

Identity, Culture, Contestation:  
Theorizing the Invisibility of Dominant Group Identity with Freud, Kristeva, and Nancy

Thesis by Victoria C. M. Burton

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Mount Saint Vincent University

Committee members:

Dr. Elizabeth Edwards – Director and Professor, Contemporary Studies Program, University of  
King's College

Dr. Randi Warne – Coordinator and Professor, Cultural Studies Program and Graduate Women's  
and Gender Studies Program, Mount Saint Vincent University

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## *Introduction*

The 2015 Canadian election involved a clash over what Canada's values were. The Conservative leader and incumbent Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, promised to prohibit women from wearing a niqab when taking their oath of Canadian citizenship, stating that covering one's face was against Canadian values.<sup>1</sup> This election promise came after Mr. Harper's attempt to enact the prohibition before the election had been struck down in court due to its violation of Charter rights. In election speeches, Mr. Harper positioned Muslim culture and religious practice as contrary to women's liberty and Canadian values.<sup>2</sup> In equating Muslim practices with discrimination against women, Mr. Harper set up Canadian national identity as the protector of women's rights against a threat from Islam. The Liberal party leader and current Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, also appealed to Canadian identity. For his part, Mr. Trudeau argued that Canada has a history of welcoming refugees and new Canadians, because it is Canadian to be generous and openhearted. The divergent views of Canada's identity presented during the election campaign had opposite implications with respect to Canada's openness to other cultures and newcomers. At the same time, both views extolled a normative view of Canada, taking for granted that certain values were more Canadian than others. The election campaign raised serious questions about the way that rhetoric about national identity shapes the discourse surrounding immigration and cultural difference within Canada.

Polling showed that a majority of Canadians were initially persuaded by Mr. Harper's arguments that wearing a niqab during the Canadian citizenship ceremony could present a security

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<sup>1</sup> The "niqab," meaning "veil" in Arabic, is a particular form of hijab that covers the face but not the body. I take it, rather than any other hijab, as the example throughout my thesis because it fueled debate in the 2015 Canadian election campaign.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Chase, "Niqabs 'rooted in a culture that is anti-women,' Harper says." *The Globe and Mail*. Mar. 10, 2015.

risk and/or would be disrespectful toward women. The argument that Muslim women are oppressed by the practice of wearing veils is problematic from the standpoint of intersectional feminism as it assumes either that they are forced and coerced into wearing them (which undermines the importance of their culture), or that they do not have the capacity to make their own choices at all (which denies them agency). Due to Mr. Harper legislating a ban on wearing the niqab in Canadian citizenship ceremonies, a Muslim woman named Zunera Ishaq postponed her citizenship ceremony and went to court for her right to wear the niqab. She expressed her position thus: “It’s precisely because I won’t listen to how other people want me to live my life that I wear a niqab. Some of my own family members have asked me to remove it. I have told them that I prefer to think for myself” (2015). I point to this because it highlights the gap between Ishaq’s desire for self-determination and the idea that the niqab is a sign of a woman’s deprivation of agency. It raises the question, why would a plurality of Canadians ignore or dismiss the evidence that this Muslim woman freely chooses to wear a niqab?

The niqab case in Canada exposes the fact that many non-Muslim Canadian women viewed all Muslim women as coerced or brainwashed in spite of evidence that many Muslim women exercise agency with respect to their religious and cultural practices, especially when they already have legal protections against abuse and oppression.<sup>3</sup> This viewpoint implicitly asserts the negative corollary that non-Muslim Canadian women have self-determination, without encumbering religious or cultural ideas shaping their identities. The application of a secular Western standard of freedom and gender equity to other cultures’ traditions can only go

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<sup>3</sup> Sirma Bilge explores the nuances of agency with respect to the Muslim veil, in her article, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women” (2010).

unquestioned as long as the secular Western culture in question considers its values to be culturally neutral, which is precisely the claim of liberalism.<sup>4</sup>

My thesis poses the following question: why do those included in the dominant group identity of a society have difficulty perceiving that identity, especially with respect to exclusions from that identity? I pose the question in terms of the “dominant group identity,” even though I want to resist the idea that any group identity is homogenous, essential, or representative. Much work has been done on the problem of “hegemony,” as coined by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, referring to the set of normative ideas that condition a society (Bates, 1975, 351). Other approaches to the question of dominant group identity include ideology critique, cultural anthropology, critical race theory, postcolonial criticism, and more. I have chosen “dominant group identity” as a catchall term, the usefulness of which is that it may have explanatory value even for societies that do not overtly privilege one monolithic group. I choose to leave the definition of “dominant group identity” open, because the dynamics of inter-group hostility that I want to account for can exceed the determinant definitions of particular identity differences. For instance, in the case of the niqab debate in Canada, multiple identities make up the Canadian group that excludes the Muslim niqab, and, on the other hand, the niqab is associated with Islam and with many Middle-Eastern nations and cultures.

This thesis explores the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva, and the deconstructive work of Jean-Luc Nancy in order to see what resources psychoanalysis might

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<sup>4</sup> When I say “Western,” I am not referring to a stable entity defined by geographical Westernness and colonial/imperialist history. I use the term, rather, as a synecdoche for the Eurocentric, historically colonial, politically liberal, and predominantly Anglophone array of cultures that have greater access to wealth and power than do many other cultures in the world. It is important to note that such cultures are not homogeneous, and that “Western” countries also include people who have varying degrees of similarity to the idea of the monolithic “Western” civilization.

offer, if any, for understanding dominant group identity. Psychoanalytic theory has the potential to connect the large-scale political problem with processes of individual subject formation, since it addresses the early stages of mental life of individuals, while also questioning the terms of subjecthood, i.e. the ways that people come to understand themselves as subjects. To put it another way, psychoanalysis may be uniquely positioned to account for the way that the individual and the group form in relation to one another, which could contribute to poststructural theories of difference, from Derrida's to Butler's. While using a trajectory of psychoanalytic thought to answer the problem of the invisibility of dominant group identity, I will also ask whether psychoanalysis can serve as a productive intervention into the problems of dominant group identity. A successful intervention into these problems would, for my purposes, lead to a more comprehensive account of how group identity formation leads to the invisibility of dominant group identity, and it might also lead to proposals for how to encourage cross-cultural awareness. The goal of understanding the invisibility of dominant group identity is instrumental in working toward a society that welcomes foreignness.

The problem of dominant group identity figures differently in liberal societies than it did historically in cases of violent genocides, expulsions, or imperial colonization. For liberal societies, there can be varying degrees of multicultural tolerance, cultural accommodation, and so forth. The particular challenge with dominant group identity in liberal societies is that liberalism promotes inclusion, but it also takes itself to be reasonably neutral, culturally speaking.<sup>5</sup> This appearance of neutrality is one of the key factors at issue in the problem I identified in the example of the 2015

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<sup>5</sup> Wendy Brown explains the uneven attribution of culture, for instance, with regard to Americans having culture, while Iraqi subjects are a culture. With this distinction, she shows that the American society frames its culture as a product of creativity, whereas the culture of Iraq obscures reason and freedom (2006, 150).

Canadian election debate about identity and Canadian values. I am also approaching the problem theoretically in terms of identity formation. The particular credos of different Western nations are of vital importance in analyzing particular cases, but that is not my objective. For example, the liberalism of the United States does not present itself as neutral in the same way as Canada's, since politics in the United States uses Christian messages more than that of any other culture or faith. On the other hand, France has espoused a particular variety of secularism, which launches debates about what constitutes an inappropriate religious symbol to display in public. Another approach to the challenge of liberalism's appearance of neutrality comes in the form of a history and analysis of secularism, exemplified in the works of Talal Asad (2003). Rather than engaging the question of religious practices and secularism, I want to take a psychoanalytic approach to group formation at the level of the individual and ask how it is theoretically possible for a member of the dominant group identity to be unconscious of the way their group identity excludes differences.

The general invisibility of the identity of the dominant group to its own members is apparent in several well-established phenomena, for example "white privilege." This term refers to the various advantages that white people have in white dominated societies, which white people rarely see as unusual because of the appearance of normalcy from their perspective (McIntosh, 1990, 31-32). The problem as I formulate it is not specific to racial identification, although the structure of racial identity has historically been a decisive identity marker for hierarchical divisions in society. It is characteristic of the dominant group identity that people can assume that anyone with the corresponding identity markers belongs to the group, and whiteness is a frequently cited marker for inclusion in Western societies. Individuals may have no conscious experience of unity or dominance, while still belonging to the dominant group. In fact, many may even feel like

outcasts from the community. Nonetheless, the default perception of those who appear similar enough to the dominant group identity is that they are part of the dominant group. Therefore, when I discuss the dominant group identity, I take it to include individuals who might consciously differentiate themselves from the stereotypical character of the dominant group. However, further study might use the “dominant group identity” logic in other contexts, such that a marginalized group who, for the purposes of this thesis, I understand as part of the dominant group identity might hold the other position, that of the excluded group.<sup>6</sup>

National identity is an obvious example of dominant group identity in that it can encompass a wide swath of more particular identities within a given nation, while at the same time excluding “others.” As Sunera Thobani writes, in relation to the structural Canadian oppression of First Nations, immigrants to Canada generally participate in the prejudices against First Nations, which indicates that people can belong to the national identity in some ways while not in others (2007, 249). The entrance of immigrants of colour into Canadian citizenship granted inclusion to new Canadians but did not alter the foundations of this citizenship in terms of the subjugation of indigenous peoples, thereby aligning immigrants to Canada with the settler colonial mentality toward the dispossessed indigenous peoples (249). Though Canada can be said to have no privileged national identity, because of the history of its contestation—between indigenous and colonizers; between English and French; and being in the shadow of the United States—there are limits to the inclusivity of Canadian identity. These limits are related to an identity, even if only one that coalesces a family of resemblances among multiple identities. That is, Canada has no

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<sup>6</sup> Both Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Wendy Brown (1995) have, for example, drawn attention to the combination of whiteness, maleness, socioeconomic hardship, and social exclusion in the case of lower income white men, and the way that this group then begrudges the liberal programs for remediation of racism and sexism.

internally consistent national identity, but exclusions from Canadian identity are indicative of the boundaries of an identity.

My thesis responds to ongoing academic debates about cultural accommodation which are dominated by a liberal approach. The predominant approach of North-American and British political theory is to define its own practice in terms of reason, aspiring to cultural neutrality.<sup>7</sup> This neutrality can obscure the cultural nature of the dominant group's norms. Barbara Arneil, a feminist liberal theorist on cultural justice, points out that by framing cultural difference debates in terms of what the dominant culture should tolerate, every marginal culture figures as a threat (2007, 64). The intercultural dialogues occurring in this milieu depend on values that present themselves as universal, which can lead to subordination of other cultural viewpoints. Instead of making Western liberal justice the ideal at the outset, I focus on the question of how certain values appear universal in conjunction with a dominant group identity that endorses them.

Contemporary European and North-American political theorists predominantly treat the ideal of inclusivity (equally, diversity) within a paradigm of democratic institutions, legal rights, and liberal freedom.<sup>8</sup> In these treatments, inclusivity is bound up on multiple levels with the particular cultural understanding of inclusivity that inheres in liberal systems. I will follow poststructural and deconstructionist thinkers in challenging classic liberal views of inclusivity. Since key examples of poststructuralism and deconstruction refuse to either establish alternative ethical parameters or to adopt those of liberal thought, they risk being perceived as incapable of

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<sup>7</sup> As is the case in John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (2009).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Taylor (1992) and Kymlicka (1989).

ethical judgment.<sup>9</sup> I will show that Nancy's demand for openness in ethical thought is not born of moral relativism, but rather signals an interest in destabilizing false universals and leaving ethics in perpetual contestation in order not to exclude "others."<sup>10</sup>

The issue of Muslim face-coverings in Canadian society challenges the coherence of liberalism's tenets, because it appears to pit the interests of women (seen as a universal category) against the interests of Muslims (also seen as a universal category). The treatment of any political identity, such as women, as a universal category, allows problematic assumptions to remain intact by flattening out the heterogeneity of any group of people. Thus, when liberal feminist theorists negotiate between the supposedly competing interests of women and Muslims, multiple sites of tension and of intersectionality are rendered invisible.<sup>11</sup> Liberalism, I contend, fails to grapple with the preconditions of such a debate because its tenets of personal freedom and of uniform equal treatment are seemingly at odds here, which produces a deadlock. The following discussion of a selection of such attempts will illustrate my point.

Susan Moller Okin put the debate in starkest terms when she asked in her eponymous essay, "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" (1997). Okin takes for granted that liberal culture is not a "culture" in the same sense as the minority culture in question. By framing the debate as a choice between two different liberal ideals—freedom from gender-based discrimination and freedom from religious discrimination—Okin ensures that liberal ideals are the unquestioned frame of the political debate. At one point, she argues that people whose culture involves gender

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Judith Butler, "Merely cultural" (1997a) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), and Jacques Derrida, "Force of law" (1992).

<sup>10</sup> There are many examples of criticisms of poststructuralist feminism, and of the search for ethical openness. For an insightful overview of the debate, see Claire Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The political grammar of feminist theory* (2011).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Eisenberg (2005), Arneil (2007), and Okin (1997).

discrimination would benefit from assimilation into the liberal nation. Okin makes a case that cultural minorities can impede women's equality. Missing from this argument is the problem that only a liberal perspective, which is also culturally specific, appears to have this authority.<sup>12</sup> Okin goes on to state that the severe discrimination the minority culture experiences could complicate the politics of integration. However, Okin undermines the application of this inclusivity by qualifying that only extreme discrimination warrants special conciliatory treatment of otherwise intolerable sexist practices: "it would take significant factors weighing in the other direction to counterbalance evidence that a group's culture severely constrained women's choices or otherwise undermined their well-being" (Okin 1998: 680; cf. similar passage in Okin 1999a: 22-3, cited in Okin, 2005, 70 nt). Okin implies that, on the one hand, cultural minorities do not regularly face intolerance of the kind she describes, and, on the other hand, that assimilating cultural minorities into liberal society is a solution to cultural contestation. Okin argues that members of minority cultures would benefit from assimilation into liberal society if, in particular, women of such cultures face gender-discrimination within their cultures that they would not face in liberal society. In so arguing, Okin does not consider the cultural particularity of her standpoint in determining what is best for women of another culture.

Barbara Arneil stands out among liberal feminist theorists for questioning the terms of the culture vs. gender debates. She points out that the division between liberal feminists and multicultural feminists limits the range of proposed solutions to political identity issues; both theoretical camps search for compromises between the demands of gender equality and inclusion of cultural differences (2007, 50), but Arneil calls for feminist theorists to view this problem

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<sup>12</sup> *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* exposes the tendency of institutional knowledge disciplines to favour colonial ways of knowing, which is a strong starting point for critiques such as the one I make here (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

through a wider lens, attending to the complex dynamic between gender and culture.

Supplementing Arneil's claim, I think a discussion of the intersectionality of gender and minority status as it applies to these cases would be fruitful. In the case of the niqab, for instance, feminist theorists should complicate the women's vs. Muslims' rights quandary by considering the ways in which Muslim women are impacted by minority identity and female gendering at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

Arneil goes a long way toward rejecting liberal approaches to cultural identity issues, as is evidenced in the following quotation:

We must recognize the ways in which liberalism and the norms that underpin it, in both the classical liberal and the multicultural liberal forms, can serve to extinguish or severely constrain the diversity of cultural expression through the power of cultural colonization. Thus, the courts, legislatures or democratic spaces of various kinds should not fundamentally be about finding resolution or consensus within an overarching liberal political framework. Rather, they should provide venues by which to give voice to the pain and injustice incurred by the cultural colonization described above. (2007, 66)

Arneil proposes that political and juridical spaces should eschew one overarching set of ideals (in her words, the "overarching liberal political framework") in favour of greater input from all peoples who have been historically excluded from the Western halls of political power. Arneil envisions a transformation of liberal political institutions' approach to cultural contestation, but I will argue that, since these institutions have been produced through a liberal tradition, the move away from an "overarching liberal political framework" may necessitate changes at an institutional level.

Judith Butler exposes the tendency of universal norms to foreclose debates before they can happen, which is one of the inevitable outcomes of the invisibility of dominant group identity (1992, 16). Butler also challenges liberalism by arguing that the subject is not neutral, but always

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<sup>13</sup> While I do not overtly pursue this line of thinking in my thesis research, the concept of intersectionality informs my approach, particularly Leslie McCall's "The complexity of intersectionality" (2005).

already caught up in social, political conditions. She argues that aspects of one's identity, e.g. one's gender, result in large part from regulatory discourses that each individual internalizes, and that this process enables them to present as a coherent self within their social context (1999, 185).

Following Butler, I argue that no identity can retreat into an apolitical position, since the supposedly apolitical constitutes a normative condition that embodies the politics of the dominant regulatory forces. My thesis will apply the critique that normativity endows objects with false neutrality to the problem of group identity. I question how the normative elements of group identity take hold at the level of the individual subject formation, within the context of sociality, political formations, and discourse. Though Butler is instructive for this line of inquiry, I am taking a different approach from Butler's.

The theories I explore—chiefly psychoanalytic and deconstructionist—stem from European contexts and concerns. Deconstruction has gone some way toward disrupting the assumptions of cultural supremacy of colonial cultures. I will thus employ deconstruction for its postcolonial efficacy to unwork problematic hierarchies and binaries in the texts I analyze, especially—given psychoanalysis's complex gender claims—those by Freud and Kristeva. I will test these psychoanalytic theories as they apply to questions of group identity, while also critiquing the hierarchies that they reassert, whether it is male-female, civilization-primitive, or Western-Muslim. I defer to the work of postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak and her position that textuality is ideologically infused. She emphasizes the accidental meanings of texts apparent in their choice of tropes, and espouses reading beyond “tropology or figurative practice” (1999, 16). Taking my cue from Spivak, I will sift through the language of each text in order to counteract latent ideological assumptions.

I position my research within the field of Women and Gender Studies, because it enables me to take an interdisciplinary approach to my topic, and because this field foregrounds issues of identity and social justice in both theory and methodology. The question of cultural exclusion intersects with issues of gender equality, as is visible in the example of the niqab debate in Canada. Moreover, gender, culture, and multiple other socially constructed modes of self-identification are always interrelated in various ways. I take methodological cautions from Women and Gender Studies, understanding the role of the researcher as responsible toward any community that is impacted by the research. Based on this understanding, I have undertaken to conduct this research reflexively, and without taking over the voice of different groups I discuss in it.

*Chapter 1: Oedipus and the Tenuous Territory of Individualism*

I begin with Freud because I want to ask whether there is a problem at the root of psychoanalysis for an intervention in the problems of dominant group identity. Since his theories provide building blocks for my analyses of Kristeva and Nancy, it will be important to address the shortcomings in Freud's texts, in order to identify any limitations that might carry over into later psychoanalytic approaches to inter-group hostility. Freud's theories will, at the same time, provide useful insights into this problem.

