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# HAVING A PEOPLE: BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM AND ESSENTIALISM IN RESISTANCE TO INTERLOCKED OPPRESSIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

LISA TESSMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1996

Department of Philosophy

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# HAVING A PEOPLE: BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM AND ESSENTIALISM IN RESISTANCE TO INTERLOCKED OPPRESSIONS

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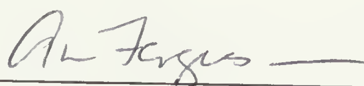
LISA TESSMAN

Approved as to style and content by:



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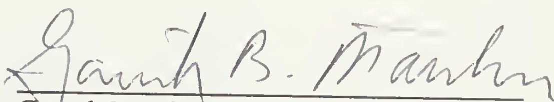

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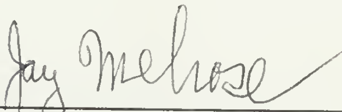

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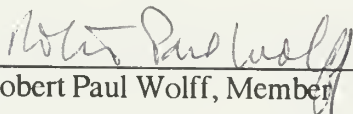

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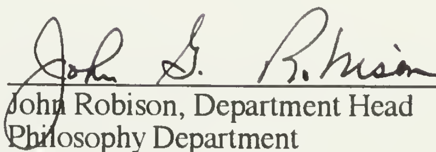

John Robison, Department Head
Philosophy Department

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## ABSTRACT

HAVING A PEOPLE:
BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM AND ESSENTIALISM
IN RESISTANCE TO INTERLOCKED OPPRESSIONS

FEBRUARY 1996



LISA TESSMAN, B.A., CARLETON COLLEGE

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Ann Ferguson



This dissertation draws on the Aristotelian and contemporary communitarian belief that humans are socially constituted, and analyzes the manifestations of this belief in contemporary identity politics and in the concept of 'culture' that often underlies identity politics. While I argue that it is important to maintain a communitarian conception of the self, I depart from Aristotle and the communitarian tradition by rejecting the assumption that a constitutive community is characterized by unity and homogeneity. I then claim that identity politics has inherited both the virtues and the problems of communitarian theory. Just as communitarians claim that the self is never free from social constitution, so identity politics have taken the self's identity to be formed along lines of socially defined group differences, and like communitarianism, some identity politics has entailed a call for unity. In the case of identity politics, the requirement for membership in the community may be sharing certain essential characteristics of identity; difference can result in marginalization, forced assimilation to the group norm, or expulsion. Because identity politics often relies upon the concept of 'culture' to ground group identities, I also examine this concept. When a community's unity derives from its members understanding themselves to share a culture, the maintenance of the culture itself can be conservatizing; the culture can remain closed off from changes as it preserves the "traditional" or "authentic"; furthermore, it can come to be treated as an object outside of the people who live it and as such the changing

lived realities of these people--particularly changes that cross lines of identity--do not serve to continually offer new, changing, and ambiguous ways of conceiving of what is shared between members of the community. I argue for the development of group identity that recognizes intersecting group differences, and can permit hybridity or mixed identities. I end by suggesting that for a constitutive community to remain truly constitutive without harming its members through marginalization, forced assimilation to a norm or a shared essence, or stagnation, members must give up the sort of control that maintains the community as a unity.

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# INTRODUCTION

If not with others, how?
--Adrienne Rich

"Who are my people?" is a question which has surfaced frequently within the discourse about strategies for resistance to oppression. Asking the question, as well as giving any answer to it, is always a political matter. That is, whether or not one makes a conscious political choice about how to answer the question, one's answer always depends upon politically relevant ideological assumptions and always has political consequences; furthermore, answering the question one way or another--and structuring one's community of sense accordingly--can in itself be a purposeful political act. I am interested in reaching an understanding of what it is to have "a people" in the hopes that this understanding will provide a conceptual framework within which those who resist interlocked oppressions can both have "a people" and maintain complex identities.

Posing the "who are my people?" question as one that makes sense implies that there is such a thing as having a people, that is, having a sense of collectivity to one's self. Furthermore, asserting that it behooves one, as one struggles to sort out how best to act in the social and political world, to consider who one's "people" may be and to <u>affirm</u> them as one's own implies that to have such a communitarian sense is indeed desirable. But answering the "who are my people?" question (and thus trying to maintain a communitarian sense about one's political life) proves problematic when one refuses to answer by endorsing distinct categories of identity, whether they be gender categories, racial categories, ethnic categories, or so on. The "who are my people" question has been raised <u>as</u> a problematic question by people who are marginals, on the edges or the outside of communities, people who recognize their community identifications as multiple, intersecting, and conflicting; it has been raised, for instance, by women of color and

Jewish women writing within the discourse of feminist theory or the discourses of racial or cultural movements, when such theory assumes a simple "we": "we" who are women or "we" who are Black, and so on. Listen, for instance, to the following varied musings on the complications of having "a people":

> Once when I walked into a room
> my eyes would seek out the one or two black faces
> for contact or reassurance or a sign
> I was not alone
> now walking into rooms full of black faces
> that would destroy me for any difference
> where shall my eyes look?
> Once it was easy to know who were my people.
>
> --Audre Lorde ("Between" 112)

> In a troubled voice, my grandmother asked me the last time I saw her before she died, "How can you live so far away from your people?" In her mind, "my people" were not synonymous with a mass of black people, but with particular black folks that one is connected to by ties of blood and fellowship, the folks with whom we share a history, the folks who talk our talk (the patois of our region), who know our background and our ways. Her comment silenced me. . . . My silent response was tacit agreement that only misguided confused folks would live away from their people, their own.
>
> --bell hooks (Yearning 90)

> Oh, I would entertain the thought of separation as really clean, the two components untouched by each other, unmixed as they would be if I could go away with my own people to our land to engage in acts that were cleanly ours! But then I ask myself who my own people are. When I think of my own people, the only people I can think of as my own are transitionals, liminals, borderdwellers, "world"-travellers, beings in the middle of either/or.
>
> --María Lugones ("Purity" 469)

> Liberals and pacifists often challenge the notion of "one's own people." Liberals "don't like labels"; pacifists say, "face your enemies with love." Both say, "people are people." I think Jews are haunted--intelligently so--by specters of cattle cars packed to the top with our people. Some of who I am roots in the knowledge, as early as I can remember: there are people who did not want us to exist--millions of them. For these people, there is no love. It's easy for me to think in terms of "my people" and "our enemies."
>
> --Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (77-78)

In asking and trying to answer the question of what it might mean to "have a people" (politically speaking) I will, in this dissertation, both a) affirm the communitarian possibilities implied by the question; that is, I take it that it is desirable to "have a people," to have a collectivity from within which one constitutes one's self, develops social meaning, and can engage in resistance, and b) reject accounts of what it is to "have a people" which reify categories of identity or which depend upon the illusion of unity within socially constructed categories of identity, and which thus cannot countenance oppressions as interlocked. I will argue that while the implications of these two intentions may be in tension with one another, resisting domination calls for their resolution.

* * *

The question of what it means to have a people arises out of two debates along different axes: it arises both out of a debate between liberalism (which cannot countenance having a people at all) and communitarianism; and out of a debate between essentialist accounts of identity and accounts which recognize oppressions as interlocked and identities as inseparable mixtures. While I will in later chapters discuss extensively what is implied by liberalism and by communitarianism, I will say briefly here that I take liberalism to include a principle of non-interference in each individual's freedom to choose his/her own conception of the good, and to include the belief that one's values and ends are in fact the products of one's private choices rather than the result of being socially constituted

amongst a people; I take what I will call traditional communitarianism to depend upon a view of the moral self as socially constituted or formed in community, so the communitarian self is always a self with certain values, never a choosing subject which could exist prior to making a choice of values or ends. The communitarian self cannot be understood without reference to there being "a people" amongst and as one of whom the self is constituted. While communitarianism provides a way of rejecting liberal individualism, the sense of community--of having a people--which communitarian theory offers has tended to rely upon their being some shared or common identity among members of the community. Communitarian theory has portrayed constitutive communities as distinct from one another, as clearly bounded, and as internally homogeneous--that is, as not cut across by group differences. Although contemporary political movements have challenged some of the traditional communitarian notions of who makes up a community, some of the communitarian assumptions have been retained; significantly, the discourse and practices associated with these movements have tended not to recognize that community members may be constituted within several communities, and that any given community is itself cut across by relevant group differences. Political movements which are communitarian in the sense of their being movements of particular peoples whose social identities are constituted together, not just of collections of individuals--for example, the women's movement, *el movimiento* (the Chicano movement), and so on--have called for unity based on some essential characteristic of identity: being a women, being *Raza*, and so on. And yet when the unity is challenged by the recognition of intersecting group differences, there is the danger of being left without any way to conceive of the "we" of a political movement. Lack of *a priori* unity is taken to imply that no collectivity or "peoplehood" is possible; I think this has been one effect of recent critiques of essentialism--many feminists, for instance, have come to think that rejecting essentialism means giving up the possibility of collectivity in feminist movement. My claim is that community is crucial to the self; however, community must not be bought by sacrificing complex

identities, simplifying them into essential core identities. What is needed is an account of having "a people" which does not make this fatal sacrifice. Vital political movement, then, will require developing a constitutive community that is not based on one unified identity; it will require learning to engage in meaning-making together without necessarily making only one meaning.

Creating such a sense of collectivity while rejecting both abstract individualism on the one hand and essentialism on the other requires walking a line between two options: the first (individualist) option is seeing just anyone--regardless of all features of social identity--as equal candidates for being each other's "people"; and the second (essentialist) option is ruling out someone or including someone automatically as "one's own" (politically speaking) just because of a feature of social identity. I hear echoes of the first option in, for instance, June Jordan's insistence that since "partnership in misery does not necessarily provide for partnership for change," it must instead be that "the ultimate connection must be the need that we find between us" ("Report" 82) and that we will be "carried there by the personal strength of what we can do for each other one by one" ("Report" 84). Elsewhere she asks "Where is the love?" (like "who are my people?") and answers that the love that fuels political change has at least the possibility of developing anywhere, regardless of lines of social identity:

> If I am a Black feminist serious in undertaking self-love, it seems to me that I should gain and gain and gain in strength so that I may without fear be able and willing to love and respect, for example, women who are not feminists, not professionals, not as old or as young as I am, women who have neither job nor income, women who are not Black. And it seems to me that the strength that should come from Black feminism means that I can, without fear, love and respect all men who are willing and able, without fear, to love and respect me. ("Where Is" 174-176)

The first option, then, downplays the relevance of the social constitution of identity, and underestimates the effect that socially constructed features of identity (gender, race, etc.)

have on forming our experiences, positions in the world, perceptions, motivations, and, we might say, possibilities of seeing each other as "our own." It infers from the claim that gender, race, and so on do not simply determine our possibilities of solidarity that in fact they have no bearing on it at all.

The second of the two options makes the opposite assumption: race, gender, and other features of social identity do exhaustively determine who our people are. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz expresses this sentiment in places. It is as if she is answering June Jordan's question of "Where Is The Love?" by saying "no, it cannot be just anywhere," when she writes: "there are people who did not want us to exist--millions of them. For these people, there is no love. It's easy for me to think in terms of 'my people' and 'our enemies'" (77-78). This second option, then, takes the sharing of a social identity to imply too much: "my people" are simply determined by a shared enemy.[1] But beyond critiquing these two options, recognizing the complexity of socially constituted identities requires developing a new account of what sort of constitutive community grounds the self. Is it possible to both affirm that there is a "we" and yet refuse essentialist definitions of who the "we" is?

As María Lugones has argued, white women theorists' response to Lorraine Bethel's "What Chou Mean We, White Girl?" question has been to say that there can be no "we" to feminist theory; the response has been that if the "we" is not "we who are essentially women," then there can be no "we"--no collectivity to the politics of feminism--and we must instead speak only out of our own experience. This response solves "the problem of difference" in feminist theory without solving the problem of their being a lack of true solidarity in feminism, a solidarity which can happen only when white women

---

[1]Although I have used June Jordan's and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's words in illustrating the two options I described, I think that for each of them, the words I have chosen represent only strands of their thoughts, and not their whole positions. Each of them do express more ambivalence than I have shown them to about who may or may not be among "their own." I choose these particular passages not to critique each of these authors, but to illustrate two different reactions to the "who are my people?" question.

really see women of color (and similarly along other lines of privilege).[2] The response that there can be no "we" is harmful; it is like saying to anyone who does not have their identity completely exhausted within one distinct constitutive community that they are sentenced to lonely individualism. And so it becomes clear to me that it is important to ask and try again to answer the question: who is the "we"?

I attempt to do this in this dissertation by first making sense of the concept of "having a people" at all; I begin with Aristotle's account of the self as a social animal and then examine some contemporary communitarians' development of the idea of having "a people." I then go on, having established that it makes sense to think of the self as socially constituted amongst "a people," to consider what some problematic ways of describing this self have been. I focus on the conceptions of "having a people" that have been prevalent within radical political movements, both to critique them and to try to develop an account of "having a people" that can ground the possibility for collective resistance to oppressions as interlocked.

---

[2]This is a loose interpretation of Lugones' argument in "The Logic of Pluralist Feminism" in Feminist Ethics, ed. Claudia Card. 35-44.

CHAPTER I

# ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY

## A. Introduction

In developing an account of having "a people" who are positioned to resist oppressions as interlocked, I am going to begin in what might appear to be an unlikely place: Aristotelian ethical theory. I begin here because I want to start with a solid conviction that it does make sense to speak of having a people, of being socially constituted by a community or *polis*. Aristotle provides a thorough account of what it means to be constituted in this way, and his description of humans as political animals constituted in community with others is useful for a rejection of the liberal ideology that says that there is no such thing as having a people. However, not just any conception of having a people will do for thinking about how to resist oppressions as interlocked. I thus begin with Aristotelian theory in part to draw on it and in part to critique it; by beginning with an Aristotelian version of having "a people"--that is, having fellow participants in a true *polis*--I can then complicate this account by asking in what ways it is inadequate for describing social identities as complexly constituted, given intersecting group differences, and for developing an account of constitutive community that does not erase such identities.

* * *

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics were intended as a necessary part of or prelude to his Politics. As he tells us,

> . . . if politics makes use of the other sciences, and also lays down what we should do and from what we should refrain, its end must include theirs; and this end must be the good for man. For even if the good of the community coincides with that of the individual, it is clearly a greater and more perfect thing to achieve and preserve that of a community; for while it is desirable to

secure what is good in the case of an individual, to do so in the case of a people or a state [*polis*] is something finer and more sublime.
Such, then, is the aim of our investigation; and it is a kind of political science (NE 1094b5-11).[3]

In keeping with fineness and sublimeness, then, this chapter is a political reading of the Nicomachean Ethics.

My assumption is that one must read Aristotle's ethical and political works together; we must look at his ethical theory for its political implications, and look at his political theory with an understanding of how it is informed by his view of morality. This is not just a comment about how these two works of Aristotle's should be read; rather, it reflects my recognition that politics are informed by morality, and that questions of morality are always political. To read the Ethics as something other than a grounding for a political theory, or to look at the Politics without an understanding of Aristotle's ethical theory would be to depoliticize morality and to pretend that politics can be empty of moral content. More precisely, it would be to claim that one could somehow construct a state (or any other form of political organization) not based on any particular conception of the good. As I will point out, liberal theory tries to separate ethics and politics by imagining that the state can and should remain neutral on the question of the good; liberal theory sees ethics and politics as separable because it denies the fact that particular conceptions of the good inform every arrangement of the state.[4] Aristotle, however (and I agree with him on this point), sees the two as inseparable. His political theory, then, suggests the impossibility of the liberal state, the state which according to liberal theory has no influence or effect on its members' conceptions of the good or on the possibility of attaining this or that version of human flourishing.

---

[3]All references to the Nicomachean Ethics, except where otherwise noted, are from the J.A.K. Thomson translation.
[4]See, for instance, John Rawls' argument in A Theory of Justice, where he intends for the state not to be based on any particular given conception of the good; he stipulates that parties in the "original position," who deliberate about the best form for society, do not know what their conceptions of the good are. The form of society they decide upon is supposedly not based on any particular conception of the good.

I am interested in Aristotle politically because I think that his ethical and political theory is potentially useful for political theorists who are radical and whose radicalism is directed towards questions of community. I say potentially useful because Aristotle himself does not take his theory in the direction of what I would call a radical construction of community, of communities that would strive to be free from relations of domination and subordination and that would promote the full and varied flourishings of all. Aristotle's extreme inegalitarianism and his reliance upon homogeneity makes him quite problematic for radicals who oppose hierarchy and who respect diversity. However, one can question Aristotle's inegalitarianism and his refusal to recognize or encourage diversity and at the same time find much that is valuable in his theory for radical thinking about community.

I will be looking, then, at several components of Aristotle's ethical theory that have important political implications and that are valuable claims for radical communitarians. I will consider, for instance, his recognition of the sociality of human existence; his argument that the purpose of a *polis* is the good life and that members of a *polis* must share a conception of the good so that they might aim at it together; and his belief that moral virtue depends upon the passions, which are constructed or trained in the context of the *polis*. I will argue that these claims could serve as a basis for thinking about the following important question (which Aristotle, of course, does not address): how is it possible for a group of people who are diverse with respect to their experiences and social locations to form what Aristotle would call a true *polis*-- that is, a community that is not a mere conglomeration of separate individuals, but rather one where human flourishing or the good life is the aim of the community? I will consider how Aristotle avoids seeing this as a relevant question in part because he fails to see a certain sort of diversity within the human species; he is committed to the claim that one has an essential purpose as a member of a species, so members of the human species all have one purpose, which is to attain the ultimate good for man, that is, *eudaimonia*. Meanwhile, however, he only takes certain

people to be fully human and to therefore have the possibility of reaching *eudaimonia.* In his considerations of the good life, then, Aristotle feels justified in only addressing certain "well-trained" free men, those whom Aristotle already considers to be most disposed towards moral virtue and therefore most capable of reaching *eudaimonia.* I will argue that Aristotle has not conceived the *polis* to be a place where political struggle takes place over the question of what the good is, for those who may differ on the question of the good life are excluded from participation in politics. It is not relevant, for Aristotle, that people in different social locations may have different conceptions of the good, for among the participants in political affairs there is significant homogeneity. It is when there is heterogeneity among the political participants in a community that what the good is must be politically contested in order for members of a community or *polis* to come to a shared understanding of the good towards which they might strive together.

## B. Political Animals

One of Aristotle's most central claims is the claim that man is by nature a political animal [*politikon zöon* ] (Pol 1253a1-2).[5] Aristotle is so strongly committed to this claim that he does not even consider someone to be quite human if he does not live in political relation with others; he writes, ". . . he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god; he is no part of a state [*polis*]" (Pol 1253a 27-29). Aristotle is looking, in the Ethics, for the supreme good for man, and recognizes that this good is something "self-sufficient." But he has a social sense of the self involved here: "By self-sufficient we mean not what is sufficient for oneself alone living a solitary life, but something that includes parents, wife and children, friends and fellow-citizens in general; for man is by nature a social being" (NE 1097b8-

[5]All references to the Politics are from the Benjamin Jowett translation.

12). His search in the Ethics for what human flourishing is, then, is a search for what it is for a man to be flourishing in community.[6]

While liberal theorists may assume that a state is formed because self-interested individuals rationally arrive at the belief that by forming a state they can better achieve their individual self-interests,[7] Aristotle is clear that this does not accurately characterize the motivation for forming a *polis*; the sociality of human existence is deeper than humans' practical need for one another. As he says in the Politics, ". . . the state [*polis*] comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life" (Pol 1252b 28-30). Because man is a political animal, "men, even when they do not require one another's help, desire to live together" (Pol 1278b20-21). Aristotle's account of the *polis* in the Politics indicates that he has a sense of the importance and

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[6]One could argue that Book X, chapters 7-8 of the Ethics stand in contradiction to Aristotle's earlier argument that the ultimate good for man can only be attained in a *polis*. In these chapters he claims that the contemplative life is in fact the happiest life (NE 1177a12-19 and 1177b15-25) and that "the wise man can practice contemplating by himself" (NE 1177a34-35). Aristotle admits that "no doubt he [the wise man] does it better with the help of fellow-workers," but maintains that "for all that he is the most self-sufficient of men" (NE 1177a35-b1), seemingly employing a different sense of "self-sufficient" than he does earlier (NE 1097b8-12). Aristotle does call into question, however, whether the contemplative life is truly a human life or whether it is divine, requiring of humans that we "put on immortality" (NE 1177b35); he claims here that moral virtue is secondary precisely because "activities in accordance with it are human" (NE 1178a8-10). He also writes that the contemplative life "will be too high for human attainment; for any man who lives it will do so not as a human being but in virtue of something divine within him" (NE 1177b26-28). He does, on the other hand, argue that contemplation "will be the perfect happiness for man" (NE 1177b23-24); and although he thinks contemplation requires that we "put on immortality," he says this in the context of arguing that "we ought not to listen to those who warn us that 'man should think the thoughts of man,' or 'mortal thoughts fit mortal minds'" and that we should "do all that we can to live in conformity with the highest [i.e. the divine element] that is in us" (NE 1177b31-1178a1). So he seems to be arguing both that the contemplative life is not a truly human possibility and that we should try to live the life of contemplation in spite of its being in the realm of the divine, for the divine element is within us. In any case, we can see that it is debatable whether or not, even in these chapters, Aristotle is maintaining that human happiness is attainable only in a *polis*. And, it is clear throughout the rest of the Ethics that he thinks that the community is what makes the good life possible, and that self-sufficiency cannot mean solitude. For instance, he asserts that "it is also surely paradoxical to represent the man of perfect happiness as a solitary; for nobody would choose to have all the good things in the world by himself, because man is a social creature and naturally constituted to live in company. Therefore the happy man also has this quality. . . . It follows, therefore, that the happy man needs friends" (NE 1169b18-23). It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully discuss the inconsistencies between Book X, chapters 7-8 and the rest of the Ethics; I am, throughout this paper, favoring Aristotle's claims that self-sufficiency is a social state and that human flourishing is attainable only in community.

[7]In much contract theory, this is the standard reason given for why humans form a state. See Hobbes' Leviathan, chapter 14; Locke's Second Treatise of Government, chapter 8, § 95; or Rousseau's The Social Contract, Book I, chapter 2. John Rawls, in A Theory of Justice (a central text for contemporary liberalism), also makes similar assumptions about human society (chapter 1).

centrality of the relations between members of a *polis.* Members of a *polis* have relations which can be characterized as a type of friendship, although the intensity of the friendship between fellow-citizens may or may not be high (NE 1159b25-1160a8). In discussing friendship, Aristotle mentions that "friendship also seems to be the bond that holds communities together" (NE 1155a22-23). He describes concord (or unanimity), which is a sort of a "friendly feeling," as "friendship between the citizens of a state [*polis*]" (NE 1167b 2-3). A *polis* is not just a gathering of people with no relation between them, then; there is expected to be friendliness between citizens: "friendship and justice seem . . . to be exhibited in the same sphere of conduct and between the same persons; because in every community there is supposed to be some kind of justice and also some friendly feeling" (NE 1159b 25-28). In this way, Aristotle's *polis* is neither like what in contemporary terms is called a state nor a city; the contemporary term 'community' better connotes the presence of the sort of relations that are indicated by Aristotle's use of the term '*polis.*'[8] Ideally, members of a *polis* (and here Aristotle refers only to citizens; women and slaves are not a part of the *polis,* although they are necessary for it[9]) all know one another: "if the citizens of a state [*polis*] are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other's characters" (Pol 1326b15-17). The *polis,* thus, must be small enough in size that citizens all know one another, for when this is not the case, "both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong. When the population is very large they are manifestly settled at haphazard, which clearly ought not to be" (Pol 1326b17-

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[8]For this reason, I will sometimes use the term 'community' as a parallel term to Aristotle's '*polis.*' However, the terms are also quite different from one another. For instance, 'community' is seldom considered to be a unit of political organization the way a state is. However, as will become clear, I am more interested in the possibilities for the deep political and social relations which we find in communities than I am in the political structure of (liberal) states. For this reason, I am interested in the ways that Aristotle's theorizing about the *polis* is relevant to issues of community, rather than issues about the state.
[9]For instance, note that Aristotle claims that ". . . in a state [*polis*] or any other combination forming a unity not everything is a part, which is a necessary condition. . . . And so states require property, but property, even though living beings are included in it, is no part of a state" (Pol 1328a 21-36, my emphasis). And elsewhere he states, "a slave is a living possession [i.e. a piece of property]" (Pol 1253b31). He also states that a *polis* is a "community of equals," (Pol 1328a37) and clearly, slaves and citizen class women are not the equals of citizen men; thus, slaves and citizen class women cannot be considered to be a part of this community of equals.

20).[10] A *polis* is not just a collection of living beings who all reside within a certain territory. To say that a collection of people constitute a *polis* is to say more than that they live in some proximity to or association with one another; rather, they have significant relations to one another.

It is not just the fact that there are relations between all members of a *polis* that make the *polis* more than just a collection of people residing in proximity; it is also the fact that these people share an aim--the good life--which they can aim for only as a *polis*. Aristotle claims that a *polis* is "a community of equals, aiming at the best life possible" (Pol 1328a37-38). He emphasizes this point: "a state [*polis*] is not a mere aggregate of persons, but a union of them sufficing for the purposes of life" (Pol 1328b16-17). I would like to highlight several points embedded in these claims, namely that Aristotle is demanding that 1) the *polis* be made up of equals, 2) that these members of the *polis* have a shared aim, and 3) that the purpose of the *polis* (and what its members are aiming at) is the good life. As I will suggest, one of the reasons that Aristotle requires that there be a community of equals could be that he believes that without this there cannot be true friendship--the deepest kind of relation that there is. I will also discuss what Aristotle considers to be the implication of his claim that members of a *polis* aim together at the good life--namely, that they must share a conception of what the good life is.

It is possible that Aristotle's motivation for requiring that the only people to be counted as full members of the *polis* be free (i.e. not slave) men lies in his belief that there can only be the desirable degree of depth to the association if this requirement is met. If the basis for political community is a sort of friendship (NE 1155a22-23;1159b25-28;1167b2-3), and the best sort of friendship takes place between good men (NE 1156b7-24), one can see how Aristotle's description of a *polis* as a "community of equals, aiming at the best life possible" (Pol 1328a37-38) might spring from his desire for there to be significant

[10]Similar claims have been made by communalist anarchists, who argue for politics being done on a local enough level so that there can be relations between all members of a political community. See, for instance, Colin Ward's "The Organization of Anarchy" in Patterns of Anarchy, or Murray Bookchin's "A Note on Affinity Groups" in Post Scarcity Anarchism.

relations--friendships--between citizens, and for these citizens to have the possibility of aiming for the good life together. I will look later at what I take to be problematic about his requirement that deep association (that of friendship, including fellow-citizenship) require likeness (or, more precisely, like goodness, or likeness and goodness). What I want to point out here is that his motivation for such a requirement may be, in part, his belief that this is necessary for the purpose of achieving depth in the sense of community (the relations with others) which constitutes the *polis*. While I will reject Aristotle's argument that likeness is required for such deep relations, I will agree with Aristotle that an association should count as a *polis* (or a community) just in case there is depth to the relations which constitute the association. A liberal state (such as the U.S. or any state or city whose organizing principle is liberalism, including abstract individualism) does not, in that sense, constitute a *polis* because it prohibits the sort of depth of relations that consists of understanding oneself to be morally formed in relation to others rather than choosing one's values by exercising an individual will.[11] So I start with this point of agreement with Aristotle: there are "goods" for humans (Aristotle would more likely say "a good" for humans) that are attainable only in community; theorizing about human flourishing should involve thinking about someone attaining such flourishing in a social context, in a fabric of relations to others.

[11]This critique of liberalism will be much more fully developed in the next chapter. Briefly, though, consider the example of Rawls' A Theory of Justice in which parties to the "original position" elect principles of justice which are meant to ensure that the institutions of their society will allow each individual member to, as fully as possible, pursue their individual conceptions of the good. Such institutions are not intended to, nor do they guarantee, that a member of society could hold and pursue collectivity (or the social constitution of self-identity) as a conception of the good--for such a good is not conceivable as a product of individual choice. It is not among the "primary social goods" that the principles of justice are aimed at maximizing. Furthermore, institutions based on the conception of justice--of individuals' approaching one another through a framework of rights and justice--may actively inhibit the possibility of relations like friendship. Michael Sandel argues this point in Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, p. 35.

## C. Aiming Together at the Good Life

I also begin with another assumption that Aristotle shares: that considerations of what the best form is for the *polis* depends upon our being able to give an account of human flourishing--or, one might say, that politics depends upon ethics (NE 1094b5-11). That is, the purpose of the *polis* is to create and promote human flourishing(s), given some particular understanding(s) of what the good is for humans. Just as an association only counts as a *polis* if there is some depth to the relations of its members, so an association also is not truly a *polis* unless it concerns itself with the virtue, including the justice and injustice, of its members. Aristotle illustrates this point by contrasting the social intercourse of men with that of other "gregarious" animals: the difference lies, in part, in the fact that there is moral content to the social relations between men, while there is not for other animals:

> Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. . . . the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state [*polis*] (Pol 1253a 7-18, my emphasis).

If an association is constructed without moral content--that is, without concern for the virtue and vice of its members--then it is not a truly human political community, that is, a *polis*. Aristotle writes:

> Those who care for good government take into consideration virtue and vice in states. Whence it may be further inferred that virtue must be the care of a state [*polis*] which is truly so called, and not merely enjoys the name; for without this end the community becomes a mere alliance which differs only

> in place from alliances of which the members live apart; and law is only a convention. . . and has no real power to make the citizens good and just (Pol 1280b4-11).

In order for a *polis* to serve the purpose of enabling its citizens to be good and just, there must be a particular conception of the human good toward which the *polis* aims. A *polis* that failed to concern itself with the project of directing its citizens towards a particular conception of moral excellence and flourishing would fail to truly be a *polis*; in order to be a *polis*, an association cannot just leave its members alone in this respect, doing nothing but keeping members from interfering with one another. "It is clear that a state [*polis*] is not a mere society, having a common place, established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange" (Pol 1280b30-32). In agreeing with Aristotle on this point, I am going against two major assumptions of liberal political theory, namely the assumptions that 1) it is possible for the state to remain neutral on the question of the good life and 2) that it is desirable to live under such a neutral state, rather than in a community that does concern itself with the "moral" state and with the possibility of "happiness" or flourishing of its members.

There is a connection between believing that humans are, in a strong sense, social beings and believing that the state/community/*polis* should act to promote a particular sort of human flourishing. It is only when one thinks of the state as an entity that at its best refrains from interfering in individual affairs that one imagines it as staying away from meddling in any individual's conception of the good life, of human flourishing. A neutral state is a state designed to (supposedly) keep out of individuals' lives, to prevent interference between members of the state rather than to foster relations which involve members concerning themselves with each other's virtues and vices and thus with each other's possibilities of attaining human flourishing. Having a more social sense of human existence--that is, believing that the self is constituted in relation to others--leads one to want more than non-interference, more than neutrality, from a community. Aristotle does believe that our selves are constituted or formed differently depending upon the social

context we are in; for instance, our moral dispositions develop differently in contexts where we are permitted to engage in vicious acts than they do in contexts where we are required to perform virtuous acts; it is the constitution of the *polis* that affects our moral constitution (NE 1103a14-1103b26). Assuming that the social context we are in serves to constitute our selves, attention to the form and values of the community is attention to the social context in which we ourselves are constituted. Thus, rather than demanding non-interference from the state or community, I would like to recognize that the community does form us morally and that given this, it is active engagement in (rather than independence from) the constitution of the community that allows one agency in one's own moral formation.

What the values of the community are--and what conception of the good underlies the reasoning to construct a community in such a way that this or that kind of person might thrive in it--should be, as I will argue, contested ground. It should be politically contested ground, and the politics of it depend on who gets to come to the table to discuss it. That is, it depends on who the members of the *polis* are and what informs their conception of the good. As I will argue, Aristotle does not consider how the political contestation of the good might take place, largely because he does not allow that political participants could differ significantly, so he does not consider how people's different social locations might inform their conception of the good and thus how different groups of political participants may come to hold opposed conceptions of the good. I will consider later what the effects are of Aristotle's refusal to see the conception of the good as politically contested. What I want to point out here is that, unlike liberal theorists, Aristotle at least is after a *polis* which is acknowledged to be designed according to a particular conception of the good and meant to promote the continued development and enactment of that conception of the good. At least the *polis* is, for Aristotle, meant to be a training ground for [some] humans to develop moral excellence and experience happiness or flourishing. For contemporary radicals who are communitarians, Aristotle's idea of the *polis* may be in many ways a better starting

point than the liberal state: a state that does not acknowledge itself to be aiming at any particular conception of goodness or happiness. The failure to acknowledge that the state is not neutral but rather does effect members' moral constitutions leads believers of liberal ideology to fail to see the importance of active engagement in determining how the state concerns itself with the virtue and vice of its members; they cannot both call for engagement and insist that the state is not concerned with promoting some version of human flourishing. The liberal state is intended (although of course it fails to carry out this intention) to stay out of our way; as it is conceived by liberal theorists, it is not truly the social realm, the realm of relations with others recognized to be the context in which our selves are forming according to some particular conception of the good life.

