explanation often requires an exercise of selective memory or what Renan calls “forgetfulness” (l’oubli):

Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is essential to the creation of a nation, which is why the advance of historical study often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, brings to light the violent

⁹ There is a wealth of literature exploring these nationalist themes. See Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ *What is a Nation?*, p. 43.

events that are at the source of all political formations, even those whose consequences have been beneficial.¹¹

In contrast, we have a prospective justification when there is a call for a consolidation of national unity—such as the one we see in current African “nations” and in Hispanic nationalism.

I have mentioned that nationalists, whether speaking retrospectively or prospectively, in general believe that varying groups ought to be fused together for different possible reasons. Among those reasons, we could typically find the two we noted in Michelet and Mazzini. First, groups need to be together because they all have a common *destiny*; and second groups ought to come together because they are a *sacred* or *chosen* community.

In many historical cases, these themes—unity, destiny and sacredness—have had a quasi-religious character, which seems to have made nationalist feelings all the more potent. In highlighting the religious provenance of these themes in history, Smith points out that the nation,

is invested with sacred qualities that it draws from older beliefs, sentiments, and ideals about the nature of community, territory, history, and destiny. The result is a national community of faith and belonging, a sacred communion, every bit as potent and demanding as that sought by the ancient Jewish prophets and psalmists.¹²

¹¹ *What is a Nation?*, p. 19.

¹² *Chosen Peoples*, p. 23.

The latter comment does not imply that all forms of nationalism actually have (or need to have) explicit religious overtones, such as the ones we find in Zionism or the Afrikaner movement. The comment rather implies that certain religious categories can often help us “explain the scope, depth, and intensity of the feelings and loyalties that nations and nationalism so often evoke.”¹³ One could perhaps think of national groups not as mere allegiances designed to satisfy common interests, but rather as peoples united by strong bonds and feelings of solidarity. To many people, the nation has been something like a “communion” —a religious notion in itself.

2. THE AMERICAN STATE AND HISPANIC IDENTITY-MAKING

An examination of the way in which the identification of Hispanics displays the nationalist themes I have mentioned merits a complete study and is certainly well beyond the scope of the current project. What I wish to do now is simply to draw attention to some trends that illustrate how the identification of Hispanics is interwoven with some of the nationalist themes that have been discussed.

¹³ *Chosen Peoples*, p. 15. Why is nationalism such a potent force in mobilizing people? This is the question Smith attempts to examine. His analysis focuses on the “sacred foundations” of the nation and the “relationship to the older beliefs, symbols, and rituals of traditional religions.” p. 4. Nationalism is often cast in religious language. Renan, for instance, rejects religion as the basis of national unity and nevertheless speaks of “this sacred thing we call a people.” He speaks of nations in the following terms: “a spiritual principle, originating in the profound complexities of history; it is a spiritual family, not a group determined by the configuration of the soil.” *What is a Nation?*, pp. 44-45.

The Presidential Proclamations inaugurating the Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15)¹⁴ every year—which are good examples of top-down group identification—provide telling illustrations about the unity of Hispanics. Some of the themes that tend to constantly appear in the Proclamations are: diversity in American society, the achievements of Hispanics, and the contribution made by Hispanics and other groups to the American way of life.¹⁵ Along with these themes, one of the most salient features of the Proclamations is that Hispanics are identified as a *community or people*.

The standard view of the Proclamations seems to go along the following lines. There is a nation that is composed of diverse cultures or peoples (all of whom make a contribution to the American way of life). Alongside the set of peoples that make up American society, we find one group, namely, Hispanics.¹⁶ Thus one can speak of the Hispanic *people*, and the Hispanic *culture* and *heritage*.

The 2000 Proclamation, for instance, states that “the vibrant Hispanic *influence* can be seen in all aspects of American life and culture, from distinctive cuisine to colorful festivals....” (my italics).¹⁷ The 2001 Proclamation speaks of how all Americans

¹⁴ An observance that began as a week in 1968 under the Lyndon Johnson administration and was then expanded to a month in 1988.

¹⁵ These themes are not only present in the Proclamations inaugurating the Hispanic Heritage Month, but also in the Proclamations that inaugurate observances such as the National African American History Month, the Irish American Heritage Month and the Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that although previous Proclamations speak of “Hispanics” and “Hispanic-Americans,” the Proclamations issued under the Bush administration speak only of “Hispanic-Americans.”

¹⁷ William J. Clinton. “Proclamation 7338 of September 14, 2000,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 65, no. 182, Tuesday, September 19, 2000, Presidential Documents, p. 56457.

“celebrate the vibrant Hispanic American *spirit* that influences our Nation’s art, music, food, and faiths” (my italics).¹⁸ The 2002 Proclamation states that “the Hispanic American *community* has a long and important history of commitment to our Nation’s core values, and the contributions of this *community* have helped make our country great” (my italics).¹⁹ And the 2003 Proclamation contains the following statement: “During Hispanic American Month, I join with all Americans in recognizing the many contributions of Hispanic Americans to the United States, and in celebrating Hispanic *heritage and culture*” (my italics).²⁰

The view of Hispanics as a *people* or *community* with a common heritage is also heard from agencies and organizations that advocate the recognition of a Hispanic identity. An instance of those views may be clearly found in a recent report released by one of the oldest agencies aiming to represent Hispanics in the United States, the National Council of La Raza²¹ —which describes itself as “the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization and the leading voice in Washington D.C. for the Hispanic community.”²² In the foreword of the report —adapted from a speech

¹⁸ George W. Bush. “Proclamation 7471 of September 28, 2001,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 66, no. 191, Tuesday, October 2, 2001, Presidential Documents, p. 50097.

¹⁹ George W. Bush. “Proclamation 7591 of September 13, 2002,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 67, no. 182, Thursday, September 19, 2002, Presidential Documents, p. 58955.

²⁰ George W. Bush. “Proclamation 7706 of September 17, 2003,” in *Federal Register*, vol. 68, no. 184, Tuesday, September 23, 2003, Presidential Documents, p. 55253.

²¹ *State of Hispanic America: Latino Perspectives on the American Agenda*, National Council of La Raza, February, 2004.

²² *State of Hispanic America*, presentation.

delivered by Raul Yzaguirre, president of NCLR, to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, September 24, 2003—the current state of affairs is described in the following terms: “we are closer than ever to a *national Latino community with a shared past, a common agenda and a united future*” (my italics).²³

Interestingly, as the growth of Hispanic political power is celebrated, the question is posed: “power to do what?” The answer is that “we seek power to help this nation [presumably the American nation] fulfill its destiny, to live up to its ideals, and to go beyond the sometimes too narrow definition of what it means to be an American.”²⁴ It is interesting to note the relationship between the attainment of power for a community and the task of fulfilling a national destiny. Similarly, it is interesting to note the way in which “heritage” is described: “we believe in the *sanctity* of the heritage of language and culture and we treasure these gifts” (my italics).²⁵ These themes have a clear nationalist tone.

It is indeed acknowledged that Hispanics have diverse backgrounds and origins. Thus “the Hispanic American community is a collage of distinct groups, including people with roots in Central and South America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Spain.”²⁶ But by the same token, as already mentioned, Hispanics are characterized as a people who have what appears to be a common history or heritage.

Let me highlight the point that the notion of a heritage has been historically vital for the existence of many nations or peoples. One of the elements constituting, in

²³ *State of Hispanic America*, p. iii.

²⁴ *State of Hispanic America*, p. iii.

²⁵ *State of Hispanic America*, p. iv.

²⁶ “Proclamation 7338,” p. 56457.

Renan's view, the "spiritual principle" of nationhood is "the shared possession of a rich legacy of memories of the past." Renan also puts it this way: "A heroic past, great figures, glory (true glory, that is) this is the social capital on which we base a national idea." An essential component of the legacy or social capital of a people is that of glorious heroes, "for our ancestors have made us who we are."²⁷

With the point on the significance of heritage in mind, it is interesting to note that one of the standard sections of the Proclamations mentioned above is a hagiography in which the accomplishments of Hispanic figures are emphasized. One of those hagiographic sections describes the legacy of Hispanics thus:

The achievements of today's Hispanic Americans build upon a long tradition of contributions by Hispanics in many varied fields. Before Dr. Ochoa and other Hispanic Americans began to explore the frontiers of space, Hernando de Soto and Francisco Vázquez de Coronado ventured into the vast uncharted land of the New World. A thousand years before Mario Molina calculated the effects of human actions on the atmosphere, Mayan priests accurately predicted solar and lunar eclipses. And before Oscar Hijuelos described a Cuban family's emigration to the 1940's America, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra gave us the classic adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.²⁸

²⁷ *What is a Nation?*, p. 43.

²⁸ William J. Clinton. "Proclamation 7220 of September 14, 1999," in *Federal Register*, vol. 64, no. 180, Friday, September 17, 1999, Presidential Documents, p. 50417.