I will start by examining the ways in which Freudian psychoanalysis can expose the processes of subjectivity constitution. Although Freud has a strong explanation for the adherence of individuals to the will of a leader, his work in *Group Psychology* is not decisive on the question of how the group and the individual are variously separable and co-constitutive. On one hand, I ask whether Freud necessarily understands the group as a unit comprised of disparate individuals, as opposed to individuals being constituted in tandem with the formation of the group. On the other hand, I will grapple with the ramifications of the dichotomy between the primitive group and the civilized, a dichotomy Freud inherited from anthropologists like Gustav Le Bon. I will argue that Freud's *Group Psychology* shines light on the impossibility of separating the individual and the group in explanations of group identity formation.

In thinking about whether psychoanalysis has the potential to lend new insight into the problem of dominant group identity, the problem arises that Freud's work, which founded psychoanalysis, is bound up with many prejudices of his society. The common understanding of the rational individual was gendered male, as well as racialized white. Freud therefore theorized on the basis of men's primacy in social, political life, and the superiority of European civilization. Like

his coevals, Freud credits the faculties of autonomy and rationality, understood as the domain of men, for the development of a superior European civilization. I will argue that Freud undercuts this understanding of autonomy and rationality, however, by theorizing unconscious drives as powerful underlying forces in human psychology.

The place of women in Freud's oeuvre is problematic for any uptake of psychoanalysis within feminist research. Psychoanalysis is fundamentally androcentric, making the male child the basis of ego theory as Freud does in *The Ego and the Id* in 1923. Nonetheless, poststructuralist feminists have mobilized psychoanalysis, while also critiquing and deconstructing it, notably Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). It is beyond the scope of my research to work through the various feminist approaches to psychoanalysis. For the purposes of my inquiry, I will focus on the way that Freud's androcentrism and heteronormativity, like his view of Europe's superiority in the world, stem from a multivalent worldview that lends legitimacy to the modern white European man's dominant role in society. As Spivak suggests, bringing out the latent values of the text may lead to more productive readings.

In Freud's view in *Group Psychology*, the leader of a group exerts powerful influence over the group's members, and the group's members identify with one another via the identification with the leader (1995, 85; 1995, 108). These tenets offer one explanation of in-group bias and violence toward others, especially in cases where the leader of a group incites hatred of another group of people. Freud theorized that group coherence derives from the elevation of a leader to the place of each individual's ideal (1960, 16–17). Freud concluded that the individual subsumed by their group attachment puts their super-ego to one side and invests the leader with the role of moral arbiter (1995, 85). In doing so, the potential arises for the whole group to follow the leader in

aggressive acts, especially when the targets are people the group already excludes or deems inferior. The danger Freud's theory illuminates is that individuals may be mobilized for violent and discriminatory projects at the whim of a charismatic leader.

It is no coincidence that Freud singles out the role of the leader as opposed to diffuse social pressures or other incitements to violence. In *Group Psychology*, the base unit of analysis remains the individual, even when Freud's theory seeks to explain group phenomena. Freud's conception of the individual's early existence is of a germinal nucleus that does not differentiate between itself and its pleasurable environment until external factors cause it suffering and it forms a psychic<sup>14</sup> boundary around what belongs to it alone (Freud, 1961, 15). In keeping with this model of individual self-containment, Freud claims that individuals form a group because of the identity they hold in common. I will delve into what this common identity consists in for Freud later in the chapter.

Central to my reading of Freud's theory of identification is the question of how the ego is invested with narcissistic libido—a question on which Freud himself wavered. In the 1925 *Autobiographical Study*, Freud wrote that the ego was the source of libido (Strachey, 1960, 69). In such a case, narcissism originates with the ego, and libido is transferred to another object through identification. Previously, in 1923, Freud wrote in *The Ego and the Id* that libido is originally stored in the id (Strachey, 1960, 69). Editor James Strachey argues that the inconsistency between the two claims could point to the psyche existing originally as undifferentiated ego-id, as Freud discussed in *An Outline of Psycho-analysis* (1949) (cited in Strachey, 1960, 70). Regardless of whether Freud ultimately resolved the inconsistency in this way, I will argue that his 1921 work *Group Psychology* is

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<sup>14</sup> I borrow Freud's use of the term "psychic" throughout the thesis, which does not refer to a paranormal activity but to the dynamics of the psyche. I will avoid saying "psychological," because psychoanalysis is distinct from a contemporary scientific approach to the mind.

consistent with the later theory—that the ego is the source of libido—which accounts for an important disparity between the theory of identification in *Group Psychology* and the theory of identification found in *The Ego and the Id*.

The difficulty in pinning down the origin of libido points to a nebulous issue concerning whether the ego's narcissism is of a primary or a secondary order, and the difference between these has bearing on whether or not the individual has to extend libido to external objects in order to circuit their libido to their own ego. Strachey highlights the disparity between a statement in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and one from *Outline* (1949) with respect to the process of forging libidinal ties from the psyche to external objects:

Two different processes seem to be envisaged in these two accounts. In the first the original object-cathexes are thought of as going out direct from the id, and only reaching the ego indirectly; in the second the whole of the libido is thought of as going from the id to the ego and only reaching the objects indirectly. (Strachey, 1960, 71)

In the first place, the libido does not belong to the ego, but the ego, as Freud theorizes in *The Ego and the Id*, makes the id transfer libidinal energy to it by identifying with the love object (Freud, 1960, 45). Freud states, “The narcissism of the ego is thus a secondary one, which has been withdrawn from objects” (1960, 45). Meanwhile in the second case, the ego mediates between the id and the love object because the idea of the love object must be a focus of the ego prior to libidinal cathexis (the energetic attachment of desire to an object) (Strachey, 1960, 71). Given the centrality of libidinal attachment to every social relation in Freud's account, the question of which cathexis process Freud builds on in *Group Psychology* will have ramifications for the formation of group ties.

In the case where the id circuits libido through the ego to the object, the ego is an initial site of narcissistic satisfaction, which enables a higher degree of autonomy for the ego. The ego will be

less autonomous if the attachments individuals form are produced by the id, since this will make the ego's narcissism a secondary one, forcing the ego to identify with love-objects in order to recuperate libidinal energy. If the ego's narcissism is instead primary, then the individual's attachments to other individuals need never force the ego to alter its ego ideal via identifications with any love objects. If the ego does not have to form identifications in order to be a site of libidinal satisfaction, then the ego can maintain an ego ideal relatively unencumbered by outside influence. This view, whereby the ego tends toward conserving or acquiring libidinal investments, is consistent with Freud's theory of primary narcissism, which he references in *Group Psychology* as a self-love that explains fundamental antipathy toward anyone but oneself (1995, 102). To restate, when Freud wrote *Group Psychology* in 1921, he appears to have held the view that the ego is the original site of libidinal energy, which means that the ego does not need to identify with external objects in order to enjoy libidinal investment. What this means for the theory of identification is that the ego will seek love objects that resemble it in order to recuperate libidinal investment in external objects. Therefore, in the work where Freud deals most explicitly with the formation of group identity, the operative theory of identification is one that privileges underlying commonalities among individuals.

Group ties are difficult to account for if Freud defers to the theory that the ego is directly invested with libido, as he does in *Group Psychology*. Only libidinal attachment can overcome innate interpersonal antipathy, but individuals in a large group do not each form libidinal attachments to all the other group members. Freud writes,

So long as a group formation persists or so far as it extends, individuals in the group behave as though they were uniform, tolerate the peculiarities of its other members, equate themselves with them, and have no feeling of aversion towards them. Such a limitation of narcissism can, according to our theoretical views, only be produced by one factor, a libidinal tie with other people. (1995, 102)

Freud does not challenge modern social contract theory, first articulated by Thomas Hobbes in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, which understands the bonds among members of a society as a result of a calculation of how to maximize one's own benefit through exchange and collaboration. Rather, Freud objects that the bonds of such calculation could only ever be temporary (1995, 102). Since groups are often long lived, there must be a force holding individuals together. That force, in Freud's account, is Eros, or libidinal energy. Thus Freud's challenge throughout *Group Psychology* becomes how to provide an explanation for libidinal attachments that adhere throughout a large group of individuals who are not all directly attached to one another.

Between the 1921 text *Group Psychology* and the 1923 text *The Ego and the Id*, the schema of early attachment remains largely stable, in spite of the disparity between their theories of identification. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud posits that the first form attachment takes is that of incorporation. He writes that each child bonds with its mother in this fashion because of the pleasure of consuming milk from the mother's breast. The ensuing bond is one of incorporation in a double sense: the child consumes the mother's body, and the child consumes the mother as an intrinsic aspect of itself while maintaining its primary narcissism. As Freud wrote in 1923 in *The Ego and the Id*, "At the very beginning, in the individual's primitive oral phase, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other" (1960, 23). The child's preservation of selflove rests on the annihilation of the mother qua *other*. This model of attachment is seemingly consistent with the idea of an ego originally invested with libido, since the

child does not need to experience their dependence on the mother *as* dependence (which would deprive them of some narcissistic energy) when the object (the breast) makes up a part of their own psyche. In this way, attachment with external love objects appears to derive from assimilation of the other with oneself, which is consistent with the *Group Psychology* theory that identification depends on commonality among atomized individuals.

In *The Ego and the Id*, incorporation is superseded by identification with the father. This next identification arises due to the Oedipus complex, in which a boy wishes to take his father's place with his mother and possess her (1960, 30). The primacy of heteronormative male experience is central to this instance of identification. Crucially for the future of the child's identifications with others, this father identification indicates the possibility of forming identifications based on one's desire to take the place of another. By contrast, in *Group Psychology*, Freud claims that all identification derives from assimilation with oneself on the model of incorporation. Freud writes,

Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal. It behaves like a derivative of the first, *oral* phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such. (1995, 105)

According to Freud's *Group Psychology* argument, both incorporation and identification involve the necessary hostility of a narcissistic ego wanting to horde its love. All further identifications can be understood as more complex configurations based on these original moments.

In *Group Psychology*, the particular kind of attachment that Freud associates immediately with members of a group is a partial identification based on perception of a common quality. Freud describes the case of young girls in a boarding school who act out the "fit of hysterics" of one of the girls who has recently received a love letter (1995, 107). Freud takes from this example

the theory that the other girls have identified with the recipient of the letter out of a desire to take her place. The common quality that prompts the girls to identify with the recipient is the desire for such a letter to be written to them. Freud suggests that such identification, which occurs toward people who are not the objects of sexual instincts, is the basis of group attachments. He writes, “We already begin to divine that the mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality; and we may suspect that this common quality lies in the nature of the tie with the leader” (1995, 108). The group attachment here is distinct from direct identification or object-cathexis in that the girls identify with one another only by way of a direct identification with the one privileged letter recipient. Freud therefore prioritizes identification with a group leader in his account of libidinal ties among group members.

While Freud’s explanation for group formation hinges on identification with a leader, the transferal of the leader to the place of the individual’s ego ideal means that group formation changes individuals at the level of moral self-regulation as well as at the level of personal identity. Initially Freud argues that, when the individual joins a group, they no longer feel bound by moral scruples: “For us it would be enough to say that in a group the individual is brought under conditions which allow him to throw off the repressions of his unconscious instinctual impulses” (1995, 74). In *Group Psychology*, Freud contends that this overthrow of repressions is automatic because “‘social anxiety’ is the essence of what is called conscience” (1995, 75). According to this formulation, the need for social approval leads individuals to heed their super-ego, but the group’s cohesion ensures social acceptance, thereby allowing for the overthrow of social anxiety and its associated commands.

However, within *Group Psychology*, Freud also theorizes the leader's sway with the group, which leads him to offer a different explanation for why the group members no longer exhibit moral scruples. He writes, "In obedience to the new authority he [the follower] may put his former 'conscience' out of action, and so surrender to the attraction of the increased pleasure that is certainly obtained from the removal of inhibitions" (1995, 85). Since the individual puts the leader in the position of their ego-ideal when they identify with him, they are no longer beholden primarily to their own super-ego but instead to the will of the leader. Group formation reduces the autonomy of the super-ego, which was the product of the Oedipus complex.

In *The Ego and the Id*, the Oedipus complex is the site of the first prohibition, so it is no surprise to find that the resolution of the Oedipus complex is the super-ego, which serves to criticize the ego and thereby enforce prohibitions. The Oedipal prohibition is that the male child cannot take the place of his father in possessing his mother, as he instinctively wishes to do (Freud, 1960, 30). The male child wants to be like his father, and, since he cannot possess his mother in his father's stead, he represses his desire for his mother. The work necessary in order to repress such a strong impulse results in the super-ego. The super-ego resolves the Oedipus complex in two ways, which are bound together: it makes the prohibition of incest a structural necessity for the integrity of the psyche, and it represents the desired identification with the father (1960, 30). This identification is a further development in the psyche after the incorporation of the mother. Since the child identifies with the father not on the basis of preexisting commonality but instead on the basis of a desire to be like the father, Freud provides for a type of identification that does not depend on a commonality between individuals.

While this type of identification could lead theoretically to a model of group formation on the basis of differences among group members, the example that Freud privileges in *Group Psychology* does the opposite. The type of identification operative in the desire to be like the father is premised on a male heteronormative experience. In contrast, the kind of identification among group members is premised on the experience of young girls. If Freud chose the example of the girls in the boarding school because the girls exhibited signs of illness as a result of their group identification, it was because he had already determined at another point that group identification typically involves a deficiency of the individual's mental capacities. The gendering of the individual is typically male, in Freud, which coincides with the characteristics of reason and autonomy. Meanwhile, the gendering of the group is female in this instance, which coincides with the characteristics of neurosis and deference to the leader. Freud's formulation of the group, then, is the site of multivalent deficiencies, with gender implications. Later, I will show that the deficiencies have cultural implications as well.

As I explained, Freud theorizes the identifications among group members as indirect identifications based on the common identification with the leader. Although the leader operates toward the group in a way that is analogous to the father and his child, the type of identification at stake in *Group Psychology* seems to retain the need for preexisting commonality, which was not the case in the male child's identification with the father in *The Ego and the Id*. However, the group's adoption of a leader as their moral authority through identification is reminiscent of the way the male child adopted the father's prohibition through identifying with the father. In both cases, there is a development of morality, or at least obedience, that gives authority to a male figure.

The causes Freud cites in these two cases differ. In *Group Psychology*, Freud says that the individual sees in the leader qualities he wants to possess, and that, by transferring the leader to the place of his own ego ideal, the individual derives narcissistic satisfaction. Freud examines love and hypnosis as two instances in which the individual submits to external influence. He writes that individuals will often choose a love object because this person represents an ideal that the individual aspires to:

It is even obvious, in many forms of love-choice, that the object serves as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own. We love it on account of the perfections which we have striven to reach for our own ego, and which we should now like to procure in this roundabout way as a means of satisfying our narcissism. (1995, 112-13)

Freud explains that the love object takes the place of the ego ideal, which lets the lover take pleasure in feeling themselves to have reached the ideal they aspire to. Similarly, the group member puts the leader in place of the ego ideal and thereby gratifies him or herself in feeling that he or she possesses the qualities he or she imagines the leader to possess. Implicit in this operation is the elevation of the group's character overall in the perception of its members.

If, in Freud's view, individuals partake in a group identity because they believe they are essentially similar to a leader, then the identity of the group would underlie all attachments among the group's members. The leader is only able to inspire libidinal ties among group members because he embodies characteristics with which the members of the group are disposed to identify, which grounds the group's existence in its own identity. The influence of other group psychology writers prompts Freud to take this view of group formation. Freud takes up Le Bon's insight, which he summarizes as, "He [the leader] must himself be held in fascination by a strong faith (in an idea) in order to awaken the group's faith; he must possess a strong and imposing will, which the group, which has no will of its own, can accept from him" (1995, 81). In this assertion, the

common identification of all group members with the leader makes the group's identity a matter of assimilation of all individuals to the will of the leader. Later on, I will contrast this assimilation model of group identity with Nancy's conception of a more heterogeneous form of community.

The homogeneous model of group identity is an individualist one as well. In suggesting that the group's identity depends on all group members being inspired to identify with the same leader, Freud assumes that individuals must have previously shared the tendency toward the beliefs the leader espouses in order to have entered into group relations with one another. Such a view ignores the possibility of fundamental sociality making group relations prior to commonality among atomized individuals. Psychoanalysis' methodological tenets may explain Freud's focus on individual identification with a leader, since psychoanalysis takes the male individual as the primary object of analysis, and thereby naturalizes the authority of the man relative to the family or the group. Paradoxically, *Group Psychology* is the work where Freud sets up an assimilation-based view of identification, whereas, in the case of identification with the father, the child at once wants to be like, and cannot be like, the father. Difference, then, can produce identification.

In spite of the individualist leanings I have pulled out of Freud's work, it is necessary to complicate any depiction of the individual as separable from the group in psychoanalytic theory. Freud's account of group formation in *Group Psychology* leaves open-ended the matter of what type of commonalities precede the identification with the leader. Freud does not commit himself to a theory in which individuals are essentially alike prior to group formation so much as he provides for the impact of shared beliefs on the leader's capacity to symbolize the ideals of the group.

In spite of psychoanalysis's emphasis on the individual as the object of study, the relation between the individual and the group in Freud's work can never be understood as one of linear

causation from the group to the individual or vice versa. For one, Freud's Oedipus theory lays the groundwork for Judith Butler's theorization that prohibitions are not biologically inherited but are socially constituted (1990).<sup>15</sup> Freud thereby, if incidentally, allows for the possibility that groups share beliefs (metaphysical, ethical, etc.) because they perpetuate these beliefs in the constitution of the individuals who are its members. Since the family is the site of the child's original prohibition, it stands to reason that social relations help to constitute the super-ego's adoption of further prohibitions. The father is the original moral arbiter, and, on the basis of his influence, the child is bound to adopt the moral norms of his father's society as his own mode of moral self-regulation.

Group formation can then be understood as a process that comes about in tandem with the formation of individuals, rather than as a subsequent configuration of preexisting individuals. According to the super-ego theory, the morals of individuals are those inculcated into infants by their father. In contrast to Freud's thesis that the cohesion of groups comes about through essential commonality among atomized individuals, the super-ego theory points to the way in which the commonality of group members' beliefs is a consequence of the common beliefs in their society, as inculcated by the father. Since Freud's theories are grounded in individualism yet provide resources for more relational understandings of group formation, his work points to the circular relation between the group's influence on the individual and the role of individuals making up the group. That is, the individuals must precede group formation, and at the same

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<sup>15</sup> The Oedipus theory is most closely associated with biological essentialism of gender, due to the way in which male children supposedly desire their mothers, and female children, their fathers. The structure of the psyche is thus determined on the basis of sex. I am arguing that, taking the implications of Freud's theory beyond his own context and gender determinism, the interrelational dynamic of super-ego theory hints at the social construction of the very prohibition that the Oedipus theory depends on.

time, in order for individuals to be constituted as group members, commonalities must be inculcated within the group.

