

Liberating Medusa: Strategies of Accommodation and
The Elasticity of Culture

by

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**WE KNOW THAT ACTS OF RECOGNITION, AND THE CIVIL APPARATUS OF
SUCH RECOGNITION, CAN SOMETIMES OSSIFY THE IDENTITIES THAT
ARE THEIR OBJECT. BECAUSE HERE A GAZE CAN TURN TO STONE, WE
CAN CALL THIS THE MEDUSA SYNDROME.**

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (110)

INTRODUCTION

As I waited among the crowds in the dust filled bus depot, my gaze settled with astonishment upon a man standing at the far end of the station. I had looked up from my book with interest upon hearing another distinctly American voice in this decidedly foreign place. The cadence of his speech, his boisterousness, promised of a familiarity that I yearned for while sitting alone among strangers. When I lifted my eyes, I was overcome by a new intrigue as I scanned an African-American man's knitted head covering, bright robes, and gold Star of David chain around his neck. I could not help but watch him while he conversed easily with his neighbors, piquing their interest with his flamboyant garb as much as my own.

I had been alternately reading and worrying as I waited hour upon hour for my bus from Accra, Ghana's capital, to Cape Coast, where I would embark upon my independent research project for the final six weeks of my semester abroad in the fall of 2006. After I obtained a ticket, found a spot to lay down my backpack, and commenced waiting, my mind flooded with the precariousness of my proposed plan of study. I had constructed an entire month-long project surrounding Hebraic identity in Ghana based on conversations with a handful of individuals about the relationship between Ghanaian peoples, such as the Ashanti and Ewe, and the Lost Tribes of Israel. While I substantiated some of these myths in the history of trading routes between the Middle East and West Africa, I couldn't help but wonder if I had simply made up the continued relevance of Israelite identity in Ghana. I had originally intended on studying abroad in Israel, when the sudden eruption of violence in the

Middle East that summer forced me to change my plans. Now, as I hoped to engage questions of Jewish identity, I feared that I had forced my interests upon the country in which I now found myself.

My project largely depended upon the openness and generosity of one individual, Rabbi Kohain N. Halevi, whom I had met only once. When I first found out that we would be meeting a rabbi for a lecture, I pressed my group leader for information about him. He told me that Rabbi Halevi was an African-American, and had been living in Ghana for more than 15 years. My instructor was unsure of the Rabbi's specific beliefs or practices, but suggested that he was closely affiliated with Judaism. Before meeting Rabbi Halevi at the lecture, I researched his background on the Internet, and came across several articles about "Hebrew Israelites" and "Black Jews" that informed me of an expansive, and contentious history concerning the cross roads between African-American religion and the Old Testament.

I learned from this early research that Hebrew Israelite identity originated in the United States as early as the late nineteenth century, and denoted individuals of African descent who identified as the direct descendants of the biblical Israelites. Until the middle of the twentieth century, the majority of African-Americans defined themselves as "Black Jews," attempting to couch their movement within mainstream Judaism. When white Jews repeatedly rejected the claims of Black Jews, many sects repudiated any association with Judaism, and defined themselves as Hebrew Israelites. While I initially believed the Hebrew Israelites to be a single community representing a coherent identity, I soon learned through additional research and

interviews that multiple religious and nationalistic sects within the African-American community utilized the term, including Christian, Muslim, and Rastafarian sects. In Cape Coast alone, I interviewed members and observed rituals within two separate Hebrew Israelite populations, the *HaShuva* Mission, led by Rabbi Halevi, and the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC), a satellite community of the most well known Israelite group, now centered in Dimona, Israel. During the past four decades, this group has demanded full citizenship in Israel under the Law of Return, established in 1950. As descendants of the biblical Israelites, the AHIC argued that its members deserve full membership in the state. I will discuss the experiences of this latter group, distinctively referred to as the “Black Hebrews,” in great detail in the second half of my thesis.

Following Rabbi Halevi’s lecture, I approached him to explain my interest in Ghanaian identification with biblical Israel, and that I was especially interested in exploring Hebrew Israelite identity in the country. I told him how I had “discovered” this term on the Internet, and wondered if he would advise me? While I did not yet tell him that I was Jewish, I anticipated being welcomed and embraced into the Rabbi’s community once I divulged my own religious identity. In retrospect, I find my absolute naiveté comical and slightly appalling. Here I was, asking a leader of a prominent Hebrew Israelite sect in Ghana if he had ever heard of the Hebrew Israelites, and if he would indulge my curiosity by letting me prod his beliefs and scrutinize his community. While my earnestness enabled me to approach this project

with little inhibition, I now realize how little I understood about the sensitivities my questions provoked. Rabbi Halevi agreed, though he did so reluctantly.

While waiting at the bus depot a day before I was to begin my interviews, I realized how unprepared I was, how little I knew, how difficult it would be to ask such personal questions surrounding faith and identity, race and belonging. Just because I was eager to learn about these communities, did not ensure that they were eager to receive me. Somehow, the flimsiness of my proposal only struck me the morning of my departure, as I sat waiting for my bus indefinitely, imagining the Rabbi's eyes narrow as I pitched my plan to enter somewhat radicalized communities, historically guarded against two populations to which I inherently belonged: white society and mainstream Judaism. Imagining being alone and without purpose in a new city, I began to dread the coming weeks.

The anxiety and uncertainty I felt about my project eased as I interpreted the presence of this man at the bus depot to be a sign of a significant journey to come. On the morning of my departure, I came to understand that "Hebrew Israelite" was not simply a term that I had come across on the Internet, but defined the lives and beliefs of real people who lived in Ghanaian society. While I was daunted by the prospect of walking up to strangers, and boldly asking them to trust me with their unconventional beliefs, I found purpose in what I was attempting to do. I did not make up the presence of Hebraic identity in Ghana, nor did I force my interests onto this society. Rather, I had stumbled upon a group of people who would provoke me to question my own identity, and challenge me to evaluate the way we approach difference in the

twenty-first century. After observing him for hours in the crowded station, I finally met and interviewed Omar in Cape Coast, at the African Hebrew Israelite Community headquarters. He was patient and kind, while I tried not to betray my emotion at seeing him again, knowing that my experiences with his community would stay with me for years to come.

The individuals with whom I spoke offered a starkly different understanding of religion, race, and nationality from my own. While I related to each of these categories as unique and isolated (Jewish, White, American), the Hebrew Israelites expressed the wholeness of their assertions. They were Hebrew Israelites, an identity that subsumed all three categories of religion, race, and nationality. Assuming that my view was representative of mainstream America, I wondered how such an identity could be accommodated by the United States, or other democratic societies that attempted to parse the public and private aspects of our lives. Many individuals suggested that Israelite identity simply could not be accommodated by societies like the United States. Both Rabbi Halevi and members of the AHIC suggested that they left the United States because the nation inherently denied their self-perceptions. Projecting negative images of blackness, and equating Jewishness with whiteness, American society forced Hebrew Israelites to constantly defend the complexity of their identities. While many Hebrew Israelite sects remain in the United States, some groups, including the two communities I studied in Ghana, opted to leave their nation of birth rather than compromise their espoused identities. While I empathized with

their struggles, I resisted the claim that the United States would never be hospitable to people like them, who maintained radically different understandings of the world.

Throughout my experience, I learned to ask questions surrounding issues of belonging. Upon what grounds can groups make identity claims within their host society? According to what principles can states legitimately reject or affirm these claims? Is it possible, or prudent, to categorically dismiss a group's espoused identity? What are the repercussions of either rejecting or accommodating difference? My personal relationships with members of these communities, and the great friendship and warmth I received, prompted me to argue that we should absolutely recognize others as they see themselves. If I say I'm Jewish, and I feel thoroughly Jewish, who are you to tell me that I'm not? If the Hebrew Israelites fervently feel that they are descended from the biblical Israelites, how is it possible to respond, "Well, you're wrong." Why should we care how others define themselves?

Upon returning to Wesleyan the following spring, I sought out new ways to approach these questions. Through conversations with professors and friends, I confronted again and again the obvious response to my impassioned rant, "What do you mean we should recognize people as they see themselves? How would there be any kind of meaningful or organized way of constructing identity groups if the only requisite for entrance was how you *felt*?" Without citizenship laws, nationality is meaningless. Without theological tenets, religion is empty. In defining who *belongs*, it is necessary to determine who *doesn't belong*. While I accepted such reasoning, I still searched for a more optimistic resolution, one that offered room for people who

not only professed unconventional beliefs, but rejected the assumptions of liberal society altogether.

Of course, there are certain kinds of profound difference that ought never to be tolerated. Groups that enact their radical agendas without regard to the rights of others to live without fear, unequivocally transgress both the liberal system of justice and standards of human decency. I certainly do not attempt to argue that groups preaching unrestrained hate, such as white supremacists, ought to be accommodated by the state. When speaking of profound difference in liberal society, I generally refer to nonliberal groups who subscribe to markedly different comprehensive doctrines from their host society, such as some form of traditional religion, but who do not actively seek to dominate other groups.¹

Beginning from questions of this kind of profound difference, the following study attempts to illustrate the evolution of liberal strategies of accommodation, and evaluate whether or not liberalism can adequately address the claims of groups who challenge the system's foundational assumptions, like the Black Hebrews in Dimona. By tracing the development of liberal theory, from the fervent and enduring defense of individually based rights, to the increasing popularity of group-differentiated strategies in the twenty-first century, I hope to evaluate the extent to which liberal theory can adapt to the identity claims of contemporary groups, now couched within an increasingly globalized world. What kinds of differences ought the state tolerate in

¹ While members of my primary case study, the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC), have made hateful remarks concerning white society in the past, I do not believe that their actions can be construed as ones of domination. Because the AHIC emerged in the 1960s, amidst explicit efforts at white domination of blacks, their radicalized rhetoric must be viewed as reactive, rather than racist.

order to preserve the ideals of freedom and equality? What kinds of differences must the state repress, in order to preserve the integrity of society? In attempting to answer these questions, I aim to determine the extent to which liberal theory remains relevant.

In Chapter I, I will discuss the traditional tenets of liberalism, and introduce the classical assumptions concerning the accommodation of difference put forward by John Locke and John Stuart Mill. In promoting ideals such as freedom, equality, and self-determination, these theorists necessarily grapple with the presence of diversity in society. In confronting diversity, however, both theorists remain unequivocally committed to individual rights, and therefore fail to appreciate--or even deny--the significance of groups in political society. Furthermore, Locke's and Mill's staunch defense of the individual promotes a limited and exclusive conception of human flourishing. Rather than accommodate profound difference, both theorists presume that all citizens do or ought to subscribe to the same basic ethical conception of the "good life," which proves their liberalisms to be biased, and suggests the limits of their ability to accommodate deep divides within society.

At the end of the first chapter, I introduce John Rawls' theory of *political* liberalism as an attempt to preserve the classical tenets of liberalism while making space for deep doctrinal difference within public life. While maintaining Locke's and Mill's beliefs of a constrained central authority, Rawls argues that principles of reciprocity and reasonableness lead to political institutions that not only accommodate differences in preference or life style, but also enable profound

doctrinal diversity. As such, Rawls confronts the presence of multiple ideals of human flourishing, and aims to promote a liberal theory that allows them to peacefully coexist.

Despite Rawls' amendment, however, classical liberalism fails to recognize the significance of groups within society, and therefore offers inadequate policy prescriptions. Believing individuals to be the primary agents of political society, Locke, Mill and Rawls argue for a limited state. Because the authority of the state stems from the social contract, or the will of the people, these theorists assert that the state ought to interfere with individuals' affairs only to protect or advance other citizens' civil interests. The state's position is therefore wholly defined by the needs of the presumed free and equal individual, the rational agent.

In Chapter II, I will introduce the theory of multiculturalism as a response to the failures and misconceptions of classical liberalism. In order to enable individuals to become fully defined and rational agents within society, multicultural theorists argue that governments ought to recognize the integral role of relationships and collectives in contributing to individual identity construction. Charles Taylor largely defines this discourse by arguing that humans are not *monological*. Individuals are not born with a particular core identity. Rather, humans create their identities in dialogue with the people and environments within which they live. Furthermore, individuals often approach their peers according to the broad categories they appear to represent. Because some populations may be disproportionately burdened by these identity presumptions (especially minorities and women), Taylor argues that the state

ought to grant group-differentiated rights.² These group-based rights are also appropriate, according to Taylor, for groups burdened by the cultural biases of the liberal state.

I will then outline Will Kymlicka's practical framework for determining the legitimacy of group claims. In order to differentiate between just and unjust demands for group recognition, Kymlicka suggests that states distinguish between "immigrant groups" and "national minorities." By constructing a theory based upon the categorization of difference, however, Kymlicka erects rigid understandings of culture, clearly reflected in his call for cultural "preservation." Employing Kwame Anthony Appiah's critique of group-differentiated rights, I conclude Chapter II with a statement of the competing tensions inherent within liberal doctrine today. While many theorists accept the increasing importance of groups in political society, and therefore aim to create a system that acknowledges collectives as integral political entities, they simultaneously fear that group recognition impedes individual freedoms.

In Chapter III of my thesis, I will introduce the experience of the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC), also referred to throughout my study as the "Black Hebrews," to highlight the inadequacies of the multiculturalist agenda put forward by Kymlicka. By illustrating that the AHIC cannot be accommodated by Kymlicka's multicultural framework, I will argue that contemporary identity claims cannot be evaluated according to rigid schema, or as isolated and contained systems.

² It is important to note, however, that some *majority* populations are also disproportionately burdened by identity presumptions, such as black citizens in South Africa. In order to promote justice, multiculturalists would argue that this population also deserves differential treatment in order to compensate for past injustices and secure equality for present generations.

Rather than exist as being static or immutable, I will utilize this case study to illustrate culture as dynamic and changing. In keeping with Taylor's assertion concerning individuals, cultural groups evolve according to their interactions with their host society. While the AHIC initially spouted aggressive and combative rhetoric in its attempt to be fully recognized in the State of Israel, the group softened its rhetoric over the past two decades. I will argue that the transformation of the AHIC's narrative and cultural identity resulted in part from the State of Israel's policy shift towards the group. After multiple decades in Israel illegally, the AHIC began to receive tokens of recognition, such as work permits and membership in the Israeli Sick Fund. These measures encouraged the Black Hebrews to begin to trust the Israeli government, and enter into negotiations with the Minister of the Interior. Despite their illiberal practices and initial combativeness, the State of Israel eventually granted the AHIC legal residency, with a promise of eventual citizenship.

While groups may not be entitled to state recognition by virtue of their moral claims, strategies of accommodation can create trust and ease resentment within discontent populations, such that members of these groups become engaged and law abiding citizens, able to pursue their civil interests as free and equal members of society. As such, accommodation of illiberal groups may produce results consistent with classical liberal doctrine. This case study suggests that the relationship between groups and their host societies, as well as the content of their claims, may undergo an evolutionary transformation over time. In order to evaluate group claims, therefore,

the state cannot examine only one aspect or manifestation of a particular culture. Rather, the culture must be appraised in light of its past, present and potential future.

Furthermore, by scrutinizing the impulses and motivations that have initiated reconciliation between the AHIC and the State of Israel, I hope to demonstrate that accommodation of difference within liberal societies cannot be examined strictly in reference to liberal theories of justice. Even within liberal societies, states do not weigh group claims exclusively according to what promotes the greatest individual autonomy, or what produces the greatest equality within society. While classically liberal concerns, such as the preservation of free and equal conditions among individual citizens, ought to significantly contribute to a liberal state's accommodation program, it is equally necessary to examine the impact of external considerations on these policies. The strengthening of transnational networks suggests that both states and groups appeal to international opinion and humanitarian concerns when determining their course of action. While these concerns may be broadly interpreted as liberal, they transcend the narrow program of classical liberalism, described in detail in Chapter I. The fact that states and groups appeal to considerations external to liberalism further demonstrates the need to reorient our understanding of culture as fluid and reactive, rather than as immutable and mechanized.

By demonstrating how an extremely volatile and aggressive group has become a functioning member of Israeli society, and has encouraged the state to celebrate its presence, I hope to provide reason to believe that deep seeded diversity can be

adequately accommodated within liberal society. Rather than exist as an insurmountable problem and imminent threat, profound doctrinal difference can be embraced rather than feared within liberal states.

I.

LIBERALISM AND DIFFERENCE

Introduction

The contemporary movement of people, ideology and culture has obscured the authority of the circumscribed nation-state, casting doubt about the predominant political entity of the last three centuries. Nonetheless, political theorists continue to debate the proper role of government within this constrained framework. In envisioning the most just and prosperous organization of political communities, theorists have grappled with ensuring individual rights, and erecting central authority within a given territory. To what extent should governments interfere with the self-determining capabilities of its citizens? What constitutes “public affairs,” about which governments may justifiably legislate, and what should remain “private,” and thus necessarily free from government control? These questions have historically guided thinkers in outlining the proper role of the state towards its citizenry, and in turn, the rights and duties of individuals in relation to the state.

While Thomas Hobbes maintained the primacy of the sovereign in political organization, John Locke argued that governments should seek to preserve the natural rights of individuals, and only interfere with personal actions for the purpose of preserving and maintaining others’ rights to life, health, liberty and possessions. In ensuring these natural rights, the government fulfilled its mission of aiding each individual’s attainment of happiness and prosperity. Locke’s original articulation of the rational agency of individuals has created the foundation for liberal theory that continues to define democratic society today.

By defining the scope of individual autonomy, liberal theory has necessarily engaged with questions surrounding issues of diversity. When states legislate for their populace, they inevitably erect universal norms prescribing how *everyone* ought to live, and thus necessarily limit self-determination in the public sphere, as well as influence individual behavior in the private sphere. For instance, by mandating that every child must attend school from the age of five to sixteen, an administration universalizes its preference for education. Are citizens who prefer the experience and financial reward of work instead of education unfairly burdened by this mandate? In most western societies, governments have overwhelmingly put forth the claim that the benefits of education ultimately outweigh the costs for *all* citizens. Children cannot form rational assessments of their preferences, and therefore cannot be expected to “choose” to attend school. Furthermore, individuals without a basic education within an industrialized state cannot adequately provide for themselves, contribute to society, or fulfill their responsibilities of citizenship.

If a state mandates that all citizens from the age of five to sixteen must attend exclusively Christian Sunday school, however, liberal opinion would hold that the administration acted unjustly, and unfairly burdened non-Christian individuals. How do these two mandates differ? While the first arguably strengthens the citizenry, and benefits the state as a whole, the second appears exclusionist and tyrannical. General education remains a public concern, for it enables an active and informed citizenry, while religious education remains a private concern, for it involves beliefs of a personal nature. Liberal theory seeks to define which kinds of difference ought to be

accommodated, and to what extent they should be recognized by the state. Liberals hold that each citizen should be free to articulate and, without limits, pursue his or her conception of the good life. Due to the elusiveness of the concept, however, liberal theorists over the past 325 years have continued to debate these issues.

Beginning with John Locke, liberal theorists have proposed strategies for both recognizing difference and preserving the unity of the state. To what extent does permitting difference undermine cohesion, and thus threaten the state as a whole? How should states delineate permissible difference from prohibited difference? In 1689, at the time of the anonymous first publication of John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, the liberal demand for "toleration" pertained exclusively to religious freedoms. After the restoration of the monarchy and national church that followed the English Civil War and Oliver Cromwell's failed Protectorate (1660), the church forcefully imposed Anglican uniformity upon all English citizens. The government viciously oppressed dissenters, including Quakers, Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians, with fines, confiscation of goods, and incarceration.³ In his impassioned indictment of these practices, Locke asserts religion as a distinctly private concern of individuals. As such, the civil magistrate has no authority to impose a particular system of belief upon citizens. Locke's suggestion that individuals retain private rights separate from the realm of government bolsters the claim of individual autonomy, and thus of allowable difference.

³ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689)*, ed. James H. Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) Introduction.

In contemporary times, however, the notion of “diversity” has exponentially widened to include not only a multiplicity of Protestant beliefs, but also a variety of religious, ethnic, racial, gender, social, and ideological affiliations. With the expansion of political rights in the previous two centuries and the augmentation of transnational activity in the current century, liberal states have increasingly confronted new questions of difference. The demand for both equal treatment and recognition of difference by women and African-Americans in the United States triggered numerous social movements asserting these dual claims. Throughout the United States and Europe, the historic homes of liberal political organization, domestic and immigrant groups increasingly demand specific rights of recognition in order to ensure their equal political agency. Such demands aim to legitimate the use of alternative languages, ritual observances, and a diverse public school curriculum.

