Opposed Identities: Exploring Some Alternatives

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What are the solutions to the bitter and vicious conflicts founded on dichotomous us/them thinking? Potentially they are many; actually they may be none. The answers are to be sought and found not in theory alone, for what will be promising will depend on circumstances of power, leadership, resources, and needs. Nevertheless some responses and approaches have theoretical aspects tied to issues of categorization and insider/outsider distinctions. In this essay, some of these responses will be described, with attention to actual cases where that is feasible and appropriate.

Two responses are undesirable, given the assumption that one's goal is to end or at least limit violent conflict. These are overcoming a division between two groups by constructing a situation in which they have a common enemy, and achieving a military victory over one group and repressing it so as to eliminate any expression of its ideology and history. About these approaches little will be said -- though in the context of the common enemy, readers may recall that Ronald Reagan once made comments along these lines. In 1985, Reagan told Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev quite seriously that they would easily be able to overcome their differences and get rid of nuclear weapons if they faced a common enemy in the form of aliens from outer space.

Two further responses are deemed to be practically impossible, for reasons that will be explained here. One might urge that people do entirely without any categories around which social groups could be formed. The idea would be to treat each person purely as an individual, to be considered in virtue of his or her personal attributes. Or one might seek to eliminate any discourse within which the problematic categories appeared. This elimination of divisive ethnic categories is currently being attempted in Rwanda, where 'divisionism' is illegal and it counts as divisionist to speak of Rwandans as either Tutsi or Hutu. It is illuminating and of considerable interest to consider these approaches and seek to understand just why they are impractical, especially in the light of the great importance of the Rwandan example.

Four further responses have more promise, for both theoretical and practical reasons. These are (1) alternate identification, in which people base their social identity on another aspect of their lives, different from membership in the perniciously opposed groups; (2) pruning, in which the group identification is preserved but that identity is detached from its perniciously oppositional aspects; (3) trans-categorization, in which people identify with a larger group inclusive of the formerly contending groups; and (4) radical re-categorization, in which the context is shifted so that the former social identities become less relevant in a new situation.

Two Unworkable Approaches
(a) Not Categorizing People
In 1995, Anna Stubblefield published a paper about racial identity and non-essentialism.[1] She wrote in the context of movements for black pride and black solidarity based on racial identification, and puzzled over how (if at all) such movements could be rendered compatible with non-essentialism about race. The context was one in which she saw a need for racial identification by disadvantaged African-Americans, while at the same time scientific and philosophical arguments pointed to there being no basis for the notion of distinct 'races' of human beings. Stubblefield referred to an article by Richard Wasserstrom, who had argued that the ideal society would be one in which race mattered as little as eye color does in our own society. Wasserstrom's

approach struck her as involving an underlying difficulty, given that some racial identification would be needed even to identify the means required to arrive at a better society. Another philosopher, Iris Marion Young, had tried to define race as a quality around which people coalesced in groups, with relatively privileged groups defining themselves as normal and deeming the 'others' to be 'different.' In an ideal society no such identifications would be needed because levels of privilege would cease to exist; groups could live together and interact without either isolating themselves into small homogeneous communities or assimilating themselves into one large 'mainstream.'

Stubblefield considers whether group membership ('I am white,' 'I am black,' 'I am Chinese,' and so on) means that the group as such is a separately existing category. She answers in the negative, saying that there are no social groups as *really existing* things; groups are "constructed through discourse." At this point she appears to be saying that if we did not speak of black people, white people, Chinese people, Aboriginal people, and so on, the groups 'blacks', 'whites,' 'Aboriginal' and 'Chinese' would not exist. By corollary, if we did not speak of Hutus and Tutsis, there would be no group 'Hutu' and no group 'Tutsi.' There would nevertheless be many individuals living in a part of Africa with the present geographic boundaries of the country we call 'Rwanda.' But people would not use these group categories in describing or identifying themselves, and thus, in a highly important political sense, there would be no Hutus and no Tutsis but only individuals. The notion that social groups do not 'really' exist may be taken to mean that blacks, whites, Aboriginals, Hutus, Tutsis and the Chinese are not logically comparable to mountains and trees. The point seems to be the following: if we did not speak of material entities as 'mountains' and 'trees', they would exist notwithstanding. If we did not refer to Hutus, Tutsis, blacks, whites, and Aboriginals, many individual people would exist, notwithstanding. But these ethnically or racially defined *social groups* would not.[2] Stubblefield then moves on to consider the categorization of people as belonging to these social groups as *labeling*. On this account if one calls a person black, or Aboriginal, or Hutu, one is labeling that person and, she submits, "labeling is harmful to the person being labeled, regardless of the label."[3]

The argument at this point is that labeling is harmful because you diminish a person by seeing him or her only as representative of a certain category of people, rather than as a complete person. In other words, however much you admire your Chinese-Canadian friend and appreciate his mathematical abilities, you should not think of him as a *Chinese-Canadian* with these abilities. To think of him or describe him in this way would be to label him as a group member and consider him with reference to a group stereotype, as distinct from treating him as an individual.[4] Stubblefield says, "When someone labels me, she sees me as who she thinks I am based on the label, rather than seeing me as who I really am." One might think 'boys are interested in sports; girls are different from boys; Fred is a boy and will be interested in sports; Maria is a girl and will not.'[5] Labels blur over features of individuality and in so doing may separate people who are really compatible or lead to wrong decisions about individuals. "We are not the sum of our labels," Stubblefield insists.[6]

