

Entrepreneurs of hate and entrepreneurs of solidarity: Social identity as a basis for mass communication

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Abstract

The authors draw upon the principles of the social identity tradition in order to elaborate a psychological model of mass communication. This centres on the way in which people construe their social identities and the meanings of events for these identities. They then go on to look at the ways in which these principles have been employed both to mobilize collective support for genocide and collective resistance to genocide. They conclude that it is critical to understand these principles and to apply them effectively in order to promote social harmony and the defence of vulnerable groups.



There is a long-standing view that the masses are mindless and hence should only be appealed to in the simplest possible terms. Ever since Herodotus, the so-called “father of history,” exclaimed “I hate the blind mass,” this view has

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had many classical adherents. In modern times, however, it was most forcibly and influentially expressed by Gustave Le Bon in his text ‘The Crowd’.¹ Le Bon argued that as soon as people become anonymous within the crowd, they lose their sense of identity, their ability to judge, and hence they uncritically accept any passing idea and emotion. There is no point in appealing to them with reasoned arguments, content becomes almost irrelevant. What matters is how things are expressed: make it clear, make it simple and say it repeatedly. As long as these rules are observed, the mass can be led in almost any direction.

Introduction: Group theory and models of mass influence

Le Bon’s explicit aim was to advise the autocrats of his age on how to turn the masses from a threat into a bulwark of the existing order, and he was highly successful in this regard. The list of his admirers reads like a roll call of early twentieth century dictators, including Mussolini, Goebbels and Hitler.² Indeed, it is as filtered through these acolytes that Le Bonian principles have achieved most resonance. Thus Hitler wrote: “I use emotion for the many and reserve reason for the few.” This was echoed by Goebbels, who advised that: “The most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly — it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over.” Or, more succinctly and most famously perhaps, Goebbels boasted that “if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”

Classic models of influence: All form and no content

While the post-Nazi world has rejected the content of Goebbels’ lies, it has retained his claims about the process of lie-telling — or at least the general assumption that mass influence depends upon the form and not the content of what is said. In part this is because the underlying Le Bonian assumptions about loss of self have been retained in some modern theories of the group and of group influence.³

In part it is because of the ways in which others challenged Le Bon’s legacy. They did so by saying that groups were constituted either by the individual characteristics of members or, more usually, by the relations of dependency between these individuals. In 1976, Moscovici wrote a trenchant critique of this, by then, mainstream view.⁴ He pointed out that if groups are

1 Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 1895; translated into English: *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 1897.

2 Serge Moscovici, *L’age des foules*, Fayard, Paris, 1981; R. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology*, Sage, New York, 1975.

3 See Stephen Reicher, Russell Spears, & Tom Postmes, “A social identity model of deindividuation phenomena,” *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 6, 1995, pp. 161-198.

4 Serge Moscovici, *Social Influence and Social Change*, Academic Press, London, 1976.

constituted out of inter-individual dependency relations and if social influence follows these lines of dependency, then it can only serve to reproduce existing inequalities of power. Irrespective of their message, those upon whom others are dependent will spread influence, and, irrespective of what they are told, those who are dependent upon others will be influenced. Moscovici argued that this ignores the role of dissidents in promoting social change and launched a whole tradition of research on minority influence. But even within this tradition, a critique of the critique of Le Bon, the emphasis was still on how things were said — minorities must be consistent in their views without laying themselves open to being dismissed as simply rigid — rather than what is said.⁵

The bizarre result of all this is that psychological studies of social influence, to the extent that they even consider what speakers are saying (rather than what speakers or the audience are like), for the most part analyse general features of a text, such as how complex it is or whether it uses one-sided as opposed to two-sided arguments. Studies very rarely look at precisely what is being said.

A new psychology of mass influence

In this article we will challenge both this general neglect of content and the more specific claim that mass communication must necessarily substitute passion for reason. However, as should be clear by now, such claims are not incidental but rather are deeply rooted in the more general history of group psychology. Our challenge, then, will start by outlining an alternative social psychology of groups. From that we will draw some general principles about mass social influence, and will then go on to show how these principles can be applied either to promoting acts of violence against others or else acts of solidarity and succour.

Social identity and collective action

At one level, Le Bon and his early critics appear as polar opposites. Le Bon claimed that identity was lost in the group. His critics⁶ claimed that identity was retained or even accentuated in the mass. But despite this, both shared the assumption that the individual self constituted the sole basis of reasoned action. Social factors, such as the presence of others, might affect the operation of this self, but neither theorist entertained the idea that such factors might actually constitute the self, thus providing a social basis for the norms, values — and hence judgements — that shape collective action.⁷ Work within the social identity

5 Serge Moscovici, "Social influence and conformity," in G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 3rd edition, Vol. 2, Random House, New York, 1985, pp. 347-412.

6 See as an example Floyd Allport, *Social Psychology*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston MA., 1924.

