

Conclusion

General Arguments

The issues and challenges that identity questions represent are two of the most contemporarily relevant topics involved in the study of International Relations. However, the disruption of belonging ties with the state and the construction of new ways of belonging have re-acquired importance at the light of the current context and in relation with the decline of the state. Indeed, one of the major tasks of this thesis has been to demonstrate the decline of the state and reconcile this with the disruption of the traditional belonging tie. To recognize a decline in the role, status and preponderance of the state in the international arena has been a hard task; most of all because the concept of the state itself has been widely embedded in international theory and practice.

Nevertheless, and more than ever, identity issues and the rupture of belonging links with the state – mainly due to its decline – constitute a major social concern because of the ontological fear this had created. The post Cold War period drove to a generalized concern about state's status and already evidenced a rupture of belonging links with it. But the aftermath of September 11th confirmed people's concern about their own collective identity(ies) and how they are defined, and has left open the opportunity of new ways of belonging to appear and provide people with more adequate identification.

There is a natural difficulty to establish a strong relationship between identity issues and the declining state. Therefore, the main task of this thesis was to reevaluate those concepts dealing with the construction of identities and the role of the state in this process. While making this study I realized that there are fewer academic sources connecting the social issue of the disruption of identities with the declining situation of state, a topic belonging to international academia, than I expected (or than there should be). There was also a difficulty

to establish what the ‘traditional’ connection between collective identities and the state is, or has been.

Unfortunately, there is not much literature dealing with the ontological fear that decline of the state has enhanced, and it is even more difficult to find sources on the construction of new and renewed belonging links based on different actors than state. That is why, for to reach a better understanding on the interaction of these phenomena, I have combined social theories dealing with ontological fear and the disruption of belonging ties between people and state, with the theory of the decline of state. As a result, a new set of theoretical claims connecting the individual, social and international dimensions of identity emerged to provide a better understanding on the current processes motivating people to obtain a more stable and comfortable identification.

Yet the major difficulty that this thesis has faced was to show a rupture of the belonging links between people and state as well as establish the causes of this disruption. The difficulty resides in correctly understanding what collective identities that tie together the society and the state are. Clearly, various forms of citizenship are not the only possible ones; other kinds of collective identities have a political component. These collective identities are composed by the interaction of individual self with other individual selves.¹ However, collective identities are not mere aggregates of individual selves, since collectivities in the contemporary era evolve through “impersonal bonds”² that do not require a face-to-face dynamic, and a sense of assimilation to symbolic groups.

Furthermore, and as I have claimed in this thesis, collective identities are an *alive* concept that constantly move and transform. The flexible character of collective identities allows them to adapt to their surrounding context and people’s needs in order to provide a comfortable identification. It is the capacity for group identities to be flexible on which I base

¹ Marilynn B. Brewer and Wendi Garner, “Who is this ‘We’?: Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations,” in *Organizational Identity: A Reader*, ed. Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 66.

² Brewer and Garner, “Who is this ‘We’?”, 67.

the claim that belonging links are more than ever before undergoing a major transformation to in their search for ontological stability in the contemporary west.

This thesis is mainly based on the claim that the construction of new belonging links now have far less to do with the state than over the last three centuries, for the expected security has not been forthcoming from the state for the reasons that I have elaborated. Hence other kinds of identification links have started to become the centre of appeal: shared language, culture, history, beliefs, values translated and practiced in a way that has not been provided by state. 'Nation-state' conceived as a whole is a concept that leads us to misjudge what belonging links with the state really are, and why they are breaking up. The realization that these links are not the ones able to provide security and a conformable identity is one of the main contemporary reasons enhancing ontological fear as Catarina Kinnvall asserted.

Kinnvall is central to this thesis not only because her views contain a very clear idea of how individual and international dimensions are deeply related through the disruption of belonging links. It is also valuable because she determined that there was more than a physical- or military-based understanding of what people require to be 'secure' - in contrast to what other authors as Jennifer Mitzen, Jef Huysmans or Bill McSweeney argue. I have also relied heavily on Kinnvall's work as a launchpad for the main argument in this thesis. This is because, unlike most other scholars, she not only highlights the importance of other international actors in the process of constructing new belonging links not as related to state; she, unusually, also dares to sketch what some of these look like and might turn into.