Stubblefield notes that Anthony Appiah wrote about race, saying that concepts like 'race', 'tribe,' and 'nation' are illusory. But, she comments, Appiah offered no alternative to racial identification in the context of programs that might be needed to overcome oppression based on what people had regarded as racial categories. Stubblefield wants to question racial and other group categories as 'constructed' and harmful, while at the same time making sense of what means could be used to overturn such categories and end oppressive practices that presuppose them. What happens with racial descriptions, on this analysis, is that when we describe an individual, x, in terms of a category, C, the category has social meaning and carries with it assumptions that may create barriers for x. Stubblefield regards labeling as incompatible with basic human respect which, on this account, involves recognizing that each individual is distinct from each other individual. If

we label x as 'a C,' we will interact with x as though he is a C and *just a C*, as though he is not an individual but is, rather, some kind of prototype of C-ness. Now on Stubblefield's view, this approach to individuals amount to *false essentialism* in its erroneous assumption that there is such a thing as essential C-ness. Furthermore, it is problematic because it interferes with mutually rewarding communication and shared understanding. Stubblefield asserts:

> I cannot respect you as a unique individual self as long as you are a representative of a category to me. I cannot respect myself as long as I perceive myself in that way. While there is no such thing as a pre-social individual, we are each more than a collection of labels. To label each other is to deny that.[7]

On this account, labeling is descriptively inaccurate and morally wrong. When a label attaches to a category of people who have been lower in a socio-economic hierarchy, disadvantaged individuals are labeled so as to signify their lower status in that hierarchy. These people ('blacks,' 'Aboriginals,' and under Belgian colonialism, 'Hutus') then easily identify with each other, because they are treated in similar ways in the society in which they live. And as a result of social practice, they do come to share at least one attribute: *they are labeled in the same way*. The social group is *constructed* by persons who employ the same categorical term to many different individuals. Their uses of the term to label individuals are real, and it is those uses that create the social group in question. At this point, Stubblefield states that although groups are not real in the sense that they could exist as entities independently of social practices, they are real, given those practices. And that reality makes sense of the notion that their members can identify themselves as such and work against their own oppression.

When the social environment changes, there will no longer be any need or justification for its members to identify themselves as members of the same group. At that point, blacks will no longer be blacks, Aboriginals will no longer be Aboriginals, and so on. (One is tempted to recall here the withering away of the state at the Marxist end of history.) People will no longer need to label each other or to make assumptions about each other's lives based on labels. Instead, they will be able to take philosophical non-essentialism literally in practical contexts, and base their judgments about each other on the experience, beliefs, needs, and interests of individuals as such.[8]

Although there is much to admire in the moral presuppositions and concerns underlying this analysis, the account cannot withstand scrutiny. The approach may be criticized as unworkable on the grounds that it is a practical impossibility to acquire enough relevant knowledge about every individual person so as to interact solely on the basis of his or her individual qualities. If we take Stubblefield's bold comments about categories and labeling literally, such lack of practicality understates the difficulties with this account. In its stress on knowing and responding to the person as a unique individual, and maintaining respect for persons in this strong sense, the account rules out far too much.

The account is extremely broad and uncompromising; further theoretical difficulties arise. The argument Stubblefield puts forward can be summarized as follows:

> 1. To categorize someone is to label him or her.
> 2. To label a person is wrong.
> Therefore
> 3. To categorize a person is wrong.

In this context, the term 'wrong' as used in (2) and (3) seems to be both moral and epistemic. In (1), the term 'categorize' seems to apply whenever one describes an individual person using a general predicate around which group membership could be constructed. According to Stubblefield, we are involved in disrespect for the individual person, which is morally objectionable, and we commit an

epistemic wrong due to the blurring over of individual attributes leading to careless assumptions and possible inaccuracy. Now the argument stated above is a valid syllogism, so our appraisal of it depends entirely on our assessment of its premises. Assuming that the term 'label' carries negative evaluational weight, we can grant (2). But if we accept that premise, there is a problem with (1). It is not reasonable to accept that *any* categorization of a person by applying to him or her a general descriptive category amounts to labeling in an objectionable sense. Any descriptive predicate can be used to 'construct' a category, and through that category, a social group: think of women, men, tall people, old people, young people, people living in rural Alberta, people living in suburbs, and so on. All people are describable by some descriptive predicates and as such potentially 'categorized.' On Stubblefield's account, we are going to be objectionably 'labeling' a person, and thereby committing moral and epistemic wrongs, if we say of him that he is a young man who lives in rural Alberta. If speaking in this way is going to count as wrong, morally and epistemically, then we will not be able to describe individuals by general predicates without committing wrongs. This implication is absurd and would restrict science and ordinary speech as well as social philosophy. Its absurdity indicates that there is something seriously mistaken in Stubblefield's argument; we cannot reasonably accept both premise (1) and premise (2) in her argument.