I began this chapter with the troubling character of in-group bias and obedience to the leader that Freud's theory brings out. Freud's wariness about group mentality and leader identification is a direct outcrop of the works of previous group psychologists, like Gustave Le Bon and William McDougall. In Le Bon's account of group psychology, the modern European man figures as a cultural and intellectual superior to all men of other provenance, but in groups, even civilized men regress to an earlier historical state (Le Bon, 1920, 36). The anthropological study of non-European groups was rife with this kind of progress narrative that confirmed the European belief in European superiority. Therefore, throughout Freud's work, the "primitive" figures as a condition that applies to early human life, and is associated with greater violence, less intellect, and less artistry.

For Freud, there is a problem with understanding civilization in relation to Le Bon's regressed version of group life. In order to account for the discrepancy between Le Bon's violent crowd and McDougall's organized, stable group, Freud produces a psychoanalytic explanation of the feature that separates them. He describes the paradox of civilization in terms of morality: "Whereas the intellectual capacity of a group is always far below that of an individual, its ethical conduct may rise as high above his as it may sink deep below it" (1995, 79). The primitive group represents a case of the group regressing ethically, whereas civilization represents ethical triumph. There is immediately a tension in Freud's thought about civilization's ethical supremacy over so-called primitive groups. The individual is able to be self-regulating when they are alone because they have not regressed to the primitive state of the group, and the individual is thereby presented

as the rational contrast to the automaton group member. Yet, Freud says that the intellectual capacity of the group is not the determinant of ethical conduct, because, while the intellect of the group is always inferior to that of the individual, the ethics of the group can be at either extreme: deficient or superior relative to the individual's ethical conduct. The separation of the rational (that is the individual's purview, particularly the man's) from the ethical (that can reach greater heights in group life) suggests that neither reason nor ethics can in and of itself be the determinant of civilization's orderliness.

Instead of reason or ethics, Freud makes autonomy the key factor in separating civilization from groups. In Wendy Brown's essay, "Subjects of tolerance: Why we are civilized and they are the barbarians," from her book, *States of Injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*, she analyzes Freud's separation of the "primitive" from the civilized, arguing that the rational, autonomous individual maps onto the civilized, versus the irrational passions of the group mapping onto the "primitive" (2006). Freud asserts that the ethical success of a group depends on its ability to attain the reason and judgment of an individual:

It seems to us that the condition which McDougall designates as the 'organization' of a group can with more justification be described in another way. The problem consists in how to procure for the group precisely those features which were characteristic of the individual and which are extinguished in him by the formation of the group. (1995, 86)

William McDougall, a British psychologist contemporary with Freud, had previously argued that factors like tradition and structure enabled groups to organize themselves in such a way that they might behave rationally and morally (Freud, 1995, 86). Freud counters McDougall with his claim that it is not external social and political frameworks that alter the capacity of the group to be ethical, but rather the group's capacity to replicate the autonomy of the individual. What Freud means by the group attaining the autonomy of the individual is unclear.

Freud does not offer a coherent account of how a group might actually come to possess the positive qualities of the individual. The closest Freud comes to an explanation of transferal of individual character traits onto a group is a description of the events that led the primal horde to develop into a group loosely resembling the societies of the modern period. In the primal horde theory, we can find a provisional resolution to the circular relationship between individual and group life; in fact, there were always individual and group psychologies at the same time. Freud writes,

Individual psychology must, on the contrary, be just as old as group psychology, for from the first there were two kinds of psychologies, that of the individual members of the group and that of the father, chief, or leader. The members of the groups were subject to ties just as we see them to-day, but the father of the primal horde was free. (1995, 123)

There is an unevenness between the individual and the group in the above formulation of the difference between the individual and the group. Fundamentally, the psychology of individual members of a group is lacking, for Freud, in ethical development. On the other hand, the *individual* father, chief, or leader paradoxically represents the psychology of a civilized group. Whereas the individual group member is underdeveloped prior to group development, the group is only constituted as such by a free male authority whose freedom lies beyond the fabric of the group formation, again aligning the individual with positive masculinity implicitly countering the negative femininity of the group.

When Freud describes the transformation of a primal horde member into an “individual,” some of the logic of the autonomy of the civilized group becomes clear. The sons of the primal father are mere primitive group members at first, but one of them must eventually replace the primal father (1995, 124). Freud discusses the original primal father’s role of suppressing all sexual “impulsions” of his sons, founding the incest taboo (1995, 124). In accordance with the theory of

leader identification, Freud posits that the primal father brought about the original form of group life by prohibiting all sexual satisfaction out of his jealousy (1995, 124). Then the primal father's sons worked together to kill him, but this fragmented the horde into competitive individuals (1995, 135). Finally, one of the brothers desires the place of the father and is able to become the father's successor after enough time has passed that the brothers are no longer afraid of belonging to a group with a ruler (1995, 135–36). The youngest brother succeeds his father because he is the mother's favourite son, which shelters him from the fearsome primal father's jealousy (1995, 136). He invents a myth to position himself as the ruler; he tells his brothers that he has killed the father by himself in order to establish himself as the horde's new sovereign. Freud writes, "The hero was a man who by himself had slain the father—the father who still appeared in the myth as a totemic monster. Just as the father had been the boy's first ideal, so in the hero who aspires to the father's place the poet now created the first ego ideal" (1995, 136). Under the rule of the primal father, the brothers had not established an ego ideal because they were merely afraid of the father and did not identify with him before obeying him. With the explanation of the father's successor, who invents the myth of killing the father alone, Freud provides the entire schema of the leader gaining the identification of the group members in the shape of their ego ideal. This explanation accords well with Freud's analysis of identification based on his clinical observations. However, it is only the leader of the group who attains the status of the individual, which provokes the question of whether the group's autonomy is, after all, a question of central organization of society.

In the 1930 work *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud makes no explicit mention of his earlier claim that civilization depends on the group as a whole attaining the character of the individual. In this work, he actually arrives at the position that the individual and the group are

not entirely separable. He traces a continuum from the Oedipal prohibition to the self-regulation of group members, and the continuity points him to the intertwining of the individual and the group. Freud writes,

In him [the individual man], when tension arises, it is only aggressiveness of the super-ego which, in the form of reproaches, makes itself noisily heard; its actual demands often remain unconscious in the background. If we bring them to conscious knowledge, we find that they coincide with the precepts of the prevailing cultural super-ego. At this point the two processes, that of the cultural development of the group and that of the cultural development of the individual, are, as it were, always interlocked. (1961, 107)

Freud points to the way in which ethical norms that emerged in childhood coincide with the ethical norms of the group. He refers to the “prevailing cultural super-ego,” which conveys the idea that the prohibitions of the super-ego are always specific to the culture of the group. This being the case, the kind of shared beliefs that he alluded to in *Group Psychology* no longer could have been in place prior to the formation of the group.

While Freud’s model of the super-ego provides a ready explanation for culturally transferred beliefs, he also insists on a universal set of taboos that do not vary from one culture to another. In the 1913 work *Totem and Taboo* Freud lays out the origin stories of major taboos, which he believes have been passed on through social relations, but also perhaps via phylogeny, that is, biological inheritance. He writes, “They [taboos] must have persisted from generation to generation, perhaps merely as a result of tradition transmitted through parental and social authority. Possibly, however, in later generations they may have become ‘organized’ as an inherited psychological endowment” (1985, 85). The Oedipus complex is thus a universal psychological structure as a consequence of the prohibition of incest, as Freud awards this taboo fundamental importance to psychic life. On the one hand, taboos are a significant aspect of a group’s culture, but, to the extent that taboos are invariable, they do not account for the “cultural super-ego” that Freud

discusses in *Civilization and its Discontents*. What this says is that the preexisting shared beliefs Freud discusses in his *Group Psychology* explanation of the conditions that lead individuals to identify with a leader really are inconsistent with Freud's other theories concerning the transmission of beliefs, such that later psychoanalysts may take up the parts of Freud's theories that do not rely on preexisting shared beliefs in order to theorize group formation.

Implicit in Freud's account of totemic origins are associations between the "primitive," women, passions, and lack of free thought. Freud's opposition of "primitive" and "civilized," thereby follows the logic Lévi-Strauss identified that a structure depends on positing binaries (Lévi-Strauss 1978, 22–23). Admittedly, for Freud, unconscious drives are dominant in all individuals, which undercuts the Enlightenment ideal of a rational autonomous man characterized by will. Yet Freud says in *Group Psychology* that, in groups, "the racial unconscious emerges," meaning that people of the same ethnicity (a scientific construct in Freud's time) have a common psychoanalytic history. At the same time, Freud asserts that the human species also has a common psychoanalytic history, which would suggest one origin of all human races with separate histories after the divergence of races. Freud explains Le Bon's primitivism argument in psychoanalytic terms: "As we should say, the mental superstructure, the development of which in individuals shows such dissimilarities, is removed, and the unconscious foundations, which are similar in everyone, stand exposed to view" (1995, 74). Freud's account of the origins of ethical behaviour in groups reproduces Western assumptions surrounding the superiority of European society over all peoples of colour.

As I noted earlier, in Brown's "Subjects of tolerance," she analyzes the unevenness between the individual and the group in Freud's work on group psychology, and she argues that this

unevenness underpins contemporary liberal assertions of cultural neutrality. She writes, “some cultures are depicted as tolerant while others are not: that is, tolerance itself is culturalized insofar as it is understood to be available only to certain cultures” (2006, 150). She argues that countries with liberal democracies are often described as *having* culture, which is a supplement to their national identity, while people who are outside the bounds of the national identity are described as *being* cultures. In this light, it is within the frame of liberal politics to assert that national subjects are rational autonomous individuals, while people who are inscribed as cultural others appear irrational and bounded by primitive principles. Brown writes,

For the organicist creature, considered to lack rationality and will, culture and religion (culture *as* religion, and religion *as* culture—equations that work only for this creature) are saturating and authoritative; for the liberal one, in contrast, culture and religion become ‘background,’ can be ‘entered’ and ‘exited,’ and are thus rendered extrinsic to rather than constitutive of the subject. (2006, 153)

Brown draws a parallel to Freud’s assumptions about primitive groups versus civilized ones.

Where, in Freud’s analysis, the group lacks rationality unless it takes on the characteristics of the individual, in Brown’s account of contemporary liberal politics, all groups are considered irrational, except liberal ones, which appear to master their cultural character rather than being defined by it.

According to Brown, Freud’s account underlies the contemporary American rhetoric of cultural superiority over Middle-Eastern cultures. She analyzes the rhetoric of American politicians in support of the invasion of Iraq. Freud makes autonomy the site of mature rational judgment in opposition to collectivity as the site of infantile unregulated desire. Brown writes, “Moral autonomy, the name liberalism gives to this individuated figure, is widely understood by theorists of tolerance to constitute *the* underlying value of the principle of liberal tolerance” (2006, 154). If

tolerance is only deemed possible for those individuals who are considered morally autonomous, then it is always an uneven relationship, for the people who are supposedly tolerated are de facto inscribed as being incapable of this kind of tolerance. Freud's thinking underwrites this assumption of liberalism's universality (that it is not subject to its own cultural identity). As Brown writes, "...organicist societies are inherently less civilized than liberal individualistic ones because non-individuation signals a libidinally charged psychic economy that constrains rational deliberation and impulse control" (2006, 164). The Freudian move to argue that any non-individuated group is a site of regression to primitive and child-like absence of self-regulation perfectly dovetails into the liberal claim to a higher ethical worldview rooted in reason—a quality that is, by nature of the unique liberal mastery over culture, out of reach for all non-liberal subjects.

Even in the face of the group-civilization dichotomy, Freud's analysis cannot be bound absolutely in such restrictive separations, particularly when it comes to the associated dichotomy of desire-reason. I pointed before to the fact that Freud does not allow for a permanent state of autonomy/civilization. It would be untenable for him to do so given the strained potential for reason in the psychoanalytic framework. As I noted earlier, Freud says that the intellectual capacity of the group is not the determinant of ethical conduct, because, while the intellect of the group is always inferior to that of the individual, the ethics of the group can be at either extreme: deficient or superior relative to the individual's ethical conduct (1995, 79). Clearly, in spite of the need for autonomous reason, ethics is at the same time a question of sociality and unconscious drives.

The social nature of the super-ego is a necessary result of its emergence through the Oedipus complex. Taking the super-ego's desirous character even further, Freud shows that the

super-ego represents libidinal desires to the ego. Freud writes, “The ego ideal is therefore the heir of the Oedipus complex, and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful impulses and most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id” (1960, 32). The libidinal character of the super-ego is another mark of its Oedipal origins. The super-ego is paradoxically only able to enforce prohibitions by concomitantly representing the desires to be prohibited. Since the ego ideal (based on identification with the father) is an impossible goal for the ego to attain, the ego is always found wanting and ensuing feelings of guilt arise, further provoking the desire and prohibitions of the super-ego (1960, 33). Freudian psychoanalysis takes into account how the psychic origins of so-called higher faculties or morality are bound up with desire.<sup>16</sup>

Freud’s *Group Psychology* proposes that groups are held together when many individuals with similar beliefs identify with a leader who animates the passion of these beliefs. Freud posits the individual as the base unit of psychoanalytic inquiry, which may account for the way in which his theory of group formation prioritizes the psychology of the male authority figure in the formation of groups. However, the ideological underpinnings of Freud’s work provide an alternate explanation for the untenable separation of the individual from the group. Freud adopts Le Bon’s idea that groups tend to be irrational, and he provides an additional rationale for civilization’s supremacy over so-called primitive groups. He contends that the individual can be autonomous on his own, but becomes regressed to childlike irrationality in groups. At the same time, historically, Freud understands the so-called primitive group as predisposed to aggression, where the civilized group has gained the qualities of individual autonomy that he asserts allow for the higher accomplishments of civilized men. In both the individual-group separation and the primitive-

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<sup>16</sup> Freud’s writings do not take the form of a fully consistent system of thought, so the relation of morality to desire in his work is open to interpretation. Jacqueline Rose’s use of psychoanalysis makes the case that passions give rise to public discourse that is presented as rational (1998).

civilized dichotomy, Freud's use of Enlightenment values, including the centrality of the white, male subject, bolsters the Western progress narrative that pervades his political milieu.

The other tie between Freud's problematic separation of the individual and the group and his initial separation of the primitive group from the civilized one is that they are both at odds with some finer points of his own theory. In the case of the individual and the group, Freud posits a moment early in human history when the individual's morals and the group's arose in and through each other. For Freud, this settles the paradoxical matter of how the individuals in a group can share ethical characteristics prior to their identification with the leader of their group. However, his analysis struggles persistently to keep sociality out of the equation of group life. Moreover, the Oedipus complex and its relation to the individual's ethical disposition leads to the hypothesis that Freud ignored: group morality arises organically through the social pressures of ethics combined with the familial origin of the super-ego (one could extend this theory to include mechanisms Freud did not account for). Meanwhile, Freud's demarcation of civilized groups from primitive ones is considered self-evident in his intellectual milieu such that he does not articulate how the civilized group came to possess the autonomy of the individual. Even the claim that individuals are rational when autonomous lacks support, given that Freud's entire explanation of morality emphasizes the role of libido and guilt. These latter may produce a seemingly rational subject, but ultimately the individual's judgment, like civilization's achievement, is subject to unconscious dynamics. Taken together, the phylogenic explanations and the tension within Freud's explanations suggest that Freud's observations were in tension with the ideological framework that Freud inherited.

Freud's psychoanalysis can, I contend, serve as an intervention into the problem of the invisibility of dominant group identity, in spite of the fact that many elements of his work run counter to the goal of openness to difference. Freud's political thought impresses the need to understand group psychology and ethnocentrism in order to preempt violent regimes from gaining hold. His theory contributes to an understanding of the invisibility of dominant group identity by illustrating the way that personal identity encompasses group identity for the individual, leading the individual to experience what they have inherited from the group as merely natural. Freud implicitly shows that the cohesion among people does not stem from a natural group identity, but rather commonly held beliefs are transmitted through the social processes involved in identity formation. This theory is a precursor to the position I will discuss with respect to Nancy's work that groups are formed based on interrelationality rather than being the product of a natural common identity. In Chapter two, I will discuss the elements of Kristeva's theory of othering that relate back to Freud's work. I will also expand on the foregoing psychoanalytic explanation of the invisibility of dominant group identity.

## Chapter 2: Identity and the Other

Kristeva understands in-groups and their exclusions of “others” in psychoanalytic terms, building on Freud’s thought as well as other theories, psychoanalytic, feminist and linguistic. She applies the logic of repression and projection (taken from Freud’s “The Uncanny”) to the way in-groups form and group members exclude those who appear different. The exclusion of “others” is a problem many researchers have tackled;<sup>17</sup> yet Kristeva develops a psychoanalytic explanation for it that is distinctive. For Kristeva, the term “other” refers to the figure of difference as it is alienated and excluded to the point of limiting any possible relation to the “self.”<sup>18</sup> She argues that fear of “others” is a projection of the in-group members’ fear of their own strangeness. As with the fear of the uncanny in Freud’s essay, Kristeva argues that people are afraid of an external “other,” because it serves as a substitute for something they have repressed. In Kristeva’s account of *othering*, the projected fear derives from the repression of strangeness internal to oneself. Inherent in Kristeva’s argument is a view of the subject that is internally split and dominated by unconscious drives. For Kristeva, the unconscious plays a significant role in psychic life, which means that each person’s self-understanding is limited insofar as they do not see the workings of their unconscious. Thus, one is always a stranger to oneself.

Kristeva makes a case for psychoanalytic reflexivity as a cure for ethnocentrism. She points to a part of the problem that prompted my thesis: in-group members are protective of their identity whether or not their identity is structurally subjugated. Her proposal is that people will be less protective of their group identity if they recognize the way in which their fear of “others” is merely a projection of their internal strangeness. She claims that members of dominant in-groups as well

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, *Diversity and Community: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (2008).

<sup>18</sup> The concept of the “other” in this register owes its evolution to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit* (1998) and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979), among other works.

as marginalized ones can equally overcome their exclusions of “others” by developing this reflexive understanding of in-group formation and exclusions. Should Kristeva’s recommendation prove effective, her use of psychoanalysis would be a substantial transformation of Freud’s Eurocentric and patriarchal theories into theories that work for openness, diversity, and democracy.