7 For a more detailed development of this point see Stephen Reicher, "Crowd behaviour as social action," in J. Turner, M. Hogg, P. Oakes, S.D. Reicher & M. Wetherell, *Rediscovering the Social Group*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987.

tradition (including both social identity theory⁸ and the later development of the self-categorization theory⁹) is based on a challenge to this viewpoint.

Identity as a multi-level system

For social identity theorists, the self is not a unitary individual construct but instead is a complex system. While we always define our identity in terms of our relationship to others, this can be done at different levels of abstraction: on the subordinate or personal level (where my self is what makes “I” distinct from “you”); on the intermediate or social level (what makes “us” distinct from “them”); and on the superordinate or human level (what makes people distinct from non-humans). Most attention, however, has been paid to the level of social identification, that is, the identities which derive from our membership of social groups. It is important to stress the plural here. Insofar as we all belong to several groups, we also have a series of social identities (myself as a European, as a humanitarian, as a Jew, as a woman and so on) which will be salient to us in different contexts.

The core argument of the social identity tradition is that the psychological shift from a personal to a social level of identification underlies the behavioural shift from individual to group action. Indeed, shared social identification is what makes collective action possible.¹⁰ The corollary is that group behaviour is associated with depersonalization. In other words, as group members we tend to see self and others in terms of the social categories they belong to — and, more particularly, whether they belong to the same group as ourselves (ingroup members) or to another group (outgroup members) — rather than their specific individual characteristics. More generally, we tend to see events in the world in terms of their significance to our group and to ourselves as group members rather than their implications for ourselves as distinct individuals.

Social identity as basis of social power

There is meanwhile a rich and complex body of research based on these principles and we have no space to do it justice here.¹¹ However, for present purposes, there are three elements in particular that are of especial relevance. First, shared group membership transforms the relationship between people in such a way as to enable coordinated and effective collective action. Thus, when people view

8 Henri Tajfel & John Turner, “An integrative theory of intergroup conflict,” in W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Brooks/Cole, Monterey, CA, 1979, pp. 33-47.

9 Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, *op. cit.* (note 7).

10 John Turner, “Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group,” in H. Tajfel (ed.), *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 15-40; Stephen Reicher & Alex Haslam, (in press) “Rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC Prison Study,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*.

11 For reviews, see Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears & Bertjan Doojse, “Self and social identity,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 53, 2002, pp. 161-186; Alex Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations*, Sage, London, 2001; for an elaboration of principles see John Turner, “Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories,” in N. Ellemers, R. Spears & B. Doojse (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, pp. 6-34; Stephen Reicher, “The context of social psychology: Domination, resistance and change,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, 2004, pp. 40-62.

others as belonging to the same category as they do, they are more likely to trust, respect and cooperate with them;¹² they are more likely to offer them help and solidarity¹³ and they are more likely to seek out agreement with them. All this combined leads to enhanced organizational efficiency.¹⁴ One aspect of this is particularly important for the ensuing argument. It is that where people share an identity and hence share values and priorities, it becomes possible for somebody (or some bodies) to represent what they have in common. In other words, shared identity makes leadership possible.¹⁵ This further enhances the ability of a set of people to ensure that their efforts complement each other and are directed in the most effective way to reach group goals. In short, social identity is an important basis of social power — especially for groups which otherwise lack resources or control institutions.¹⁶

Self-stereotyping and the process of conversion

Second, when people categorize themselves as members of a group, a process of self-stereotyping is set in motion.¹⁷ That is to say, people seek to ascertain the norms, values and understandings which characterize the said group and then conform to them. Insofar as these so-called “criterial attributes” will vary from group to group (as an academic at my desk, it is important for me to be impartial, dispassionate and objective; however, place me as a sports fan at a game, then loyalty, passion and commitment take priority), so our behaviour will vary from context to context as different identities become salient. It is important to stress that this is a genuine process of conversion: we act on the basis of the group ideology not because we succumb to the power of others or because we seek their approval but because it defines who we are and what counts for us. That is, the terms which guide and control our actions as group members are defined by a social construct that cannot be reduced to any single individual. The concept of social identity thereby opens the way to a psychological understanding of how the individual can act as a social subject in ideologically intelligible ways.

Insofar as the definition of a social identity (or else the precise implication it has for action in the immediate context) is not self-evident, then group

12 Tom R. Tyler & Stephen L. Blader, *Cooperation in Groups: Procedural Justice, Social Identity, and Behavioral Engagement*, Psychology Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2000.

13 Mark Levine, Clare Cassidy, Gemma Brazier & Stephen Reicher, “Self-categorisation and bystander non-intervention: Two experimental studies,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 7, 2002, pp. 1452-1463; Mark Levine, Amy Prosser, David Evans & Stephen Reicher, “Identity and emergency intervention: How social group membership and inclusiveness of group boundaries shapes helping behaviour,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 31, 2005, pp. 443-453; Stephen Reicher, Clare Cassidy, Nick Hopkins & Mark Levine, “Saving Bulgaria’s Jews: An analysis of social identity and the mobilisation of social solidarity,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 36, 2006, pp. 49-72.