2. Legal Bans on Perniciously Oppositional Categories

Another flawed approach is that of seeking to ban, not categorization as such, but those specific oppositional categories underlying a bitter conflict. A current example is the outlawing of 'divisionism' by the Kagame government in Rwanda. In media, education, and political discourse there are to be no more ethnic divisions, or regional divisions; these are outlawed. After long years of conflict between Hutu and Tutsi, followed by the genocide of 1994, any concerned observer could certainly understand why those charged with governing a post-genocide state would wish to abolish ethnic categories. The categories Hutu/Tutsi are a paradigm of perniciously oppositional categories, and supported a genocidal ideology rationalizing over 800,000 brutal killings.[9] In the aftermath of that genocide, the Kagame government propagates an image of national unity and shared politics. Post-genocide Rwanda expresses norms of shared power, commitment to the rule of law, and as much freedom of expression as possible. Rwanda's Ambassador to the U.N. articulated these commitments, stating that you cannot build a new country with old bricks (presumably old ethnic categories); you need new ones.[10]

The idea of non-ethnicity in Rwanda is 'We are all Banyarwanda' (people of Rwanda). In post-genocide Rwanda, one is not allowed to mention ethnic identities, question the ethos of forgiveness and reconciliation, or point out that in its defeat of the genocidal Hutu *interhamwe*, the Tutsi RPF force killed some 25,000 – 45,000 people including many civilians. Community courts, the *gacaca*, function only to consider the anti-Tutsi genocide of 1994 and do not deal with allegations of violations by RPF or government forces. There is a law against ethnicism; authorized discourse does not allow ethnicity to exist.[11] A Tutsi member of Parliament, interviewed by journalist Constance Morrill, told her firmly, "We don't have ethnic identities here." Who was slaughtered? They were people "considered to be the Tutsi."

The Rwandan government aims to erase ethnicity, but still sometimes needs to appeal to ethnicity when seeking to establish its legitimacy and even when specifying its political goals. Interestingly, the underlying narrative about the genocide, from which the Kagame government gained its legitimacy and very considerable international support, is deeply dichotomous. The very government seeking to legislate the end of ethnicity has depended on a dichotomous narrative within which ethnic identity plays a crucial role, to establish its own legitimacy. The foundational dichotomy in this narrative is between *innocent Tutsi victims* and *guilty Hutu perpetrators*. This binary split is greatly over-simplified and omits to consider a number of highly relevant facts. There were some Tutsi perpetrators and the RPF, under Kagame, played a role in constructing the

situation in which the 1994 genocide occurred.[12] There were many Hutu victims; these were opponents of genocidal action attacked and killed for their opposition. There were also Hutu heroes, who sought to save Tutsis from the slaughter. There were Rwandans (the Twa) who were neither Tutsi nor Hutu, as well as many who (from inter-marriage) were both Hutu and Tutsi. These people were often compelled in the vicious struggle to identify as one ethnicity or the other. Commentators have mentioned an unwillingness in many quarters to criticize the Kagame government by acknowledging flaws that would disturb the founding dichotomous narrative and complicate the role of the innocent victim, supposed to be beyond criticism due to his terrible suffering.

The categories 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' were constructed in colonial times, with horrifying results. The idea behind anti-'divisionism' legislation is that if one can *construct* identities and learn that differences and different identities exist, then, by parallel reasoning, one can *deconstruct* those identities and learn that they do not exist. Article 13 of the Rwandan constitution deals with "revisionism, denial, and trivialization" of the genocide, all of which are legally punishable offences. Article 33 makes the propagation of ethnic, regional, and racial discrimination or any other form of divisionism punishable by law. According to a 2002 criminal law, *divisionism* is

> The use of speech, written statement, or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflict among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination. (Rwanda 2002a Article 1)[13]

Furthermore,

> Any person who makes public any speech, writing, pictures or images or any symbols over radio airwaves, television, in a meeting room or public place, with the aim of discriminating <against> people or sowing sectarianism <divisionism> is sentenced to between one year and five years of imprisonment and fined between 500,00 and two million Rwandan francs <U.S. $1000 to U.S.$ 4000>, or only one of these two sanctions.[14]

Thus the very idea of ethnicity is to be dissolved. History is not taught in schools, because without the Hutu/Tutsi categories, based on constructed differences, Rwanda's twentieth century history would have been impossible. In education camps for returning Rwandans, people are taught about the *myths* of difference, oppressors, oppressed, and ethnicity.[15] Clearly, vast amounts of censorship and self-censorship are required to not speak of any Hutu/Tutsi divisions in Rwanda.

The Kagame government of Rwanda has received praise in some quarters and clearly it has functioned in an extraordinarily difficult situation. But even some who admire what the Kagame government has accomplished in post-genocide Rwanda admit that Rwanda is by no means an open society.[16] The ban on divisionism restricts discussion and debate in areas that have been crucially important in people's personal and political lives. One obvious difficulty here lies in the fact that the government's 'national unity' approach is incompatible with individual memories of events.[17] People will think of what they have experienced as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa; if they cannot speak of past events using these categories, they will not be able to express their thoughts and feelings. To ban reference to such key aspects of history and politics is, in effect, to render impossible discourse about key events of the twentieth century, affecting millions of individuals. The restrictions are enormous in their impact and accordingly require considerable surveillance, interference, and repression. The restrictions on expression are formulated in laws that are vague and open to abuse. Critics of the Kagame government run a high risk of being accused of divisionism, genocidal ideology, or inciting tribal hatred.

In an essay on censorhip and propaganda in post-genocide Rwanda, Lars Waldorf chronicles a number of abuses, including harassment of independent journalists, political opponents, western commentators, and some humanitarian groups. Groups harassed include the BBC, the Voice of America, Reporters without Borders, and Care International. Waldorf concludes his discussion by saying that post-genocide Rwanda shows just how easy it is to abuse hate legislation in post-conflict societies.[18] There is ample evidence that Rwandan laws against 'divisionism' are restricting political discourse, are vague and open to abuse, and have been exploited to limit political opposition.