While interpreting Kristeva’s work on group identity, I will attend to two major Freudian developments that help to frame her theory of othering. These developments are the intergroup aggression Freud explains with reference to narcissism, and the theory of the uncanny. Kristeva does not engage with the first of these developments, even though it is relevant to the problem of othering. Kristeva does not make use of *Group Psychology* despite the fact that, in it, Freud explicitly grapples with ethnocentrism. In Chapter one, I differentiated between Freud’s theory of identification in *Group Psychology*, and his more standard theory of identification expressed, for example, in *The Ego and the Id*. Kristeva alludes to the latter and not the former when she makes use of “The Uncanny” to describe repression of one’s strangeness and projection of the ensuing fear. Kristeva’s feminist psychoanalysis necessarily departs from Freud’s as she attends to the subjugation of women in Freudian theory, while finding psychoanalytic tools to signal the revolutionary potential of women’s bodies and speech.<sup>19</sup>

Earlier I claimed that *Group Psychology* theorizes ethnocentrism, that groups of different origins are psychically prone to exclude one another. In *Group Psychology*, Freud claims to have explanations for hostility between similar groups as well as that between opposites. He says, “Of two neighbouring towns each is the other’s most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon

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<sup>19</sup> It is beyond the scope of my thesis to discuss the feminist debates about the relative merit or gender essentialism of Kristeva’s thought. As just two examples of feminist approaches to Kristeva, see Judith Butler’s, “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva” (1989), and Ewa Ziarek’s “At the Limits of Discourse: Heterogeneity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva’s Thought” (1992).

the others with contempt” (1995, 101). Here the hostility springs from jealousy, which Freud has experience theorizing from the primal band of brothers, among other things (1995, 135). Freud goes on, “We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the white races for the coloured” (1995, 101). Freud reasons that, if the inherent hostility of each individual for every other is enough to produce aggression among neighbouring towns, then it stands to reason that such hostility will be less contained and moderated among widely divergent peoples, such as Aryan and Semite.

For Freud, the inherent hostility among peoples is a necessary result of the individual’s original self-love. Freud writes, “In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to do we may recognize the expression of self-love—of narcissism” (1995, 102). Freud’s theory that narcissism is a source of hostility toward strangers will be relevant in explicating Kristeva’s theory of othering. In Freud’s view, there is a kind of defensiveness that accompanies hostility towards difference. He says, “This self-love works for the preservation of the individual, and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his own particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration” (1995, 102). According to Freud, the differences of strangers appear to each person as a criticism of their own qualities. It is interesting that Freud considers the defense to be a reaction against perceived criticism, rather than an explanation along the lines of strangers provoking a perceived threat to one’s survival. It is possible to find in Freud an understanding of intergroup hostility based more on identity preservation than on biological survival, and Kristeva puts such an understanding to the test.

Kristeva's psychoanalytic explanation of intergroup hostility takes this basic premise of identity preservation and applies another psychological pattern to explain it. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva begins by painting the obstacles to cosmopolitanism in broad strokes. She frames her study with an account of the displacement of traditional values in modern life, especially the loss of an extra-human divine ground for social codes. She argues that the contestation of any such ground leads people to feel uncertain of their essential belonging, which makes them cling desperately to identity facets they can claim as their own:

The violence of the problem set by the foreigner today is probably due to the crises undergone by religious and ethical constructs. This is especially so as the absorption of otherness proposed by our societies turns out to be unacceptable by the contemporary individual, jealous of his difference—one that is not only national and ethical but essentially subjective, unsurmountable. (1991, 2)

For Kristeva, people are fundamentally hostile to welcoming new people into a nation, because each person wants to secure the things that make their identity what they believe and want it to consist in. Like Freud's view that individuals become defensive when they encounter the differences in others, Kristeva too favours an explanation of hostility toward difference based on identity preservation.

The first difference to notice between their two approaches to group identity is that Kristeva relates the defensiveness that Freud observed to a fundamental anxiety about identity, rather than relating it to a fundamental wish for dominance over others. She defines the particularity of identity that each person wants as "subjective, unsurmountable" (1991, 2). The secure and self-enclosed identity in Kristeva's description is impossible to attain. The contradictions that individuals hold as part of themselves attest to the fact that this pure identity is a fantasy (1991, 2). Kristeva here advances the psychoanalytic precept that, if the identity that gives

individuals a sense of belonging is imaginary, then the desire to protect this identity is not based on self-assertion. Rather, the individual must constantly exert effort to maintain the plausibility of this imaginary construct. They do this partly through protection of self by exclusion of others, and, as with the effort needed to maintain repressions, the psyche exacts a toll in the form of anxiety.

For Kristeva, understanding the nature of the anxiety offers a solution to the difficulty of diverse individuals inhabiting a common society cooperatively. Kristeva claims that individuals whose identities differ can relate to one another “when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherences and abysses” (1991, 2). Kristeva considers the imaginary unsurmountable identity to be the veil that individuals need to lift before they can recognize that the stranger is no more strange than they are. Kristeva’s proposal to encourage psychical openness to diversity is an instance of psychoanalytic theory overcoming the limits that I found when testing Freud’s *Group Psychology* theories in terms of their usefulness for understanding the problem of naturalized, or invisible, group identity.

Kristeva advances the goal of cosmopolitanism, that is, the idea that every citizen of a nation is at the same time a citizen of the world, of multiple different locals. Kristeva has a particular idea of the nation in mind here, one where the nation stands for the protection of the most general human rights (1993, 32). I will delve into this conception later on. I choose to study Kristeva’s proposal to reduce inter-group hostility because it has the potential to fight structural inequality without trapping the individuals implicated in a circuit of *ressentiment*. In *States of Injury*, Brown dedicates a chapter to the argument that identity politics entrenches *ressentiment*. Brown borrows the term *ressentiment* from Nietzsche, and defines it as “a cultural ethos and politics of reproach, rancor, moralism, and guilt” (1995, 26). She speaks of the origins of identity politics in

terms of the desire to subvert the humanist discourse that would absorb all historically constructed marginalized peoples as neutral individuals: “Refusing the invitation to absorption, we insisted upon politicizing and working into cultural critique the very constructions that a liberal humanism increasingly exposed in its tacit operations of racial, sexual, and gender privilege was seeking to bring to a formal close” (1995, 2003). The discourse of liberal humanism views each subject as neutral from the vantage of law and nation, but it thereby fails to adequately address historically constructed forms of discrimination. The promise of “absorption” does not seek to make amends for historical wrongs; instead it denies that structural inequalities persist since the institutions only recognize each individual as equal and neutral, thereby effacing historical structures of violence that persist. Kristeva’s proposal for inclusion requires that people recognize their vulnerability, which I argue is a counter to the structural production of *ressentiment*.

For Brown, the politics of advocating for individual rights to counter historic discrimination further entrenches the liberal individualism of a society, and the hierarchical positions that are already in place. According to Brown, the liberal paradox of both absolute liberty and absolute equality produces a brew of guilt and entitlement called *ressentiment* (1995, 67). According to Brown, the *ressentiment* occurs in two major categories: one is the position of people who are victims of discrimination and work to limit the power of the wealthy in order to further the goal of equality, while the other is the position of those who want everyone to be treated equally and therefore work to deny special interests and further the goal of autonomy for the individual (1995, 67). The problem with these positions is that they produce a circuit in which the terms of the opposition are never in question. Moreover, for Brown, the psychological impact of *ressentiment* is always to further immobilize the political conditions that are its precondition—hence,

the title of the chapter, “Wounded Attachments.” Brown writes, “Revenge as a ‘reaction,’ a substitute for the capacity to act, produces identity as both bound to the history that produced it and as a reproach to the present which embodies that history” (1995, 73). According to Brown’s analysis, a politics that could resolve a history of structural violence would need to understand and take stock of the history, but find ways to heal the wounds and thereby lead opposing sides of a historical wrong to move beyond old hatreds. Psychoanalysis can serve a productive role towards this goal. Brown herself does not make use of it, instead suggesting that the various identity politics movements should redefine themselves beyond the victimhood imposed on them by historical violence.

If Kristeva’s theory of the psychodynamics of othering is correct, then her proposal that individuals reconcile with the fact that their identities are not coherent and self-enclosed would overcome the challenge of wounded attachments, if only partially. By admitting one’s own internal strangeness rather than attempting to continually repress it, individuals of either major *ressentiment* category (as theorized by Brown) stand a chance of recognizing the way that the “other” is like them, insofar as they are also internally strange. The shared vulnerability of this admission that each one makes is a starting place from which open dialogue might proceed without getting stymied by rancor. Kristeva understands the process of diverse peoples learning to be open to one another as work that people of both structural positions (both French and foreigner) would have to engage in. Since the challenge is one that members of any group have to take on for themselves, there is no need for the constant reproduction of the antipathy among peoples. Kristeva writes,

For one must take into consideration the domination/exclusion fantasy characteristic of everyone: just because one is a foreigner does not mean one is without one's own foreigner, and the faith that abated at the source is suddenly rekindled at the journey's end in order to make up from whole cloth an identity the more exclusive as it had once been lost. (1991, 24)

When Kristeva refers to the "domination/exclusion fantasy," one might think of the role *ressentiment* will play regardless of what tools people from different groups use to bridge the gaps between their groups. The fantasy cannot be realized, and that itself breeds rancor against the strangers whose status is not sufficiently subordinated to one's own or against the stranger who has historically subjugated one. At the same time, though, Kristeva's approach does not isolate one type of identity from another; it understands each identity as equivalent to the next insofar as each one seeks to protect itself through the exclusion of others. She discusses the heightened anxiety evoked when a group's identity has experienced subjugation, indicating her concern about the iniquities of intergroup violence. At the same time, Kristeva's point is that intergroup violence becomes recursive if the only redress is for people to continue to protect their identities to the exclusions of others.

By the same token, however, Kristeva's proposal risks denying the unevenness of political and cultural differences as they have been historically constructed. That is, her theory fails to grapple with the fact that certain dominant groups have already constructed subordinate identities for the people they exclude, and any attempt to undo the hierarchies in place would arguably have to account for this historical violence. If Kristeva succeeds in theoretically overcoming the deadlock of violent oppositions in identity politics, it is still highly doubtful whether her theory could produce open cosmopolitanism out of a historically complex struggle between a dominant group and its others. Sara Ahmed levels a criticism at Kristeva that resonates with this problem.

Ahmed focuses on Kristeva's exclusion of the Muslim veil, and I will return to this argument after considering the way that Kristeva's use of Freud relates to her neglect of the uneven historical construction of different identities. For now, I provisionally raise the objection to Kristeva that she reduces the various ways that people experience group identity to one model.

Kristeva explains her theory of othering in terms of Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" (1995). The kernel of both Freud's theory of the uncanny and Kristeva's theory of othering is the idea that things that are repressed find ways of returning to conscious life. Though Kristeva's use of "other" does not coincide with Freud's "uncanny," there is a common structure, in that they both involve internal contradiction. Moreover, Kristeva finds a pattern in Freud's explanation of the uncanny that she transposes on to the context of identity's exclusion of difference. For Freud, the uncanny is a fear of something once repressed, which makes it at the same time strange and familiar. For Kristeva, the fear of others is an externalized fear of the repressed knowledge of one's internal otherness.

Freud arrives at his theory of the uncanny by several lines of inquiry, which lead him to posit two major origins of uncanny phenomena: childhood fears and "primitive" beliefs. At different points in "The Uncanny," Freud uses the word "primitive" to refer to both ancient non-Western civilizations and to the ancient cultures that supposedly developed into the modern Western civilization (1995, 235; 240). For Freud, the common aspect of both the child and the "primitive" man is an animistic view of the world, that is, one where spirits inhabit the world (1995, 240). Freud had earlier asserted a link between animism and the uncanny in the context of early human civilization in his *Totem and Taboo* (cited in 1995, 241, n. 1). An example of the

childhood origin of uncanny fears is the fear of losing one's eyes, which Freud understands as a manifestation of castration anxiety. Freud writes,

A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*. (1955, 231)

In Sophocles's three Theban plays, Oedipus is the mythical character guilty of the crimes of incest and patricide. When Oedipus discovers that he has unknowingly committed these crimes, he blinds himself (Sophocles 1991). Freud's reading of the play interprets this blinding as an act of castration, which would be the necessary retribution for the crimes of incest and patricide. With recourse to this association between castration and loss of sight, Freud explains the way in which a familiar childhood fear translates into an altogether unrecognizable spookiness in stories such as Hoffman's "The Sand-Man," which is replete with uncanny doubling and strangely false eyes. Freud uncovers complications in the matter of repressed childhood fears.

He expands the origins of uncanniness to childhood wishes and beliefs, and he finds that some childhood fears coincide with "primitive" beliefs (1955, 233–35). This is in keeping with his assertion that civilized individuals pass through a developmental phase that corresponds to the "animistic stage in primitive men" (1995, 240). Though I do not pursue the question of whether modern Western children and ancient civilizations' have corresponding instinctive fears, I draw attention to the use of language in Freud's assertions about the "primitive," to further the critique of his Eurocentrism that I articulated in the first chapter of this thesis. Other sources of uncanniness seem to be based on "primitive" beliefs taken alone, for example, the belief in supernatural events. Freud writes:

Let us take the uncanny associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfilment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead. The condition under which the feeling of uncanniness arises here is unmistakable. We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed that these possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them . . . As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny. (1955, 247–48)

Here Freud articulates a transformation of peoples' explanations of the world from a “primitive” beginning involving spirits, the “animistic stage” to a modern paradigm of reason and knowledge. Nonetheless, Freud argues that the beliefs of the ancient precursors to Western civilization have been transmitted to modern Western men, much like the psycho-sexual phases of childhood producing latent feelings that are mostly unconscious.

Freud explains the similarity between the respective relations of the “primitive” people and of the child to uncanniness by once again making a claim that ontogeny reproduces phylogeny. He writes,

It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as uncanny fulfills the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (1955, 240-41)

Freud here asserts that ancient peoples (Freud cites, for example, Ancient Egyptians) had childlike, or immature, ways of dealing with the world around them (1955, 235). The child thus becomes a window into learning about the beliefs of early peoples.

Freud discusses the desire to fight off death as a source of the uncanniness of the “double,” a case that turns out to have another dimension of the archetypal progress narrative imbuing Freud's work. Freud proffers an additional conjunction between children and “primitive” man in the form of early narcissism. He writes,

The same desire [to fight off death] led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. (1955, 235)

Here Freud discusses the desire to fight off death, as a strong drive to allay fears of death by externalizing the threat and performing rituals that will distance the threat. The self-love of children and “primitive” people give rise to uncanny fears, because such early narcissism evokes the powerful desire to fight off death, and fear of death is exemplary of the uncanny (1995, 235).

However, Freud goes on to claim that the residual uncanniness of the “double” is not unaided by the more mature psyche. Indeed, Freud says that the “critical agency,” which he later names the “super-ego,” evokes another anxiety that falls into the domain of the “double.” It is the anxiety that the self is split into a “conscience” and the object of its criticism, as though one were alien to oneself, or even being watched by something alien (1995, 235). Thus Freud structures the sources of the “double’s” uncanniness in terms of two general phases: that of early narcissism, “primitive” man, and fear of death, and that of mature psyche, modern civilization, and the conscience. The transformation from one phase to the next is not a complete reversal of the early anxieties, but rather a displacement of these anxieties by new ones that nonetheless maintain the existing forms of uncanniness.

The relationship between Kristeva’s “other” and Freud’s “uncanny” is multifaceted. The premise of Kristeva’s “other” is fundamentally psychoanalytic, though it is not an explicit idea within Freud. People are strange to themselves, Kristeva argues, because they encompass their own unconscious and their selves are permeable, changing. She writes, “let us know ourselves as unconscious, altered, other in order better to approach the universal otherness of the strangers that we are” (1993, 20-21). Freud anticipates the idea that people feel strange in their own skin in

saying that the existence of the conscience lent strength to the uncanniness of the “double” (1995, 235). He even hints that the unconscious would lend strength to a fear originally based on illness and madness; he writes that psychoanalysis could be an uncanny thing in people’s minds given that people are afraid of the “hidden forces” that psychoanalysis tries to understand (1995, 243). Already in Freud, then, the idea of the unconscious producing anxiety is present.

As I mentioned initially in describing the uncanny, Kristeva borrows the pattern of psychic repression, anxiety and externalization from Freud’s theory. The recurrence of old affects is a structural condition of repression (1955, 241). At the same time, repression of affects translates into conscious experience of anxiety. Taken together, the pattern explains that repression of one kind leads to anxiety that is externalized in the form of an object that somehow brings back the thing repressed. In Kristeva’s analysis of literary examples of strangers, she discovers this pattern over and over again, and she therefore theorizes othering as a repression of one’s own otherness and a resultant fear of an external “other” (1991, 191-92). By transposing Freud’s pattern from uncanniness onto fear of foreignness, Kristeva provides a hypothesis as to what core process leads to intergroup hostility.

Lastly, the resemblance between the uncanny and otherness manifests in the fact that each of these concepts involves internal difference. On the side of uncanniness, Freud explains that the German word for home-like, *heimliche* [sic] can sometimes actually mean its opposite (1955, 224). This oddity of language comes to coincide with Freud’s definition of uncanniness in that the uncanny is at the same time most familiar and nonetheless strange (1955, 241). For her part, Kristeva defines the otherness within each person as the thing that is so close as to be impossible to perceive. There is a structural parallel here between Freud’s not-at-home-ness and Kristeva’s aporia

of one's own strangeness. In each case, the thing most familiar is also outside the field of visibility. Kristeva does not make this parallel explicit. It is possible that the function of repression accounts for the character of internal difference in both the uncanny and in otherness, without Kristeva having made this a deliberate connection.

I contend that the invisibility of what is most familiar plays a part in making the dominant group's identity invisible to the group's members. Since the members of the dominant group have repressed their internal strangeness, following Kristeva's argument, their projection of the fear of this strangeness onto "others" does not appear to be a projection, and does not even rely on the knowledge of forming an in-group. If the act of excluding "others" is provoked by unconscious needs, then members of the in-group can remain unconscious of the group identity that they belong to while still acting out of a need to protect this identity. Moreover, members of the dominant group can remain unconscious of their group identity, because it coincides with their self-understanding of their personal identity. In this case, as in the inability to see what is most familiar, an individual may be oblivious to a structure of their identity precisely because it is too close to them for it to be visible.

Kristeva's engagement with Freud's "The Uncanny" does not give a traditional interpretation of Freud, instead moving immediately into Kristeva's re-imagining of this work in terms of othering. I have unpacked the connections between the two theories, but, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva primarily provides her own argument, while secondarily articulating the arguments drawn from "The Uncanny." Kristeva's work is not meant to be a traditional psychoanalytic, literary, or philosophical treatise, so it is consistent that she does not explain Freud's theory as part of her argument. Nonetheless, the danger in taking certain elements from

Freud's work and all but ignoring the text itself is that the resultant theory will not have the benefit of showing what is problematic in Freud's work and thereby going some way to overcome its limitations. While it does not appear to be the case that Kristeva reproduces the progress narrative of Freud's phylogenetic arguments, it may be the case that her reduction of historical intergroup violence to an equivalence among peoples' capacities for othering indicates a general inattention to the historical unevenness of group identities. Hypothetically, had Kristeva taken up the question of othering with respect to the discriminatory progress narrative in Freud's *Group Psychology*, her own work may have been better equipped to engage with, for instance, the theoretical implications of colonial history for France's openness to its "others."