14 Haslam, *op. cit.* (note 11); Reicher & Haslam, *op. cit.* (note 10).

15 Stephen Reicher, Alex Haslam & Nick Hopkins, “Social identity and the dynamics of leadership: Leaders and followers as collaborative agents in the transformation of social reality,” *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 16, 2005, pp. 547-568.

16 John Turner, “Examining the nature of power: A three-process theory,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 35, 2005, pp. 1-22.

17 Turner, *op. cit.* (note 10); John Turner, *Social Influence*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1991.

members need to seek out or else evaluate information relating to these issues in order to know what to do. For this reason, the process of self-stereotyping is also, in effect, a process of influence with implications for who will be influenced, what will be influential and who will exert influence. Thus, only those who identify with a social category will be influenced by information about the group identity. Those who do so identify will only be influenced by information that is evidently consonant with the category definition. And only those who are in a position to give an authoritative definition of group identity — in particular, those who are perceived as exemplary (or prototypical) group members — will be in a position to exert group influence.

Societal implications of social identity processes

Third, social identity theory is explicitly formulated to be of relevance to large-scale social categories as well as small groups. Indeed, when Tajfel¹⁸ introduced the concept of social identity, he drew on Emerson's¹⁹ discussion of the nation as a body of people who feel they are a nation. More generally, the concept of the group as a set of people sharing a social identity is close to Anderson's famous definition of nations as "imagined communities."²⁰ From this perspective, the broader societal implications of the foregoing processes can be readily appreciated. To define a set of people as belonging to a common social category (or, more accurately, to lead a set of people to define themselves as belonging to a common social category) is to create social power through mobilizing people to act together, and to define the parameters which constitute the social category is to guide how that power is applied.

More specifically, the definition of who is included in the category (category boundaries) will determine the extent of the mobilization, the definition of what it means to be a category member (category content) will determine the direction of the mobilization, and the definition of who best exemplifies the category (category prototypes) will determine the leadership of the mobilization.²¹ This can be summarized by saying that social categories constitute the mobilizations that (re)make the social world. To control the definition of social categories hence confers a world-making power. How, then, do these definitions come about?

Defining social categories: Influence agents as entrepreneurs of social identity

One broad consequence of the Le Bonian tradition of collective irrationality is a tendency to see group level perceptions as a form of error and distortion. By contrast, those in the social identity tradition, and self-categorization

18 Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation between Social Groups*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978.

19 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *From Empire to Nation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1960.

20 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983.

21 For more details see Stephen Reicher & Nick Hopkins, *Self and Nation*, Sage, London, 2001.

theorists in particular, stress that these perceptions must be related to social reality. The original emphasis was on the way in which the perceptions of social categories reflected the social structuring of social contexts.²² More recently, emphasis has been laid on the way in which social categories are used to mobilize people in order to create structures in the social world.²³ That is to say, there is a bi-directional relationship between social categorization and social reality. Categories both reflect present social realities and are also constructed in relation to projects for the future of society. All those who actively seek to shape social reality — politicians, NGOs, movement activists — are necessarily concerned with the definition of social categories. To be effective, they must be skilled entrepreneurs of identity.

In overall terms, this skill involves constituting as a single category the audience which the entrepreneur wishes to mobilize, constituting the project which the entrepreneur wants to achieve as an instantiation of the norms, values and priorities associated with this category and constituting the entrepreneur him/herself as prototypical of the category. Let us briefly illustrate these broad claims with specific instances.

On 2 April 1982, Argentinian forces landed on the Falkland Islands — a place unknown by most of the British population and, even to the extent that it was known, one that had hitherto been of little concern. Certainly, there was no outcry when, the previous year, the citizenship status of the islanders had been severely downgraded in the 1981 Nationality Act. The next day, 3 April, the British parliament met on a Saturday for the first time since Suez and voted to send a military task force to reclaim the Islands. However, for the military mobilization to be possible it was necessary to create a popular mobilization in favour of war. It was necessary to get people to feel engaged in the events and to feel outrage as if they themselves were under attack.

The frontpage headline of the Daily Express newspaper on 3 April was: ‘Our loyal subjects. We MUST defend them’ (emphases in the original). The second paragraph of the article read: “The right of the Falkland islanders, people who are wholly British in origin, sentiment and loyalty, to remain British and to continue to live under British rule must be defended as if it were the Isle of Wight which had been invaded.” These words were echoed by Margaret Thatcher in her speech to the House of Commons. She concluded: “The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few

22 Penny Oakes, Alex Haslam & John Turner, *Stereotyping and Social Reality*, Sage, London, 1994; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, *op. cit.* (note 7).

23 Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, *op. cit.* (note 15), pp. 547-568; Stephen Reicher & Nick Hopkins, “Constructing categories and mobilising masses: An analysis of Thatcher’s and Kinnock’s speeches on the British miner’s strike 1984-5,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 26, 1996, pp. 353-371; Stephen Reicher & Nick Hopkins, “Seeking influence through characterising self-categories: An analysis of anti-abortionist rhetoric,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 35, 1996, pp. 297-312; Stephen Reicher, & Nick Hopkins, *Self and Nation*, Sage, London, 2001; Stephen Reicher & Nick Hopkins, “On the science of the art of leadership,” in D. van Knippenberg & M. Hogg (eds.), *Identity, Leadership and Power*, Blackwell, Oxford 2003.

in number, but they have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. It is the wish of the British people and the duty of Her Majesty's Government to do everything that we can to uphold that right."