The notion that one can abolish perniciously oppositional ethnic categories by legislation is clearly implausible in practical terms. While the Rwandan case is profoundly important and of great practical importance, we would not actually have to consider this case to reach the conclusion that legally abolishing us/them categories will be an ineffective approach to overcoming deep conflict. The case can be made on the basis of quite general considerations. Let us stipulate that in a given society people identify themselves either as As or as Bs, and that the As and the Bs have engaged in a vicious and destructive conflict. Let us further stipulate that during this conflict and throughout their lives, individuals in that society have had experiences as As or as Bs. Sometimes, as As or Bs, they have been in conflict; many have been subjected to discrimination and violent mistreatment on the basis that they were As or Bs. Let us now suppose that there is some kind of peace settlement between the As and Bs, the violent phases of the conflict have been brought to an end, and people are in an aftermath situation. They wish to construct a peaceful society, bringing to an end the animosity between As and Bs. Let us now suppose that some among them are writing a constitution for the new society. They wish to end social divisions and think of citizens rather than enemy ethnic groups. What to do? Can state authorities reasonably hope to legislate the A/B categories out of existence? Clearly the answer here is negative. People will continue to think as they have been identified and have lived; they will recall and reflect on their past using the categories that did so much to shape it. As human beings, their meaningful lives are extended over time. To make it illegal to talk so as to express their feelings and thoughts will render honest discourse impossible. It will require repression and intervention and be open to abuse. The results are bound to be counter-productive so far as building a new society is concerned. It is reasonable and desirable to educate in terms of unity, inclusiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation. But given that human beings think and lead their lives using categories that emerge from their past experiences, it is not possible to eliminate discourse involving those categories by resorting to the coercive power of the law. Nor is it desirable to try. The goal of ending animosity is commendable but should be pursued by non-coercive means.

More Promising Approaches
1. Alternate Identifications
Amartya Sen points out that the practice, accompanied of regarding 'British Muslims' as an identity group is politically counter-productive and over-simplifies a complex reality.[19] These practices, Sen argues, tend to polarize 'British Muslims' from 'the mainstream,' grouped together (vacuously) on this set of assumptions as being 'non-Muslim.' If there is a conflict between 'British Muslims' and 'the mainstream,' one might seek replacement of these identities by alternatives, urging people to form and identify with social groups on the basis of something other than religious affiliation. Alternate identities are real enough; no one has just one identity. No one is *purely and only* a British Muslim, francophone Quebecois, Alberta Aboriginal, or Rwandan Tutsi.

A version of this approach has been advocated under the name "transversalism." This idea was put forward in a feminist version by Cynthia Cockburn in a 1998 book *Bridging the Gap*. Cockburn proposed that women could organize around shared gender identity and on this basis work for peace, seeing themselves as first and foremost women.[20] She hoped and expected that gender

identity could dilute conflicted sectarian identities. This alternative identification would enable women (or at least an influential group of them) to move past the polarized religious/political identities that had grounded violent conflicts. Cockburn worked first in Northern Ireland but later turned her attention to other post-war situations, including those in Cyprus and Sierra Leone.

Cockburn's approach has been criticized by Fidelma Ashe who argues that, although promulgated as feminist, such an appoach nevertheless presupposes some very non-feminist stereotypes and oppositions.[21] According to gender stereotypes, in a political struggle women stay home whereas men go forth and fight. Men make the nation by violence whereas women symbolize it, nonviolently. But in real conflicts, women often strongly support violence and are engaged in it. Ashe questions the feminist transversal approach, saying that in its ignoring of violent sectarian behavior, including violence committed by women, it romanticizes women's role. It presumes women to be morally ideal and omits to consider such crucial facts as bigotry, and violent sectarianism. Ashe cites the behavior of women in the Holy Cross school dispute in the fall of 2001. In that bitter dispute, parents in a Protestant area of North Belfast protested so vociferously against the crossing of Catholic schoolgirls on their way to Holy Cross school that the children required escort by armed police officers. Some parents who resisted the blockade received death threats. The blockading parents included mothers; newspaper coverage of the events showed women depicted with expressions of pure sectarian hatred, screaming invective at young girls. Ashe reminds her readers that women are by no means all modeled on the pacifistic Virgin Mary, and people who seek to rectify situations of bitter conflict should not assume them to be so. In their quest for good-natured rhetoric, story-telling, and caring relationships between women, Ashe submits that Cockburn and other advocates of appealing to gender to dilute oppositional categories have failed to consider bitter differences seriously.

This case illustrates the fact that 'transversalism' can be problematic in certain respects. Ashe's reflections point to more general considerations. First, when an alternate identity is sought, that identity may itself be based on idealizations and stereotypes. Second, given the situation, we are likely to be in a situation in which groups have been intensely opposed. When that is so, the engagement of many individuals in serious conflict, often including violence, will likely have been a striking element in their lives. To supplant their oppositional identity by another that is transversal (alternate and inclusive of many individuals who regarded each other as enemies) will not be easy. It may not even be realistic, given that extremely salient aspects of one's past life and activities are no longer to be central to one's social identity.

2. Adapting Oppositional Elements

We have seen that identities can and do change over time; change is also possible with regard to perniciously oppositional aspect of identities. Given that identity is not to be held as fixed and sacrosanct, given that intensely oppositional identities have had viciously destructive implications and can fairly be deemed to be pernicious, and given that social identity seems to be of great importance to many individuals, a further possibility is to seek to amend some social identities. This would not mean abolishing the identities (as attempted in Rwanda) but rather trying to adapt their content so as to eliminate or minimize their perniciously oppositional features.