One of the most striking features of this list is that it combines apparently dissimilar and unrelated figures. Some of the people described on the list are indeed American nationals: Ellen Ochoa was born in California and Oscar Hijuelos was born in New York from Cuban parents. Nevertheless, Hernando de Soto, who died in Mississippi during one of his expeditions, was born in Badajoz (modern-day Spain), and Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who died in Mexico City, was born in Salamanca (also in modern-day Spain). Mario Molina, professor at MIT, was born in Mexico City (although I ignore whether he has become a U.S. citizen or not).

As a matter of fact, some of the figures on the list would have hardly acknowledged any affinity with each other. It is hard to imagine any degree of significant affinity between Cervantes and the Mayans. It is also hard to imagine Soto or Coronado acknowledging any noteworthy degree of affinity with the Mayans or, more broadly, natives from the New World. Similarly, Mexicans and Americans do not often think of themselves as people who belong to the same group in any pertinent sense. What I am trying to illustrate is that some of the figures mentioned on the list, if confronted with each other, would probably not have many significant characteristics in common, or recognize each other as fellow members of a relevant group.

Nevertheless, having significant features in common or recognizing each other as fellow members is not essential for being included in a group of national heroes or become part of a nation's heritage. A puritan settler would probably not have had much affinity with a Pequot, or have acknowledged a Pequot as a fellow member in a relevant group, e.g., a coreligionist. The situation would have been similar between a Virginian citizen and a slave from West Africa in the XVIII century. A Roman Catholic in colonial

Maryland would probably not have seen someone from Congregational and Unitarian New England as a fellow member in a relevant group. We could even think not only about lack of recognition as fellow members, but also conflict across groups—the Pequot War or, most notably, the American Civil War.

But what we need to see is that all the characters mentioned so far would, in some way or another, be thought of as part of the *American* “history” or “heritage.” In connection with all the disparities and even conflict among these characters, the point about “forgetfulness” made by Renan is well taken. Formerly disjointed groups are now a source for American national identity.

There is then an important implication in combining dissimilar and unrelated figures. Whether Cervantes and Ochoa, or the Mayans and Hijuelos, have significant degrees of affinity (or whether they all in fact equally belong to a relevant group) is not the essential point. The point at stake is that we see in the combination of these characters the crafting of a heritage. These characters ostensibly inform the lives of a community that has a “common heritage” and a “shared past.”

The crafting and consolidation of such a heritage is an important step towards Hispanic identity-building. Renan would have probably put it this way: in order to apply the spiritual principle of nationhood one needs shared memories. Having a shared past is essential for identifying Hispanics as a community or a people.

Identifying Hispanics as a *people* could eventually have the following result: a series of fragmented (and sometimes conflicting) identities, e.g., Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, may become a community of solidarity, with a given heritage, subsumed under the single category of “Hispanic.” As I have suggested, the American state by

means of policies and documents is playing an important role in identifying and shaping the heritage of a community or people designated as “Hispanic.”

I have emphasized the role of the state as one of the elements in the process of identifying and shaping the heritage of Hispanics. Let me, however, stress the fact that the state is one element among others. One could certainly mention the census needs of the American state and the aim of political parties to attract potential voters. In addition, one might also mention the fact that media networks attempt to have a clear target audience; and, similarly, one might indicate the needs of publicity agencies in their aim to detect the patterns and tendencies in a particular consumer population.²⁹ These are all phenomena, or what Renan might call “agents of unification,”³⁰ that tend to individuate by means of identification a Hispanic people. All these phenomena help to explain the potential and actual process of Hispanic unification.

Let me conclude with some thoughts on a possible tension that may arise for the Hispanic people. We can see the tension I have in mind by asking ourselves the following question: could the emergence of the Hispanic people command, in fact, the sort of loyalty (and match the intensity of feelings and attachments) that nation-states currently evoke?

If the latter situation is the case, Hispanics might have a similar task to the one of Irish-Americans at the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries. In discussing the interesting phenomenon of Irish nationalism on American soil, Kerby Miller

²⁹ Geoffrey Fox describes Hispanic media as the “image machine.” See *Hispanic Nation: Culture, Politics and the Constructing of Identity* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996), pp. 40-66.

³⁰ *What is a Nation?*, p. 29.

describes the situation of Irish-American nationalist elites during the first part of the XX century in the following way:

Except for some extreme Irish-American nationalists, most nationalist leaders made tortuous efforts to reconcile Irish and American patriotism and to reassure the American middle class, as well as hesitant middle-class immigrants and Catholic clergy, that Irish-American nationalism was fully compatible with aspirations to respectability and assimilation.³¹

We already see a similar situation in the tension that arises between Hispanic nationalism and the view that such nationalism might undermine American unity. Samuel Huntington believes the following about Mexican immigration: “along with immigration from other Latin American countries, it is advancing Hispanization throughout America and social, linguistic, and economic practices appropriate for Anglo-Hispanic society.”³²

Huntington sees such a trend as a threat to the “American dream created by Anglo-Protestant society.”³³ Hispanic nationalists such as Raul Yzaguirre would perhaps

³¹ “Class, Culture, and Immigrant Group Identity in the United States: The Case of Irish-American Ethnicity,” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology and Politics*, ed. V. Yans-McLaughlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 117.

³² *Who are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuter, 2004), p. 221. Huntington’s views on Hispanics are also presented in “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2004, pp. 30-45.

³³ *Who are We?*, p. 256.

want to reply to Huntington that Hispanic nationalism is not only compatible with, but actually helps to “expand the *American* agenda” (my italics).³⁴

3. HUNTINGTON ON IMMIGRATION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

The growing influence of Hispanics is presumably shaping the future of American society. As mentioned, Huntington sees this trend as a threat against American national unity and American values.

In his book, *Who are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Huntington makes three claims. First, Anglo-Protestant values are the core of American culture. Second, this culture is currently being eroded. And third, one of the reasons for this cultural erosion is the influence of Hispanics. It is the third claim that interests us.

According to Huntington, the reason why Latin American immigrants, and particularly Mexicans, pose a threat to American unity and values is because of certain immigration trends. People from Latin America are immigrating to the U.S. in massive numbers and are not integrating fast or efficiently enough into American mainstream culture.³⁵

Massive immigration might eventually cause a bifurcated American culture. Huntington believes the following:

The high continuation of high levels of Mexican and Hispanic immigration plus the low rates of assimilation of these [Latin American]

³⁴ *State of Hispanic America*, p. iv. See the exchange between Yzaguirre and Huntington in *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004, p. 4 and p. 90.

³⁵ See *Who are We?*, pp. 221-256.

immigrants into American society and culture could eventually change America into a country of two languages, two cultures, and two peoples. This will not only transform America. It will also have deep consequences for Hispanics, who will be in America but not of it.³⁶

Now consider that, as previous discussions point out, people from Latin America currently have a set of fragmented national identities. The variety of identities stems from the fact that “Hispanics see themselves more as having separate and distinct cultures based on the country of origin rather than sharing a single culture as Hispanics or Latinos.”³⁷ Given the variety of national origins and identities, it may then be difficult to speak of “Hispanic identity” in any relevant or robust sense. Immigrants from Latin America generally see themselves not as Hispanics, but rather as Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Argentineans, Salvadorians, etc.

The last point is very significant because it shows that there is currently no common or coherent Hispanic identity and culture. It may then be true that Latin American immigrants are not integrating themselves into the American mainstream fast and efficiently enough. Let us grant this point for the sake of argument. But notice that neither is there a Hispanic identity or culture.

As a consequence, if Latin American immigrants do not become part of American mainstream culture fast enough, the result will not be a parallel Hispanic culture. The

³⁶ *Who are We?*, p. 256.

³⁷ Mollyann Brodie, Annie Steffenson, Jaime Valdez, Rebecca Levin, and Roberto Suro, *2002 National Survey of Latinos*. Report prepared by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2002, p. 33.

result might be a set of parallel sub-national cultures and identities: Mexican-American, Cuban-American, Venezuelan-American, Peruvian-American, Brazilian-American, Spanish-American, etc.

In all fairness to Huntington, he does distinguish between different immigrant groups, e.g., Mexicans, Cubans, etc. And, in fact, it is particularly Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who are the object of his observations. In my view, however, he skews the analysis when he conflates different national groups from Latin America and assumes that they might have a common identity. In other words, he wrongly assumes, at times, that diverse groups have a common Hispanic identity and that this Hispanic group is the protagonist of a phenomenon he labels “Hispanization.”

But now we must also consider another angle having to do with the people-making phenomenon that was discussed above. As already pointed out, members of the Hispanic group may currently have a set of fragmented national identities, but they are a people in the making. Several agents are tapping into and shaping the emerging feelings of commonality that exist in a group still largely consisting of Latin American immigrants. I pointed out above that among the agents of Hispanic people-making we may count political organizations and lobbying groups, e.g., National Council of La Raza, the Spanish-speaking media, and the American state.