It is even more striking that Kristeva's later work elevates aspects of European enlightenment thought because her earlier work emphasizes the unconscious aspects of subjectivity. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she starts with the Freudian tenet that a person becomes recognizably themselves through a process of drives being ordered and distributed throughout the psyche in response to external stimuli, notably familial interactions (1984, 25). Kristeva calls this process "semiotic," which means that the drives create traces that are the precondition of intelligibility (1984, 25). Before an individual experiences any particular desire or aversion as their own, the assemblage of drives is *doing* everything that the individual already *is*, and Kristeva calls this space of semiotic motility a *chora* (1984, 25). The sense in which, for Kristeva, the self is a precipitate of the unconscious (rather than the self and the unconscious being coextensive) is grounded in this understanding of the *chora*. Kristeva here furthers the Freudian precept that one is not an autonomous self-made totality in possession of will. Instead, for Kristeva, each subject is primarily bodily and desiring, and only belatedly (in the case of the

archetypal Western subject) sees himself (because the subject is gendered male) as a subject in the liberal humanist sense. The implications of this bodily, desiring self coincide with Kristeva's view that one is a stranger to oneself: both claims undercut the idea of a free, autonomous subject. At the same time, these claims logically undercut the possibility of choosing one's cultural identity, e.g. cosmopolitan. Thus, Kristeva's later work, namely *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Nations without Nationalism* are in tension with her psychoanalytic framework, as developed in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

For Kristeva, the psychoanalytic theory that the drives precede the intelligible self leads to a new understanding of language. This dimension makes her view of the subject all the more compelling as a starting place for understanding political sameness and assimilation of others, since language plays a role in regulating politics, and group life in general. She writes, "The theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which signification is constituted" (1984, 26). Kristeva calls attention to the existence of the material substratum that language depends on before there is recognizable linguistic communication, e.g. bodies. She writes, "Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it" (1984, 26). Kristeva criticizes the modern Western view of language for asserting that its signification is entirely born from a system of symbols, rather than acknowledging that language is, at the same time, a material practice involving irregularities that cannot be systematized (1984, 95). At the same time as discourse depends on the material substratum of language, this substratum, the *chora*, is ordered by processes that are somewhat symbolic, such as familial interactions (1984, 27). It is this back and forth of the symbolic (order and structure of language) and the semiotic

(embodiment and sensory qualities) that Kristeva understands as the basis of the subject's structuring in social life and discourse, the latter terms being bound together, though differently constructed. Therefore, according to Kristeva, the construction of the self involves a fundamental linguistic dimension, because language organizes social structures, which have a direct impact on the ordering of the psychological drives. That is to say, the infant is constituted by language before they learn language by virtue of the fact that their familial and cultural context has language-based roles and relations that shape the infant's pre-linguistic experience. In Chapter three, I will compare Kristeva's approach to subjectivity's basis in language with Nancy's theory of myth. For now, I will return to Kristeva's project of fostering cosmopolitanism and inclusivity, which, I contend, is partially at odds with her theory of the semiotic.

I agree with Sarah Ahmed's criticism that Kristeva's later work, namely *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) and *Nations without Nationalism* (1993), falls short of Kristeva's stated goal of fostering inclusion. Ahmed argues that Kristeva structures her account of cosmopolitanism in such a way that the Muslim veil becomes a physical sign of an inadmissible difference. Ahmed analyzes the way that Kristeva inscribes the French nation with the role of a father and the Muslim veil with the shame of a prohibition. I compare the way that Kristeva espouses the French model of cosmopolitanism (a self-proclaimed secular society informed by a colonial history) to the way that Freud upholds autonomy and an implicit western progress narrative in *Group Psychology*. In both of these cases, the frame of enlightenment values, such as reason, autonomy and equality, lead to an assumption of western supremacy, in spite of the explicit moves both thinkers make to undercut the belief that people are predominantly rational and autonomous.

Kristeva's proposal that everyone recognize the strangeness in themselves appears to overcome the barrier of "wounded attachments"—the way *ressentiment* immobilizes both sides of cultural wrongs. Yet, in making everyone's work to heal old wounds equivalent, Kristeva effaces the unevenness of historical suffering. In "What of tomorrow's nation?" Kristeva writes, "Recognition of otherness is a right and a duty for everyone, French people as well as foreigners, and it is reasonable to ask foreigners to recognize and respect the strangeness of those who welcome them" (1993, 31). When Kristeva says it is "reasonable to ask foreigners to recognize and respect..." she positions herself in a defensive posture toward the anger of marginalized peoples clamoring for greater respect. Furthermore, her characterization of the French people (the example most prevalent in *Nations*) as "those who welcome them [foreigners]" produces a figure of benevolent generosity on the part of the colonial nation.

In Kristeva's essay "What of tomorrow's nation?" she argues that any attachment to origins is a defensive reaction. Again Kristeva does not discriminate between the attachment to origins of a person whose identity is constructed as superior to others, versus one whose identity is historically subjugated. Kristeva writes,

The cult of origins is a hate reaction. *Hatred of those others* who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally . . . *Hatred of oneself*, for when exposed to violence, individuals despair of their own qualities, undervalue their achievements and yearnings, run down their own freedoms whose preservation leaves so much to chance; and so they withdraw into a sullen, warm private world, unnameable and biological, the impregnable 'aloofness' of a weird primal paradise—family, ethnicity, nation, race. (1993, 3)

Where Kristeva had previously emphasized the fantastical character of the self-enclosed identity with reference to anxiety about one's own internal strangeness, here she emphasizes the fantastical character of this identity's supposed origins. The combination of defensiveness and self-

denigration Kristeva attributes to intergroup hostility produces a desire not only for a self-enclosed identity, but also for a grounding of identity that is immovable by nature of its origin in the origin, i.e. that which seems “primal” (1993, 3). Even though Kristeva makes reference to what is “primal” in this passage, I argue that the word in this context refers to a fantasy of the “primal,” which works to undercut any belief that there was a pure and simple “primitive” human civilization. In ascribing an imaginary object to the “cult of origins,” Kristeva demonstrates her ability to take psychoanalytic insights and understand national identity (as it figures in desires for an origin) as imaginary. Here, Kristeva’s view of national identity accounts for the way in which belonging to a nation is fundamentally structured by an affect of desire. This use of psychoanalysis goes beyond Freud’s own theories of group life, and makes it possible to critically examine the deployment of national identity as though it were an objective condition organized by rationally governed institutions.

Another dimension of the above quotation tells a different story, though. Kristeva abstracts her explanation of inter-group hostility from any specific cases and generalizes the matter such that hatred of others and hatred of oneself are inseparable and equally present across all individuals involved. However, hatred of others may have a different character for people who experience different levels of socioeconomic status and who have experienced different levels of historical and structural violence. The same can be said even more strongly of the differences in how different peoples experience hatred of themselves. Frantz Fanon famously argues that the historical construction of blackness as inferior to whiteness structures the self-consciousness of black people, which would, for example, lead to the kind of self-denigration that Kristeva describes in a more violent way than the self-denigration of Caucasian people (Fanon, 2008, 41–43). While it is true

that Kristeva's general picture of hatred of others and of oneself does not represent an attempt at a full, detailed account of the dynamic of desiring an identity grounded in origins in all cases, it prompts the question of whether Kristeva has failed to be reflexive about her position as a French-Bulgarian "cosmopolitan" (1993, 15). At the same time, it poses a challenge to psychoanalysis as a whole to ask whether its methodological and conceptual tools should be applied uniformly across different material and historical conditions.

*Nations without Nationalism* clearly speaks to Kristeva's experience of France, which suggests that the text is grounded in the particulars of her experience at the same time as being a theoretical engagement of the general dynamics of xenophobia. When it comes to reflexivity, though, Kristeva's work hits a limit. Kristeva does not situate herself in relation to her origins, saying only that she is a "cosmopolitan" (1993, 15). Her sole reference to her origins comes when she grants the objection, "It is beneficial to be a cosmopolitan when one comes from a small country such as Bulgaria" (1993, 15). Then she writes, "Nevertheless, I maintain that in the contemporary world, shaken up by a national fundamentalism on the one hand and the intensive demands of immigration on the other, the fact of belonging to a set is a matter of choice" (1993, 15-16). Kristeva rejects the worldview that defines people according to their nationalities or ethnicities, which she associates with nationalism and its intersection with fascism. Her objection to nationalism stems from her criticism that origins are a fantasy. By identifying as a cosmopolitan, though, Kristeva positions her viewpoint as one that transcends historical conditions.

France's particular approach to state secularism informs Kristeva's thought about otherness, insofar as Muslim veils are largely unaccepted in French society and Kristeva considers Muslim veils to offend the liberty of French citizens. In 2010, France banned the wearing of face-

covering Muslim veils in public places. In “French Secularism and the ‘Islamic Veil Affair,’” anthropologist Talal Asad examines the 2003 Stasi report, commissioned by the French government to determine whether girls should be allowed to wear Muslim veils in public schools. Asad persuasively argues that the Stasi report produced definitions of “religious symbol,” “display,” and other such ambiguous concepts in such a way that the government could ban Muslim veils in public schools (2006, 95–97). Asad’s point is that the French nation uses secularism as a means of transforming people from different backgrounds and traditions into normatively French subjects. The French doctrine of secularism insists on separation between religion and state, but the Stasi report illustrates a case where the nation compromises religious freedom in order to make its subjects visibly secular and, therefore, French (2006, 106). In this context, Kristeva’s exclusion of the Muslim veil in her 1993 text is complicit with a desire for national unity, even though she rejects nationalism.

Ahmed’s critique of Kristeva resonates with my critique of the limits of Kristeva’s reflexivity. In the passage Ahmed analyzes, Kristeva asks why the nation should permit Muslim women to wear veils:

The French population is subjected to a twofold humiliation: First there is the interior impact of immigration, which often makes it feel as though it had to give up traditional values, including the values of freedom and culture that were obtained at the cost of long and painful struggles (why accept [that daughters of Maghrebian immigrants wear] the Muslim scarf [to school]? Why change spelling?—while the French secular tradition asserts women’s freedom and is proud of an education system that gives one access to the linguistic subtleties of Moliere and Proust); then there is the exterior impact of tomorrow’s broadened Europe. (1993, 36)

This passage seems to contradict Kristeva’s consistent objections to nationalism, insofar as she here asserts pride in French secularism and literary accomplishment over and against cultural

accommodation for immigrants to France. The passage continues with Kristeva claiming that the Muslim veil threatens the individual like a threat to the ego ideal of a child:

That involves a breach of the national image and it corresponds, on the individual level, to the good image of itself that the child makes up with the help of the ego ideal and the parental superego, allowing it to grow up and acquire its culture—or, on the contrary, when that good image is damaged, leads it into depression and inhibition. (1993, 36–37)

The implication of the psychoanalytic analogy is that the nation figures as the parent of each individual, figured as a child, and accepting the Muslim veil leads each individual to mourn the loss of the ego ideal that the nation provided. Kristeva does not, then, object to the Muslim veil polemically, but theorizes that French citizens are psychoanalytically predisposed to reject it. At the same time, she enjoins French people to assert the rightness of their ideals: “Let us not be ashamed of European and particularly French culture, for it is by developing it critically that we have a chance to have foreigners recognize us as being foreigners all, with the same right of mutual respect” (1993, 38). In asking why French people should accept the practice of Muslim women wearing veils, Kristeva makes the case for a ban against wearing Muslim veils in French schools. She abides this exclusion from the cosmopolitan state on the grounds that the veil itself goes against the principle of openness among diverse peoples.

The denigration of the veil, as Ahmed explains, takes the form of making it a concrete symbol of the difference that cannot be accepted without undermining the project of cosmopolitanism (2005, 98). Ahmed writes, “She [the ‘veiled woman’] becomes a sign of the absence of freedom that betrays the idea of the nation. She becomes a symbol of what the nation must give up to be itself, a discourse that would require her unveiling in order to fulfill the promise of freedom and culture” (Ahmed, 2005, 97). In Ahmed’s interpretation of “What of tomorrow’s nation?” there is a tension between the nation, with its claim that it alone secures

universal freedom, and the construction of the limit at which foreign practices must be excluded. In fact, the nation cannot achieve universal freedom. Though the nation claims to offer freedom for all its citizens, it asserts its ideal (which also affects the ego ideal of the citizens) as supreme over practices that this national ideal cannot embrace.

Ahmed's essay makes constructive use of Kristeva's theory of abjection to enrich her theory of the construction of boundaries to inclusion, such as the veil for Kristeva. Abjection refers to a quality of revulsion and fascination that Kristeva identifies in liminal objects, e.g. the skin that forms on top of milk (Kristeva, 1982, 2-3). Abjection results from a threat to stability of oneself: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982, 4). For Ahmed, Kristeva's theory serves to illuminate the idea that the abject body is not threatening because of its intrinsic abjectness. Rather, it is threatening because the perceiver *abjects* it. The perception of abjection misses this, however, which leads the person who sees something as abject to attribute some disturbing character to the thing. That is, the person who feels revulsion and fascination about an object reacts to something imaginary about the object that, in actuality, reflects the fear of their own instability (Ahmed, 2005, 102). Ahmed writes,

Kristeva shows us that the ambiguity [between object and border] relates to the very necessity of designating that which is threatening: borders need to be threatened in order to be maintained, and part of the process of 'maintenance-through-transgression' involves the very appearance of border objects. Border objects are hence disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects. (2005, 102)

For Kristeva, abjection attaches itself to border objects as a projection of anxieties about the borders of the self. The objects that tend to be abject are either connected to the boundaries of the body, e.g. excrement and menstruation, or they are associated with boundary transgression, e.g. the

skin of the milk or decomposing bodies (1982, 2-4). The abject is always a feeling that relates to problems of securing a delimited self.

It is interesting how both Kristeva's theory of othering and her theory of the abject depend on the tenet that each person wants a secure, self-contained identity, and that such an identity is never achieved. The instability of the self produces anxiety and motivates each person to make their identity appear more stable to him or herself. The advantage of Kristeva's theories, both the abject and othering, lies in opening in a seemingly closed circuit. In the case of abjection, the circuit is one where the border object elicits expulsion because of prior associations, but the border object becomes abject only as a result of its expulsion (Ahmed, 102). However, the prior associations that the border object elicits do not produce the expulsion so much as the imaginary threat to identity produces the expulsion (Ahmed, 2005, 102-03). Ahmed writes, "Hence the abject is never about an object that appears before the subject; the abject does not reside in an object, as either its quality or matter" (2005, 103). The significance of such a gap in the circuit of border object/expulsion is that the abjection of bodies is not essentially determined, and therefore, the construction of abjection can be undone.

The theory of othering resonates strongly with Ahmed's analysis of the theory of abjection. While Kristeva explains the phenomenon of abjection with reference to inanimate objects or to liminal body functions in *Powers of Horror*, she does not consider the dynamic of racial difference in that book. Ahmed takes the tools of abjection theory and applies them to the expulsion of the Black body. She relates Audre Lorde's story of being a child on a Harlem subway and having a wealthy woman sitting next to Lorde pull the edge of her fur coat away from Lorde's leg (Ahmed, 2005, 104-05). In this story, Ahmed identifies the imaginary threat of Lorde's body to the white

woman. As a child, Lorde pulls away from the woman, too, because she understands the woman's gesture to mean that there is something disgusting in between them, rather than immediately realizing that the woman is pulling away from her (Ahmed, 2005, 105). In analyzing this story, Ahmed draws attention to the border that the movement of the woman creates both for her and for Lorde (2005, 106). Ahmed writes,

The alignment of some bodies with some others and against others take place through the *affecting of movement*; bodies are dis-organized and re-organized as they face others who are already recognized as familiar or stranger. The organization of social and bodily space creates a border that is transformed into an object, as an effect of this intensification of feeling. So the white woman's refusal to touch the Black child does not simply *stand for* the expulsion of Blackness from white social space, but *actually re-forms that social space through the re-forming of the apartness of the white body*. (2005, 106)

Ahmed deftly shows that the expulsion of a Black body is made possible because of the codification of Black skin as untouchable, but that the social space is re-formed in the process of contact between Black bodies and white ones. The white woman's movement away from Lorde communicated her emotion of disgust in such a way that Lorde understood the repulsion as emanating from an object between their bodies. The space becomes divided as a result of this affect, containing the white body and expelling Blackness. Reading racial difference as a construction based on abjection brings to light a similar dynamic to that of othering. In both cases, the exclusion of difference both results from the desire for a self-enclosed identity and further engenders the experience of such an identity.

Through her critique of Kristeva, Ahmed demonstrates that the theoretical deployment of abjection and othering is a productive tool for race theory. At the same time, Ahmed's deployment of the concept of abjection to explicate the construction of racial difference goes beyond the limits of Kristeva's theories. It explores the structural dimensions of expulsion (social, historical, and

spatial) in a way that neither Kristeva's work on abjection nor her work on othering did.

Meanwhile Ahmed's insight that the construction of racial difference is a circular process, except for the gap that is the imaginary identity of the other, suggests that there is no ground of identity to speak of. Kristeva herself seems to take this position in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984). The circular nature of expulsion and identity calls into question whether "group identity" has any objective character, or is rather imaginary in some sense. I will return to the imaginary character of group identity by drawing on Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* in Chapter three. While Ahmed critiques Kristeva's exclusion of the Muslim veil in *Nations*, she sees fit to expand on the underpinning logic of othering/abjecting. Ahmed seems to want to rehabilitate Kristeva's text as a site of interest for race theory. To do so demands an accounting of what elements of Kristeva's theory, if any, underpin the construction of the Muslim veil as a concrete representation of the difference that cannot be welcomed within cosmopolitanism.

Ahmed proposes that a critical uptake of Kristeva's work on othering needs to take account of the nation as constituted by dynamics of identity. Ahmed says,

The nation is a concrete effect of how some bodies have moved towards and away from other bodies, a movement that works to create the very affect and effect of boundaries and borders, as well as allows the approximation of what we can now call the character of the nation (like-ness). (2005, 108)

The construction of race-based abjection, in Ahmed's account, leads to the conclusion that structures of society, e.g. education and the separation of people in public space, take on the norms of affective exclusion. In the case of the Muslim veil in Kristeva's description of French society, Ahmed's observations indicate that the covering of women's faces appears to native French people as a rejection of the values that make France a country to which Maghrebian people would want to immigrate. The reason that the Muslim veil holds this significance for native French

people is not, for Ahmed, that the Muslim veil thwarts the ideal of equality as such. Rather, the exclusion of the veil is an act that maintains the particularly French vision of equality. As Ahmed makes clear, the nation does not safeguard universal ideals that afford cosmopolitan inclusivity. It is yet another identity constructed out of the historical desires of a people who are culturally and politically specific.