For an illustration of this approach, we may consider the traditional Orange Order parades in Northern Ireland. These parades celebrate the Orange Order (Protestant) and, in particular, the Protestant victory over Catholics in the Battle of the Boyne in the late eighteenth century. Marching in the parades has been a prominent, almost defining, element of membership in the Orange Order. Yet the parades are problematic due to their triumphalist attitude (we won, you lost) and the insistence by marchers that they be allowed to proceed through Catholic areas. Defenders of the parades argue that they are part and parcel of Protestant tradition in Northern Ireland, going

back hundreds of years. Critics argue that the celebrated Protestant tradition has been one of discrimination, oppression, and violence against Catholics; to be Protestant and Orange has meant to be anti-Catholic. Critics point to animosity and violence during marching season, which involves hundreds of thousands of marchers and lasts from April to November, peaking on July 12. Protests and riots have often been occasioned by Catholic resistance to the routes chosen by marchers. Catholics claim that when these marchers insist on going through Catholic-dominated areas they are in effect asserting their right to dominate public space. Whereas Protestant marchers have tended to insist on their right to hold parades, based on tradition, Catholic residents' groups regard the Orange parades as sectarian triumphalist events. With regard to Drumcree, a particularly controversial route, the comment was made that "one man's parade is perceived as another's capitulation."[22] Clearly, this is zero-sum language: 'if *they* get what they want, *we* lose.'

Recently attempts have been made to re-define these parades, so as to render them less oppositional and more compatible with the peace processes in Northern Ireland. The Parades Commission was founded under the Public Processions Act in 1998. Its duties and functions include the promotion of greater understanding by the general public of issues concerning public processions and of mediation as a means of resolving disputes about them. In mediation, the goal is agreed outcomes that reflect a mutual respect for each others' rights, traditions, and sensitivities. Competing and conflicting interests are to be negotiated and mediated – not expressed through guns, stones, and bombs. An order in July 2008 states that "bigoted behavior will not be tolerated." The idea, then, is that marches will continue and will remain a central activity of the Orange Order but the prevailing ideology will change. The Protestant and Loyalist identities are to be preserved, while their perniciously oppositional elements diminish. The attitudes expressed within those marches should not be those of bigotry and hatred but rather be attitudes of respect for the rights of all. While there are still disputes about routes and also disputes within the Orange Order, these parades are becoming more peaceful. A greater focus is placed on cultural aspects, with the prospect of attracting tourists.

In a commentary on parade disputes, Dominic Bryan writes that it is a mistake to understand issues solely in terms of appeals to fixed traditions of the past. He points out that there are current political discussions about the nature and meaning of the parades, and these matters are always open to reinterpretation. The Orange Order faces the challenge of adapting to changing times; its membership, over 100,000 in the 1950s, was estimated at about 45,000 in 2001. The Orange Order has lost its ability to control the parades, which are increasingly contested by groups exhibiting various shades of Unionism. Ritual parades "demonstrate complex political resources that reflect contemporary, shifting, power relations."[23] While some understand the parades as overt expressions of political power, others prefer to understand them more as celebrating cultural and religious efforts within the Protestant community. Bryan notes that Presbyterian, Methodist, and Church of Ireland leaders have criticized displays of violence at parades and demonstrations, making it harder for the Orange Order to depict itself as the defender of Protestantism if marches involve violence.

The Protestant community is shifting away from displays of militarism and anti-Catholicism to the revival and strengthening of its own cultural heritage. After 1998, Loyalist para-militaries, who had given some support to the parades, became involved in intra-community violence in Northern Ireland. They were largely discredited, coming to be regarded as bullies, extortionists, or even criminals. Historically, the parades were assertions of solidarity by working class men. They have long featured bands, and band competition. For male working class youth, these parades give opportunities to publicly display their identity; they also provide a focus for social activity and, especially with regard to flute bands, the development of musical ability.[24] One cultural adaptation is to further stress musical training and competition, with attempts to increase musical competence, gain or maintain community support, and limit drinking.[25] There are even efforts to establish a

carnival type atmosphere, emphasizing family orientation and including persons dressed as cartoon characters, handing out sweets and toys to children. For such innovations, organizers may apply for and obtain grants from government or non-governmental organizations.

Perhaps the Orange Order could adapt to changing times by turning its annual marches into a community party, with emphasis on enjoyment and celebration. Members would still mark pride in being Protestant, but would not so much emphasize the anti-Catholic elements of the Protestant identity. One organizer spoke of 'Orangefest' as a family-friendly pageant intended for the whole community.[26] In its quest for Orangefest, the Orange Order received a grant of 104,000 pounds from the United Kingdom government.[27] There are new immigrants in Ireland: it has become more obvious that not everyone is Protestant or Catholic. The dichotomy between Protestant and Catholic is not exhaustive; nor is it fully exclusive. As Christian religions, Catholicism and Protestantism have much in common – though in Northern Irish history, Catholics and Protestant have been bitterly opposed. And the al-Qaeda issue looms as a conflict issue, indicating that new oppositions may replace old ones.

The example of the Orange Order illustrates the more general point that in any social identity there will be multiple elements. To some extent, it is a matter of choice which of those elements are emphasized and cultivated. Variations among individuals and subgroups existed in the past, persist in the present, and will exist in the future; one's social identity is not a single thing. It is an over-simplification to think that for a group to maintain its identity and continue its traditions, it must maintain something fixed, in which enmities and oppositional attitudes are fixed. No claim has been made here that the Orange Order in Northern Ireland has shed its anti-Catholicism, and no claim is being made that it would be an easy matter for any other group with a perniciously oppositional identity to shed its strongly oppositional elements. Nevertheless the case of the Orange Order serves to illustrate that such adaptations are plausible enough to be attempted, and the multiple and variable strands in social identity provide a theoretical basis for that claim.