I am starting then, with Aristotle, with the social self and with a concern for knowing what conception(s) of the good life--of human flourishing--should inform the construction of a community or *polis*. I share the belief that it is in the realm of the social--in the community or *polis* --rather than in individuals' private lives that the question of moral excellence and of human flourishing should be addressed.

### D. The Training of the Passions

One additional claim of Aristotle's that radical communitarians ought to be excited about is the claim that our emotions can and should be influenced by reason and be trained differently in different social contexts. Such a claim supports the notion that, desires being socially constructed rather than "natural," one has the possibility of ridding oneself of desires which stand against radical transformation of the status quo, for if desires are constructed there is the possibility of their being reconstructed differently in a different social context; so, for instance, one can attempt to change one's desires to be in accordance with a conception of the good in which one believes, by attempting to change the social context which constructs one's desires. I will look, now, at how Aristotle conceives of the

training of desire by looking at the role that desire and reason play in moral excellence for him.

An action, for Aristotle, can only be a good action if it was chosen for the right reason and in accordance with the right desire. It is not the consequences of an action which determine its rightness, but rather it is the character of the agent. Aristotle makes this clear when he states, "virtuous acts are not done in a just or temperate way merely because they have a certain quality, but only if the agent also acts in a certain state, viz. 1) if he knows what he is doing, 2) if he chooses it, and chooses it for its own sake, and 3) if he does it from a fixed and permanent disposition" (NE 1105a30-34). Right reason alone cannot be the efficient cause of an action, for it is desire that moves humans to act. Because of this, in thinking about how to produce a right action, one must think about the desirative faculty of the soul. Right desire alone can be the efficient cause of an action, but not of a good action, for an action may be voluntary but not chosen, and an action can be a right action only if it is a chosen action, and choice requires both reason and desire (NE 1111b4-1112a18). Aristotle defines choice as "a deliberate appetition of things that lie in our power" (NE 1113a10-12). Reaching the point of choosing a right action, then, requires both right reason and right desire.

Thus according to Aristotle one must be concerned with desire, for without proper desire there can be no good action. Since pleasure compels us to do things (and reason alone cannot compel us to act), one must be concerned with whether one feels pleasure at the right things. That is, it is not enough to know what the right action is; one must feel pleasure at the thought of doing it so that one feels the desire to do it (NE II, *iii* ). Thus in speaking of training oneself to be virtuous, one is really speaking of training in how to properly feel desire.

Training the desires is a matter of influencing them through rationality--through the exercise of which one can know what actions are right (but which, by itself, cannot move one to do those actions)--and then acting on them repeatedly until they become habit (NE II *ii-iii* ). One must train the desires, for the wrong desires may--depending on how one stands against the passions (i.e. depending on whether one is continent or incontinent)--serve to lead one towards the wrong end. As Aristotle states in the Metaphysics: "the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of rational wish" (Met 1072a27-29).[12] Thus untrained (or improperly trained) desires might lead one toward the wrong end, toward what is only the apparent good (NE 1113a24-30). Properly trained desire leads one to pursue the right ends, the real good. Thus a right action is the action which would be committed by a man whose desirative faculty is properly trained or healthy, a man of good character (NE 1105b5-8). Such a man "judges every situation rightly; i.e. in every situation what appears to him is the truth" (NE 1113a29-30).

It is important to notice that if feeling the passions correctly were not in one's control, then (assuming that right desire is necessary for right action) moral theory could be nothing more than a description of which people are virtuous and which are not. It is only if one is taking the training of the passions to be in a person's control that one can take moral theory to be prescriptive, and it is only then that one can hold people responsible for their character. Setting aside the question of whether Aristotle's classification of actions as voluntary/non-voluntary/involuntary is justified as a basis for deciding which actions someone is responsible for, one can still agree with Aristotle that one's character (and thus the actions that one chooses because of one's character) is something for which one is responsible.

The sense of responsibility here, however, is not an individualistic one; since we do not train our desires all by ourselves, but rather do so in the social context of the *polis,* a man's character is understood to be his own responsibility only if one understands "his

[12]W.D. Ross translation.

own" to mean his own social self--his self in its relation to others. In this sense, the whole *polis* is responsible for each man's character; there is a collective responsibility. When Aristotle claims that "those who care for good government take into consideration virtue and vice in states" (Pol 1280b5-6) and when he asserts that good legislators play the role of making their citizens good by developing in them the proper habits (NE 1103b3-5), I am taking him to be saying that the *polis* has the responsibility of forming each member's moral character, of developing each member's habits so that they are pleased by the proper actions. Aristotle sees good statesmen as taking responsibility for fellow-citizens' moral characters: "the true statesman is thought of as a man who has taken special pains to study this subject [the nature of virtue]; for he wants to make his fellow-citizens good and law-abiding people" (NE 1102a8-10). Thus questions of morality--of producing men of good character, men whose desirative faculties are healthy--become questions of how to properly train the desires; and these are questions to be addressed as a *polis* (cf. NE 1179b32-1180b27).

Because men's dispositions are formed through habit, the *polis* must concern itself with its members' activities and the habits that are acquired through them. Habits are acquired through practice, and thus it matters what sort of acts a *polis* allows its members to practice. "We become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones" (NE 1103b1-2). So, for instance, a *polis* whose members can enact cowardly activities will not train these members for courage, whereas a *polis* whose members must perform courageous acts will produce members with courageous dispositions. "Legislators make their citizens good by habituation; this is the intention of every legislator, and those who do not carry it out fail of their object. This is what makes the difference between a good constitution and a bad one" (NE 1103b 3-6). As Aristotle sees it, a constitution is either good or bad depending on how members of a *polis* with such a constitution are trained. A *polis* with a good constitution is one which is habituating its members to aim at the right good by acting in accordance with virtue.

Implied by this is the claim that the constitution of a *polis* has an effect on the emotional constitution of its members. Learning to feel pleasure at the proper things is a matter of habit, and these habits are acquired depending on the constitution of the *polis* under which one lives.

One can think of Aristotle's *polis*, then, as a training ground, a context in which one's desires are trained in accordance with some particular conception of the good. To put this in contemporary terms, Aristotle's claim that the *polis* is a training ground for how we feel the passions amounts to the important idea (central to much feminist and other political theory) that desires are socially constructed, and that the particular institutions of a society construct our desires in particular ways. Since desires are socially constructed, the claim continues, we can reconstruct our desires by changing the social setting which forms or informs our desires. So, for instance, emotions that people have been trained to feel in a misogynist and racist society are not in accordance with a feminist conception of the good. As Alison Jaggar puts it in her article "Love and Knowledge":

> Within a hierarchical society, the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interest of the dominant group. Within a capitalist, white supremacist, and male-dominant society, the predominant values will tend to serve the interests of rich white men. Consequently, we are all likely to develop an emotional constitution quite inappropriate for feminism. Whatever our color, we are likely to feel what Irving Thalberg has called "visceral racism"; whatever our sexual orientation, we are likely to be homophobic; whatever our class, we are likely to be at least somewhat ambitious and competitive; whatever our sex, we are likely to feel contempt for women. (159)

The emotions that a society trains us to experience are those emotions that support that society's status quo version of the human good--a version that may exclude certain members of society from ever experiencing the good life. Jaggar continues, "[b]y forming our emotional constitution in particular ways, our society helps to ensure its own

perpetuation" (159). However, if emotions can be trained and re-trained, then there is reason to reorganize society so that it fosters emotions that will lead us to act in pursuit of ends which we can endorse, which may very well mean acting in resistance to the conception of the good that informed the community in which we had formerly been "trained."

What this points to is how much is at stake when one is deciding upon or trying to change the constitution of the *polis*--or the institutions and practices in a community--which will serve to train our emotional constitutions. As Aristotle conceives it, it is the activities in which one engages--the activities which are condoned or encouraged or required in a *polis*--which form in us certain dispositions, that is, which form in us the habits of feeling pleasure at this or that thing. Aristotle argues that:

> like activities produce like dispositions. Hence we must give our activities a certain quality, because it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions. So it is a matter of no little importance what sort of habits we form from the earliest age--it makes a vast difference, or rather all the difference in the world (NE 1103b21-26).

The construction of desires, then, can be purposeful in the sense that when one decides upon or tries to change the constitution of a *polis,* or the institutions and practices that will comprise a community, one is making decisions about how one wants desires to be constructed. The claim that desires can be purposefully constructed and reconstructed is an important claim for people who want to radically change the way we have been constituted by the current institutions and practices of our society, a society which has developed in most of its members emotions such as greed and possessiveness, jealousy, the desire to control or be controlled, a deference to authority, an aesthetic appreciation of a very small range of body types, and so on; this claim goes against the argument that such emotions are natural and not changeable. If something can be changed by habituation, it makes no sense to call it 'natural.' Since, as Aristotle argues, moral goodness is a result of habit, it cannot be said that any particular moral state is a natural one: "none of the moral

virtues in engendered in us by nature, since nothing that is what it is by nature can be made to behave differently by habituation" (NE 1103a18-20). The question of what form a *polis* or community should take is tied to the question of what sort of emotional constitution its members should develop. In considering what the emotional constitution of the members of a community should be, one is really asking: what conception of the good life should the community aim at?--that is, should we train our emotions so that we feel pleasure at striving towards this conception of the good life or at that conception of the good life? I will go on to investigate how Aristotle has determined what the good life is, and how this might be done differently.

### E. Consulting with Aristocrats

Aristotle commits himself to the claim that a man's desires are trained--and thus that his character is formed to be a particular way--in accordance with the particular influences on him (NE 1103b1-6). One implication of the claim that different upbringings result in different characters is the conclusion that it is possible to purposely set up a particular upbringing in order to construct a man whose character will be in accordance with a particular conception of the good life. Aristotle thus acknowledges that nobody just so happens to have certain desires: desires are constructed in particular ways depending on the circumstances one is brought up in, and these circumstances can be purposely arranged so as to create men with desires that lead them to act in accordance with this or that conception of human flourishing. If a man was trained in a certain way, one should not be surprised that he has desires that reflect this training--training that is based on a particular conception of the good life. Thus when Aristotle calls for "well-trained" men to be his students, he must acknowledge that he is calling for men who have been trained in accordance with a particular idea of what it is to be morally virtuous.

I will look at the passages in the Ethics where Aristotle does this. In Book I, chapter *iv,* Aristotle writes:

> We must start from what is known. But things are known in two senses: known to us and known absolutely. Presumably we must start from what is known to us. So if anyone wants to make a serious study of ethics, or of political science generally, he must have been well trained in his habits. (NE 1095b1-6)

In this passage, Aristotle recognizes that he cannot begin with a universal as a first principle, but must begin with what is known to "us," the students of ethics and politics. I will problematize in a moment who the "we" is and how this affects his study of ethics. What Aristotle overtly tells us here about the "we" is that it must consist of men who have been well trained, who have been habituated to feel the proper pleasures for the proper reasons. His aim here is just to point out that his lectures on ethics are intended for those who are already prone towards virtue--they have proper habits and they want to be good--and who merely need to study how to be good men so they can correctly act on their desire to be good. He argues later that "the mind of a pupil has to be prepared in its habits if it is to enjoy and dislike the right things . . . we must have a character to work on that has some affinity to virtue" (NE 1179b24-31). In hand-picking this set of [citizen] men for his students, however, Aristotle is selecting a group who have been trained in accordance with a particular conception of the good. An invitation from Aristotle to study ethics and politics, then, is not an invitation to engage in contestation over the question of what the good is; it is an invitation to learn how to become good given the conception of the good which Aristotle has developed. In choosing men who have been well trained, Aristotle is, in effect, choosing a group which is homogeneous in a certain respect: they already share a disposition towards a certain conception of *eudaimonia.* Their similar emotional constitutions makes them tend towards the same good.

I am not arguing, here, that Aristotle develops his account of the good life by consulting and adopting the perceptions of these well trained men without acknowledging that these men have already been trained in accordance with a particular conception of the

good; on the contrary, Aristotle does not rely upon anyone's already existing perceptions or habits in the process of coming to give an account of *eudaimonia* (NE I, *vii* ). Rather, what I am pointing out is that he is inviting to the discussion or study of ethics and politics only men whom he considers to be well trained and disposed towards his account of the good; in so doing, he creates for himself a homogeneous student body, rather than a group who would come together for the purpose of struggling over a conception of the good.

Although Aristotle does not rely on consultation with well trained men in developing his account of the good life, Aristotle does check with men's perceptions of the good life to see if his account is in harmony with them. This is a strange move, since Aristotle ought to recognize that the men with whom he consults have already been trained in a social context whose basis is a particular conception of the good. Thus it matters greatly which people Aristotle consults with and how these people have been trained; whether or not "commonly" held notions of what the good is will be in harmony with Aristotle's account has everything to do with what sort of training has been had by the people whose beliefs Aristotle examines. And yet he does not problematize this process of checking with men's actual beliefs, beliefs which have already been formed in accordance with training they have had.

It is towards the end of Book I of the Ethics that, after carefully developing an account of the ultimate good for man, Aristotle confirms this account by checking it against men's actual beliefs. He writes:

> We must examine our principle not only as reached logically, from a conclusion and premisses, but also in the light of what is commonly said about it; because if a statement is true all the data are in harmony with it, while if it is false they soon reveal a discrepancy. (NE 1098b9-12)

Aristotle is concerned, then, with whether his account of the good life corresponds to "what is commonly said about it." We need to wonder, however, whose voice Aristotle is listening to; when he checks to see if "all the data are in harmony" with his account of the

good life, is he checking only the perceptions of those who have already been well trained in accordance with his conception of the good? He knows there is no one whose perceptions have not been formed according to some particular conception of the good and yet he does not question what sort of training has been had by the people whose perceptions he consults. He does not, for instance, purposefully consult with the perceptions of a diversity of beings. Quite the opposite: we can be sure that there are some sorts of humans--male and female slaves, for instance, and citizen class women--whose conception of the good is not considered to be relevant for Aristotle.

There are questions to ask, then, about Aristotle's choice of who belongs in the "we" who are the students of ethics, who are included in whatever discussion there is to be about the question of the good life. It is clear that it is only free men who are even considered to be possible candidates for the well-trained-men-pool-of-potential-students-of-ethics. More than this, we can assume that some free men were, in Aristotle's eyes, more likely than others to have been properly trained. Aristotle is not setting up a political context in which differently trained beings--people whose emotional constitutions have formed in different social contexts--might struggle over an account of the good life and might thereby have a basis for struggling over the question of what constitution is best for the *polis.* By including in his group of students--and in the group of people whose perceptions he considers to be relevant--only well trained men (i.e. men who have been trained according to his account of human flourishing) Aristotle ensures a certain sort of homogeneity among political participants. What would the serious consideration of a diversely trained group of humans do to Aristotle's process of checking to see that "all the data" are "in harmony" with his account of happiness? What would happen if Aristotle paid serious attention to the conceptions of the good that were held by a diversity of human beings, and if he constructed the political realm to be a place of struggle over what it means to reach *eudaimonia*? I will keep these questions centrally in mind as I go on to look at how human diversity is addressed by Aristotle.

## F. The Good for Man and the Good for Fish

Aristotle is an objectivist--in the sense that he does think that we can make true and false claims about, say, what the good is--and he is also a relationist--in the sense that these true and false claims are true and false in relation to certain beings in certain circumstances. So, for instance, there is a particular good for humans; Aristotle would not agree that the good for each person is whatever that person takes it to be, or that happiness is, for each person, whatever makes that person happy (NE III, *iv*). A man might think he is happy (*eudaimonous*) but actually not be, for he may have the wrong conception of what happiness (*eudaimonia*) is. On the other hand, happiness is relative to different sorts of beings; for instance, happiness is different for humans than it is for gods. What Aristotle does not allow is that there be different ultimate goods for different humans.

A relationist objectivist stance such as Aristotle's is potentially a good one for radical communitarians. Unlike liberals, such communitarians have rejected the possibility of neutrality on the question of the good life. That is, it is acknowledged that no state is neutral in this respect, and it is recognized that the construction of any community (purposefully or not) promotes some particular conception of the good life. If it is given that one is always working from a particular conception of the good (say, for instance, a conception that includes the claim that any form of oppression, of dominance and subordination, diminishes human flourishing and is thus not a part of the good life), one needs objectivism in order to label claims about what promotes human flourishing as true or false claims. So, for example, I want to say that the proliferation of racist propaganda is not an exercise of freedom of speech; it is not just an expression of someone's conception of the good, where anyone's conception is as good or true as anyone else's. I want to say in this case, "it is a true claim that this propaganda is racist and that it works against human flourishing. It is not just that it is racist for me, given my conception of racism; rather, this is what racism is, and racism is not a part of the good life." Another example: as long as

there are some women saying that they like pornography, liberals cannot make the claim that pornography is harmful to women; instead, they are stuck claiming, "well, if some women feel it is good for them then it is good for them." Radicals who are interested in collective formation of values, and who share a conception of human flourishing that excludes dominance and subordination, will not want to agree that whatever someone says is good for them is necessarily good for them. One might want to be able to say, instead, "they may think it is good for them, but perhaps they think this only because their emotional constitutions have been formed by participation in misogynist practices and they have thus become habituated to feeling pleasure when faced with violence against women; thus although some women may experience pornography as pleasing, actually, the pornography industry is working against women's flourishing." Of course, there might be a real disagreement over whether or not something does promote the good life. So in this example, for instance, there could be political contestation over the question of whether or not pornography is harmful to women. But notice that one would not end such a political struggle by saying, "well, you keep your opinion and practice it in the privacy of your own home, and I'll keep my own opinion"; rather, one would engage in the struggle over which claim is right. This struggle can be an interesting place: in the fact that each person would be arguing that what she or he believes is right (not just that it is right for one*self*) there is the sense that participants in the struggle are aiming to come to a shared understanding; at the same time, however, it is important to not over-value the state of *being* in agreement at the cost of ignoring or erasing anyone's conception of the good.[13] In this way, people can engage with one another in discussion or struggle over what they believe, neither taking the liberal path of maintaining individual opinions without engagement, nor taking the

[13]In such a struggle over which claim is right, it would also be important to consider the complicated questions of epistemic privilege. I may think I am right about something, but meanwhile question my own judgment because I recognize that someone else is in a better epistemic position. The contestation must be informed by a recognition that many different features of our social positions affect our perceptions and epistemic abilities, but what the effects are will seldom be clear or simple, so relying on "epistemological privilege" seldom is an easy way to resolve a struggle, and may itself be problematic. See, for instance, Bat-Ami Bar On's "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege" in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter.

totalitarian, homogenizing path of needing to be in a state of agreement. One could say that the aim is to be in this place of engagement. The liberal rejection of objectivism in favor of complete relativism prevents one from making any political (in Aristotle's sense of the word--i.e. having to do with a true *polis,* and not just a mere association of people) claims at all. It prevents a certain level of political engagement.

One also needs relationism in order to make claims about social and political phenomenon such as oppression, phenomenon which function relative to social position. Aristotle recognizes that virtues must be determined in relation to the person and the circumstance; however, unlike Aristotle, I would like to complicate this by saying that many times they must also be determined in relation to significant social categories (e.g. of race, class, gender, and so on). For instance, one might speak of having the habit of inspiring resistance (i.e. to the status quo), or the ability to expose hidden assumptions of oppressive ideologies, or the tendency to have a radical imagination as examples of virtues for oppressed or subordinate people who are engaged in struggles of resistance, even while they are not necessary or even desirable virtues for those actively involved in dominating others.[14] Furthermore, I want to recognize that what the good is can be politically contested, and that people's social locations might affect their sense of what the good is; that is, it might place them in a particular spot in the political struggle over what conception of the good life ought to inform the construction of the community or *polis.* In this sense, I want to recognize that people's conceptions of the good life may be constructed in relation to their social position. If one were to include all people (including people of different social locations) in the political realm--unlike Aristotle, who only includes free (not slave) men--then the *polis* would have to be a context in which contestation would take place over which conception(s) of human flourishing the *polis* is designed to create and promote, for different people would bring to the political arena different conceptions of the good. As I

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[14]Ann Ferguson suggests "being uppity" as another virtue for the oppressed but not for dominators. She also notes that to the extent to which one person is both oppressed and an oppressor, which of the virtues apply may be complicated.

have pointed out, Aristotle does not conceive of the *polis* as a place for this sort of contestation, for he does not allow for heterogeneity (with respect to social positions or life experiences which would form in people diverse emotional constitutions) within the political realm. If there were diversity within the political realm, the struggle over a community's shared conception of the good life would need to be informed by reflection about the effect that social position has on the formation of values. If, unlike Aristotle, one wants a diversity of people to be full members of a community--full political participants--then one needs a way of not only seeing variation within the human species but also of aiming together at a shared conception of the good without simply taking (as Aristotle does) some select group to be representative of all humans. First, however, I am going to look at the ways in which Aristotle does recognize variation among humans.

To begin with, Aristotle does recognize that how the different virtues are to be exercised varies depending on who the person is and what the circumstances are. In this way, not all humans--not even all humans who are capable of moral virtue--are alike. This is a piece of Aristotle's relationist stance. In a discussion of the general rule that virtue always lies in the mean, Aristotle makes it clear that what the mean is varies for different people. He writes: ". . .virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it" (NE 1106b36-1107a3, my emphasis). Although one might read the "relative to us" as "relative to us as human beings," that reading is not supported here, for Aristotle's illustrative analogy clearly shows that he means we must each find the mean relative to our individual selves:

> Supposing that ten pounds of food is a large and two pounds a small allowance for an athlete, it does not follow that the trainer will prescribe six pounds; for even this is perhaps too much or too little for the person who is to receive it--too little for Milo but too much for one who is only beginning to train. . . In this way, then, every knowledgeable person avoids excess

and deficiency, but looks for the mean and chooses it--not the mean of the thing, but the mean relative to us. (NE 1106a35-b8)

It is because virtue is relative to the person and is also context-dependent that one cannot give rules for moral conduct which could be automatically applied in all circumstances: "questions of conduct and expedience have as little fixity about them as questions of what is healthy" (NE 1104a 4-5). Because of this, "the agents are compelled at every step to think out for themselves what the circumstances demand" (NE 1104a8-9).

Despite the fact that Aristotle sees enough variation among those people who are capable of virtue to argue that virtue must be determined relative to each person and circumstance, he does not follow through very far on this recognition of diversity. He does not, that is, admit there to be variation in what the ultimate good is for humans.[15] In considering what the good life is, Aristotle is clear that this varies depending on species. Book I, chapter *vii* of the Ethics is a search for what the proper purpose of man is, and it turns out to be happiness, as a virtuous activity of the soul. The methodology of this search involves differentiating all humans as belonging to a certain species, where all members of a species share a certain essential purpose--but different members of one species do not have different essential purposes. Aristotle writes: ". . . the goodness that we have to consider is human goodness, obviously; for it was the good for man or happiness for man that we set out to discover" (NE 1102a13-15). Even while he asserts that "what is wholesome or good is different for human beings and for fish" (NE 1141a22-

[15]This is not entirely true. As becomes evident in Book X, Aristotle does present two different, competing accounts of the ultimate good; one account claims that happiness is a contemplative activity, the other that it is the exercise of moral virtue. Thus one could argue that the philosopher (who contemplates, or theorizes) and the politician live according to different conceptions of the good life. I have two responses to this argument. The first is that Aristotle's argument in Book X, chapters 7-8 is problematic enough (see footnote #6) that I am not convinced that we can really take him to be claiming that humans--who are, as he has argued again and again, political animals--can really live the contemplative life, a life which does not require [political] relation with other people (NE 1177a27-1177b1). Secondly, even if Aristotle is recognizing these two accounts of the good life as human possibilities, my point is that the question of the good life is not contested within the political arena, for the philosopher, to the extent to which he engages only in contemplation, is not a politician, i.e. one who participates in politics; he is not present in the political arena, an arena which thus remains full of homogeneous beings. So I am not arguing that Aristotle necessarily does not recognize the existence of different accounts of the good life; rather, I am arguing that he does not design the *polis* to be an arena in which political struggle over the question of the good life takes place.

25), he does not make the sort of divisions within a species which would allow him to recognize different goods for different humans. Rather, the one ultimate good for humans is that which is aimed at by the man with a morally virtuous disposition (NE 1113a25-30). It is clear that Aristotle is favoring a homogeneous political community here, for it is only in such a community that there would be one standard measure of what the proper pleasures are; if there were heterogeneity then differently trained people would be emotionally constituted so as to feel pleasure at different things. But Aristotle's good man is the standard measure: "the man of good character . . . is a sort of a standard and yardstick of what is fine and pleasant" (NE 1113a32-33).

Meanwhile, however, it is not that Aristotle sees no variation among humans with respect to the good, for he certainly does see different humans as significantly different in their relation to the good life; however, it is not that Aristotle believes that *eudaimonia* is different for different humans, but rather that he thinks different sorts of humans are differently placed vis-a-vis the possibility of reaching the one yardstick version of *eudaimonia.* Thus when he is thinking about human flourishing, he is really only thinking about it with respect to a select group of humans, those whom he considers to be fully human, those who live fully human lives. Aristotle makes this clear when he mentions that "no one assigns to a slave a share in happiness--unless he assigns to him also a share in human life" (NE 1177a8-9).[16] He virtually eliminates diversity when it comes to a consideration of who can reach *eudaimonia.* Since Aristotle only recognizes diversity in terms of hierarchy, when he discusses the good for humans, he feels justified in looking at the good for one (the best, most virtuous) group of humans; the "diversity" disappears because we see that he does not quite take all humans to be fully human, to have the

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[16] I am using the W. D. Ross translation here, for it emphasizes that it is because slaves do not live human lives that they cannot reach *eudaimonia.* (The J.A.K. Thomson translation reads: "nobody attributes a part in happiness to a slave, unless he also attributes to him a life of his own" [NE 1177a8-9].) It is clear that Aristotle thinks that slaves do not lead lives of their own--lives in which they exercise choice, which is necessary for moral virtue--in the way that fully human people do. He says in the Politics: "a state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life of free choice [i.e. a life of their own]" (Pol 1280a31-34).

purpose that "humans" have, that is, reaching *eudaimonia*. In fact, in discussing pleasures, Aristotle explicitly states that pleasures experienced by some select people are truly human pleasures, but pleasures experienced by others cannot be considered to be fully human; he acknowledges that pleasures differ for different people, but then dismisses this diversity by asserting that "whether the perfect and supremely happy man has one activity or more than one, it is the pleasures that perfect these that can properly be described as human" (NE 1176a26-29).

Thus Aristotle sees humans as diverse, but this diversity is not within the political arena, for any variation in someone's placement vis-a-vis possible *eudaimonia* is a hierarchical variation which takes them out of the political arena of the *polis* altogether--in fact, it makes them not quite human. Among the *polites,* who are the only people who are potentially *eudaimonous,* there is significant homogeneity.

Furthermore, anyone who is not the right sort of being--a citizen man--or who is the right sort of being but who is not good (or well trained) is excluded from the realm in which any possible discussions of the good life would take place. The circle is closed: being well-trained (i.e. trained to have a disposition towards virtue, trained to be pleased by striving towards a particular version of the good) is a pre-requisite for being in the political realm where any discussion about the good life would take place, but it is precisely because only similarly trained beings are participants in politics that politics is not a matter of struggling over which conception(s) of the good life should inform the construction of the *polis* and the training of its members. Those who have no potential for reaching *eudaimonia* (given a particular account of it), that is, women of the citizen class and all slaves (male and female) are among the people who are excluded from the political arena; they are not members of the *polis.*[17] Their conception of the good is not relevant for the

[17]See footnote #9 about how they are necessary for the *polis* without being a part of the *polis*. It could be argued that in being a part of the household, where households are what make up the *polis* (Pol 1253a39), citizen class women and all slaves are a part of the *polis*. However, I think we need to look at the claim that it is households which make up the *polis* in light of Aristotle's claims that a slave is a piece of property (Pol 1253b31) and "states require property, but property, even though living beings are included in it, is not part of a state" (Pol 1328a35-36), and his definition of a *polis* as a "community of equals" (Pol

*polis.* Among the people who remain as political participants, there is no diversity with respect to the conceptions of the good life at which people aim, or Aristotle sees none.[18] Thus the following question does not arise for Aristotle: how is it possible for a diverse group of people to all be members of a *polis* (in the true sense of the word) in which human flourishing is a contested issue; that is, how can there be engagement, among a diverse group of people, in a discussion of what to strive for together, of how (accordingly) to construct the community, of how to train the passions? But this is a question that I think should be raised.

## G. Friends Who Are Mirrors

There is another way in which it is clear that Aristotle favors a homogeneous composition of the *polis.* I have noted that Aristotle conceptualizes community to be related to friendship (NE 1155a22-23; 1159b25-28; 1167b2-3). So looking at Aristotle's view of friendship will be instructive in seeing what he values about community.

Aristotle recognizes the existence of many different types of friendship; there is friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on goodness (NE 1156a6-22). Furthermore, there are friendships between equals and another type of friendship between unequals (NE 1158b12-28). Friendships can also differ in intensity (NE 1159b29-1160a8). However, despite Aristotle's recognition of a variety of sorts of friendships, there is only one sort of friendship which is properly so called, and that is friendship between good men who are similar in their goodness and whose friendship is for the sake of the good: "friendship in the primary and proper sense is between good men in virtue of their goodness, whereas the rest are friendships only by analogy" (NE 1157a31-32). Aristotle calls this friendship perfect: "only the friendship of those who are good, and similar in their goodness, is perfect" (NE 1156b7-8). These

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1328a37). Considering these claims, I think we cannot interpret Aristotle's statement that households make up the *polis* to mean that all members of the household are political participants in the *polis.*

[18]Again, since philosophers--whose idea of the good life is that it consists in contemplation--are not, to the extent to which they are really leading the contemplative life, political participants.

friendships are characterized by equality, for good men are, by virtue of their similar goodness, equal to one another; friendships which lack equality are only called friendships to the extent to which they develop a sort of equality through proportionate love (the inferior party must love more than he/she is loved) (NE 1158b24-28). Thus anyone who is inferior to good men (e.g. children, wives, etc.) cannot be said to have perfect friendship with good men; they can only approximate equality in the friendship by having the parties love proportionately (NE 1158b12-28).

What Aristotle emphasizes in his discussion of friendship is the importance of the parties' similarity (qua good men). Good men who are friends provide reflections of one another; Aristotle argues that friends who are good also please one another "because everyone is pleased with his own conduct and conduct that resembles it, and the conduct of good men is the same or similar" (NE 1156b16-17). Aristotle describes a good man's friend as "a second self to him" (NE 1170b7), i.e. someone just like himself.

Aristotle thus requires homogeneity among true friends. And, the homogeneity found in true friendship extends into the sort of friendship that can be called concord (unanimity) or "friendship between the citizens of a state" (NE 1167b2-3); that is, homogeneity serves to hold a community together just as it holds a pair of true friends together, and again, this homogeneity is based on the participants' (in the political arena of the *polis*) being good men and thus (because they do not hold a variety of conceptions of the good but rather share one) being similar in their goodness. Aristotle writes:

> This sort of concord [i.e. friendship between citizens] is found among good men, because they are in accord both with themselves and with one another, having (broadly speaking) the same outlook. For the wishes of such people remain constant and do not ebb and flow like the tides; and they wish for what is just and advantageous, and also pursue these objects in common. But bad men cannot be in concord (just as they cannot be friends) except to a very limited extent. . . .(NE 1167b5-9)

It becomes very clear in this passage that Aristotle's inclusion of no one but good or well trained men ensures homogeneity; they all share a conception of the good and their concord or friendship is based on this similarity. By excluding anyone who holds and acts according to a different conception of the good--that is, anyone who in Aristotle's eyes is a bad man (or, we might add, not a free man at all)--Aristotle creates a homogeneous political community. Furthermore, such a community--where there is concord based on similarity--cannot be a place where the conception of the good is contested, for such concord is at odds with political contestation.

### H. A Vision of Community: The *Polis* Revised

Aristotle has developed a valuable account of how a *polis* can be constituted so that it is truly a community with relations of moral engagement between its members, and not just a collection of people living in the same area. He has presented a description of the self which is social in the most profound ways. He has argued that the community, the realm of social relations, is not just a place of exchange and mutual benefit; rather, it is the realm in which members' emotional constitutions are developed; it is a training ground for moral virtue; and it is the context in which men are able to aim together for the good life. For as Aristotle puts it, living together (as friends do) is, for humans, quite unlike "being pastured like cattle in the same field" (NE 1170b13).