By constituting the Falkland Islanders as emblematically British, an attack upon them became an attack upon Britain. Moreover, by constituting the population in identical national terms (both the Express and the Prime Minister take it as given that their audience is positioned as a British people), then all became the subjects of Argentinian aggression. Thus, the fate of the Falklanders (which previously concerned, let alone outraged, virtually no one in the UK) now became the fate of all. Or, to put it more technically, the use of inclusive categories that linked victims to the population as a whole provided the basis for mobilizing the population for war (and in favour of those prosecuting the war). Support for the war surged and stayed at between 70 and 80% throughout the conflict, Margaret Thatcher, previously the most unpopular post-war Prime Minister, became the most popular. The ruling Conservative Party doubled its opinion poll rating from 23% in December 1981 to 46% just after the war.

So, broad categories enable broad mobilizations and hence the broader the mobilization one wants to achieve the more inclusive one's categories need to be. Nationality, for instance, does not necessarily encompass the whole population. It can be defined in a series of ways involving lesser or greater inclusion: as a matter of descent (in which case migrants and hence most ethnic minorities are included); of birth (more inclusive, but still excluding first generation migrants); or of involvement in and commitment to national life (thus including everyone in the national territory who so chooses). To use an example that is local to us, there are groups in Scotland who seek to mobilize only sections of the population in direct action and are content to use ethnically exclusive definitions of Scottishness. By contrast, those political parties who want to be voted into office cannot afford to exclude any section of the electorate and therefore use highly inclusive formulations of the national category. For instance Alex Salmond, leader of the separatist Scottish National Party (SNP), spoke to his 1995 party conference in the following terms: "our ambition is to see the cause of Scotland argued with English, French, Irish, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and every other accent in the rich tapestry of what we should be proud to call, in the words of Willie McIllvanney, 'the mongrel nation' of Scotland."

It wasn't just the separatists who used such an inclusive definition of nationhood and employed it to appeal to the population. All the main parties did likewise, even the Conservative party who vehemently opposed any extension of Scottish statehood.²⁴ The value of using "Scottishness" lay in its ability to reach the entire electoral audience, not in any inherent link to a particular policy or ideology, and since all the parties sought to reach this same audience, they did not differ in their appeal to people as Scots. Where identity did link to policy and ideology, and hence where the parties differed profoundly, was in

24 See Reicher & Hopkins, *Self and Nation*, *op. cit.* (note 23).

the content ascribed to being Scottish. In other words, parties all appealed to the same national category because they wanted to appeal to the same people, but they all characterized the category differently because they all wanted to get people to do different things. For the left-wingers of the Labour Party, Scots are inherently egalitarian, communal, welfarist and opposed to privilege — in the words of one Labour parliamentarian, they endorse “the corporate community that is Scotland.” For the right-wingers of the Conservative party, Scots are inherently “canny and thrifty,” hard-working and entrepreneurial. In each case, the party purports not to impose its view on the audience but, it claims, simply expresses what they already believe (while the opposition abnegates these beliefs). The link is often implicit but is sometimes made quite explicit. For instance, according to the Conservatives (or at least the party’s Ian Lang, when he was Secretary of State for Scotland), “distinctive Scottish qualities” are “so compatible with Conservatism,” while “socialism” is “alien.”

However, of all the rhetorical efforts expended by politicians, perhaps the most intense are devoted to constructing themselves. Indeed, it may be said that the key to being chosen as a representative by an audience is to render oneself representative of that audience. All political autobiography is either selected or invented to that end. There are therefore countless examples to choose from: Margaret Thatcher altering her dress, her appearance, even lowering her voice, to personify herself as “Britannia” in order to rule the British people; Tony Blair, the erstwhile rock guitarist who represented a new “cool Britannia” to the electorate; George W Bush as the leather-jacketed Texan whose verbal mishaps only made him more plausible as a typical middle-American. Wilner,²⁵ provides a particularly detailed case study of the way in which the Indonesian leader Sukharno was represented as Bima, the legendary hero and demigod of Javanese and Balinese mythology. Like Bima, Sukharno’s life story was told so as to highlight the key attributes of bravery and stubbornness. To echo Bima, Sukharno’s physical muscularity, his booming voice, his brutal gestures and his coarse language were emphasized, although these violated the norms of Indonesia’s dominant cultural groups. Sukharno even evoked Bima’s association with the colour black (which symbolizes strength) by invariably carrying a black baton. When it comes to trading influence, the determined entrepreneur of identity can leave no detail to chance.