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3. More Inclusive Identities
A possibility would be to form a broader group from contending groups with the idea that individuals could find a social identity through their membership in that broader group. If the As and the Bs are strongly competitive and opposed, if they have been involved in inter-group conflict characterized by enmity and violence, then perhaps they can be incorporated into some larger group, the Cs, inclusive of both. If individual members of A and B can reinterpret their identity so that they are instead Cs, that would overcome the perniciously oppositional aspects of their identities.

An example of such an attempt is the European Union. Analysts and theorists debate as to whether there is such a thing as a European identity, formed due to economic and political relationships within the EU, especially after the fall of communism in the fall of 1989. Europe has strong national and ethnic identities that have fueled terrible wars in the past. Now almost 500 million people live within the boundaries of EU countries. The question is not really whether these people would relinquish their identities as Dutch, Danish, French, German, Polish, and so on. Rather, there could be 'both and' with regard to national and European identities. One could be both Dutch and European, both French and European – even both English and European. Identity

would be a kind of multi-level thing, involving region, nation, and continent. Whether it is possible to be Muslim and European is a more complex question.

Are there common values, common reference points, a sense of shared citizenship and identity within Europe? If so, what is their basis? Proposed answers are democracy, liberty, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. In 2007, a proposed list of European values included individuality, human dignity, the equality of men and women, peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, and solidarity. There was no mention of God or of European tradition having roots in Christianity – though some (including the Catholic Church) strongly contested these omissions. According to a Eurobarometer established to ascertain attitudes on questions of affiliation and identity, 91% of persons interviewed felt attachment to their own nation, whereas only 49% felt attachment to the EU. In addition, voter turn-out for elections to the European Parliament is relatively low.

One identifies *as* this or that; identity is based on similarities and differences, as these are interpreted or valued. Thus identity is not just there, but is established in interactions with others, as individuals, groups, and nations. Social identity is of great interest not only to intellectuals but in politics, popular culture, and consumer behavior. Identity has dynamic elements and its contents can change over time. These shifts are made by individuals but every individual identity is historical, constructed in a field of values, norms, and collective symbols. This is a territory where what is imagined is also real; the nation state produces a 'we'. Dirk Jacobs and Robert Maier ask about an emerging cosmopolitan identity in Europe, noting that identity is not just a matter of how one interprets what one is, but of what one wants to become.[28] They ask: "Are we in the presence of the constitution of a new 'we', a new people with the characteristics of Europeanness?" Is there some new form of ethnicity, proper to Europe? There may be a sense of a more universal narrative involving human rights and persons instead of nationalities. Another possibility considered by Jacobs and Maier is that of a post-national time in which even a European identity would be too narrow to matter. (One would, presumably, simply be engaged in global citizenship.) A European identity might be sought on the basis of the cultural myths of Christian heritage, the common legal system in the EU, or some new citizenship amounting to 'citizenship of the Union.' There are some indicators: well-educated young Europeans advance their careers by enjoying mobility within the EU, blue collar workers may also benefit from that mobility. Airports with different lines for EU and non-EU offer reminders of a European identification. Even so, Jacobs and Maier note that according to the Eurobarometer, "In everyday practice popular identification with the European project is fairly modest and there is a continued importance of national identity."[29]

Traditionally identity has been based on relatively fixed elements such as class, gender, and race, but it is becoming more fluid with globalization, mobility, and fast-paced change. Jurgen Habermas, advocating and aspiring to universalism, has argued against efforts to melt down all the existing European identities in an effort to reduce them to one. Rather, he advocates transformation of such identities into something post-national that would involve a European identity. Jacobs and Maier note an important and theoretically fascinating complication in the quest to develop a European identity, subsuming national identities.

The primary aim is inclusion of European nationals in a common economic, cultural, and political project. But this inclusion is in practice at the same time accompanied by internal exclusion of foreign residents of Europe who are of non-European origin. In this respect, the issues of European identity supplies us with a telling example that categorization can both entail vision and di-vision, inclusion and exclusion around identities, with the coin flipping over to its 'dark side.'[30]

If the EU were to become like a nation so as to transcend old divisions and enmities based on national identities as English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and so on, the more inclusive identity would displace old oppositions. However, in doing so, the more inclusive identity might generate new problems, given that many Muslims immigrants to European countries are not able to become citizens of European nation states, and would for that reason (assuming no relevant change in citizenship practices in those countries) not be granted citizenship in the EU. If such persons sought an identity, their identity would likely be religious rather than nation; they would be 'Muslim.' As Muslims these excluded people would likely regard themselves as non-European and non-Western, in an oppositional sense. Clearly, new dangers would be posed.

4. Radical Transformations

Philip Esler puts forward a notion of radical conceptual transformation when he offers an interpretation of the Good Samaritan parable. Esler refers to social identity theory and its emphasis on the in-group/out-group distinction, pointing out that for the Judeans the Samaritans were a despised out-group. When Jesus preached about loving one's neighbor he was asked by a lawyer, 'who is my neighbour?' In other words, 'what are the limits of my social group?' As the story goes, Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. When a man lay injured along a road it was not members of his own social group but rather a Samaritan who, moved by compassion, came to assist him. Those who were supposedly members of his own community had passed him by. The Samaritan's compassion transcended locally sanctioned ethnic boundaries: when confronted with a real, endangered, suffering human being, the Samaritan did not stop to ask when this man was his 'neighbor' (member of the same ethnic group) or not. He assisted, going considerably out of his way to do so. Interpreting this story from the point of view of social identity theory, Esler argues that the point is that Jesus was *not* seeking to provide an answer to the question about the proper boundaries of the in-group. Rather, he was rejecting the lawyer's question about those boundaries, treating it as a question of morally inferior kind. Responding with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus should be understood as seeking to undermine that question and render it irrelevant by a new narrative. He may be understood as saying that when we face questions about how to act, those questions should not be framed in terms of in-group boundaries. The more fundamental question lies elsewhere: what should a compassionate human being do when encountering someone injured and in need?