The recognition of particularity, however, drastically counters John Locke’s original idea that the state be neutral towards religious belief. In order to adequately “recognize” diverse markers of identity, contemporary multiculturalist theorists assert that the state must legislate according to *group* rights, rather than individual rights. By explicitly granting groups rights, however, it is said that the state no longer remains a neutral actor. Instead, the state becomes a champion or protector of specific populations. In aligning itself with collectives, rather than with individuals, does the liberal state undermine its commitment to liberty and equality? According to Brian Barry, political and moral philosophy’s increasing reliance on the “politics of difference” unequivocally threatens, rather than augments, the possibility of

achieving the ideals of the French Revolution. Instead of promoting equality and liberty through differential treatment, multiculturalist policies exacerbate difference and breed resentment among groups.⁴

Many contemporary liberal theorists, however, including Charles Taylor, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Will Kymlicka, generally reject the possibility of state neutrality in attempts to accommodate difference. Due to the centrality of collective identity in modern society, these theorists argue that liberal states can uphold their constitutive principles only by granting particular groups distinct rights and privileges. In order to fulfill the true ideals of liberalism in contemporary society, particular groups *must* be accorded differentiated rights.

In the following discussion, I will examine the development of classical liberal thought concerning the relationship between individual autonomy, recognition of difference, and the authority of the state. Through evaluating the particular assertions of John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls, I aim to examine the foundation upon which multicultural discourse began. In order to understand our modern conceptions of difference, as well as contemporary strategies for accommodating diversity, it is necessary to revisit the thinkers who first confronted these issues. Furthermore, by evaluating the difficulties inherent within each of these liberal doctrines, I will demonstrate the problems multiculturalist theory has sought to address.

⁴ Brian Barry, Culture & Equality (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) Introduction, 11-13.

According to each of the following theorists, liberal states must protect individual autonomy, and therefore must permit particular expressions of difference within the state. In these prescriptions, accommodation results from the state's commitment to negative liberties in regards to religion and other forms of difference. While Locke, Mill and Rawls attempt to create a system in which neutrality and non-interference promotes justice, contemporary theorists argue that these theories insufficiently accommodate difference because they further hinder the ability of many individuals to construct their lives according to their own conception of the good life. This perceived failure of classic conceptions of liberalism encouraged the development of an alternative strategy to accommodate difference: multiculturalism and the politics of difference. I will return to these later theories, and their response to classical liberalism, in Chapter II.

John Locke

While Locke primarily addresses questions of religious difference, his discussion reveals a broader understanding of the appropriate role of government. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke asserts that the sole purpose of the civil magistrate is to encourage and aid the procurement of "Civil Interests," including "Life, Liberty, Health, Indolency of Body and Possession of outward things," to all subjects of the Commonwealth, regardless of their particular religious beliefs.⁵ According to Locke, these "Civil Interests" address the preferences of all individuals. Each individual, Locke implies, naturally values these "Civil Interests," and therefore

⁵ Locke 26.

maintains a legitimate claim to them in civil society. When individuals obstruct the obtainment of these rightful possessions for others, the government may justifiably intercede to constrain the transgressor with power conferred on it by the citizenry. In this way, Locke affirms that the sole purpose of the state is to facilitate and secure the satisfaction of each individual's endeavors. Apart from providing the context within which citizens may freely pursue their conception of happiness and prosperity, the government ought to remain silent.

While the government retains authority over "Civil Interests," each individual has the authority to determine what is necessary for the "salvation of the soul." According to Locke, the state comes into being only through a social contract among citizens, who determine that the state will best ensure their civil interests. Because the state depends upon the authority of the people, however, its powers remain necessarily constrained to the terms upon which citizens contracted into the state: the protection of civil interests. As such, the state may not justifiably interfere with the practice and belief of religion unless it threatens to impede upon these matters.

Locke further notes the limitations of the state by suggesting that individuals pursue "Life, Liberty and Health" according to their nature, while individuals *voluntarily* determine the content of their religious beliefs and associations. Being constructed for the sole purpose of protecting the *natural* rights of humans, Locke argues that the commonwealth has no right to legislate on the "free and voluntary" religious affairs of individuals. Locke articulates the qualitative difference between natural pursuits such as civil interests, and voluntary determinations such as religion:

No Man by nature is bound unto any particular Church or Sect, but every one joins himself voluntarily to that Society in which he believes he has found that Profession and Worship which is truly acceptable to God. The hopes of Salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that Communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there. For if afterwards he discover any thing either erroneous in the Doctrine, or incongruous in the Worship of that Society to which he join'd himself, Why should it not be as free for him to go out as it was to enter?⁶

While many of us are born into particular religious traditions, we ultimately determine to what extent we will shape our lives around these particular principles. We may end our religious affiliations simply by failing to believe in the tenets that define religion. Because religious belief fails to qualify as an innate human characteristic, Locke argues that the government maintains no authority to interfere on behalf of individuals. Instead, the government's authority is constrained to ensuring the civil liberties through which citizens may freely define their own religious system of belief.

In addition to the contractarian argument for religious tolerance, Locke presents a spiritual appeal for religious tolerance that bolsters the argument outlined above. The state may not compel individuals to believe in a particular creed, for religion "consists in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and Faith is not Faith without believing."⁷ Locke refutes the notion that the ruler *knows* the one true path to salvation. Rather, he asserts that individuals must discover their own path to salvation through independent learning and personal reflection, protected and guaranteed by the state:

⁶ Ibid. 28.

⁷ Ibid. 26.

There is only one of these which is the true way to Eternal Happiness. But in this great variety of ways that men follow, it is still doubted which is the right one. Now neither the care of the Commonwealth, nor the right of enacting laws, does discover this way that leads to Heaven more certainly to the Magistrate, than every private man's Search and Study discovers it unto himself...Neither the Right, nor the Art of Ruling, does necessarily carry along with it the certain Knowledge of other things; and least of all of the true Religion.⁸

By outlining the distinctly personal nature of spiritual matters, Locke further affirms the limited powers of the state. Because the citizenry constructed the state to fulfill a particular purpose, the protection of civil interests, the people necessarily constrained its authority. While centralized governance remains necessary for the development of society, its only duty lies in ensuring individuals' natural rights and advancing their common interests.

According to Locke, legitimate state action hinges upon the distinction between public and private pursuits, as determined by the original social contract through which the Commonwealth emerges. Individuals yield their "Executive Power of the Law of Nature," and submit to the authority of a third party, in order to acquire the protection of their property. By laying down their right to judge and punish offences, members of civil society "avoid and remedy those inconveniences of the State of Nature," such as the absence of property rights and lack of arbitration.⁹ Thus, the social contract confers power on the state to resolve conflicts surrounding these civil interests, such that individuals may have "comfortable, safe and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security

⁸ Ibid. 36.

⁹ John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, c1960, 2004) "The Second Treatise," Ch. VII, v. 90.

against any that are not of it.”¹⁰ Locke’s understanding of the explicit purpose of the state, as mandated by the people, creates a useful delineation between “public” and “private” matters, and suggests a framework for justifiable state action. Because *all* rational humans, regardless of position in life, have a legitimate claim to freedom and property, the state is required to legislate upon these matters. Conversely, because religious belief depends upon the individual’s personal convictions, it therefore exists outside the limited realm of legislative action. While many individuals may view their religious affiliation as an essential element of their identities, the state is only empowered to intercede on behalf of the civil interests that all citizens share.

An extension of Locke’s distinction yields a clear formula for resolving questions of difference within liberal society. The state must tolerate, through state neutrality, manifestations of difference that exist as components of “private” life. If we define “private” concerns as matters that involve individual preference, belief or proclivity, this category becomes both broad and sprawling. We may include within this category of extended Lockean “permissible difference” not only religious affiliation, but also political ideology, sexual preference and family life. The state ought not, however, to tolerate difference that threatens the foundational concepts of the liberal state that define the boundaries of “public life,” such as the universal entitlement to the “Civil Interests” of “Life, Liberty, Health, Indolency of Body and Possession of outward things.” When individual actions seek to undermine the political organization of the state itself, as well as the universal honoring of critical autonomy, then the state must intervene for the sake of those “natural” rights. Locke

¹⁰ Ibid. Ch. VIII, v. 95.

thus defends a significantly limited conception of state power. It is important to note, however, that Locke's most explicit concern while writing was the ever-growing reach of the restored monarchy, dominated by Charles II and the Anglican Church.¹¹

At the time of Locke's writing, the pertinent question was not how to *accommodate* or *incorporate* difference into dominant society, but rather how to *protect* those who subscribed to minority opinions from violent repression, bodily harm, and prolonged incarceration. In order to create a truly free society, Locke maintains that personal beliefs, such as religious convictions, must remain the distinct concern of individual citizens. While Locke affirms the necessity of tolerance, he is not concerned with *preserving* diversity. Rather, Locke confronts difference of belief as a permanent feature of human society. In order to quell the constant struggle among varying denominations, as well as halt the growing tyranny of the state, Locke aims to extricate religion from government. Rather than encourage or denounce particular views, the state must remain silent on matters outside of civil society. Locke articulates the specific nature of the "public" and the "private" sphere, and vehemently argues for the preservation of this separation.¹² Locke's conception of the "toleration" of difference thus remains distinct from the "accommodation" of difference asserted by political theorists today.

¹¹ Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, Introduction.

¹² *Ibid.* 34.

John Stuart Mill

In keeping with John Locke, John Stuart Mill promotes individual autonomy as the central doctrine of liberal society. In his theory of *comprehensive liberalism* propounded in *On Liberty* (1859), Mill affirms that the state must protect and encourage individual decision-making behavior, and thus must tolerate difference of opinion and lifestyle within society. The state should not interfere in the lives of individual citizens with active legislation unless, “there is a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public.”¹³ Damage, according to Mill, refers to the obstruction of individual autonomy and decision-making through bodily harm, neglect, or discrimination.

While Mill bolsters Locke’s original articulation of critical autonomy, as well as his understanding of how the state should protect individual freedom, he defends toleration of difference on new grounds. Rather than tolerate difference in order to assuage conflict, and thus sustain peace and order in society, Mill posits that diversity *in itself* is a valuable and necessary good in liberal society. In this way, Mill presents *individuality* and *diversity* as intimately related concepts. As such, they must be protected simultaneously by liberal society. In order to ensure progress and development, the state must encourage each citizen to think independently, and thus to seek out their own, individual pursuits. Uniformity, stagnancy, and like-mindedness produce a society of automatons that merely utilize “ape-like” qualities of imitation. In addition to providing an atmosphere within which genius, charisma,

¹³ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), ed. David Bromwich and George Kateb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) Ch. IV, p. 145.

and leadership grows, diversity acts as a public good, and produces benefits that each citizen ultimately enjoys. Mill thus broadens Locke's call for toleration of religious difference, and demonstrates the worthiness of diversity as a general condition for progress. Only when humans have reached the epitome of their perfection should diversity naturally begin to decline. Mill comments:

As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living: that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when anyone thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself.¹⁴

In order to prevent the ossification of "collective mediocrity" within modern society, Mill vehemently advocates for independent thought and action. He asserts that each individual requires particular experiences and particular environments for spiritual development. To declare one way of life as valuable, or to designate a particular custom as necessary, inevitably stunts each person's intellectual and emotional capabilities. By allowing the free expression of multiplicity, liberal societies will ensure that, "human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation ... making the race infinitely better to belong to."¹⁵ Not only must governments respect unpopular opinions within society, but also ought to value and encourage such diversity for the purpose of universal progress.

While Mill affirms the importance of individual diversity, not group diversity, his general discussion of the former leads to progressive implications concerning the

¹⁴ Ibid. Ch. III, 122.

¹⁵ Ibid. Ch. III, 127.

latter. Mill offers specific applications of his theory to contemporary debates surrounding moral and religious sanctions by the state that illustrate the importance of groups within public policy. Through drawing parallels among the prohibition of pork in Muslim countries, the prohibition of non-Roman Catholic worship in Spain, and the prohibition of alcohol in the United States, Mill argues that any legislation that interferes with the “personal tastes and self-regarding concerns of individuals” unduly infringes upon individual liberty.¹⁶ In condemning such policies for their interference with individual liberty, Mill necessarily discusses the *groups* of people who are unfairly burdened by the rigid entrenchment of particular customs and beliefs. By mandating that public worship conform to Roman Catholicism, Spain categorically excludes individuals who identify as non-Catholics, such as Protestants and Jews. Mill further articulates the injustice of persecuting entire populations of people through examining the repeated and cruel repression of Mormonism in the American West. While Mill admits the distastefulness of Mormon doctrine, including its commitment to polygamy, he suggests that this illiberal practice fails to be sufficient grounds for state interference with the personal life choices of individuals within the Mormon community. As a population, Mormons do not impose polygamy on anyone external to their group, nor do they dispute the lifestyles of their neighbors. Thus, Mill concludes, “...it is difficult to see on what principles but those of tyranny they can be prevented from living there under what laws they please, provided they commit no aggression on other nations, and allow perfect freedom of departure to

¹⁶ Ibid. Ch. IV, 149.

those who are dissatisfied with their ways.”¹⁷ Like individuals, Mill suggests that groups should be secure in their cultural practices and beliefs so long as they do not hinder others in designing their own life paths.

While he does so subtly, Mill introduces the notion of the individual *within* the group. In order to properly understand individual autonomous action in relation to the state, Mill suggests it is necessary to examine exclusionary policies that unfairly burden particular segments of society. The guarantee of liberty to the individual thus requires recognition of problems that target particular groups. Through his presentation of tangible political woes, Mill introduces collectivities as viable political units in the state. The scope of individual action remains indiscernible without appraising the organization of social blocs.

Mill’s emphasis upon diversity as a good in itself, as well as his recognition of groups, have been greatly incorporated into contemporary multiculturalist thought. By expanding Mill’s conception of “damage” to include *inadequate recognition* or *misrecognition* of collective identities, modern thinkers have couched their calls for active state policies towards groups, including differential treatment, in Mill’s comprehensive liberalism. Furthermore, contemporary thinkers construct their arguments for group rights according to Mill’s “Diversity Principle,” suggesting that diversity inherently enriches society.¹⁸ As diversity of life style and religious belief contributes to societal achievement, so too does the presence of heterogeneous

¹⁷ Ibid. Ch. IV, 154.

¹⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) 141-143.

cultures and ethnicities. In this way, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that Mill initiated much of the multicultural rhetoric that pervades liberal scholarship today. Appiah suggests, “The tree Mill planted . . . has grown up to be mighty indeed.”¹⁹

Mill maintains, however, that the best way to promote diversity within society is through state neutrality. Although his reasons for championing toleration may differ from Locke, his policy prescriptions remain largely the same. Human flourishing depends upon freedom of expression and exploration, which the state ensures through a commitment to objectivity. By refusing to promote particular beliefs, the state protects the rights of individuals to define their own beliefs and life goals. While Locke and Mill attempt to construe theories that create environments conducive to peaceful disagreement, both theorists present normative understandings of society that inevitably reject other comprehensive doctrines as false. According to Mill, the good life depends upon critical autonomy, and each individual’s ability to independently construct his or her life goals. For Locke, each individual necessarily pursues his or her civil interests, and therefore agrees upon the specific function of the Commonwealth. In his contractarian theory, Locke constructs a limited account of permissible difference, and therefore fails to recognize the dimensions of diversity. By championing only a particular kind of difference as worthy of tolerance, and a particular kind of human flourishing as worthy, Locke and Mill implicitly refuse to accommodate any kind of foundational doctrinal difference. In order to truly exist as a practical political theory, however, liberalism must confront the presence of deep divides in society. Can liberal theories incorporate individuals and groups who fail to

¹⁹ Ibid. 143.

subscribe to the liberal ideals of freedom, equality, and individuality, such as traditional religious groups? How can liberal doctrine truly become inclusive if it continues to ignore these issues of profound ideological diversity? John Rawls ultimately takes up these questions in his reformulated liberal doctrine, *Political Liberalism*.

John Rawls

While Locke and Mill present theories of state neutrality meant to reconcile difference within liberal society, they both construct their visions upon one major assumption: that every citizen holds the same comprehensive doctrine based upon a liberal world view. In *Political Liberalism* (1993), John Rawls suggests that a truly just society depends upon principles that every rational person may reasonably accept, regardless of his or her particular comprehensive doctrine. Rather than present a formula mandating when states may justifiably interfere with an individual's self-regarding action, Rawls attempts to construe a political philosophy that logically results in social unity among diverse social entities. Unlike Locke or Mill who preceded him, Rawls begins explicitly with the question of diversity, rather than the foundation of individuality. While Locke and Mill remain committed to preserving rational agency *through* tolerance of difference, Rawls suggests that diversity itself exists as a central concern of modern liberal societies, and therefore must be thoroughly evaluated. Rawls states his objective:

In sum, *Political Liberalism* considers whether in the circumstances of a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, a well-ordered and stable democratic government is possible, and indeed even how it is to be conceived as coherent.²⁰

Rawls' determination to propose political principles through which a variety of moral doctrines may peacefully coexist illustrates his increasing concern with groups rather than individuals. Thus, *Political Liberalism* signifies further distancing from the critical autonomy championed by both Locke and Mill.

Rawls, however, draws upon classically liberal notions of critical autonomy in order to illustrate how individuals with profoundly different beliefs become unified through liberal political society. Rather than presuppose a particular kind of human flourishing, like Locke and Mill discussed above, Rawls suggests that rational agency enables consensus even among people who subscribe to extremely divergent doctrines. In his thought experiment concerning the *original position*, an ahistorical moment when individuals determine the laws of political society, Rawls affirms that citizens establish an expectation of reciprocity. Under the *veil of ignorance*, individuals do not have information about their particular social position, gender, race or religious affiliation within society. Without knowing the specifics of their lives, Rawls argues that individuals could settle upon his two principles of justice put forth in his work, *A Theory of Justice* (1975), by presenting reasons for their actions and

²⁰ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) Introduction to the Paperback Edition, xl.

beliefs that others both understand and reasonably accept as free and equal citizens.²¹ From this expectation of reciprocity established in the original position, Rawls asserts that diverse individuals and groups can reach agreements concerning the institutional system and moral underpinnings of political society. Most importantly, each individual can rationalize governmental policies from *within* their own comprehensive doctrine, and thus their own conception of human flourishing. By encouraging individuals who hold inconsistent beliefs to enter public discourse, and rationally articulate their beliefs to their neighbors, Rawls asserts that “justice as fairness” enables individuals who hold competing doctrines to peacefully coexist.

This broad basis for consensus becomes the content of *public reason*, a recognizable “family of reasonable political conceptions of justice,” that citizens may draw upon to explain their beliefs and settle conflicts. This set of principles, however, remains constantly evolving. Because the principles that public reason contains are often contradictory, individuals contribute to the revision of this amalgam of political values.²² Rawls suggests that engaging with and adding to public reason enables diverse groups to actively participate in the political process, and arrive at agreements that opposing populations may interpret as reasonable. Rawls asserts that any comprehensive doctrine that both satisfies the conditions of reciprocity and also acknowledges the requirements of reasonable disagreement must be tolerated within public reason.

²¹ Ibid. xlvii.

²² Ibid. li.

Furthermore, Rawls' articulation of the principles of justice, which enable political consensus among diverse elements, explicitly depends upon classically liberal conceptions of rational agency. First, each person has "an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of basic rights and liberties."²³ Because individuals are capable of rational thought, they ought to be free to construct their lives independently. While Rawls constructs a theory that seeks to embrace different conceptions of human flourishing, and thus does not endorse Mill's assertion of only one kind of "the good life," Rawls' first principle presumes that a system of individual rights can adequately and peacefully accommodate difference. In keeping with Locke and Mill, social organization ought to guarantee the basic rights of individuals, such that all citizens may freely pursue their own life path. Rawls thus upholds the individual as the primary agent of liberalism, asserting that basic rights and liberties must be distributed without reference to particular group affiliation.

While the second principle of justice, "The Difference Principle," explicitly acknowledges the presence of social and economic disparity, and therefore confronts the presence of unfairly burdened groups in society, the principle also seeks to create conditions that strengthen rational agency. Rawls states that social and economic disparity should only exist if these inequalities are "attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" and must "be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society."²⁴ The special attention awarded to the least well off in Rawls' scheme attempts to equalize access to

²³ Ibid. 5.

²⁴ Ibid. 6.

resources and opportunities, such that each individual can freely and equally pursue his or her life aims. Rawls suggests that his broad principles of justice, which aim to erect an extensive system of individual rights along with limits on socio-economic inequality, can adequately accommodate all forms of difference, such that individuals who hold profoundly diverse beliefs can co-exist under terms they all freely accept.