Mobilizing hate

One way of reframing and encapsulating what we have argued thus far is to say that effective mass communication involves construing speaker and audience as mutually involved in a common social category so that the speaker can interpret the relationship of actual and possible events in terms of shared collective concerns. Communicators put themselves in a position to answer certain key

25 Ann Ruth Wilner, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984.

questions for their intended constituency: “What does this mean for us? Does it represent or undermine who we are, what we believe in and what we care about?” Thus far we have addressed these processes and techniques in general terms. Let us now apply them to the more specific issues of intergroup relations. In particular, how is it possible to mobilize people to condone — or even actively participate in — violence towards others?

We suggest that, as with any other phenomenon, collective evaluations of human beings and actions towards them depend upon how their significance for “us” as a social group is viewed. That is, the orientation of an audience to a given target depends upon how “we” are construed, how “they” are construed, and on the relationship that is put together between these two constructions. Contrary to much popular belief and academic misinterpretation, there is no inherent antipathy or antagonism between people who are different or even who are seen as belonging to different groups.²⁶ Even where such antagonism is presented as a reflection of “ancient hatreds,” much rhetorical work goes into creating the conditions of exclusion, discrimination and violence.

The importance of analysing the nature of this work becomes all the more apparent if one accepts that, in the main, even the most appalling acts are rarely accepted as such by those who perpetrate them. Violence is generally legitimated as “self-defence” against the perceived aggression of the target²⁷ and atrocity is generally represented as a noble and even virtuous act. Or, to put it the other way round, atrocity becomes more possible when the perpetrators can regard themselves as doing good. Indeed, perhaps one of the most chilling speeches of the twentieth century was delivered by Himmler to SS personnel in Poznan, Poland, on 4 October 1943: “Most of you must know what it means when one hundred corpses are lying side by side, or five hundred or a thousand. To have stuck it out and at the same time... to have remained decent fellows. This is a page of glory in our history.”²⁸ How, then, can genocide be sanctioned as virtue?

The process can be analytically divided into three elements, although in practice they may be intertwined. First, and most importantly, the ingroup identity needs to be construed so as to exclude the outgroup. Perhaps the most dangerous form this takes is to define the national community (“the people”) in ethnic terms — or, as Mann²⁹ puts it, to render the *demos* as *ethnos*. At this point, the minority are already excluded from the benefits of national inclusion, the rights and resources that stem from being a “national.” Moreover, to identify people as a distinct category raises a “minority question” for the majority. It does not in itself determine any particular course of action, but it does provide a space in

26 Stephen Reicher, “The context of social psychology: Domination, resistance and change,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, 2004, pp. 40-62.

27 Clifford Stott, Paul Hutchison & John Drury, “‘Hooligans’ abroad? Inter-group dynamics, social identity and participation in collective ‘disorder’ at the 1998 World Cup Finals,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 40, 2001, pp. 359-384; Clifford Stott, & Stephen Reicher, “How conflict escalates: The inter-group dynamics of collective football crowd ‘violence,’” *Sociology*, Vol. 32, 1998, pp. 353-377.

28 Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA., 2003, p. 221.

29 Michael Mann, “The dark side of democracy,” Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

which extreme answers can be proposed. It furthermore allows the institutions of the nation and (where relevant) the State to be mobilized in order to implement any “solution.”

Second, the minority needs to be construed as a problem, or, more acutely, a threat for the ingroup. Much is often made of the dehumanization of outgroups, but when one looks more closely at the images used by genocidal regimes it becomes clear that outgroups are often portrayed both as subhuman and superhuman.³⁰ In Hutu extremist propaganda, Tutsis were sometimes *Inyenzi* (cockroaches) and sometimes *Inkotanyi* (tough fighters). In Nazi propaganda, Jews were sometimes maggots and rats and sometimes all-knowing and all-powerful figures. It wasn't just that they were animals, but that they were vermin: out of place, polluting, defiling. Nor was it just that they were powerful, but that they were conspiring against Germany. What these different images had in common was the danger and threat to the ingroup that the outgroup supposedly represented. Often the implied threat was one of physical annihilation, but often it was a symbolic annihilation: the destruction of ingroup identity and of a way of life based on ingroup norms and values. At this point a violent solution to “the minority question” is legitimated, since violence can be construed as self-defence.

Third, the ingroup needs to be construed as virtuous. This is, perhaps, the most under-appreciated aspect of the process. It is, however, addressed comprehensively in Koonz's book ‘The Nazi Conscience’. She writes: “(a)lthough it may strain credulity to conceive of Adolf Hitler as a prophet of virtue, therein lay the secret of his immense popularity.”³¹ Hitler characterized the German *Volk* as an ethical community, as selflessly devoted to others, modest and abstemious in their tastes. He celebrated their humility, their purity, their cleanliness. He pledged himself to defend German “morality, customs, sense of justice, religion, etc.”³² Koonz emphasizes that in the years after 1933 Hitler repeatedly celebrated “the pillars of (German) national character,” but hardly ever mentioned the Jews. Some commentators thought this reflected a softening of his views, but here they missed the point entirely.