After stating key elements of social identity theory, Esler explains three ways of overcoming harmful in-group/out-group divisions. He mentions cross-categorization (considered here as *alternate categorization* or transversalism), re- categorization (considered here as *more inclusive categorization*), and *de-categorization*, which involves a shift into a new framework. Esler argues that the Good Samaritan parable involves de-categorization. De-categorization as explained by Esler is not quite the same thing urged by Anna Stubblefield. Rather, it involves unseating the lawyer's question so as to pose a new question in a new framework.[31] How should one act toward other human beings? In the new framework the old oppositional identities of Judean and Samaritan would cease to be relevant to personal decision-making.

It is interesting to consider Barack Obama's speech on race as an initiative toward de-categorization in this sense; we may consider its potential for upsetting the oppositional racial categories of black and white. The speech on race was given on March 18, 2008, at which point Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were engaged in an intense competition for the Democratic Presidential nomination.[32] Although the severe economic downturn of the fall of 2008 had not yet occurred, serious problems in housing, health care, and education were already apparent in the United States and receiving attention in the campaign. The Reverend Jeremaiah Wright had made a number of remarks from the 'angry black American' point of view. Barack Obama was under attack for his associations with Wright and with a church that was anti-white and anti-American.

Wright was the pastor of Obama's church in Chicago and had officiated at his wedding and baptized his children.

In his speech on racism, Barack Obama addressed those criticisms. Describing himself as someone who was *both* white *and* black in his heritage, whose wife was descended *both* from slaves *and* from slave-owners, he communicated empathy both with the anger and frustration of many blacks *and* the fears of many whites, stating that his candidacy should not to be seen purely through a racial lens. He said that he did not agree with Reverent Wright but could not disown him any more than he could disown his own white grandmother, who had helped to raise him.

In this speech Barack Obama consistently used inclusive language, speaking of Americans as "we," alluding to "the union," "unity," "common problems," "our kids," "common challenges," "cooperation," hope, and possibilities for positive change. He said:

> I believe deeply that *we* cannot solve the challenges of our time unless *we* solve them *together* – unless *we* perfect *our union* by understanding that *we* may have different stories, but *we* hold common hopes; that *we* may not look the same and *we* may not come from the same place, but *we* all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for *our* children and our grandchildren.

Wright, Obama said, had not been mistaken to speak of race. Rather, he had been mistaken to think and speak of race in terms of fixed, forever-polarized categories. To bring real change, alliances are necessary – and they are possible. Obama argued that addressing the fundamental problems of blacks and Hispanics will benefit whites as well. For African Americans, the path to a 'more perfect union' will mean

> . . .embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances – for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs – to the larger aspirations of all Americans – the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man whose been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means taking full responsibility for our own lives – by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

Obama claimed that it is necessary to realize that there are common problems and "your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams." He advocated a frame of reference in which it is not 'us or them', or 'you or me'. Society need not, and should not, be understood as divided into forever polarized groups; social relations are not zero sum, and people need not think of them in that way.

In an essay about history and forgetting, F.R. Ankersmit distinguishes four types of forgetting. These are (a) forgetting mundane details of daily life, such as where one put one's keys yesterday; (b) forgetting something we think of as insignificant (our feelings when forced to submit to a dominant parent) but which is really rather important; (c) forgetting a traumatic event such as witnessing the death of a beloved parent; and (d) forgetting in the sense of moving from a past into a new world which differs radically from the previous one, so radically that that lost past can never be retrieved. In distinguishing the third type of forgetting from the fourth, Ankersmit states that

when one has forgotten a traumatic event, one can go through therapy and retrieve one's memory of it. But in the case of the transformed world, changes have been so fundamental, and the world changed so much, that past events cannot be retrieved. This sort of past leads to contemplations of "idylls of the lost world;" that world is absent but somehow still present, albeit in a form in which it cannot be experienced again.[33]

Hegel argued that the life and death of Socrates brought fundamental changes, in this sense, to the Western cultural tradition; after Socrates one could not find it plausible to appeal solely to *custom* to determine what should be done, and that was a radical transformation. It would be necessary to reflect on problems and reach decisions about what to do. The facts that Socrates was tried, convicted, and put to death do not undermine this point: rather, they mark "a self-condemnation of the condemners themselves," Ankersmit maintains.[34] Another example of such radical change would be the French Revolution; after it, the old order was gone and could not be re-constituted.

In his book *Radical Hope* Jonathan Lear describes such a change, for Aboriginal people in North America, with the slaughter of the buffalo and coming of white settlers.[35] Their old life had gone, absolutely, and it remained for leaders to somehow construct a new life in a radically new order not suited to past categories and practices. Lear argued that going forward in these circumstances required 'radical hope.'