While Rawls acknowledges the presence of diverse doctrines within modern liberal societies, and offers an alternative prescription for how the state ought to accommodate this multiplicity, he also appears to maintain classical views concerning the distinction between “public” and “private” life. In order to accommodate individuals and groups who subscribe to differing comprehensive doctrines, the political conception of justice must pertain solely to the *public* realm of interaction. Similar to Locke and Mill, Rawls suggests that the state has only limited authority over the personal convictions and practices of individuals. As such, Rawls believes that by securing political autonomy and social equality for each *citizen*, “the legal independence and assured political integrity of citizens and their sharing with other citizens equally in the exercise of political power,” each *person* may safely pursue his or her own moral doctrines concerning his or her “deepest ends and ideals.”²⁵ While Rawls does not presume that all members of society agree upon a comprehensive doctrine or conception of human flourishing, he maintains that his theory of political liberalism best enables individuals to pursue their different conceptions of the good life. Thus, Rawls suggests that the state accommodates difference through providing the broadest freedoms and opportunities to all members of society, founded upon a

²⁵ Ibid. xliii.

reasonable political conception of justice. In this way, Rawls' *Political Liberalism* may be read as a modern continuation of Locke and Mills' general approach to diversity.

Conclusion

In the three liberal theories discussed throughout this chapter, each thinker posits a system in which individuality has primacy within political organization. Therefore, each thinker attempts to construe a philosophy that enables and secures individual rights most effectively. For both Locke and Mill, the state must remain neutral with regards to matters involving the private sphere, and should only interfere to secure each individual's personal pursuits. While Locke asserts that toleration is necessary to enable peace within society, Mill affirms the potential good of diversity in itself, for variation results in progress and development. These theorists ultimately promote the accommodation of diverse religious beliefs, lifestyles, family dynamics, and preferences through state neutrality.

While Rawls' *Political Liberalism* conveys a commitment similar to that of classical liberalism, it also attempts to engage more thoroughly with the type of diversity exclusively found in societies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the time of Rawls' first articulation of his principles of justice in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), traditionally oppressed social groups in the United States, including women and African-Americans, increasingly demanded political recognition. The type of recognition these groups sought, however, was not only equality and justice under the

law, but also recognition of their distinct plights *as members of these populations*. In addition to the agitation of diverse social groups, the growing prevalence of African, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Asian populations throughout classically liberal societies warranted an alternative approach to diversity.

With larger populations of individuals who emigrated from illiberal societies, and maintained diverse religious and cultural beliefs, liberal societies confronted more profound divisions among citizens. In Rawls' reformulation of "justice as fairness" in 1993, he argues that *Political Liberalism* adequately accommodates these forms of diversity by enabling social consensus among people who subscribe to profoundly different comprehensive doctrines. He suggests that in the *original position*, all individuals, regardless of their diverse worldviews, could reasonably accept "justice as fairness" as a political philosophy, not because they share a common understanding of human flourishing, but because they reach consensus on political society based on reciprocity and shared interests. After accomplishing this social consensus, Rawls suggests that specific attention to groups would be unnecessary.

Following Rawls, political philosophers increasingly questioned the underlying assumption of classical liberalism, that a system of individual rights could sufficiently create conditions of freedom and equality in society. Rather than securing each individual's freedom and equality to pursue his or her own life path, the central tenet of classical liberalism, contemporary thinkers noted that uniformly distributed rights often served to mask flagrant injustices perpetrated upon particular groups

within society. Without policies that targeted cultural minorities and historically disadvantaged groups, liberal societies would never achieve truly free and equal conditions for all. Contemporary theorists such as Charles Taylor, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Will Kymlicka have thus asserted that classical liberal strategies can undermine the primary values they seek to promote. While equal treatment dramatically dismantles structures of oppression, there exist contexts in which equal treatment disguises actual *unequal* treatment. For instance, the mandate that all individuals wear helmets when they ride motorcycles, or hard hats at construction sites, places unfair burden upon Sikh men who don turbans. To obey these laws, Sikh individuals must transgress a fundamental element of their creed.²⁶ Rather than categorically dismiss the theories developed by Locke, Mill and Rawls, however, many contemporary thinkers have developed multiculturalism as a modified version of classical liberalism. In order to invigorate and legitimate the liberal ideals of freedom and equality, contemporary societies must acknowledge the significance of groups in defining each individual's understanding of the good life. While critics like Brian Barry fear that such differentiated strategies will promote greater divisiveness among populations, multiculturalists counter that universalized rights are effective only among individuals with similar opportunities, histories, and perceptions. Without confronting the position of collectivities in defining how each of us perceives the world around us, as well as how we understand what is possible for our own lives, the classical model of liberalism fails to achieve its aim.

²⁶ Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 31.

In Chapter II, I will evaluate the strategies put forth by proponents of multiculturalism as a more relevant form of liberalism. After discussing how the particular visions of Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka attempt to respond to the major flaws inherent within classical liberalism, I will argue that multiculturalism itself contains many of the faults of its predecessor, employing critiques put forth by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Rather than erasing the discriminatory tendencies of universalized policies, multiculturalism can create categories of identity that either exclude or paralyze entire groups within society. In order to better illuminate these deficiencies, I will turn to my case study, the history and experience of the African Hebrew Israelite Community in Chapter III. Here, I will evaluate the experiences of this marginalized religious group within the United States, Liberia and Israel to illustrate the inadequacies of current understandings of multiculturalism, and suggest an alternative perspective concerning strategies of accommodation.

II. MULTICULTURALISM AND ACCOMMODATION

Introduction

Because of the failure of classical liberalism to fulfill its promise of liberty, freedom, and equality for all, contemporary theorists have extended their focus to collectives rather than focusing exclusively on individuals. While the empowerment of individuals remains an imperative of the multiculturalist system, this often requires the explicit recognition of group identity. The multiculturalist critique of classical liberalism rejects the individual as the only basic unit of society. Multiculturalist thinkers argue that individuals define themselves, their life aims, and their understanding of the “good life,” according to the particular social fields within which they interact. Rather than entering the world with an authentic nugget of “selfhood,” multiculturalists suggest that we develop into who we are only through interaction with those around us, and so the freedom and self-realization of the individual depends upon the structure of that interaction. In order to ensure each individual’s ability to create a unique and autonomous self throughout life, liberal multiculturalists frequently affirm that the government must preserve distinct cultures by granting them differentiated rights and exemptions. Multiculturalists thus reject state neutrality as a sufficient strategy to accommodate difference.

In this chapter, I will discuss the theories of three prominent multiculturalist thinkers, Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and Kwame Anthony Appiah. While they profess similar views concerning the increased significance of group identity in the contemporary era, they offer differing responses to classical liberalism. First, I will

present the broad multiculturalist agenda, as put forth by Charles Taylor. Next, I will discuss Will Kymlicka's theory of "differentiated citizenship" as a specific model intended to implement practically the multiculturalist agenda. While interjecting my own critique throughout the chapter, I will employ the critical theory of Kwame Anthony Appiah in order to best highlight the persistent deficiencies of multiculturalism. Ultimately, I intend to show that multiculturalism has not eradicated the problems it attempts to address within classical liberalism because it often erects rigid categories of identity.

Charles Taylor: The Fallacy of Authenticity

After tracing the origins and development of the value of authenticity from the end of the eighteenth century, Taylor denounces it as inherently flawed. In his essay, "The Politics of Recognition" (1992), Taylor critiques the popular assumption that he believes has been the crux of liberal political theory since its inception. In order to have critical autonomy, Taylor asserts that liberal theorists such as Locke and Mill presumed that each individual had a distinctly authentic self that directed his or her own actions. Because of this authenticity, each individual ought to have the right to direct his or her future. Yet, Taylor disputes the possibility of such an "inwardly generated" self. Rather, he asserts the *dialogical* nature of each individual. We are not born with an ingrained or static core of who we are or who we desire to be, but develop our ideas and preferences in dialogue with those around us. Taylor employs

his alternative understanding of human development in order to introduce the central importance of relationships and groups in our lives. He comments:

We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression . . . People do not acquire the language needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us—what George Herbert Mead called ‘significant others’.²⁷

In his use of “language” to refer to the many modes through which we learn to communicate (gestures, words, thoughts, music, art, etc.), Taylor notes the intimate connection between personal identity and group membership. Humans only develop identities in reference to others. Through interpersonal comparisons, we discover how to view ourselves.

As the term “dialogical” suggests, however, the conversational process through which we create identity greatly depends upon how others treat us. In order to identify myself as smart, independent, and generous, others must perceive me and treat me as a smart, independent and generous person. If I view myself as smart, independent and generous, but others systematically question my integrity and call my character into question, I will often be moved to reappraise my own identity. For historically marginalized populations, misrecognition, or the absence of recognition, often perpetuates and transmits feelings of inferiority as strongly as overt prejudice. Taylor cites the prevalence of male and Eurocentric histories in secondary and university curriculums as a means by which women and minorities within society

²⁷ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” Multiculturalism, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) 32.

come to view themselves as incapable or even unworthy.²⁸ Through constantly studying the experience of a particular group, individuals either view themselves as belonging, or not belonging, to dominant society. In this way, Taylor presents identity and recognition as inextricable components of one another. Individuals inevitably construct their futures by reference to the messages they receive from their community.

Because of the essentially dialogical aspect of human development, Taylor suggests that classical liberalism, focused as he claims it is upon the individual as the sole author of his or her beliefs, fails to fulfill its mission to cultivate critical autonomy among members of society. First, Locke and Mill interpret individuals as wholly self-directing and independent agents, and thus fail to acknowledge the profound significance of community, association, and interaction in the process of identity construction. By ignoring the importance of collectives, Taylor argues that classical liberalism fails to grasp the primary condition necessary for cultivating critical autonomy: a vibrant and varied cultural experience. This inadequate psychology supposedly results in equally inadequate policy prescriptions, such as staunch neutrality towards markers of group membership. The liberal state's refusal to bolster cultural life through protecting and aiding diverse groups ultimately cripples its ability to foster critical autonomy among its citizenry.

Taylor illustrates this tension by examining the enduring debate surrounding Francophone culture in Quebec. While the Canadian *Charter of Rights* (1982), modeled after the United States *Bill of Rights* (1791), grants equal protection to all

²⁸ Ibid. 43.

individuals under the law, citizens of Francophone descent assert “claims for distinctness” as a matter of cultural survival and individual autonomy. Many members of this population suggest that their ability to pursue their vision of human flourishing depends upon a measure of cultural autonomy and collective recognition. In the name of cultural survival, Quebec has implemented legislation that promotes its particular collective goal, the predominance of Francophone culture in Quebec, through language laws. French-speakers must send their children to French-speaking schools, and commercial signage can be in no other language than French. With this example, Taylor suggests that states cannot enable *all* citizens to freely pursue their understanding of the good life, and thus fulfill the mission of classical liberalism, unless they actively protect particular cultural groups.²⁹

Taylor further criticizes the policy prescriptions of classical liberalism by noting that liberal mandates ultimately privilege a particular set of cultural values in the state’s dominant discourse, and thus inadvertently enact intolerance of multiple kinds of difference. Through what Ronald Dworkin calls “procedural liberalism,” liberal governments attempt to tolerate diversity by striving to treat all individuals “fairly and equally...regardless of how we conceive our ends.”³⁰ By granting uniform rights to all, however, purely procedural liberalism ultimately perpetuates oppression and intolerance by upholding one value system, originally conceived within Christian societies, as *right*. Taylor notes that the separation of civil and religious society originated in the Protestant Reformation, and thus modern liberalism emerged from a

²⁹ Ibid. 52-59.

³⁰ Ibid. 56.

distinctly Christian foundation. For instance, the centrality of the individual in liberalism resembles the Protestant emphasis upon individual salvation. Therefore, liberalism cannot be understood as truly “difference-blind,” for it promotes a rigid system of values.³¹ Among populations often discounted by classical liberalism are individuals who understand public life and religion to be deeply integrated, as well as individuals who have been historically marginalized within Western societies. For example, if an observant Jew refuses to work on Saturday, and is denied unemployment benefits upon these grounds, he or she is being unfairly burdened by norms that have established Sunday, the Christian day of rest, as a non-working day. Taylor summarizes the most severe complaint of many multiculturalists:

The claim is that the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity is in fact a reflection of one hegemonic culture. As it turns out, then, only the minority or suppressed cultures are being forced to take alien form. Consequently, the supposedly fair and difference-blind society is not only inhuman (because suppressing identities) but also, in a subtle and unconscious way, itself highly discriminatory.³²

In order to provide all individuals with the ability to craft their lives according to their own particular beliefs, Taylor suggests that liberalism must become more nuanced. Rather than applying rights universally, invoking the classically liberal “Politics of Universalism” or “Politics of Equal Dignity,” governments should actively judge group claims according to “the importance of certain forms of uniform treatment against the importance of cultural survival.”³³ In order to create a framework for true equality, governments ought to recognize and work to address the

³¹ Ibid. 62.

³² Ibid. 43.

³³ Ibid. 61.

unique burdens that particular populations within traditionally liberal societies confront. Those burdened by liberal policies often fall within two categories. First, communities that have suffered from legacies of racial oppression and social exclusion remain unfairly burdened by “difference-blind policies” that refuse to acknowledge the particular plight of groups, such as minorities and women. In order to provide members of these populations with equal opportunities and freedoms, the government ought to implement policies of “reverse discrimination” that aim to eradicate socio-economic discrepancies among groups. Proponents of such policies suggest that after a period of time, reverse discrimination will no longer be necessary, for the government will have created a truly equal society.

The second kind of injustice endemic to liberal societies, however, remains more enduring and less easily addressed with isolated policies. Because liberalism inherently promotes a particular value system, discussed above, the theory fails to adequately accommodate peoples that subscribe to *nonliberal* doctrines. For example, humane slaughter regulations implemented across Europe, based upon animal welfare arguments, necessarily limit the extent to which observant Jews and Muslims can adhere to their particular religious codes. These laws mandate that animals must be stunned before being slaughtered, and therefore prohibit traditional methods of ritual slaughter outlined in the laws of *kashrut* and *halal*. While Brian Barry is generally opposed to policies that privilege particular groups, he admits that a “rule-plus-exemption” strategy is appropriate in this case, where “although ritual slaughter is far from being the best practice, it is nevertheless above some threshold of cruelty below

which prohibition would be justified.”³⁴ In order to avoid discriminating against religious populations, Barry suggests that governments ought to allow ritual slaughter. He therefore endorses Britain’s 1967 and 1979 exemptions of Jews and Muslims from these regulations.³⁵ Taylor similarly notes that governments ought to weigh the relative worth and cost of recognition. In refusing to permit traditional modes of slaughter, and thus a fundamental element of religious identity for observant Jews and Muslims, governments inevitably impinge upon the autonomy of a significant portion of its citizenry, and thus undermine their liberally oriented aims. The multiculturalist agenda, labeled the “politics of difference” by Taylor, seeks to adjust the liberal program, such that it makes room for profound pluralism within society. The recognition and support of groups unfairly burdened by traditionally liberal assertions enables Locke’s and Mill’s foundational ideals of autonomy and equality.

In further defense of a “politics of difference,” Taylor argues that societies ought to promote a “presumption of equal worth” among varying cultures. Even when certain cultures or groups contain elements that we find extremely distasteful, or even horrifying, we ought to presume that they also contain elements that would likely enrich our society. Taylor cautions, however, against the possibility of homogenization. Because our understanding of “worth” in liberal societies is generally informed by “North Atlantic” standards, we risk imposing our value system upon another when we seek to appraise it. By invoking Mill’s assertion of the benefit

³⁴ Barry 43.

³⁵ Ibid. 40-50.

of diversity in itself, the “Diversity Principle,” Taylor bolsters the multiculturalist demand for more explicit accommodation of difference.

Finally, Taylor asserts that the sheer increase in immigration and transnational movement demands the reevaluation of classical liberalism. The majority of societies founded upon the tenets of classical liberalism currently struggle to integrate growing populations who speak different languages, practice different religions, and perform different rituals. Taylor notes that many liberal societies have growing populations of citizens who also maintain allegiance to cultures that “call into question our philosophical boundaries.” When confronting such profound and entrenched diversity, the attempt to employ a “Politics of Universalism,” without attention to the particular needs of certain groups, can be cruel. Taylor comments, “In these circumstances, there is something awkward about replying simply, ‘This is how we do things here’... The challenge is to deal with [minorities’] sense of marginalization without compromising our basic political principles.”³⁶ As such, the growing Latino community in this country should not have to fear that bilingual education, or Spanish language options on governmental websites, could be revoked. Because these policies provide a significant population in this country with the opportunity to participate in political society, and do not diminish the rights of other citizens, they ought to receive continued support from the federal government.³⁷ By criticizing purely procedural

³⁶ Ibid. 63.

³⁷ It is important to note, however, that providing optional bilingual education for Spanish-speakers runs counter to Taylor’s discussion of language legislation in Quebec, where French speakers are *forced* to send their children to Francophone schools, and English-speakers are *forced* to send their children to Anglophone schools. In Taylor’s example, the government explicitly denies English-speaking residents of Quebec the right to use their language on

policies, such as those that would denounce bilingual education for privileging some cultures above others, Taylor endorses strategies that make space for difference. Through calling for a “politics of difference,” Taylor seeks to acknowledge the immense change that has occurred within our political landscape, while simultaneously preserving the ideals from which it has grown.

While Taylor provides a comprehensive analysis of the issues plaguing classical liberalism, and demonstrates how liberal policies can undermine their own mandate, he fails to offer a way to effectively move beyond these inadequacies. He recognizes the need to accommodate groups and protect cultures in specific circumstances, yet remains wary of infringing upon fundamental rights. Taylor attempts to reconcile his convictions and fears concerning group recognition by endorsing a model of liberalism that distinguishes “fundamental rights from the broad range of immunities and presumptions of uniform treatment that have sprung up in modern cultures of judicial review.” Taylor suggests that he would endorse differentiated policies to preserve cultures only when fundamental rights are not transgressed.³⁸ In his discussion of those rights that ought to be “unassailably entrenched,” however, Taylor fails to define what is fundamental, and what is not. For instance, Taylor’s call for a “politics of difference” seems to violate a “fundamental” institution of traditional liberalism in itself, for it counters the notion that all citizens should be treated equally under the law, established under the

equal terms with the French. This contrast distinguishes group recognition that involves “enabling” legislation, which provides opportunities for cultural expression, from “prohibitive” legislation, which prevents some segment of the population from freely making decisions.

³⁸ Ibid. 61.

Fourteenth Amendment. Because he never presents a clear definition of what is and is not “fundamental” to liberal societies, Taylor fails to articulate what kinds of group claims ought to receive recognition and support from the government.³⁹ In his work, Will Kymlicka attempts to fill this void.

Will Kymlicka: Creating Categories of Difference

Following Taylor’s broad and inconclusive introduction to the “Politics of Difference,” Will Kymlicka produced a more detailed account of how to organize a multicultural society. While agreeing with Taylor’s basic premise, that classical liberalism remains inadequate for contemporary society, Kymlicka offers a more practical framework for the accommodation of diversity. Ultimately, his framework for the just recognition of minority claims depends upon the *kind* of difference he perceives within a particular population. Kymlicka suggests that the government ought to appraise demands for recognition according to the historical and cultural experience of the group. While he recognizes the potential for “hard cases” that do not fit into his binary discussed below, such as African-Americans or refugees, Kymlicka affirms the general inclusiveness of his framework, by citing international studies conducted by Tedd Gurr in *Minorities at Risk* (1993).⁴⁰

Like Taylor, Kymlicka positions his work, *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), in direct response to classical liberalism. While Taylor attempts to demonstrate the relationship between critical autonomy and membership in groups, Kymlicka focuses

³⁹ Ibid. 60.

⁴⁰ Will Kymlicka 25.

his articulation of multiculturalism upon classical notions of *freedom* and *dignity*. In order to be free, or conduct our lives according to our own ambitions and without external interference, Kymlicka argues that we must maintain access to broad resources and diverse networks. According to him, free action depends upon an individual's ability to make informed and independent decisions concerning his or her life. In order for this to occur, individuals must maintain access to a diverse array of life experiences and world-views.