The key, but implicit, premise of all Hitler's rhetoric was a celebration of Germany as an ethnic community. In this context, the virtuous content of group identity — solidarity, altruism, respect, love, devotion — leads to prosocial behaviour only towards those within this community. With regard to Jews, these norms did not translate directly into behaviour but rather worked through their impact on the significance of this outgroup for the ingroup. The more Germany was celebrated and the more the people became devoted to it, the more rage could be directed against those who threatened it. The more the *Volk* were seen to be good, the more evil enemy actions were perceived to be and

30 See as examples Hege Lovdal Gulseth, “The use of propaganda in the Rwandan genocide,” unpublished thesis, University of Oslo, 2004; D. Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, Routledge, London, 1993.

31 Koonz, *op. cit.*, (note 28), p. 17.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the more virtuous it became to destroy the enemy. Hence Hitler's rhetoric did not need to mention Jewish people explicitly. Instead it created the conditions under which it became unexceptional to propose the destruction of Jewry.

In effect Hitler and his propagandists "crafted a national morality play"³³ in which the poor honest *Volk* were faced by a satanic alien and the hero was he who struck that alien down. That is how Himmler was able to describe members of the Gestapo as "men with human kindness, with human hearts, and absolute rightness."³⁴ They, alongside members of the SS, undertook those unpleasant but necessary tasks which everyone knew to be necessary but not everyone had the courage or discipline to carry through. This example synthesizes the various elements we have been describing. Once the exclusive ingroup is seen to be threatened by the excluded outgroup, then the more one emphasizes ingroup virtue, the more one removes limits to action against the outgroup. There is an important theoretical and practical point here. On the whole, work on discrimination in psychology and other disciplines has focused on representations of the outgroup. However, the explicit focus of "hate rhetoric" is frequently on who "we" are and this leaves implicit (but obvious) who is excluded. Equally, once it is evident who "they" are and that "they" endanger us, then a focus on ingroup vulnerability and ingroup virtue is sufficient to legitimate intergroup violence. Unlike the early observers of the Third Reich, we should not be fooled into thinking that those who do not denigrate outgroup members are necessarily any the less hateful towards them.

To underscore this point, we shall conclude this section with another example taken from a very different cultural context. On 27 February 2002 a train carrying Hindu activists caught fire as it passed through the town of Godhra in India and 59 passengers died. Hindu nationalist groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) claimed that the train had been attacked by Muslims and this led to a wave of anti-Muslim rioting in the province of Gujarat during which up to 1,000 people were killed. Pravin Togadia, one of the leaders of VHP, was one of those who, according to the Muslim Milli Gazette, justified this violence. Yet after having interviewed Togadia, the paper perceives "a silver lining in the darkness of hate" owing to the fact that he sees Indian Muslims and Hindus as sharing a common ancestry. Indeed, the report on the interview is entitled "We (Hindus and Muslims) are ethnically and culturally the same."³⁵ Yet this is to mistake similarity and a common past for common identity in the present. Even though these are frequently connected — and construals of ancestry are often a basis for constructing present identity — the connection is not a necessary one. In fact, Togadia uses historical similarity as a basis for casting Muslims as an inherently dangerous "other."

Togadia bases his views on the claim that India is an inherently Hindu country and that originally the entire population was Hindu. He also claims

33 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

35 *Milli Gazette* (2006): "We (Hindus and Muslims) are ethnically and culturally the same," available at: <<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15102002/1510200233.htm>>, (last visited on 19 January 2006).

that Hinduism is an inherently tolerant and humane belief system. To his mind, Muslims are those who deliberately turned against this credo. They are the one thing worse than enemies — they are renegades.³⁶ By their very nature they threaten the group by corroding it from the inside. Moreover, by turning against an inherently virtuous group they are inherently deprived.

In this way the ingroup value of tolerance serves to justify a policy of extreme intolerance. Destruction of Muslims is a necessary defence against evil. So Togadia crafts his own morality play by drawing upon local cultural resources, notably the stories of the god Rama. Thus he states that: “(w)hen the secularists selectively condemn the Gujarat violence, it seems that without *Sita haran* (Sita’s abduction) the *Lanka dahan* (Lanka’s burning) is imagined.” The reference is to the story of the good goddess Sita, who was abducted by the bad demon Ravana. Rama, Sita’s husband, destroyed Ravana, an event brought about by Ravana’s own actions and an act of purification. In the same way (Togadia implies) the massacre of Muslims was necessitated and justified by their own destructive nature as displayed at Godhra.

In sum, we must beware of taking descriptions of similarity and difference in the abstract, and the same goes for characterizations of the ingroup and outgroup. To repeat, what counts is how “we” and “they” are construed and the meaning of “them” for “us.” Hence a common past can invoke antagonism when it is used as an antecedent of opposition, and ingroup “tolerance” can invoke intolerance when it is supposedly threatened by the outgroup. As Koonz concludes: “(t)he potential for racial hatred lurks whenever political leaders appeal to the exalted virtue of their own ethnic community.”³⁷

Mobilizing solidarity

It is valid to study hate in its own right. But also, if we understand the conditions which create antagonism, we thereby understand what to do in order to avoid it or even invoke positive acts towards other people. If the starting point for entrepreneurs of hatred is to create an exclusive definition of the “moral” community, then it follows that entrepreneurs of solidarity need to define their communities more inclusively.