For those of us who live in a social and historical context in which the term "community" is so overused that it has lost its meaning--so that any collection of people with some incidental tie to one another is said to be a "community"--Aristotle's description of what a *polis* is may sound promising. His *polis* is just the sort of community we are likely to be lacking if we live in associations structured according to liberalism, where non-interference in each other's lives and neutrality on the question of the good are the premisses of the state. In such a context, the possibilities for collective action and for the profound participation of community members in one another's lives--in the formation of

one another's dispositions and values--are obscured. In the attempt to uncover these communitarian possibilities, Aristotle's description of the true *polis* appears to be valuable. The descriptive claim about how a self is socially constituted is a necessary basis for the normative claim that members of a community ought to actively engage in the public realm in the collective development of a conception of human flourishing which can inform the creation of a community constituted to promote such human flourishing.

But as I have argued, there is another side to Aristotle's *polis*. Aristotle creates, in his discussions of ethics and politics, a tie between the possibility of a true *polis* and the existence of homogeneity among its members. The deepest sorts of relationships--friendships--in the *polis* are possible, Aristotle has argued, only when members are similar to one another, when they share and reflect one another's goodness. Furthermore, since those who are to be favored for inclusion in the political realm are men who are well-trained according to a given conception of the good, the *polis* can be thought of as a place of concord, not of political struggle over which conception(s) of the good should guide collective action. Differences in life experiences and social locations are not welcomed as the basis for collective thought about what human flourishing could be; rather, these differences are the basis for exclusion from the political arena. The true *polis*, for Aristotle, is achieved only through the significant homogeneity of its members; it is not meant to be a context for the contestation of the conception of human flourishing on which the community (and all of the social relations within it) are based.

The link between the concepts of "community" and "homogeneity" is still strong, at least in the U.S. today. Although the term "community" is seldom used in any strong sense at all, when it is used, it is quite often in reference to a group of people who are thought to be similar in some respect. For instance, one may think of a community as a place of shared culture, and take culture to be a unifying set of practices, both in the case of mainstream communities and in the case of communities of marginalized groups.

One can, of course, think of cases in which, within what is called a community, there is a professed commitment to diversity.[19] However, when it is a liberal "community" (an association which merely enjoys the name "community") which is diverse, the diversity depends upon each individual's (or group of individuals') staying out of each other's way, leaving one another to hold separate, different values without interference. The strong sense of community is lost. There is not a commitment to the diverse group of members engaging with one another to form each other's values or participate in the development of one another's dispositions; there is not meant to be a shared, collective struggle over the meaning of human flourishing.

Communitarians who are drawn to Aristotle's account of a *polis* (precisely because of the strong sense of community in it) and who are radical in the sense of opposing hierarchy and thus opposing Aristotle's inegalitarianism and his requirement of homogeneity need to develop an account of how a community could struggle to aim together at some good without presupposing homogeneous members and thus similar conceptions of what the good is. The critique of Aristotle's *polis* suggests some things about what such a community might look like; to begin with, it makes it clear that to even begin imagining such a community, one needs to break the conceptual link between "community" and "homogeneity," but that in doing this one must retain the strong sense of community (*polis*) that Aristotle has developed. One leaves oneself free, then, to imagine a *polis* in which the shared conception of the good is open to collective formation. The idea here is that a conception of the good life is something to be discussed or developed in community, not something to be presupposed before the members of a *polis* come together.

Such a collective formation of values would mean leaving oneself open to be constructed in one's relations to others unlike oneself. It would mean being willing to call into question whatever conceptions of the good one might begin with. It would mean

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[19]Even in these cases, however, there is often an emphasis both on the community's unity and on its diversity. For instance, the "women's community" is often described by feminists as a place where there is unity--as women--amongst members but also diversity--as, e.g. people of different races, cultures, or economic classes.

paying attention, during the process of engaging with others, to the reasons why different people have developed different virtues and aim at different conceptions of the good. Finally, it would be a process in which the link between members of a community could be even more significant than Aristotle imagines there to be between fellow citizens in a *polis*. For Aristotle's citizens do participate in developing in one another the tendency towards virtue, but they do not engage in the sort of collective formation of value that I am describing. This engagement, I would like to suggest, requires a very difficult and very profound sort of knowing or experiencing of fellow members of a community, for knowing other members is not like looking in the mirror, as it is for the good men who are friends in Aristotle's *polis*. In a diverse community, knowing other members means crossing into worlds of sense unlike one's own, and understanding those worlds of sense to such an extent that they enter into the formation of one's self and of the community. The conception(s) of the good life at which the community might strive together, then, can only emerge out of a process of real engagement between members of the diverse community.

# CHAPTER II

# THE CONTEMPORARY POLIS: CONSTITUTIVE COMMUNITY

## A. Introduction

The Aristotelian ethical tradition takes its contemporary shape, among other places, in communitarian theory. The communitarians draw on Aristotle's account of the *polis* in developing a description of community rather than drawing on contract theorists' accounts of the state or on deontologists' accounts of human relations as built upon duties and rights. At the base of communitarian theory, then, is a conception of community and of human nature and thus human relations which is fundamentally different than those found in liberal theory. John Rawls, in developing his (liberal) theory of justice, takes up and revises Kant's deontological theory, dropping Kant's dependence on the transcendental subject and replacing it with what Michael Sandel refers to as the unencumbered self of the "original position," a self much like the abstract individuals in contract theory who, prior to having any relation with one another, nevertheless are able to choose to make a contract to form a state which will regulate their relations. In a parallel way, communitarians such as Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre take up and revise Aristotelian theory, dropping (to a greater or lesser extent) Aristotle's dependence on the existence of a given human *telos* and replacing it with the idea that human purposes or ends are given by or developed in particular histories and communities which "encumber" the self with particular values and conceptions of the good. While Aristotle's *polis* serves as a training ground for how its members will develop their virtues and vices, and thus determines the possibility of a member reaching the end of *eudaimonia,* the communitarian community not only "trains" or socializes its members but it is also the place where human ends and conceptions of the good actually <u>develop</u>--unlike the Aristotelian *telos*, they are not a "natural" given prior to their development through history.

While liberal theory such as that of Rawls has no way of making sense of the idea of having "a people," communitarian theory sees having a people as central to having a self; the self is constituted as a self with a history of a people and a community of a people. Thus communitarian theory suggests at least some understandings of what it is to have a people, to have a sense of collectivity about one's self-constitution and about one's ability to develop values and act on them, and so this body of theory seems a potentially fruitful place to begin trying to answer the question I am pursuing: what understanding of "having a people" describes the sense of self and of collectivity that could empower political resistors? I am interested in finding a description (and further, a prescription or at least a normative suggestion) of a self who has a collectivity within which to work on morally constituting or training the self with habits of resistance to oppressive status quos, but I want to insist that such a community cannot require homogeneity as Aristotle's *polis* does. The communitarian model of the community as constitutive rather than merely cooperative--to use Michael Sandel's terms--gets to the core of some of what I am looking for; it meets my demand that politics be collective rather than individualistic.

However, just as Aristotle relied upon a sense of community as homogeneous, so the contemporary communitarians, I will argue, also tend to fail to recognize the community as made up of beings who differ from one another based on their multiple, intersecting group memberships. They find it to be too easy to answer the "who are my people?" question, for the question is not complicated, for most of them, by the recognition that community membership is not static, and that communities are not clearly bounded entities. They might say, "my people are those with whom my identity--my self--is formed; it is those who share my history and thus my values," without noticing that their identities are fluid, that their selves may be multiple, or that their histories can be told in a variety of perhaps inconsistent ways. That is, the communitarians see the self as constituted by membership in particular social groups, see identities as the result of particular histories, as moments in a narrative that has taken place over time and which

includes other people; however, they sidestep the crucial questions: which narrative do we tell to explain our identities? Which of the many histories and moments of social occurrences form our identities? Where in the intersections of different social groups do our identities congeal and then again when do different groups and group identities come in and change our identities? I will argue that to state that we are constituted by our locations in particular histories and communities is not enough, for it is crucial to go on to ask, which of our many possible histories constitute us? What story do we tell; what story are we a character in? Which of our communities constitutes us and what is its hold on us when our communities are multiple? How does one account for the self that is constituted in community and yet is resistant to that community's values; that is, if the self is exhausted by the description of itself as it is developed in one single community--as it is whenever one fails to recognize complicated mixtures of community or group identities--then communitarian theory has no way to account for where the resistant self springs from.

Thus, agreeing to an extent with the communitarians, I will argue that yes, one must recognize the collectivity of the constitution of our identities, but I will add the claim that it is essential not to ignore questions such as the one Gloria Anzaldúa poses when she writes: "the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a dark skinned mother listen to?" (Borderlands 78). This chapter will thus examine and critique communitarian theory, with the aim of seeing how the claim might be made that indeed the self is constituted in community, amongst a people, but who the people are and what the self becomes constituted as must be more complicated than the communitarians recognize. How one is constituted in the community depends on who one is in the community. So while one member may be constituted in the community so as to internalize, accept and animate the community's values, another member may be constituted in the community as a rebel, someone who experiences and perhaps internalizes and yet may reject the community's values. Such a member may choose to leave the community and form an intentional (also constitutive) community, but, I will argue, the choice is made

as the particular person she is, not as an unencumbered self. Sandel argues that the unencumbered self (contrary to the claims of liberal theory) cannot possibly exercise choice, for the "choosing" self cannot exist prior to its ends, and thus the right (i.e. the right to choose one's ends) cannot be conceived of prior to the good. But he seems to believe that the encumbered self is also hampered in her ability to exercise choice. However, I will argue that the encumbered (encumbered with--but not exhausted by--a conception of the good) self does retain agency, for instance, the agency required to change or even leave a community.

The insistence that the encumbered self can exercise choice is essential to developing a communitarian political theory which is radical, for without recognition that the self can move in relation to its constituted values, one cannot account for how radical change might be brought about. Since a radical politics of resistance is about change (e.g. change in what a community values and how it acts on these values), it is essential that one be able to conceive of the communitarian self as capable of resistance, of bringing about change. One also cannot think about radical change without the idea of the encumbered self and the constitutive community, for unencumbered selves (were they to exist) would be too independent, too unaffected by each other and by their social context to possibly change one another, and a merely cooperative (as opposed to constitutive) community promises to be a place where nobody would interfere with or try to change one another's values. The point of radical, communitarian politics, I will argue, is to make the community a place where it is appropriate to engage in changing one's own and others' values, and to form a collectivity out of which members can act on these values.

So I will turn now to communitarian theory, to make sense of the claim that our selves are encumbered or collectively constituted. The concept of the collectively constituted self will become useful, then, for the assertion that our political selves are collective (that is, that there is such a thing as having a people, politically speaking), and

for the further claim that the possibilities of whom that collectivity might be made up of are numerous.

## B. Michael Sandel: A Rejection of the Unencumbered Self

Michael Sandel draws an illuminating distinction between the liberal sense of community and the communitarian sense of community, dubbing them "cooperative community" versus "constitutive community." The difference lies in the relation of the self to others in the community, and the conception of the role of the community in relation to its members.

Liberalism, Sandel argues, emphasizes the priority of the right over the good. That is, the purpose of a "community" of people under liberalism is to ensure that individual rights are protected, not to provide a way towards achieving some particular conception of the good. Central among the rights that an individual must have is the right to choose his/her own ends or conception of the good. Thus the right to decide what the good is (and to pursue it, as long as one does not interfere with others' like rights) is secured independent of and prior to there actually being any conception of the good that is already held by the individual or by the community. The principles which regulate individual rights, then, cannot be justified by reference to any particular conception of the good; the procedure by which these principles are arrived at must be a neutral one, a procedure which does not favor any one conception of the good over another one. How to make this procedure a fair one, is, of course, a great pre-occupation of liberals, and I will not discuss in detail the failings of all such attempts. Many communitarian authors, including Sandel, have exposed the failings of the arguments of liberal theorists such as Rawls. Rather than delve into the problems with liberal theory here, I want to discuss the liberal senses of community and of the self only to contrast them with the communitarian sense.

In order to conceive of the liberal community as regulated by neutral principles of justice, there must be a corresponding conception of the individual subject as capable of

choice (so he/she can choose a conception of the good) prior to having any conception of the good, any values. Sandel calls such a self an "unencumbered self"--a self who is not encumbered by any particular values or conception of the good--for it is only such a self who would call for a neutral state as providing a realm of free individual choice. It is this unencumbered self, Sandel claims, which Rawls must have in mind for the parties in the original position, the fair position from which regulative principles of justice are to be chosen. The original position is Rawls' attempt to justify the right prior to the good. However, Rawls must make an assumption about persons in order to make sense of this fair position from which principles are chosen, and that is that "there is always a distinction between the values I have and the person I am" (Sandel, "Procedural..." 18). The parties to the original position must be able to exist (conceptually, that is) without having values, or in fact any other distinguishing characteristics. Such a self is unencumbered, free as a choosing subject to select any possible conception of the good.

Sandel's claim is that the unencumbered self is a conceptual impossibility; a person cannot exist, even conceptually, except as a person with particular values and characteristics. But the unencumbered self is thought to be a self which exists prior to its ends: "For the unencumbered self, what matters above all, what is most essential to our personhood, are not the ends we choose but our capacity to choose them" ("Procedural..." 19). What such a self calls for, then, is only the right to choose its ends, and it is only a self conceived as unencumbered which would ground an argument for this right. As Sandel puts it, "[o]nly if the self is prior to its ends can the right be prior to the good. Only if my identity is never tied to the aims and interests I may have at any moment can I think of myself as a free and independent agent, capable of choice" ("Procedural..." 19). Thus the possibility of choice--i.e. the possibility of choosing one's own values--depends upon the separation of who I am (a moral agent capable of choice) from what my values are; for if I am the person who has certain values, then it does not make sense to speak of a subject (without values) choosing these values.

One may think, then, of the unencumbered self as possessing a set of (chosen) values, but not as consisting of a person with those values. The possessed values could change without disrupting the identity of the person. Sandel comments:

> In so far as I possess something [e.g. a conception of the good], I am at once related to it and distanced from it. To say that I possess a certain trait or desire or ambition is to say that I am related to it in a certain way--it is mine rather than yours--and also that I am distanced from it in a certain way--that it is mine rather than me. The latter point means that if I lose a thing I possess, I am still the same 'I' who had it; this is the sense, paradoxical at first but unavoidable on reflection, in which the notion of possession is a distancing notion. (Liberalism... 55)

The subject's chosen values can be possessed and dispossessed without disruption of the identity of the subject, for the identity existed prior to and independent of the acquisition of values. The actual identity of the unencumbered self, then, is never open to constitution or reconstitution in a community. The community, for an unencumbered self, is never a place to develop or change one's identity, for in fact identity is secure prior to community. "Where the subject is regarded as prior to its ends. . . [t]he bounds of the self are fixed and within them all is transparent. The relevant moral question is not 'Who am I?' (for the answer to this question is given in advance) but rather 'what ends shall I choose?' and this is a question addressed to the will" (Liberalism... 58).

The identity of the subject, then, is not tied up with its community. In fact, if the subject is unencumbered and the right is prior to the good, then whatever goes on in community must stop short of "interfering" in the choosing subject's conception of the good, for nothing must impede the freedom with which the individual chooses a conception of the good. As Sandel writes:

> The Rawlsian self is not only a subject of possession, but an antecedently individuated subject, standing always at a certain distance from the interests it has. One consequence of this distance is to put the self beyond the reach of experience, to make it invulnerable, to fix its identity once and for all.

> No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it. No transformation of life purposes and plans could be so unsettling as to disrupt the contours of my identity. (Liberalism... 62)

Given such a conception of the self as independent of others in his/her formation of values, the self does not need the community for much, for it can exist (i.e. have an identity), at least conceptually, independent of the community. The community of others might be something which the unencumbered self will choose--for instance, if companionship or co-operative satisfaction of material needs were part of his/her chosen conception of the good--but the choice itself is antecedent to the community. The choice is not informed by any values the community may have already developed in the individual. Thus while the unencumbered self may choose or even need the community to satisfy needs, the particular character of the needs themselves are not created in the community. Sandel summarizes:

> This notion of independence carries consequences for the kind of community of which we are capable. Understood as unencumbered selves, we are of course free to join in voluntary association with others, and so are capable of community in the co-operative sense. What is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties antecedent to choice; he cannot belong to any community where the self itself could be at stake. Such a community--call it constitutive as against merely co-operative--would engage the identity as well as the interests of the participants, and so implicate its members in a citizenship more thorough-going than the unencumbered self can know. ("Procedural" 19)

Subjects who co-operate, then, are very different than subjects who are constituted together, for subjects who come together merely co-operatively must have been separate, distinct subjects prior to their union. In co-operative community, "[w]e are distinct individuals first, and then (circumstances permitting) we form relationships and engage in co-operative arrangements with others" (Liberalism... 53).

In contrast, subjects in a constitutive community have their very identities at stake in the community. Sandel writes that:

> community would describe not just a feeling but a mode of self-understanding partly constitutive of the agent's identity. On this strong view, to say that the members of a society are bound by a sense of community is not simply to say that a great many of them profess communitarian sentiments and pursue communitarian aims, but rather that they conceive their identity--the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations--as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part. For them, community describes not just what they have as fellow citizens but also what they are, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity. (Liberalism... 150)

Sandel conceives of the encumbered self, then, as in some sense given by the community; it is not just that it is in community that the self is constituted, but in fact the self is described as something which is "discovered," as if already made within the confines of some particular community. It is the play or tension between being a self who actively--and yet collectively--constitutes her self and being a self who finds herself as a given, a person who already has certain values and characteristics, that I would like to investigate further. It is necessary to know more precisely what it means to be encumbered for Sandel, and to think about whether Sandel's encumbered self is the only alternative to the liberal abstract individual who is unencumbered.

## C. The Self Too Encumbered to Move

In Sandel's move from the liberal, unencumbered self to the communitarian, encumbered self, he fails to adequately account for the ways in which the self--without being conceived of as an abstract individual--has the sort of moral agency which can allow the self to change or resist. Sandel's move is not so much from individual to collective, but rather it really is from unencumbered to encumbered; the difference is that there is a loss of agency in his move, because he does not have a concept of collectively formed or acted agency that can account for radical change. Thus he rejects the claim that we are 'free to

choose' and replaces it with the claim that we are 'not free to choose, because we did not summon or command our history or character'; he does not see the possibility of rejecting the idea that we are 'free (from interference) to choose as an individual' and replacing it with the claim that 'freedom is a social product, so we are capable of choosing or creating collectively with others a history or context which we do in part create.' It seems as if the only alternative which Sandel sees to the liberal individual is a self who is completely encumbered by an identity given within a community--to the point of losing the kind of agency required for change.[20]

The meaning of "encumbered" applies all too well to Sandel's account of the encumbered self; the American Heritage Dictionary gives this definition of what it is to encumber:

> **Encumber** *tr.v.* **1.** To weigh down unduly; lay too much upon. **2.** To hinder, impede, or clutter, as with useless articles or unwanted additions. **3.** To handicap or burden, as with obligations or legal claims. [Middle English *encombren,* from Old French *encombrer,* to block up. . .].

Sandel's encumbered self, it seems, is characterized as burdened with obligations or moral commitments, hindered from changing in radical ways. Not only is a self thus characterized harmful to radical imaginations (which need to see the possibility of resistance in the self), but the self thus characterized is simply not born out in reality: it is possible to see evidence of collective change whenever one looks for it, one can see selves being constituted and reconstituted--burdened but also breaking free from burdens--in ways not accounted for when one recognizes only the effects that one single, bounded and consistent community has on a particular self.

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[20]Amy Gutmann makes a similar criticism of Sandel, although hers is coming from a liberal perspective. She claims that Sandel's method "invites us to see the moral universe in dualistic terms: either our identities are independent of our ends, leaving us totally free to choose our life plans, or they are constituted by community, leaving us totally encumbered by socially given ends. . . The critics thereby do a disservice to not only liberal but communitarian values, since the same method that reduces liberalism to an extreme metaphysical vision also renders communitarian theories unacceptable" ("Communitarian Critics of Liberalism" in Avineri and de-Shalit, eds., Communitarianism and Individualism, 130).

It is not from a liberal point of view that I am rejecting the dictionary's implication that the encumbered self is to be understood as weighed down with obligations (for the liberal, for different reasons, would shudder at the thought of this clutter of involuntary obligations). In fact, one might argue that the word "encumber" was defined from the point of view of liberal ideology, from which position any moral pull must be seen as an obligation and any obligation must be seen as a burden on the free individual. A commitment which holds moral weight does not have to be seen as a burden if we understand that to be a person simply <u>is</u> to be a person in social relations with others and thus with responsibilities or moral pulls (which the deontologist can only recognize as duties or "obligations"). It is not that having moral responsibilities are objectionable, but rather what is objectionable is that these responsibilities burden in a way that prevents movement or change or the exercise of agency in determining what the responsibilities are. Thus I am not disagreeing with Sandel that in fact the self who is understood to exist and have been formed within particular social relations <u>does</u> "come with" moral responsibilities, but what makes Sandel's claim that we incur moral responsibilities simply from being constituted in relation to others too simple is the fact that he does not see conflicts or tensions in <u>which</u> commitments have moral weight for us; to see the social relations or context in which one is constituted as complicated makes it impossible to see any <u>one</u> social relation (out of context of other relations one might have or other features of one's social position which might pull on one in one way or another) as pulling on us irrevocably. Such an irrevocable pull <u>would</u> be a burden, a hindrance, an impediment to change or perhaps to move out of an oppressive situation. My claim is that Sandel sees the encumbered self as being encumbered in just this burdensome way, precisely because he mistakenly believes that the self is thoroughly constituted by one consistent set of values, within one clearly bounded and homogeneous community, a community in which one "finds" oneself, but which one does not create.

Sandel emphasizes the involuntary nature of our moral commitments and obligations. He writes:

> But we cannot regard ourselves as independent in this way without great cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are--as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic. Allegiances such as these are more than values I happen to have or aims I 'espouse at any given time'. They go beyond the obligations I voluntarily incur and the 'natural duties' I owe to human beings as such. They allow that to some I owe more than justice requires or even permits, not by reason of agreements I have made but instead in virtue of those more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person I am. (Liberalism... 179)

Marilyn Friedman has pointed out that the sorts of communities which Sandel and other communitarians have in mind are very traditional communities, and that the social relations they acknowledge are traditional ones. She sees the communitarians' philosophy as problematic because they do not give much thought to which communities are or should be the locations of our self identities. In particular, she thinks that communitarian philosophy does not serve feminists well, for the communitarians do not see how traditional communities form ethical thinking in non-feminist ways. Theorists like Sandel and MacIntyre, Friedman argues, tend to take for granted that communities are based on given structures such as those of family, neighborhood, school, church or even "nation." These traditional communities--which Friedman refers to as communities of place--tend to embody traditional values, including values of (different kinds of) dominance and subordination. She points out that "feminist theory is rooted in a recognition of the need for change in all the traditions and practices which show gender differentiation; many of those are located in just the sorts of communities invoked by communitarians, for example, family practices and national political traditions" (281). Feminists, she argues, should

therefore be wary of communitarian theory which assumes or claims that the self is constituted only in these traditional communities. Friedman argues that within communitarian theory, these traditional communities are accorded "a kind of morally normative legitimacy" (279); in claiming this, the communitarians fail "to acknowledge that many communities make illegitimate moral claims on their members, linked to hierarchies of domination and subordination" (279). It is the recognition that such moral claims are problematic for women--since the hierarchies of these communities subordinate women--that motivates Friedman's rejection of Sandel's claim that these are the communities which hold moral weight. While Friedman wants to retain the communitarians' claim that the self is constituted in community, she is motivated to reject their assumptions about what counts as a community and about the "legitimacy of the moral influences which communities exert over their members" (280).

However, it is not just that the oppression of traditional communities' moral weight on one is a motivating reason for critiquing communitarian theory, but it is also simply false that traditional--homogeneous, clearly bounded, and relatively static--communities are the only communities which form us. In fact, it is generally false that such homogeneous communities exist, a fact which is obscured by the erasure of group difference. The focus on traditional communities damages both the validity of communitarian theory and its usefulness for a politics of resistance. Because the communitarians picture communities as traditional and homogeneous, they imagine a member of a community as simply inheriting a set of values, or discovering themselves embedded in and thus constituted by a set of values. On the other hand, seeing group differences intersecting within communities helps us explain how resistance to community values is possible--that is, it provides a way to understand moral agency that is not individualistic. My claim is that, in fact, one does not always learn or become constituted with only one set of values; there are always oppositional values, even when there are also dominant values in a community.

It has perhaps been more true in the past than it is in contemporary life that a person would be likely to be born, live, and die surrounded only by others like him/herself in significant ways. Isolated, rural communities could, in the past, have more control of the ways in which individuals within the community were constituted. It is much more rare, now, to find instances of such isolated communities. The communitarians seem, then, to be basing their claims about community on some romanticized, out of date (one might even say pre-colonial) version of what a community is. However, even if one were thinking about traditional versions of what a community is, one would be mistaken in imagining homogeneity of values even in these communities. All communities are, to some degree, cut across by group differences which affect how members are constituted. There is probably no community in which there are no conflicts of values created by group differences (whether or not anyone conceives of the group as a group), however suppressed these conflicts may be. There are, for instance, always or almost always differences of gender, age, social role, and so on within the most homogeneous-appearing communities, and different members of a community may experience day to day life in different enough ways so that they develop different values.[21]

One may speak of the "official" values of a community as a whole; for instance, in (crude) anthropological fashion one might make statements like: "this community believes in the sacredness of the cow"; or in doing ideological critique one may point to institutions which define or control the values of the community, as in the claim: "heterosexuality is institutionalized in this society." However, pointing to the dominant values of a community never reveals the whole picture. To claim that there is an identifiable value of a community as a whole is not at odds with claiming that members, or groups of members, within the community may not hold those values.

I am not claiming that there is some way in which individuals develop idiosyncratic values (although it is also probably true that some characteristics of people would best be

[21] Which group differences are socially relevant, which, if any, are socially recognized, and within which, if any, there is a sense of community, are all dependent on changing historical and material conditions.

called idiosyncratic, for not all differences are socially significant group differences), but rather that the presence of overlapping group differences means that it never makes sense to speak of oneself as belonging to only one community or only one socially significant category in which one's self would be fully constituted. It is only when a community's dominant values are taken to be the only existing values in the community that there is the appearance of a member of the community being constituted simply with those values. I am arguing that resistance to hegemonic values always exists (even when unconscious), it just may not always be visible; Sandel's account of community indicates that it is not visible to him.

Recognizing that people are constituted within the intersection of several group differences maintains the communitarian claim that selves are constituted socially, in relation to others rather than individualistically; however, it destroys the illusion that one just finds oneself to be the inheritor of a set of given values. This is so because the tensions or conflicts between the values of intersecting groups--when they are evident, that is, when they are not thoroughly erased by a hegemonic value system--do not allow an individual to be constituted only with one given set of values. The communitarian assumption that a community's values are "discovered" as a given is equivalent to saying that some set of values is thoroughly hegemonic. The fact that there has always been resistance, that beliefs, values, emotions, styles or ways of being not sanctioned by the hegemonic value system have always existed, tells us that no set of community values ever does achieve complete hegemony.[22]

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[22]Alison Jaggar has argued for this claim that although our values are socially constituted, there is never a complete hegemony of one set of values: there is always the possibility of developing resistant values. She speaks of these values in terms of the emotions we are constituted to feel, and dubs resistant emotions "outlaw emotions." She writes: "We absorb the standards and values of our society in the very process of learning the language of emotion, and those standards and values are built into the foundation of our emotional constitution. Within a hierarchical society, the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interest of the dominant group. . . Consequently, we are all likely to develop an emotional constitution quite inappropriate for feminism. . . By forming our emotional constitution in particular ways, our society helps to ensure its own perpetuation." However, the picture of dominant values thoroughgoingly constituting us is incomplete: "it ignores the fact that people do not always experience the conventionally acceptable emotions. . . In other words, the hegemony that our society exercises over people's emotional

There is a confusion that takes place in the rush to reject liberal individualism. The critic of liberalism may mistakenly equate the liberal pre-occupation with preserving room for "individuality" with the very different claim that intersecting group differences should not be erased in community. It is not as an unencumbered individual (whose idiosyncratic, "freely" chosen values cannot be accounted for once one recognizes that the self is socially constituted) that a member of the community becomes a resistor of the community's values, but rather it is as someone who is socially constituted, but constituted by a complicated mix of socially developed values. In rejecting the possibility that the unencumbered self "chooses" individual values, Sandel has also thrown out the possibility that a person be "encumbered" or constituted in a way that allows for--or calls for--exercising agency in the pull between conflicting systems of values.

I have so far emphasized the way in which Sandel sees values as a given; in fact, Sandel does also attempt to describe ways in which a person is "always open, indeed vulnerable, to growth and transformation in the light of revised self-understandings" (Liberalism... 12). This is his attempt to account for how change does take place for the encumbered self. His description of how and how much the encumbered self can change or move in relation to his/her constituted values is very limited, however. These limits derive, I will argue, from Sandel's failure to see intersecting group differences as a factor in how the self is constituted. Without an understanding of intersecting group difference, Sandel can acknowledge that the encumbered self moves a bit in relation to given values, but he can only see this movement as extremely limited, as the encumbered self is seen as weighed down or burdened with given moral weights but is not also seen as being fed or sustained with collective, resistant values.

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constitution is not total" (Jaggar, Alison. "Love and Knowledge" in Gender/Body/Knowledge, eds. Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo. 159-160).

Let us examine Sandel's explanation of moral agency. He writes that:

> to have character is to know that I move in a history I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences none the less for my choices and conduct. . . . As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense to distance myself from it, but the distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself. A person with character thus knows that he is implicated in various ways even as he reflects, and feels the moral weight of what he knows. (Liberalism... 179)

This passage is ambiguous, for he at once tells us that we "neither summon nor command" who we are, and that through reflection and interpretation there is room for movement. It is the nature of the reflection and the subsequent movement that needs analysis. I will argue that while Sandel develops an account of agency and the role of reflection for the encumbered self, the account is inadequate, for it erases the sources of real resistance and is thus unable to explain how the encumbered self could be constituted as resistant.

Sandel seems to use his claim that one's distance from the history and community which constitutes oneself is "always precarious and provisional" to ignore the significance of serious and successful resistance to a constitutive community's values. Even if one thinks of the most extreme examples of constitutive communities which try to exercise complete control over their members' identities (and where one set of values appears to have complete hegemony), one can see resistance which involves enormous moral change, or change in the moral constitution of the self. While such change may begin as something "precarious and provisional," one need not dismiss the significance of moral change just because the ground its subjects stand on feels shaky. In fact, resistance to dominant community values can often be characterized by the feeling of having the ground continually pulled out from underneath one's feet.[23]

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[23]Sandra Bartky calls this feeling "double ontological shock," something which she notes that women frequently experience as they go through the changes of values and of self-identity involved in coming to have a feminist consciousness. Double ontological shock is "first, the realization that what is really happening is quite different from what appears to be happening; and second, the frequent inability to tell

As an extreme example of a community which would appear to constitute its members with only one set of values, think of the cult communities in which ritual abuse takes place; growing up in such a community means being subject to the community's attempt not only to have one's identity thoroughgoingly constituted by the community's sadistic "values," but also to stamp out any possibility of resistance. However, survivors of community-inflicted ritual abuse can and do resist their communities' values and leave the community, re-constituting their identities within other communities. The writings of such survivors often stress that despite the enormity of the forces which have fragmented them, programmed them for suicide or for perpetual loyalty to the abusive community, they can break with this history of sadism.[24] While I am not denying the hold that the community has on its members (including survivors who have "left" the community), for it obviously does have a strong hold, I am just pointing out that Sandel looks only at the hold the community values have on someone, and so he sees no resistance. He sees shaky ground as preventing moral change; I would suggest instead that although walking on shaky and unsure ground may be a condition of the lives of those who are resistors to the moral status quos, this living with ambiguity can be a creative, even if painful and difficult, source of resistance itself.

Furthermore, Sandel seems to characterize the hold the community has on its members as a legitimate hold, for as he has said, any "person with character. . . knows that he is implicated in various ways even as he reflects, and feels the moral weight of what he knows" (Liberalism... 179). Sandel never suggests that there might be a problem with knowing that one is implicated by one's community; the moral weight is never characterized as oppressive.

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what is really happening at all" (Bartky, "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness," in Philosophy and Women, eds. Sharon Bishop and Marjorie Weinzweis, 256).