Yet, as I pointed out in the introduction, her work does not link the declining status of the state and the implications this has for enhancing ontological fear and the construction of more ontologically secure ties. This omission led me to use the concept of ontological fear as a point of departure to later link it with the ambit of international relations through the analysis of its interaction with the declining of the state. As a result I was able to affirm that

identities based on links with the state are not as able to provide security as other international actors can now do.

Thesis Structure and Central Argument

Of the three chapters in this thesis, the first two set up its theoretical framework. Chapter one explored the concept and practice of ontological fear as it has appeared in the literature, and how belonging links with the state have been disrupted because of an increase in this kind of fear. Chapter two was devoted to a detailed examination of the various arguments suggesting the decline of the state and how this can be plausibly linked to *a slackening of feelings of affiliation and allegiance to the state which has led several groups to search for new, or renewed, more psychologically fulfilling modes of belonging elsewhere*—the first part of my central hypothesis. By looking at two examples in some detail, the third chapter attempted to present empirical confirmation and further illustration of this hypothesis, demonstrating also the second part of the central hypothesis that *those new, or renewed, modes of belonging found elsewhere have modified the allegiance and belonging links between certain social groups and the state itself*.

At the beginning of this thesis, I established the importance of reconsidering identity issues in the study of international relations for two key reasons. The first is that they possess a factual and current importance in practical international relations, and the second is that, given that identity issues are constantly in flux, we need to ensure that our ability to theorize in a useful way about collective identity in the contemporary west keeps up with the rapidly changing circumstances brought about by globalization. For an unstable and less predictable panorama generates existential angst and ontological fear that threatens to (and often in fact has) destabilize traditional collective identities and identifications, and rupture their attachments to the institutional centres that used to keep ontological insecurity at bay.

In the same direction, if a universal and single, comforting and foundational (i.e., unchallengeable) truth is a main source of security, the *balanced* opposition of two poles has also been shown to confer security and stability. But the end of bipolar certainty produced a generalized uncertainty due to the multiplication of threatening and unknown factors and actors. The end of the Cold War meant the collapse of the modern comfortable and certain world; the aftermath of this event witnessed a more marked rupture of the belonging links with the state. People became uncertain of their own identity and belonging ties, of the world they used to consider safe; and the referent and framework in which their identity used to evolve disappeared in a short period of time.

Using the dynamic of ‘otherness’ and an ‘*us-and-them*’ discourse is an inherent human way to achieve identification and assure identity. The disappearance of the single, significant other of the Cold War and the emergence of ‘multiple others’ that did not conform to any firm hierarchy summed to the collapse of their referent – the state – exponentially increasing existential angst and ontological fear. Then, the terrorist attacks of September 11 and its outcomes confirmed and increased the pre-existing existential angst and ontological fear. First, they also confirm the decline in the state’s international preponderance and its diminished capacities which contributed to rupturing some more its former belonging link with its people. The state’s few remaining capacities have kept the attachment between state and people (barely) alive today, but if it continues to decline, as Kinnvall and others think in the long-term it will, this link will not last long. And so the state faces a huge dilemma between allowing a major transformation in its structure and role in order to fit to its new context and current needs; or remain the same, losing its remaining capabilities, the allegiance and identification of its people and slowly coming to its end.

The second outcome of the terrorist attacks of September 11th is that they renewed an awareness of the necessity to find or construct new and more stable identities able to avoid the

ontological fear and existential angst so prevalent over the last decade. Those identities will need to fit flexibly into the fluctuating contemporary context, while still being able to provide sufficient security and stability. The state as both structure and actor in the international system is not yet dead, but it is clear that it needs a major transformation which, in some cases (such as that of sovereignty, for instance), clearly threatens its own foundational principles and most traditional functions.