Similar to Mill's discussion of freedom in *On Liberty*, Kymlicka suggests that individuals must determine their own life courses even in opposition to prevailing norms. Thus, he agrees with Mill that freedom requires active deliberation between opposing options. Individuals assert their wills only by advocating their own judgment. Mill expounds on the importance of choice and the danger of complicity:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision.⁴¹

According to Mill, the activity of choosing between options not only affirms freedom of conscience, but also enables the intellectual and emotional development of the individual. While Kymlicka preserves Mill's classical understanding of freedom *as* choice in his discussion of multiculturalism, he rejects Mill's claim that choice results only from the absence of state interference. According to Mill, individuals have access to the widest array of options when the state intervenes only when "there is a

⁴¹ Mill Ch. III, 125.

definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public.”⁴² For Kymlicka, however, an individual’s ability to make informed decisions concerning his or her own life depends upon the existence, endurance, and vitality of his or her own societal culture, which involves “‘a shared vocabulary of tradition and convention’ which underlies a full range of social practices and institutions.”⁴³ Therefore, to maximize freedom, the state must safeguard endangered societal cultures, such that all individuals maintain an equal opportunity to revise their ends and make informed life choices in the context of these social fields. Rather than ensuring choice through state neutrality, Kymlicka suggests that the state ought to actively promote choice through the preservation of culture:

Since we can be wrong about the worth or value of what we are currently doing, and since no one wants to lead a life based on false beliefs about its worth, it is of fundamental importance that we be able rationally to assess our conceptions of the good in the light of new information or experiences, and to revise them if they are not worthy of our continued allegiance.⁴⁴

In order to encourage societal progress and individual perfectibility, the state ought to allow individuals to reevaluate their life goals, but such choice is possible only in the context of societal cultures, which are alive and vigorous. The absence of state protection for cultural minorities ultimately diminishes the autonomy of citizens who belong to these groups by failing to preserve the culture that makes choice possible. Through this argument, Kymlicka argues that state neutrality “damages” individual autonomy, for neglect of cultural groups impedes informed decision-making among

⁴² Ibid. Ch. IV, 145.

⁴³ Kymlicka 83.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 81.

the broadest array of meaningful options. He thus advocates explicit state action to protect endangered cultural groups.

Kymlicka further argues that the explicit recognition of groups, rather than individuals, facilitates the preservation of another vital ideal of classical liberalism, *dignity*. Liberals assert that all individuals are worthy of respect and honor simply because they are human. Because human beings are able to determine their own life course, they ought to be presumed to be self-knowing and self-determining. Kymlicka asserts, however, that the recognition of individual dignity often depends upon how society perceives and treats one's culture. If my culture is denigrated by society as low and uncouth, or if I perceive my culture to be excluded from public discourse, then I inevitably feel unworthy. The way in which I view myself greatly depends upon the way in which society treats groups to which I belong. Due to this intimate relationship between individual identity and group association, Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz argue that groups create an "anchor for self-identification."⁴⁵ Similar to Taylor's argument that Euro-centric and male-centric school curricula contribute to low self-esteem among minorities and women, Kymlicka suggests that the absence of recognition prevents the construction of a positive identity as much as overt prejudice, for it damages one's basic sense of selfhood. Thus, the liberal commitment to grant dignity to each individual citizen may require the recognition of equal worth of cultural groups.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid. 89.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Alongside Kymlicka's modification of classical liberal ideals, however, he observes that the explicit recognition of *all* cultural groups would necessarily threaten liberalism as a doctrine, as well as social unity within liberal nations. He willingly admits, "The demands of some groups exceed what liberalism can accept. Liberal democracies can accommodate and embrace many forms of cultural diversity, but not all." In order to preserve the integrity of the liberal nation, as well as the autonomy of the individual, Kymlicka asserts that the claims of cultural groups must be thoroughly examined. By classifying types of groups, he suggests that society will be able justly to determine which groups deserve differential rights, and which forms of group recognition would undermine freedom and equality, the primary commitments of liberalism.⁴⁷

While Kymlicka asserts the significance of all collectives in the process of individual identity construction, he distinguishes between particular kinds of groups. Kymlicka recognizes the increasing importance of "non-ethnic social groups" that consist of populations historically excluded from dominant society, such as women, the working-class, or the disabled, yet he centers his study on minority groups defined by ethnicity and territory.⁴⁸ He couches his understanding of multiculturalism largely in terms of the nation-state:

⁴⁷ Ibid. 152.

⁴⁸ Kymlicka uses "social group" and "societal culture" to refer to distinct concepts. The "social group" connotes an association of people who share a particular life experience, external to ethnicity. While this kind of group may share "distinct customs, perspectives, or ethos," the social group fails to qualify as a "culture" in Kymlicka's definition (18). In contrast, Kymlicka defines a "societal culture" as "a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities." Furthermore, he notes that societal cultures "tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language" (76).

My focus will be on the sort of ‘multiculturalism’ which arises from national and ethnic differences. As I said earlier, I am using ‘a culture’ as synonymous with ‘a nation’ or ‘a people’—that is, as an intergenerational community more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history.⁴⁹

According to Kymlicka, the context for meaningful culture remains exclusively couched within geographic borders. When individuals or groups resettle, their cultural life continues to emanate from their supposed “homelands.” Thus, Kymlicka presumes that most individuals maintain strong emotional, religious, linguistic, or familiar ties with a particular place within the world.

With the dramatic increase of immigration, transnationalism, and displacement in the last fifteen years, however, to what extent does this presumption of a meaningful homeland undermine Kymlicka’s argument? While Kymlicka recognizes that his framework, distinguishing between “national minorities” and “immigrants,” fails to integrate two important groups, he suggests that these cases remain somehow anomalous. Refugees and African-Americans did not choose to leave their homelands (as immigrants did) and were not conquered on the particular land they now occupy (as national minorities were). The assumption that these cases remain outliers, however, seems overly simplistic. In the twenty-first century, can a multiculturalist theory be meaningful that excludes these groups, as well as the increasing number of transmigrants, and those born in diaspora, without any enduring sense of “home”? While his reliance upon geographically circumscribed identities raises many questions, including what it means to occupy a given territory, be

⁴⁹ Ibid. 18.

institutionally complete, or share a distinct language and history, it enables Kymlicka to put forth a theory of how to evaluate group claims. Through his definition of culture, Kymlicka may systematically determine what kinds of groups ought to be recognized by the state and in what manner.

Kymlicka articulates his argument by dividing societal cultures into two distinct categories: national minorities and ethnic groups. According to Kymlicka, “multinationalism” describes societies within which multiple “national minorities” exist, each having their own societal culture. According to Kymlicka, national minorities are groups that were integrated into the dominant society forcefully, and against their will. Following conquest, war, or exploitation, the aggressor absorbed these previously autonomous groups into dominant society. Because these groups, such as American Indians and Australian aboriginals, forfeited autonomy against their will, Kymlicka suggests that they maintain legitimate claims to government recognition and cultural protection, and thus advocates for greater autonomy and political representation for national minorities. By contrast, “polyethnic” diversity describes societies within which multiple immigrant groups have settled. As opposed to national minorities, these “ethnic groups” have migrated voluntarily to their host society, and therefore are presumed to integrate into the dominant cultural practices without protest.

Due to the unjust process by which national minorities merged with the dominant nation (in effect through conquest), he asserts that many of these groups suffer from “unchosen inequalities.” As national minorities, these populations must

abide by an alien institutional and cultural regime that inherently privileges some ethnicities over others. Rather than suffer from “benign neglect,” Kymlicka suggests that national minorities confront systematic exclusion. He states:

Government decisions on languages, internal boundaries, public holidays, and state symbols unavoidably involve recognizing, accommodating, and supporting the needs and identities of particular ethnic and national groups. The state unavoidably promotes certain cultural identities, and thereby disadvantages others.⁵⁰

In order to ensure that “the good of cultural membership is equally protected for the members of all national groups,” Kymlicka proposes that national minorities be allowed greater cultural autonomy.⁵¹ Through granting national minorities increased language rights, proportional representation, and self-governance, the state compensates these populations for their “unchosen inequalities,” and effectively provides them with an equal opportunity to exist. In doing so, the state enables members of these populations to exercise their autonomy as free and equal citizens.

In contrast, Kymlicka suggests that the voluntary nature of immigration largely invalidates the claims for increased government protection and autonomous control put forth by ethnic groups. Unlike national minorities, ethnic groups anticipate assimilation upon arriving into a new country, and therefore implicitly assume personal responsibility for navigating the transition into their new cultures. Because these individuals and families uproot themselves, their claims for differential treatment lack substance. As long as immigrants “had the option to stay in their original culture,” they cannot demand self-government or linguistic privileges from

⁵⁰ Ibid. 108.

⁵¹ Ibid. 113.

their host society. Because they willingly abandoned their original culture, Kymlicka states, “[they] voluntarily relinquish some of the rights that go along with their original national membership.” In addition, the nature of resettlement prevents immigrants from maintaining cultural infrastructure that would enable self-government. Kymlicka suggests that the “dispersed, mixed, assimilated and integrated” nature of resettlement precludes adequate maintenance of cultural institutions. Thus, immigrants may demand nothing beyond fair and just treatment within their host society, and assume responsibility for the survival of their particular culture. While they are expected to integrate into their host society, they may also expect the host society to embrace them as new and potential citizens. Kymlicka thus concludes that policies meant to ease integration, such as the implementation of anti-discrimination laws as well as the inclusion of immigrant histories in public schools, remain adequate measures to accommodate ethnic groups and ensure autonomy for their members.⁵²

While his framework attempts to evaluate the myriad claims being put forth in pluralistic societies, Kymlicka’s differentiation between “ethnic groups” and “national minorities” often oversimplifies questions of identity, drawing artificial boundaries within and among populations. Above, I suggested the risk in assuming all individuals maintain allegiances to particular “homelands” or “nations.” The fact of increasing globalization and transnationalism greatly undermines the assumption that individuals identify with a single nationality, and therefore undercuts the crux of Kymlicka’s argument. While Turkish communities in Germany, or North African

⁵² Ibid. 96.

communities in France maintain a cultural heritage from the place of their ancestors, it is understandable that third and fourth generation members of these populations resent being called immigrants. They may feel as German or French, or more so, than they feel Turkish or North African. Individuals from diasporic communities, like Armenians or South Asians, populate multiple regions of the world, and may adopt two or three national identities over the course of their lives. Kymlicka's rigid schema cannot capture the omnipresence of these complexities.

As a result of this inadequacy, Kymlicka fails to properly assess the claims of immigrants. Kymlicka admits that refugees should not be included within the category of "voluntary immigrant," and thus should be allowed to recreate their cultural traditions in their new society.⁵³ Yet, many immigrants not classified as "refugees" would reject the notion that they "voluntarily" abandoned their nation of origin. Due to economic, social or religious pressure in their homelands, many individuals feel they had no option *but* to flee. Should we view immigration out of extreme poverty as a matter of choice? How is it possible to determine the "voluntariness" of one's departure? While individuals may choose immigration over a lifetime of struggle, they surely do not elect to abandon their cultural heritage in its entirety. The choice to emigrate must not be viewed in isolation, but rather in the context of the individual's exit. To his credit, Kymlicka recognizes the difficulty in proposing such distinctions in our current world:

⁵³ Ibid. 99.

Perhaps then my argument should be limited to what Rawls calls ‘ideal theory’—that is, what would the claims of immigrants be in a just world? I believe that if the international distribution of resources were just, then immigrants would have no plausible claim of justice for re-creating their societal culture in their new country. But the international distribution of resources is not just, and until that injustice is rectified, perhaps immigrants from poor countries have stronger claims.⁵⁴

While Kymlicka readily admits the flaws of his method of categorization, he ultimately maintains their value in discussions surrounding multiculturalism, even if they remain relegated to “ideal theory.”

Kymlicka again invokes this strategy in his discussion of anomalous cases, such as the experience of African-Americans in the United States. Recognizing the failure of his model to encompass the plight of this group, which neither immigrated voluntarily to the United States nor originated from one cohesive nation, Kymlicka attempts to justify this exclusion by citing African-Americans’ disinterest in obtaining a distinct identity separate from other Americans. While he admits that the United States simultaneously prevented African-Americans from either assimilating to the dominant culture *or* maintaining distinct cultural practices, Kymlicka claims that African-Americans do not demand cultural recognition, but rather “have fought for full and equal participation within mainstream society.”⁵⁵ The endurance of Black Nationalist groups, both political and religious, however, suggests otherwise. Furthermore, the experience of the African Hebrew Israelite Community, comprised of African-Americans, proves that the desire for cultural recognition pervades

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 25.

multiple populations within society, and cannot be constrained to “national minorities” or “ethnic groups.”

While Kymlicka openly acknowledges the problems with his binary, he ultimately downplays the significance of these flaws. Rather than exist as mere blips, his difficulty in defining “voluntary immigrant,” as well as his inability to assess the experience of African-Americans, demonstrates the limitations of his argument. Kymlicka provides many useful insights to the debate surrounding recognition of groups, yet fails to create an adequate system to determine which types of difference to accommodate, and how to proceed into the future.

Kwame Anthony Appiah: The Potential Hegemony of Multiculturalism

Kwame Anthony Appiah offers an account of the risks inherent within multiculturalism as a whole. In both his response to Taylor in his article, “Identity, Authenticity and Survival” (1994),⁵⁶ as well as in his expanded discussion of multiculturalism, *The Ethics of Identity* (2005),⁵⁷ Appiah explains his ambivalence about Taylor’s “politics of difference.” Ultimately, Appiah suggests that shifting political and social attention away from individuals and onto groups inevitably undermines liberal freedoms. Rather than promoting the liberal ideals of freedom and equality by accounting for the particular plights of specific populations, Appiah worries that multiculturalism unknowingly represses difference.

⁵⁶ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction,” *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Appiah's critical remarks concerning the multiculturalist agenda remain especially significant due to his general agreement with Taylor's argument. Rather than dismissing the "politics of difference" by asserting that individuals are born with an authentic self, Appiah agrees with Taylor and Kymlicka that groups significantly contribute to individual identity in contemporary society. Appiah confirms that individuals construct themselves in the context of societal cultures. He illustrates the reality of this claim by making reference to the significance of nationality in the construction of individual identity. Within our everyday lives, we must constantly make reference to the nation to which we belong. When traveling, applying for college, pursuing a career, we are constantly asked to identify our nationality. By doing such, we take on what it "means" to be of that nationality, both in how others perceive us, and in how we perceive ourselves.⁵⁸ While traveling abroad in Ghana in the fall of 2006, I was constantly aware of being an American. Not only did it evoke a particular response from Ghanaians (Did you vote for George Bush? Can you send me a bicycle when you return?), but it also made me acutely aware of my lofty status in the country. Like both Taylor and Kymlicka, Appiah further concedes that our choices are often determined by the messages we receive from our surrounding societal culture. Appiah thus joins Taylor and Kymlicka in rejecting the "ethic of authenticity":

⁵⁸ Ibid. "Identity, Authenticity, Survival" 153.

[The ethic of authenticity] is wrong, however, not only because it is in dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity (Taylor's point) but also because my identity is crucially constituted through concepts and practices made available to me by religion, society, school, and state, and mediated to varying degrees by the family.⁵⁹

Appiah thus begins his discussion of multiculturalism from the same argument put forth by Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition." He quickly reveals, however, his ambivalence concerning policies aimed at bolstering groups, rather than individuals. Appiah's position offers the most significant critique of multiculturalism.

While he notes the importance of collectives in the process of self-creation, Appiah remains careful to emphasize the significance of individual agency within this process. Similar to Kymlicka, Appiah suggests that the presence of choice determines the extent to which we are free. In keeping with Mill, and the tenets of classical liberalism, Appiah remains reluctant to forego all expressions of autonomy. As such, he reiterates that individuals must ultimately determine their own life course. Again in keeping with Kymlicka, he suggests that groups provide the "toolbox" from which individuals craft their personas and life pursuits, "We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose."⁶⁰ Appiah's explicit concern for the preservation of autonomy within increasingly group-dominated theories remains an enduring theme in his writing. He ultimately fears that "hard pluralism," or state-protection of groups without interference of internal practices, inevitably strips the

⁵⁹ Ibid. 154.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 155.

individual of liberal rights. Multiculturalism, Appiah notes, risks replacing “one kind of tyranny with another.”⁶¹

Appiah questions the multiculturalist argument, offered by both Kymlicka and Taylor, suggesting that cultures ought to be preserved. While Taylor offers this line of reasoning as a potential justification for group-based policies in Quebec,⁶² Kymlicka asserts that state-sponsored cultural survival maintains diversity, and therefore increases the freedom of choice and conscience for all members of society.⁶³ In his response to both thinkers, Appiah suggests that “preserving culture” undermines the core of its nature. Because cultures are dynamic, not static, preservation becomes extremely dangerous. Cultures develop in response to their particular historical context and in relationship with other cultures. To prevent this natural process of growth and development, argues Appiah, is as oppressive as denying a culture the right to express itself at all.⁶⁴

Apart from the difficulty of determining what practices constitute the “authentic” spirit of the culture, Appiah articulates his concern for future generations who must carry the weight of the “preserved culture.”⁶⁵ At what point does the preservation of culture for future generations limit the autonomy of individuals to determine their own aims and ambitions? Additionally, who determines which cultures ought to be preserved? Appiah fears that racist and intolerant groups, such as white supremacists, could hijack the “preservationist ethic,” and make claims that

⁶¹ Ibid. 163.

⁶² Taylor 52-61.

⁶³ Kymlicka 81.

⁶⁴ Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 132.

⁶⁵ Ibid. “Identity, Authenticity, Survival” 158.

their plight is also desperate and deserving of government support. We already encounter this rhetoric within immigrant-fearing populations in the United States, and across Europe, such as within La Pen's National Front party in France. Appiah determines that the potential consequences of invoking the "preservationist ethic" more than validate its rejection within multicultural discourse.

Not only do "preservation" tactics stifle and paralyze future generations of potential culture-bearers, but Appiah suggests that administering group-differentiated rights may also prevent current individuals from being independent actors. Appiah explains that collective identities give rise to particular "scripts," or modes of behavior, for individuals within that group. In this way, society becomes divided into *kinds of persons*: women, Jews, African-Americans, homosexuals, etc. Collective identities result from the interaction between individuals internal and external to the group. First, external individuals must recognize an individual as a member of the group, for instance as a woman, African-American, or straight person. Through this process of recognition, dominant society creates a label for those within the group. Appiah suggests that this label contains stereotypes as well as a narrative of how this group came to be. Next, members of the group *internalize* the socially devised label such that it "carries ethical and moral weight." The internalization of the label facilitates cohesion of the group, as well as demarcates the boundaries between the group and outsiders. Finally, Appiah suggests that society reinforces collective identities by perpetuating patterns of behavior towards members of the group. A member of group L is *treated as* an L, and required or at least expected to act in

accordance with the scripts that constitute “L-ness.”⁶⁶ The imposition of these prevailing norms infringes upon the freedom of individuals to determine their identities, and construct their lives.

While the features described above remain inherent to all collective identities, and are therefore not always damaging, they cause Appiah alarm when conjoined with policies that seem to privilege the collective over the individual. Similar to the paralyzing effect of attempting to “preserve” culture, Appiah warns that recognizing group claims rather than individual claims may result in “The Medusa Syndrome.” By being given rights according to membership within a group, individuals become married to that singular identity, and thus are metaphorically turned to stone. In this way, Kymlicka’s differentiated-citizenship model places extreme burdens on those it seeks to empower, for it limits the autonomy of the individual by elevating only one aspect of that person’s identity. Appiah asks whether the new kinds of rights created by multiculturalism demand too great a sacrifice:

Demanding respect for people as blacks and as gays requires that there are some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay, there will be expectations to be met, demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another... The politics of recognition requires that one’s skin color, one’s sexual body, should be acknowledged politically in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And personal means not secret, but not too tightly scripted.⁶⁷

Through his critical discussion of multiculturalism, Appiah suggests that like classical liberalism, multiculturalism fails to fulfill its promise. While it attempts to rectify the

⁶⁶ Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 67-70.

⁶⁷ Ibid. “Identity, Authenticity, Survival” 163.

historical disadvantage and unfair burden that particular segments of society continue to confront, the “politics of recognition” erects equally great obstacles to the establishment of freedom and equality in contemporary societies.

Conclusion

Through his thoughtful critique of group-differentiated rights, Appiah reveals the increasing complexity involved in justly accommodating difference in the present era. In order to make room for populations unfairly burdened by the liberal system, governments ought to accord privileges to disadvantaged groups, and thus must transcend traditionally liberal notions of neutrality and individuality. At the same time, however, the state ought to be sensitive to the perpetuation of identity “scripts” that group recognition invariably involves, and remain staunchly committed to protecting individual rights. While traditional forms of liberalism may impose a set of cultural assumptions upon diverse populations, multiculturalism similarly risks transgressing foundational liberties by imposing identities upon individuals. The preservation of justice in liberal societies thus demands the careful negotiation of these competing claims. In order to achieve a meaningful solution, multiculturalists must be prepared to confront this question: How can governments recognize groups, without turning individuals to stone?

In the following chapter, I will present the experiences of the African Hebrew Israelite Community in order to further highlight the deficiencies of inflexible theories of difference, such as Kymlicka’s evaluation of group claims according to

national allegiances and ethnic divisions. Through the narration of this group's struggle to obtain recognition for its unconventional claims, I aim to dispute Kymlicka's understanding of culture as something that can, or should, be "preserved." Rather, as the following chapter details, culture transforms in accordance with the messages and impulses it receives from its host society. The dynamic, rather than static, character of culture suggests the futility of a multiculturalist theory that attempts to categorize claims and evaluate justice according to a predetermined framework.