[24]As one survivor writes: "WE ARE NOT THE SUM OF WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO US. . . The impulse to suicide is a programmed response to what's been done to us; we are brainwashed to ensure the protection of cult hierarchs by killing ourselves. As Audre Lorde wrote so eloquently: we were never meant to survive. That doesn't mean, however, that we can't or won't or aren't surviving. Whole." (Girl Insurrection, "Some Notes on Abuse," Valley Women's Voice, Fall 1993: 5)

It will be useful to explore Sandel's account of agency to see how much possibility there is for an agent to actually bring about change in how his or her identity is constituted. Sandel draws a distinction between agency in the voluntarist sense and agency in the cognitive sense. He explains that "if I am a being with ends, there are at least two ways I might 'come by' them: one is by choice, the other by discovery, by 'finding them out'. The first sense of 'coming by' we might call the voluntarist dimension of agency, the second sense the cognitive dimension" (Liberalism... 58).[25] He has rejected the plausibility of the voluntarist sense of agency, for it requires that the choosing self exist prior to having any ends, which, he has argued, is a conceptual impossibility. Sandel's alternative explanation of the relation of the subject to its ends is that "the ends of the self are given in advance," in which case,

> the subject achieves self-command not by choosing that which is already given (this would be unintelligible) but by reflecting on itself and inquiring into its constituent nature, discerning its laws and imperatives, and acknowledging its purposes as its own. . . . In reflexivity, the self turns its lights inward upon itself, making the self its own object of inquiry and reflection. (Liberalism... 58)

Thus the subject exercising agency in the cognitive sense is just asking "who am I?", for the answer to this question determines what ends the subject (already) has. Understanding oneself--that is, understanding what ends one has been constituted to have--is what comprises the exercise of agency: "For the self whose identity is constituted in the light of ends already before it, agency consists. . . in seeking self-understanding" (Liberalism... 59). It is through this process of self-reflection that a subject can "play a role in shaping the contours of its identity" (Liberalism 152).

Sandel then moves to what could be a promising consideration of this process of self-reflection; it appears promising because Sandel does recognize that this is a process of

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[25]It is interesting that Sandel claims there are "at least" two ways. Does he leave room for there being other ways, as I am arguing that there are?

self-interpretation (with possibilities for multiple or conflicting interpretations), that it is not an individual process (others can participate in my deciding who I am), and that the result can be a revision of my identity (the bounds of my self are not given in advance). He has even gone so far as to tell us that "for certain purposes, the appropriate description of the moral subject may refer to a plurality of selves within a single, individual human being, as when we account for inner deliberation in terms of the pull of competing identities. . ." (Liberalism... 63). What I still find to be problematic in Sandel's account is that while he sees the process of self-reflection as collective in the sense that others participate with me in it, he again fails to ask the relevant question: "which others?" This question can only appear unimportant to him because he imagines the community as not cut across by socially significant group differences. If there are significant group differences within a community--differences which mean that selves are systemically (not idiosyncratically) constituted with different values--then it matters very much whom I engage in the process of self-reflection with, if this is the process through which my identity is shaped.

Sandel, then, has recognized that we "have a people"--and that it is these people with whom we participate in shaping our identities--but he still does not recognize the necessity of questioning who the people are or should be. For Sandel, participating in constituting one's self is not seen as including the day to day navigation of conflicting ways of being constituted which arise out of the intersection of multiple communities; this navigation involves gravitating towards some people and perhaps away from others. It cannot be that he thinks that it does not matter which people I shape my identity with, for he would not deny that who the people are (i.e. what their ends are) is what constitutes who I am; so it must be that he sees who my people are as a given, something that is completely antecedent to the constitution of my identity. Sorting out what my identity is, then, is done with a people, but does not itself consist (even in part) in sorting out who my people are, who the community is within which my identity is constituted. I can ask "who am I?" but I cannot ask "with whom am I?", for this is a given. Although Sandel

recognizes that there is some agency in my shaping who I am, he does not acknowledge that this agency must include shaping or deciding whom I am constituted with.

This last point becomes clear in Sandel's discussion of friendship, where he describes how it is that a friend can help me know who I am--that is, can help me know what my ends are. Aristotelian thinking surfaces once more in Sandel's theory; Sandel's friend is quite like Aristotle's friend: a mirror. I will now look at Sandel's account of constitutive friendship.

Sandel criticizes Rawls for being committed to the claim that others cannot really participate in one's act of "choosing" a good, and then points out that Rawls lacks a deep sense of friendship, in which intimacy would involve participating in one's friend's self-reflection and self-constitution: "If arriving at one's own good is primarily a matter of surveying existing preferences and assessing their relative intensities [as it is for Rawls], it is not the sort of inquiry in which another, even an intimate other, can readily participate. Only the person himself can 'know' what he really wants or 'decide' what he most prefers" (Liberalism... 171). But friendship, Sandel argues, can be "marked by mutual insight as well as sentiment" (Liberalism... 180) if we understand friendships to be constitutive attachments. It is only "for persons presumed incapable of constitutive attachments" that "acts of friendship. . . face a powerful constraint. However much I might hope for the good of a friend and stand ready to advance it, only the friend himself can know what the good is" (Liberalism... 180-181). He contrasts the limited, liberal conception of friendship with a communitarian sense, according to which friends may participate in knowing and shaping each other's conceptions of the good. Having particular ends is, in this case, not a matter of choosing them, but rather a matter of knowing what my character is: "In consulting my preferences, I have not only to weigh their intensity, but also to assess their suitability to the person I (already) am" (Liberalism... 180). Since a friend (in the constitutive sense) can know my character, a friend can know and shape what my ends are.

Knowing what a friend wants, then, is the same as knowing who the friend is, that is, what their character is given their history, and therefore what ends they have. But Sandel stresses that understanding a friend's character and thus their ends is a matter of sharing a history with the friend, or being constituted together in the same community. Where they have a shared history, friends know one another partly by knowing their shared history, and thus their shared values or ends. Sandel writes:

> For persons encumbered in part by a history they share with others. . . knowing oneself is a more complicated thing [than choosing among existing wants]. It is also a less strictly private thing. Where seeking my good is bound up with exploring my identity and interpreting my life history, the knowledge I seek is less transparent to me and less opaque to others. . . Uncertain which path to take, I consult a friend who knows me well, and together we deliberate, offering and assessing by turns competing descriptions of the person I am, and of the alternatives I face as they bear on my identity. (Liberalism... 181)

It is in this way that a friend participates in constituting my identity.

Throughout his description of constitutive friendship, Sandel never once raises the question of which friend he deliberates with. He simply "consult[s] a friend who knows [him] well." However, he never considers, "which 'me' does my friend know well?" or "which of my friends knows 'me' well?"[26] While he emphasizes that the 'me' who is the (subject and) object of self-reflection is open to revision or shaping, he does not similarly recognize that the friend with whom I deliberate cannot be presumed to be identifiable in advance. Just as the possibilities of my identity are multiple, so the possibilities of whom my identity is constituted with must also be multiple.

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[26]See, for instance, María Lugones' "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling and Loving Perception," where she describes being different "selves" in different "worlds." Her friends in one of her "worlds" would assure her that she is a playful person, while her friends in another of her "worlds" will tell her she is not in the least bit playful. It seems a contradiction to her that she is both playful and not playful, but this contradiction resolves with the recognition that she is not one unified self; the different "worlds" have constituted her differently. This example can stand in contrast to Sandel's assumption that one is constituted within one community. It is clear in Lugones' example that it makes all the difference in the world (so to speak) which friend she deliberates about her identity with.

It matters so much who the friend is precisely because the differences between members of a community are so socially significant. If the differences between community members were only individual idiosyncrasies, or if the differences were not connected to having different ends, then it would not be so important who the friend was. There would be no systemically manufactured way in which the ends I come up with depends upon whom within the community I do the deliberating with. But socially significant group differences--such as differences of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, religion, and so on--are tied to differences in identity and in ends. If these group differences exist within the realm of people whom my identity is or can be constituted with, then I have to ask the question: with whom is my identity constituted/to be constituted?

Sandel's friend is someone like himself, someone with a shared history; one's ability to know a friend well is dependent upon seeing oneself as similar to the friend in the sense of having a shared history. Knowing another by knowing oneself and assuming the other to be like oneself is what Elizabeth Spelman describes as "boomerang perception," perception in which "I look at you and come right back to myself." Sandel's friends look at one another and come right back to themselves, seeing in each other only their shared history. But this seemingly shared history is not likely to be a neutral one; it is likely to reflect a dominant group's sense of which similarities are important. As Spelman notes: "In the United States white children like me got early training in boomerang perception when we were told by well-meaning white adults that Black people were just like us--never, however, that we were just like Blacks" (Inessential... 12).

As with Aristotle whose friends are "similar in their goodness" (NE 1156b7-8), Sandel's friendship is also based on at least a degree of similarity. However, Sandel never considers or argues for the desirability or undesirability of this similarity for he assumes that the constitutive community is homogeneous in the relevant ways and therefore that for a friendship to be constitutive, it must be based on similarity, on having a shared history.

For Sandel, one's constitutive community is those with whom one finds oneself. Only a mainstream (not marginal within the community) member of a mainstream (not marginal within the larger society) community could find it plausible to assume that there is something desirable about opening oneself up in friendship to the less-than-private, un-individualist process of reflecting upon and constituting oneself with others whom one <u>finds</u> oneself with, without <u>also</u> having agency in determining <u>whom</u> one is with. For subordinate people may "find" that they are in community with their dominators, with those who have a stake in continuing to constitute the subordinate as subordinate. It is only those who are thoroughgoingly mainstream folk who can remain blind to the fact that it matters very much <u>whom</u> one takes to be one's own people, the people with whom one is constituted. For such folk can afford not to consider whom they are with and still be likely to find themselves among folk with whom they not only share values but also find unproblematic being constituted in accordance with those values. Someone whom dominant ideology favors and who in turn believes in and takes as his own this dominant ideology can travel around to anyplace that subscribes to a similar ideology and easily claim, "where ever I go, I always find folks I connect with," etc. Someone who is rejected by or who rejects dominant ideology must choose connections much more carefully; it is not all that frequently the case for such folks that without purposely seeking out particular others who share values, that such connections will come accidentally.

Furthermore, it is not just undesirable to have whom one is with as a given, it is also implausible that it <u>can</u> be a given. The presence of diversity in a community <u>creates</u> the question of whom one is with. Which members of the community I am constituted with is a morally significant question when there are systemic differences of values between different groups within a community. In a (counter-factual) completely homogeneous community, there would not be any morally relevant difference between being with one member of the community and being with another. It is only through a failure to see that systemic differences within the community do exist that I can fail to notice what rides on

the question of whom I am with; the question of who I am in fact depends on the question of whom I am with, a question whose answer cannot be a given unless there are no relevant differences between the possible people. Thus in any community which is cut across by group difference (as I am claiming that all communities are), whom I am with is never completely given prior to my "shaping the contours of my identity."

Whom I am constituted with cannot be such a given because it changes both with shifts of consciousness and with shifts in whom I am actually with day to day. For instance, if I am a white person in a pre-dominantly white community, I might think I am just with other "people," all of whom (despite some of them being people of color) I assimilate in my mind to the norms of white/anglo culture. It is my lack of consciousness about racial differences (allowed to me by my white skin privilege) and not the lack of racial differences which leads me to see myself as constituted simply as one among other "people" in the community. If my race consciousness changes then I might begin to notice the particular mixture of values, experiences, and so on of the people as racialized people; if I now describe whom I am with, I would note the way race has functioned to constitute some of us differently, although in intersecting ways. One could say that whom I am with changed because of my shift of focus. Whereas before I was just with "people," now I am with racialized people; the extent of my identification of myself with those of my own racial group is now conscious, and may in itself change.

Change in consciousness, then, affects change in whom I am constituted with, not just change in who I am given whom I am with. Who I understand myself to be and whom I am with continually inform each other. For instance, in one sense I could say I have always been "with" other Jews, growing up as I did in a largely Jewish community. However, I did not identify (strongly) as a Jew; I did not really understand Jewishness as a significant part of who I was. In this sense, it is false to say that I was constituted with other Jews in the same way that I would make that claim now, although I did without realizing it absorb and become constituted with what I can now recognize as Jewish values,

manners, style, and so on. There is a difference between being unconsciously a member of a group or community and being consciously, actively, and purposefully a member. This difference makes for one sense in which I can say that whom I am with changes just because of a change in focus or attention that comes with a change of consciousness.

We cannot, as Sandel claims that we do, just "find" ourselves in a community, for we continue, throughout our lives, to find different descriptions for that same community, to find different understandings of whom we are with. In this way, it is no more a given than who we are is. These shifts in definition of who the people of the community are can be described as a sort of a shift in whom we are with. Furthermore, the shifts are certainly not just definitional; they are not just shifts of understanding. For along with shifts of consciousness come actual shifts of who the people are that I am with day to day. For instance, recognition of gender as an organizing element of oppression may make me not only describe differently who makes up the community (now gendered subjects make up the community, not just "people"), it may lead me to form different sorts of community ties, for instance, ties with the women in particular. My practices change as my consciousness changes, and the practices involve developing and sustaining ties to certain people--say, to women--and refusing to sustain connections to those who constitute me as subordinate.

We can only avoid the definitional shifts of whom we are with if we never become conscious of the significance of group differences within our communities. If we do come to consciousness of group differences (and we may become conscious of some, but not other group differences), we are confronted with the question of <u>which</u> members of <u>which</u> communities we are with. If our recognition of whom we are with is problematic, we exercise the same agency with respect to changing this as we can exercise in answering the question, "who am I?" And yet while Sandel gives a description of the process of self-reflection in which we come to understand and revise the bounds of our self, he does not give a description of the companion process of understanding and revising the bounds of

who our people are. It is that he does not consider the importance of my having agency to change who my people are, nor does he consider the fact that we do in fact act as agents in doing this; we do not just find ourselves with a given community. Coming to a consciousness which compels us to reject mainstream ideologies which inform our ways of constituting ourselves and others requires that we exercise agency in having a people or a community. For a failure to exercise agency in determining who our people are amounts to an acceptance of the mainstream or dominant people in the community in which we do find ourselves. And for someone who cannot find herself in the mainstream--if she is caught between communities or if she is rejected by whatever mainstream there is--the exercise of agency in having a people cannot be avoided.

It is not just in friendship but in constitutive community in general that, for Sandel, histories and values must be shared (for it is not just with one's friends but in a wider sense within the community in general that one's self is constituted). In defining constitutive community, Sandel writes:

> In so far as our constitutive self-understandings comprehend a wider subject than the individual alone, whether a family or tribe or city or class or nation or people, to this extent they define a community in the constitutive sense. And what marks such a community is not merely a spirit of benevolence, or the prevalence of communitarian values, or even certain 'shared final ends' alone, but a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understanding within which the opacity of the participants is reduced if never finally dissolved. (Liberalism... 172)

It is the "common vocabulary of discourse" and the shared "background of implicit practices. . ." that provide the ground for community members to be constituted together.[27]

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[27]Sandel certainly believes that shared understandings and history make for constitutive community, and that the community must be thought of as clearly bounded and homogeneous. However, even Sandel is not the most rabid of communitarians in making this assumption. Michael Walzer, for instance, is absolutely obsessed with the question of membership (who is in and who is out) in a community, and with maintaining the community as a bounded world within which all meanings are common meanings. He is led to focus on communities as clearly bounded worlds because he is primarily concerned with questions of distribution, and believes that to theorize about distribution we must do so in reference to a bounded world. He writes that "the idea of distributive justice presupposes a bounded world within which distributions take place: a group of people committed to dividing, exchanging, and sharing social goods, first of all among

In arguing that exercising agency with respect to one's identity must include asking whom one is being constituted with, I have not yet necessarily called into question whether or not one can still only be constituted with others like oneself. I have suggested that one can exercise agency in determining who the friends are that one reflects with, or in moving within certain parts of a community, or in leaving a community altogether and creating or joining a different one.[28] However, all of this is potentially consistent with attempting to continue to be constituted with others like oneself. I have argued that who one's constitutive community is need not be a given, and have thus opened up the question of whom one might be constituted with. This leaves open the question of whether to argue that constitutive community can, cannot, should, or should not be based on similarity. I will discuss more fully later why I think that basing a constitutive community on a given similarity is neither possible nor desirable in a society characterized by intersecting group differences. The illusion of this similarity is certainly possible, but it is achieved only by focusing on the mainstream of a community, or on describing community members only in

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themselves. That world. . . is the political community" (31). This political community--a bounded world--is the only sort of constitutive community of which Walzer speaks. It seems natural to Walzer that members of a political community share one unitary culture and want to keep their boundaries clear so as to avoid sacrificing the distinctiveness of their culture. In speaking of neighborhoods (in order to make an analogy to political communities) he claims that "their members will organize to defend the local politics and culture against strangers" (38). He reasons that "the distinctiveness of cultures and groups depends upon closure and, without it, cannot be conceived as a stable feature of human life" (39). He has absolutely no way of accounting for cultural *mestizaje.* Furthermore, he writes that "we who are already members [of a political community] do the choosing [of whom to admit into the bounded world], in accordance with our understanding of what membership means in our community and what sort of a community we want to have. Membership as a social good is constituted by our understanding; its value is fixed by our work and conversation; and then we are in charge (who else could be in charge?) of its distribution" (32, my emphasis). It is clear that this is a dangerous situation for anyone who is not in the mainstream of the political community, or for anyone who is considered to be on the outside of it and may want in. If there is to be a "we" who have shared understandings (and who manifest no diversity or cultural *mestizaje*), it is only going to be achieved by erasing everyone who is not definitive of that norm. The illusion of the political community as both homogeneous and clearly bounded is a dangerous weapon, but it is an illusion which Walzer is especially committed to.

[28]When I speak of "leaving" a community, this "leaving" could be literal, as one leaves a geographically based community of place, or it could be a matter of a shift of focus or attention; one could "leave," for instance, a patriarchal community while remaining physically amongst the same group of people, but shifting one's sense of whose perceptions and actions carry moral weight. See, for instance, Marilyn Frye's description in "To Be and Be Seen" of women shifting their focus onto each other in the "background" while what she calls phallocratic reality takes up the "foreground." There is a shift in who one's community is and how one's self becomes constituted or reconstituted within community that accompanies the shift of focus.

terms of what they share, not in terms of their differences, as if the description of their similarities exhausted them.

There have been two parts to the critique of Sandel here. First of all, he does not consider that it matters whom I constitute myself with, and therefore does not explore how I could exercise agency in shaping whom my constitutive community consists of; and, in fact, he describes the encumbered self as for the most part unable to move in relation to given values. Secondly, he characterizes constitutive friendship and constitutive community as based on having a shared or common history, and so he never explores the question of whether one can be constituted in relation with people from whom one is different in significant ways.

### D. Alasdair MacIntyre and the Quest for Unity: At Whose Expense?

Alasdair MacIntyre, like Sandel, recognizes that we are constituted as beings embedded in particular histories and communities, with particular social roles and ends defining those roles. His account gives some depth back to what a "self" is, depth which is lacking when morality is replaced by the emotivism found in modern, liberal societies. I turn now to MacIntyre because like Sandel, MacIntyre gives an account of the historically and socially constituted self, and his account is potentially useful for understanding what it is to have "a people" in a political sense. Like Sandel, MacIntyre argues that the modern liberal (and emotivist) self--the self who cannot be understood as having any "people"--is illusory. He contrasts the modern self primarily to the self of heroic societies, a self defined by his (I use the word advisedly) social roles and the given virtues of these roles. MacIntyre's task could be described as that of modifying a lost version of the moral self so that we might begin to redevelop it here and now, amidst the moral disarray of modernity. To succeed in regaining a sense of the self as constituted with a history and a community of a people (and an attendant catalogue of the virtues) would displace modern liberalism, but,

as I will argue, if it is done on MacIntyre's terms, it will also erase the complexities of the self that derive from the presence of interlocking, socially significant group differences.

MacIntyre begins by contrasting the (illusory) emotivist self--whose moral sense comes from nowhere and consists of nothing more than an assortment of attitudes--with the pre-modern self, who is defined by a particular placement within social history and social roles. He writes of the modern, emotivist self:

> . . . whatever criteria or principles or evaluative allegiances the emotivist self may profess, they are to be construed as expressions of attitudes, preferences and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle or value, since they underlie and are prior to all allegiance to criterion, principle or value. But from this it follows that the emotivist self can have no rational history in its transitions from one state of moral commitment to another. Inner conflicts are for it necessarily *au fond* the confrontation of one contingent arbitrariness by another. . . . The self thus conceived, utterly distinct on the one hand from its social embodiments and lacking on the other any rational history of its own, may seem to have a certain abstract and ghostly character. (After... 33)

In rejecting such ghosts and developing an alternative understanding of the self, MacIntyre harkens back to "pre-modern, traditional societies." He does so for two reasons. First of all, such societies understood selves to be defined socially and so a pre-modern understanding of the self is an alternative to the ghost-selves of modernity. Secondly, because he sees selves as constituted in part by inheriting a particular past, he must look at "our"[29] history, a history which goes back to heroic societies.

For MacIntyre, there is a way in which heroic societies had it right about morality. One can learn from heroic societies, MacIntyre writes,

> first that all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion; and secondly that there

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[29]More later on problematizing this "us."

is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition in which we inherit them and our understanding of them from a series of predecessors in which series heroic societies hold first place. If this is so, the contrast between the freedom of choice of values of which modernity prides itself and the absence of such choice in heroic cultures would look very different. For freedom of choice of values would from the standpoint of a tradition ultimately rooted in heroic societies appear more like the freedom of ghosts--of those whose human substance approached vanishing point--than of men [*sic*]. (After... 126-127)

So it is not just that heroic societies had an account of morality that is more than the "morality" of ghosts and so will be a useful tradition to consider as in developing an alternative to modern liberalism, but furthermore there is a sense in which one must turn to the history of heroic societies to understand one's own moral self because, MacIntyre claims, it is "our" history, a history by which "we" are partly constituted.

What, then, is the pre-modern understanding of a moral self? It is a self whose given social position and history places him/herself at a moral starting point. MacIntyre writes:

> In many pre-modern, traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. Individuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast. To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress--or to fail to make progress--toward a given end. (After... 33-34)

At first glance MacIntyre's description of the pre-modern self looks promising as a model for a contemporary, socially constituted self. First of all, he does recognize that one person

can have many "interlocking" social roles at once; and secondly, he also characterizes the moral subject as able to move and change within certain given social relationships. MacIntyre's project continues to look promising as he goes on to consider Aristotle's understanding of ethics and politics; he is interested in preserving Aristotle's communitarian sense of what a *polis* is while also critiquing and rejecting certain aspects of Aristotelian theory.

According to MacIntyre, there are three related problems with adopting an Aristotelian conception of the *polis* as a model for political community. First of all, assuming that one does not accept Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" that grounds his teleology, one needs some other way of grounding one's knowledge of what man's *telos* is. He puts the question out, "If we reject [Aristotle's metaphysical biology], as we must, is there any way in which that teleology can be preserved?" (After... 162). He mentions that others have responded to this question by saying that "all we need to provide in order to justify an account of the virtues and vices is some very general account of what human flourishing and well-being consists in" (After... 162). However, MacIntyre argues, "This view ignores the place in our cultural history of deep conflicts over what human flourishing and well-being do consist in and the way in which rival and incompatible beliefs on that topic beget rival and incompatible tables of the virtues" (162-163). So MacIntyre has introduced into Aristotelian theory the idea that if a good or *telos* is not given in advance in some "natural" way, then it must arise out of human society; but where no single *telos* is given, the question of what human flourishing is might be an open question. If there is not agreement on the matter, how can one say it is a given? Thus it appears that MacIntyre is going to develop a communitarian sense of how a community develops a conception of the good without presupposing agreement.

The second problem which MacIntyre raises for contemporary communitarians who want to preserve a form of Aristotelianism, is stated: "If a good deal of the detail of Aristotle's account of the virtues presupposes the now-long-vanished context of the social

relationships of the ancient city-state, how can Aristotelianism be formulated so as to be a moral presence in a world in which there are no city-states?" (After... 163). MacIntyre thus recognizes that a constitutive community (*polis*) in contemporary society must look very different than it did in Ancient Greece; he is not laboring under the illusion that we can somehow go back to the pre-modern self of the good ol' days. Again, this looks promising because one might expect that an examination of how the conditions of contemporary society differ from those of Ancient Greece would lead a theorist to develop a conception of political community which recognizes group differences. MacIntyre has laid the groundwork for this recognition, but in the end he never really explores what the differences between a Greek *polis* and a contemporary political community must be, since he fails to acknowledge some of the (contingent, but nevertheless present) characteristics of contemporary society in the United States. Among the relevant features of this contemporary society, for any theory of constitutive community, must be the presence of intersecting group differences, such as differences of race, gender, class, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.[30] I will return later to why these features of society cannot be ignored in a constitutive community.

MacIntyre's third objection to Aristotelian ethical and political theory is that it assumes that harmony, not conflict, is a desideratum in the *polis*. MacIntyre argues that:

> there are the questions posed by Aristotle's inheritance of Plato's belief in the unity and harmony of both the individual soul and the city-state and Aristotle's consequent perception of conflict as something to be avoided or managed. . . The absence of this view of the centrality of opposition and conflict in human life conceals from Aristotle also one important source of

[30]We should note that many of these group differences--in different formations and by different names--existed in Ancient Greece as well, although the differences were erased by thinkers such as Aristotle, who strove for homogeneity among participants in the *polis*. Aristotle accounts for the existence of different "groups" of humans (citizen men, citizen class women, male and female slaves [whom Aristotle did not recognize as genderized--see E. Spelman, Inessential Woman, ch. 2], etc.), but this is irrelevant for the question of how one is constituted or trained in the *polis*, for the *polis* is really only constructed to be a training ground for one kind of humans, for citizen men.

human learning about the one important milieu of human practice of the virtues. (164)

In critiquing some of Aristotle's assumptions, MacIntyre has pointed in a direction to go in revising a conception of political community as constitutive. MacIntyre has claimed, in sum, that contrary to what Aristotle believed, there is no naturally given *telos*, there is no context of a given *polis* (in contemporary society), and there is not (nor should there be) any *a priori* unity within a political community. Rather, he thinks, there is disagreement over what human flourishing is, there is a heterogeneous society without clearly given social structures and with a variety of practices, and there is (and should be) conflict within political communities. However, MacIntyre goes on to argue--and here is where I part ways with him--that despite our lack of a given *telos*, a given *polis*, and a given unity, there is an overall unity to be found; one just needs to develop an account which would explain how to conceive of that overall unity. And this is precisely what MacIntyre sets out to do.

MacIntyre begins his quest for unity by looking head on at the apparent lack of unity in "our" moral tradition. He notices that in his depiction of the history which has led up to our present sorry state of moral disarray, different points in the history (as presented by different thinkers or writers) reflect very different conceptions of the virtues. MacIntyre wonders whether these different tables of the virtues are "different rival accounts of the same thing" or whether they are "accounts of three different things" (185). He summarizes:

> We thus have at least three very different conceptions of a virtue to confront: a virtue is a quality which enables an individual to discharge his or her social role (Homer); a virtue is a quality which enables an individual to move towards the achievement of the specifically human *telos*, whether natural or supernatural (Aristotle, the new Testament and Aquinas); a virtue is a quality which has utility in achieving earthly and heavenly success ([Benjamin] Franklin). (185)

MacIntyre's task is to acknowledge the differences in these conceptions of the virtues and yet to demonstrate that all these points in history with their corresponding virtues belong to one tradition, a tradition in which there is to be found an overall unity. He aims to "disentangle from these rival and various claims a unitary core concept of the virtues" in order to "provide the tradition of which I have written the history with its conceptual unity" (186). This conceptual unity, we learn, is to be achieved by casting out those virtues which do not comprise the tradition--by distinguishing, one might say, between those virtues which are essential to the tradition and those which are only accidental. MacIntyre claims that the conceptual unity of the tradition "will indeed enable us to distinguish in a clear way those beliefs about the virtues which genuinely belong to the tradition from those which do not" (186). There is a clue here that MacIntyre is recognizing heterogeneity just enough to know how to "deal" with it--how to designate one part as essentially comprising the unitary tradition and how to throw out the part that does not belong.

It is helpful to look at how MacIntyre argues for his conceptual unity, to see where the recognition of heterogeneity comes from, and also how it gets lost or overridden by the quest for unity. To develop his account of which virtues comprise the moral tradition which he is describing, MacIntyre focuses on the necessary background concepts of what he calls a practice,[31] a narrative order of a single human life, and a moral tradition. His first, partial definition of a virtue depends on the concept of a practice:

> *A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.* (191)

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[31] "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (MacIntyre, 187).

Because a virtue is defined in terms of a practice, and because there are many varied practices in contemporary society, the virtues are many--and they do not yet appear to be unified in any way, for in fact they can be incompatible with each other. But MacIntyre has been led to this preliminary account of the virtues because of his critique of Aristotle, and MacIntyre's account of the virtues does avoid two of the problems which he cited in Aristotelian theory. First of all, by locating virtues as developed within practices, it is teleological (MacIntyre calls it a "socially teleological account") without being dependent on Aristotle's "metaphysical biology." And secondly, it includes a description of the source of conflict: conflict springs from "the multiplicity of human practices and the consequent multiplicity of goods in the pursuit of which the virtues may be exercised--goods which will often be contingently incompatible and which will therefore make rival claims upon our allegiance" (196-197).

In this preliminary account of the virtues as located within specific and various practices, MacIntyre recognizes heterogeneity in the form of group differences: different practices call for and sustain different human virtues. What is missing is a recognition that the group differences are systemic; humans do not just randomly participate in different practices, but rather practices are tied to systemic, social ways of grouping people--by gender, race, class, and so on. As I will go on to argue, MacIntyre's readiness to resolve the heterogeneity of practices and corresponding virtues into an overall unity derives from his failure to see that this unity can only be bought at the price of a systematic dismissal of certain practices--and thus certain persons--as not genuinely belonging.

So far MacIntyre has, by noticing a multiplicity of practices and corresponding multiplicity of virtues, recognized heterogeneity and conflict. But he is troubled by the heterogeneity--the lack of unity--in this preliminary account of the virtues. He has found a place to account for heterogeneity and hence conflict, but he wants to go on to find a larger unity in which this heterogeneity has a place. This larger unity is to be found in a whole human life. He writes:

> The most notable difference so far between my account and any account that could be called Aristotelian is that although I have in no way restricted the exercise of the virtues to the context of practices, it is in terms of practices that I have located their point and function. Whereas Aristotle locates that point and function in terms of the notion of a type of whole human life which can be called good. And it does seem that the question 'What would a human being lack who lacked the virtues?' must be given a kind of answer which goes beyond anything which I have said so far. For such an individual would not merely fail *in a variety of particular ways* in respect of the kind of excellence which can be achieved through participation in practices and in respect of the kind of human relationship required to sustain such excellence. His own life *viewed as a whole* would perhaps be defective. (201)

If it is in a whole life that virtue must be located, then the fact that any person participates in a multitude of practices--with perhaps conflicting virtues--must be problematic. MacIntyre is concerned about there being "*too many* conflicts and *too much* arbitrariness" (201). In particular, he fears that "the claims of one practice may be incompatible with another in such a way that one may find oneself oscillating in an arbitrary way, rather than making rational choices" (201).

It is clear that for MacIntyre, conflicts created by having multiple practices are a threat to the unity of my whole human life. And lacking such unity--and thus lacking the virtues which can be evaluated only as manifested in a whole life--can make me defective. He remarks that those people who have allegiances to different particular practices experience too much conflict and an overall arbitrariness to their lives. He gives examples: "there may be tensions between the claims of family life and those of the arts. . . or between the claims of politics and those of the arts. . ."(201). But what MacIntyre and these examples can lead one away from seeing is that there is in fact nothing arbitrary about having split allegiances. Anyone with multiple identifications in different communities or with different histories experiences the pull of different practices with different

corresponding virtues, but there is nothing arbitrary about it; the differences are systemic. Furthermore, the call for unity, for anyone who acknowledges their multiple group identifications, must be heard as a call to cast off some of these identifications. For instance, if the practices imbedded in Jewish history beckon me to develop one way in accordance with "my" virtue--say, to marry a Jewish man and raise Jewish children in order to perpetuate "my people" in the face of cultural annihilation--while the practices of lesbian community beckon me towards another virtue--say, recognizing and resisting compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory motherhood--then there is nothing arbitrary about my conflicting allegiances, and no call for unity will resolve the situation if it entails throwing away "pieces" of my identity.