Note the presence of the American state. A point I made above is that the American state is a crucial agent in the engineering of Hispanic identity. Heritage-building, one of the crucial steps for people-making, is the task that the American state and public institutions, perhaps somewhat unaware of the causal effect,

have been carrying out for several decades. The American state then is one of the key agents for transforming Latin American immigrants into “Hispanics.”

If my perspective is right, Huntington’s view of the situation is incomplete. The Hispanic influence on American society —and consequently what he and others perceive as a threat to American unity and values—is more complex than what he assumes. Latin American immigration and lack of integration into a core national culture are not the only factors contributing towards the formation of Hispanic identity. The embryonic emergence of Hispanics, and their identity, results from a process of people-making in which one of the most significant agents is the state—i.e., the *American* state.

If these observations are on target, the issue of Hispanic identity in American society takes on a new meaning. The question is not only whether Latin American immigration should be prevented or regulated—which is a conclusion that could be derived from Huntington’s observations. The question is also one that state-officials, policy-makers and the general American public need to ask themselves: what should the national identity of American society be like?

I believe that Huntington is right to raise the question on American identity. The American people should indeed ask themselves: who are we? But I also believe that there is a second question that the American people ought to ask themselves, namely, who do we want to be?

4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I spoke about what Hispanics could become, namely, a people with an identity. I began by observing that Hispanics do not satisfy the third condition of

relevant groups, intrinsic identification. But looking at this condition might help us to understand Hispanic identity as a tipping phenomenon.

In analyzing the condition of intrinsic identification, I have advanced a particular hypothesis. A process of identification and identity-making may turn the Hispanic group into the type of group that satisfies the three conditions of relevant groups. In short, Hispanics may become a group with a strong identity. And this might be just the type of group in which membership is central to the identities of group members.

I elaborated on this hypothesis by making two points. First, we must see Hispanic identity-formation in the context of national identity-formation. I suggested that there might be a parallel between the two processes. Second, one of the most important agents (among other agents) in the identity-formation process of the Hispanic group is the American state.

The last point has important implications for a recent discussion by Samuel Huntington on immigration and American national identity. Here, I suggested that the formation of Hispanic identity must be understood not only as an immigrant phenomenon, but also a phenomenon that is caused by the American state. From a public policy perspective, the question then is: what should American national identity be like?

CHAPTER 8

ARE ALL MINORITIES EQUALLY “MINORITIES”?

In 1915, Horace Kallen argued that democratic principles required a “federal republic” view of American society. The substance of such a republic would be “a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously through common institutions in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kinds.”¹ Despite the year in which Kallen’s writings were published, his views capture a contemporary thesis. Following Kallen, let us call this thesis “cultural pluralism.” According to cultural pluralism, the composition of American society entails a set of ethnic or cultural minorities whose membership in their cultural groups is central to their identities.

Several assumptions underlie the thesis of cultural pluralism. The first one is that membership in cultural groups is important for individual well-being, and so if cultures are not publicly recognized, the well-being of group members will be hampered.²

¹ *Culture and Democracy in the United States: Studies in the Group Psychology of the American Peoples* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 124. Most recently, an explicit version of this “cultural pluralism” has been proposed by Michael Walzer in *What it Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York, Marsilio, 1996), pp. 23-49.

² See Judith Lichtenberg on the “flourishing argument.” “Nationalism, For and (Mainly) Against,” in *The Morality of Nationalism*, eds. R. McKim and J. McMahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 160-162.

Second, borrowing from Horace Kallen's metaphor, society is like an orchestra of diverse racial and ethnic voices and they should all receive an equal hearing.³ Several cultural groups comprise society, and justice requires that all groups should be equally recognized, which is indeed the thrust of one version of multiculturalism.

Combining these two assumptions, we have a picture of equal relevance across all cultural minorities. In this picture, cultural membership is important for personal well-being and so all groups should be equally recognized in order to guarantee the well-being of the members of all cultural groups. In the words of Charles Taylor: "Just as all members have equal civil rights, and equal voting rights, regardless of race or culture, so all should enjoy the presumption that their traditional culture has value."⁴ Given this presumption, all groups are genuine recipients of public recognition. Cultural groups may be different from each other, but what they all have in common is that their member's well-being is tied to the group and thus all groups are equally relevant.⁵

In this chapter, I wish to challenge the picture of equal relevance across groups. The picture is that in the American plurality of cultural voices, all voices are equally

³ *Culture and Democracy*, pp. 104, 124-125.

⁴ "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 68.

⁵ According to Anthony Appiah, the value of multicultural education lies in creating a common loyalty and mutual understanding in a pluralist society. He claims, for example, that "once I consciously grasp [...] the significance and value of my identity for me, I can see what the significance and value of their collective identities would be for others." "Culture, Subculture, Multiculturalism: Educational Options," in *Public Education in a Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique*, ed. R. Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 85. The assumption is that all acknowledged identities play a similar role in all respective groups.

significant because they all give group members meaning and direction. I will argue that memberships in different minority groups have varying degrees of significance. A comparative approach between two minority groups in American society, African-Americans and Hispanics, will show that when looking at the status of cultural identities among different groups, one finds varying degrees of significance.

I will then question the simple view that all cultural minorities are more or less the same, i.e., groups that provide members with a meaningful identity. If my claim is true, it undermines the notion that all cultural groups are equally relevant. Thus it becomes harder to see how different groups can be grouped in a common alliance of “minorities.”

1. IS AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEMBERSHIP BASIC?

a. Race and Basic Membership

A good starting point for our inquiry is to examine whether membership in the African-American group is basic. I will argue that African-American membership is indeed basic.

Let me begin by quickly refreshing the notion of basic membership. Membership is basic when the traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding are traits that make her a member in a group. Note the two conditions in my characterization of basic membership. First, there are certain traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding. Second, these traits make the person a member in a particular group, since the traits are associated with such a group.

What is the trait (or set of traits) that is both essential to the self-understanding of African-Americans and makes them a member of a particular group? The immediate answer that comes to mind is *race*. But we must be more precise about the meaning of race and the way in which it is pertinent for relevant membership. So let me now discuss race and its meaning for group members.⁶

Looking at the way in which African-Americans are identified will help us to understand the meaning of race. My question here then is: what is the criterion by which members of the African-American group are identified? The answer seems to be quite obvious. African-Americans are identified on the basis of *race*.

Note, however, that race as the basis of relevant identification is bound to run into a difficulty. One could wonder whether race *per se* is the kind of property that is essential to the self-understanding of group members. One may wonder, for that matter, whether any physical trait is necessarily essential for the self-understanding of group members.

The answer to the question of whether a particular trait is necessarily essential to someone's self-understanding is negative. Consider that not all members of all cultural groups are physically identical. Group members may have some physical traits in common, but not *all* physical traits in common. For example, not everybody within a single group has the same hair color, mouth size, height, weight, etc. If a group then is to

⁶ Although I do not address it directly, Anthony Appiah's discussion and analysis of "race" is illuminating. See his "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections," in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 30-43

be distinctively identified on the basis of physical traits that are essential to members' self-understanding, the matter that needs examination is: which traits and why?

In the case of African-Americans, we know that they are presumably identified on the basis of a physical trait related with skin color. But we also need to know why they are identified on the basis of this particular physical trait and not a different one.

Claiming that African-Americans are identifiable on the basis of race *per se* is not enough; we also need to know why race is the basis of relevant identification.

The question we are then looking for is not simply what the criterion is for identifying members of the African-American group. The criterion seems to be very simply "race." We are looking instead for the answer to two interrelated questions. First, why is a particular physical feature the criterion by which African-Americans are currently identified? Second, why is the criterion by which African-American are identified essential to the self-understanding of group members?

In order to address these questions, we must turn to certain *beliefs* and *social conceptions* associated with race. These beliefs and social conceptions derive from a historical process of racial formation.

b. Racial Formation

Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that racial formation has been a prominent characteristic of political and social life in the United States of America.⁷ The American social structure has a racial dimension that has become crucial for

⁷ *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

comprehending human relationships and conflicts. In this social structure, “we utilize race to provide clues about who a person is.”⁸

Omi and Winant at times speak about “race” in general, but it is clear that their discussion specifically revolves around African-Americans. The upshot of the discussion is that the racial understanding of African-Americans is a salient characteristic of American social life.

According to Omi and Winant “race” is a concept that allows us to understand the conflicts and interests that arise due to different types of human bodies. It is not, however, physical features or human bodies as such that motivate conflicts and interests; the latter arise from social and historical meanings associated with human bodies. While bodily traits are understood according to social and historical meanings, one should not assume that the concept of race is extremely ambiguous and simply arbitrary. Omi and Winant concede that the concept is indeed imprecise and vague, but that does not mean it is not useful. Accordingly, “a more effective starting point is the recognition that despite its uncertainties and contradictions, the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world.”⁹ The task of the social theorist then is to examine the phenomenon of race in American society and attempt to give a causal explanation for its existence.