III. TRANSCENDING TYPES: THE AFRICAN HEBREW ISRAELITE COMMUNITY

Introduction

The inadequacies of multiculturalist theory, as set out in Chapter II, suggest that questions of identity have become more nuanced in recent decades. Due to increased pluralism in contemporary society, liberal governments face greater demands by groups to be recognized as particular collectives, rather than simply recognizing their members as individuals. While theorists have acknowledged the growing significance of groups in political society, many remain wary of distributing rights and privileges according to collective identities and group memberships. In his attempt to erect an evaluative framework for the validity of group claims, Kymlicka suggests that certain kinds of groups, predominantly those constituting the “national minorities” discussed in the previous chapter, ought to receive comprehensive recognition in order to fulfill liberal ideals, such as freedom and equality. Only by granting these populations group rights, such as increased autonomy and proportional representation, can the state facilitate cultural preservation for diminishing communities, and thus guarantee rational agency for individual members of these historically oppressed groups.

Kymlicka designs his policy recommendations according to each population’s particular cultural heritage. Specifically, the objective circumstances from which a group emerged dictate how states ought to appraise claims for accommodation.

Groups defined as “immigrants” are subject to different policies than groups classified as “national minorities.” Kymlicka thus argues that states should vary their policies towards groups according to their status.

In contrast, Appiah suggests that policies of cultural accommodation may ultimately diminish the extent to which individuals are free to be independent agents, rather than being freed to act within prescribed categories of identity. By empowering and institutionalizing group identities, such as Jewish, Black, Hispanic, Gay, Immigrant, or Native American, states inevitably erect expectations for how members of these groups ought to behave. Thus, individuals come to represent their groups, rather than themselves. Kymlicka’s model, while intended to include groups historically susceptible to exploitation and exclusion, fails to account for the constantly evolving and transformative nature of identity, both personal and collective.

The first two chapters of this thesis set out the competing tensions within both classical liberalism and contemporary multiculturalism, and presented the continued difficulties of accommodating difference today. In order to recognize groups unfairly burdened within liberal societies, states ought to recognize and support particular groups. The recognition of groups, however, risks transgressing the foundational concepts of liberalism, such as individual freedom. To what extent should governments maintain neutrality towards groups, and thus uphold rational agency, as conceived by Locke and Mill? To what extent does respect for rational agency prevent particular segments of society from achieving the liberal ideals of freedom

and equality? And finally, to what extent does the equal recognition of groups infringe upon individual rights, by imposing scripts onto individuals? Neither classical liberal theory nor contemporary multicultural theory has satisfactorily balanced the liberal demands for rational agency with the actual significance of groups in contemporary society. In order to adequately accommodate profound pluralism in our current political landscape, it is necessary for states to simultaneously recognize the centrality of groups in our personal self-construction, without sacrificing the extent to which we are able to freely move and choose between these collective entities. Achieving equilibrium, however, cannot result from formulaic determinations of who ought to receive rights, and who ought not.

In order to better understand the current challenges that liberal societies face, as well as to illuminate the particular tensions within multiculturalism today, I will present the experiences of an especially creative and mobile group, the African Hebrew Israelite Community of Israel (AHIC). After emigrating from the United States at the height of the Civil Rights era in 1967, and subsequently struggling for citizenship rights in Israel for the last four decades, the varied and volatile history of this group of African-American expatriates demonstrates the extreme tenacity with which individuals demand group recognition as a means to acquire greater agency within society. The individual identities of the Black Hebrews, as well as the ever-changing collective narrative of the AHIC as a whole, suggest the fluidity of culture. Rather than articulating a static narrative throughout their stay in Israel, the AHIC has transformed its rhetoric according to its changing relationship with the State of Israel.

By demonstrating the extent to which Black Hebrews have altered their culture in response to their surroundings, I intend to dispute Kymlicka's suggestion that culture can and should be preserved. Finally, the fact that culture is responsive, rather than static, suggests that rational agency and group recognition are not mutually exclusive. Rather, individual members create and transform the cultures to which they belong by reacting to changing circumstances. While individuals may demand to be recognized as part of a group, they simultaneously assert their own independence by actively and perceptibly transforming their own culture over time.

The AHIC professes that its members, and all people of African ancestry, directly descend from the biblical Israelites. As the modern day Children of Israel, and God's chosen people, the AHIC claims full citizenship rights in Israel under the Law of Return. Through this demand, they assert their entitlement to the land of Israel specifically as Hebrew Israelites, rather than as a segment of modern-day Judaism.⁶⁸ The Law of Return, established in 1950, grants full citizenship rights to all Jewish immigrants upon arrival in Israel, including housing, employment, and health care benefits.⁶⁹ The group's fantastic narrative and radical theology, however, has raised serious objections within religious and secular Israeli populations, such that forty years later their legal status remains unresolved. While the first arrivals to Israel in 1969 received benefits accorded to all new immigrants under the Law of Return, the

⁶⁸ The term "Hebrew Israelite" denotes a person of African descent who claims kinship to the biblical Israelites. Many groups have used this term, including Rastafarians, the AHIC, and numerous Black Jewish sects. In this paper, I will use the term "Black Hebrew" to refer exclusively to the AHIC, as is commonly found in literature about the group.

⁶⁹ Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 17-18.

state denied subsequent groups of Black Hebrews these benefits, and changed the status of the initial group to that of tourists. Following this reversal of policy, hundreds of Black Hebrews illegally settled in Dimona, a desert town in the south of Israel, crowding into apartments of already established members of the AHIC.⁷⁰ In the 1980s, following tumultuous relations with the state and the AHIC's publication of anti-Israel materials, the state deported over thirty members of the group.⁷¹ The government's oscillating policy and wavering position towards the AHIC suggest the extreme difficulty of decisively appraising identity claims, even within a state that attempts to define itself concretely as a *Jewish* state.⁷²

The AHIC's troubled existence in Israel, as well as their emergence in Chicago and stay in Liberia, offers a pertinent case study for the debate surrounding multiculturalism due to the group's determination, and ultimate success, in receiving official recognition of its unique identity claims. By espousing a varied and often incoherent narrative, the AHIC has challenged Israel to loosen its methods of accommodation. The AHIC has behaved according to its own principles of identity, and largely rejected the ways in which nation-states determine belonging. Despite its

⁷⁰ Israel J. Gerber, The Heritage Seekers (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers 1977) 103-115, 126.

⁷¹ Joshua Brilliant, "African Americans Win Israeli Residency," United Press International 1 September 2003.

⁷² While the State of Israel champions a common pursuit, the maintenance of explicitly Jewish sovereignty, and thus cannot be described as wholly liberal, the nation-state simultaneously upholds classically liberal aims. In the proclamation of independence, the founders of Israel confirmed the state's liberal orientation, "[The State of Israel] will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture." Because of its strong commitment to liberal goals, the State of Israel's relationship with the AHIC remains a relevant case study to this project (The Proclamation of Independence, <[http:// www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm)>).

initial adversarial disposition towards institutionalized power, the AHIC and the State of Israel currently maintain a cordial relationship. While the State of Israel initially denounced the AHIC as fraudulent and parasitic, it currently embraces the group as part of its varied population. Despite the prevalence of illiberal and non-Jewish practices within the Black Hebrew community, the State of Israel recognized the right of the AHIC to permanently reside within its borders in 2003. The achievement of peace and understanding between the AHIC and the State of Israel suggests that accommodation should not be reserved only for groups that easily cohere with the dominant doctrine of the state, but rather ought to be employed to facilitate cooperation with initially combative communities.

While the AHIC emerged from the Civil Rights Era with hostility and aggression towards established structures of power, including all established “Euro-gentile” nation-states, the Black Hebrews eventually tempered their rhetoric and softened their vocabulary, such that one of their leaders, Prince Asiel recently reflected, “In 1968 we were young, we were radical, and no white was going to tell us who we were and what we could do. As we learned more [about Jewish and world history] we grew and we changed.”⁷³ While the AHIC has not altered its defining narrative concerning the glorious past of African populations and their particular election by God, Black Hebrews now readily welcome people of all colors and creeds into their community. They suggest that Israel exists as a “speckled bird,” composed of multiple populations and traditions. While they continue to view themselves as

⁷³ Fran Markowitz et al., “Soul Citizenship,” American Anthropologist Vol.105, No.2. June 2003: 307.

chosen by God, the Black Hebrews no longer denounce the righteousness, or possible chosenness, of others. Furthermore, in recent years, the leaders of the AHIC have made concerted efforts to integrate their community into Israeli society, such that they may exist within, rather than apart from, the State of Israel. In the following sections, I will argue that the shift in the rhetoric of the AHIC resulted from the group's increasing sense of belonging and acceptance in the State of Israel. As a result of improving relations with the government, the AHIC in turn altered its discourse, and ultimately recognized the sovereignty of the State of Israel.

The experience of the AHIC suggests that even groups that place themselves in explicit opposition to their host societies can be incorporated into the state through strategies of accommodation. These strategies are not required solely by virtue of the group's moral claims, but rather, by the ends that accommodation often procures. Through offering to negotiate with historically oppressed and disenfranchised groups, as well as offering financial support, states may foster trust with their potential adversaries, and work towards peaceful relations with past antagonists.

After narrating the emergence of the AHIC in Chicago as well as their brief stay in Liberia, I will discuss how the Black Hebrews initially positioned themselves outside of liberal political entities and modes of national belonging. In addition to the group's fundamentalist doctrine, the Israeli government's ambiguous policy towards the AHIC enabled the Black Hebrews to appeal to nonliberal theories of justice to voice their claims. Citing human rights violations in Israel, and their status as refugees, the AHIC reached out to numerous international organizations. Rather than

viewing themselves as rooted within a particular nation-state, the Black Hebrews shirked national institutions of justice, and asserted their own particular nationality. Their experience suggests that multiculturalism cannot be discussed only in conjunction with particular states, but rather must be contextualized transnationally.

By first articulating the extreme antagonism with which the AHIC positioned itself within Israel, and then illustrating the thorough reconciliation that the state achieved with the Black Hebrews in the last fifteen years, I hope to provide an alternative understanding of multiculturalism in the twenty-first century. Rather than accommodating groups solely out of an obligation to liberal understandings of justice, I will argue that the experience of the Black Hebrews suggests that states ought to refer to multiple theories of justice, including humanitarianism and international concerns, when determining whether or not to accommodate a group's identity claims. As the following case demonstrates, accommodation grounded in nonliberal theories may enable peaceful coexistence between profoundly different groups, and thus ironically lead to an outcome consistent with liberal theories of justice.⁷⁴

Establishing the Myth: The Emergence of the AHIC

During the height of the Civil Rights era, the African Hebrew Israelite Community existed alongside many groups associated with Black Judaism in Chicago. Like the Nation of Islam, and the Moorish Science Temple, the AHIC

⁷⁴ While “humanitarianism” and “international concerns” may be understood to fall under liberal theories of justice, for the purpose of this paper, I restrict the meaning of “liberal theory of justice” to its classical definition. According to both Locke and Mill, liberalism demands that an individual's civil interests and independent freedoms are protected.

embraced “messianic-nationalism,” a theology that pronounced the chosenness of the black race, as well as the imminent destruction of “Euro-gentile” rule. In response to constant rejection and overwhelming deprivation, some African-Americans turned to religio-national groups that restored positive black identity. In their article, “A Typology of Black Sectarianism,” Baer and Singer articulate the allure of messianic-nationalist groups, such as the AHIC:

Messianic-nationalism combines religious belief with the ideal of achieving cultural independence and political or even territorial self-determination. Central to the ideology of this sectarian movement is the repudiation of “Negro” identity as an oppressive creation by the White man and the substitution of a new ethnicity predicated on a belief in the unique spiritual importance of Black people.⁷⁵

Such restorative theologies facilitated the transcendence and refutation of “misrecognition” and “non-recognition” that African-Americans historically suffered in the United States. Charles Taylor asserts that without challenging and rejecting oppressive kinds of recognition, individuals may internalize self-loathing, “Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false distorted and reduced mode of being.”⁷⁶ Millenarian-nationalist sects, such as the AHIC, aimed to empower African-Americans to halt this process.

Over twenty African-American cultural and religious organizations in Chicago similarly asserted that their members were the direct descendants of the biblical Israelites, and “chosen people” of God. In 1970, a participant in the Black

⁷⁵ Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, “Toward A Typology of Black Sectarianism,” Anthropological Quarterly Vol. 54, No. 1. Jan. 1981: 1-14.

⁷⁶ Taylor 25.

Jewish movement, James H. Benjamin, maintained that there were over 10,000 Black Jews in New York, and at least 4,000 Black Jews in Chicago.⁷⁷ While increasing in number, the Black Jewish movement lacked both organization and cohesion. The multiplicity of movements remained socially, physically, and theologically disjointed, and often fiercely competed with one another for membership.⁷⁸ The sects remained associated only by their similar rejection of the label “Black Jew,” and the assumption of the term “Hebrew Israelite,” in the late 1960s. After white mainstream Jews repeatedly rebuffed their claims of Jewish heritage, leaders of Black Jewish movements created their own language of identification. Multiple organizations thus adopted the title “Hebrew,” “Israelite,” or “Hebrew Israelite” to denote their membership in a cohesive *nation*, rather than in a particular religion.

The AHIC, known as the Abeta Hebrew Cultural Center in its early years, distinguished itself from other Israelite groups by promoting imminent return to Africa as its central mission. In 1966, Ben Ammi Carter, the group’s founder and messianic leader, had a vision revealing to him the urgency and necessity of exodus.⁷⁹ By drawing upon the biblical allegory of America as Babylon, Ben Ammi gained great popularity by unequivocally rejecting the United States as a homeland for people of African descent, and further identifying it as the quintessential “anti-home.” In Markowitz’s description of this dichotomy, the “home” represents a “safe, divinely sanctioned and life giving place” while the “anti home” embodies an “alien, satanic,

⁷⁷Merrill Singer, “The Social Context of Conversion to a Black Religious Sect,” Review of Religious Research, Vol. 30, No.2 Dec. 1988: 179.

⁷⁸Morris Lounds, Israel’s Black Hebrews: Black Americans in Search of Identity (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981) Introduction.

⁷⁹James E. Landing, Black Judaism (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001) 326.

and life-threatening space.”⁸⁰ The myth of “homeland” compounds the characteristics of the “home” with a geographical place attributed with ancestry. According to Markowitz, “homes” and “homelands” ought to recognize us in a way that complements and augments our own self-perceptions. We feel “safe” rather than “alien” within our homelands because these societies reflect back to us empowering images of ourselves. Upon recognizing that a presumed “home” is actually an “anti-home,” individuals and communities flee. The AHIC recruited many individuals to join their ranks by arguing that the United States had never been, and would never be, a homeland for African-Americans. While African-Americans had been born in this land, they had been subjected to systematic captivity, and therefore could never participate fully in American society.

Because a place of birth does not necessarily connote a “homeland,” Kymlicka’s assertion that immigrants ought to receive less state recognition in light of their decision to voluntarily abandon their homeland, fails to account for the complex and changing relationships individuals have with their original cultures. While many Black Hebrews maintain strong allegiances to the United States through family and friends, these individuals categorically reject that America is their emotional or spiritual homeland. Furthermore, the ambivalent nature of homeland challenges Kymlicka’s argument that immigrants fail to qualify for state support because they chose to leave their nations of origin. As discussed in the previous chapter, many immigrants flee from their country of origin due to religious prejudice, social exclusion, or financial strife. In these circumstances, the culture of immigrants

⁸⁰ Fran Markowitz, “Leaving Babylon to Come Home to Israel: Closing the Circle of the Black Diaspora,” *Homecomings*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (New York City: Lexington Books, 2004). 183-186.

may be as endangered as that of national minorities when they arrive in their host society.

The ambiguity of “home” and “anti-home” further sheds light on the oscillating relationship the AHIC has had both with the United States and Israel. Their espoused “anti-home,” the United States, has provided the AHIC with the opportunity to stay in Israel through generous loans and legal support. Their espoused “home,” Israel, actively sought to deport the sect in the 1970s and 1980s, vigorously denounced the claims of the Black Hebrews, and withheld state benefits. The experience of the AHIC illustrates the dynamic relationship that can exist between peoples and their nations, and thus undermines the static articulation of identity and recognition posited by Kymlicka.

After centuries of self-loathing within American society, the AHIC noted that full redemption depended upon an absolute redefinition of life. In order to reclaim God’s favor, members of the AHIC had to irrevocably remove themselves from their past identities as “Negroes,” “Blacks,” or “African-Americans.” Ben Ammi urged both men and women to change their dress, diet, and outlook in order to physically and mentally disengage from the oppressive qualities of American life. Individuals further disengaged from American society by breaking communication with family and friends outside of the AHIC. The AHIC completely rejected the validity of assimilated life in the diaspora. They determined that the United States would never truly embrace people of color, but would continue to economically exploit them for the benefit of white society. In order to truly transcend this continued enslavement, African-Americans needed to recognize their biblical roots, and actively pursue the

restoration of the Hebrew Nation. In his treatise, *God, The Black Man, and Truth* (1982), Ben Ammi exhorts his followers to seize the “Power to Define” in order to usher in the “New World Order”:

We that stand for God can no longer accept America and Europe, defined as rich when we are poor; mighty when we are weak; lands of the free, when we are slaves. Hereafter, we shall define our objectives and the ways and means of achieving them.⁸¹

For members of the AHIC, the Hebrew identity directly opposed that of the “Negro” or “Black.” By eschewing the United States completely, Ben Ammi argued, African-Americans could command their own identities, rather than live in a country where “you are free to be anything or anybody you choose—except yourself!”⁸²

The AHIC leadership professed that God punished African-Americans by inflicting lowliness, disease, oppression, and violence on the population in the United States, for they had rejected the laws of God. By returning to the laws of the Old Testament, and by honoring the original covenant between themselves and God, African-Americans would be returned to divine favor.⁸³ Furthermore, the AHIC leadership professed that the Bible clearly documented the entire history of the exile, enslavement, and oppression of African-Americans.⁸⁴ This collective narrative offered dejected and disenfranchised individuals a concrete way to ameliorate their conditions. It allowed individuals to place themselves in the context of a divine past and biblical diaspora, and to identify with a transcendent purpose. Furthermore, the

⁸¹ Ben Ammi Ben Israel, God the Black Man and Truth (Nashville, TN: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1982) 79.

⁸² *Ibid.* 69.

⁸³ Singer, “Symbolic Identity Formation,” Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism, eds. Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 63.

⁸⁴ Lounds 34-40.

ideology offered individuals an answer to *why* they had been specifically victimized throughout their lives. Most importantly, the existence of a Hebrew Nation provided lost individuals with a positive identity and purpose in life. One member of the AHIC described the appeal of the group's doctrine:

I heard them speak and what they said really made sense. They said, you're not Black, black is just a color. And you're not Afro-American, Africa has thousands of tribes. How can you be an Afro-American, it doesn't mean anything. They told me I wasn't something vague like that, I was something very specific. I was a Hebrew of the Hebrew people and this is my people.⁸⁵

While other Black Jewish groups expressed a desire to leave America, the AHIC asserted the divine necessity of fleeing from the United States. The orchestration of African resettlement thus gained great urgency for the group. In 1967, group leaders prophesied that they would be miraculously returned to Africa during Passover. Numerous individuals went to the Abeta center with luggage packed, and waited. After divine intervention failed to occur, the leadership made immediate plans to immigrate to Liberia.

After scouting out lands in previous months, the AHIC invested in 500 acres of heavily forested land in Liberia for the resettlement of the Hebrew Nation. While this land required significant manual labor, individuals remained ebullient at the prospect of finally leaving America and returning to Africa. With concrete ownership of land in Liberia, members of the AHIC anticipated the arrival of a deluge of African-Americans on their campgrounds. They remained confident that their future life in their true homeland would be characterized by what they had been systematically denied in the United States: opportunity, freedom, prosperity, and happiness.

⁸⁵Singer, "The Social Context of Conversion" 184.

The reality of their first homeland experience, however, quickly revealed the difficulty and complexity of homecoming. Because they were not Liberian citizens, the Black Hebrews could not directly buy land in Liberia. Rather, they depended upon an American expatriate and Liberian citizen, James Flemister, for its purchase.⁸⁶ This first obstacle concerning the right to own land underscored the tension between members' self-definition and government assigned legal status. While the Black Hebrews perceived themselves to be fully West African, and therefore entitled to the institutions and resources of West African countries, the modern state's requisites for belonging defined them as outsiders until they had resided in the land for two years. In addition to hostility from Liberian officials, including the Attorney General who publicly denounced the AHIC as "undesirable aliens," members struggled to find work and generate income to sustain the community.⁸⁷ Individuals became increasingly discontent with the scarcity of vital resources, and many returned to the United States after determining that, "Racism and intolerance had become more acceptable than deprivation."⁸⁸

The extreme difficulty and alienation associated with homecoming in Liberia emerged as a reoccurring theme in the AHIC's experience upon departure from the United States. From the time of the first members' exodus to Liberia in 1967 until the AHIC's attainment of permanent legal status in Israel in 2003, the majority of members in the AHIC remained without legal citizenship in any country, and thus in effect, remained homeless. Unwilling to compromise their self-proclaimed identity by applying for formal citizenship in Liberia, nor capable of sustaining their community

⁸⁶Landing 388.