In recognizing exactly how MacIntyre is going to create unity out of conflict, it is possible to see how his solution requires people to reject some identifications. Unity is to be found, MacIntyre argues, in the unity of narrative. We are characters in (and partial authors of) narratives with a long history; human actions are not isolated events, but instead are tied by a narrative history in which they are embedded. He asserts that "narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions" (208), and adds that "someone may discover (or not discover) that he or she is a character in a number of narratives at the same time, some of them embedded in others" (213). We are authors of these narratives in a collective sense; that is, "we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives" (213).

Thus the resolution of arbitrariness comes from discovering which practices fit oneself, that is, which ones fit the character in the narrative of one's life. MacIntyre writes:

> The key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters--roles into which we have been drafted--and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be

> construed. It is through hearing stories. . . that children learn or mislearn . . . what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. (216)

It is clear from the fact that MacIntyre sees narrative as providing unity and replacing the arbitrariness of participating in multiple practices that he does not recognize split allegiances as re-occurring now in the form of multiple narratives. Through stories, children learn about a cast of characters to form their own identities, but what do they learn when the stories they hear are themselves multiple and contradictory? For instance, for those people who are "split at the root"--to borrow the phrase that Adrienne Rich uses to describe her mixed Jewish and Gentile heritage--the root which is revealed in narrative history will not provide unity. If "the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest" (219), then that unity can only come from hearing/living a unitary story (or several stories amongst which there is unity). But narratives can be multiple and conflicting just as practices can.

When MacIntyre goes on to the third stage in his account of the virtues, he begins with the recognition that "I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only *qua* individual" (220); he needs to look, here, at the social circumstances that construct different narratives (and thus identities). At this stage, if he were to recognize that some people are constructed in a multitude of communities he would be led to see the production of different, conflicting narratives as all describing one person's life. But he does not recognize multiple communities as providing social identity. He writes:

> But it is not just that different individuals live in different social circumstances; it is also that we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation.[32] Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who

[32]Note that some of these relations are more constitutive of identity than others. Iris Marion Young distinguishes between social groups, associations, and aggregates. A "guild" or "profession" would be counted as an association, not a social group. Only social groups are constitutive of identity. Relations of

> inhabits these roles. As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity. (220)

While MacIntyre has not acknowledged that the pull of different constitutive communities on one person's life creates conflict or dis-unity just as the pull of different practices does, he does see conflict as thriving within constitutive communities. He argues that our particular social circumstances are part of particular traditions, and traditions are not static; they change. Thus MacIntyre argues, the idea of a tradition is not necessarily conservative; conflict within traditions create change. He describes a "living tradition" as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (222), and notes that "traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict" (222). Traditions can die out, MacIntyre thinks, but they do so because of the failure to sustain the relevant virtues: "Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness, lack of courage, lack of the relevant intellectual virtues--these corrupt traditions" (223). MacIntyre, then, has partially opened the question of which traditions we inherit, but one can see by his description of how traditions die that he has completely failed to recognize the context in which traditions exist: the context of cultural imperialism, for instance, which serves to wipe out certain traditions systematically. He makes it seem as if by an internal weakness and lack of virtue a tradition will die, while failing to acknowledge that traditions are killed from forces such as cultural imperialism. He notes the "virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one" (223) but does not mention that it is cultural imperialism and subsequent compulsory assimilation which destroys many people's sense of the traditions to which they belong. He has thus squashed the political question of which story one tells, which tradition or community gives a person an identity, as soon as he raises it. According to MacIntyre, the traditions

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members of associations to one another can be liberal relations, relations which do not bear on the identity of members.

which sustain the virtues are those which survive, and it is these traditions which we inherit.

It is now possible to see why the call for unity systematically erases all but the dominant communities' traditions. The unity of a single human life is the unity found in the narrative embodied in that life, MacIntyre has asserted. But it is not as individuals that we are characters in narratives, it is as people with certain histories and social roles which we inherit or discover ourselves within, and this history and our social roles legitimately define our identity and our moral commitments. The unity required for a full account of the virtues thus requires the discovery and acknowledgment of ourselves within our histories and communities. And this is where the call for unity becomes a call for erasure of heterogeneous or multiple traditions and communities. For a tradition to provide unity it must not be a mixture of perhaps contradictory histories; for my location within a social matrix to guide the virtuous living of my life it must not consist of social roles with competing allegiances. And when there is a mixture of histories to inherit and yet I must tell a unified story, I am directed to those traditions which sustain virtue and therefore do not die; I am not directed to ask what the political forces of dominance and subordination are which annihilate some traditions and make others hegemonic.

Because he believes there must be a unified story to be told, MacIntyre tells the most visible story, the history which has virtuously survived. This is why "our" tradition is rooted in heroic societies. He has told us that "living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past" (223). But he does not ask, 'which past?' It is clear that he disregards this question by his assumptions about which past "we" share, which past "we" inherit. He writes, for instance: "We are, whether we acknowledge it or not, what the past has made us and we cannot eradicate from ourselves, even in America, those parts of ourselves which are formed by our relationship to each formative stage in our history. If this is so, then even heroic society is still

inescapably a part of us all. . ." (130, my emphasis). This claim can only trigger echoes of some version of Lorraine Bethel's refrain: "What 'chou mean we, white girl?"[33] All of the examples throughout his book are from the history of white Anglo Americans or Western Europeans; this alerts us to the fact that his attention is on those people who inherit this history, this history which claims dominance in the United States today. There are to my knowledge two exceptions in After Virtue where MacIntyre mentions non-dominant peoples. The first is where he mentions "black Americans" only to illustrate a point about white people's individualist lack of a sense of history. It is not an analysis of the situation, history, or social roles of Black people, but rather a use of Black people's history to make a point about white people's history. MacIntyre writes, "...individualism is expressed by those modern Americans [white, we are to presume, as all MacIntyre's subjects are unless otherwise noted] who deny any responsibility for the effects of slavery upon black Americans, saying 'I never owned any slaves'" (220). He makes a similar point about Englishmen who refuse responsibility for having wronged Ireland, and contemporary Germans [Aryan, we are to presume] who see their relationship with Jews as morally unaffected by the history of the Nazis. The second place where MacIntyre mentions non-dominant peoples is to illustrate the presence of contemporary, traditional communities. After describing modern society as a "conceptual *mélange* of moral thought and practice," exhibiting only fragments of a tradition of virtues, he claims that he does see traditions surviving more intact in "certain communities whose historical ties with their past remain strong." He continues:

> So the older moral tradition is discernible in the United States and elsewhere among, for example, some Catholic Irish, some Orthodox Greeks and some Jews of an Orthodox persuasion, all of them communities that inherit their moral tradition not only through their religion but also from the structure of the peasant villages and households which their immediate ancestors inhabited on the margins of modern Europe. (252)

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[33]Lorraine Bethel, "What Chou Mean We, White Girl?" in Conditions: Five 11, no. 2 (Fall, 1979): 86-92.

These examples stand in contrast to his emphasis on traditions being living traditions, characterized as ongoing arguments; a tradition is healthy, he has told us, only when it embodies conflict and change, and yet this sole reference to non-dominant traditions portrays these traditions as stagnant, not living traditions, not vital. In mentioning non-dominant cultures only to emphasize their traditional nature, he contributes to the insistence that non-dominant cultures must die (for lack of vitality). Furthermore, he still has not seen that members of marginalized cultures in the United States are often those who have to complicate a sense of having a people, not those who have a clearly-bounded, traditional culture and clearly given social roles.

MacIntyre never considers, "even in America," the history of those Americans who inherit the narrative pasts (or presents) of Africans, Asians, or Native Americans; he also, thus, never considers the narrative past(s) of those who are hybrids or *mestizos*. And thus it never seems problematic to him to speak of "our" narrative past or pasts, for the question of "which past?" never seems hard for him to answer, is never itself the source of conflict. But for many it is a source of conflict. As Gloria Anzaldúa has written, "the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a dark skinned mother listen to?" (Borderlands 78).

'What traditions am I a part of?' should be a key question. It is tied to the question, 'whom should I engage in meaning-making with?' which is the question of whom the argument--the argument which constitutes a living tradition--is with. MacIntyre does see people as having histories and traditions, which become present social contexts or communities, but just like Sandel, MacIntyre fails to problematize the question of which traditions one locates oneself in, which present communities constitute one's identity. It is as if he asks, 'given my history and tradition, what should I do to live it out?' (or 'how should I engage in the argument about what the good life is, the argument which constitutes my living tradition?') but not, 'which living tradition (as if they were even distinct) am I located in, which argument should I participate in? with whom?'

Furthermore, his characterization of a living tradition as an ongoing argument is misleading. It implies that we are all equally regarded as being within the tradition, legitimate participants in the argument. But it is not just an internal argument. It is also a contest of borders. Questions arise before the argument begins: who is in the tradition? what goes on in the margins or the borderlands--is there an argument there, too? The context of cultural imperialism, of dominance and subordination between different traditions, has a bearing on the survival of some traditions and a bearing on who belongs within which traditions. MacIntyre ignores this context.

To summarize: MacIntyre recognizes that there is conflict stemming from there being multiple practices in a society. However, he does not recognize that the different practices--and hence the conflicts of values--are systemically different. Since he has not characterized contemporary society as cut across by overlapping group differences of race, gender, ethnicity, etc., he cannot recognize the systemic nature of the different constructions of practices. This has resulted in two failures on MacIntyre's part.

First of all, in a society in which group differences construct different people with different values (i.e. as having allegiance to different tables of the virtues) and in which the group differences arrange groups of people hierarchically, the search for overall unity tends to result in a forsaking of the practices of subordinate groups and a consequent increased hegemony of dominant groups' practices. MacIntyre fails to see that his call for unity leads to systematically abandoning subordinate groups' practices. Since the unity is based in narrative history--"our" history going back to heroic societies--there is an erasure of conflicting histories, histories of subordinate groups, for recognition of such histories would disrupt the unified nature of the narrative.

But there is a second failure on MacIntyre's part, which has to do with the fact that group differences are overlapping, and they overlap within individuals. No one is just racialized or just genderized, and so on; we are constituted with a gender which is in part itself defined by race and ethnicity and class, and so on; for any given person, then, there is

never just one story to tell. Even if there were some way of isolating, say, race, and thereby being able to tell the story of one person by telling the story of their race, there is still, in most people's "racial" story (remember, this is supposing, contrary to fact, that a racial story could be told separate from any other story, a "gender" story for example) actually several perhaps conflicting stories, for races are seldom "pure."

Thus any one individual belongs to many "groups" whose histories overlap and might conflict. Identification with one group rather than another is a political act, and the attempt to live out a mixed, or *mestiza* identity is also a political act. Which identities are possible and desirable are among the important political questions to ask. However, MacIntyre takes these as a given by failing to problematize the act of knowing and drawing on one's history, the past which has formed oneself.

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Sandel and MacIntyre's conceptions of encumbered selves, or selves who come as bearers of particular histories provide an account of how a certain kind of a self is constituted as having a people. This self comes by his/her ends through a certain sort of reflection, a reflection which asks "who am I?" and answers with reference to a single, bounded community or a single narrative history. But I am interested in a different sort of a self, because it is clear that in a world where multiple and conflicting community identifications and multiple and conflicting narrative histories converge within individuals to create complex identities, there us a need to understand a self who is forced to ask, "who are my people?" precisely because the answer is not given in advance and in any case will not reveal a unity. It is this complex self who is interesting because if I understand myself as such a self, I am compelled to ask as open-ended the politically motivated question of who the people are with whom I will engage in resistance, a resistance which in part involves re-constituting my own self identity. For the complex self, this question cannot be answered by reference to a unified community or history; so one is led to ask, who are the people, who are the political companions, of the complex self, the self who lacks the

unity that is the aim of MacIntyre's narrative quest? In the next chapter I will consider theorists who are in dialogue with communitarian theory but who do not presuppose that only traditional forms of community constitute our selves.

# CHAPTER III

# BEYOND COMMUNITARIAN UNITY

> The paradox of sociability reappears within the community of life as a paradox of group cohesion: insofar as sympathy in social life requires an allegiance to common ends, it threatens to destroy the individuality it wants to protect. By its very nature, community is always on the verge of becoming oppression. The existing consensus may be mistaken for the final expression of the good, and used as a justification for denying the humanity of individuals and rejecting the legitimacy of dissident groups. . . A politics that responds to this threat must be one that emphasizes the transitory and limited character of all forms of group life as manifestations of human nature. Such a politics will be committed to the plurality and diversity of groups, and it will prize the conflictual process through which community is created and made universal above the preservation of any one collectivity.
>
> --Roberto Mangabeira Unger

## A. Introduction

As I argued in the previous chapter, Sandel and MacIntyre--as well as other communitarian theorists--have extremely limited conceptions of what counts as a constitutive community. At least, however, they do offer a model of community which allows for the recognition that it makes sense to speak of "having a people"--that we are not unattached, unencumbered ghost-selves who appear out of nowhere and can become (through free individual choice) anything. In response to both Sandel and MacIntyre, I have argued that instead of presupposing who the community is or which history our character derives from, it is crucial to complicate the understanding of constitutive community by opening the question of who one's people are, while meanwhile not sacrificing the claim that it does indeed make sense to speak of having a people, a collectivity to one's self.

What the traditional communitarians give is a descriptive account of the communitarian self. We are constituted in community, they claim; we do "come with" our

histories. The claim is descriptive in the sense that they are asserting that this is the way human selves are. As social animals, we cannot fail to be constituted in relation to others, although one can fail, as the liberal does, to understand oneself in this way; one can mistakenly believe that one gains one's ends through an exercise of the will in which a previously value-free subject selects from among the possibilities.

The traditional communitarian account of the self, then, can be understood to constitute a descriptive claim that we are constituted in community; it can also be extended to imply the limited normative claim that it is best to understand ourselves as so constituted, for there is a poverty involved in seeing oneself only as an unencumbered ghost-self. However, stronger and more complicated normative claims can be made when one revises communitarian theory with the suggestion that while we are constituted in community and through history, the communities and histories which constitute us are not unified, and are not wholly given in advance. For if we are in part agents in the determination of whom we are constituted with, then one can make normative claims about which histories and which communities claim one's allegiance. The basis for these normative claims is political, for if one understands politics in the Aristotelian sense, then one understands doing politics with others as an undertaking which is constitutive of one's identity. A complex, communitarian view of the self reveals that political communities are neither completely "chosen" by the unencumbered self nor are they completely determined in advance by reference to a single, homogeneous community which was, say, one's community of origin. I will argue that one can make normative claims about who should comprise one's (constitutive) political communities, but that these claims must be ones that make sense for selves whose identities are understood through intersecting group differences.

This chapter will open the way for such claims by considering whether and how it is possible to exercise agency underneath the pull of conflicting constitutive identities. Thus I am going to turn now to theorists who attempt to develop communitarian ways of thinking about community without presupposing who the constitutive community is

composed of. I will begin with Marilyn Friedman, whose account of community comes out of her critique of communitarians such as Sandel and MacIntyre.

B. Community of Choice/Intentional Community

Marilyn Friedman's goal is to retain the communitarians' claim that the self is constituted in community, but to reject their assumptions about what counts as a community and about the "legitimacy of the moral influences which communities exert over their members" (280). She suggests that one begins to think about the self as constituted not only in communities of place but also in what she refers to as communities of choice; she rejects Sandel's description of community as "not a relationship they [members] choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity" (Sandel, Liberalism 150, qtd. in Friedman 283). In contradistinction to his point, Friedman asserts that "one need not have simply discovered oneself to be embedded in them [communities] in order that one's identity or the moral particulars of one's life be defined by them" (284). She writes, "communities of choice foster not so much the constitution of subjects but their reconstitution" (289)--that is, purposeful, chosen reconstitution. Her suggestion is that "communities of choice" can be better moral starting points--and better locations for doing continued collective ethical thinking--than communities of place, for one can choose to become a member of a community which is based on feminist or liberatory values, a community whose norms and practices are informed by feminist thinking; implicit is the claim that one can choose to constitute or "reconstitute" oneself as a member of a community which is based on feminist or liberatory values. According to Friedman, to create or join a community of choice allows one to exercise choice about what sort of relations and norms will inform one's ethical thinking; one does not have to take as given (or as unshakable), as one does in communitarian philosophy, the set of moral values which are held in the community in which one finds oneself.

Friedman's use of the distinction between communities of place and communities of choice in thinking about how the self is constituted in community could be helpful if it allows one to maintain a commitment to thinking of the self as socially constituted without thereby being committed to seeing oneself as necessarily constituted by the dominant moral values which were embodied by the communities of place which were one's communities of origin. However, it is not clear that Friedman's description of "choosing" a community within which to reconstitute one's self is supported by an adequate account of the choosing subject. Although she describes the self as being socially (re)constituted once it is within a community of choice, she does not give a defensible account of what this self is like at the point of entry into the community of choice; in fact, the image of the self at this point is of a self who can cast off her history and the ways her community of place have constituted her, and start anew. This conception of the self--which Friedman in fact refers to as the modern self--is quite like the liberal, unencumbered self <u>at the point of choosing</u> a community of choice--and from then on, the self is characterized as communitarian, socially constituted within the community of choice.

Thus a communitarian response to Friedman's advocating that we form communities of choice might include the assertion that recognizing humans' sociality requires acknowledging the extent to which we are necessarily constituted by the cultures of our communities of place; thus, one might argue, to suppose that a person could simply "choose" with whom to constitute their self-identity is to make an individualist assumption about human nature. Friedman's valorization of communities of choice thus needs to be re-examined. However, I do not think that this re-examination needs to lead to a rejection of the possibility of communities of choice; instead, it means one has to show that a self can be both socially constituted and capable of exercising agency in changing, leaving, or creating a constitutive community. Friedman has not provided a description of the choosing self as someone who is already encumbered or socially constituted, but this does not mean that an encumbered self could not "choose" to radically change which community

she is constituted within. In fact, I have argued that an encumbered self can, contrary to Sandel's characterization, exercise the sort of agency necessary for making this sort of change.

Friedman critiques "the legitimacy of the moral influences which communities exert over their members" (280). But questioning the legitimacy of moral influences--which Friedman is quite right to do--does not entail denying that these moral influences are present in the self's history or identity. Being a self who comes to resist or reject certain moral values--say, the ethnocentrism of a particular community--should be distinguished from being a self who has no history of being constituted with that value--of being, for instance, ethnocentric. By equating a rejection of the legitimacy of the values with a denial that the values in part constitute the choosing subject's history or identity, Friedman leaves herself open to the criticism that she relies on a conception of the self as unencumbered upon entering a community of choice.

But one can argue for both the possibility and the desirability of communities of choice (which might better be called intentional communities, to emphasize intention--which the encumbered self can have--as opposed to choice, which connotes a choosing subject with no prior or given ends) without denying that the self is always constituted with a history of values, whether these values exert a legitimate or an illegitimate pull. The exercise of agency in rejecting the values one is constituted with is the agency of the encumbered, not the unencumbered self. The communitarian critical claim (that it requires making a mistaken individualist assumption to see oneself as capable of "choosing" a community rather than finding oneself as constituted in a community) ignores the way in which, for instance, marginal beings are constituted as (partially) outsiders in communities of place; recognizing this leads one to see that "choosing" an intentional community is not an act of an (illusory) individual--an unencumbered self (i.e. someone who somehow would not have been constituted in a particular social context)--but rather an act of someone

who was constituted in a particular social context, but a context which constitutes her as someone partially outside (or in a problematic relation with) the community.

It is important to notice that Friedman does not characterize the "choice" to leave one community or set of values and to enter into another one as an act of a socially constituted self, but rather as the act of an idiosyncratic individual. She discusses friendship, for instance, as a relationship which is not "discovered" as part of one's social role, but rather is freely chosen. She writes, "friends are supposed to be people whom one chooses on one's own to share activities and intimacies. No particular people are assigned by custom or tradition to be a person's friends" (286). It is as if any individual could choose any other individual as a friend, independent of their social positions. But this is clearly false; social customs play a large part in determining whom one can be friends with. There are social sanctions against friendships across race, or age, or class, for instance. And in some instances, there are particular others whom one is expected to be friends with--one's cousin, for example. Friedman seems to deny these forces when she writes that friendship is based on "voluntary choice," where voluntary choice "refers to motivations arising out of one's own needs, desires, interests, values, and attractions, in contrast to motivations arising from what is socially assigned, ascribed, expected, or demanded" (286). But this is a false contrast, if it is the case that my "needs, desires, interests, values, and attractions" have themselves been socially constituted. For instance, the fact that many women desire relationships with men is tied to their being socially constituted in a context in which heterosexuality is institutionalized. Resistance to such a construction of desire comes not, as Friedman would have it, out of an individual and idiosyncratic desire and choice, but rather out of being socially constituted as resistant. Why would our conformity to community values be socially constructed but our refusal to conform be somehow a product of a ghost-self?

When Friedman writes, "women moved out of their given or found communities into new attachments with other women by their own choice, that is, motivated by their

own needs, desires, attractions, and fears rather than, and often in opposition to, the expectations and ascribed roles of their found communities" (287) she is falsely assuming that their found communities constituted them through a completely hegemonic set of moral values.[34] To make this assumption is to see a given community as homogeneous and clearly bounded. But in fact--and Friedman would agree with this--there is not just one consistent set of values which influences or constitutes someone's identity, because communities are neither homogeneous nor clearly bounded. It is the recognition of the fact that one can be socially constituted in multiple ways that allows one to claim that it is the encumbered self who has been constituted so as to animate resistance to dominant values in her own community. Only if one sees a community as having one consistent and thoroughgoingly hegemonic set of values is one then unable to explain resistance without reference to some idiosyncratic individual who somehow has, in a vacuum, developed counter-hegemonic desires, attractions, values, and so on.

I would like to revise Friedman's theory with the claim that intentional communities develop through the intention of the socially constituted self--not the idiosyncratic individual. Revised in this way, Friedman's suggestion that communities can be both intentional ("chosen") and constitutive opens a wide range of question about what constitutive communities are and can be. While Sandel and MacIntyre and other communitarians' accounts of constitutive communities are merely descriptive (or may include the fairly weak normative claim that we not only <u>are</u> encumbered, but that we also ought to <u>understand</u> ourselves as encumbered), the claim that constitutive communities can be intentional allows one to give a normative account of them. Rather than being limited to describing the community in which I find myself, I can now consider, given my agency

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[34]Alison Jaggar would attribute women's attraction to each other within a society where heterosexuality is institutionalized as an instance of "outlaw emotions." These emotions are not indications that there is some part of us which has escaped being socially constituted, but rather they are indications that we have been socially constituted within a context where the hegemonic values do not have a complete hold on us; values created and sustained within other, non-dominant collectivities affect us also, and ground the possibility for these "outlaw emotions."

(still as an encumbered or collectively constituted self) and my capacity to develop or create communities intentionally, what should those communities be?

## C. Agency and the Encumbered Self

Garry Brodsky, in "A Way of Being a Jew; A Way of Being a Person" brings to the dialogue about the communitarian self similar concerns--although his are coming from a different "place" of identity--to those of Friedman. Like Friedman, he recognizes that a moral position does not gain legitimacy just because it carries the weight of being an encumbrance of one's "given" history or experience. The self he describes is a self who does not accept the moral particulars of her/his given community as given; this self is:

> aware of such general points as that traditions and communities can be conservative and provincial and that telling someone that her identity is bound up with family, nation, religion, or tradition often can be a means not of revealing a fact but of fashioning one, thus persuading someone to bind herself to a group, accept a belief, and, perhaps, support an action such as a war, for no good reason. (258)

His account of the self maintains the communitarian claim that we are encumbered selves, but he meanwhile wants to argue that such a self can and should exercise what he calls liberal choice. He sees the claim that the self is encumbered with a history and a sense of identity or peoplehood as consistent with the claim that the self engages in an act of choosing which manifests his/her freedom as independence from encumbrances. That is, he aims to advocate a liberalism which is not dependent upon the liberal conception of the self as unencumbered.

Brodsky's argument is based on the example of a particular sort of a person--a particular sort of a Jew--whom Brodsky believes stands as evidence that one can both be liberal in one's ability to exercise choice and make independent decisions, and yet still "come with" a history and sense of identity. He begins his argument by pointing out that the sort of person he has in mind--and whom he himself is--does not fit the description of

the self offered by communitarians such as Sandel and MacIntyre, but on the other hand certainly does not fit the description of the self which communitarians take liberals to be positing: the self who is "'wholly unencumbered. . . individuated in advance' and given prior to its ends" (259). Brodsky has in mind a Jew who "is an assimilated, atheistic, nonobservant, postmodern American who nevertheless feels deep attachments to Jewry and Judaism" (260). The strong sense of Jewish identity felt by this self cannot be explained by an account of the self as unencumbered, and so this self (whom Brodsky refers to as the "postmodern Jew") might turn to a communitarian account of the self to make sense of her/his attachment to Jewish history and feeling of Jewish identity. However, Brodsky argues, a communitarian vision such as MacIntyre's description of a self as constituted through narrative history also does not adequately characterize the "postmodern Jew." For such an account ignores the dis-unity caused by the many different pulls on the "postmodern Jew"; it ignores the "complex character of the life and allegiances of the postmodern, assimilated American Jew" (253) and the fact that such a self "lives her Jewishness and its history as a member of a group whose relations to the dominant, mainstream culture are intrinsically complex" (254). These relations involve connections to Gentiles through one's profession, through living together in the same neighborhoods, being tied to many of the same cultural influences, and so on; but on the other hand,

> no matter how assimilated the American Jew may be, how comfortable he feels in the mainstream culture, to what extent he identifies with and situates himself within the American version of Western civilization rather than with Jewish culture. . . he knows that there is a significant part of that culture to which he, as a Jew, does not belong, despite talk of 'our Judeo-Christian heritage.' (254)

Thus the "postmodern Jew" is both encumbered with a sense of Jewish identity but also complexly constituted by the variety of perhaps conflicting allegiances which result from living a life not wholly circumscribed within one single, bounded and homogeneous

community such as one that might be experienced by someone who lives or lived "as a believing Jew in a Jewish community" (254-255).[35]

These sorts of split allegiances are precisely what MacIntyre believes disturb the desired attainment of a "metanarrative or 'scheme of overall belief which extends beyond the realm of pragmatic necessity,'" (MacIntyre, Whose Justice, 393, qtd. in Brodsky, 248). A self like the "postmodern Jew" would be condemned by MacIntyre, Brodsky argues, as a self "which has too many half-convictions and too few settled coherent convictions, too many partly formulated alternatives and too few opportunities to evaluate them systematically" (MacIntyre, Whose Justice, 397, qtd. in Brodsky, 248). Brodsky, however, disagrees with MacIntyre's claim that unity is a desideratum for the self: "one reason we are so willing to dispense with what the *polis* made available is that unlike MacIntyre we don't think the kind of self we have ascribed to the postmodern Jew has serious short-comings" (255). For the unity which MacIntyre call for, Brodsky believes, precludes the very pull of conflicting allegiances which allow one to (indeed demand that one) exercise choice. And "postmodern Jews," Brodsky posits, particularly value the possibility of individual choice for they are particularly aware that "for a very long time such options were not available to Jews" (262). Thus Brodsky believes that the "postmodern Jew" not only continually faces choices to make but furthermore values the ability to make such choices (about, for instance, "their careers, places of residence, friends, marriage partners, and so on" [256]); and, in making choices, such a self can be "partially responsible for fashioning her identity" (256). He acknowledges that "the choices available to a person are delimited by, among other things, the sociohistorical circumstances in which she lives, her family and her native physical, psychological, and mental capabilities" (256) but notes that "while she is not, in Sandel's words, 'a sovereign agent of choice,' she is a partially sovereign agent of choice, and when she exercises this

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[35]And, I would argue, even the "traditional" Jewish villages or *shtetl* communities in which, say, our grandparents lived were also not as homogeneous and bounded as they have been made out to be.

capacity and makes these choices she also exercises and develops her relative independence from the communities that nurture her" (256).

Brodsky's critique of the communitarian view of the self as unified and his observation that the "postmodern Jew" is not such a unified self has led him, then, to claim that the sort of agency exercised by the "postmodern Jew" is an agency that while affected by history and social circumstances, is also an act of independence. But what is the nature of the freedom which the "postmodern Jew" seems to cherish? Brodsky identifies it as the same freedom which the liberal cherishes, the freedom to make independent choices about one's own life plans. His insistence that his account of how the "postmodern Jew" acts is consistent with the tenants of liberalism would seem to imply that this freedom is understood as (even if to a lesser degree than the liberals imagine it) freedom from interference; otherwise, it is not clear why Brodsky would want to call his theory a liberal theory. He tells us that "the postmodern Jew can affirm and cherish his ties to the Jewish people and its history and, the communitarians notwithstanding, also accept the basic tenets of liberalism" (259), acknowledging that to fully argue this point he would have to go on to show that liberalism can be defended without reliance on its untenable deontological foundations. But it is unclear why Brodsky would insist that the only alternative to the communitarian account of the self as unable to exercise agency must be the liberal conception of agency as an exercise of choice free from interference.

Brodsky seems to be pointing to a difference of degree between the self he calls the "postmodern Jew" and the unencumbered self of liberalism: the "postmodern Jew" is encumbered, but not too encumbered; he/she is affected by history and social circumstances, but not too affected to continue to make choices independent of these encumbrances. What Brodsky does not do is develop a distinction based on a difference in the kind of freedom that the self can be understood to have. This is odd precisely because his recognition that the "postmodern Jew" can only explain his/her Jewish identity and allegiances by understanding the self as encumbered would seem to imply an understanding

of freedom to choose as a social product, not as a form of freedom from interference, for to understand that the self is always socially constituted (even if in a variety of perhaps conflicting social contexts) is to understand that we never act free from "interference." Brodsky's recognition that the "postmodern Jew" has many difference allegiances--ties which cross Gentile worlds and Jewish worlds--need not stand as evidence that such a self requires freedom or independence in the liberal sense, but rather it can point to the fact that the social worlds which create the freedom of this self are multiple and intersect in complex ways. Freedom is no less a social product, though, just because it is a product of many different or complicated social worlds. Thus I want to maintain the claim that the agency exercised by the complex, communitarian self (including the self which Brodsky calls the "postmodern Jew") is a form of collective agency, an agency which draws on the complicated mixture of encumbrances or constitutive ties which are part of this self. It is not the agency of an individual asserting independence from social ties or all sources of "interference," but rather the agency of a self whose sources of "interference" or social constitution are multiple; thus who it is that makes up the collectivity in which the agency is grounded is not obvious or simple. The fact that someone asserts independence from this or that particular community is not evidence that this person is acting free from interference; rather, it is evidence that there is some other social world whose values are sustaining the resistance.

If the self one is concerned with is, like Brodsky's "postmodern Jew" or like Friedman's feminist, constituted in a variety of communities and through multiple, intersecting histories, then one needs to recognize that "community"--even in a constitutive sense--means many different things, and it will be helpful to sketch out some of the ways in which one might conceive of communities. Sandel and MacIntyre's view of communities as being limited to communities of place (especially communities of origin) derives from their failure to recognize both that many different socially significant groupings of people serve as constitutive communities for any given person, and that there

can be intention involved in determining who one's communities are. But before going on to explore the senses of community that might emerge, I am going to turn briefly to Roberto Unger's description of community, for he does use the term "community" in a normative sense, providing a very different notion of what a community is than what Sandel and MacIntyre have in mind.

### D. The Spiral: Increased Community as Diminishing Domination

Roberto Unger comes to an exploration of community because he is engaged in a consideration of the good, and sees that the good emerges in community. Beginning with the claim that "the good is properly viewed as an actualization of human nature" or what he calls the "species nature" (239), Unger goes on to describe the conditions under which the species nature can emerge. His doctrine thus has two parts: the first defines the good in relation to the species (human) nature, and the second specifies that community--as opposed to domination--is a pre-requisite for the emergence of this species nature and therefore of the good. He describes the two elements of his doctrine:

> The first element is the concern of the theory of the self: it is the notion that the good consists in the development of the species nature in the lives of particular persons. The second element is the thesis. . . that both human nature and our understanding of it can progress through a spiral of increasing community and diminishing domination. (239)[36]

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[36]Notice that Unger's conception of human nature is not an essentialist one, for he sees the species nature as evolving through the interaction of individuals; their participation in a universal human nature is in a dialectic relation with their own particularity, which in part comprise the universal. His theory "does not rely on the notion that mankind [*sic*] as a whole and each of its members has an essence or an unchanging core that can somehow permeate history and biography. Instead, it starts out from the idea that the distinctive experience of personality is that of confronting a certain set of intelligible, interrelated problems that arise in one's dealings with nature, with others and with oneself. Insofar as both the problems and the ideal ways of responding to them are continuous in space and time, one may speak of a human nature and of a universal good. But continuity does not mean permanence" (240). We might call his understanding of human nature a socially teleological account; that is, the bounds of human nature are developed socially under changing conditions and so are changeable and not tied to any given essence, but at the same time, no one individual's "nature" is completely free from the givens of their social context. Unger writes, "The species nature advances through the development of the capacities of individuals. But no definable set of realized individual talents exhausts human nature, which is continuously changing in history. The universal good exists solely in particular goods, yet it is always capable of transcending them" (240). His communitarian argument allows him to retain some conception of a human nature as not entirely up for

Immediately the question arises for Unger: if the species nature advances through whatever acts take place in community, why would one assume that this species nature would develop in the direction of the good? That is, if one equates the good with the attainment of the species nature, and if the species nature is whatever comes out of the unfolding history of human acts in community, then what allows one to value certain possible directions of development over others? What allows one to say that domination is not a part of the good? Certainly domination is a part of what emerges though the development of individual capacities and "talents."