Consider the following study.³⁸ Supporters of Manchester United football club are recruited for an experiment. In a first scenario, they are greeted in one building, their support for the team is stressed, and then they are told to go to another building in order to be tested. As they are on their way they see someone (actually an actor) fall over and hurt himself. This person is wearing either a Manchester United shirt, a rival team’s (Liverpool) shirt or an ordinary

36 José M. Marques & Dario Paez, “The ‘black sheep effect’: Social categorisation, rejection of ingroup deviates and perception of group variability,” *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 6, 1994, pp. 37–68.

37 Koonz, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 274.

38 Levine, Prosser, Evans & Reicher, “Identity and emergency intervention: How social group membership and inclusiveness of group boundaries shapes helping behaviour,” *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 443–453.

T-shirt. In the first case, help is almost universal. In the other two cases people almost always just walk on by. A second scenario is identical to the first, apart from the fact that here the Manchester United fans are told they are taking part in a study on how football supporters in general are treated. This time, they go to the aid of the actor both when he is wearing a Manchester United shirt and a Liverpool shirt. They still pass by him when he is wearing an ordinary T-shirt.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, we are more likely to help people when they are ingroup members. Second, and more important perhaps, the nature of our ingroup categories can be defined differently, and the more inclusive the categories the wider the nature of our helping. Of course, for all its clarity this study concerns a rather trivial incident. So consider a second study.³⁹ This involves British participants whose identity either as British or as European is stressed by the experimenters. They are then given information about natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods and told that they have occurred either elsewhere in Europe or in South America. How much help do participants give to victims in these different conditions? The results indicate that, when British identity is made salient, there is no difference in the level of support given to victims as a function of whether disasters are ascribed to Europe or South America. However, when European identity is made salient, more support is given in the European than in the South American case. What is more, the level of support given to European victims is greater when European identity as opposed to British identity is salient. So once again, using a more socially consequential example, people are helped more when they are ingroup members and therefore patterns of helping depend upon the boundaries of the currently salient identity.

Finally, let us turn from the experimental manipulation of social identities to the ways in which identities are actually used by those who seek to promote social solidarity. We have spent much time addressing the dark side of virtue, so it is appropriate to conclude by considering the brighter side of even the most terrible times. In amidst the horrors of the Holocaust there are some remarkable examples of rescue both on an individual level and, more consequentially and more relevant for us, on a collective level.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most remarkable example of collective rescue is to be found in Bulgaria. Although Jewish people were sent to their deaths from annexed territories, not a single Jew was deported from 'Old' Bulgaria, and more Jews were living in the country at the end of the war than at the beginning.⁴¹ When, in 1940 and 1943,

39 Mark Levine & Karen Thompson, "Identity, place, and bystander intervention: Social categories and helping after natural disasters," *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 144, 2004, pp. 229-245.

40 Kristen R. Monroe, "Altruism and the theory of rational action: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe," *Ethics*, Vol. 101, 1990, pp. 117-118; Kristen R. Monroe, "The psychology of genocide: A review of the literature," *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 9, 1995, pp. 215-239; Samuel P. Oliner & Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, Free Press, New York, 1992.

41 Abram Ben-Yakov, "Bulgaria," in I. Gutman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, (2 Vols.), MacMillan, New York, 1990; A. Cohen & A. Assa, *Saving the Jews in Bulgaria: 1941-1944*, State Publishing House "Septemvri," Sofia, 1997; R. Genov & I. Baeva, "Incomprehension of the nature of the race question: Saving the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust," in G. Halfdanarson (ed.), *Racial Discrimination and Ethnicity in European History*, Edizioni Plus, Pisa University Press, Pisa, 2003.

measures were taken against the Jewish population, there were widespread counter-mobilizations which ultimately prevented genocide taking place.

Todorov⁴² describes these mobilizations and reproduces the documents which were used to instigate them. We have analysed the nature of the arguments that they contain.⁴³ These take three forms. The first is “ingroup inclusion.” Jews are rarely described as such but rather referred to as part of the nation, a national minority. It is stressed that they are Bulgarian in their culture, their habits, even in the songs that children sing and the games they play. To quote from an open letter from the Bulgarian Writers Union to the Prime Minister and Chair of the National Assembly, the aim of repressive legislation “is to deprive a Bulgarian national minority of its civil rights... Our legislature must not approve a law that will enslave one part of Bulgaria’s citizens, and leave a black page in our modern history.”