The causes for the racial dimension in American society are many and very complex, but one particular source for the formation and reproduction of the African-

⁸ *Racial Formation*, p. 59.

⁹ *Racial Formation*, p. 55.

American race has to do with political institutions.¹⁰ Omi and Winant comment that “the state from its very inception [in American history] has been concerned with the politics of race. For most of U.S. history, the state’s main objective in its racial policy has been repression and exclusion. Congress’ first attempt to define American citizenship, the Naturalization Law of 1790, declared that only free ‘white’ immigrants could qualify.”¹¹ And the distinction and codification of races (or rather a particular race currently classifiable as “African-Americans”) due to governmental policies has been a continual characteristic of American political history. The self-representation of “race” among Blacks has changed throughout history, but one constant feature of American society is that the conditions and rules for racial identification have been replicated due to the enactment of governmental policies.

An important implication about the concept of race is that it serves not only to classify and identify African-Americans, but also to define *who they are*. By defining who they are, the category of “race” becomes an important component for the self-representation of African-Americans. And although Omi and Winant do not flesh out the point this way, one can draw out the following implication from their discussion: the

¹⁰ I focus, following Omi and Winant, primarily on the shaping force of political institutions. But other institutions, for example religion and media, are just as important for shaping group identity. For an interesting study on the role of religion in African-American identity, see Eddie Glaude “Myth and African-American Self-identity,” in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

¹¹ *Racial Formation*, p. 81. It is not exactly clear what the authors mean by the “state,” but we can ignore this point without undermining the broader discussion.

social and historical meanings surrounding the notion of “race” have become essential to the self-understanding of African-Americans.

A historical process of identification and exclusion policies has facilitated a state of affairs in which a particular group is identified according to a physical trait defined as “race.” Given the exclusion of the group on the basis of this criterion, the trait has become essential to the self-understanding of group members. What I mean by this is that one of the essential traits for the self-understanding of African-Americans is their skin color. An African-American could not presumably conceive of and characterize herself without thinking of her skin color. This state of affairs generally makes membership in the African-American group basic.¹²

2. RACE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

African-Americans also belong to a national group that has traits that tend to be essential to the self-understanding of its members. I will now argue that since these national traits are essential to the self-understanding of group members, including African-Americans, the national membership of African-Americans is also basic. I will also point out that, for African-Americans, there is a tension between their racial and national memberships.

In order to understand the basicness of American national membership, let us take a closer look at American *national identity*. Imagine someone who is raised in the United

¹² For an interesting discussion, from a social science perspective, on the elements and implications of racial identity and solidarity among African-Americans, see Paul Sniderman and Thomas Piazza, *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 11-60.

States of America. Such a person will most likely grow up speaking a certain language, English, pledging allegiance to a national flag and other patriotic symbols, participating in a life that is organized and ruled by a set of governmental policies, adhering to the values of freedom and justice, and developing habits of mind that create a certain degree of social cohesion.

Members of the American nation belong to a community that represents a whole worldview and thus they participate in a collective story. This story talks about the Pilgrims, the Founding Fathers, the saga of Independence, the Civil War, a land of freedom that attracts immigrants from the rest of the world, etc.

Now, the national story also contemplates failures and contradictions. For example, one may count as failures the fate of Indians in the hands of the English-speaking settlers, the inability in the past to effectively and immediately incorporate immigrants from certain parts of the world (e.g., Ireland, China and Japan) and, in general, the inequalities of a society presumably characterized by fairness and justice.

Chief, however, among the failures told in the national story are the incidents of *slavery* and *racism* against Blacks. These incidents stand as a testimony of how a group has been constantly excluded in a land of liberty and justice for all. They also stand at the center of national landmarks, i.e., the Civil War and the Civic Rights movement, which have presumably pushed the nation forward in the struggle for liberty and justice.

The point that needs highlighting is that there is a *national story* that informs the identity of a whole *community*.¹³ Even some of those that have been excluded are protagonists of such a national story by virtue of the fact that they have been unjustly excluded and should now be included. Inclusion in this context means that the American nation might have a diversity of backgrounds, cultures and races. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, all those groups ought to be equally recognized and have equal participation in a community that is a national unit. There is an overarching national story for a single community subsumed under a particular state.

The importance of this national community is that it represents a primary source of meaning and direction for most of its members. Membership in the American nation is central to the identity of most members, which means that the traits associated with membership in this particular group are essential to the self-understanding of group members. These members belong to a national community with a certain history and a set of practices and values that give meaning and direction, in a very vivid manner, to their lives.

Now consider that African-Americans are part of the American nation, which has implications for the national identity of African-Americans. African-Americans belong to a national community characterized by traits that are essential to the self-understanding of group members (e.g., language, history, values, etc.). Since African-Americans are members in this national community, some of these national traits are presumably

¹³ For the role of collective histories and narratives, see Robert Fullinwider, "Patriotic History," in *Public Education in a Multicultural Society*, p. 205. See also Jonathan Glover, "Nations, Identity and Conflict," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, pp. 23-25.

essential to the self-understanding of African-Americans. Thus the national membership of African-Americans is basic.

At this point, however, an important situation arises with regard to African-Americans and their membership in the American nation. Let us here remember that, as I argued earlier, membership in the African-American group is basic. Thus African-Americans possess, at least, two basic memberships: national and racial memberships.

Keeping this dual membership in mind, consider the following situation: African-Americans have been excluded and unassimilated members of the American nation for much of its history. As a consequence, there is tension between basic memberships that arises from the fact that African-American assimilation into the American mainstream has not been, for multiple and complex reasons, fully successful—a fact that is, according to Nathan Glazer, the driving force behind contemporary multiculturalism.¹⁴

The tension between national and racial memberships is perceptively pointed out by W.E.B. Du Bois. He expresses the tension this way: “one ever feels his twoness, — An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”¹⁵

In conclusion, then, the national membership of African-Americans, in conjunction with their racial membership, is basic. Given, however, historical circumstances of racial exclusion there has been, for African-Americans, a salient tension between their American national identity and African-American membership.

¹⁴ *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 78-121.

¹⁵ *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989 [1903]), p. 3.

3. HISPANICS AND AFRICAN-AMERICANS

I have discussed African-American membership to this point. It is now time to compare African-Americans with another group that has often been thought of as being analogous with African-Americans, i.e., Hispanics. In comparing the two groups, I will argue that three compelling reasons show significant differences for purposes of minority recognition in American society between African-Americans and Hispanics. All three reasons are closely interrelated with each other, but I will discuss them separately for analytical purposes.

a. Basic Memberships

The first reason for distinguishing the two groups has to do with the various basic memberships of both African-Americans and Hispanics. A closer look at their basic memberships will be the point of departure for our discussion. My goal is to show several important differences that have vital implications for the relevance and public recognition of each one of the groups.

Let me begin by pointing out that the national memberships of both African-Americans and Hispanics are generally basic. I argued in chapter five that the national membership of Hispanics is basic; and I also argued in the previous section of the current chapter that the national membership of African-Americans is basic. In this regard, the two groups are apparently similar.

Note, however, that whereas there is a tension between the national and racial memberships of African-Americans, since the two memberships are basic, there is no

similar tension among Hispanics. In chapter five, I pointed out that national membership is basic for most Hispanics, but their Hispanic membership is not generally basic.

Additionally, I argued in chapter six that the traits that are essential to someone's self-understanding and also seem to make such a person a member of the Hispanic group are really national traits. As a consequence, Hispanic membership is not basic and its apparent basicness is really an epiphenomenon of nationality. The result is that given the weakness of Hispanic membership, it is not basic and hence does not come close to competing with national basic memberships. So, unlike African-Americans, there is no tension between national and Hispanic memberships.

I have spoken about the tension of two basic memberships among African-Americans and also the lack of a similar tension among Hispanics. Let me turn here to the following question for a moment: why is there no tension between basic memberships among Hispanics? Part of the answer to this question has already been mentioned: Hispanic membership is currently an epiphenomenon of national membership.

But there is also more to be said. The process of identity-formation that I previously discussed, in chapter seven for Hispanics and the current chapter for African-Americans, will also show us part of the answer to our question.

Here we must remember that Hispanics and African-Americans are to a certain extent the byproduct of an identity-formation process. In this process, African-American identity has developed a level of significance that is lacking with respect to Hispanic identity. In the context of the work of Omi and Winant, I suggested that the criterion of race has served to identify African-Americans and has become essential to their self-

understanding. A social and historical process of racial formation linked with governmental policies has brought about such a situation.