⁸⁷Ibid. 392-396.

⁸⁸Gerber 44.

without government assistance, the AHIC leadership planned a final exodus to Israel in 1969, where they were informed that all Jewish immigrants received generous state support and immediate recognition of their entitlement to the land of Israel.

The AHIC has since incorporated the Liberian experience into their overarching narrative of damnation and redemption. Citing passages from the Old Testament, Ben Ammi, the messianic leader of the community, re-interpreted the Liberian experience to be a fundamental and necessary component of the Israelites' eventual homecoming to the Promised Land. According to the biblical prophecy of the redemption of the Children of Israel, the exiled slaves would return to the Promised Land the way that they had exited. As descendants of slaves taken from the Gold Coast, the return of the Hebrew Israelites necessitated travel through West Africa. This view has continued to inform AHIC practices and involvement in the region. Recently, the AHIC has commenced construction of satellite communities throughout West Africa. In both Benin and Ghana, the AHIC has opened community centers and sponsored events meant to attract new members, and strengthen its connection to West Africa. Through opening vegetarian restaurants, health spas, and study centers, the AHIC has attempted to spread its vision in these societies. According to each of the Black Hebrews I interviewed while studying in Ghana in 2006, Israel remained their ultimate destination. They considered their work in Ghana necessary to prepare new members for life in the true Kingdom of God.

Following the AHIC's flight from Liberia, the leadership of the group affirmed that the Black Hebrews' hardship in Liberia mirrored the biblical Israelites' forty years of destitution in the desert. The struggle for survival in Liberia took on

mythical dimensions, such that it entered the Black Hebrews' collective memory of diaspora and homecoming, even for those members of the AHIC who did not physically experience life in Liberia. I heard many accounts of the pioneers' strife repeated by young Ghanaian men and women who had recently joined the sect in Cape Coast. Enduring such adversity, they suggested, unquestionably proved the holiness of the group. Liberia purified the souls and bodies of the Israelites from the poisonous habits and "Negrotisms" they had acquired in diaspora, such that they could enter Israel with pure souls.⁸⁹ In both biblical and modern times, God tested the faith and righteousness of the Israelites before allowing them to enter the Promised Land.

Eschewing Israeli Citizenship, But Demanding Recognition

Upon entering Israel, however, the AHIC confronted even greater skepticism than what they had encountered in Liberia. While the President of Liberia, William V.S. Tubman, initially expressed sympathy toward the group as a descendant of former American slaves himself, the Israeli government gawked at the AHIC's claim of entitlement to the land of Israel.⁹⁰ Without comprehending the group's connection to the land of Israel, or to Judaism, many officials viewed the AHIC's demand for full citizenship under the Law of Return as outlandish. Furthermore, the group's assertion that they embodied the Original Hebrew Israelite Nation alerted officials of their radical ideology and potential combativeness. The relatively new country had no precedent for dealing with immigrant claims like those of the AHIC, however, and

⁸⁹Landing 398.

⁹⁰Gerber 38.

therefore struggled to implement consistent policy towards the group. As a result, each group of Black Hebrews to arrive in the country encountered drastically different treatment from officials.⁹¹ Israeli policy towards the AHIC was further complicated by the particular citizenship structure of the state. Defined as an explicitly Jewish state, yet formally committed to liberalism, the State of Israel had constructed a sprawling and mutable system of citizenship.

On May 15th, 1948, David Ben Gurion, the soon to be first prime minister of Israel proclaimed the protectorate to be independent from the British Mandate, and declared that the new nation would safeguard, “the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state.”⁹² While all nations have erected frameworks for determining who belongs, Israel’s explicitly Jewish orientation has greatly complicated the citizenship discourse, for the country and its officials continue to struggle with the question, “Who is a Jew?” In his analysis of citizenship debates in democratic polities, William Safran discusses the implications of a dual citizenship structure in Israel. While individuals of Jewish descent gain citizenship rights through *jus sanguinis*, or presumed membership in the Jewish “nation,” non-Jews gain citizenship rights through their affiliation with Israeli territory, *jus soli*. Thus, Israel grants all individuals born in Israel before 1952, as well as their descendents, full citizenship in the Jewish state. Non- Jews without Israeli parents may be naturalized upon a minimum period of residence of three to five years, renunciation of their previous nationality, and avowal of political loyalty to the State of Israel. According to *jus sanguinis*, all Jewish immigrants who can prove

⁹¹ Ibid. 126-127.

⁹² Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [The Proclamation of Independence](http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm)
<http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm>

their Jewishness by matrilineal descent receive full Israeli citizenship through the Law of Return. This law is complicated, however, by the fact that individuals who convert to Judaism under Orthodox law may also gain citizenship through the Law of Return. Thus, “affiliation by blood” also resembles “affiliation by religion.” This association of religion and nation underscores the central tension within Israeli citizenship discourse: is Jewishness defined by ethnicity or religion?⁹³

The AHIC’s identification with the land of Israel as their original homeland, as well as with the Patriarchs of the Old Testament as their ancestors, encouraged members to make citizenship claims within both frameworks, *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*. On both accounts, however, the state seriously questioned their authenticity. After the Israeli government provided the first group of immigrants with jobs and homes, another group of thirty-nine Israelites from Liberia entered the country on December 21, 1969. The Israeli government provided this group with three-month tourist visas, apartments in an immigration absorption center in the desert town of Dimona, health benefits and employment. While the government rejected the group’s request to be admitted under the Law of Return, the government accorded the group special privileges, with the intention of inquiring further into the origins of the AHIC. The Minister of Absorption soon sent an official rabbi to Dimona to evaluate the group’s authenticity according to *halakha*, Jewish law as prescribed by the Talmud. Upon visiting the community, Rabbi Dar’i unequivocally rejected the group’s claim to Hebraic ancestry. After discussing their amalgam of Jewish and Christian rituals, as well as their continued reverence of Jesus as a prophet of God, Rabbi Dar’i

⁹³ William Safran, “Citizenship and Nationality in Democratic Systems,” International Political Science Review Vol.18, No.3. Jul. 1997: 325-26.

suggested that members should begin the process of conversion to obtain Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, and thus be fully integrated as Jews within the Israeli state.⁹⁴

The demand that the Black Hebrews convert to Judaism in order to be recognized as full members of the Israeli state echoed the experience of rejection that the group encountered in their previous host society. Similar to their stay in Liberia, the AHIC faced great skepticism and suspicion surrounding their claims of belonging to the nation-state. Their imagined home once again perceived them to be strangers and outcasts, attempting to infiltrate an already established and stringently demarcated society. Ben Ammi, the undisputed messianic leader of the group since orchestrating the exodus from the United States, interpreted the conversion request as a grave and irrevocable insult. By converting to Judaism, members of the AHIC would betray their true identities as descendants of the original Israelites, and further emblazon their aggressors with the power to define them. One individual, El Kannan expressed incredulousness at the suggestion of conversion, “What will I convert to or from? I am a Hebrew. I have been a Hebrew all my life. Why should I convert to what I already am?”⁹⁵ Upon his arrival to Dimona in March, 1970, Ben Ammi ordered all members of the AHIC to reject the process of Jewish conversion. Experiencing complete rejection by Israeli society, the AHIC responded by denouncing affiliation with mainstream Judaism. By way of explaining his severe outcry against conversion, Ben Ammi proclaimed that the AHIC vigorously protected

⁹⁴Ibid. 396-397.

⁹⁵Gerber 124.

its “power to define who we are as a people.”⁹⁶ Following their failed attempt to become full citizens in the State of Israel through the Law of Return, the leadership of the AHIC increasingly positioned their community in opposition to the established state.

In her article, “Soul Citizenship: The Black Hebrews and the State of Israel,” Fran Markowitz demonstrates that the Black Hebrews refused to be defined by traditional modes of belonging. After failing to procure citizenship rights as recognized descendants of the original Jews, the AHIC further rejected this entrenched system for determining who belongs. Markowitz posits that after living in the State of Israel for 40 years without recognized citizenship, the AHIC now offers an alternative account of citizenship that transcends the state, and furthermore resolves the tension between group recognition and individual autonomy. The author suggests that “soul citizenship” redistributes the power to define to the individual, and thus creates groups made up of empowered and self-determining individuals:

Soul citizenship, then, expresses the doubleness of rejecting the Euro-Christian world defined by the exclusionary categories of blood and nation, while accepting the rectitude of matches between a people’s soul, land, language, and culture. This model can thereby open new space for framing claims of inclusion that allow self-defining people—be they immigrants, diasporic groups, sexual or racial minorities—to place themselves in the states that resonate with their aspirations.⁹⁷

Once denied recognition by the state, the AHIC rejected citizenship by virtue of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, and instead posited a system of citizenship evaluated solely by personal affinity. By asserting the wholeness of their multifaceted identity, and further requesting special privileges as bearers of a particular culture, members of

⁹⁶Markowitz, “Leaving Babylon to Come Home to Israel” 190.

⁹⁷Ibid. “Soul Citizenship” 304.

the AHIC eschewed the prevailing “scripts” of both classical liberalism as well as contemporary multiculturalism. Disenchanted and seemingly excluded from the democratic liberties of the United States, the AHIC erected an alternative system of values dependent upon their particular relationship to God. The group affirmed a particular kind of justice that depended upon their own interpretation of biblical law, rather than liberal understandings of “freedom,” “equality” or “rational agency.” In this way, the group consciously placed itself outside of the State of Israel, and therefore challenged the government to either deport every member of their growing community, or loosen their policies in order to accommodate an illiberal, radical religious sect within their borders. By holding its ground for four decades, the AHIC eventually proclaimed itself victorious.

Rejecting Liberal Systems of Justice

In defining justice according to their exclusionary interpretation of the bible, the AHIC further positioned itself in opposition to Israeli society. The group denounced Israeli sovereignty by erecting a complete institutional system exclusively for Black Hebrews, and pledged allegiance only to their own laws and customs. When the State of Israel forced Black Hebrews into national courts, the group further disregarded Israeli authority by appealing for support from individuals and institutions outside of Israel. In cultivating these international relationships and denouncing Israeli law, the Black Hebrews overtly refused to abide by state mandates. In order to gain full Israeli citizenship, the Black Hebrews would have been forced to convert to Judaism or accept their status as Gentiles, and thus sacrifice

the specific identity they claimed. The alternative, living in Israel illegally, and rejecting the state's liberal and religio-ethnic conceptions of justice, enabled the group to preserve each element of its discourse. The AHIC eventually drew upon each of its particular relationships to the United States, Africa, and Israel to garner support for its diverse identity demands. In promoting often contradictory and incoherent claims, the Black Hebrews spurned prevailing assumptions concerning the whole and unchanging nature of identity. Although the group often responded to rejection and skepticism with vitriol, their ultimate success in attaining accommodation for their uniqueness reveals the dynamic nature of identity discourse, such that it can gradually make way for accommodation.

In the following section, I show the extent to which the experience of the AHIC in Israel, as well as the State of Israel's attempt to respond to the group's claims, relied largely upon non-liberal theories. In constructing its narrative, the AHIC absolutely rejected the supposed goods of the "Euro-Gentile" world from which they fled: freedom, equality, and individuality. Instead, the group emphasized the necessity of God's word, self-definition, and obedience. In its dealings with the AHIC, the State of Israel approached the group as an anomaly. After absolutely rejecting the group's claims of Jewishness, the State of Israel crafted policies for the group according to international opinion and humanitarian concerns, rather than referring to liberal conceptions that predominantly governed state affairs. I will demonstrate how the AHIC tailored its identity claims to the particular circumstances it confronted in Liberia and Israel, and thus shirked conventional understandings of cohesive, static identity. Once in Israel, the group continued to define itself in

opposition to the State of Israel by refusing to recognize Israeli sovereignty, and continuing to organize the lifestyle of its members according to illiberal practices. The AHIC's multifaceted and dynamic identity, including African, American, African-American, Jewish, and Refugee enabled them to disregard entrenched liberal institutions of justice. Markowitz suggests that the group's unique power has stemmed from its refusal to reconcile its many-layered identity:

...the AHIC, in and through its locations in Israel's Negev, American cities, and on Africa's west coast, goes on blending with and crashing against blackness, whiteness, Judaism, Christianity, America, Africa, and Israel, to recover and play out, while constantly amending, their always authentic, but never static, culture.⁹⁸

Rather than promote a single, comprehensive identity when making demands, the AHIC actively altered the prioritization of identities according to its needs and audiences, and consequently positioned itself above any one particular legal system.

In Liberia, the AHIC drew upon its African ancestry to win aid and sympathy from the Liberian government. The Black Hebrews couched their claims in their experience as members of an oppressed and disadvantaged black population that had escaped from the throes of American racism. They argued that their African ancestry entitled them to government aid, housing and employment. Ultimately, the group's heritage and depraved condition persuaded the state to provide financial assistance to members of the AHIC. Each family received a monthly stipend of \$50 for three months, as well as help in finding jobs around the country. While the leadership of the AHIC did not encourage members to apply for citizenship, they confirmed their

⁹⁸ Markowitz, Fran, "Claiming the Pain, Making a Change," Homelands and Diasporas, eds. Andreh Levy and Alex Weingrod (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005) 324.

intention to integrate into Liberian society.⁹⁹ Due to their particular circumstance, the AHIC privileged their African heritage well above their relationship with Judaism.

Upon confronting their profound destitution in Liberia, however, the AHIC embarked upon their final exodus to Israel. Here, the Black Hebrews privileged an alternative element of their identities in the hopes of finding acceptance and comfort in the Promised Land. As an oppressed and disadvantaged Israelite population, the AHIC demanded full immigration rights in Israel. Upon arriving in Israel, many Black Hebrews glossed over their ethnic ties, and instead emphasized the extent to which they resembled Jews, citing their observance of Shabbat, use of prayer shawls, and knowledge of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁰ While initial groups of Black Hebrews received immigration rights, including housing and employment, the government soon repudiated the Jewish claims of the AHIC, and deemed the Black Hebrews “tourists,” entitled to nothing beyond a three month stay in the country.

While relations between the Black Hebrews and the State of Israel were volatile from the group’s sudden arrival in the country in 1969, the government’s increasing skepticism surrounding the group reached new heights in 1971, in response to a Black Hebrew lawsuit against the state. Following the expiration of their tourist visas, the Ministry of the Interior issued deportation orders to eight Black Hebrews. The Black Hebrews subsequently sued the State for full immigration rights, again citing their lineage to the biblical patriarchs as well as their adherence to the Torah as evidence of their Jewishness. While they recognized their divergence from *halakhic* law, the Black Hebrews suggested that “Jewishness” encompassed multiple customs,

⁹⁹ Gerber 40-43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 86-87.

beliefs, and legacies, and therefore entitled them to the benefits of immigration under the Law of Return. The Israeli High Court, the highest judicial authority in the country, ultimately determined that “Israel had no legal or moral obligation to the Black Hebrews as non-Jews; and that, by declaring themselves enemies of the State, the Black Hebrews nullified the humanitarian basis for accepting them.”¹⁰¹

In this sentiment, the government affirmed that it had previously accorded rights to the group not on the basis of any liberal theory of justice, but in reference to an alternative framework for evaluation: humanitarianism. The State of Israel confirmed that it was not obligated to provide the group with housing or employment benefits in order to enable each individual’s pursuit of the good life, such as would be required by the theories of Locke or Mill, but rather, the State elected to do so in order to alleviate the enduring struggle of a small population. Furthermore, the state rejected any multicultural basis for according the Black Hebrews rights. According to Taylor’s “Politics of Recognition,” some groups ought to be recognized in order to allow for the fulfillment of the liberal mandate. Under this interpretation, the Black Hebrews would have moral claims to being recognized as Black Hebrews if the granting of special privileges enabled individual members to more fully attain freedom and equality. According to the multiculturalist logic, the Black Hebrews must prove that being denied full citizenship rights inhibits the ability of each individual member to pursue his or her understanding of the good life in Israel. Being an overtly *nonliberal* group, however, the AHIC cannot assert its claims for full Israeli citizenship according to liberal discourse. Because Israel has never recognized

¹⁰¹ Gerber 152.

the right of the group to immigrate to Israel upon religio-ethnic or liberal grounds, the State assumes no obligation towards the AHIC.

Without proving any formal relationship to Israel through theories of *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis*, the court determined that the AHIC forfeited any capacity to make claims of justice on the State of Israel. This decision illuminated the government's creation of a sprawling system of patchwork policy towards the group, often determined on a case-by-case basis. While the Israeli government formally dismissed the identity claims of the Black Hebrews in this instance, and declared Israel free from any responsibility towards the group, the state failed to carry out any decisive action against the AHIC since its arrival in 1969. In keeping with this pattern of what Markowitz deems “nonpolicy,” the state permitted the eight Black Hebrews to remain in the country, as long as the AHIC forbade additional members from immigrating to Israel.¹⁰² In rejecting the Black Hebrews' relationship both to Judaism and the State of Israel, however, the government articulated that the group's residence within Israel remained precarious, and against the explicit wishes of the State.

Until recently, the State of Israel continued to implement inconsistent policies towards the group, and refused to clarify the group's legal status in the country. From the time of the 1971 lawsuit until the mid 1980s, the State of Israel denied the group any formal state benefits such as healthcare, employment, or food assistance, yet the government also failed to actively oust the AHIC. Instead, Markowitz comments that the Black Hebrews exploited Israel's lenience, and eventually “became a self-sufficient, self-governing ‘tolerated presence’ in Israel.”¹⁰³ Due to its limited size, the

¹⁰² Gerber 152.

¹⁰³ Markowitz, “Soul Citizenship” 305.

government largely dismissed the AHIC's often combative rhetoric towards Israel and the Jewish people as a minor annoyance, rather than as a bona fide threat to national security.

In 1978, after almost a decade of unrecognized and illegal residence in the country, Yoseph Shlomo Burg, the Minister of the Interior at the time, created "The Committee for the Examination of the Problem of the Black Hebrews Cult" to thoroughly evaluate the group, and eventually resolve the status of the AHIC within the State of Israel. David Glass, the director of the commission, determined that the group never should have been permitted to enter the country, yet the government's repeated mishandling of the situation made the option of deportation "cruel and inhuman."¹⁰⁴ As such, Glass recommended that members of the group be accorded temporary resident status, and be eligible for full citizenship after a suitable transition period, during which members of the AHIC should demonstrate their commitment to the State of Israel.¹⁰⁵ Glass acknowledged the unconventional nature of his decision, yet appealed to Jewish understandings of justice, rather than liberal notions of justice, to rationalize his conclusions. The English summary of the report noted:

Over and above all other considerations, it seems to us that the recommendation to allow the "Black Hebrews" to stay in Israel, to grant them recognized status, and to allocate a site for their settlement, is basically a moral, humane, and *Jewish* decision. Its speedy implementation, in spite of the many difficulties that may be encountered, will be a tribute to the maturity of Jewish society in Israel.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Landing 410.

¹⁰⁵ Markowitz, "Soul Citizenship" 305.

¹⁰⁶ Israel, Ministry of the Interior, The Black Hebrews: An English Summary of the Special Committee Report (Jerusalem: Ministry of the Interior, 1980) 45.

While the report advised accommodation of the group as potential citizens, the Committee again denied the group's espoused tie with Judaism, and thus their claim to full citizenship rights in Israel under the Law of Return. Further, the report suggested that the group be given residence in a special "village community," rather than integrated within Israeli society. Finally, the report reiterated the conclusion of the 1972 court decision that additional Black Hebrews should not be allowed to enter the country.¹⁰⁷

Following these episodes of official rejection by the Israeli High Court as well as the Minister of the Interior, members of the AHIC appealed to various communities and institutions outside of Israel in order to bolster their claims. While Israeli officials often created policy that was motivated by nonliberal concerns, the AHIC also conducted its affairs, both internally and externally, according to nonliberal principles. After having been formally denied recognition as descendents of the biblical Israelites by the most powerful legal institutions of the nation, the AHIC vigorously and indiscriminately reached out to anyone willing to support their plight, including countries hostile to Israel, African-American Congressman, and anti-Israel social groups. Concomitantly, the AHIC increasingly radicalized its rhetoric and disassociated from the state. First, the group publicly denounced the legitimacy of the Jewish State, and asserted its own authenticity as the "Original Hebrew Israelite Nation." In his 1980 testimony of his intense involvement and eventual disenchantment with the sect, Thomas Whitfield details the most extreme and exclusionary elements of Ben Ammi's teachings:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 409.