Forgetting in this sense of leaving behind a transformed past does not mean that one's former identity has been entirely forgotten. The suggestion here is that one's former identity may be forgotten in the restricted sense that when it is recollected it cannot be experienced in its previous form. Ankersmit suggests that in the process of change categories used in the past are suspended in such a way that one has free play between reason and imagination. A part of history has died, and identities tied to that history will die as well. Although the past will be placed into some kind of narrative and recalled, it cannot be recalled as it was lived because life and thought have changed too much. Categories and beliefs, previously scarcely contemplated as such, become distant and are seen as having structured our world in the past but unable to do so in an altered reality. Ankersmit says "Identity is like our shadow: always outside our grasp and never coinciding with ourselves."[36] He cites Arthur Danto as saying that normally we represent to ourselves the world, not our representations of it. Our own beliefs and representations we treat as transparent; we see the world right through them, as though they were not there. A radical shift may make us conscious of our previous assumptions and concepts, but at the very time we become conscious of its optional character, we are no longer within it.[37]

Shifts away from perniciously oppositional categories could be radical in this sense. New categories will be appropriate to new realities and challenges and old categories based on the opposition of enemies will lose their relevance.

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[1] Anna Stubblefield, "Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 21, #3 (1995), 341 – 368.

[2] These examples and comments are my own exposition and not to be found in Stubblefield's article.

[3] *Ibid.*, 345 – 346.

[4] Again, my example and comments.

[5] My example.

[6] *Ibid.*, 352.

[7] *Ibid.*, 354.

[8] Stubblefield cites Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992); Langston Hughes, *Something in Common and Other Stories* (New York: Hill and Wang 1963);

and Erving Goffman, *Stigma* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1963) as broadly supportive of her anti-labeling views.

[9] For an authoritative account of their construction, the *locus classicus* is Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998). I summarize and comment on his arguments in *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Acknowledgment, Reconciliation, and the Pursuit of Sustainable Peace.* (Amherst NY: Humanity Books (Prometheus) 2006.) Appendix Six.

[10] Joseph Nsengimana, Rwandan Ambassador to the United Nations, Statement to the U.N. General Assembly, March 19, 2009.

[11] Constance Morrill, "Show Business and 'Lawfare' in Rwanda: Twelve Years After the Genocide," *Dissent*, Summer 2006.

[12] The victim/perpetrator dichotomy is discussed in Govier, *Taking Wrongs Seriously*. Allegations that Kagame was responsible for the shooting down of a plane on April 6, 1994, resulting in the deaths of the presidents of both Rwanda and Burundi, were made by a French judge, Jean-Louis Bruguiere in a report issued on November 17, 2006. These are described in Robin Philpot, "Nobody can call it a 'plane crash' now," *Counterpunch*, March 12/14, 2004. Kagame has denied all involvement. It remains a mystery who was responsible for shooting down of the plane, which immediately preceded the beginning of the genocide.

[13] Cited in Lars Waldorf, "Censorship and Propaganda in Post-Genocide Rwanda," International Development Research Centre (Canada), Document 14. Accessed May 20, 2009 at http://www.idrc.ca/rwandagenocide/ev-108305-201_I-DO-TOPIC.html.

[14] Cited in Waldorf, *Op.Cit*.

[15] Rene Lemarchand, "The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda," University of Florida. Accessed online, May 2009. See also Chi Mgbako, "Inganda Solidarity Camps: Reconciliation and Political Indoctrination in Post-Genocide Rwanda." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 18 (Spring 2005).

[16] Philip Gourevitch, A Reporter at Large, "The Life After," *New Yorker*, May 4, 2009, page 37.

[17] Mgako, *Op.cit*.

[18] Waldorf, *Op.Cit.*

[19] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York: Norton 2007.

[20] Cynthia Cockburn, *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (London: Zed Books 1998); *The Line: Women, Partition, and the Gender Order in Cyprus* (New York: Zed Books 2004); *War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (New York: Zed Books 2004).

[21] Fidelma Ashe, "The Virgin Mary Connection: Reflecting on Feminism and Northern Irish Politics," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9, #4 (2006), 573 – 588.

[22] *Belfast Telegraph*, July 11, 2007.

[23] Dominic Bryan, "Parade Disputes and the Peace Process," *Peace Review* 13, 1 (2001), 43 – 49.

[24] "The 'War on Terrorism' and Protestant Parading Bands in Northern Ireland," author unidentified. Accessed May 26, 2009. at http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QUEST/FileShare/Filestoupload,25795,enn.pdf.

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] "Northern Ireland: Orange Order marches on, but now it's a festival," *The Independent* (U.K.), July 8, 2007.

[27] "Northern Ireland's Orange Order Sees Peaceful July 12 Parades," *The Epoch Times* July 11, 2006.

[28] Dirk Jacobs and Robert Maier, "European identity: construct, fact, and fiction," Utrecht University. http://www.flwi.ugent.ne/ue/europe.pdf Accessed May 28, 2009. Quoted passage is on page 5.

[29] Ibid. page 8.

[30] *Ibid*. Quoted passage is on page 9.

[31] Philip Esler, "Jesus and the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict: The Parable of the Good Samaritan in the Light of Social Identity Theory," *Biblical Interpretation* 8 #4 (October 2000) 325 – 357.

[32] "Obama Race Speech: Read the Full Text." *The Huffington Post*. March 18, 2008. The title of the speech was "A More Perfect Union." For obvious reasons I am considering the speech in the context in which it was presented and not in the light of further developments during Obama's presidency, within which a series of crises and the development of a vicious opposition severely lessened any potential for the success of idealistic rhetoric.

[33] F.R. Ankersmit, "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One is No Longer," *History and Theory* October 2001, 295 – 323. Cited phrase is on page 301.

[34] Ankersmit cites and endorses Hegel on his interpretation of the life and work of Socrates.

[35] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2008 (paper).

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] Ankersmit cites Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1981) at this point.