Unger responds to this problem by arguing that not just any actions are equally representative of the species nature, for actions take place under different conditions; some conditions serve to repress the emergence of the species nature or to wrongly represent it. If one simply takes an inventory of the ways in which humans act or have acted across different social and historical circumstances and come up with a list of seemingly shared characteristics of human nature or common ends, then one engages in a method which "pays no heed to the way values are determined by society. . . it disregards the corrupting effects of domination on the capacity of shared purposes to show human nature and therefore to measure the good" (242). Domination may itself produce a consensus--or the appearance of a consensus--of values, but such shared values are not truly representative of humanity or of the good. Unger argues:

> Instead of asking what people want, we should ask first under what conditions their choices might inform us more fully about what is distinctive to each of them and to mankind [*sic*] as a whole. Our first concern should be to determine the circumstances in which we are entitled to give greater or lesser weight to consensus, taking agreed-upon values as better or worse indications of our common humanity. . . Because of the fact of domination, moral agreement is often little more than a testimonial to the allocation of

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grabs, while meanwhile not falling into an essentialism; he writes that his effort "is to retain the conception of a unitary human nature while acknowledging that man [*sic*] makes himself through the different forms of social life he establishes" (246).

> power in the group. For moral union to be representative of the species nature, it must arise from conditions of autonomy. . . Shared values carry weight only in the measure to which they are not simply products of dominance. (242-243)

Unger's claim, then, is that the good consists of those shared values which will emerge from people through history, but only under certain conditions: the conditions that allow moral agreement to be arrived at in an egalitarian way, to be uninfluenced by domination, since domination creates a situation where only the dominators' views become hegemonic, come to stand for "agreed upon" values. Thus domination inhibits the good from emerging. And the opposite arrangement from that of domination, Unger stipulates, is that of community. Thus he is led to conclude, "the species nature is revealed and developed in history through the spiral of diminishing domination and increasing community" (260).

Unger has thus justified a definition of community in a normative sense: community is not just any gathering of people, nor is it even just any way in which people may engage with one another in the formation of values. It is only those ways of engaging which do not manifest relations of domination and subordination; community, Unger can claim, is opposed to domination and is <u>better than</u> domination. To call something community is not only to refer to a collective development of values, but it is to make the normative claim that the development of values can only tend towards the good when there is freedom from domination.

It become clear, then, how Unger's understanding of community differs from that of Sandel or MacIntyre; for both Sandel and MacIntyre refer primarily to communities which are characterized by entrenched relations of domination and subordination. Their accounts of community are merely descriptive; their claim is that we <u>are</u> constituted in community, not that we <u>should</u> strive for community (where community is opposed to domination). By understanding communities as intentional Friedman opened the way to make sense of the normative claim that we <u>should</u> develop community; by defining

community in opposition to domination, Unger provide a motivation for making this normative claim.

Unger must now consider what the conditions are for community, or for the absence of domination. To this end, he develops an account of what he calls the organic group. The organic group is a community regulated by three institutional principles, principles which Unger acknowledges to depend upon certain empirical assumptions and inferences; these principles are the community of life, the democracy of ends, and the division of labor. I will focus here on the community of life, whose aim is to make a community a location of "sympathetic social relations"; it is a community in which the "political equivalent of love" can take place (261).[37] Unger argues that:

> Two factors coalesce in sympathy: the communion of purposes by virtue of which each views the other as a complementary rather than as an antagonistic will, and the willingness to see and treat others as concrete individuals rather than as role occupants. . . Sympathy means that people encounter each other in such a way that their sense of separateness from one another varies in direct rather than inverse proportion to their sense of social union. When individuality and sociability complement each other, others are viewed and treated as unique persons and as partners to whom one is bound by common purposes. (261-262)

The face-to-face coexistence and the fact that members participate with one another in a variety of activities prevents members from seeing one another as role-occupants; instead, they are able to see one another as concrete, particular people, with whole personalities. Thus "an association characterized by face-to-face coexistence and by multipurpose organization is a community of life" (262).

Unger's primary concern with the organic group as a locus for community--for non-domination--is with the tension between the group cohesion necessary for community and the preservation of what he refers to as individuality. The elements of the community

[37]The democracy of ends indicates the "circumstances under which choice would become increasingly expressive of humanity," and the division of labor describes the kind of organization of labor that can "serve as a basis for the development of individuality as well as for the advancement of the species nature" (261).

of life are meant to both foster cohesion or a sharing of values and to provide a basis for members to exist as and be known as concrete individuals. The community of life must remain a small group in order to allow members to recognize each other as individuals rather than role-occupants, for "others cannot be known and dealt with as real individuals unless they can be seen and touched in the flesh" (263). But at the same time, the shared values which ground members' sympathetic relations with one another can serve to destroy this very individuality. When Unger makes the arresting remark that "community is always on the verge of becoming oppression" (266) he is expressing his wariness of achieving a consensus of values, a consensus which so often only reflects the fact that dissension has been suppressed. But the nature of this dissension itself needs to be examined, for Unger does not give an adequate account of it. Dissension, for him, arises from individual differences, not from group differences tied to categories of social identity. Unger has a tendency to equate diversity with individuality: differences for him tend to be described as individual differences, not group differences, and so it is these individual differences which he strives to protect within community.

Recognizing differences as socially significant group differences rather than just individual differences requires adding to Unger's description of the tension present in the community of life. He sees a paradox between group cohesion and individuality; but I would like to add that there is not only the question of individuals' idiosyncrasies being subordinated to group cohesion, but also a question raised by the interlocking of race, class, gender, and so on in the formation of identity: if group cohesion is based on one of these categories of identity--a shared racial identity, for instance--then does the norm of the group become based on only those who are dominant in other categories of identity? If group cohesion requires shared identity, then members who belong to more than one marginalized group will always be the dissenters in every group they are in. Unger powerfully represents the problem of the possibility of group cohesion becoming coercive or tyrannical. But the problem is more than the problem of the subordination of

individuality; it is the problem which arises when the group cohesion is achieved by defining the group in terms of an essential characteristic of identity, and thus when all of the complexity of identity as constituted through interlocking social categories is ignored. When Unger asks how to preserve the possibility of individuality, he does seem to be saying (despite his insistence that he is not saying this) that we need something like "room" for individuality--that is, non-interference from others in the community; however, one might say instead, what is needed for group cohesion not to be tyrannical is also the possibility of having significant ties to (and of being able to act out the expressions whose meaning is imbedded in) other communities, tied to one's multiple membership in social groups.[38]

This leads to a complication in Unger's concern for not seeing others as merely role-occupants. Although others should be seen as concrete, particular persons rather than occupants of social roles, in fact what their social roles or identities are cannot be ignored because they are in part what make up the concrete particulars of people's "personalities" and experiences. Unger's emphasis on seeing others as individuals rather than role-occupants leaves no room for seeing others as individuals who are constituted in part by their social roles or identities. It is important to retain an awareness of other members' belonging to a variety of social categories (e.g. of race, gender, etc.); while it will not do to see others merely as role-occupants (as instantiations of categories defined by essential characteristics), it is nevertheless crucial to recognize how membership in a variety of social categories affects or forms someone's experience. As Pat Parker puts it, "For the white person who wants to know how to be my friend/ The first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black./ Second, you must never forget that i'm Black." (297); the sense here is that it is necessary to both see someone as a unique, particular person (and not to see someone as an

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[38]Unger does raise the fact that people should be able to have multiple memberships in different communities of life, but he never answers the question of how these people are to avoid being pulled in different directions, and partially erased as whole personalities in each separate community of life. He writes, "the individual ought to be entitled to be a member of various groups. The prudential problem will then be to reconcile the requirements of a community that embraces many aspects of life with the possibility of plural membership" (280). Indeed, this is the problem.

instantiation of a category which is defined by an essential characteristic) and also to recognize how the fact of important socially constructed categories of identity do affect experience. Unger's focus on seeing someone as a particular individual does not provide a way to also see them as affected by their experience of being in particular interlocking social categories. It misses the "never forget that i'm Black" half of Parker's imperative.

Thus Unger is concerned with not erasing individuality for the sake of group cohesion. However, answering that concern is not enough; one also needs to be concerned with the problem of erasing multiple, interlocked group identities which come together in the individual. This is more complicated because different group identities are connected to or expressed by sets of shared practices or ways of being; but because a community (such as Unger's community of life) is the locus for shared practice, one must consider what the shared practices of the community should be. Shared practices might leave room for a variety of individual expressions, thus answering Unger's concern, but it is more complicated to consider how to leave room for different expressions based on mixed, interlocked social identities. Unlike communitarians such as Sandel and MacIntyre, Unger seems to see society not as homogeneous; however, heterogeneity for him is due to individual idiosyncrasies, not group differences. Thus his concern with allowing for the expression of individuality within the organic group is not a concern with allowing for the expression of complicated, interlocked group differences.

Unger, unlike Sandel and MacIntyre, argues that membership in any particular community must be voluntary. In this way, he imagines "choosing" to be a member of an organic group much as Friedman sees people leaving their communities of origin and entering communities of choice. Unger argues:

> A forced membership in the community of life or a prohibition of departing from it violates the conditions on which its being is based. Suppose that there are many organic groups already established, each united by an initially distinct set of common experiences and shared purposes. The

> individual should be able to choose which of them to join or to leave in view of his own experiences or purposes. (279)

However, it is important to notice that Unger, unlike Brodsky, does not have a liberal conception of "choice"; for Unger, it is the encumbered self who exercises agency in leaving or entering a community. He explicitly rejects the liberal definition of freedom "as the nonexistence of external interference with one's ability to do what one wants" (277) by noting that "the self cannot be imagined apart from social relations" (278). Defining freedom, for Unger, depends upon distinguishing "legitimate and illegitimate power, for only the latter represents domination" (278). To be free entails freedom from domination or illegitimate power, but it does not require freedom from the necessary and legitimate powers of socially constituted values. This is a very useful distinction which could be applied to explain, for instance, the actions of Brodsky's "postmodern Jew." The "independence" which the "postmodern Jew" asserts is an independence from the illegitimate powers of one particular community, but it is not independence from being socially constituted (or "interfered with") altogether. It is really not accurately characterized, then, as an exercise of free choice in the liberal sense.

Freedom, for Unger, as "the measure of an individual's capacity to achieve the good" is necessarily a social product as the good is only achieved in community. Freedom is neither complete freedom from interference nor is it a complete internalization of "objective or communal values." Rather,

> The good for each individual has a universal as well as a particular aspect so that neither the affirmation of individuality nor the obedience to principles or practices suffices to characterize freedom. Instead, freedom lies in the relationship between the universal and the particular good, and between choice and value, portrayed by the theories of human nature and community. Individual choice is important both as a manifestation of individuality and as a sign of the species nature. . . (278)

Thus Unger's definition of freedom successfully describes how the encumbered self is still capable of choice or the exercise of agency, and he is able to account for why it is important for the encumbered self to be able to exercise such agency. But, despite his insistence on an understanding of freedom as a social product, he still describes the motivation for such a self to choose one community or another in terms of the manifestation or the preservation of individuality, not in terms of the conflicts generated by being socially constituted by a mixture of perhaps clashing values or ways of being. The individual picks and chooses between established organic groups or creates a new one, not because he/she is constituted with an identity that is tied to one group or another, but because he/she has an individual personality suited better for a particular group. Thus Unger does overlook some of the ways in which an individual cannot be free to leave a community, even with a social understanding of what freedom is. For instance, one cannot leave a group that one is racialized or genderized as a member of (except if one can and wants to "pass" or assimilate), for others will continue to identify one as a member of the group and one's identity will continue to be in part constituted by these perceptions.[39]

The same tension between group cohesion and individuality is present within the organic group. Unger argues that members of a community must be able to transcend the shared values of the community and to access values of other communities or cultures, but again he does not see the tension as a conflict of values created by the interlocking of different categories of social identities. He writes:

> Community requires cohesion; it can survive only in an atmosphere of strongly felt, though relative and shifting, moral agreement. At the same time, however, individuals must have access to a culture that transcends what any one group can perceive or accomplish on its own. The different traditions of thought or work constitute the deposits of the species nature in history. For that reason, they represent, despite their distortion by the vices of dominance, parts of the good and indispensable aids to its further

[39]Thanks to Ann Ferguson for pointing this out here.

realization. Moreover, without a basis for the criticism of shared values, there will be the tendency to sacrifice autonomy to moral union, and transcendence to immanence. (287)

Here it is clear that while Unger sees the species nature as "deposited" in different cultures, what he does not see is that particular people belong to particular cultures--belong in the sense that MacIntyre does recognize, that we are "bearers" of a particular history or tradition. To see us as truly constituted by our communities is to see that we embody, as bearers of a history, particular manifestations of the "species nature"; we do not just pick and choose from among the available cultural construals of the species nature. So while MacIntyre (and Sandel) might not see enough possibility for agency in which values we choose to have constitute us, Unger perhaps sees too much room for this agency; he fails to see the "choice" of which communities constitute us as in part informed by the histories defined by our cultures, race, and so on.

What Unger does provide is an expanded understanding of how constitutive communities can aim purposefully towards the good where that good is socially developed, but where the good is also understood to have the possibility of emerging only in the absence of domination. His conception of freedom as a social product allows one to understand choice as something which a socially constituted--or encumbered--self can engage in. Thus both Unger and Friedman point to the need to expand what counts as a constitutive community. Recognition of both pluralism (in what is constitutive of identity) and intention (in development/formation of community) requires a broadened list of what will be included in the term "constitutive community." It will also allow one to include in that list communities which have the intention of political resistance to dominance and subordination, and to ask about these communities: who are my people in the sense of being in such a community of resistance with me?

Unger opens the question of how a community can achieve the desired absence of domination and subordination, and he answers by describing the features of the organic group. What I have pointed out is that he has not given enough attention to how relations

of domination and subordination are maintained by a failure to recognize how communities can suppress the values and expressions of members of a community who are also constituted through a multiplicity of interlocking collectivities--collectivities based on categories of social difference such as those of race, class, gender, ethnicity and so on. By thinking, now, of various collectivities or communities which constitute self identities, we can continue Unger's attempt to describe how a community (or set of communities) can create and maintain conditions of non-domination; however, I intend to think of the members of communities as in part constituted by racial, class, gender (etc.) identities, and evaluate constitutive communities in terms of their possibilities for resistance to forms of domination which are based on these categories of identity.

### E. Senses of Community[40]

I want to suggest here many different ways of using the term "community," not in order to focus on the idea that some ways of using the term are incompatible with each other (which may also be true) but more importantly in order to foreground the idea that our identities are always constituted in a multiplicity of collectivities. To talk about the sort of communities which constitute the self as a resistant political being, it is helpful to notice what other sorts of communities also constitute the self's identity. Included in the term "community" are, for instance:

--community of origin

--community of place

--"home" community

--community of support

--community of choice

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[40]Many of the ideas and the terms (and some whole sentences!) in this section are taken from a workshop called "Sentidos de Comunidad: herramientas para pensar sobre redes comunitarias y sobre política de base comunitaria / Senses of Community: tools for thinking about networks and community based politics" developed by the Escuela Popular Norteña, a folk school in Valdez, New Mexico, for our summer encuentro in 1993. The workshop was created collectively by the staff of the school, including myself. The text of the workshop is included in an appendix.

--community of social/political movement

--community of social/political identity

--political community

--community of resistance

--community of destination

The list could, of course, continue or be revised in many ways; the terms are flexible and often overlapping or contained within each other. I list them not because I am interested in setting definitions of them, but rather because I want to generate thinking about the plurality of communitarian sources in which our identities are constituted. Some explanation of each of the terms will help illustrate the broadness of the term "community."

A community of origin is the community one is born into, but this can be understood in many ways: one is born into a particular place--a town or a neighborhood, for instance--but one can also be born into a family (extended or not, biological or not, etc.), a religion (consciously observed or not) or lack thereof, a culture or a mixture of cultures, etc. One does not choose one's community of origin as a community of origin. What the features of one's communities of origin are depend upon which characteristics of identity are salient. For instance, one is born as one sex or another and so in a society in which there is a gender system (and only in such a society) one is born into a gender that one does not choose to be or not to be born into. However, were there not consciousness of gender as a socially significant characteristic, one would not think of a "community" of people of one's gender.[41] One's community of origin includes all that one inherits as one is born as a historically constituted self. One can be born with a history of being a colonizer, for instance, or a history of being colonized, or one can be born embodying this conflict, inheriting the history of both colonizer and colonized. Whether one later identifies

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[41] Ann Ferguson points out here that there are other circumstances as well in which one would not see gender as a basis for calling a set of people a community. She notes, for instance, that "a group of people who had minimal contact with other people might take gender to be socially significant" (for instance, they might employ a sexual division of labor) and "yet not think of 'communities' of the women and men, since there is no reason to think in such distinguishing terms unless and until women of one community want and need to relate to women of another community." (Notes on an earlier draft).

with features of one's communities of origin is not determined simply by virtue of one's birth into them, but it is not unrelated, either (For instance, the fact that I identify as Jewish is not a necessary implication of the fact that I was born with this heritage; rather, it is in part a result of a conscious act of identification and a form of resistance to assimilation. But it is certainly dependent upon my being born as a "bearer" of Jewish history).

A community of place is based on the place where one lives. It could be small--my block or neighborhood--or huge--the nation. A community of place could remain relatively constant or could be continually shifting. For instance, a community of place based in a small rural town might be quite constant; there is little movement into or out of the town. On the other hand, the community of place located in a college dorm is very temporary. If one moves around a lot, one will have many communities of place, and if one is in a community of place very temporarily, that community will probably not become very constitutive of one's identity (unless, perhaps, one's experience there is particularly intense in one way or another). One may belong to a community of place out of a variety of reasons, for instance, out of choice, out of tradition, out of economic necessity or privilege, out of force (the inmates in a prison cell block, for instance, form a community of place), and so on. Members of a community of place may or may not have a common reason for being there, and members may be extremely similar or extremely different from one another. A given community of place could include many other communities within it.[42]

A "home" community may or may not be one's actual home in the sense of where one lives. It is quite possible to not have any "home" community (and one may or may not feel this as a lack). It is the community at which one is most "at home" or at ease. One might describe such a community by saying things like, "it's where I can really be myself," or "it's where I'm accepted for who I am," etc. It could be as small as a circle of friends or family, or it could refer more widely to a social group; for instance, some lesbians express

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[42]Ann Ferguson suggests workplaces as possible examples of communities of place.

the feeling of being at "home" only in lesbian community. One's "home" community is where one is not constantly alienated, misunderstood, unappreciated; it is where one is loved, where one is understood on all levels of meaning, where one can let down one's guard without being attacked. Perhaps it is also where one is not constantly challenged to change. Of course, there can be various degrees to which a particular community feels like it is a "home" community.

It is an interesting question whether "home" community is good or bad from a radical political point of view. On the one hand, it is sustaining, and can offer the base of appreciation, encouragement and love necessary to keep up hope, to not "burn out" or despair, to risk creativity, to support the growth of identities which are forbidden or undervalued in the mainstream. It can also provide material support or physical protection. In extremely hostile conditions, a "home" community can be essential; for instance, gangs can be "home" communities absolutely necessary for their members' survival, for their sustenance on all levels. On the other hand, if the "risks" of the outside world are more imagined (out of racist fear, etc.) than real, the comfort of "home" can be too seductive; it can keep us from entering communities where we are at risk, or where meanings are not shared. For instance, in a community in which one is seen as an oppressor--where one is someone with class privilege, for instance, or someone who speaks the "official" language--one may feel not appreciated, not at "home." And identification with oneself as someone who is not always to be loved and appreciated may be unappealing if there is a "home" community calling one in. If such identification is politically necessary for change, then having a "home" community may work against change.

Bernice Johnson Reagon contrasts the concepts of home and coalition, arguing that coalition, and not home, is where political change is to be made. But at the same time, she does not deny the necessity of having a home to go back to, to retreat from the battlefield-like atmosphere which she experiences coalition to be. She writes:

> Coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition; they're looking for a home! They're looking for a bottle with some milk in it and a nipple, which does not happen in a coalition. You don't get a lot of food in a coalition. (359)

Reagon sees coalition work as necessary for political change, and also necessarily difficult, precisely because it is not a "safe space" like home is. But change and safety are at odds with each other. However, Reagon does not think it is possible to engage in coalition work all the time; it is too hard, too draining: "In a coalition you have to give, and it is different from your home. You can't stay there all the time. You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back to take your bottle wherever it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more" (359). Coalition, according to Reagon, "is a monster. It never gets enough. It always wants more. So you better be sure you got your home someplace for you to go to so that you will not become a martyr to the coalition" (361).

Reagon's insistence that coalition and home be separate can be problematic. It dismisses the possibility that a home which is separate from coalition can serve as a hiding place from coalition rather than as a recharging place. But even more importantly, it assumes that everyone <u>has</u> a "home" community. However, not everyone <u>can</u> have a "home" community if communities are based on seemingly "separable" features of identity and if shared identity is part of what makes a "home" a "home." It is possible for a person to have a "home" in a very personal sense--a family or a circle of friends--but still lack a more public or political "home," that is, a political community that serves as a home and yet is not banished to the private sphere. For instance, if lesbian community is to be a "home" for all lesbians, it cannot be based on the shared meanings which only white middle-class young lesbians share. When there are many different lesbian communities (for instance, a lesbian of color community, an older lesbians' community, etc.), it is still often the case

that the lesbian community that occupies the most visible or public space is the one whose members are mainstream or dominant in other ways: they are white, young, and so on. Reagon is at the same time arguing that "the barred rooms [filled with members of a single feature of identity] will not be allowed to exist" (362) and that we all had better have homes to go back to. But to be marginal in every community is to not have a "home" community. If one wants to make the claim, as Reagon does, that one needs a home to go back to after surviving coalition, then one needs to consider how to make this possible for those who are marginalized everywhere that might be called "home." If what is necessary about "home" community is sustenance and love and appreciation and material support and protection, then we need to learn how to create this without pre-supposing shared meanings. If coalition can only be maintained as long as everyone has a "home" to recuperate in, then the fact that it is not the case that everyone has a "home" community points to the need to make coalition itself a more sustaining place. The lack of *a priori* shared meanings must not entail a constant battlefield, a lack of appreciation or love or other personally and politically sustaining necessities.

A community of support can be narrower in scope than a "home" community, in the sense that members of one's community of support may offer support in specific, limited ways rather than for one's "whole" self (or for all of one's multiple selves). It might be a club or a group of friends who support one another in their projects. The limits of the support may be well defined; for instance, it could be a group of colleagues in an academic setting who read each other's work and offer help, critique, and appreciation but who do not necessarily develop their thinking or their projects collectively. It could be a network of women who watch out for each other's kids or serve as each other's confidantes.

Community of choice refers to a group of people that comes together purposefully and voluntarily for a common end. The entry into the group is intentional; it is not a given of one's life. It could be a liberal political group, a musical band, a coalition, or a study group. It could be a group based on a feature of social identity--for instance, a women of

color caucus or a Latino student organization--but the group itself (though not the identity) is intentionally formed for a particular purpose. It is possible for a community of support, for instance, to be one kind of community of choice.

A community of social/political movement exists only in times of movement. Identity in these times is dependent, at least in part, upon the movement for definition or re-definition ("re-articulation" as Michael Omi and Howard Winant would put it[43]). It is through the movement that the community is affirmed as constituting a community. Identity in times of movement is not stagnant if the movement itself is vital--that is, if it is truly movement and not stagnation. For instance, Chicano identity grew from Chicano Movement, constituting identity as Chicanos or as Raza for people formerly self-identified as "Mexican-American." The Women's Liberation Movement created a sense of women as forming a socially significant political category, and of there being reason for the formation of women's communities such as consciousness raising groups. The meaning of being a woman is changed through the women's liberation movement, and the concept of "lesbian" as a political category was created in this movement. The Black Nationalist Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and so on all create and re-create (in compatible and incompatible ways) the meaning of Black or African-American identity. The movement against the Vietnam war created a community--and a counter-culture--which was constitutive of identity for its members.

A community of social/political movement can evolve into a community of social/political identity if the movement ends or stagnates but the identity created in it remains. This is not a clear line because it is often unclear whether or not a movement is alive. The "women's community" or the "lesbian community" often tends to define identity (and thus regulates membership) *a priori*--that is, instead of the movement's defining and redefining the meaning of "woman" and "lesbian," a given "women's community" or "lesbian community" may take a stagnant definition of who counts as members of these

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[43]See Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1980's.

categories and then one must meet this prior definition to gain admittance to the community. When this happens the social meaning of the term "woman" or "lesbian" does not continue to develop out of movement. Social/political identities are also created not out of oppositional movements but out of oppressive systems of classification; for instance, categories of racial identity are created by the racial state (as represented, for instance, by the census), categories of ethnic identity emerge out of anthropological or sociological research and colonial practices, and so on.

A social identity can embody the tension between resistance to and maintenance of the status quo. For instance, to the extent to which the gender system is itself a tool of oppression, basing a community on or embracing an identity such as "woman" might serve to maintain the oppressive nature of the dual gender system; furthermore, if a gender identity is defined in a way which does not recognize interlocking features of identity (e.g. if having a gender is seen as separable from having a race, etc.) then defining a community on the basis of gender enables race, class, etc. to be erased. On the other hand, movement can re-define or re-articulate the meaning of identities, and a movement which resisted oppressions as interlocked could create identities which did not depend upon the illusion of the separability of, for instance, race, gender, class and so on. So a community of social/political identity refers to a community where the identity upon which it is based is at least problematic in some of the above ways--that is, given the tendency for features of identity to be seen as separable and not interlocked, and given that many identities are in fact tools of oppressive systems: for instance, the dual gender system and the racial state. Communities of social/political identity are the communities which ground "identity politics."

By political community I mean to include communities which correspond to Aristotle's conception of the *polis* as not a mere aggregate of persons, not just cattle who happen to be grazing together in the same field, but rather people who self-consciously participate in the formation of each other's--of the public's--values or conception(s) of the

good. I am not agreeing with Aristotle that such a community requires unity or harmony or a consensus about what the good is; but it does require engagement and struggle about values rather than disengagement or the infamous "freedom from interference." A political community in this sense could be conservative (for instance, the "moral majority") or it could be radical (for instance, a communo-anarchist group) but it could never be liberal (nor could it be libertarian).

A community of resistance, then, denotes a political community which engages in resistance to the oppressive status quos and thus whose values include, at base, a commitment to such resistance. I am not including liberal groups who advocate members' individual rights to choose their own conceptions of the good, for such groups purport to not be constitutive of identity; they are not political communities. A community of resistance might be both inwardly and outwardly directed: personal transformation in accordance with collectively changed values combines with action or education or the creation of movement aimed at changing oppressive practices or institutions or systems. A community of resistance could be at the same time a community of place, or a community of social/political movement, and so on. I will leave open for now the question of whether a community of resistance could be a community of social/political identity, for to answer this question means going on to consider whether maintenance of distinct lines of identity is consistent with resistance to the oppressive status quos, a question which I will take up in subsequent chapters.

A community of destination denotes one's political destination or aim. It is a (political) community of resistance but it may have not yet been forged as a community; in claiming it as one's community of destination one expresses a hope for such a community. The community of destination constitutes the self as resistant, but at the same time the community of destination is itself a product of resistance; it is the destination at which one's resistance aims. A destination can change as social/political conditions change and as movements redefine identities. To say that political destinations are both the products of

resistance and the pre-conditions or the ground for further resistance is to invoke the anarchist idea of perpetual revolution: the goal of political resistance is not to reach some stagnant, ideal state in which no further changes will be necessary, but rather political resistance must be understood to be ongoing, offering continual resistance to re-emerging dominance or oppression within changing conditions.

A community of destination could be a found community or it could be a purposefully formed community or both (as lesbian communities were purposefully formed and can now often be found-already-formed). Since one engages critically with any political community, whether it is already formed as a community or not, one's engagement with it in part forms it; it remains continually in the process of formation.

Lacking a community of destination could be described as lacking political clarity, or lacking the conditions for such clarity. Knowing what one's community of destination is requires radical imagination; it means being visionary with respect to the goal or destination of one's resistance. But such vision must take into account what may be problematic about affirming any one community or another. For instance, one may not be able to unproblematically affirm any one community of social/political identity as one's community of destination, given that oppressions (and features of identity) are interlocked. To affirm a community as one's community of destination without ignoring interlocking oppressions requires creating a community of destination that itself recognizes identities as complex. Without such recognition, the affirmation of any one community of destination can mean condemning one's own self to marginalization; for instance, for a Black Puerto Rican to affirm U.S. Latinos as her community of destination may mean subjecting herself to ostracism for her own dark skin. To be able to say, then, that one has a community of destination in the sense of affirming that community as one's own--and for that affirmation not to require ignoring the interlocking of oppressions--is itself a political achievement, a product of resistance.

To name one's community of destination is, in fact, to be able to answer the question, "who are my people?" in a particular sense; it is to be able to point to the people with whom one wants to throw one's lot, with whom one engages in political resistance where this resistance includes both the transformation of members' self-identities in accordance with liberatory values, and the transformation of systems of oppression through the creation of or participation in movement.

Having surveyed many different possible senses of community it becomes clearer that the "who are my people?" question can be answered in many different senses; that is, it can be answered by reference to any (or many) of one's constitutive communities. To call someone one of "my own people," then, may just indicate that we belong together in some community which is truly constitutive of our identities. Calling someone "my own" may be merely descriptive or it may be normative; that is, the affirmation of some but not others of our communities serve to promote political resistance and change of oppressive status quos. I might call someone "my own" in a descriptive sense just because we came, say, from the same community of origin. But if I am fundamentally at odds with this person, I may be reluctant to affirm them as "my own." I would like to distinguish between admitting someone to be one's own and affirming them as one's own. For instance, I should admit that the classist and racist members of the community of place (in this case, I am thinking of the particular town) I grew up in are "my own" in a descriptive sense; this admission both acknowledges that I have in part been constituted within a community with these values and it indicates that I am responsible for engaging with this community in an attempt to change their values. But I would not affirm the community unproblematically as my own, as a community whose values I could stand behind.

However, if I draw a distinction between affirming and admitting someone to be one's own, I want to maintain that even when "just" admitting someone to be one's own, there is no less of a strong sense of moral connection: they implicate me and I implicate them; we are, in a sense, morally responsible for each other, whether I want to affirm their

actions and values or whether I want to try to get them to change. Their actions and values are still in some sense mine, despite my being opposed to them. Bat-Ami Bar On illustrates this sense of being implicated in the actions of one's own people even when one would oppose, rather than affirm, their actions. She argues that when one counts someone as one's own, it is appropriate to feel not only anger (which one can feel towards someone from whom one is morally separate) but also shame, for feeling shame reflects one's own connection to the actions of one's people. One's opposition to the action does not make one thereby not responsible for or implicated by it. Bar On writes:

> Uncomfortable as shame is, I need it, and I need it more than I need the anger that I feel at the governments that have formulated and dictated the Jewish-Israeli policy in relation to the Palestinians. Although anger too presupposes horror at what happens, and it too is a moral feeling and thus motivates action, it allows me to separate myself from what becomes posited as the origin of the repression, for example, the Israeli government. In this respect anger is a self assuring and purifying feeling. Shame, on the other hand, does not separate but includes. It is a feeling entailing the taking of personal responsibility of seeing oneself implicated in the wrongdoing. ("Meditations on National Identity" 56-57)

Feeling shame, then, is a way of claiming someone as one's own and simultaneously expressing opposition to or horror at their actions or values.

Affirming a community or a people as "my own" means making a political claim both that the community should exist as a community, and that I can stand behind the values of the community (this would not necessarily mean that I agree with all of the values of the community). My different communities may stand in complicated relations to being affirmed as "my own"; some communities I could affirm as "my own" only with ambivalence. And given that there is never a morally "pure" community, whatever this would be, there should probably be some ambivalence in the affirmation of any community as one's own. For instance, to say "my people" are those in my "home" community may be easy if I have such a "home," but it may be politically problematic; if my "home"

community is based on shared identity, for instance, then the affirmation of this community could itself be expressive of a failure to count as "my own" the people from whom I am different. And, it would leave people who recognize their identities as complex and interlocking mixtures--who have no "home" community based on seemingly distinct features of identity--without any people to call their own in the "home" sense.