Chapter Arguments

Chapter 1 had the aim of providing the foundational theory of the ontological fear and the framework validating the possibility (and usefulness) of importing this theory to the realm of international relations. This is possible due to the claims of this theory that the loss of a key identity-referent and the international rapid changes in space and time produce ontological fear. Such a move allowed me to later complement this theory with arguments concerning the end of the state. I have outlined the causes of ontological fear since these elements allowed me to import Kinnvall's theory to the international realm.

I claimed that the application of Kinnvall's theory in more mainstream IR circles would be both theoretically possible and practically important when this is combined with the claim of the declining of the state because it is precisely this contemporary phenomenon that enhances ontological fear and provokes the search for more secure ways of belonging. Furthermore the last section of this chapter allowed me to verify my subhypothesis which claimed that the ontological question possesses a relation with the appearance and increasing importance of new international actors; since it allows a multiple and overlapping allegiances and belonging ties.

This theoretical framework allowed me to establish the base for better understanding the conditions driving the disruption of traditional liberal democratic forms of citizenship.

The search for certainty and stability through routines was also central to this first chapter's exploration of ontological fear, since routines are able to create ontological security as well as have the contrary effect if this become a "a blind commitment."³ It is easier to adapt to the circumstances than trying to adapt circumstances to these routines.

Chapter two had the tasks of showing that the state is really declining and that this weakening of its capacities and role has made it less able to provide adequate identification according to the current needs of people. The main argument of this chapter was to show that the decline of the state and the disruption of the traditional belonging link between people and state has exacerbated the ontological fear discussed in chapter one. The first task of chapter two was therefore to show that a crisis already exists that is leading state toward its decline. I analyzed the way in which globalization is contesting the once strong and stable economic, cultural and political foundations that made the state a symbol of security and certainty. I argued that, as a result, the state is clearly less capable of cover popular needs, including providing ontological and other forms of security that are so necessary for strong and loyal identification.

I then approached the decline of the state and its links with the rupture of belonging ties with its people from a historical perspective. I selected two of the most relevant modern moments causing people crises of identification and the rupture of belonging links between them and state: the end of the Cold War and the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11. There were two reasons motivating me to make such a move, the first is that making that selection made easier and clearer the analysis of the rupture of belonging links; the second motivation is trough a historical perspective it was easily to show the process of slackening of feelings of affiliation and allegiance to the state. Finally, by proving that state is declining I was able to claim that state is no longer a strong referent and provider of

³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 40.

ontological security for identities, which is a key reason for the new ways of belonging to emerge and revise people feelings of affiliation and allegiance.

Chapter three had the task of confronting the theoretical framework of this thesis with real cases in which the break-up of people's belonging link with the state has been replaced by a new way of belonging that has modified people's considerations on what their identity priorities, allegiances, and modes of belonging are. This chapter was intended to validate and illustrate my claim that new or renewed ways of belonging constructed around nodes, centres, or international actors other than the state are more able to provide people with a secure collective identity able to counter ontological fear more adequately. I concluded that as my subhypothesis had claimed the widespread and intensifying need for ontological security has clearly produced social transformations that have, and will continue to have, a huge effect on the way we understand the international milieu today and in the future.

Benefits to International Relations

I have argued that this thesis is beneficial to International Relations mainly because it provides new tools to systematize our understanding of the reach and implications of new ways of belonging in the individual sphere and the international one. I also attempted to highlight that there are positive outcomes of the process of identities suffering from ontological fear. For ontological fear has clearly begun to push many contemporary collectivities to look for different, more secure ways of belonging than that provided by liberal citizenship, because these fit better to the current surrounding circumstances and because they are able to fulfil the psychological identity needs that political membership of a state is no longer really able to do. Finally my thesis aimed to point out that the study of these new ways of belonging should continue—particularly because such new or renewed ways of belonging can and have led to conflict and violence between different groups on the

basis of protecting these new, sometimes fragile, identities from the threat of the 'other'. This thesis, unfortunately, could not get into discussions about such violence and conflict for reasons of brevity and clarity. I merely intended this study to provide the beginnings of the necessary theoretical groundwork and very initial steps in applying it needed to suggest that examining these collective identities will be of crucial importance to the study of International Relations in the near future.