Kristeva is not oblivious to the difficulty of making nations cosmopolitan, rather than nationalist. That is the driving force behind *Nations*. It is therefore necessary at this point to consider what persuades Kristeva of the ideal of a cosmopolitan Nation, and whether this ideal can be thought in such a way that it does not construct inadmissible objects. Kristeva expresses her preference for one of two versions of the nation to emerge out of the French enlightenment: the *esprit général*, “general interest,” of Montesquieu. This ideal of nationality seems to make cosmopolitanism possible by allowing that the national character is not permanently defined, and that a plurality of social and political conditions give rise to the spirit of the nation (Kristeva, 1993, 56). In contrast, there is the German ideal of *Volksggeist*, “spirit of the people,” developed through Hegel and Herder. Kristeva aligns this concept with the conditions that lead to Nazism, insofar as the Nazis understood their agenda to be a preservation of the *Volksggeist*. Kristeva writes that appeals to racial superiority are still made with reference to the *Volksggeist*, which is one way of indicating that the concept carries an essentialist view of identity (1993, 53–54). The difference between the *esprit général* and the *Volksggeist* appears to hinge in part on the plasticity of the defining character of a nation, with the *Volksggeist* representing an extreme oppressive vantage resulting from an overly essentialist idea of the supposedly determinate national character. For Kristeva, then, a

cosmopolitan nation is one that does not ground itself in any particularistic identity. It remains to be seen whether this kind of nation is theoretically possible.

Kristeva argues that the *esprit général* safeguards individual rights in a way the *Volksggeist* does not, because the *esprit général* is concerned with the person insofar as they belong to the nation, yes, but more fundamentally, to Mankind (1993, 28). Writing in the Enlightenment, Montesquieu, like his compatriots, talks about men, to the exclusion of women, as free subjects. Kristeva describes Montesquieu's theory of a nation as a "guaranteed hierarchy of *private rights*" (1993, 31). The hierarchy extends from universal man to each individual by way of descending particular groupings, e.g. the nation and the family (1993, 28). Accordingly, the nation no longer grounds itself in what is most particular but what is most general, which could theoretically engender a utopian level of openness to plurality. Kristeva describes this ideal as "a certain national idea . . . affirmed as a space of freedom and dissolved in its own identity" (1993, 32). By appealing to Montesquieu's political theory, Kristeva has adopted a humanist idea at odds with her more destabilizing psychoanalytic conception of subjectivity. She grounds the possibility of cosmopolitanism in the universality of Mankind, borrowing the terminology from Montesquieu's androcentric philosophy. Such an appeal to universality theoretically overcomes the problem Ahmed pointed to in Kristeva's framing of the French nation as the universal standard of freedom. If the universal standard of freedom only inheres in France because France itself is grounded in the desire for universal freedom, then the ideals France expounds would, in theory, not be hegemonic French values.

The nation claims to ground itself in universality, but it is continually making itself into the universal on which it claims to depend. Kristeva does not attend to this dynamic, visible for

instance in the particular cultural history of the *esprit général*. It is French Enlightenment thought that buttresses Kristeva's cosmopolitanism, which cannot fail to produce a particularly French cosmopolitanism. Kristeva can perhaps afford to ignore the tensions in her argument, since she admits that the nation as a basis of political life will not be overcome for a long while yet (1993, 33). She is therefore offering a best-case description of the cosmopolitan nation in an attempt to make it so. She addresses her position both to the left-wing politics that place insufficient stock in the value of integration of immigrants into French life, and to the right-wing politics that only values immigration in cases where there is an economic argument for it (1993, 31-32). Kristeva espouses a profound integration of foreign peoples within the French nation, which creates an almost insurmountable tension with her project of promoting inclusivity. Without delving into all the contextual influences on Kristeva's view of French politics, it is only possible to point out that her argument against both left and right positions on immigration rests on a desire to move away from old wounds, which persistently ground identity in origins.

Kristeva's thought is fundamentally emancipatory, and she accordingly theorizes a non-deterministic idea of national identity. She insists that France's identity is *transitional*, that its stability does not prevent it from a continual state of flux in which the individuals who identify with the nation still have freedom to choose their own identities (1993, 41-42). Kristeva writes,

Let us give thought to the transitional nation that offers its identifying (therefore reassuring) space, as transitive as it is transitory (therefore open, uninhibiting, and creative), for the benefit of contemporary subjects: indomitable individuals, touchy citizens, and potential cosmopolitans. (1993, 42)

The psychoanalytic identification of individuals to nation does not, Kristeva posits, necessarily take the form of child to authoritarian parent; it can instead resemble a familial identification wherein the identification is a step to individuation. In the above passage Kristeva presents identification as

potentially indeterminate, giving way to greater possibilities for the individual on the basis of the safety that identification entails. Elsewhere she contrasts the “abstraction” of the French Enlightenment idea of citizenship against Edmund Burke and Hanna Arendt’s preference for the *Volksgeist* (1993, 45). She makes the case for France’s cosmopolitan potential by underscoring the potential and freedom that people can enjoy when a nation does not cleave to origins.

The problem I want to highlight within Kristeva’s thought is that the desire for freedom from origins veers into a disavowal of historical problems whose effects have not gone away or found any resolution. She mentions that scores of intellectuals argue that the Enlightenment gave rise to historical injustices and violence (1993, 46). For her, such criticisms are a show of self-hatred that follows from encountering foreigners, who reject and expel the values one holds (1993, 3). Her diagnosis of the self-hatred of French people also figures in her exclusion of the Muslim veil. It is no coincidence that, in her attempt to expel all investment in origins, she simultaneously finds the Muslim veil inadmissible and finds the intellectual association of colonial violence with Enlightenment thought merely an indulgence of self-hatred. The rejection of origins as a facet of identity elides the way in which the dominant group identity has turned its origins into the standard by which to judge others. When only the origins of minorities stand out from the nation’s identity, minority cultures are de facto the source of conflict. At the same time, the national character is not articulated as such, in part because Kristeva represents the nation as a promise that has yet to be fully realized. It therefore shifts away from a construct (“the nation”) understood as a particular political configuration and towards one understood as an innovation on politics itself.

Kristeva defends the importance of the nation in part by suggesting there is no other means for procuring personal rights for disenfranchised individuals. In arguing that there are no alternatives to the nation's promise of cosmopolitan freedom, Kristeva relinquishes the task of criticism in favour of the desire for a better world. She says, "The time has perhaps come for pursuing a critique of the national tradition without selling off its assets" (1993, 46). The inherent problem in her disposition here is that it would be possible to retain the promising aspects of the nation without taking into consideration how even such promising aspects are bound up with the problems of its history, e.g. colonialism. Returning again to the lessons of Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, it is not a sufficient safeguard against the textual repetition of ideological positions to only excise claims that are overtly oppressive or discriminatory. One must also interpret the seemingly benign elements as part of a system of thought that produces such oppression. In the case of Kristeva's use of *esprit général*, the elements of the Enlightenment idea of nation that she wants to retain are consistent with her neglect of unevenly constructed historical positions. She claims that the abstraction of *esprit général* is an asset for a cosmopolitan nation because it fosters the greatest number of possibilities for identities belonging to the national character.

On the other hand, Kristeva's interest in fostering cosmopolitanism only appeals to a universal humanity as an abstraction. Her strategic deployment of this universal is similar to hegemony's need to refer to an "absent totality" as Laclau and Mouffe formulated in the 1985 work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards A Radical Democratic Politics* (2014, 7). For Laclau and Mouffe, the positioning of particular demands as integral to the universal aims of society is a

necessary part of liberationist political struggle. In a later text, in which Laclau is in dialogue with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, Laclau writes,

If the hegemony of a *particular* social sector depends for its success on presenting its own aims as those realizing the *universal* aims of the community, it is clear that this identification is not the simple prolongation of an institutional system of domination but that, on the contrary, all expansion of the latter presupposes the success of that articulation between universality and particularity (i.e. a hegemonic victory). (Laclau, 2000, 50)

Laclau's theory encourages the use of universals by people who wish to challenge the institutional political authority, because the institution will be made to conform to the demands of the people.

In both Laclau's and Kristeva's political theses, the appeal to universals is made to positive ends, and the political institutions are made to conform to these goals rather than deploying them in any oppressive manner. As I will argue in Chapter three, however, Kristeva's proposal does not address the way that political institutions themselves impose a particular worldview on all the nation's citizens and thereby devalue the different perspectives of people who are marginalized due to foreignness.

Kristeva is an ambivalent character in her thinking about group identity, just as Freud was before. On the one hand, her theory of othering is a helpful tool for explicating intergroup hostilities and potentially shifting people's consciousness toward more reflexive awareness of identity dynamics. On the other hand, her use of French Enlightenment ideals precludes the critique of false universality that I delineated, even though I contend that Kristeva's earlier theories of subjectivity would support such a critique. I argue that Kristeva comes to a contradictory position because of this limit in her critique of Enlightenment ideals: that the Muslim veil is a necessary exclusion from France in order to safeguard plurality. The promise of freedom that Kristeva finds in the concept of *esprit général* is not empty of radical potential to grant the rights of

citizenship to all people. However, her own suspicions of nationalism are applicable to her position. By making France's identity an unassailable object in the interests of securing political openness, Kristeva shelters a Trojan horse of nationalism under the guise of universal freedom. Signs of this nationalism include her dismissal of criticisms of the historical determination of Enlightenment thought and oppressive actions, the symmetry between host and immigrant in her claim that immigrants must likewise recognize the strangeness of the host, and, most strikingly, in her exclusion of the Muslim veil. As I continue to interrogate the formation of dominant group identity and its corollary of invisibility, Kristeva's inadvertent nationalism stands as a cautionary tale. Her articulation of the French nation justifies a belief in its universality, which may lie at the root of the invisibility of national identity to those who are encompassed within it. Nonetheless, I consider Kristeva's insight that othering entails the projection of one's own strangeness onto *others* to be a critical tool for explicating the invisibility of dominant group identity. I will use this insight to explain the subjective attachment to dominant group identity. In Chapter three, I will bring the tools of Kristeva and Freud into conversation with Nancy's philosophy of mythical identity and democratic openness. Nancy will permit me to employ psychoanalytic tools while also attending to the discursive and juridical aspects of dominant group identity.

### *Chapter 3: Deconstructing Identity, both Subjective and Political*

Thus far, I have shown that Freudian psychoanalysis contributes to an understanding of the invisibility of dominant group identity in the following ways: Freud's understanding of subject formation implies that the group identity appears to the individual to be indivisible from their personal identity, which makes it appear natural rather than constructed; Freud also offers the explanation for intergroup hostility that it stems from a need to protect one's identity, rather than a drive to fight for survival. In Chapter two, I showed that Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory contributes to an understanding of dominant group identity by accounting for the way that one's identity is always vulnerable, which means that even members of a dominant group will project anxiety onto "others" in the form of fear. Kristeva's theory also proposes an antidote to this pattern of "othering," which is to teach everyone to acknowledge that they are internally strange and thereby relieve the anxiety about identity in some measure. I argued that both Freud and Kristeva's contributions to the problem of the dominant group identity's invisibility have limitations due to their adherence to viewpoints that took for granted the superiority of Western civilization. In this way, Freud and Kristeva each provided examples of the risk of excluding others by positioning Western ideals as culturally neutral.

Psychoanalysis again falls short as an intervention into dominant group identity in that it does not explain how the dominant group identity imposes itself on a whole society instead of being contested at every turn. To address this problem, psychoanalysis needs to include analysis of political structures and, crucially, language. Jean-Luc Nancy makes use of all of these tools, and his theories help account for the invisibility of dominant group identity. As a deconstructionist who has engaged with psychoanalysis, Nancy's theories demonstrate the multivalent character of the

concept “identity.” My inclusion of Nancy with his deconstructive method represents a shift in the approach I am able to take to my research question.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter, I will present Nancy’s arguments as they pertain to dominant group identity, and I will conclude that the continuous intertwining of subjectivity and political structures is the missing piece in the psychoanalytic account I established in Chapters one and two. First I will present Nancy’s deconstruction of identity in order to better articulate the way that identity dynamics are at odds with the plurality and contestation of individuals’ identities. Nancy’s theory is that identity is a totalizing symbolic construct, which produces the appearance of essential commonality rather than deriving from it. Second I will argue that Nancy’s account of myth helps to account for the way that language is a medium for symbolic identity’s impact on subjective identity. I use “subjective” here to refer to the level of personal identity that appears to the individual to be self-given, although there can never be an absolute separation of different orders of a person’s identity. I will compare Nancy’s deployment of myth to Kristeva’s theory of the linguistic symbolic order, and argue that Nancy’s theory is effective at exposing the link between subjective identity and political structures. Third I will discuss Nancy’s claim that political and governmental institutions fail to acknowledge the insufficiency of their overarching principles relative to the contestation and plurality of their citizens. Finally, I will argue that the invisibility of dominant group identity for members of the dominant group is a function of the way that symbolic identity structures affect subjective identity in such a seamless way that their influence makes no disjunctive impression. Group identity further seems entirely personal and individual

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<sup>20</sup> Deconstruction is partially indebted to psychoanalysis, but the relationship between them is complex and deserves much greater treatment than I can give it here. Key deconstructive critiques of psychoanalysis include *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Irigaray, 1985), *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (Derrida, 1998) and *The Title of the Letter* (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe, 1973).

when the group to which one belongs is dominant, because dominant group identity is a structure that covers over the rifts of plurality.

For Nancy, taking group identity to be representative of essential qualities constitutes the immantist view of identity. Nancy coins the term “immanentism” to refer to the view that the essence of the identity is produced by the subjects the identity supposedly defines. Immanentism, for Nancy, is not only flawed but also dangerous. Historically, the belief that one’s group identity is representative of the essence of all the group’s members has buttressed genocidal regimes’ desires to purify a society of its “others” (1991, 3). In my formulation of the invisibility of dominant group identity, the problem of intergroup hostility is on the other end of the spectrum from genocide, insofar as liberal subjects may believe they are tolerant and non-racist while nonetheless privileging the dominant group’s worldview and social norms.

Nancy shows that a group’s appearance of unity in the form of its identity is actually a myth, but Nancy has a particular concept of “myth” in mind that differs from other uses of the term. For now, it will suffice to think of “myth” as a narrative of collective identity that holds members of a group together. Nancy explains group formation in terms of the multiplicitous attachments people in groups have to one another, creating a large decentralized network with an emergent sense of cohesion. In Nancy’s view, individuals are not atomized and closed off, but are always already interrelated and become “selves” only inter-subjectively (1991, 33).<sup>21</sup> The corollary in the case of group life is that the group does not exist as a unit composed of individuals who share in the group’s essential attributes before they identify as part of the group. Instead, individuals become part of a group through the multiple connections that bind them to

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy borrows this understanding of the inter-subjective formation of the self from the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose work is in the background of Kristeva’s theories as well.

individuals around them (1991, 28). The identity of the group, its shared characteristics, are, to Nancy, a discursive effect that only partially and belatedly captures aspects of members of the group. The identity that the group uses to represent itself is, by this token, an imaginary one, for the group's identity is constructed, symbolic, discursive, and mythic (1991, 42). Nancy's theory of group identity takes stock of the way group identity shapes individuals but at the same time asserts an imaginary and symbolic unity that is over and above any objective unity.

Nancy expounds a different approach to community from the modern liberal conceptions based on the idea that people "agree on a concept of the good life" (Schwarzmantel 2007, 461). Contrary to the direction that Freud takes to group identity, Nancy contends that the group does not depend on preexisting features that the members of the group hold in common. Instead Nancy builds on the phenomenological tenet that each person is always constituted through relations with other people, which Heidegger formulated in *Being and Time* as *Mit-sein*, or being-with. Heidegger's philosophy was concerned with the question of Being, in the ontological sense of a primordial condition that marks all experiences of beings, and the relational character of being-with was one of several ways that he characterizes *Dasein* (*being-there*), which is his term for the kind of being that humans are (1996). Nancy calls for a rethinking of Heidegger's ontology on the basis that being-with is ontologically co-original with being-there, not an additional characterization of *Dasein* (1991, 14). Nancy thinks of this ontological being-with as a condition that leads to community, but not community in the sense of having a common essence. Instead, Nancy posits the "inoperative community," which does not work to produce an essential common identity (1991, 3).

For Nancy, community arises emergently at the same time that the individual members subscribe to it—which, reverting to the psychoanalytic framework of Kristeva, can occur through various mechanisms such as socialization and familial connection. Nancy expresses his core idea of relationality thus:

The shared world as the world of concern-for-the-other is a world of the crossing of singular beings by this sharing itself that constitutes them, that makes them be, by addressing them one to the other, which is to say one by the other beyond the one and the other. (1991, 103)

Nancy describes the interrelatedness of people, showing that it is not a fact that depends on a prior state of separate individuals in their own individual environments. Rather, the sharing of places with other people is true as soon as an individual enters the world. Nancy draws on Heidegger's theory that *Dasein* is the kind of being who has concern for Being itself and, by extension, for other *Dasein*, who are also concerned with Being (Heidegger 1996, §142). Nancy takes from Heidegger this idea that relation among people involves concern, which is not a particular affect, such as compassion, but rather an integral part of the intelligibility of the world.

I will briefly ground Nancy's approach in the example of Canadian identity to concretize (to a degree) his somewhat abstract claims. As I intimated at the beginning of this inquiry, it is impossible to determine what marks Canadians as a group in a way that is representative of all Canadians or completely true of any single one. The identity, "Canadian," is symbolic, and, to the extent that it captures lived experiences of Canadians, it is an aggregate of parts of many different people's experiences based on family resemblances across many more particular symbolic identities. For example, Canadians are stereotypically polite, which is not a homogeneous characteristic, but rather an emergent

practice and cultural impression, which reinforces itself through discourse and myth.

Nancy points out that the symbolic character of a group identity is not the basis on which a group comes to exist. He argues that, in fact, the community is constitutively plural and that its integration of people is nothing more than the interpersonal associations among people that form networks of continual interaction. Nancy's thought accounts for the production of national identity through a process that does not depend on essential homogeneity across group members.

Nancy's approach to interrelationality means that attention to the singular necessitates attention to the multiple relations constitutive of this singularity. Furthermore, the singularity of each person and each relation means that no collective stands as a self-enclosed and homogeneous entity; hence, the singularity of each person and of the set of relations that constitute an individual necessitates the plurality of any group of people, where "plurality" means that multiple relations are irreducible to one identity. In his treatise *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy explains the unreality of any totality outside relation. He says, "Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* in this singularly plural coexistence" (2000, 3). The formulation, "singularly plural coexistence," plays on the exposition of interrelationality as a conjunction of singularities and plurality. Following on this tenant, Nancy's theory of an "inoperative community" aspires to a form of being-together that does not give way to an idea of commonality, or unity.