He preached that blacks are the true Hebrews, and that the present Israelis are impostors. He insisted that all of the heroes of the Old Testament--- Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, you name them--- were black. He made the point that Israel is in Northeast Africa, and that the Suez Canal was never intended to separate Egypt from Palestine.¹⁰⁸

In further response to rejection by the State of Israel, and difficulty in procuring healthcare, education, housing, and employment for their members, the AHIC initiated a propaganda campaign, meant to publicize their plight and inflame anti-Israel sentiment. The Black Hebrews sent vehement letters to African-American congressman, urging them to restrict American aid to Israel. They groomed relationships with contentious figures, such as the leader of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan.¹⁰⁹ In the group's desperate attempts to gain power and status in Israel, the Black Hebrews even appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, suggesting that they were being mistreated and racially discriminated against in Israel.¹¹⁰ When the newly inaugurated Minister of the Interior, Yitzhak Peretz, authorized a number of deportations of Black Hebrews in response to the group's vitriolic campaign in 1986, Ben Ammi urged members to renounce their American citizenship, and thus force Israel to retain them as stateless refugees in accordance with the United Nations' refugee policy.¹¹¹ In public demonstrations throughout Israel and the United States, the AHIC portrayed images of their deplorable living conditions in Israel, and implied that Israeli policy toward the group had been motivated by overt prejudice against people of color. The AHIC continued to assert their entitlement to benefits in Israel as descendents of the biblical Israelites, while

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Whitfield, From Night to Sunlight (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1980) 47.

¹⁰⁹ Landing 415-417.

¹¹⁰ Gerber 164-167.

¹¹¹ Markowitz, "Soul Citizenship" 305.

also hoping to gain sympathy from the international community as a small population of wandering and homeless refugees. They thus appealed to both liberal and nonliberal theories of justice when agitating for recognition. Markowitz comments on the marked inconsistency of the AHIC's claims:

While still convinced of their particularistic claim to soul citizenship in Israel, the Black Hebrews' appeal to the Israeli and the U.S. public was based on the universalistic discourse of human rights, including the rights of refugees to residence and state services.¹¹²

Furthermore, the Black Hebrews publicized their resentment towards the United States by renouncing their U.S. citizenship, yet simultaneously appealed to the Black Congressional Caucus, and ultimately accepted financial grants from the United States. The group's varied attempts to garner support for their efforts revealed the AHIC as a constantly transforming community, rather than as an immutable culture. By reaching out to diverse communities, and appealing to varied discourses, the AHIC succeeded in maintaining the multiple elements of its identity, as well as defining the type of recognition it sought for its members.

As the AHIC defined "soul citizenship" in opposition to liberal modes of belonging, so too did the group reject the liberal system of justice established in Israel, as demonstrated by their appeals to institutions outside of the state. Both the AHIC and Israel thus increasingly transported their discourse surrounding national belonging and accommodation of difference outside of classical modes of liberal discourse. While the State of Israel suggested that the AHIC maintained no concrete claims of justice that compelled Israel to recognize the Black Hebrews according to liberal theory, the AHIC seemed to reject liberal theory altogether.

¹¹² Markowitz, "Soul Citizenship" 306.

In defiance of the State of Israel, members of the AHIC openly disregarded every level of national law. As members of the Black Hebrew Nation, individual Black Hebrews asserted that they remained immune from governmental institutions. On numerous occasions, the leadership of the AHIC encouraged its members to challenge established rules in order to protest against the government, and demand full rights in Israel. In a particularly bold demonstration in 1971 meant to attract attention to their impoverished condition, ten Black Hebrew women entered a supermarket in Dimona, filled their carts with groceries, and left the store without paying. The AHIC had invited reporters and photographers to the location to witness the event.¹¹³ Perhaps even more representative of the group's brazenness was the fact that Black Hebrews continued to actively recruit peers to abandon the United States and resettle in Israel. Newcomers moved into overcrowded apartments with already established Black Hebrews, and allowed their visas to expire, implicitly challenging the government to deport what had become hundreds of individuals. Finally, the group erected its own rigid legal system, comprised of extensive domestic, dietary, health, religious and educational laws. The leadership of the AHIC, made up of Ben Ammi (literally "Son of my People") and his Council of Twelve Princes, ensured that every member conducted their lives in accordance with the community's mandates.

Justice, according to the leadership of the AHIC, absolutely depended upon the literal word of God, as revealed to Ben Ammi through the Old Testament. The leaders of the community professed that the liberal notions of freedom and equality, as defended in societies like Israel and the United States, had not only excluded people of African descent, but had furthermore contributed to their destitution. In

¹¹³ Ibid.142.

writing about the Civil Rights Movement in 1982, Ben Ammi asserted that white society ultimately co-opted the messages of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, such that “Euro-Gentiles” defined the aims of the movement.¹¹⁴ In order to obtain *true* freedom, Ben Ammi affirmed that African-Americans must eschew everything but the word of God. Ben Ammi exhorted his readers to reject their current understandings of freedom in favor of freedom through knowing the God of the Black Hebrews:

When you understand our struggle, you will understand that it is a struggle to free the souls of our people to think as God would have us think, to do as God would have us do, and be the mighty people God has destined us to be. Anything else would be a disgrace to humanity. Up until now, the adversary [the Euro-gentile world] has defined his objectives as if they were ours.¹¹⁵

Later on, Ben Ammi exclaims:

Father, if we are to be persecuted (and we understand that persecuted we must be) then we want to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Let us be persecuted at the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let them blaspheme us for trying to educate our people in truth, and not for trying to integrate into a system of evil. If we must fight, let us fight for our people. If we must perish in the fight, let us perish trying to get them free.¹¹⁶

In these writings, Ben Ammi expresses the necessity of opposing established authority in the United States and Israel, which has been founded largely on liberal doctrine, such that the Black Hebrews may erect a true system of justice, founded exclusively on God’s word.

Within their three communities in the Negev (Dimona, Mitzpe Ramon, and Arad), the AHIC established an elaborate system of internal institutions that, according to the leaders of the AHIC, superseded the authority of the State of Israel.

¹¹⁴ Ben Israel 66-69.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 79.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 79-80.

Thomas Whitfield, a former member of the group who returned to the United States in the late 1970s, wrote about the intensity of Black Hebrew “trials”, in which individuals who disobeyed established codes were publicly shamed.¹¹⁷ Whitfield also notes that the leaders of the AHIC forbade members to utilize Israeli healthcare or education.¹¹⁸ The leadership attempted to construct a comprehensive system of social institutions such that members could lead lives insulated from Israeli society. Ben Ammi further flouted the sovereignty of the State of Israel by issuing “Certificates of Nationality” to all members of the AHIC, affirming that each individual was “born an Israelite,” and thus entitled to legal residence in the land of Israel.¹¹⁹ In defiance of Israeli laws that aim to protect the rational agency of each individual, the AHIC claimed complete sovereignty over individual Black Hebrews. Within a liberal state, the AHIC succeeded in erecting their own comprehensive system of justice that openly rejected the tenets of liberalism.

According to Whitfield, the laws and customs of the Black Hebrews especially burdened women, who were expected to accept their primary roles as mothers and wives, and serve their male counterparts without question. To encourage a high rate of reproduction, the AHIC leadership forbade the use of birth control, and permitted the practice of polygamy for any man who could financially provide for additional wives.¹²⁰ Ben Ammi is believed to have four wives, and fifteen children presently.¹²¹ While men also received punishment for questioning authority,

¹¹⁷ Whitfield 76.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 77.

¹¹⁹ Gerber 136.

¹²⁰ Julien Borger, “Real Lives: let my people go too,” The Guardian [London] 10 Sept. 1998.

¹²¹ Linda Jones, “After Three Decades in Israel,” The Dallas Morning News 31 July 1997.

Whitfield comments on the disproportionate number of women brought to trial within the AHIC for dissidence. Women also faced more severe punishment for their offenses. When women were found guilty of any kind of transgression, such as adultery or even disobedience, the AHIC leadership instructed community members to shun them. Whitfield writes that some women were even forced to have their heads shaved, in order to mark their crime.¹²²

As in most communities based upon fundamental religion, the AHIC has constructed clearly defined roles for men and women, and strongly discourages transgressing established gender boundaries. In this way, the AHIC maintains a distinctly illiberal way of life that privileges order and hierarchy over individual autonomy for all members. If the Israeli government recognizes such a group, to what extent is the state condoning practices that restrict freedom? Susan Okin takes up these questions in her essay, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” where she argues that multiculturalism is frequently anti-feminist. Because many of the cultures that multiculturalism seeks to protect demand the subservience of women, Okin determines that cultural preservation often endangers the healthy development and rational agency of female members.¹²³

Within the AHIC, men and women assume distinct dress codes, daily rituals, and community responsibilities. In an attempt to understand the rigid gender differentiation present within the AHIC, Markowitz comments upon its relationship to the group’s foundational narrative:

¹²² Whitfield 77.

¹²³ Susan Okin, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women with Respondents, eds. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

As part of their mandate for righting the wrongs of slavery, African-descended men are exhorted to reclaim their rightful status as household heads, and the women are urged to reassert their place as homemakers and mothers. By following this divine plan, men and women can bring healthy children into the world and raise them together to be happy, spiritually fit human beings, finally equipped with a ‘land, a language, and a culture.’¹²⁴

The subservient role of women in the AHIC reveals the fundamentally illiberal nature of the Black Hebrew lifestyle. While individuals may voluntarily elect to join the AHIC, once they become Black Hebrews, Ben Ammi and the Council of Twelve Princes oversee every aspect of their lives. Once they belong to the AHIC, individuals sacrifice their entitlement to be treated as self-determining, rational agents. Whitfield reflects on his own experience living in Dimona throughout the group’s early years:

They encouraged us not to think for ourselves. Let them do our thinking. Let them plan our lives. They knew best. They would tell all of us just to lay things into their hands. This was the problem with all of the brothers there. They didn’t think. They didn’t think about anything.¹²⁵

As a fundamentally illiberal group that professed a lifestyle contrary to the mandates of the country within which it resided, the AHIC confronted great obstacles in making rights-based claims in Israel, a predominantly liberal and democratic society. The AHIC’s stringent patriarchy, aggressive rhetoric, and overt irreverence would suggest that Israel maintained every right to expel the AHIC from its borders. Yet, the group continued to reside in three desert towns in the Negev for four decades, increasing its numbers and strengthening its resolve.

While its publicity ploys often inflamed resentment and hostility from Israeli neighbors, the AHIC eventually procured greater resources for its community through its outreach campaigns. Following the deportation of numerous Black Hebrews and

¹²⁴ Fran Markowitz, “Millenarian Motherhood,” *Nashim*, Vol. 3, 2000: 112.

¹²⁵ Whitfield 67.

the heightening of tensions with the State of Israel in 1986, the group requested support from the Black Congressional Caucus in the United States. Eventually, the lobbying group succeeded in persuading the United States government to pressure Israel to stop deportations, and provide legal aid to members of the AHIC. Furthermore, the U.S. government provided the community with a sizable grant to subsidize a free lunch program and fund a fully equipped K-12 school for Black Hebrew children.¹²⁶ Following this achievement, Ben Ammi entered negotiations with Israeli officials to further resolve the status of the Black Hebrews. In 1990, the Israeli Consul General, Uri Bar-Ner, agreed to the “General Principles of the Arrangement Regarding the Hebrew Israelite Community.” In addition to legalizing the members already in Israel, the “Principles” enabled Black Hebrews to receive state benefits, including health, education and employment assistance.¹²⁷ The legal status of the members, however, depended upon each individual’s reclamation of their American passports, and acceptance of U.S. citizenship.¹²⁸ The agreement, which established the AHIC’s recognition of Israeli law and commitment to capping membership, provided the group with a guarantee of eventual citizenship. As of September 1, 2003, the State of Israel granted members of the AHIC with permanent resident status in Israel, though the country continues to withhold full citizenship rights from the Black Hebrews.

¹²⁶ Markowitz, “Claiming the Pain” 331.

¹²⁷ Landing 421.

¹²⁸ Brilliant, “African Americans win Israeli Residency.”

Rationalizing Reconciliation: The Significance of Nonliberal Considerations

The AHIC's success in receiving institutional support for their radical efforts suggests that neither the United States nor Israel appraised the group's claims solely in reference to liberal theories of justice. As discussed above, the AHIC's enduring rejection of Israeli sovereignty and law, compounded by numerous criminal charges against individual members of the community and Ben Ammi's dictatorial style, would legitimize Israel's rejection of the Black Hebrews' claims under any liberal system of justice. In 1986, the newly inaugurated Minister of the Interior, Yitzhak Peretz, initiated proceedings to expel over fifty members of the sect, but succeeded in deporting only thirty-six. At the time, the Mayor of Dimona, Jacques Amir, commented that the group had become a "state within a state by living according to their own rules, maintaining independent institutions and refusing to recognize the official school or health systems."¹²⁹ Upon renouncing their American citizenship and staging demonstrations throughout Israel and the United States, however, the Black Hebrews erected formidable obstacles to further deportation.

Ultimately, the unique position of the Black Hebrews as both African-Americans and professed Jews, encouraged the Israeli government to act with caution. In his 1986 article detailing the precarious position of the group in the *New York Times*, Bill Kurtis, enumerates the multiple concerns of the Israeli government in dealing with the AHIC:

¹²⁹ "Court Rules Israel Can Expel 45 U.S. Born Black Jews," *The New York Times* 31 Nov. 1986.

The Israeli government had the legal right to expel the cult but they quickly realized that it was no longer a matter of deporting a small band of black Americans. The sect's numbers had swelled to 2,000, primarily as new members had infiltrated the country as tourists. They occupied sections of three Israeli cities—Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon. No government official seemed anxious to take action against them, fearing a charge of racism from the world press, and it was soon clear that Ben-Ami Carter would bring the issue to the news media's attention.¹³⁰

Reluctant to further inflame anti-Israel sentiment in the United States, or in the international arena, the Israeli government repeatedly avoided decisive action against the group, even when the Black Hebrews openly flouted state sovereignty. While AHIC membership reached 2,000 individuals in Dimona by the late 1980s, officials easily dismissed Ben Ammi's assertion that "two million blacks would come from the United State to wrest the Land of Israel from its Jewish inhabitants" as mere rhetoric.¹³¹ Both the community's restricted size and isolated existence suggested that the group presented no real threat to the incumbent government.

Officials' skepticism and resentment toward the group, however, increasingly motivated questionable governmental procedures, such as the detention of many African-American tourists in Ben Gurion International Airport. Rabbi Kohain N. Halevi, my advisor and Hebrew Israelite leader of another sect in Ghana, relayed his own experience traveling to Israel for a two-week sightseeing tour with a group from his New York synagogue in the 1980s. After being detained for twenty-four hours in the airport, the entire group was forced to return to the United States, without having set foot in the country. The recounting of similar experiences from a number of African-Americans encouraged Bayard Rustin, the director of BASIC (Black

¹³⁰ Bill Kurtis, "Strangers in the Holy Land," The New York Times 22 Mar. 1981.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Americans to Support Israel Committee) at the time, to travel to Israel to investigate claims of discrimination.¹³² Despite Rustin's visit, and Ben Ammi's subsequent commitment to halt further settlement in Dimona, some reports suggest that the government continues to scrutinize African-American tourists.¹³³ The mounting of hostility towards Israel from the African-American community encouraged Israeli officials to enter into negotiations with Ben Ammi, described above, that eventually provided legal status and financial assistance to the group in 1990.

Following the commencement of dialogue between the Israeli Minister of the Interior, Aryeh Deri, and Ben Ammi in 1989, the rhetoric and activities of the AHIC markedly changed. Markowitz writes that the "aggressively anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic slurs ... all but disappeared from their publications and press releases."¹³⁴ Upon winning legal status, and access to social services, the group promoted a more inclusive narrative, accepting the diversity of the Jewish people, as well as the right of the State of Israel to exist. Markowitz contextualizes the evolution of the group's narrative within their relationship to Israel, and white society as a whole:

Over the years, as their status in Israel changed, the Black Hebrews softened their position from racial absolutism to one of pluralism if not hybridity, and abandoned the claim that they were the only original Hebrew Israelite nation. Now they acknowledge that, in the wake of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, some Israelites fled northward into Europe and Asia and became the ancestors of today's Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Since the 1980s, the community has come to accept the sovereignty of the State of Israel and the right of all Jewish people to return to its land.¹³⁵

With the government's explicit recognition of their self-proclaimed identity, the AHIC reoriented their narrative. Perceiving their new legal status as evidence of

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Linda Jones, "After three decades in Israel."

¹³⁴ Markowitz, "Soul Citizenship" 306.

¹³⁵ Ibid. "Claiming the Pain" 333.

Israel's commitment to them, the Black Hebrews no longer had an incentive to place themselves in stark opposition to the state. The granting of legal status to the AHIC encouraged the group to significantly alter its narrative, and in turn, assured the government that the AHIC would contribute positively to Israeli society. In a 1996 interview with *United Press International*, Ben Ammi admitted that the Black Hebrews' initial aggression towards Israel stemmed from their personal experiences of rejection and racism in the United States, "For us whites were the oppressors... The rabbis came to me and said 'You're not Jewish.' I said, 'Neither are you.'... It was a reaction."¹³⁶

Once the Israeli government recognized the group's right to reside legally in Israel, and live without fear of deportation, the Black Hebrews increasingly embraced Israeli culture. While the AHIC continues to maintain a relatively insulated daily existence in the three towns they inhabit in the Negev, the Black Hebrew leadership encourages regular interaction with Israeli society, and no longer preaches an "us vs. them" mentality. Rather, the Black Hebrews now profess that their mission is to facilitate peace and understanding among the many diverse peoples that populate, and lay claim to the Land of Israel. They embrace their prolonged struggle and eventual success in Israel as proof that they are in a privileged position to assuage tensions between historically hostile groups. The Israeli government and international Jewish organizations acknowledge the ability of the Black Hebrews to act as mediators, and frequently employ them to dispel anti-Israel or anti-Jewish sentiment. After being called on by the American Jewish Congress to speak to a group of African-American

¹³⁶ Brilliant, "African-Americans Win Israeli Residency."

teenagers in December 1994, Sister Yadah, the director of the group's public relations, noted the Black Hebrews' desire to work for universal harmony:

Having come out of the American experience of racism and second class citizenship, we have now in Israel developed a relationship with people whose skin color is lighter than ours. We find in Israel brothers and sisters of different colors who have come out of the same heritage. If we have a common heritage, we must have a common goal. We wish to help others understand what this means.¹³⁷

As part of the AHIC's attempt to foster understanding, the group also conducts mediation work in the United States, between Jews and African-Americans, as well as within communities wrought with gang violence. In February 2006, with funding from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Hebrews opened the *Dr. Martin Luther King/SCLC Ben Ammi Institute for a New Humanity* to teach strategies of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and non-violence to diverse communities.¹³⁸

In further evidence of the community's integration into wider Israeli society, the AHIC participates fully in economic and social activities throughout Israel. The AHIC operates a vegetarian restaurant in Tel Aviv, produces vegetables and grains marketed throughout Israel, and directs musical groups performing "Songs of Deliverance" that tour Israel, the United States and Europe.¹³⁹ In 2006, Eddie Butler, who grew up in the "Village of Peace" in Dimona, represented Israel in Eurovision, the international music competition.¹⁴⁰ Black Hebrews also represent Israel in the

¹³⁷ A. Paul Hare, "The Community as Mediator," The Hebrew Israelite Community, ed. A. Paul Hare (New York: University Press of America Inc., 1998) 83.

¹³⁸ Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hebrew Israelite Community 29 Sep. 2006.

¹³⁹ Yadah Baht Israel, "Holistic Life," The Hebrew Israelite Community, ed. A. Paul Hare (New York: University Press of America Inc., 1998) 18-19.

¹⁴⁰ Kaufman, David, "Quest for a Homeland Gains World Stage," The New York Times

Maccabiah games, an international athletic competition for world Jewry, as well as international academic competitions. While the group once courted alliances with Arab nations hostile to Israel, the Black Hebrews now boast their capacity to protect their homeland by serving in the Israeli Defense Force. As of 2006, more than 100 Black Hebrews served in regular units in the IDF.