The historical and social process that has engendered and shaped the racial identity of African-Americans has been absent with respect to Hispanics. The latter is obvious, since (as we will see in more detail below) African-Americans have been part of American national life, one way or another, for centuries, whereas Hispanics did not start making a highly visible and significant appearance until the sixties. Nonetheless, as I have also pointed out, the identity-making role of the American state with regard to Hispanics may change (and is currently changing) the significance of Hispanic membership.

At this point in time, however, the fact is that there is a tension between basic memberships among African-Americans that is absent among Hispanics. This is the first important difference between the two groups.

Let me now finally go back for a moment to the claim that the two groups are similar in that national membership is basic in each group. This is indeed true, but here the following question must be raised: when looking at the national memberships of both African-Americans and Hispanics, *which national membership is basic?* An attempt to answer this question will have us turn to the other two reasons that show why the two groups are significantly different for purposes of public recognition in American society.

b. Political Memberships

African-Americans are full members of the American polity. This should be an obvious fact, but it is often taken for granted. Understanding this fact will allow us to see

a very important quality that distinguishes African-Americans from many members of the Hispanic group.

Assertions about the membership of African-Americans in the American state must be immediately qualified because African-Americans have not always had access to the social and political goods available to the rest of American society. So African-Americans have been “excluded members” or “barred citizens” of a political community, which is indeed, as we have seen, a condition that raises difficulties in analyzing African-American membership.

The fact of the matter, however, is that African-Americans are currently full-members of the American political community. Even if this claim is contested, it is necessary to acknowledge that if African-Americans are not, in fact, full members of the political community, they *ought to be*. The fact that they have not been full members throughout American history is regarded as an evil that ought to be corrected. So either African-Americans are currently, in fact, full members, or ought to potentially have full membership in the American polity.

In order to illustrate what I mean by full-membership, let us look at citizenship. The American citizenship of African-Americans is normally clear and unproblematic. Since African-Americans are not, for the most part, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Gambian or Malawian citizens, it follows that their American citizenship is unquestionable. African-Americans are not commonly recognized as subjects of particular African states, meaning that they are not entitled to the rights or liable to the duties of other citizens belonging to

African states.¹⁶ For example, African-Americans are not entitled to vote in Rwanda, and are not obligated to pay taxes in Ethiopia or defend the Nigerian state.

In contrast, African-Americans possess rights recognized by the American state (not always recognized, but again this is part of the African-American struggle) and presumably have duties towards the American state, manifested, for example, in the obligation to pay taxes and defend the American territory. The fact that the citizenship of African-Americans is unquestionable, showing that they are full members of the American state, should be obvious in one of the hyphenated terms that currently describes them, namely, *African-Americans*.

One may observe at this time that some African-Americans are immigrants. For example, Jamaicans, Haitians and Black South Africans who migrate to the United States are likely to be classified as “African-Americans.” This might be true, but when we refer to African-Americans we do not normally think of an *immigrant* group. We refer instead to a group that has been on American soil for many generations. The ancestors of African-Americans were brought to the United States against their will as slaves, but the fact remains that since then several generations have gone by. Thus African-Americans are a stable and well-established group in the fabric of American society and are also (or ought to be) full members of the American polity.

In describing the African-American condition, let us say that “all members of the African-American category are also members of the American state.” To repeat, there

¹⁶ Let me reinforce the point that this expectation is one of the most prominent characteristics of modern states. In characterizing modern states, Christopher Morris puts the point this way: “Members of a state are the subjects of its laws and have a general obligation to obey by virtue of their membership.” *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 46.

might be some exceptions (e.g., Jamaicans), but they are largely minimal and irrelevant for our discussion.

Let us now turn to Hispanics. If we take the same statement and apply it to Hispanics, “all members of the Hispanic category are also members of the American state,” we will immediately detect the falsity of such a statement. Surely, a more accurate statement is that “*not* all members of the Hispanic category are also members of the American state.” The political membership of Hispanics, in contrast with African-Americans, is problematic in that not all Hispanics are, in fact, members of the American polity.

Roughly speaking a Hispanic may be someone who (a) is born in a Latin American country and migrates to the U.S., (b) Someone who is born in the U.S., and is thus an American citizen, from Latin American parents or, at least, ancestry. By the same token, one may break down (a) into other two groups: (a.1) those who have the intention of returning to their original Latin American countries, and (a.2) those who have the intention of getting permanently settled in the U.S. We could continue refining these two groups. If (a.1), two other groups are possible: (a.1.1) those who are recognized by the American state by some type of guest-worker or non-immigrant visa, and (a.1.2) those who are not recognized by the American state, i.e., illegal immigrants. If (a.2), then two possibilities: (a.2.1) those who have already been admitted as permanent residents and (a.2.2) people aspiring to become permanent residents (some members of (a.1)).

One could continue refining the taxonomy, but we have enough detail for illustrating our claim that not all members of the Hispanic group are also members of the

American polity. Clearly, some members of the group known as “Hispanics” are also members of the American state, whereas others are not. For instance, not all Hispanics are American citizens, or even legal residents.

Among the latter group, i.e., illegal aliens, some have the *intention* of becoming members of the American state, whereas others do not. Additionally, among those intending to become members of the American state some have the *possibility* of doing so, whereas this is not true for others.

In conclusion, while the political membership of African-Americans is unproblematic, the political membership of Hispanics in the American state is highly problematic. It is just not possible to generally assume that Hispanics are, or ought to necessarily be, members of the American polity.

c. Self-Image of the American Nation

I have said that, in contrast with Hispanics, we should assume that African-Americans ought to be members of the American polity. This is simply an uncontroversial statement. But let us now wonder: why should it be assumed that African-Americans ought to be members of the American polity, whereas the same cannot be assumed with regard to Hispanics? The answer to this question will show a third significant difference between the two groups.

It is necessary to look at the self-image of the American community. As I said in an earlier discussion, communities, not least, national communities, have a certain narrative. This narrative consists of a story that often includes many of the traits that are essential to the self-understanding of community members.

As suggested earlier, African-Americans stand at the center of the American national story. And in a certain sense the particular story of African-Americans can be seen as a struggle of many generations for greater participation and full recognition in the larger national community. The point is that the history of African-Americans is embedded in the history of the American nation.

Now compare Hispanics and African-Americans. The contrast we will notice is that while we may take it for granted that African-Americans are part of the American national story and experience, the same is not true about Hispanics.

I suggested that African-American history is embedded in American history. When looking at the history of Hispanics, we will see a contrast because Hispanic history is not embedded in the American national story. It is perfectly possible to appreciate the American national story without any reference to Hispanics, whereas it is virtually impossible to comprehend the national story without references to slavery, the Civil War, the Civil Rights movement, art forms such as Jazz, Blues and Rock 'n' Roll, etc. In short, it is almost inconceivable to tell an American national story that does not have any reference to those members classified under the category of "African-American."

One may reply, of course, that the American national story could contemplate events like the purchase of what is now New Mexico (and more generally, the Southwest), the Mexican-American war, the Spanish war, etc. But two observations must be made. First, those events have not been essential for the shaping of the American national story; they are indeed important events, but they are not at the center of the story reflecting the American self-image. Second, and most importantly, those events, and

generally speaking events entailing exchanges with Latin American countries, belong to the history of American *foreign* relations and not the *national* story.

An important implication derived from the latter point is that Hispanics are originally “foreigners,” i.e., people from a foreign land who migrate to the U.S. Accordingly, historically speaking, Hispanics are perceived as a subset of the category of “immigrants;” a category that implies the insertion of an outside group into American society. Thus, Hispanics have some affinity with Italians, Poles, Irish, and Koreans, all national outsiders who migrated to the U.S.

It is true that “immigration” is an essential component of the American national story (America is thought of as “a nation of immigrants”), but Hispanics are only a subset of such a component. One could perfectly well understand immigration without including Hispanics—and including instead other groups such as Indonesians or French-Canadians. The central point is that although immigration is essential for understanding the American self-image, the particular immigration of Hispanics is not.

As a consequence, Hispanics are not essential to the national story and hence whether Hispanics are American nationals or not is irrelevant. In contrast, African-Americans are intrinsic to the national story and are thus necessarily an element of the American national self-image.

The difference between the two groups in the American self-image is an important one. This difference shows that one group is central whereas the other is peripheral to the American self-image. The difference between center and periphery also answers the question of why African-Americans ought to be full members of the American policy, whereas this is not necessarily the case with Hispanics.

4. DIFFERENT QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

I set out to question the simple view that all cultural minorities are more or less the same, i.e., groups that provide members with a meaningful identity. Questioning this simple view implies challenging the perception of equal relevance across groups. For all groups to be equally relevant they would have to be analogous. What is the analogy between African-Americans and Hispanics—the two largest minorities in American society? It can be inferred from my previous discussion that, given the differences between the two groups, not much can be said to answer this question positively.