A second set of arguments concerned “category norms,” and more specifically the notion that Bulgarians have “traditions of religious tolerance and humanity” (to quote again from the Writers Union) and are therefore inherently inclined to oppose oppression and protect the weak. It is striking how similar these claims are to Togadia’s claims about Hindus. Yet here Jews are included as ingroup members, rather than excluded and categorized as threats to the group. Hence the construction of the group as virtuous serves as protection rather than as a warrant for violence. Indeed Dimo Kazasov, in another open letter to the Prime Minister, argues that should they fail to help the Jews, the people: “will lose their moral and spiritual uniqueness, their Slavic essence, their Bulgarian face.”

The third set of arguments focuses directly on “category interests,” stating in particular that, were the country to sanction the deportation of the Jewish population, it would gain a negative reputation in the eyes of other countries and may forfeit benefits as a result. To quote from the Writers Union one last time, Bulgaria might “lose [its] place among the world’s free and civilized peoples.” Thus the threat to the group comes not from the Jews but from attacks against the Jews. Correspondingly the defence of the ingroup comes from defending and not attacking Jewish people.

Overall, what we see in the Bulgarian opposition to genocide are exactly the same elements as in the German sanction for genocide: definitions of category inclusion/exclusion, definitions of how the ingroup is threatened and how to defend it, and definitions of ingroup values and virtues. What matters, then is exactly how these elements are defined and configured. In the context of subgroup exclusion, imagined outgroup threat and ingroup virtue, a population can be mobilized to hate and to condone or even support hateful policies. However, in the context of subgroup inclusion, constructions of threat and virtue can operate in precisely the opposite direction and serve as powerful tools for those who wish to promote solidarity and rescue.

42 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2001.

43 Reicher, Cassidy, Hopkins, & Levine, “Saving Bulgaria’s Jews: An analysis of social identity and the mobilisation of social solidarity,” *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 49-72.

Conclusion: Grasping the tools of power

In this paper we have sought to demonstrate the importance of category constructions as the basis for effective mass communication and mass mobilization. This is not to suggest this is all there is to communication and mobilization. Clearly many other factors apply from the organization of the state to the histories and motivations of individuals. Nonetheless, we consider that the psychological basis of influence derives from the way in which texts invoke social identities. Thus, on the one hand, we argue that there are certain general psychological processes operating in all cases irrespective of what one is arguing for and whether one is promoting evil or good. What is critical, we suggest is how the meaning of events is aligned with the meaning of categories and how ‘they’ are said to impact on ‘us’.

On the other hand, we argue that the actual outcome of these processes — whether they lead to tolerance or intolerance - is anything but general. What counts is the precise content ascribed to category boundaries, category content, category prototypes and category relations in any given situation. Clearly, the ability to create convincing definitions depends upon context, upon the ability to draw upon widely disseminated cultural understandings and hence upon both profound local knowledge and rhetorical skill. For all their claims to follow Le Bon, Mussolini and Hitler were particularly adept in these matters.⁴⁴ Mussolini drew on shared visions of the glorious Roman past (*romanita*) in order to construct his fascist Italy, just as Hitler drew on a popularized version of German romanticism — notably concepts of strong leadership (*Führerprinzip*) over an ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) — in popularizing Nazi ideology. Neither leader built his ideas from scratch, nor were those ideas an epiphenomenal reflection of something that already existed. Both skilfully crafted a Manichean vision of the world out of the resources they had to hand. Both were brilliant entrepreneurs of identity.

The difference between entrepreneurs of hate and entrepreneurs of solidarity is not only a matter of the constructions they use, but also of the way they authorize these constructions⁴⁵. A distinction can be made between democratic discourse, which makes explicit the grounds on which proposals are linked to identities and hence opens up space for debate and alternatives, and autocratic discourse which takes the link for granted and hence rules out debate. At the extreme, the speaker portrays him or (much more rarely) herself as not just a representative of the category (amongst others) but rather as the living embodiment of the category — an avatar of the collective essence. The closing peroration by Rudolf Hess to the 1934 Nuremberg rally, where he asserted that ‘Hitler is Germany just as Germany is Hitler’ is but one example of this. In such cases anything the speaker says is, by definition, an expression of group identity

44 Stephen Reicher, “The crowd century: Reconciling theoretical failure with practical success,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 35, 1996, pp. 535-553.

45 See Reicher & Hopkins, “On the science of the art of leadership,” *op cit.* (note 23).

and anyone who opposes the speaker is, by definition, attacking the category. Discussion becomes treachery, autocracy is thereby guaranteed.

There is, perhaps, a third difference between the advocates of intolerance and the champions of tolerance — albeit of a rather different sort. On examination, many of the various dictatorial and genocidal regimes of our era seem to have a powerful understanding of how to use identity in order to support their pernicious projects. They know how to build up their constituency, how to enrage them and direct their rage against specified targets. Likewise, they know how to destroy the collective resistance of their targets by so shaming them that they cannot join together to fight back. In short, the entrepreneurs of hatred have fully grasped the psychological tools of power and know how to use them. But is the same true of those who wish to defend and support the weak and vulnerable? Do we make full use of the tools which promote social solidarity? Are we effective entrepreneurs of solidarity? Because if we do not address the question of category construction and how to use it for good, we thereby allow evil to triumph.