While the AHIC has actively sought approval and acceptance from Israeli society since receiving legal status in 1990, the Israeli government has also increasingly embraced the Black Hebrews as permanent and vibrant members of their country. Rather than cast doubt on the group's authenticity as Jews, the government now incorporates the AHIC into its broader discourse concerning pluralism and multiculturalism in Israel. In an article about the community published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the narrative begins, "A phenomenon in a land full of phenomena is the story of the Hebrew Israelite Community in Dimona, Israel." The article closes with a similar tone of triumph and self-congratulation, "Their story is a testimony of the great growth and maturity of the State of Israel and its people."¹⁴¹ As the AHIC adopted the narrative of biblical exile and return as its own, the State of Israel ultimately absorbed the experience of the Black Hebrews into its own national myth of protracted struggle and prophesied exaltation.

16 April 2006.

¹⁴¹ Baht Israel 18-19.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the AHIC in Israel cannot be adequately accommodated by conventional multiculturalist theories that presume both groups and democratic governments to operate under fixed principles. As demonstrated by the case study detailed in the previous chapter, cultural groups undergo substantive changes over time, and transform in part according to the evolving policies and attitudes they confront in their host society. The fact that the Black Hebrews now enjoy legal recognition in the State of Israel after decades of contentious relations with the government, illustrates the possibility of reconciliation through accommodation, even with groups who initially position themselves in stark opposition to the state. In understanding cultural groups to be dynamic and reactive bodies, governments may begin to think of accommodation more broadly, and as a means to peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. Rather than reserve state support and group-differentiated rights for populations that already subscribe to liberal ideals, the state may employ accommodation strategies in order to create stable relationships with groups professing markedly different beliefs. While Kymlicka suggests that accommodation ought to be reserved for groups with particular moral claims, the case of the AHIC demonstrates that states ought to consider these strategies even in the absence of such moral claims.

By initiating open dialogue, the State of Israel provided the Black Hebrews with a measure of confidence that their claims would be seriously addressed. In response to this overture, the group gradually altered its rhetoric, halted its anti-Israel campaign, and crafted a more inclusive doctrine. While the Black Hebrews have

continuously professed their intimate relationship with the biblical Israelites and strict commitment to the literal word of God, the group has altered almost every other aspect of its doctrine since immigrating to Israel in 1969. Rather than denouncing white Jews as frauds and usurpers, the AHIC now boasts of the diversity inherent within Judaism. Rather than discouraging integration with Israeli society, the AHIC incorporates its activities, such as organic farming, the “Soul Messengers” music group, and community mediation with all aspects of Israeli society. Perhaps most illustrative of this reorientation is the fact that the AHIC now encourages its youth to defend the State of Israel by serving in the Israeli Defense Forces. While initially calling for the destruction of the Israeli state, the Black Hebrews now recognize that their vitality depends upon the flourishing and endurance of the State of Israel.

The group has also transformed its position towards the United States. The Black Hebrews initially renounced the United States as “Babylon,” and concluded that the country would never empower African-Americans to be free and equal citizens, but the AHIC now invests multiple resources in the country. Throughout urban centers, such as Detroit, Washington D.C, and New York City, the AHIC runs community centers promoting healthy and peaceful living. As discussed in the last chapter, leaders of the community, including Ben Ammi himself, regularly travel to the United States to facilitate dialogue between black and Jewish populations. Despite their original attempt to completely and irrevocably extricate themselves from American society, the Black Hebrews now actively foster relationships with individuals and communities in the United States, including U.S. government officials. The AHIC’s willingness to cooperate with American officials allowed the

group to obtain legal status and substantial financial aid. The comprehensive reorientation of the AHIC's attitude toward both the United States and Israel over the past forty years highlights the immense elasticity of culture. While Ben Ammi and the Council of Twelve Princes initiated some of the transformations described above, the bulk of the AHIC's evolution occurred gradually, propelled by dialogue with dominant Israeli society. It is foreseeable that the AHIC will continue to revise and modify its cultural content in reference to the impulses it receives from the Israeli government in the future.

The experience of the AHIC lends support to John Rawls' theory of political liberalism, first introduced in Chapter II. In proposing principles of justice by which individuals with profoundly divergent doctrinal beliefs and understandings of human flourishing may ultimately endorse the same institutional structure, Rawls argues that liberalism can indeed accommodate deep diversity. By abiding by norms of reciprocity, through which individuals must defend their beliefs according to precepts that others can reasonably accept, citizens can rationally sanction the political doctrine of the state (political liberalism, according to Rawls), while continuing to uphold their personal convictions. Furthermore, each individual can accept the state's political authority by appealing to his or her own comprehensive doctrine. While the case of the AHIC in Israel is not a pure example of such reciprocity between divergent groups, the eventual recognition of the AHIC by the State of Israel, and the gradual transformation of the AHIC's rhetoric, suggests the strength and practicality of Rawls' argument for political liberalism within pluralistic societies.

In discussing the requirements of creating an “overlapping consensus” based on a unified moral conception, Rawls determines that opposing groups must mutually recognize the “burdens of judgment” that allow for the existence of starkly contrasting, but nonetheless reasonable convictions. By appreciating the immense breadth and complexity of life experience, as well as recognizing the numerous challenges involved in assessing information and making decisions, individuals can arrive at what Rawls terms “reasonable disagreement.”¹⁴² Rather than conclude that an individual who believes in the literal interpretation of the Bible is wrong, ignorant, or misinformed, I recognize through the “burdens of judgment” how this individual arrived at her beliefs through a reasonable assessment of her own life experiences. If she can similarly interpret my rejection of literal biblical interpretation as consistent with human reasoning under the “burdens of judgment,” then she can also approach me as a fully reasoning person, rather than as willfully stubborn.

Over the course of forty years in Israel, the relationship between the AHIC and the State of Israel perceptibly shifted from antagonism to reconciliation. While the Black Hebrews have maintained decidedly illiberal practices and convictions, the group nonetheless has espoused allegiance to the State of Israel and its laws. Although not a pure model of Rawls’ “overlapping consensus” under terms of reciprocity and mutually recognized “burdens of judgment,” the relationship between the AHIC and the State of Israel exhibits properties of Rawls’ requirements for “reasonable difference.” By offering measures of accommodation to the AHIC, the State of Israel initiated a fluid exchange, in which both sides experimented with positions and policies that could be reasonably accepted by the other. The Black

¹⁴² Rawls 54-56.

Hebrews realized that they could not expect recognition while continuing to descry the fraudulence of white Jews. Likewise, the State of Israel could not expect the AHIC to abide by its laws and recognize Israeli sovereignty unless the government provided the Black Hebrews with legal recognition and basic necessities.

Through this process of gradual accommodation, the relationship between the AHIC and the State of Israel progressed from a *modus vivendi* between antagonists towards an *overlapping consensus*. Rawls clearly distinguishes between these two kinds of agreements. In the first, consensus depends upon the “convergence of interests” between groups. Traditionally, warring states arrive at a *modus vivendi* by agreeing to terms that outline particular institutional arrangements reflecting only the balance of power between them. As long as the agreement enables both states to pursue their aims, peaceful relations persist. This kind of consensus, however, stems from self-interest, rather than philosophical or moral agreement. Because of their rootedness in self-interest, Rawls argues that these kinds of agreements are flawed, “... social unity is only apparent, as its stability is contingent on circumstances remaining such as not to upset the fortunate convergence of interests.” As soon as conditions shift, such that the consensus no longer satisfies the self-interest of one of the agents, the consensus disappears.¹⁴³

Throughout the first two decades of the AHIC’s illegal residence in Dimona, neither the Black Hebrews nor the State of Israel would have benefited from the group’s expulsion. This fact largely dictated the Israeli government’s calculated *nonpolicy* towards the group. As a young state already having to defend its right to exist, the fear of international condemnation encouraged the Israeli government to

¹⁴³ Ibid. 147.

avoid decisive action against the Black Hebrews. Thus, the potential power discrepancy between the militarized state and the meager group was offset by external concerns. Israel's preoccupation with grooming alliances and ensuring security provided the AHIC with an opportunity to demand serious attention for its identity claims. Due to fear of deportation, however, the Black Hebrews initially attempted to maintain a low profile throughout the country. When individual Black Hebrews transgressed Israeli laws, they were expelled from the AHIC, so as not to draw negative attention to the group. The AHIC constructed a self-contained existence, organizing its own school curriculum, justice system, and health care facility. As long as the State of Israel continued to allow them to live unhindered in the Negev desert, the Black Hebrews attracted little attention in the country.

The unspoken agreement between the AHIC and the State of Israel, however, proved tenuous. Whenever either side breached this apparent *modus vivendi*, the consensus quickly collapsed, resulting in aggression and hostility. In 1972, the Israeli High Court formally rejected the Black Hebrews' claims of Jewish descent, inciting the AHIC to initiate an anti-Israel propaganda campaign. After American intervention, the *modus vivendi* was reestablished in the late 1970s. In response to deteriorating living conditions, however, the AHIC again launched verbal attacks on the State of Israel in the mid 1980s. Following an especially hostile polemic, the State of Israel initiated deportation proceedings against over fifty Black Hebrews in 1986. The State of Israel's failure to implement concrete policies towards the AHIC encouraged the development of de facto conditions of *modus vivendi*, punctuated by periods of chaos and instability.

After almost twenty years of relations based on “happenstance and a balance of relative forces,” the State of Israel attempted a new tactic: explicit accommodation. Through this process, the established *modus vivendi* between the Black Hebrews and Israel began to transform into an *overlapping consensus*. The current relationship between the AHIC and Israel now more closely resembles an agreement founded upon mutual understanding and reciprocity, than one based purely on self-interest. While Rawls suggests that state intervention on behalf of groups is largely unnecessary after the establishment of his “principles of justice,” the above consideration suggests that accommodation can propel one kind of agreement to evolve into the other, such that antagonists can ultimately coexist peacefully, on terms both can regard as reasonably just. While power discrepancies often prevent groups with limited resources from gaining adequate attention for their claims, the case of the Black Hebrews suggests that even marginal groups with minimal power can initiate processes that move toward just outcomes. By persistently repeating their claims and exploiting the State of Israel’s vulnerabilities, the AHIC carved out an existence for itself in the state. The group’s protracted struggle to obtain legal status eventually forced the State of Israel to reevaluate its policies towards the Black Hebrews. Once the government initiated negotiation proceedings with the group, their relationship naturally deepened and evolved over time, such that consensus no longer depended solely on self-interest, but came to represent mutual understanding.

The possibility of such thorough cultural transformation over time undermines Kymlicka’s argument that group claims can be justly evaluated according to the historic legacies and present practices of a given population. In addition to his rigid

framework distinguishing “national minorities” from “ethnic groups,” Kymlicka differentiates between liberal and illiberal cultures. He asserts that groups that impose illiberal principles upon their members must not be supported by the state, for the preservation of groups that practice “internal restrictions” would run counter to his justification for multiculturalist policies. Rather than ensuring autonomy for its members, he suggests that preserving a culture that impinges upon the individual rights of its members negates the aims of multiculturalism. In this way, Kymlicka further narrows the kind of cultural minorities that qualify for state accommodation. By evaluating the current doctrines of groups, rather than the potential ends of accommodation, Kymlicka suggests that it is possible to determine whether or not a group maintains a moral claim to state recognition. He thus fails to acknowledge the kind of transformation that groups undergo in dialogue with their host societies, as demonstrated by the relationship between the AHIC and the State of Israel.

In anticipation of objections concerning the prohibitive nature of his model, Kymlicka mitigates his position by suggesting that states ought to evaluate the extent to which illiberal groups violate fundamental rights, and thus enable illiberal groups that adequately respect autonomy to receive state accommodation.¹⁴⁴ Similar to Taylor, Kymlicka notes that states should differentiate between essential and nonessential liberties, yet, again like Taylor, he fails to offer a strategy for doing so. While Kymlicka thus admits the difficulty in proposing a rigid schema for evaluating difference, he generally maintains that the state ought to classify group practices and beliefs according to their alignment with liberal ideals.

¹⁴⁴ Kymlicka 152-155, 165.

The elasticity of cultural groups, however, suggests that states should not discount accommodation of populations solely because they employ “internal restrictions” that limit the autonomy of their members. Groups can revise their narratives over time, and have the capacity to create meaningful relationships with liberal societies in spite of their different practices. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent members of illiberal groups experience “internal restrictions” as actual limits on their autonomy. For example, Markowitz suggests that many Black Hebrew women value gender-differentiation in the AHIC, and attribute their newfound contentment and self-esteem to the specificity of female life in the community.¹⁴⁵ Liberalism can embrace cultural groups that hold nonliberal convictions, so long as these groups abide by Rawls’ requirements of reciprocity, and recognize the “burdens of judgment.” While it is clear that all group claims cannot be accommodated by liberal states, it is also apparent that a group’s current ideology should not dictate how a liberal state evaluates its claims.

After initiating dialogue with the AHIC in the late 1980s, the State of Israel was presumably encouraged to continue its efforts at reconciliation by the Black Hebrews’ cooperation and responsiveness. Eager to resolve the group’s status and acquire basic resources for his community, Ben Ammi agreed to the terms of legal residence outlined by the Minister of the Interior, including the immediate capping of the Black Hebrew population in Israel. Following their provisional agreement, the AHIC received financial support for their community endeavors, including substantial school aid from the United States and land resources from Israel for their agricultural

¹⁴⁵ Markowitz, “Millenarian Motherhood,” 108-110, 115.

pursuits. While these initial agreements were in the best interests of both the AHIC and the State of Israel, they provided a basis for a more stable and profound agreement. Israel granted the AHIC a measure of autonomy such that the group could continue to organize its way of life around Ben Ammi's interpretation of the Bible. Black Hebrews now send their children to the AHIC school and continue to utilize the community's natural health care providers, rather than seeking out Israeli medical care, which conforms to the tenets of western medicine. Yet, the Black Hebrews also espouse respect for Israeli sovereignty and assert allegiance to the Israeli state. Ben Ammi has revised the doctrinal assumptions of the AHIC, such that it embraces the diversity inherent within Judaism. White Jews, according to the Black Hebrews' amended narrative, also have legitimate claims of Israelite ancestry. In this way, the doctrine of the AHIC remains consistent with the group's membership in the Israeli nation-state.

In creating actual terms by which members of the AHIC could become contributing participants in society, the State of Israel actively altered the relationship it had with the Black Hebrews, such that both sides attempted to recognize the "burdens of judgment" involved in their "reasonable difference." Simply by initiating dialogue and opening negotiations with the group, Israeli officials conveyed their willingness to treat the Black Hebrews as reasoning individuals. In working to foster better relationships with their Israeli neighbors, and by construing a more inclusive narrative, the Black Hebrews demonstrated their acceptance of other ways of life. The AHIC could simultaneously maintain fundamentalist religious practices, such as rigid gender differentiation and dietary law, but nonetheless endorse the sovereignty and

morality of the liberally organized Israeli state. In gradually shifting their rigid assumptions concerning their former antagonists, both the AHIC and the Israeli government created conditions for a more lasting agreement. This reconciliation resembles aspects of Rawls' definition of an "overlapping consensus":

An overlapping consensus, therefore, is not merely a consensus on accepting certain authorities, or on complying with certain institutional arrangements, founded on a convergence of self- or group interests. All those who affirm the political conception start from within their own comprehensive view and draw on the religious, philosophical, and moral grounds it provides. The fact that people affirm the same political conception on those grounds does not make their affirming it any less religious, philosophical, or moral, as the case may be, since the grounds sincerely held determine the nature of the affirmation.¹⁴⁶

Perhaps with time, and even greater conditions of reconciliation, such as the granting of full citizenship to the Black Hebrews, this agreement will increasingly evolve into an overlapping consensus.

In describing the primary features that enable overlapping consensus among diverse groups, Rawls notes the significance of both public discussion and socio-economic equality. Before radicalized groups temper their ideologies, and frame their convictions in such a way that moderate individuals can reasonably accept, they must enter the public forum and attempt to rationalize their positions. Throughout the 1980s, the Black Hebrews attempted to gain support for their claims through lobbying diverse groups in the United States and in the international arena. By appealing to entities such as the Black Congressional Caucus as well as the United Nations, the Black Hebrews began to shape their narrative so that others could reasonably accept it. Demanding attention first as an oppressed minority, and then as stateless refugees, the AHIC illustrated the adaptability of its claims. Rawls' precepts imply the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 147-148.

significance of the Black Hebrews' campaign to procure public support. In entering the public forum, Rawls argues that groups "move out of the narrower circle of their own views and develop political conceptions in terms of which they can explain and justify their preferred policies to a wider public." Open and frequent dialogue further produces conditions commensurate with overlapping consensus, for negotiations lead to the formation of political conceptions of justice that "provide the common currency of discussion and a deeper basis for explaining the meaning and implications of the principles and policies each group endorses."¹⁴⁷

Finally, Rawls notes that consensus depends upon the equal condition of all members of society. Without enjoying basic necessities and fundamental liberties, individuals simply cannot participate in political society, and therefore cannot be expected to develop or contribute to a political conception of justice. Before receiving legal status in 1991, the Black Hebrews lived in Israel without any protected rights. Without work permits, guaranteed subsistence, or secure homes, the group could not participate in Israeli society without resentment and hostility. In order to create conditions for negotiations, the State of Israel had to first ease the desperation of the Black Hebrews. While the Black Hebrews are not yet full citizens in Israel, they have increasingly integrated themselves into Israeli society. With greater benefits and more security, the Black Hebrews willingly recognize the state, and contribute to its flourishing. The success of reconciliation following accommodation suggests that granting members of the AHIC full Israeli citizenship, rather than permanent legal status, would further promote these positive relations with Israel.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.165.

By beginning with the assumption that accommodation often produces conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence, liberal states can begin to more broadly and inclusively address profound difference within society. Rather than granting special privileges to cultural groups solely in an attempt to thwart extinction or satisfy exclusively liberal claims of justice, states ought to consider strategies of accommodation when addressing legacies of hostility and aggression towards dominant society.

The case of the Black Hebrews in Israel suggests that minority groups who initially position themselves in stark opposition to the state may ultimately come to honor liberal state sovereignty after receiving formalized recognition. Following centuries of bloodshed and terror, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Protestant paramilitary groups committed to nonviolence after Britain agreed to create a coalition that distributed greater power to the Catholic minority in May of 2007. In Northern Ireland, the Protestant minister, Ian Paisley, has collaborated for the past year with Martin McGuinness, a former leader of the IRA, in governing the country.¹⁴⁸ While this distribution of power is not an “overlapping consensus” in itself, the fact that two previously warring factions now must work together for a common purpose, the peaceful and productive future of Northern Ireland, suggests that mutual respect and understanding may develop over time, as did in the case of the Black Hebrew minority in the State of Israel.

While the formal power-sharing agreement in Northern Ireland is quite new, it has produced a halt in violence and an increase in optimism since its inception. Along with the experience of the Black Hebrews, this power-sharing agreement offers an

¹⁴⁸ John Burton, “Era Ends in North Ireland,” [The New York Times](#) 5 Mar. 2008

alternative account of accommodation. Rather than consist of formulaic applications, strategies of accommodation may be applied broadly to promote peace and justice among historically hostile populations. By enabling minority groups to more effectively contribute to society through enhanced political representation and socio-economic power, accommodation diffuses latent tensions in the state. States can thus preempt the fomentation of discontent by empowering members of disadvantaged groups.

This reasoning suggests that states with disproportionately burdened immigrant populations, such as France or Germany, would improve relations with these communities by committing greater resources to them. To prevent uprisings against the government, such as the eruption of anger and violence in the Parisian suburbs in 2005, liberally oriented states ought to implement policies that incorporate these potentially subversive elements into dominant society. These cases further suggest that Israel may create conditions for peace with Arab Israelis by implementing policies that grant these populations greater political representation in the Knesset and raise their standard of living. While the struggle over land and power in Israel is deeply rooted and immensely complex, strategies of accommodation may provide the foundation upon which mutual understanding and reasonable difference between oppositional populations can gradually develop.

In providing accommodation to groups, states create societal environments that better enable the attainment of classically liberal aims, such as freedom and equality. Upon initiating negotiations with previously discontented and agitated elements, the state actively addresses the concerns of its citizenry, and expresses a

commitment to making space for difference in liberally oriented cultures.

Governments thus enter into dialogue with diverse populations, and construct terms for consensus with groups that may subscribe to divergent notions of the good life. Consequently, members of previously disadvantaged groups can more confidently and effectively participate in public life. As such, accommodation ought to be evaluated as a potential precondition for pluralism.

While liberal theorists, both past and present, have called for the accommodation of difference, they have done so only by appealing to liberal conceptions of justice. Group claims, they have suggested, carry weight only in so far as they coincide with explicitly liberal notions of autonomy and equality. As the case study of the AHIC demonstrates, however, such an approach remains far too limited in the twenty-first century. Due to the increasing centrality and elasticity of culture today, states ought to reconsider their strategies of accommodation. Rather than accommodate group claims because it is *required* by liberal conceptions of justice, states ought to grant recognition to minority cultures in order to *realize* liberal conceptions of justice.

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