Now how do the differences I have described above come up in issues of public recognition? Addressing this question will allow us to see more clearly the trouble with the view that Hispanic and African-American identity are similarly relevant because they each provide group members with meaning and direction.

I have claimed that African-American membership is basic, whereas Hispanic membership is not. If this claim is right, then one could suggest that two separate issues arise with respect to the public recognition of African-American and Hispanic identities in American society.

Since African-American membership is basic, the issue is whether African-American identity *ought* to be publicly recognized or not. One possibility here is to simply come to terms with the fact that a tension may emerge between racial and national identities, but point out that the tension is inevitable and thus racial identity ought to be publicly recognized.

Another possibility is to argue that we desire a “color-blind” society and thus, in order to achieve a state of color-blind equality, we must seek to reverse or minimize the social and political mechanisms that have created and continue to reproduce racial consciousness. The question here of course is whether, given the current significance of racial consciousness, such a reversal would be feasible without causing unacceptable degrees of social disturbance. The issue, at any rate, is this: given the basicness of African-American membership, should it be publicly recognized or not?

Since Hispanic membership is not basic, the issue of public recognition is altogether different. I pointed out in chapter seven that, by recognizing “Hispanic identity,” the American political apparatus is fostering an identity-making process. The end result of this process could be the creation of an identity and membership that may indeed become basic. The issue is whether Hispanic identity ought to be recognized so that Hispanic membership *becomes* basic.

Several alternatives arise with respect to the recognition of Hispanic identity. One may point out that the identity-making process is undesirable, since it will only bring further social fragmentation. According to a different alternative, the identity-making process is what the American pluralistic ideal is all about: welcoming foreigners that become hyphenated Americans. According to this last alternative, the identity-making process is harmless because, despite the fact that Hispanic membership could eventually become basic, such an identity will not ultimately undermine American national unity.

One could also acknowledge that, one way or the other, the identity-making process is irreversible—due not only to state policies, but also massive migration, interest-group organizations such as The National Council of La Raza and the League of

United Latin American Citizens, and a powerful Spanish-speaking media. Given the irreversibility of the process, American society should do its best to accommodate the new internal ethnic identity.

It is important to point out here that even if one believes that the identity-making process of Hispanics is desirable or irreversible, the distinction between different members in the Hispanic group must be kept clear. The distinction, for instance, between a Hispanic who is an American citizen and a Hispanic who is an illegal immigrant is important because otherwise it will be unnecessarily difficult to address the question of Hispanic public recognition in American society.

The issue of public recognition is obviously geared towards full members of American society. The issue does not have to do with the public recognition of foreigners or non-immigrants visiting the U.S. The matter at stake is not recognizing cultures in Turkey or France, or even cultures of Turkish and French visitors to the U.S. The matter is rather related to members of the American polity, which excludes visitors and illegal aliens.

Confining the question of public recognition to American nationals reinforces my point about the difference between the African-American and Hispanic situations. If we isolate *national* members, one could perhaps make a plausible case for the recognition of African-Americans, whereas the case for Hispanic recognition would be far more complicated.

Since, as we saw above, all African-Americans are members of the American polity, the African-American community as a whole is entitled to the question of public recognition. But since, as we saw above, as well, not all members of the Hispanic

category are also members of the American state, the issue of cultural recognition does not apply to all Hispanics. It only applies to those members of the Hispanic category that are also members of the American state.

The point that needs highlighting, at any rate, is that the problem of public recognition with respect to African-Americans and Hispanics is crucially different. The two situations must be addressed by raising two different sets of questions and looking at separate scenarios. This state of affairs breaks the apparent analogy between the two groups.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have compared African-Americans and Hispanics. The purpose of the comparison is to show that not all cultural minorities in American society are equally relevant.

I began by establishing that given a historical process of racial formation, the racial membership of African-Americans is basic. But the American national membership of African-Americans is also basic. Hence, for African-Americans, there are, at least, two basic memberships, racial and national, which due to historical circumstances of social and political exclusion, could be in tension with each other.

I then compared African-Americans with Hispanics. I argued that there are three reasons why the two groups are significantly different from each other for purposes of relevance and public recognition in American society.

First, the basic memberships of the two groups are different. As mentioned, African-American membership is basic. As I argued in previous chapters, the same is not true for Hispanics—i.e., Hispanic membership is not basic.

Additionally, African-Americans may find a tension between their racial and national memberships. The national membership of Hispanics is basic, but for Hispanics there is no similar tension.

Second, the political membership of the two groups is different. We may assume that African-Americans are members of the American polity, whereas this is not true of Hispanics. Some Hispanics may be members of the American polity, but, given their immigrant status, many are not.

Third, African-Americans stand at the center of America's self-image. Hispanics, who consist of a contingent immigrant group, do not have a historically prominent role in the American self-image.

I finally made the point that given the differences outlined above, the question of public recognition in American society is fundamentally different for African-Americans and Hispanics. Generally, it makes sense to raise the question about public recognition for African-Americans. Nonetheless, it does not make sense to raise the question in the same terms for Hispanics. Hispanics are in a different situation than African-Americans, and, thus, have to deal with questions that may not be equally applicable.

At the end of the day, my suggestion revolves around a plain point. Instead of simply claiming that American society consists of a plurality of voices, all of which are equally entitled to public recognition, we should take one voice at a time and ponder whether such a voice does indeed have the merits for public recognition.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: ANY CHEERS FOR HISPANIC IDENTITY?

The general conclusion of my dissertation is twofold. First, Hispanic identity is not what American policy-makers and society in general commonly assume. Members of the Hispanic group have a weak communal identity. Second, Hispanic identity might be a tipping phenomenon, i.e., Hispanicity might be on its way to becoming a significant identity.

In my project, I have addressed questions along the lines of what Hispanic identity is and what it is not; and also questions about what Hispanic identity could become. I have not, however, for the most part addressed normative questions. For instance, what should Hispanic identity be like? And I have not raised questions about the direct implications of a potential Hispanic identity for the American polity. Think, for example, of this question: what contributions, if any, would Hispanics, and their newly formed identity, make to the American nation?

In this final section, I will briefly address two questions that will hopefully set the stage for future projects. My discussion here is tentative and rather speculative, which indicates that more work needs to be done in this regard. First, does Hispanic identity necessarily pose a threat to American national unity? Second, are there any benefits derived from a potential Hispanic identity?

I will begin my discussion with the general assumption that social unity is a good. There are a number of transactions taking place in social settings that can simply happen

on the basis of cohesion. Without this cohesion, the societies I have in mind would not be able to function optimally.

Two reasons will reinforce my point. First, consider efficiency. Social cohesion brings about clear channels of communication and thus allows for efficient transactions. Think for instance of legal or economic transactions. In order for these sorts of transactions to take place effectively, it is desirable to have certain common traits such as language and also legal commonplaces.

Imagine, for instance, a social unit composed of three linguistic subsets. In order to carry out business across groups on a regular basis, it would be highly desirable to have a common language. Language in this case would be a type of *lingua franca*—either from one of the linguistic subsets or a neutral language—that allows for the possibility of understanding and thus being able to transact among groups. Without a *lingua franca*, transactions would be either impossible or would not happen as efficiently as if there were a common language.

If transactions are not possible, all subsets will be negatively affected. If they are possible, but without a common language, consider the costs attached to having to translate and interpret the content and idiosyncrasies of different linguistic groups on every single transaction. Imagine a society in which transactions in different languages were very frequent—occurring on a daily basis, thousands of times. Every time someone goes to the market and attempts to buy groceries, she finds herself having to carry out the transaction and perhaps negotiate in a foreign language. Now imagine that this is the case with more complicated transactions such as purchasing a car or a house. With the

absence of a common language, frequent and complex transactions in a social unit will have higher costs. A *lingua franca* reduces costs and facilitates operations.

Now consider a second reason why cohesion allows societies to function optimally. Social cohesion makes the delivery of a good such as justice possible.¹ This reason is closely related with efficiency, but it also goes beyond efficiency in that it constraints the existence of a social unit. Let me explain. If a social unit is inefficient, it is undesirable but not necessarily wrongful. And we would certainly not say that it is wrong for this unit to exist under its current condition. If, in contrast, a social unit fails to deliver justice—and more strongly, the social unit is unjust—the unit would not only be undesirable, but should not exist under conditions of injustice.

Oversimplifying, let us say that what we might call a just society minimally entails two formal elements: (a) a legal code; and (b) the administration of such a legal code. Note that a precondition for a legal code and its administration is some kind of language that can be understood by all those affected. Note also that another precondition for legal codes and their application is cohesion. I will focus on this last point; and so I will now elaborate on the topic of cohesion and justice.