Nancy warns against immanentism in all its varied forms. Looking at communitarian political formations, specifically those that propose communism, Nancy theorizes the goal of a

community that founds itself in its own essence—“the goal of a *human* community... the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing this essence *as community*” (1991, 2). In Nancy’s example of communist struggle, the valuation of labour acts as a conductor for the community’s desire to found itself in nothing but itself and to thereby prove that its existence is naturally, or divinely, justified. I equate natural and divine justification in this context, because Nancy is analyzing the way that a myth of any kind lends the feeling of absolute truth to the community. He writes that community produces its own essence by requiring that individual members produce this essence:

Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called ‘totalitarianism,’ but it might be better named ‘immanentism,’ as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets. (1991, 3)

Nancy’s critique of “immanentism,” referring, for instance, to the immanence of an essence of Mankind in all humans, is a logical one as well as an ethical one. He argues that it is impossible to think of community as a relational experience when the basis for thinking it is absolute man, in the sense of the individual and of the essence of mankind (1991, 3). Here Nancy speaks of “man,” which is a reference to the historical construction of Western authority as the exclusive purview of men. He is critical of the West’s myth of itself, as I will describe further on, but any critique of the androcentrism of the Western subject is limited to this arguably critical reference to the gendered male subject. Nancy makes the case that immanentism, as a tendency, exists to varying degrees in all groups, but that does not prove that it should be tolerated. Immanentism is the pervasive form of what is called ‘totalitarianism,’ and totalitarian regimes are a particular case in which immanentism is most violently demonstrable (1991, 3). The political system in any given case

presumably affects the shape and the degree that immanentism takes, but, crucially for Nancy, no political system guarantees that immanentism will be kept in check. Nancy thus proposes a different form of opposition to totalitarianism, which I will explain further on, rather than arguing for the superiority of a particular political system.

Nancy's insight that immanentism is not only present in fervent nationalists helps to further clarify problems with Kristeva's theory of national identity. As I described in Chapter two, Kristeva defended the cosmopolitan nation based on the ideal of the universality of mankind, with reference to Montesquieu's *esprit général* (1993, 28). She elevated it in contradistinction to the *Volksggeist*, theorized by Herder, which helped to intellectually pave the way for the rise of Nazism (1993, 53–54). Resonant with Kristeva's rejection of the *Volksggeist*, Nancy criticizes Herder in terms of immanentism (1991, 3). Both Kristeva and Nancy understand the political appeal to a natural society as underlying the totalitarian project. However, Nancy does not draw the firm line that Kristeva asserts between the race-derived nationalism of the *Volksggeist* and other forms of national unity. Asserting that one's own community is based on any universal right constitutes immanentism, which means that the *esprit général*, though it does not make essentialist claims based on race, still inevitably leads to the assertion of the community in terms of an absolute, an essence that is "set to work" in the community's members (1991, 3). As I suggested in Chapter two, the cosmopolitan nation Kristeva proposes undermines its own goal of inclusivity by asserting as universal what is still historically particular.

Nancy's warnings about the immanentist approach to group identity lead directly to his critique of appeals to French identity. In his recent publication, *Identity: Fragments, frankness*, Nancy reflects on the paradoxes and dangers of the public debate launched by French President Nicolas

Sarkozy about “French identity.” Nancy is initially critical of the debate on two counts. One is that the concepts the debate deploys seem to him to have no readily available and widely agreed upon meaning that would permit a debate to begin as if they did (Nancy, 2015, 1). Nancy’s second objection is even more telling of his theoretical approach. He argues that national identity is not in need of special rehabilitation as Sarkozy claims. He says, “It is not ‘national identity’—whether French or not—that is threatened by other identities, but all ‘identities’ that are undergoing a general disidentification of what we used to call ‘civilization’” (2015, 4). At first glance, Nancy’s claim seems to be making the fairly obvious point that, in a world where people are increasingly mobile, immigration does not undermine nationalism so much as all identities are in a state of flux. On closer inspection, Nancy’s takes a more profound step away from the terms of a debate on national identity and immigration. For one thing, both “national identity” and “identities” are in scare quotes here, which alerts the reader to Nancy’s skepticism about the viability of these terms. Secondly and even more radically, Nancy says that all “identities” are withdrawing from understanding themselves as sites of teleological historic progress, that is “what we used to call ‘civilization’” (2015, 4). Nancy’s criticism of the debate about French identity shows how he shifts the terms of political theory by returning to their effaced ontological grounding.

Nancy makes his argument about the destabilization of all “identities” while rejecting two opposing political deployments of the term “identity.” In doing so, he complicates the definition of “identity” in a productive way for my research question. He refers to the common assertion in France that people who are unemployed are so because of cultural factors, for example, that immigrants are lazy—a belief that belongs to xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants. This assertion makes identity central to questions of employment, leaving aside any attention to

material economic conditions. Nancy points out that unemployment is empirically a product of the economic system, not one of “cultures,” “mentalities,” or “racial stereotypes” (2015, 4). Nancy challenges both the left and right wing uses of “identity” in France that frame the debate over whether immigrants are deserving of support or are instead responsible for making their own way. He faults the Right wing for mistakenly believing that immigrants fail to work because they resist assimilation, when actually social and economic structures are failing to include immigrants. Meanwhile, he summarizes the Left’s position: “the conditions they [immigrants] are faced with do not even allow them to claim that [national] identity” (2015, 3). With respect to this left wing assertion, Nancy allows that people whose livelihood and well-being are perpetually vulnerable are unable “to consider a horizon of ‘identity,’ even when one desires precisely that” (2015, 3). However, he complicates the left wing deployment of “identity” by expanding “identity” away from being defined as a “horizon.” Identity can instead refer to the very conditions that exclude a person from the dominant group identity. The identity of a community that does not feel welcome can be a refuge and a well of emotional strength. As Nancy writes, “It is thus normal that one finds refuge in small separated identities, overidentified through their separation, hardened, and exacerbated” (2015, 3). I would add that the complexity of identity is such that one can have an intermixture of horizon identity and refuge identity—as, for example, a white feminist woman in the 1960s United States might have had with relation, on the one hand, to the freedoms and privileges of being a white American, and, on the other hand, to being an outspoken woman. Nancy’s point here is highly valuable for an understanding of uneven historical constructions of identity. While an identity that expands all around oneself like a horizon is impossible for a person who has no socioeconomic security, ethnic or cultural identity can act as a haven to insulate a

person from a hostile society. Nancy's distinction goes some way toward defining the difference between what I call "dominant group identity" and those identities that are not dominant.

Kristeva arguably did not take into account the difference between experiences of identity as "horizon" for those who are accepted and as "refuge" for those who are marginalized in society (Nancy, 2015, 3). By the same token, Kristeva says that she chooses to be cosmopolitan, which clearly speaks to her experience of identity as "horizon," a background against which to make sense of an expansive world, rather than a haven of identity from a hostile environment (1993, 15-16). Experiencing one's identity as a horizon makes it possible to adopt a new identity without risking something indispensable. Again, it seems Kristeva does not account for the effects of socioeconomic instability, which would limit the conditions in which choosing one's identity might be possible.

Nancy also complements Kristeva's work with respect to language's influences on subject formation. A more thorough comparison would be necessary to explore the specifics of the relationship between the two theories. For the purposes of this thesis, I point to the fact that Nancy's use of deconstruction does not, as Kristeva's does, make language into a self-ordering stratum of psychic and social life. Kristeva describes a structure whereby the social is ordered through language and it, in turn, orders the individual's drives, which make up the origin of signification (meaning) that gives signification (speech, writing) its power. Kristeva proposes that poetic language offers ways of disrupting the rigidity of symbolic ordering, because art emerges out of the excess of drives, *jouissance*, not bound by the symbolic ordering (1984, 79). Her thesis about poetic language deserves more consideration, but I contend that it leaves the continual discursive construction of group identity out of the picture.

Nancy, by contrast, takes on the character of group identity that inheres in myths, rather than only analyzing language itself. In doing so, he explains the way that language, in its operations as myth, affects individuals continuously. In a parallel to the absolute goal that Nancy argues every community gives itself, the myth is necessary to the existence of community. Nancy says that myth is what allows members of a community to recognize one another and to understand each other's practices as those of people who share in something (1991, 50). The reason myth is fundamental to communication is that it holds the community's sphere of possibilities in its signifying possibilities. Nancy writes, "Myth works out the shares and divisions that distribute a community and distinguish it for itself, articulating it within itself" (1991, 50). That is, myth takes the complex social network of the community and turns it into a narrative, though not a solid, unchanging one, where the goal of the community is shown to coincide with the conditions of the community's formation. Or, to put it more simply, myth is the crux of the community's capacity to understand itself as an endeavor to create the absolute, where the "absolute" is actually mythical and not objective.

Since myth establishes the absolute that the community aims at, myth also delimits the space of representation such that the absolute conditions many of the possibilities of speech and closes off others. Nancy writes, "Myth is the opening of a mouth immediately adequate to the closure of a universe" (1991, 50). Myth allows the communication of people to attain to the level of shared purpose, context, and discourse, because myth also restricts the field of possible representation to one where the discursive and conceptual norms are commonly held and asserted as ultimate truth. Myth is the form of discourse that binds individuals to their group identity by ensuring that all their communication circulates within common tropes belonging to the

community.

In conjunction with Nancy's deconstruction of the absolute that community attempts to hold onto, his explanation of myth as an articulation of community's self-ideation allows for his insights about absolutes and those about myth to come together. In particular, his insight that group identity does not actually represent the subjective identities of all group members is strengthened by his discussion of myth's "tautegorical" and also imaginary character (1991, 49; 52). The term "tautegorical" is a blend of allegorical and tautological, referring to the way that myth speaks only of itself (1991, 49). Nancy argues that myths—in the sense of the stories called myths—are not *in themselves* the myth. Instead, the ideas that myths convey are unspoken and that is why they constitute myths.<sup>22</sup> Nancy says, somewhat enigmatically, "to speak of myth has only ever been to speak of its absence. And the word 'myth' itself designates the absence of what it names" (1991, 52). In psychoanalytic terms, I liken the "absence" of myth to a kind of subconscious mythic world that informs and animates the discourse of myths. The absence of the myth from the discourse of myths may account in Nancy's work for the way that a group identity affects individuals regardless of their conscious identification with it. That is, since the myth figures as absent in all discourse of myths, the community that the myth speaks to does not need to name the myth as such in order to persuade people of their group identity. It is only by way of suggestion that people take up the group identity based on the unspoken myth.

Nancy theorizes that myth is not like other forms of communication because it does not *represent* at all. In terms of group identity, again, the "tautegorical" character of myth resonates with group identity's indirect communicability among members of the group. Nancy explains that myth

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<sup>22</sup> When Nancy discusses "myth," he is conceptually very close to the account of ideology put forward by Laclau and Mouffe, among others. The ideology critique is a prominent approach to the problem of dominant group identity, but separate from the psychoanalytic one I am tracing.

belongs to a pretheoretical space of communication. That is, generally, no one needs to learn the explicit meaning or content of myth in order for it to have already permeated their worldview.

As Schelling put it, myth is 'tautegorical' (borrowing the word from Coleridge) and not 'allegorical': that is, it says nothing other than itself and is produced in consciousness by the same process that, in nature, produces the forces that myth represents... Myth is nature communicating itself to man, both immediately—because it communicates *itself*—and in a mediated way—because it communicates (it speaks). (1991, 49)

In this passage, Nancy underlines the sense in which myth is non-representative. That is, it does not seek to show something about something; instead it naturalizes itself, giving the world sense that makes the world reflect the myth. It is debatable whether there is a transcendent dimension to Nancy's theory of myth.<sup>23</sup>

In psychoanalytic terms again, the way that myth is immediate and mediated communication, as Nancy says in this passage, suggests that it crosses a threshold between the unconscious and the conscious. If myth is partly the immediate communication of nature to man, what else is that besides, in each person's case, the universe constructed by the unconscious, or the "closure of a universe" by the pretheoretical "opening of a mouth" (1991, 50). Considering the formation of group identity in light of Nancy's theory of myth further animates the theory that group identity could be communicated across all members of a group without ever being articulated as such in discourse. When Nancy says myth mediates nature, I take him to mean that nature is only ever intelligible by way of myth. In terms of group identity, this is to say that the discursive construction of community by myth relies on a rarefied system of ideas that do not *say* the myth but *point* to it 'naturally' and automatically. Of course, group identity is not just its

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<sup>23</sup> Thinkers like Nancy Fraser argue that Nancy's attention to ontology is irresponsible and diverts theory from practical interests in politics, as in the case of his distinction between "the political" on one hand and "politics" on the other. Ian James responds to such criticisms in his essay, "On Interrupted Myth" (2006).

subconscious structure based in myth; it also takes on recognizable form that is not mythic, but these non-mythic aspects of community are relational and do not in and of themselves produce a homogenous symbolic group identity.

Myth does characteristically give rise to immanentist views of a community. One could surmise as much from the fact that myth makes the community possible by way of an absolute goal, i.e. something that makes the community appear necessary, or essential (1991, 50). Nancy attributes the desire for immanence to the historical progress narrative the West made out of itself:

Comprised within the very idea of myth is what one might call the entire hallucination, or the entire imposture, of the self-consciousness of a modern world that has exhausted itself in the fabulous representation of its own power. Concentrated within the idea of myth is perhaps the entire pretension on the part of the West to appropriate its own origin, or to take away its secret, so that it can at last identify itself, absolutely around its own pronouncement and its own birth. (1991, 46)

Nancy is unmasking the imposter that is post-industrial modernity, with its myth of progress toward the end of history when democracy has already established itself as the apex of civilization's project. I refer to the thesis put forward by Francis Fukuyama in "The End of History?" written in 1989. Though Fukuyama later reversed his position, the American zeitgeist continues to be animated by the notion that it should democratize the rest of the world in order to complete its goal of liberty for all.

The idea of myth has a different force here than myth itself, which I have interpreted, in a different theoretical framework than Nancy's, as a subconscious ur-myth. Myth itself leads to the case of the Western myth of progress, as one example of the many myths of different peoples. The Western progress myth is Nancy's exemplar of the myth where origin figures as its absolute goal. This kind of myth founds the community with

reference to an absolute purpose, such as the American people espousing “liberty and justice for all.” It follows that various countries that share in the history of the Western progress myth will be likely to have varying levels of immanentism, since taking an origin as the community’s absolute calls for the continuous production of this absolute.

It is no coincidence that Nancy’s approach to the myth yields both a critique of the Western progress narrative and a way of explaining group identity that links political structure to the pre-theoretical force of group identity. Nancy’s theory of myth explains how people in a community will believe in the unity of their group, even though the formation of the group identity does not begin with an overarching articulation of essential commonality. Instead group identity is a discursive product of the myth that already inheres in the community’s self-understanding. The articulation of group identity, then, need not explicitly make reference to the preexisting myth in order to nonetheless indirectly build on the myth, which means that group identity can be deployed with relative ease and can be defined in politically expedient ways (without the institutions and individuals involved even being conscious of what the underlying myth is). Nancy has produced a coherent and more complex theory of ideology, one that provides for the necessity of myth without venerating it as a privileged site of truth.

Given the symbolic nature of group identity in Nancy’s account, one might expect him to not grant legitimacy to the idea of group identity at all. However, Nancy demonstrates constant attention to the real effects that group identity has. Even though group identity does not represent a prior likeness of all the members of the group, it takes on the force of a set of real commonalities and it produces part of the character of group life. Nancy’s two perspectives on group identity (the interrelational sharing of lived

experience on one hand and the symbolic identity aspiring to an absolute on the other) correlate to two types of identity. He explains with reference to the European nation-state the way that national identity refers at the same time to subjective experience of relation and to a symbolic identity:

There is no doubt that the European invention of the nation-state has blurred at least two types of identity: that of the people as I have described it, which is that of the identity that makes itself by searching for itself and inventing itself, and that of an entirely different order—the identity of the recognizable or identifiable [*repérable*]. We have a name for this: civil status. (2015, 35)

The community's identity as self-constituting and in process can encompass the plurality of the group, because it does not apply any homogeneous label. On the other hand, the identity that is supposedly representative of the group is the one that is at the same time homogeneous and given an official mandate. In the case of national identity, citizens thus become knowable on the basis of their presentation of characteristics that national institutions recognize (2015, 35). I contend that the civil status of a subject thus depends on the extent to which their identity can be made to cohere in the symbolic group identity.

At the same time, Nancy's theory allows that this symbolic identity does not totally determine the interactions among people, since the identity that is recognizable, which underlies the nation's institutional and juridical norms, does not coincide with the interrelational dynamics of community and their way of constituting a stable social milieu. Nancy warns against creating a dichotomy between the real and the imaginary group identity. History, he says, does lead to a relatively stable character of French people, which is to say that the imaginary French identity is objectively real to an extent. The specific subjective identities of French citizens have been constituted in part by a common national context. At the same time, France encompasses a vast number of different historical and cultural conditions that cannot be flattened out into one

identity. Therefore, the stereotypical national identity and the subjective identities of all the nation's people overlap but are never equivalent to one another (Nancy, 2015, 36). There is an intimate relation between what the recognizable identity is and the subjective identities that partially adhere to it. The connection can be explained with reference to the tendencies of myth that Nancy illuminates. Myth enables the community to share their common space of representation, and it is the precondition of any recognizable symbolic identity. Therefore, the subjective experience of belonging to a community is tied at every point to the unspoken mythic narrative of the recognizable identity. Furthermore, the mythical group identity structures the subjective identities through the myth's infinite manifestations in discourse. Therefore, the division between the subjective and what is recognizable will always break down in the simultaneous experience of the two.

In his recent work, *The Truth of Democracy*, Nancy asserts that European politics has to actively suppress the fact that "the political" cannot establish its own metaphysical or universal ground. He writes,

The only question posed by what is today called the 'crisis,' 'eclipse,' or 'paralysis' of politics is thus, in the end, that of man's self-sufficiency and/or of the nature that is within him or that comes about through him. It is precisely this self-sufficiency that is being shown to be more and more inconsistent with each passing day. (2010, 48)

In other words, the metaphysics of the subject (i.e. that the subject is self-sufficient) is no longer an adequate answer to the experience of living in the world. Again I interpret Nancy's use of the term "man" to connote a Western myth of personhood that was historically gendered as male. That would be one of the many false universals that now show themselves to be unstable. This critique resonates with Nancy's claim that, "all 'identities' ... are undergoing a general disidentification of what we used to call 'civilization'" (2015, 4). The two assertions are parallel, in the sense that the

metaphysical claims, whether it be the grounding of the subject or the progress of history, cannot hold now that greater decentralization, greater globalization, and all associated conditions have made it obsolete.

In this historical moment when politics seems to be at risk because ontological categories show themselves to be unstable, it is a source of understandable consternation that Nancy's work challenges the appeal to any universal ideal as an ontological grounding. Nancy commentator Ian James discusses Nancy's approach to "the political" at length in *The Fragmentary Demand: An introduction to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. Though it is impossible here to present the philosophical background at James's disposal, his claim that deconstruction opens onto a yet undetermined future is an important rebuttal of the accusation that deconstruction is politically toothless. He writes,

The political dimension of philosophical practice, then, is not about producing a project on the basis of theoretical reflections on, or representations of, the world; it is rather about releasing the possible unthought from that which has traditionally or already been thought, releasing future possibilities from the limit points of what we think we know about the past and the present.