The unambivelent affirmation of a people or a community as my own, then, is the achievement of a community of destination. Having a people in this sense is never a given; it is a result of the creation and sustenance of a community of resistance which recognizes and fights oppressions as interlocked. But affirmation of people as "my own" is not an all or nothing affair: short of realizing a community of destination, I may belong to other communities of resistance which I can--with greater or lesser degrees of ambivalence--affirm as my own.

The next several chapters explore different reasons why it may be politically problematic to affirm a particular community as "one's own." I will focus on the ways in which describing the boundaries of communities have depended upon essentialist understandings of identity, and consider why such essentialism promotes continued oppression. Then, I will go on to consider communities that are defined through the concept of "culture" (these communities could be, for instance, communities of place or "home" communities).

# CHAPTER IV

# THE COMMUNITARIAN SELF IN IDENTITY POLITICS

## A. Introduction

In the previous chapters I have tried to argue that it makes sense to think in terms of having a people--that is, that the self can be thought of as encompassing more than a self-contained individual, tied to no history or community. I have argued that Aristotle's conception of the *polis* provides a model for seeing how the self is formed morally in a context of others who consider the question of what the good is (or how to attain it) to be a public matter, not a matter of private decision. I have also shown how some contemporary theorists have built on Aristotle's communitarian conception of the self and have held this conception up against modern, liberal notions of the abstract individual.

I have been interested in the communitarian account of the self precisely because I am interested in thinking about the place that it has or potentially could have in the development of a non-individualist politics, and so I will turn now to one such possibility: identity politics, that is, politics grounded in group identity. My appreciation for the politics of identity lies in the fact that it is a politics which takes identity to be socially constituted within a context characterized by group difference and thus provides a model contrary to liberal politics which denies the significance of group difference and posits the subject as a human being capable, ideally, of free choice. Just as traditional communitarians such as Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre argue that there never is a choosing subject free from social constitution with particular values but rather that all identity is social identity, so the basis for identity politics is a belief that members of different social groups are deeply constituted with a collective identity and that such an identity has a bearing on the moral and political choices that subjects make. But traditional communitarianism also consistently posits the subject as unitary, not multiplicitous or

complex, and portrays communities as distinct and separable, not themselves cut across by group difference. Identity politics has inherited these assumptions too, translating them into accounts of collective identity which depend upon the conceptual unity of groups. While an abandonment of the politics of group identity undermines the conditions for collective thinking and acting and leaves us instead with a conception of the self as unencumbered with particular moral values, a dependence upon unity for group identity ignores the complexity of the communitarian sources of identity.

In a time when collective moral and political thinking and acting is inhibited by a pervasive ideological image of the subject as an unencumbered individual, it is essential to be able to make conceptual sense of a communitarian account of the subject. Believing that meaning cannot be made alone, I am committed to the creation of the possibility for collective thinking and acting, collective meaning-making. Here I agree with María Lugones, who speaks of knowing her company: "a layering of voices of women of color comes to my mind. . . voices that have accompanied me sweetly. The voices all speak this knowledge to me: one just does not go around alone (lonely maybe), but not individual-style alone making or remaking anything. . ." ("On the Logic" 35).

But in liberal society, one is not meant to have company in Lugones' sense; one is not meant to have company with whom one makes meaning and is oneself made by this meaning. In such a society, in the moment before collective responsibility might be taken, the process is thwarted by the persistent ideology: "it's my own private decision; above all, I expect and act on my freedom to do as I choose." In contemporary, liberal U. S. society we see daily messages that our moral values are freely chosen, that our cultural identities can be changed at will as cultural artifacts are bought and sold, that nothing is lost when history is forgotten, transcended or assimilated beyond, that beneath our colorful or not-so-colorful skins, we are all simply, abstractly, human beings. This is a society in which "multi-cultural" education has come to have the flavor of an import store: ethnicities are displayed like fascinating bits to browse through, selecting what is appealing. But the

array of choices is not meant to challenge anyone's identity nor is identity understood to affect how the cultural selections are to be made, who is to take on which cultures and in what way. Even the identities which one would think are inscribed on the body are now instead able to become a matter of choice--for those who can afford such things as plastic surgery and colored contact lenses--rather than something that must be accepted as given or even respected as a marker of history and heritage. Moral problems that raise issues of public policy are responded to with solutions that rely upon the illusion that moral thinking is done as an individual whose values are formed independently of the social context. Think, for instance, of the currently popular bumper sticker which reads, "if you're against abortion, don't have one" (read: you make your decision and I'll make mine, since after all, our values need not affect each other at all as long as there is free choice). Politics based on the notion of the unencumbered self prohibits a consciously collective thinking about moral problems, and dismisses the possibility that collectively shaped identities--be they simple or complex--form or inform our moral and political thinking. It bars one from asking, then, who one's company is.

## B. Towards Alternatives to the Unencumbered Self

It will be helpful to look at a more sustained example of how the belief in the unencumbered self translates into concrete moral or political actions, before examining identity-based ways of thinking that stand in opposition to the notion of the unencumbered self. The following example should serve to contrast the ideology of the unencumbered self with identity-based thinking, thinking that sees the identity of the self as given or socially constructed, but not "chosen" prior to or apart from the given values of a particular history and social context. Recently, a gentile woman with whom I am acquainted "converted" to Judaism and now considers herself to be Jewish. I want to use this action as an example because I think it raises interesting questions about identity, and the ways in which recognition of historically and socially formed identities intersects with the

possibility of choice. For the concept of conversion to make sense in this case,[44] Jewish identity must be thought of as something that can be "chosen"; my claim is that what is required for this is a conflation of Jewishness as a historically and socially constructed identity with Judaism, the religion, and an understanding of a religion as a set of beliefs which anyone, potentially, could freely choose to adopt. This conflation serves to deny recognition of the Jewish self who is Jewish because she is part of a history and a community (perhaps an imagined community) that is Jewish.[45]

What I want to contrast here is Jewishness as a given social identity with Jewishness as belief in and knowledge about a set of claims constitutive of a religion. In the case I am describing, the woman in question thinks she became Jewish <u>just</u> by virtue of choosing certain beliefs and undergoing the recognized process of committing to them. Reconstruction of identity, in any deeper sense than the changing of one's beliefs, was not seen as necessary for becoming a Jew. The claim that all there is to becoming Jewish is choosing to learn about and believe in Judaism is consistent only with a view of the self as unencumbered; if, as Sandel puts it, "the subject is regarded as prior to its ends" then the given subject (my gentile acquaintance) chooses new ends, the ends of Judaism. For such a subject, "the relevant moral question is not 'Who am I?' (for the answer to this question is given in advance) but rather 'what ends shall I choose?' and this is a question addressed

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[44]I say "in this case" because I can imagine other cases of "conversion," or better put, reconstructions of identity, which were not thought of as "chosen" by a self who could be thought of as standing somewhere outside of the chosen values themselves.

[45]Naomi Scheman has a similar reaction to the idea of conversion to Judaism, and compares it to her "uneasiness about male to female transsexuals." She writes, "I have no problem with the *wish*, any more than I have a problem with wishing one were born in Paris; I just don't believe one can realize it." That is, just as someone raised to be a man cannot completely undo and remake gender construction to be a woman, Scheman argues, so being Jewish is not the sort of thing one "chooses." If being a Jew is a matter of religious belief and knowledge, then, Scheman points out, an atheist like herself would not count (similarly, if being a woman is at least in part a matter of animating femininity, as it seems to be for male to female transsexuals, then women who are not feminine or who reject femininity would not quite count as women.) And, Scheman argues, the convert's "kind of Jewishness [i.e. religion] is more intelligible in contemporary America than mine; more intelligible even *to me.* My own feels ineffable; but one thing I know about it with certainty is that it is my birthright, that it is not something I chose, nor is it something I could cease to be. . . it doesn't seem to me that one can really choose it, imbued as it is with history: one would have to change the past." ("Jewish Lesbian Writing" 189). I would add that the convert's kind of Jewishness is more intelligible precisely because it is grounded in the unencumbered self, whereas Scheman's (or my) kind of Jewishness requires a conception of the self as encumbered with or tied to a history of a people and a community of a people.

to the will" (Sandel, Liberalism... 58) The unencumbered self becomes Jewish by choosing new ends.[46]

It is important to notice that in the mainstream of this liberal society the predominant understanding of what it is to be a Jew is that it is a matter of religion.[47] Being Jewish is understood here through the lens of the ideology of free individual choice available to the unencumbered self. What is interesting about this example of liberal thinking is that it stands in stark contrast to the seemingly obvious fact that being Jewish can also be thought of as a given social identity. In fact, the view that being a Jew is a matter of choice co-exists, even under liberalism, with the contradictory view that a Jew can never be other than a Jew. A non-religious Jew (someone who does not "choose" to believe in the claims of Judaism) is seen as a Jew when Jewishness is present in her speech, her manners, her body, and so on; in fact, I would argue that there is a whole "culture" belonging specifically to atheist Jews, a fact which is irreconcilable with the view that being Jewish is no more than a matter of religion. Furthermore, anti-Semitism operates in such a way that a Jew cannot be seen as other than a Jew, no matter what "choices" she/he may make.[48]

What, then, is the alternative to seeing Jewishness as a matter of religion and as such something which can be chosen by the unencumbered self? Is it that Jewishness,

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[46]I think that within some Jewish communities, conversion is looked at with ambivalence precisely because for Jews whose sense of identity is so clearly tied to history and community, it is not quite believable that one can become a Jew through an act of the will: thus the convert is never quite believable as a Jew. The following story "about the Italian barber who fell in love with a Jewish girl on Broome Street" by Abe Cahan from the Jewish Daily Forward (from the early 1900's) illustrates this: "He wanted to marry her, but her mother wouldn't bless the match. Finally the mother agreed to the marriage provided the barber converted to Judaism. The mother made the new husband learn Hebrew and he had to pray every morning wearing his *yarmulka*. The Italian and his Jewish wife lived with the mother, and the barber did not get his breakfast until he had prayed. But that wasn't all. The wife had a brother named Joe and Joe never prayed before breakfast. So the barber asked his mother-in-law what was the difference between him and the brother? The answer was, 'Joe's a Jew. *I* know he's a Jew but you've got to prove you're one.'" (Harry Golden, in Metzker, Isaac, ed. A Bintel Brief 20).

[47]This was made vivid to me once several years ago when I was in a feminist consciousness-raising group in which about half the members were Jewish. One week we decided our topic would be "Jewish identity." One of the gentile women asked, "What should I talk about? Christianity?" For her, her difference from us Jews was to be found in her different religion, not in her different history or culture or race or ethnicity.

[48]Even Jews who "convert" to a Christian religion remain Jews in the eyes of anti-Semites (and, as it happens, in the eyes of Jews--the wisdom is, "once a Jew always a Jew"). My mother and members of her family were baptized Christians in Germany, but come 1933 they were, because of their Jewish background, still "non-Aryans" according to Nazi logic, and were treated accordingly. This is an anti-Semitic application of the recognition that the identity of the self goes deeper than what one chooses as one's individual ends.

understood as something more than a set of religious beliefs and a body of religious knowledge, cannot be chosen by someone whose heritage does not already include it? I think that the answer must be both yes and no, and the key here is the sense of "choice" or agency through which one could become or be Jewish. As I argued in a previous chapter, traditional communitarians cannot account for the exercise of agency involved in changing, or re-constituting one's identity; an identity is given or inherited and such an identity is morally binding. Against this view, I have argued that even when understood to be encumbered or socially constituted, the subject can and must exercise agency and continues to be constituted and reconstituted through intersecting, continually changing social contexts or communities. Thus the agency exercised is a collective agency. While the woman in my example understood herself to be exercising "choice" in the liberal sense, one could imagine a case of someone reconstituting her identity as Jewish through a process understood to involve deep cultural change--change of social identity--where this change took place through the remaking of identity in community. It would require an extreme essentialism to uphold the claim that only people meeting X condition (e.g. having a Jewish mother, having three or more Jewish grandparents, being raised Jewish, etc.) were truly Jews. Borderline cases challenge the plausibility (not to mention the desirability) of such a claim. For instance, the Jew who is raised assimilated can be understood to later exercise agency in remaking herself to have a strong sense of Jewish identity; she can reconstitute her identity in Jewish community.[49] While this involves the exercise of agency, it cannot be simply understood as an act of the will, an exercise of choice. While one could argue that this case is different than the case of someone who has no Jewish heritage who undergoes a similar process (since we can think of the assimilated Jew as still encumbered with a Jewish history, however deprived of it she was, while we would not think of a gentile in this way), it seems impossible, without invoking an essentialist definition of who is and who is not a Jew, to say that there is a clear line between those people who could

[49]See, for instance, Adrienne Rich's account of her lifelong process of reconstituting her identity as a Jew, in "Split At The Root."

and those who never could reconstitute their identities as Jews. My point in describing the example of conversion was not to assert that no one can change their socially constructed identities; rather, the point was to say that what took place in this case was not understood to be a social reconstruction of identity. It was understood to be an act of individual choice, an exercise of the will.

Traditional communitarianism can serve as the basis for accounts of identity which view the self as socially constituted such that they are essentially unchangeable. As I have argued with respect to the communitarians, the maintenance of such accounts of identity depends upon seeing communities in which selves are constructed as bounded, separate, and homogeneous. An apparently homogeneous, traditional, self-contained Jewish community, under such an account, would constitute its members simply as Jews, and someone who was not part of some such community (and one would be either in or our, never in between) and had no Jewish heritage could never become Jewish simply by choosing to commit to a set of religious beliefs; "conversion," under such an account, makes no sense.

Thus I am identifying two different existing strains of thought about the possibility of conversion: there is the predominant view that being Jewish is a matter of religion and can be chosen, and there is an identity-based view, for which communitarianism provides a grounding, which sees Jewish identity as an inheritance, a result of belonging and being constituted through a particular history and community. While I am claiming that there are alternatives to the liberal view that becoming a Jew can be a matter of the unencumbered self making a choice, I want to suggest that a view of social identities (of which Jewish identity would be an example) as completely given is only <u>one</u> such alternative. My claim that reconstruction of identity is possible in community through the exercise of collective agency suggests the beginning of another alternative account that takes the self to be neither unencumbered nor completely constituted within a given, single collectivity. What I want to question is the politics of an identity-based alternative to the unencumbered self, and the

possibility of seeing identity more complexly without losing the sense of collectivity that it represents. To do this, I turn now to an exploration of the link between politics (that is, the purposeful exercise of thinking and acting with a political aim) and group identity.

## C. Identity and Politics

The term "identity politics" makes reference to a potential or existing link between politics and group identity. I have been led to an exploration of the variety of conceptions of the self and of politics (and the connections between them) that are all termed "identity politics" because I understand these conceptions to provide alternatives to the understanding of the self as unencumbered and to politics as a matter of interest-group liberalism.[50] "Identity politics" have included politics based on identities such as: "African-American identity," "lesbian identity," "Latino identity," "working-class identity," and so on. In these terms "identity" implies socially constructed identities based on categories of race, culture, ethnicity, class, gender, "sexuality" and perhaps other categories or groupings which emerge and dissolve in different historical periods.[51] Each of these identity categories has its own history and characteristics; with some the creation of the category more clearly serves the purpose of oppressive systems while some emerge from movements of resistance (and some may have a dual nature in this sense). I take it that the groupings of people into these categories is not a "natural" given; the categories themselves, as well as the identities they refer to, are socially constructed. In each case, while I am referring to "categories" of identity, it is also the case that although they are not in any sense "natural," the categories are also not just formal; they both produce and are produced by the lived realities of social life, so that members of the categories have the lived experience of shaping their identities in relation to (or within histories and communities of) other members of that category or group, and in contradistinction from

[50] See, for instance, Ann Ferguson's "Ethico-Political Strategies and Feminist Oppositional Communities" for a discussion of how identity politics differs from interest group politics.
[51] "Sexuality," for instance, is a relatively recent mode of categorizing people or referring to personal identities.

members of other groups.[52] With some of the categories (culture, for instance) it is more plausible that the lived experience that members of the category have of shaping their identities in relation to each other (e.g. through shared values, ways of being, language, daily practices, customs, etc.) exists apart from the classification of the members into a distinct group. But even in such cases, the drawing of borders between the categories (that is, the notion that different cultures are separable and distinct from one another) can result from the articulation of the categories as categories, not simply from the lived experience of the social construction of identity.

To the extent that one does think of people in terms of such categories of identity, there is a challenge to the view of the self as unencumbered. For instance, for someone to say, "As a Black man, I think..." implies that values are informed by socially constructed identity. For the unencumbered self, color differences are only "skin deep"; they cover the generic, rational human being who is underneath. For the person who speaks "as a Black man," Blackness is more than this covering; it represents an identity with a particular history, experience, perspective and set of values. Furthermore, identity politics not only recognizes that a self's identity is constituted as tied to these categories of identity but also makes the claim that there is a connection between self identity and engagement in politics. While identity politics shares with communitarian theory the understanding that our identities go deeper than what is open to be changed by individual choice, the departure of identity politics from traditional communitarian theory is that the collectivity in which the self's identity is constituted is not assumed to be a traditional community of place but rather is thought to be based on categories of identity such as those of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and so on. My contention is that if one sees these categories of identity as complex and inseparable, and yet adheres to the communitarian recognition that our identities are constituted in community, then one must ask complicated questions about

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[52]Michael Omi and Howard Winant's account of racial formation informs my description of categories of identity here. Racial formation, for them, refers to "the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (61).

who comprises one's constitutive communities. Recognition of the profound depth with which members of a community may engage with one another--in that they form each other's moral constitutions--makes questions about who our "company" is particularly weighty.

While the existence of the ideas of culture, race, gender and so on can challenge the plausibility of the unencumbered self, even these categories of identity can be deflated in the liberal mind; they can be seen as indicators of differences that do not go deep enough to create different moral identities. Thus, for instance, women and men are seen as not constructed with different "moral voices,"[53] but rather each can, despite their superficial or cosmetic (or "sex") differences, think simply as a human being. It is not that the liberal must deny that differences exist along lines of categories of identity, but they must see these differences as only skin deep and thus not really differences of socially constructed identity at all.

Categories of ethnicity and culture would seem to present the defender of the unencumbered self with a difficult challenge, for cultural differences are recognized to be tied to differences of values. But through ethical relativism, even cultural differences are interpreted in a framework that emphasizes free choice as an exercise of the will. Non-interference in the practices of other cultures is thus required because to do otherwise would be to impede free choice. Thus recognition of cultural differences leads the liberal to a principle of non-interference, rather than to the practice of "interference"--which might better be called participation in the public realm or *polis*--at least within one's own culture or community. The recognition that culture forms its members morally might lead to a recognition that one should understand oneself to be engaged morally with others. This engagement should at least be seen to make sense within one's own culture or community, but furthermore, to the extent to which all cultures are, especially in this postcolonial

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[53]As Carol Gilligan's challenge to Lawrence Kohlberg suggests that they are. See Gilligan, In a Different Voice.

world, inextricably mixed up with one another, such engagement can make sense across, between and amongst different cultures as well.[54] However, even when the liberal acknowledges the extent to which culture plays a part in morally constituting its members, this acknowledgment leads not to engagement but rather to disengagement; since cultures are different, the thinking goes, one must not judge others unlike oneself. If this cultural relativism dissolves into an individual subjectivism, even the recognition that one is a culturally constituted self is lost and one is urged to not see oneself as morally bound to any community. Thus for the idea of social identity to present a challenge to the idea of the unencumbered self, it must be seen as going more than skin-deep. The fact of difference must be seen not as a call for tolerance or non-interference, but rather as an indication of the social construction of identity and thus as a call for engagement in the public realm in which identities are constituted.

The possibility of collectivity is both suggested by and made problematic by the recognition of the degree to which our identities are socially constituted. If social identities are constituted by collectivities based on distinctions of race, gender, and so on, then one can recognize these categories as a basis for feeling oneself to have a "people," a depth of collectivity that is denied to the unencumbered self. However, if in fact the categories of identity are not distinct and separable but rather are interlocked and mixed, then who this collectivity is becomes unclear. There is a political motivation for looking at categories of social identity as a possible yet suspicious basis from which to answer the "who are my people?" question.

It is important to ask the "who are my people?" question in relation to identity, but it is also important to be clear that the question is a political question and not simply a question about identity for the sake of identity. That is, I am not going to pre-suppose that we should hear the "who are my people?" question, as it is probably most often heard, as if it were synonymous with the question "what is my identity (be it cultural, racial, gender,

[54]This is, however, made problematic by the fact of imperialism, which makes it an exercise of domination for some to engage in others' cultural formation.

etc. identity)?" Rather, I am recognizing that accounts of identity have provided or tried to provide answers to the "who are my people?" question, and I am interested in considering what the politics are of these identity-based answers. That is, what are the motivations and effects of basing one's political sense of who one's people are on one's sense of identity? To ask what, if any, is the relation between identity and politics is to question the automatic assumption (implicit in some versions of "identity politics") that one's identity determines one's politics. There are, of course, many ways of referring to "identity" in answering the "who are my people?" question, and these different conceptions of what identity is have different political implications; one can redefine what is meant by social identity in order to avoid describing our identities in terms of apparently separable categories of identity, and thus one can create a politics that is still in some sense a politics of identity, but with very different political implications. This is, then, not an abandonment of the concept of socially constructed identity, but rather a revision of what this means. So the question is open about whether group identity makes sense as a basis for answering the "who are my people?" question as a political question, and about what account of identity best grounds a politics of resistance.

In the previous chapter I pointed out that, recognizing the many different senses of community (community of origin, community of social/political identity, community of resistance, etc.), one can see that the "who are my people?" question can be answered in many different senses. When identity politics links group identity--as it is constructed through the available categories--to political commitment, it assumes that one's community of social/political identity should also form one's community of resistance (which is a political community); that is, it assumes that to answer the "who are my people?" question with reference to one's community of social/political identity is to simultaneously answer the "who are my people?" question as a political question, a question that inquires about one's community of resistance. For instance, under this thinking, someone constructed by the binary gender system as a woman--that is, someone who has a social identity as a

woman--should be committed specifically to the politics of women's liberation. It is the assumption of the link between identity--as constructed through categories of social identity--and politics that I am going to question so I can ask, instead, what are the possibilities for a community of destination that is characterized by a depth of collectivity or a sense of peoplehood and yet does not depend upon categories of identity as they are currently and problematically constructed?

### D. Keeping Identity Political

While identity politics links group identity and politics, it is also possible for the assertion of subordinate identities to be seen as itself the political goal; that is, one can go further than seeing identity as just motivating or directing one's politics, and instead see the assertion or preservation of a subordinate identity as itself exhaustively comprising one's political action, and thus fail to see there being anything more to politics. Under this understanding, it is common to hear the "who are my people?" question as exclusively a question of identity (as opposed to a question about one's political commitments), and indeed, even as a question exclusively about social identity, it is a complicated and interesting question, one which for many people cannot be easily answered. But the question of what one's identity is can be a problematic or complicated question without necessarily being a self-consciously political question. One can hear the "who are my people?" question as a difficult question of identity without addressing it as necessarily politically motivated. An example that comes to mind is the recent attention given to the complicated identities of mixed race people. Many treatments of this topic focus primarily on the psychological difficulties involved in negotiating identity, rather than on the political implications of and motivations behind various possible identities or identifications.[55] Similarly, recent literature on the children of Holocaust survivors tends to focus on the

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[55]See, for instance, many of the essays in the collection edited by Maria P. P. Root, Racially Mixed People in America. Other essays in this same collection do focus on the political questions.

psychological aspects of this status rather than asking: what are the moral/political implications or imperatives for survivors of a genocide?[56]

I am suggesting that one not investigate identity solely in order to sort out the givens of who one is, but rather in order to also ask, politically speaking, what about who one is or whom one could change one's identity to be? In this way, one can hear the "who are my people?" question as a question about politics that may or may not be answerable in terms of what one considers to be the givens of one's identity. Insisting that one ask the question as a political question guards against getting stuck in identity as an end in itself. In emphasizing that it is not enough to stop at the recognition and affirmation of identity, June Jordan asks, "What is the purpose of your identity?" (qtd. in Parmar, 111, my emphasis). She illustrates the difference between on the one hand hearing the "who are my people?" question as a question about identity and on the other hand hearing it as a question about politics; in this second case, identity can be shown to be relevant only by saying what the purpose (i.e. political purpose) of one's identity is. Jordan says in an interview with Pratibha Parmar:

> Almost every year black students at Stonybrook where I teach, come around to say to me that they want to hold a meeting and I say yes, and I ask what's it about. They say unity and I say unity for what? I am already black and you are black so we unify okay but I don't need to meet with you about that. When we get together, what's the purpose of that, what do you want to do? I don't need to sit in a room with other people who are black to know that I am black--that's not unity. Unity has to have some purpose to it otherwise we are not talking politics. (qtd. in Parmar, 111)

While it is important to note that identity is not always as much of a given as June Jordan takes it to be here--for instance, for many mixed race people or for people who have grown up assimilated, claims like the one that "I am already black and you are black. . ." are too problematic to be given as obvious--her point is well taken that questions about identity do

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[56]See, for instance, Helen Epstein, Children of the Holocaust or Dina Wardi, Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust.

not in themselves amount to questions about politics. One can ask identity questions without any political intention (although one might also say that any question about identity is a political question, even if not intended as such). My aim here is to ask the political question: what are the politics of answering the "who are my people?" question in this particular way rather than that particular way, with reference to this particular identity rather than that particular identity? The claim that there are political decisions to be made in answering the "who are my people?" question suggests that identities are not only not givens, but that their reconstruction can be motivated and guided by political considerations.

A similar objection to political questions' dissolving into questions of identity is expressed by Jenny Bourne. She begins her essay "Homelands of the Mind: Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics" with the assertion: "Identity Politics is all the rage. Exploitation is out (it is extrinsically determinist). Oppression is in (it is intrinsically personal). What is to be done has been replaced by who I am. Political culture has ceded to cultural politics" (1). It is not that she thinks there is or can be no tie between identity and politics, but rather that political considerations (and she is primarily concerned with economic exploitation as the political problem) must guide the conscious making and remaking of our identities; identity is not an end in itself. Bourne argues: "The question that needs to be asked is not what constitutes our identity, but what is identity for?" noting that identity must have "a purpose over and above its own definition and preservation" (21).

I am sympathetic to Bourne's proposed line of questioning here, but I would like to suggest a complication which arises for me because I do not share her belief that all oppression should be analyzed through the concept of exploitation.[57] As I will argue later, enforced assimilation is itself a form that oppression takes, and the resistance to this oppression through the assertion of a threatened identity is a political act. What Bourne

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[57]See, for instance, Iris Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" in Justice and the Politics of Difference.

objects to--and here I agree with her--is the stopping with this act as a final end, as if it were the only form of political resistance to engage in. With her focus on exploitation, however, it is not even clear that she recognizes resistance to assimilation as a political act itself, but in any case, her point remains that political action does not end here; identity is not just an end. Furthermore, given what a problematic task it is to know what is involved in asserting any identity, there are political questions to ask about how identity is to be lived even for the seemingly clear purpose of resisting assimilation. For instance, Bourne is wary of Jews fetishizing Yiddish and notes that "all such searches for identity will end up on the side of recreating 'who we no longer are'"(21) rather than creating an identity which makes sense in our own historical and political context.

Thus even when asking what the purpose is of identity, it is not necessary to answer that assertion of identity has no political purpose. Bourne writes that "Identity politics regards the discovery of identity as its supreme goal. . . the mistake is to view identity as an end rather than as a means" (22). An open question, then, is how can identity serve as a means to political struggles that aim at ending oppression, and how can any embracing of identity itself avoid recreating or creating in different ways elements of oppression which produce beings who are marginalized, fractionalized,[58] or fragmented?[59]

Bourne ends with a suggested direction to take this questioning. She writes: "Identity is not merely a precursor to action, it is also created through action. . . We can only learn and confirm our identity. . . through our actions. *What we do is who we are*" (22, emphasis in the original). I am going to hold this reminder in mind as I go on to look at descriptions and justifications of identity politics that have been offered, to read these accounts through the recognition that identity can be a starting point ("a precursor to

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[58]This term was used in this context in the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" in 1977.

[59]María Lugones uses this term: "Fragmented: in fragments, pieces, parts that do not fit well together, parts taken for wholes, composite, composed of the parts of other beings, composed of imagined parts, composed of parts produced by a splitting imagination, composed of parts produced by subordinates enacting their dominators' fantasies" ("Purity" 463).

action") and can be remade through collective action where the remaking is understood with political purpose.

## E. The Social Construction of Identity and the Question of Essentialism

Claims about the connection between identity and politics could begin either with the assumption that identities are naturally given or with the assumption that they are socially constructed. While some strains of identity politics have, purposely or not, relied upon claims about the naturalness of certain features of identity, any consideration of how identity might be reconstructed through political practice must take identity to be open to social construction. Before turning to see how it is argued that identities are socially constructed, I will look briefly at versions of identity politics that make the contrary assumption.

Linda Alcoff, in "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis In Feminist Theory," describes cultural feminism (which I count as one version of identity politics) as "the ideology of a female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to revalidate undervalued female attributes" (408). She sites the work of Mary Daly and the early work of Adrienne Rich as examples of such theory.[60] She summarizes Daly by writing, "Female energy, conceived by Daly as a natural essence, needs to be freed from its male parasites, released for creative expression and recharged through bonding with other women. In this free space women's 'natural' attributes of love, creativity, and the ability to nurture can thrive" (408-409). For Daly, the natural attributes of women--that is, those constitutive of their femaleness--are their essential attributes, and all other attributes such as their race, ethnicity, and so on, are "male defined differences" (Daly, 365, qtd. in Alcoff, 409), and are, as Alcoff notes, "apparent rather than real, inessential rather than essential" (409). Daly, Alcoff argues, bases her claims

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[60]Alcoff draws on Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology and Adrienne Rich's On Lies, Secrets, and Silence and Of Woman Born. She also notes that in "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" in Blood, Bread and Poetry, Rich departs from her earlier position.

about what women's politics should be on their given female nature: "Our essence is defined, here, in our sex, from which flow all the facts about us: who are our potential allies, who is our enemy, what are our objective interests, what is our true nature" (409). Alcoff also notes that Adrienne Rich bases her arguments on the claim that women's biological characteristics can be the basis for their liberation; Rich writes that women must "come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. . . We must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order. . ." (Rich, Of Woman... 21, qtd. in Alcoff, 409). Thus Rich also "identifies a female essence, defines patriarchy as the subjugation and colonization of this essence out of male envy and need, and then promotes a solution that revolves around rediscovering our essence and bonding with other women" (Alcoff, 410).

I want to note a few things about such theories which take identity to be based on a naturally given essence. First of all, such theories are ahistorical in the sense that they do not recognize the ways in which different women are constructed differently depending on their social and historical contexts; even in the face of evidence that women often experience their differences from each other as more salient than their commonalities, still a biologically based shared characteristic is maintained to be what is essential precisely because it is seen as timeless. However, such shared biological characteristics are not timeless; this becomes clear once we recognize that the interpretation of female biology is different during different historical periods, as well as across cultures and across other defining group differences. Whether a woman's biology places her as a mother, a virgin, a deviant, a whore, and so on, for instance, has everything to do with her other features of identity such as her race and her class. To name women's shared "physicality" as a common essence, then, ignores the fact that biology itself is always socially interpreted and constructed.

Secondly, to give an account of women's identity as based on an essential and naturally given characteristic and to argue that women should privilege this identity is

harmful to those whose experience it discounts; for instance, it discounts the experience of women of color who are told that their racial identities are inessential to who they are and to what their political commitments should be.

Thirdly, to see identities as naturally given is to severely limit the questions one can ask about what one's politics should be. That is, one's political possibilities are limited to asking how one should redefine or revalue what has already been given (for instance, women's innate abilities to nurture, to be peaceful, etc.); one cannot ask how one should re<u>make</u> one's identity through practice. Furthermore, it does not make sense to ask with <u>whom</u> one should engage in politics, since, as Alcoff noted, "who are our potential allies, who is our enemy, what are our objective interests" (409) and so on are all given by our natures.

It may appear that the recognition that identities are socially constructed rather than naturally given will provide a way for identity politics to avoid the problem of essentialism and the corresponding problem of privileging only some people's identities. However, this is not necessarily so. Even if identities are constructed, they can be described as constructed with essences: a theorist who argues that identities are socially constructed might argue that one can be constructed <u>as</u> simply a woman, or <u>as</u> simply a Black person, and so on. Constructionist language reveals essentialism in its use of terms like "woman" to describe beings who have all been <u>socially constructed</u> with a shared characteristic (or "essence," to insist upon this extended use of the word) which legitimizes the use of the categorical term.