Legal codes place constraints on and regulate societies; they determine what is legally right and wrong. Now, in order for legal codes to be operational, they have to be perceived as legitimate by the subjects of such a legal code. Legal codes do not operate

¹ Although my discussion addresses a different question and makes different points, in speaking about efficiency and justice as attributes of an optimal society, I borrow from Christopher Morris' discussion on the justification of states (on grounds of efficiency and justice). See *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 136-166.

in the abstract, but are rather applied in particular societies. And for this application to work, societies must come to accept the code and its administration as legitimate.²

When I speak about acceptance and social legitimacy, I do not mean that all rules and procedures must be perceived as legitimate by all the members of a social unit at all times. The requirement for a comprehensive social consensus would be absurd. People disagree on rules. Criminals will certainly often disagree with the legitimacy of some rule. My claim is weaker. What I want to say is that some rule and procedure must be perceived as legitimate by most members of a social unit at most times. Otherwise, rules would cease to be operational and not be enforceable.

As an illustration, think of prohibition in the United States in the 1920s. One of the reasons why prohibition ceased to be operational is because it was not perceived by most members of a society as a legitimate rule that could be legitimately applied in most instances. Given the lack of social legitimacy, the rule was hardly enforceable and had to be dropped.

Now imagine a social unit with three different subsets: A, B and C. The social unit has an overarching legal code constraining all three subsets. Now suppose that A and B accept the legal code on grounds of legitimacy and C does not. The reason for this state of affairs is that A and B share a set of common values, whereas C does not share these values. The legal code will then be operational in subsets A and B, but not in

² My discussion here has been helped by Russell Hardin's ideas on the origins and enforceability of social norms. See his *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 79-106.

subset C (unless, of course, subsets A and B exercise a great deal of coercion on subset C).

Let us here remember that a just society entails, formally speaking, a legal code that is properly administered. Also, legal codes are operational when perceived as legitimate by the subjects of a certain group. If one subset within a particular social unit does not perceive the legal code as legitimate, such a legal code may not be operational for the whole system. Given this one subset, and the lack of a fully operational legal code, the condition of justice in the social unit may be undermined. One can infer from this line of reasoning that, for purposes of justice, a society is better-off when all subsets agree on the legitimacy of the legal code than when they do not.

The very simple thought-experiment of social units and subsets illustrates what might be at stake in societies wanting to implement a constitution that may not be perceived as legitimate by all sub-groups. One immediately thinks of the European Union and the prospects for a common constitution among different national groups. One also thinks of groups with cultural minorities that do not share the values and legal norms of the majority group. Similarly, the thought-experiment also illustrates what might be at stake in societies that have a sub-set of illegal immigrants—people who obviously do not abide by immigration laws.

The kernel of my discussion is that cohesion between subsets of a social unit is highly desirable for purposes of justice—understood, formally, in terms of legal codes that must be administered. A high degree of social cohesion facilitates the delivery of justice. If an optimal society is a just one, conditions that facilitate justice, such as social cohesion, are desirable.

By way of general conclusion so far, let us say that social unity is a good because it allows societies to function optimally. Optimal societies are, among other things, efficient and just. The value of unity and cohesion lies in enhancing the conditions of social optimality.

I will now turn to an obvious question. I have spoken of social units that are supposed to be optimal in rather vague terms. An essential question now is this: what are the relevant social units? I think it is not difficult to see that one of the most relevant social units in our contemporary world is the *nation-state*.

One might immediately observe that nation-states are not as robust as they used to be, and they will someday be an organizational arrangement belonging to the past. Nation-states are not perennial—they have not always been with us and will not always be. Indeed, they may soon be supplanted by other forms of social arrangement more suitable to the modern world. This trend is evinced by increased globalization and the weakening of national ties. These judgments are particularly tempting when we see ongoing experiments such as the European Union along with other prospective supra-national consortiums.

These observations are true. But a moment's thought will show the scope of the nation-state. People are citizens of nation-states. Citizenship here means that people are legally bound by duties and legally entitled to rights within a national unit. One might think of oneself as a "citizen of the world." But even if fashionable, cosmopolitan citizenship, unlike national citizenship, is legally non-binding. A citizen of a nation-state has binding obligations towards national fellow-members, e.g., defend the national

territory. A citizen of a nation-state is also accorded rights within a national unit, e.g., the right to property.

Consider that constitutions, as truly enforceable and binding texts, are national documents. The courts of justice that matter and affect most people are national systems. Tax-codes and regulations are national in scope. When we speak of welfare reform or Social Security reform, we refer to the welfare and Social Security systems of a particular nation-state. Economies, as systems that must be protected and grow, are primarily national in scope. Tariffs, loan interest rates, housing markets and product quality control would be unintelligible to most people without the underlying assumption that these rules are enforced within *national* units.

If nation-states are relevant units for purposes of social optimality, it follows that national unity is a good. National cohesion enhances the conditions of social optimality. Cohesion allows for the possibility of efficient transactions among people and also the proper administration of a formal justice system, which, as mentioned, tends to be national in scope.

It would seem then that we have good reasons to desire and promote national unity. So, in general terms, nation-building policies serve a positive purpose, since they advance national unity. Similarly, there are good reasons to be concerned about the fragmentation of national unity. The concern about multicultural policies may be exactly of this kind: they tend to undermine national unity. This is the nerve that Samuel Huntington touches, and, in my view, he is right about raising the question on American national unity.

Incidentally, let me briefly mention that the case I am making for national unity does not necessarily rest on the sort of nationalism that privileges a group for a higher reason. National unity is a good not because there ought to be something intrinsically “sacred” about nations as such, although, in some instances, the phenomenon of nationalism may be better understood by looking at religious impulses.³ But rather national unity is a good because there are benefits derived from this sort of unity. In this context, I generally agree with Russell Hardin in his analysis of group identity. He believes that group identity does not derive from “primordialist” or “irrational” human instincts. Instead, “if we can rely on the actors’ knowledge to determine what it is rational for them to do, we may often find apparently group oriented action intelligible without the mystification of primordialism and without strong claims of moralism either.”⁴

But the view that national unity is a good begins to get more complicated when one claims that cultural membership is also a good. Try to think of a nation that has several minority cultures and real-life nations will immediately come to mind, e.g., Canada, Australia and the U.S. In these nations, national unity might be a good. But now think about the implications of the view that cultural membership is also a good. This is the nerve that different stripes of multiculturalism generally touch.

Consider a situation in which national unity and cultural membership are in conflict—e.g., Muslims in France. Two views are possible. First, weakening national

³ See, for instance, Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Some religious themes help to understand the process of people-making that I described in chapter seven.

⁴ *One for All*, pp. 16-17.

unity is justified on the grounds that cultural membership is a higher good than national unity. Second, strengthening national unity is justified on the grounds that cohesion is a higher good than cultural membership. Multiculturalists will naturally follow the first route, whereas someone like Huntington will follow the second one.

Incidentally, I find much to commend in Will Kymlicka's analysis on this type of conflict, although I do not necessarily agree with his views on accommodation rights for immigrant groups and am rather skeptical about his type of multiculturalism.⁵ Part of Kymlicka's contribution is the attempt to reconcile the two goods (national unity and cultural membership) and argue that they are not against each other.⁶

On the one hand, Kymlicka is a proponent of accommodation rights for immigrant groups. On the one hand, however, Kymlicka observes that "nation-states did not come into being at the beginning of time, nor did they arise overnight: they are the product of careful nation-building policies, adopted by the state in order to diffuse and strengthen a sense of nationhood." Additionally, he comments that "the successful diffusing of a common national identity is, in many countries, a contingent and vulnerable accomplishment — an ongoing process, not an achieved fact."⁷ There is then a place for nation-building policies that promote national identity and unity.

⁵ See my discussion of this topic in chapter two.

⁶ See, for instance, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 152-176. When I speak about this type of conflict, I refer particularly to immigrant groups and not, in Kymlicka's terminology, minority nations.

⁷ *Politics in the Vernacular*, p. 229.

Kymlicka's attempt is commendable, but I doubt that the poles of accommodation rights and national unity could be easily reconciled. More importantly, for our purposes, it is unnecessary to raise this dichotomy in the context of Hispanics in the U.S. Be that as it may, I will come back to this discussion below.

I have so far made the point that national unity is a good, a point that could be challenged by multiculturalism on the grounds that membership in an ethnic group or a minority nation is a competing good. We now have enough elements in the discussion to be able to turn to the Hispanic situation.

Let me begin with a very elementary question: what type of identity do Hispanics have? I have argued throughout the previous chapters that, whatever else it might be, Hispanic identity is not very strong.

Now let us look at another question. Is Hispanic identity a higher good than national unity? The question assumes that Hispanic identity is a good, which, in my view, is false. But let us assume for a moment, for the sake of argument, that Hispanic identity is a good of some type. Since Hispanic identity is not very strong, I very much doubt that it is a higher good than national unity. Given the benefits of national unity and the weakness of Hispanic identity, there is no competition between the two items when compared against each other. National identity is a higher good than Hispanic identity.