In Nancy's theory of group identity, there is no proposal for systematic organization of group life or for overthrowing the political institutions' discourse of dominant identity. His critique of the political debate about French identity does not suggest another identity that would serve people better than the national French identity to which President Sarkozy appealed in 2009. Any proposal for a new common identity would carry the same structural problem as that of France's national identity. As Ana Luszczynska writes while explaining Nancy's key argument that individuals are relational from the first, rather than atomized, "The community of humanism has as its condition of possibility (the individual) that which makes all connections or relations

impossible” (2005, 170). Even the strategy of broadening a community to the identity of all humans maintains the thought systems that group identity depends on, one of these being the appeal to an absolute goal or value. The alternative that deconstruction offers is that of opening up thought systems that have predetermined the possibilities available for the future (Derrida 1992, 78). Though Nancy does not venture this far, in the case of group identity, political education along deconstructionist lines might hypothetically give rise to a greater openness of a group’s identity to difference.

James also helps to account for the political importance of deconstruction’s rejection of even its own language’s substantiality. Nancy’s resistance to granting representation the authority it always asserts for itself, e.g. the political authority giving itself legitimacy on the grounds of democracy, is characteristic of deconstructionist work, as James points out (2006, 156). James comments on Christopher Fynsk’s paper for the “Fins de l’homme” colloquium (the colloquium in July 1980 which spurred Nancy, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, to establish the “Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique”) (James, 2006, 155). James summarizes one of Fynsk’s points, that the metaphysical grounding of any human construct finds ways to suppress the fact that people can never appropriate their own grounds. This tenet is very close to Nancy’s argument, which I cited earlier, that myth accounts for the West’s belief that it can ground itself in its own origins (James, 2006, 156; Nancy, 1991, 46).

In keeping with this rejection of the ontological underpinnings of all truth claims and any universal or absolute goal, Nancy explains in *The Truth of Democracy* that the rule of law can never be articulated such that all conflicts are treated in a way that respects the multiplicity of circumstances and people. He says,

The polis represented itself simultaneously as a given common measure, or as the self-donation of a common measure, *and* as an indefinite instability and a permanent reelaboration (even if the manifestations of this are rather rare and episodic) of the measure of the incommensurable... The measure has a name: justice. (2010, 49)

The inconsistency of the self-sufficiency of man runs parallel to the instability of the traditional metaphysically grounded political order. For Nancy, the claim that the nation-state is the de facto arbiter of valuation in its totality no longer holds sway in the popular imagination. The “incommensurate order,” meaning those things that challenge political regulation, used to be held in relation to the nation-state by the teachings of religion, Nancy says (2010, 18). Now however, “today’s public spirit or mindset no longer considers [the incommensurable order] divine, sacred, or inspired but which maintains its separation no less (through, as we said, art, love, thought, and so on)” (2010, 18). Nancy argues that some things are irreducibly singular, which structurally sets them apart from the nation, and the nation does not have the power to arbitrate such a plurality of singularities on the basis of its supposedly universal principles, regardless of which principles it adopts. In other words, the law is by nature an approximation, since the world that law measures according to the particular principles of the society’s juridical tracts is not made of the kind of uniformity that the principles pretend it is.

There are a couple noteworthy objections to Nancy’s political thought in general. The first is that law and justice may only ever be approximate but are fundamental to the wellbeing of the vast majority of people today, and are still the best recourse for people who are marginalized and oppressed. To this, Nancy would reply that these names (“law” and “justice”) will inevitably remain important, but the challenge today is to refrain from closing their meaning in an attempt to ground them in universal truth. Such an overdetermination of the values that pervade modern nation-states is a sure way to refuse plurality and difference. Nancy writes,

The words *equality* and *freedom* are but problematic names, nonsaturated by signification, under which it is a matter of keeping open (dare one say wide open?) the exigency of *not* accomplishing an essence or an end of the incommensurable, and *yet*, and *precisely*, of sustaining its (im)possibility: the exigency to regulate power—the force that must sustain this nonorganic nonunity—according to an incommensurable ‘justice.’ (2010, 18)

Nancy advocates holding open the tension between the incommensurable and the measures of aspirations toward equality, freedom, and justice. It is necessary to political life that the political institutions subordinate their power to values they hold, chiefly justice. Yet, as Nancy points out, this term, “justice,” is always indeterminate unless the discourse of justice becomes particularized and determinate through institutional rigidity. Nancy does not propose discarding all names for indeterminate values, but striving to use them with the humility of indeterminacy. For instance, the particular determinations of “equality” in Canadian gender relations can never be the last word on what gender equality means.

The second objection is that Nancy’s proposal is utopian. In Nancy’s own estimation, the absolute singularity of each person makes the demand for openness in political ideals a “reality principle,” which is a psychoanalytic term that refers to the way material conditions force the psyche to defer gratification of its id (1991, 36). Nancy writes,

The affirmation of incommensurable value can seem piously idealistic. It must be heard, however, as a reality principle: it does not lend itself to reverie and it does not propose a utopia, and not even a regulative idea; it announces that it is from this absolute valuing that one must begin. Never from an ‘it’s all the same,’ ‘it all has the same value [*tout se vaut*]’—men, cultures, words, beliefs—but always from a ‘nothing’s the same,’ ‘nothing is equivalent to anything else [*rien ne s’équivaut*]’ (except what is open to negotiation, and that can ultimately include everything. (2010, 24–25)

In contrast to the liberal tenet that justice relies on equal treatment of everyone, Nancy asserts that making everyone equal, in the sense of equivalent to one another, does everyone the injustice of

not being understood as a singular person, that is, a person with an infinite capacity for experiencing and engaging with the world.

Nancy's theory of the symbolic national identity that arises from myth adds to the critique of the universal measurement of people. If the national identity belongs on one level to the self-disclosure of a people in myth, then the political institutions of the democratic nation-state will hold values somewhat commensurate with those of the people who belong to the national identity. Even for the people who benefit from belonging to the national identity, the institutional values will not be commensurable with their singular experiences. However, the problem is more stark for people who are excluded from the normative national identity, whether the exclusion is based on race, religion, sexuality, gender identity, country of birth, or any other difference. Being excluded from national identity not only represents a burden of difference, it also means that one experiences a diminished degree of institutional concern for one's worldview, aspirations, challenges, and so forth.

I followed Nancy's theory of the incommensurability of universal justice and particular singularities, because this argument has affinities with Kristeva's proposal that people recognize they are strangers to themselves. The affinities between Nancy and Kristeva open up a direct path to theorizing the formation of dominant group identity. In particular, the affinity between Nancy's political critique of justice and Kristeva's psychoanalytic critique of identity points to the parallel between the use of symbolic identity and absolute values, on one hand, and the use of personal identity and self-sufficiency, on the other. For both Kristeva and Nancy, the individual is not a homogeneous entity. Nancy adds the dimension of deconstructing the common identity of a community. Meanwhile, where Nancy proposes that political institutions resist predetermining the

meaning of the ideals they hold, Kristeva proposes that individuals stop seeking a façade of absolute stability over the self with its motility and internal contestations.

In spite of substantial variance between Nancy's methodology and Kristeva's, a general agreement exists in their critiques of overly determinate identities. Nancy's attention to the conjoined determinateness and plasticity of identity resonates with Kristeva's proposal for national identity to become open to difference. Nancy concludes *Identity* with the idea that, "the true consistency of a subject is the overcoming at every moment of its identifiable identity" (2015, 42). That is, "identity" in the sense of a designation of historical, geographic and political subject position runs counter to the constant change that is integral to the experience of being oneself. Nancy's explanation of identity's construction does not ignore the possibility of choosing a new identity, but it also does not take choice to be an escape from the contingencies of identity, such as one's country of origin. He writes,

Furthermore, the belonging to this original community [the one you're born into] thereby delineates the edges, at least—the more or less proximate and tangible borders—of other communities and the possibility of going from one to the other, perhaps of choosing another one, or several others, or even none. A twofold principle of falling and plasticity: This is how what one calls an 'identity' announces itself. (2015, 22)

Nancy's take on the construction of identity accounts for the dynamics of understanding oneself through the distinctions against people who are different. It also accounts for the way that identity can figure as a horizon, against which a person has certain flexibility within the scope of communities they identify with, although this type of identity experience is only possible once threats to one's identity are removed. The role that identity dynamics play is in creating a kind of architecture out of group identities within which one navigates, occupying multiple group identities that are provided by circumstance and accident. It is this set of dynamics that makes intersectionality an essential aspect of theorizing subjective identity positions. At the same time,

contingencies do not fully predetermine the individual's identity. Rather, one's identity is always in flux at the same time as being constructed by history and context. Kristeva certainly has a similar idea in mind of the fluidity of the self, in contrast to the determinacy of national identity. At the same time, here again Nancy's work serves as a basis for a critique of Kristeva. In making this point about contingency and changeability, Nancy cuts through an insidious assumption that one's national identity can either be fully deterministic (nationalist) or free (cosmopolitan). This assumption is visible in Kristeva's assertion that, "the fact of belonging to a set is a matter of choice," which neglects the importance of historical context for identity (1993, 15-16).

Even though Kristeva understands identity in terms of the determinism-choice dichotomy, her work on the fragmentary subject forcefully rejects determinism. Indeed, her understanding of the instability of the "self" is consistent with her appeal for a national identity that relinquishes its nationalist content in favour of an abstract emancipatory principle. Where Kristeva buttresses inclusivity with an abstract universal principle, Nancy refuses to endorse any universal principle, no matter the level of abstraction. I have already critiqued the weakness of Kristeva's elevation of a French ideal to a position of universality. Nonetheless, I want to argue that the resonance between Kristeva's and Nancy's thought on group identity, with the significant exception of Kristeva's use of French values, illuminates the striking continuity between their disparate objects of analysis (on Kristeva's part, the psychoanalytic process of personal group identity, and on Nancy's part, the discursive and institutional process of symbolic group identity). At the same time, Kristeva does not ignore discourse and institutions, nor does Nancy ignore the unconscious.

Unlike Kristeva, Nancy proposes that politics and law themselves require reflexivity in order to instill openness to difference. Yet, in doing so, Nancy greatly resembles Kristeva when she

proposes psychoanalytic reflexivity in order to give individuals a more circumspect approach to the inclusion of the differences that they find frightening in others. On the basis of Nancy's claims about *the political*, I contend that any set of governmental institutions will favour some people over others, even when the system makes inclusivity one of its principles. It must be because the institutions are shaped by the same myth that makes the dominant group identity appear cohesive, and therefore the institutions will align more closely with the norms of the dominant group. The solution for Nancy is the humility of admitting that the principles a society upholds are not universal, while Kristeva's psychoanalytic reflexivity functions as a corollary at the level of individual openness to difference.

The interconnectedness of the individual with the group accounts for the way that members of a dominant group may no longer experience their selfhood as bound up in a particular cultural identity. The processes that give rise to the group identity also have a hand in the construction of the individual identities, although the experience of selfhood may not appear to the self to be affected by the group identity. Therefore, people who see their identities reflected in the structures all around them are never provoked into seeing their group identity as such. Given that identity is always multivalent, the invisibility of certain aspects of one's identity does not coincide necessarily with other facets being visible. For instance, women in patriarchal societies who belong at the same time to the dominant group are more likely to see the way that their identity as women has shaped their subjective identity, regardless of the invisibility of their dominant group identity.<sup>24</sup> Group identity can figure as a mere background so long as it blends reasonably well into the members' subjective identities. Following the commonsense of the group's

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<sup>24</sup> Hélène Cixous makes the point that women's supposed inferiority in the patriarchal worldview gives women more of a chance to see the construction of gender than it does men (2000, 266; 275).

members, this identity is natural and is available to everyone, unless the group violently excludes them. Not only does it seem as though the dominant group identity should be available to everyone; it seems a sign of moral or rational inferiority not to assimilate. The interconnectedness of Nancy's deconstructive approach to identity and Kristeva's psychoanalytic one makes for a picture of group identity formation that involves layers of psycho-social, symbolic, mythic, and political processes, but at the same times these processes can be said to form one more complex, circuit of networks. Like the dominant group identity itself, these processes can never be adequately represented as a self-enclosed totality. They are the shifting ground of what can be seen only belatedly as a monolithic ideological pattern.

## Conclusion

I have tested a psychoanalytic approach to the problem of dominant group identity's invisibility through the theories of Freud, Kristeva, and Nancy. As a whole, these theories offer many distinctive insights into dominant group identity, especially, following Nancy, the way that this identity is imaginary but nonetheless shapes subjective identities to the point of reproducing the imaginary and reinforcing the normative identity. While many of the insights gleaned here have been articulated in various ways by other theorists, the psychoanalytic approach is interesting in that it can speak to the processes of subject formation, and the way that this is shaped through group dynamics, discourse, and political and judicial institutions.

The limitations of Freud's *Group Psychology* and of Kristeva's *Nations without Nationalism* are important indicators of the problems with putting psychoanalysis to use as an explanation of dominant group identity. Freud's androcentrism, the Western progress narrative that underlies his phylogeny, and Kristeva's exclusion of the Muslim veil are counterproductive for the development of a politics of inclusivity and openness. I have argued that these limitations are related in various ways to the underlying problem that I sought to address: the invisibility of dominant group identity. While undercutting the Enlightenment view of the rational, autonomous subject, both Freud and Kristeva have theories that reproduce the idea that modern Western values, informed by the values of the Enlightenment, are universal rather than particular. The appearance of universality is problematic in that it makes one group of people's values appear neutral to them, while others' values are challenged or criticized.

A psychoanalytic approach that overcomes these limitations can be derived using Nancy's philosophy. The multifaceted network of social, political, psychic, and discursive mechanisms that

lead to a group identity can be traced in tandem if the theory at issue understands these various different mechanisms as interrelated from the most preliminary stages of identity formation. While psychoanalysis holds tools that make such analysis possible, it needs to be supplemented with analysis at the level of politics and institutions if it is to have purchase on problems of political division.

I wanted to undertake this psychoanalytic approach to dominant group identity because I was interested in psychoanalysis' potential to be critically rigorous and therapeutic simultaneously—a combination that seemed to me particularly needed when it comes to tortured questions of identity, discrimination, and restitution. I expected that I would have difficulty integrating Freudian theory into my approach because of the androcentrism of psychoanalytic theories like the Oedipus complex and its resolution in the super-ego. Instead, I found that, while the androcentrism of Freud's thought was challenging to contend with, the more immediate problem with respect to a psychoanalytic theory of the invisibility of dominant group identity was that parts of Freud's works justify a Western narrative of progress. I was expecting Kristeva to be a corrective to Freud's androcentrism, but, while reading the problematic treatment of the Muslim veil in Kristeva's later works, and her use of humanist language, I determined that Kristeva reiterated a Western progress narrative in a particular way with the idea that modern Europe was more advanced than Muslim newcomers.

While Freud and Kristeva both had limitations in terms of the openness of their own theories to different identities, the explanations of group identity that emerged from analyzing them were illuminating, although not entirely unique to a psychoanalytic treatment of the topic. I was interested in putting forward Kristeva's proposal that people learn to be reflexive about their

own internal strangeness, as this seemed like a possible solution to the impasses of resentment. Once I admitted a critique of Kristeva's treatment of the Muslim veil into the analysis, I came to the conclusions that her proposal's effectiveness was limited. As I argued in my introduction, Barbara Arneil's proposal diagnosed the problem of normative values in liberal societies, but she did not extend the problem into the institutional level. She argues, "We must recognize the ways in which liberalism and the norms that underpin it, in both the classical liberal and the multicultural liberal forms, can serve to extinguish or severely constrain the diversity of cultural expression through the power of cultural colonization" (2007, 66). By the same token, Kristeva's proposal, though articulated in terms of the psyche of the individual subject, also neglects the level of institutional normativity that would persist in spite of any reflexivity about liberal norms and reproduce these norms even in people who are learning to be reflexive.

I expected Nancy's deconstruction of national identity and community to complicate the psychoanalytic approach to group identity, which it did. Nancy not only augmented the analysis of group identity's circulation through discourse; he also articulated the need to critique legal and governmental institutions and their deployment of normative values. At the same time, Nancy's argument that myth is what founds a community showed itself to have a double meaning. Going into my reading, I believed that this argument pointed to the need to deconstruct such myths in order to destabilize the dominant group identity. However, Nancy's argument also puts forward myth as a necessary precondition of understanding one's social context and, by extension, oneself. In this light, rejecting all myths would be impossible. Rather, for Nancy, the community that emerges on the basis of myth needs to hold together the tension of having a common sphere of possibilities and opening this sphere of possibilities to questioning and change. To encourage this

type of openness, a deconstructed psychoanalysis would draw attention to the unconscious passions that make a group assert its rightness, and would encourage the recognition that these passions are active and inevitable, while acknowledging them makes it possible to question the rightness of one's own group vis-à-vis other groups.

An application of this deconstructed psychoanalysis would complement the existing research areas that seek solutions to problems dealing with identity politics, cultural difference, and post-liberal democracies. In particular, where liberal theory views the goals of gender equality and cultural openness as coming into tension with each other, a psychoanalytic approach can show that the “domination/exclusion fantasy” is a common one, though differently experienced by different people (Kristeva, 1991, 24). This common pattern points to the possibility of more intersectional approaches than a divided identity politics, on the basis that identity groups might come to know each other as similarly excluded by a dominant group, or on the basis that identity groups may recognize the way in which they are dominant relative to others. For example, intersectional feminism could test this approach as a way of encouraging the recognition of white privilege in many non-profit organizations and in universities. By framing the problem of inclusion in terms of the dominant group's self-assertion as neutral, there is less of a tendency to perceive the marginalized viewpoint as a threat, as Arneil pointed out, which could encourage more openness in one-on-one or small group conversations (2007, 64).

In this thesis, I argued that any claim to universality carried the danger of asserting cultural supremacy and denying contestation. However, given Nancy's account of myth, whereby the foundational character of myth is inevitable, taking particulars to be universal might also be inevitable. Then the question becomes how to treat these universals as meaningful, but give

different values and claims the public space necessary to make debate meaningful. It may seem equally impossible to put this difficult demand into practice. There are limitations to translating the theories I have tested into any practical action. One significant limitation is that it is difficult to be theoretically oriented in this way while explicating particular instances of exclusion. The theory should not, on the other hand, be seen as a logic that applies evenly or homogeneously in diverse instances.

The goals of my research also demand further deliberation. I argued that liberal values are not universal, but constituted through particular historical processes that have material and symbolic implications for the people caught up in them. The present globalized context is one marked by neocolonial systems, and the influence of Enlightenment ideals and modern liberal values has reached all over the world. There can be no return to a pre-colonial era where the disparate and diverse cultures of the world are untouched by colonial violence, or European thought. The challenge, then, is to ascertain how liberal thought might change if it became more cognizant of the historical context of its dominance and prevalence. Psychoanalytic tools might be helpful in describing the affects and dynamics that make a dominant group adopt the position of apparent neutrality, but other kinds of intervention will be necessary if liberal thought is to become structurally open to difference.

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