But here we must remember another point, one that was made in chapter seven. Given a process of people-making, Hispanic identity may be on its way to becoming a more significant identity. If one posits that national unity is a good, as I have, this may be a troublesome trend. We must then be concerned about the possibility of Hispanicity,

or any other minority identity for that matter, undermining national unity. Huntington seems to be right in what he perceives as a crisis of national identity.

Now we have finally reached the point in which we can address the first question we set out to answer: would Hispanic identity necessarily undermine American national unity? Much of the answer to this question will depend on the type of identity that Hispanicity turns out to be.

In speculating about what Hispanic identity should and might become, let me make a distinction between strong and soft multiculturalism. Strong multiculturalism contemplates group rights and official recognition of minority groups. This is the kind of multiculturalism that Kymlicka proposes. Under this type of multiculturalism, cultural membership is central to members' identities and is thus entitled to public recognition, which often takes the form of group rights. Kymlicka's view is fueled by a concern with the Canadian situation, i.e., two distinct cultural groups (one of which, Quebec, is a minority) within a federated nation. My concern, however, is not Canada but Hispanics in America.

Now contrast strong multiculturalism with what I will call, for the lack of a better term, "soft" multiculturalism. This soft version consists primarily of voluntary memberships in fluid cultural groups that are fully integrated into a national core culture.⁸

⁸ The type of voluntary membership I have in mind here is the one described by Mary Waters in her famous study of European ethnic groups in America, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). Cultural membership in my melting pot model has some affinity with the type of fluid membership David Hollinger describes in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995). Nonetheless, I do not think, like cosmopolitans do (and in some sense, Hollinger as well), that all memberships are voluntary and fluid.

What I have in mind here is very different from group rights and minority nationalism. The type of membership in this context also contrasts with what I have called basic membership—which consists of traits that are essential to someone’s self-understanding and make her a member of a particular group.⁹

The best image for describing soft multiculturalism is one that has been long used when explaining the immigrant experience in the United States: the melting pot. Immigrant groups are assimilated into a national core culture that is also transformed by the new groups. The melting pot as I describe it is both additive and assimilationist. On the one hand, immigrant groups add new elements to the essence of a national culture; and, on the other hand, these groups become fully assimilated into such a national culture.

In my view, this type of soft multiculturalism is the one that that should prevail in the Hispanic situation. Given the historical record, one might even venture to say that this will be the case. Multiculturalism, American-style, is largely about taming the former national identities of immigrants, transforming and delivering them in benign holidays and practices that are enjoyed by everyone (think, for instance, of St. Patrick’s day and Chinese food). If Hispanic identity is framed within a soft multiculturalism, it will not necessarily be in conflict with American national identity and unity.

But we must also remember here the hypothesis I advanced in chapter seven. A process of identification and people-making by the American state, may turn Hispanics

⁹ There are exceptions, of course, to the possibility of voluntary membership in particular groups within a national unit. For instance, whereas Hispanic membership might very well be voluntary, it is not clear that African-American membership could simply be voluntary.

into the sort of group in which membership is basic, i.e., essential to the self-understanding of group members. I don't think that this possibility by itself would pose a serious and immediate threat to American national unity. But in the context of my discussion on soft multiculturalism, this possibility is unnecessary.

There is no need for Hispanic membership to become basic. It is preferable to follow a safe route, one that has worked historically: the melting pot. If my observation is right, it will be advisable for the American state to keep in check any actions that would seriously engage in Hispanic people-making. In the scenario I have in mind, the American state should refrain from heritage-building and group recognition by means of rights. A better route would be simply to recognize an elastic population consisting of immigrants who are in the process of assimilating themselves into American mainstream culture. These immigrants might contribute towards a core culture and heritage, which is after all part of the story about the melting pot. But these immigrant communities do not need particular and distinctive heritages that would characterize them.

I have addressed the first question we set out to answer. Now let me raise the second question: does a home-grown Hispanic identity represent any benefits for the U.S.? The benefits could be many, but I will simply focus on a particular one. I will suggest that, in the context of U.S.-Latin American relations, Hispanic identity could serve an important purpose. My suggestion is that the phenomenon of Hispanic identity, always framed within the scheme of soft multiculturalism, could serve as an instrument of foreign relations and national security. More specifically, given the proximity with

Latin America and the need for vital relationships with the region, it is in the best interest of the American government and society to have a home-grown Hispanic constituency.¹⁰

In making this point, let me borrow here from the case recently made by *The Economist* for Turkey's inclusion in the European Union.¹¹ The case for Turkey's admission rests on the potential benefits available to both Turkey and the EU. For instance, Turkey's "military strength and foreign-policy clout would be valuable" to the EU. Turkey would also create a bridge for the EU to reach out to the Muslim world and presumably increase its influence in the region by "showing that Islam can be compatible with liberal democracy."

The sorts of issues arising between the Islamic world and the West are different from U.S.-Latin American relations. Similarly, when addressing the Hispanic situation, unlike Muslims in Europe, we speak of identity-building and recognition of an identity in the making, and not inclusion of a ready-made group—which tends to make the Turkish situation more complicated. The two situations, however, are analogous in that a powerful group derives benefits from incorporating or, in the Hispanic case, stimulating and recognizing the identity of a different group.

I am not suggesting that the U.S. recognizes a "Latin American" identity, but rather, in line with the soft multiculturalism mentioned above, an American home-made identity that builds a bridge to Latin America. Building bridges to the region serves the

¹⁰ John Skrentny argues that the Civil Rights revolution has to be understood within the context of the cold war. The impulse for racial and ethnic equality was motivated by a concern for national security. I have found his discussion very helpful for the views presented here. See his book, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), particularly, pp. 21-65.

¹¹ Oct. 9, 2004, p. 13.

national interest. It is clear that the U.S. needs to pay attention, for instance, to the unrest that has been developing in countries such as Venezuela, with the inflammatory anti-American rhetoric of Hugo Chavez, for the past few years. More importantly, the U.S. needs to increase its clout and raise its profile in neighboring Latin America in order to offset Anti-American sentiments in the region. Having a Hispanic contingent at home consisting of Latin American émigrés—whose identities have been engineered and assimilated into a U.S. national scheme—can be invaluable in helping to achieve these purposes.

The value of the Hispanic population in the service of the national interest—although this time Mexico’s national interest—has been perceptively noticed by Mexico’s president, Vicente Fox. Fox has called himself the president of 123 million Mexicans, with 23 million living in the U.S., and has promised “to defend the rights of his constituents regardless of which side of the border they call home.”¹² The comment caters to Mexicans in the U.S., a community that could be mobilized in order to influence U.S. foreign policy towards Mexico. This kind of perception illustrates how ethnic identities, in this case “Mexican-American,” can be an instrument of national advancement.

Note that suggestions on the role Hispanic identity (or ethnic identities in general) as a potential instrument of national advancement, do not necessarily entail a view on the place the U.S. ought to have in world politics. One could assume, for instance, a strong

¹² New York article quoted by Nathan Glazer in “Assimilation Today: Is One Identity Enough?,” in *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be An American*, ed. T. Jacoby (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 70.

view of the U.S.'s role in the world, i.e., the U.S. is a world power and as such it is in the U.S.'s best interest to expand its hegemonic role in the world and Latin America. Some have even argued that it is not only in the U.S.'s best interest, but also in the world's interest (or Latin America's interest, to be more specific) for the U.S. to play the vigorous role of hegemon.¹³ Nonetheless, one could also assume a weaker view of what Ernest Lefever called "America's imperial burden."¹⁴ On this thinner and non-interventionist view, robust relationships are mutually beneficial—not only the U.S., but also Latin America derives benefits from strong ties with its northern neighbor. I think that regardless of whether one adheres to the strong or weak view of the U.S., Hispanic identity could be an instrument of benefit to the U.S.

I started out with the assumption that national unity is a good and thus there are good reasons to be concerned about the possibility of Hispanic identity (or any type of group identity for that matter) undermining American national unity. But given the right type of multiculturalism, American multiculturalism, Hispanic identity will not be likely to weaken national unity. Some could see Hispanic identity as a threat to American national unity. But as long as Hispanicity remains within the framework of soft multiculturalism, I think that this identity would be harmless. Additionally, Hispanic identity might be beneficial in that it is well-suited for advancing the national interest of the U.S. in Latin America.

These are controversial points and someone like Huntington might not be inclined to agree with them. I believe, however, that as long as the American state continues to

¹³ See, for instance, Niall Ferguson's recent book, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

¹⁴ *America's Imperial Burden: Is the Past Prologue?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999).

practice a soft and benign multiculturalism and engineer Hispanic identity under a solid scheme of common American values, the potential benefits strikingly counterbalance potential risks. In the case I have in mind, soft multiculturalism becomes a matter of national interest.

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