That constructionism is or can be really just another form of essentialism is the focus of Diana Fuss' argument in <u>Essentially Speaking</u>. She argues that essentialism "is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (*xi*); essentialism is "classically defined as a belief in true essence--that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (2). As an example of such

essentialism in feminist theory, Fuss notes that "essentialism can be located in appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order" (2). This "classical" understanding of essentialism, then, captures the sense in which theories such as those of Daly and Rich, as described above, count as essentialist.

Fuss, however, argues that there is "no essence to essentialism, that (historically, philosophically, and politically) we can only speak of *essentialisms*" (*xii*) and that, in fact, constructionism (which she defines as "the position that differences are constructed, not innate" [*xii*]) employs another form of essentialism. She is thus challenging and expanding what she has called the "classical" understanding of what essentialism is. She points out the ways in which constructionists employ a different sort of essentialism. For instance:

> While a constructionist might recognize that 'man' and 'woman' are produced across a spectrum of discourses, the categories 'man' and 'woman' still remain constant. Some minimal point of commonality and continuity necessitates at least the linguistic retention of these particular terms. (4)

The constructionist might use categorical terms in the plural (e.g. "women" rather than "woman") to indicate that there is no single or unitary way in which members of the category are constructed transhistorically, but even the use of the plural term, "though conceptually signaling heterogeneity nonetheless semantically marks a collectivity; constructed or not, 'women' still occupies the space of linguistic unity" (4). Specifying sub-categories of "woman"--for instance, using separate categories for women described differently in terms of race and class and historical period, and so on--does not avoid essentialism either, for "it succeeds only in fragmenting the subject into multiple identities, each with its own self-contained, self-referential essence" (20).

To do this fragmenting into separate essential identities employs what Elizabeth Spelman calls the "additive analysis" of identity and of oppression; each separate identity that gets added on has its own essence. Recognition that identities are socially constructed,

then, even when the process of social construction is understood in terms of multiple systems such as racial systems and gender systems, can coexist with an understanding of identity as based upon an essence or a conjunction of essences. And, simply the recognition that identities are socially constructed rather than naturally given does not necessarily avoid the harms of essentialism such as the marginalization of the experience of certain people. For instance, an identity as a "Black woman," might be understood, under the additive analysis, to consist of an identity as "Black" (defined by an essence of Blackness, likely to be based on a male norm) added onto an identity as "woman" (defined by an essence of womanness, likely to be based on a white norm). Whether the understanding of what it is to be Black and the understanding of what it is to be a woman are based on the assumption that these identities are given naturally or are based on the assumption that they are socially constructed, the identities are still understood to contain essences, and the essence is extracted from the experience of whoever is the "norm" of the category (i.e. Black men, or white women), thus excluding or marginalizing, for instance, Black women, or fractionalizing them into having two separate identities neither of which describe them properly. Thus as Fuss argues, recognizing that identities are socially constructed has not solved this particular problem of essentialism.

Indeed, Fuss' argument that there is an essentialism employed in constructionist accounts of identity seems to be confirmed by the fact that feminist critiques of essentialism in feminist theory often focus on feminist theorists who assume a social construction of identity. One clear example of this is Elizabeth Spelman's Inessential Woman which critiques feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Chodorow for their essentialist uses of the term "woman." De Beauvoir obviously rejects all claims about natural essences; with her important claim that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (249), she clearly recognizes that women are socially constructed or conditioned creatures, that is, constructed or conditioned as women. Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering is an investigation into the psychological aspects of how

females are socially constituted or genderized (within a context in which women do the mothering) to be women. Neither of these constructionist accounts of identity are able to avoid describing women's construction to be a construction as women, as people who share a particular essence, though de Beauvoir would clearly deny that there is any essence to the condition of women.

If it is true that the move from seeing identities as naturally given to seeing identities as socially constructed does not avoid essentialism and its attendant harms, then there must be further questions to ask about identity even for those proponents of identity politics who see identities as socially constructed. Fuss suggests that "the question we should be asking is not 'is this text essentialist (and therefore 'bad')?' but rather, 'if this text is essentialist, *what motivates its deployment*?'" (*xi*). Her point is that we should focus on whether an essentialist discourse is strategically smart--whether it is worth the "risk."[61] To put this differently, I would like to suggest that in examining versions of identity politics which take identities to be socially constituted, one should focus on considering whether or not the particular link between identity and politics which is posited is one that furthers the oppression of the very people whom it purports to liberate. Critiques of essentialism may be helpful in this respect because they point to some of the ways in which oppression is perpetuated (for instance, through fragmentation) by some versions of identity politics; however, the focus should be not on determining if, under some account of what "essentialism" is, identity politics is essentialist, but rather on determining whether oppression is being resisted or perpetuated.

Meanwhile, although an identity politics that assumes the social construction of identity may share with other 'nature' or biologically based identity politics the dangers of seeing identities as separable, and so on, there is an important difference: the recognition that identity is a matter of social constitution can (although does not necessarily) allow one to claim that identity can be re-constituted through changed practice. If this is so, then there

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[61]Of course, the immediate question is: worth the risk to whom?

is the possibility of remaking our identities and our political practices so as to avoid the harms imbedded in essentialist constructions of identity and their corresponding politics. Even so, as I have suggested, recognizing identity as something which is constituted in community does not necessitate seeing the possibility for change, including the possibility for embracing hybrid identities. Traditional communitarianism stands as an example of a way of understanding identities as socially constructed without thereby being able to understand identities as formed in complex or hybrid ways, and without raising questions about the possible reconstruction of identity.

Even if, as Fuss argued, the recognition that identities are socially constructed rather than naturally given does not automatically solve the problem of essentialism and its resultant imperative to base one's political sense of who "one's people" are on one's identity, what it does allow is the possibility of reconstructing identities, and of attempting to do this in a way that does not duplicate the problems I have pointed out. Any identity politics that is based on the belief that identities are given naturally through, for instance, a female essence, does not even offer this possibility, for as Aristotle asserts, "nothing that is what it is by nature can be made to behave differently by habituation" (NE 1103a18-20). To recognize that identities are socially constructed is to know they are changeable through re-habituation, even if the change is not simple or easy. As Marilyn Frye argues:

> The hope and possibility of profound change for women on this planet lies precisely in the fact that our being is *only* historically determined. . . and not given in nature. For then it is a contingent fact that I am who and how I am, and thus it *could* be otherwise, I could be otherwise. That is precisely the logical space needed to make it thinkable to assume responsibility for changing history (and our selves). ("History" 302-303)

Identity is formed through all social practice. If one pays attention to the political questions about identity (e.g. "what is the purpose of your identity?"), then one's political understandings can inform the practices through which one's identities continually are developing. That is, it is not simply that one's identities, as given, are what dictate what

one's politics should be (as some identity politics imply); rather, one's identities are themselves also formed through politics, since our political practice is itself an arena of (re)habituation, or re-constitution of identity.

* * *

I have argued in this chapter that group identity can be valorized either for its own sake or for its potential tie to politics. The communitarian account of the self can be taken to simply be a descriptive account: the self <u>is</u> socially constituted. Political motivations lead me to want more than this descriptive account: not only <u>is</u> the self socially constituted, but furthermore it is good to embrace the social constitution of the self for this allows one to take (collective) responsibility for this moral constitution. Thus I am urging that one go beyond a valorization of group identity just for its own sake; I am suggesting that there be a political thinking about how the self can and should be constituted through the creation and sustenance of different social contexts or communities. Identity politics can politicize group identity in this way. Because of this potential in identity politics, I will turn in the next chapter to an examination of the trajectory that identity politics has taken, and suggest a direction for its movement.

# CHAPTER V

# THE PATH OF IDENTITY POLITICS: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

> Humanity in the form of fraternity invariably appears historically among persecuted peoples and enslaved groups. . . . In this as it were organically evolved humanity it is as if under the pressure of persecution the persecuted have moved so closely together that the interspace which we have called world (and which of course existed between them before the persecution, keeping them at a distance from one another) has simply disappeared.
>
> The humanity of the insulted and injured has never yet survived the hour of liberation by so much as a minute. This does not mean that it is insignificant, for in fact it makes insult and injury endurable; but it does mean that in political terms it is absolutely irrelevant.
>
> --Hannah Arendt

> [P]artnership in misery does not necessarily provide for partnership for change: *When we get the monsters off our backs all of us may want to run in very different directions.*
>
> --June Jordan

## A. Introduction

This chapter will be an examination of the ways in which identity politics have inherited both the virtues and the problems of traditional communitarian theory, and an exploration of a possible politics of identity that rejects those tenants of communitarianism that are problematic. In moving to sketch the path of identity politics, I will keep centrally in mind the questions that I raised in the previous chapter of whether different versions of such politics allow one to ask questions about the parameters of group identity. While I think that communitarian theory must be revised to enable it to countenance the heterogeneity within constitutive communities, along similar lines I believe that such a revision must take place within identity politics. I will argue that identity politics--at least in some of its various guises--is characterized by a problem similar to a problem present in

communitarian theory: it requires that the collectivities that form one's self identity be conceptualized in such a way that hybridity cannot itself be countenanced as an identity or as a mode of conceiving of identity; rather, the identity exists as a unity. I will follow a line of questioning suggested in the work of María Lugones, a questioning that leads to a critique of identity politics in both its separatist and some of its coalitionist guises, without abandoning the possibility of a politics of group identity.[62]

The connection between identity and politics has been described differently by different "branches" of identity politics, and so I turn now to look at some of the different accounts of identity politics that have been formulated. The Combahee River Collective originally formulated an account of "identity politics" in "A Black Feminist Statement" from 1977 where they write:

> Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. . . .We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.
>
> This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. (212)

Their references to recognizing their own specific oppression comes out of their assertion that they "often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (213). They are also working

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[62]It is not just the critiques of specific theorists--for instance, Sarah Hoagland and Iris Young--which are informed in this chapter by Lugones' work, but more generally the direction of my thinking in this chapter has been inspired by her work, particularly "Purity, Impurity and Separation."

from the recognition that "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (210). Thus, the specific oppression to which they refer is constituted by the interlocking of these inseparable and simultaneous forces.

While they focus on this specific oppression, they also "feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand" (213). They go on to make more sense of their claim that they should focus on their own oppression rather than that of others by asserting that ending their own oppression would entail ending all others' oppression: "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (215). That is, they take it that because they experience (simultaneously, and as interlocked) sexism, racism, economic oppression and heterosexism, fighting against their own oppression involves destroying all of these major systems of oppression and thus involves ending the oppression of all others who experience any of these forms of oppression.[63]

The Combahee River Collective's emphasis on identity politics as requiring the recognition of the interlocking of oppressions is important to remember since, in popular usage, "identity politics" often refers to a politics that utterly fails to take into account more than one supposedly distinct form of oppression at a time. As Barbara Smith reflects:

> The concept of identity politics has been extremely useful in the development of Third World feminism. It has undoubtedly been most clarifying and catalytic when individuals do in fact have a combination of non-mainstream identities as a result of their race, class, ethnicity, sex, and sexuality; when these identities make them direct targets of oppression; and when they use their experiences of oppression as a spur for activist political work. (Yours In Struggle 84)

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[63]The reasoning here is problematic to me, as I am skeptical that focusing exclusively on the intersection of oppressions which Black women experience amounts to fighting everyone's oppression. The claim that Black women are affected by every major system of oppression--sexism, racism, economic oppression, etc.--may be true but because these systems of oppression operate in a variety of ways on, say, people who are racialized in different ways, fighting the particular oppressions which affect Black women will not necessarily address the particular forms of oppression which affect, say, Latinas.

She contrasts this version of identity politics (of which the Combahee River Collective stands as an example) with lesbian separatism and cultural feminism, which she refers to as more limited versions of identity politics, noting that "these approaches to dealing with being social-cultural outsiders only work when the more stringent realities of class and race are either not operative (because everyone involved is white and middle-class) or when these material realities are ignored or even forcibly denied" (84).

Thus another possible formulation of identity politics is one that posits one feature of identity as most essential or at least most salient, and advocates organization around this one identity, with other identities being subordinated. There can be vast differences within this formulation of identity politics, for there are a wide variety of ways in which one might argue that one feature of identity is more primary than others. For instance, as Linda Alcoff pointed out, Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich (in her early work) take women's identities as women to be prior to their racial identities, and their arguments are based on an understanding of a "female essence" that is naturally given. Or, one might argue that a particular system of oppression is the cause of other forms of oppression: Marxist theories posit economic bases for other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism; some feminist theories such as Daly's posit patriarchy as the model for racism. Cultural feminism is built upon the notion that women share something essential in common--a women's culture--and that women's "other" cultural ties are less central in the determination of their identity or position in society. Commenting on the rise of cultural feminism, Alice Echols writes, "cultural feminism with its insistence upon women's essential sameness to each other and their fundamental difference from men seemed to many a way to unify a movement that by 1973 was highly schismatic" (244). She sites "The Fourth World Manifesto" as one example of cultural feminism's subordination of women's differences from each other to their commonality; this "Manifesto" states:

> A woman's class is almost always determined by the man she is living with. . . . class is therefore basically a distinction between males, while the female

> is defined by her sexual caste status. . . . As the Female Liberation Movement must cut across all (male-imposed) class, race and national lines, any false identification of women with privileges that are really male (such as whiteness or class, etc.) will be fatal to our Movement. ("Manifesto" 331, qtd. in Echols, 246)

Whether the rationale behind women's unity is derived from assumptions about biology, from the claim that one form of oppression causes others, or from the belief that race, class and so on do not really constitute a woman's identity in the way her sex or gender does, the form of identity politics that emerges from these assumptions calls for women to see themselves as essentially women and to deny or downplay the importance of their racial, ethnic or class identities. Furthermore, when identity politics takes the form of cultural feminism, it is the embracing of female identity itself that is seen as the political goal; this is the route that Jenny Bourne warns against, as I noted in the previous chapter. One is prevented from asking the question of what the political purpose of identity is, beyond a valorization of the identity itself.

### B. Separatist Identity Politics

If different forms of oppression are seen as isolated and stratified, one is left with an identity politics that calls for an erasure of the non-primary elements of identity. While a "crude" version of such identity politics might explicitly state that one feature of identity is more primary than another, other more careful theories recognize that any one person may experience several oppressions and yet by advocating that separation take place along one line of identity (e.g. gender identity) and that other forms of oppression be fought within the separatist community, one form of oppression is still being privileged, and oppressions are therefore being seen as conceptually separable. It is worth looking closely at this sort of identity politics to see how it is a departure from the sort of identity politics described by the Combahee River Collective. As an example, I will look here at Sarah Hoagland's version of lesbian separatism.

Hoagland stands as an interesting example of someone whose identity politics is explicitly communitarian and could thus potentially recognize and respond to the fact that people have multiple communitarian sources of identity. Hoagland's description of the self, much like Roberto Unger's, emphasizes both collectivity and individuation; she rejects the idea that individuals are autonomous, but maintains that while engaging in community with others, the self emerges as unique. She calls this self "autokoenonous":

> I mean to invoke a self who is both separate and connected. So I create a word for what I mean : 'autokoenony' (ô´ to ken o ´ ne) which I take from the greek 'auto' ("self") and 'koenonia' ("community, or any group whose members have something in common"). What I mean by 'autokoenony' is "the self in community." The self in community involves each of us making choices; it involves each of us having a self-conscious sense of ourselves as moral agents in a community of other self-conscious moral agents. (145)

Hoagland is focused on the question of how lesbians can re-constitute themselves in lesbian community, a community that exists within a context of oppression that affects what our moral possibilities are. She recognizes how we have been socially constituted within what she calls heterosexualist contexts, but she is interested in resisting the ways in which these contexts have constituted us as valuing relations of dominance and subordination.

For Hoagland, then, separation is motivated by the possibility of creating new values, values not based on dominance and subordination, in a lesbian context that exists apart from heterosexualism, where heterosexualism is "a way of living that normalizes the dominance of one person and the subordination of another" (7). She argues that lesbian separation from heterosexualism is "a legitimate moral and political choice," for "to engage in a situation or a system in order to try to change it is one choice. To withdraw from it, particularly in order to render it meaningless, is another choice" (55). Hoagland's argument turns on the claim that by refusing to be a part of the heterosexualist system--that is, by refusing to be a member of the category 'woman'--and by defining oneself as

'lesbian', one can open up the possibility of being morally re-habituated in a context in which one is not subordinate. Not only does the heterosexualist system from which lesbians separate thereby become meaningless, but within lesbian community there is the possibility of creating new value, new meaning, for "the conceptual category 'lesbian'--unlike the category 'woman'--is not irretrievably tied up with dominance and subordination as norms of behavior" (68).

While Hoagland's recognition of the social construction (and potential re-construction) of the self is central to her thesis that we can change our moral identities within lesbian community, and while she argues that it is only among other lesbians that a lesbian can do this, Hoagland does not apply her vision of how the self is constituted only in community to think about what sort of communities lesbians' racial, ethnic, or class identities are constituted within. That is, while it is clear to her that as a lesbian, a lesbian can only re-constitute herself with liberatory values as an autokoenonous being in lesbian community, she does not problematize the act of speaking of someone as a lesbian without meanwhile speaking of that person as someone with a particular, say, racial identity; to do so would raise the complicated question of where this self could be autokoenonous as someone with a complex identity.

Thus a separatist version of identity politics can view multiple oppressions as affecting one person, and yet still imply that one feature of identity should be privileged by arguing that separation take place along one line of identity. Spelman's critique of how essentialism imbeds itself in such feminist theory is useful for seeing how this isolating and privileging of gender takes place. Spelman critiques the "additive analysis" of oppression, arguing that this analysis assumes that different oppressions--for instance, sexism and racism--are separable, and that when two or more forms of oppression are experienced by one person, these oppressions add on to each other without mixing. According to the additive analysis, then, those who experience "both sexism and racism" experience just

that: sexism and racism, not a specific form of oppression that is the result of some particular mixing, or interaction, of sexist and racist forces. As Spelman comments:

> It is highly misleading to say, without further explanation, that Black women experience "sexism and racism." For to say merely that suggests that Black women experience one form of oppression, as Blacks (the same thing Black men experience) and that they experience another form of oppression, as women (the same thing white women experience). (122)

The additive analysis claims that although we may each experience other forms of oppression, what women have in common as women is that we all experience sexism, and, by implication, should unite in order to resist this shared oppression. A lesbian separatist theory such as Hoagland's can recognize that some women experience racism, but not notice that the heterosexualism that a woman of color experiences differs from the heterosexualism that a white/anglo woman may experience. Heterosexualism is never just "a matter of men (or the masculine) dominating women (or the feminine)" (8) as Hoagland says it is, but rather it is always a matter of racialized men dominating (and/or, depending on the racial relation, being subordinate to) racialized women.

Rejecting the additive analysis of oppression, Spelman argues that we must think of gender, race, and class identities as mixing in such a way that they are partly constitutive of each other. So for any individual woman, that woman's gender is partly determined by what her race and class are. If this is true, then it is not the case that there are only two genders in the world and it does not make sense to speak of all women as sharing a gender identity. In considering this point, Spelman looks at Nancy Chodorow's work on the development of gender identity. Chodorow describes the process by which female humans are turned into gendered beings--girls, and then women. Spelman argues that Chodorow needs to go further than to just claim that females are turned into girls and women; in fact, all females are turned into particular girls and women. She notes, ". . . it does not seem accurate to describe what my mother nurtured in me, and what I learned, as being simply a 'girl.' I was learning to be a white, middle-class, Christian and 'American' girl" (85).

Similarly, we might ask of Hoagland: is a female turned into a woman under heterosexualism, or into a particular sort of a woman? When Hoagland claims that "'woman' exists only in relation to 'man' (someone who dominates), and as long as this identity holds, male domination of women will appear socially desirable and, even, natural" (7) she is seeing that heterosexualism creates 'women,' but not that heterosexualism creates particular women--for instance, women who are racialized in a particular way.

Responding to the claim that all women have gender identity in common, Spelman writes: "But do we have gender identity in common? In one sense, of course, yes: all women are women. But in another sense, no: not if gender is a social construction and females become not simply women but particular kinds of women" (113). If there is a sense in which women do not share a gender identity--that is, if 'woman' describes not one but many genders--then it does not make sense to base feminist politics on what we have in common, for there is a sense in which women do not even have gender in common.[64] In light of this, strategies such as separatism cannot argue that all women should separate from all men without making the false assumption that a woman's gender identity distinguishes her from all men and only from men, for there are many genders of women and many genders of men. Separatist strategies thus fail to acknowledge these complicated gender divisions. Furthermore, lesbian separatist strategies also fail to acknowledge (as significant for strategies of resistance) divisions that do not run along lines of gender at all. Separatist politics which simply suggest the separation of all women from all men aim at altering the power relations between what Spelman calls the "generic woman" and the "generic man," beings who, like the unencumbered self of liberalism, in fact do not exist. While there are certainly many different versions of lesbian separatism,[65] it has, in fact, generally been understood to involve some such separation of women from men.[66]

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[64]Even retaining the term 'gender' (e.g. in statements like, "she is genderized as a middle class Asian-American . . . [etc.] woman") to refer to an identity which is partly constituted by race and class factors may be problematic; it may seem to privilege gender over race or class.

[65]See, for instance, For Lesbians Only : A Separatist Anthology, eds. Hoagland and Penelope.

[66]For instance, Marilyn Frye defines separatism in "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" as "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities

Ann Ferguson proposes the term "racial gender" as a way of indicating that gender formations and racial formations interact and change one another. She does not argue that women do not have "gender" in common, but rather that women do not all have racial gender in common. Such a claim still calls an identity politics based on gender into question. She writes: "The disparity between the gender norms for the dominant and subordinate races and ethnic groups of a particular social formation account for differences in personal identities that make identity politics based on a common sense of gender difficult" ("Racial Formation" 114). She meanwhile maintains that there are some transhistorical features of gender, and that women might come together across other differences based on these features. For Ferguson, the concept of racial gender explains motivations both for antagonisms and for coalitions between groups of women:

> [T]o say personal identities involve racial genders is to say that there are economic, political, and cultural practices through which race identities and gender identities get defined. Further, in some of these practices white women and women of color are defined differently as women because of their race, which may set up a political antagonism. In other practices, women are defined similarly as women in spite of their race. ("Racial Formation" 116)

Without the concept of racial gender, Hoagland's claim that the term 'lesbian'--unlike 'woman'--is not "irretrievably tied up with dominance and subordination" (68) indicates that the lesbian she has in mind is indeed the generic lesbian. While Hoagland attempts to see lesbian subjects as non-generic--that is, as racialized, constituted with class and ethnic identities, and so on, her attempts to recognize the complexity of identity are undermined by her failure to see the necessity of multiple communities for the complex subject.[67] It is only if the category 'lesbian' describes generic lesbians that the category escapes systemic links to dominance and subordination; if all members of the category

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which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege--this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women" (The Politics of Reality, 97).

[67]In fact she is careful to consistently note the race and class, etc., identities of any lesbian she is discussing whenever these identities are relevant, and in this way is always aware of non-generic subjects.

'lesbian' are racialized members, for instance, then once again the category 'lesbian' must be seen as tied to relations of dominance and subordination, for just as the system of heterosexualism creates of males and females dominant men and subordinate women, the racial state racializes subjects as dominant and/or subordinate. Those who reject as illusory the generic lesbian cannot say that it is separation from the system of heterosexualism that frees us from all systemically created and enforced relations of dominance and subordination; it is important to also see, for instance, that to be racialized is to have identities constituted as tied to a system of dominance and subordination. If all lesbians are racialized lesbians, then the category 'lesbian' is tied to dominance and subordination.

The generic woman and the generic man (or the generic lesbian) could be described as similar in one aspect to the unencumbered self; that is, they are encumbered with a gender identity but not encumbered with identities tied to the race, ethnic and class communities to which they belong. Thus the recognition of gender as a form of social construction--that is, as the system that makes women of females and men of males--can take place without the recognition of other systems of social construction of identity, or without recognition that many systems of group difference act together and inseparably to socially constitute any one person's identity. In this way, even a communitarian-based theory such as Hoagland's offers a limited recognition of how the self is "encumbered."

Hoagland's separatism certainly tries to recognize and address multiple systems of oppression, but her insistence that all forms of oppression be addressed within a lesbian separatist community mistakenly assumes that heterosexualism is most salient in determining whom an individual woman has her most significant ties of identity--and thus of politics--with. For instance, she does not advocate separation for women of color along racial lines or suggest that within racially separatist communities, women could address heterosexualism. Her positing of heterosexualism as the form that dominance and subordination takes and her argument that heterosexualism can be fought by women's evacuating all heterosexualist contexts (contexts that construct them as women, that is, as

subordinates to men, rather than as lesbians) misses the simultaneous primacy of racism, for instance, in some women's lives and the racial state as constituting us as dominant and/or subordinate beings. Hoagland attempts to avoid calling for fractionalization by arguing that in fact racism can be fought within the lesbian community and thus that no woman has to choose to ignore her racial identity or to feel the split loyalties that result in fractionalization. And yet this argument ignores what many women of color have pointed out: that resistance to racial oppression comes out of the communities of color in which racial solidarity exists. The Combahee River Collective, for instance, asserts that they "feel solidarity with progressive Black men," noting that "our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race" (213). Along similar lines, bell hooks writes:

> There is a special tie binding people together who struggle collectively for liberation. Black women and men have been united by such ties. They have known the experience of political solidarity. It is the experience of shared resistance struggle that led black women to reject the anti-male stance of some feminist activists. (From Margin 69)

María Lugones critiques Hoagland's version of separatism precisely because it requires her to leave the communities of color in which she can engage as a critical cultural participant, a necessary act of resistance to racial and cultural oppression because it is such critical participation that keeps subordinated cultures from becoming ossified under colonization. She writes, "I come to lesbian community with 'my culture on my back' [Anzaldúa, Borderlands 21] but this is not where I can struggle for the survival of hispana culture and life" ("*Hispaneando*" 142). She argues that it is necessary for herself (and for *Nuevomejicana* lesbians) to be able to engage in this struggle, for the culture needs critical participants in order to remain alive. She writes:

> *Nuevomejicana* lesbians cannot just leave the preservation of *la cultura* to other men and women, because *la cultura Nuevomejicana* (as all other Chicana and Latina cultures) needs to be both fortified and transformed or

> else we will carry dead cultures on our backs, we will be obsolete beings ("*Hispaneando*" 143).

As someone who is socially constituted in several communities, Lugones notes that she cannot be autokoenonous as a *hispana* lesbian in either heterosexualist *hispana* communities or in lesbian separatist communities. Separation along one line of difference ignores that the self is constituted in more than one community.

Recognizing identity as complex and as deriving from membership in multiple and intersecting communities points to the dangers of an identity politics that privileges one feature of identity by advocating forming communities based on one feature of identity and then engaging in all of one's politics within this community. Even when such identity politics recognizes the need to address, say, racism within a lesbian separatist community, there is a failure to recognize that communities constitute their members and members constitute their communities and that to separate from a community is to change how one is socially constituted; thus it is not enough to address racism within a lesbian community, for the separation of women of color from their communities of color represents a choice not to continue to be constituted within these communities, and not to critically participate in the continued shaping of these communities, the communities on which their identities are in part dependent. Lugones notes that it is lesbians of color who are most aware of the harms of having to leave their communities of origin. She writes,

> [W]e have left our kin and, in a significant sense, our people in communities that will not recognize us as fully their own as lesbians. I do not know if anglo lesbians have this sense, but they do not *express* it frequently. Hispana lesbians express constantly an ambivalent attachment to *lo nuestro*.("*Hispaneando*" 141)

In fact, Jewish women also frequently express a similar sentiment. Rima Shore writes:

> As the politics of identity play an increasing role in our community, I find myself baffled at conflicting claims on my loyalty. We are being urged, and urging each other, to acknowledge and to reclaim the cultures from which

> we have emerged. . . . Am I to value the culture from which my family came, while dismissing the family itself? Do I seek to identify with Jews in the abstract, but not with the brothers I have loved all my life? (Shore, 98-99, qtd. in Bulkin, 125).

If lesbian communities reflect a culture that derives from the dominant white/anglo culture, then white/anglo (gentile) women who form lesbian separatist communities do not quite leave the communities in which their cultural identities have been constituted in the way that members of non-dominant cultures do.

Thus recognizing that identities are socially constituted and that this takes place, for any one person, in a number of communities or along lines of multiple and intersecting group differences makes it evident that separation from communities in which one's self is partly constituted results in a lack of sustenance for the self that is so constituted; at times one certainly may want to refuse to sustain some of the ways in which one's self has been socially constituted and may purposefully separate from a community for this reason. But it is a mistake to think that one could maintain a desired identity (as a living, changing identity) apart from the community(ies) that sustain it. If meaning is made socially then one cannot carry one's culture on one's back all by oneself and expect the culture to continue to make new meanings. Thus, there are problems with any identity politics that, inadvertently or not, calls for the social sustenance of only one feature of identity (separable from the rest) by requiring one to leave the communities that make the continued social constitution of, for instance, one's racially or culturally defined self impossible.

## C. Multiple Communities

In response to the problem that I outlined above with separatist politics, it might be suggested that one could have multiple and yet separate communities, each of which is built on the commonality of one feature of identity. However, I believe that such a suggestion will not do. If it is unacceptable to have to leave some of the communities in which one's self is socially constituted, the suggested line of thinking goes, then let us maintain all of

our communities and yet keep the integrity of each community as defined along different lines of difference. This model of identity recognizes that the self is constituted as multiplicitous, and thus calls for multiple community or group identifications.

Such a model is proposed by Iris Young in her description of group difference within what she calls the "heterogeneous public." Rejecting the idea that the public is the arena in which differences are to be left behind in the formation of a unity, she suggests a public differentiated by social groups each of which has a distinct sense of identity; social groups that are oppressed are entitled to special forms of representation within the public, in order to counter the fact that the public, when conceived of as a locus of impartiality, excludes such oppressed groups or requires members of these groups to assimilate as a condition of participation. To give some examples of social groups who are to be specially represented in the heterogeneous public, Young writes that "clear candidates for group representation in policy-making in the United States are women, Blacks, American Indians, old people, poor people, disabled people, gay men and lesbians, Spanish-speaking Americans, young people, and non-professional workers" (Throwing 127-128). Participation in public decision-making, then, is a matter of group representation, carried out through caucuses based on social groups whose interests and perspectives would otherwise be ignored. Young writes that:

> Though its realization is far from assured, the ideal of a "Rainbow Coalition" expresses such a heterogeneous public with forms of group representation. . . . In a Rainbow Coalition. . . each of the constituent groups affirms the presence of the others and affirms the specificity of its experience and perspective on social issues. . . Ideally, a rainbow coalition affirms the presence and supports the claims of each of the oppressed groups or political movements constituting it, and it arrives at a political program not by voicing some "principles of unity" that hide differences but rather by allowing each constituency to analyze economic and social issues from the perspective of its experience. (Throwing 126-127)

Young's proposal serves to recognize both the fact of group difference (including its role in shaping the collectivities within which identities are constituted) and the necessity of taking concrete measures towards ending the dominance of some groups over others while not ending group differentiation itself.

But what goes on within each of the social groups or caucuses? Such a concern informs María Lugones' reading of Young's proposal. Lugones uses the concepts of "thickness" and "transparency" to describe the positions of members of social groups within their groups. She writes:

> Thickness and transparency are group relative. Individuals are transparent with respect to their group if they perceive their needs, interests, ways, as those of the group and if this perception becomes dominant or hegemonical in the group. Individuals are thick if they are aware of their otherness in the group, of their needs, interests, ways, being relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestation. ("Purity" 474)

So, for instance, within a group of women, women of color tend to be thick members; within a group of Latinas, Latina lesbians may be thick members, and so on. Lugones then considers what happens during Young's process of group representation to those people who are thick members of each of the social groups to which they belong. She argues that "we need a solution to the problem of walking from one of one's groups to another, being mistreated, misunderstood, engaging in self-abuse and self-betrayal for the sake of the group that only distorts our needs because they erase our complexity" ("Purity" 473). Having multiple and yet distinct group memberships results, Lugones argues, in fragmentation, as long as some members of each group are transparent while others are thick:

> Fragmentation occurs because one's interests, needs, ways of seeing and valuing things, persons, and relations are understood not as tied simply to group membership, but as the needs, interests, and ways of transparent members of the group. Thick members are erased. Thick members of

several oppressed groups become composites of the transparent members of those groups. As thick, they are marginalized through erasure, their voices nonsensical. ("Purity" 474)

While Young does not call for separation along only one line of identity, as lesbian separatists such as Hoagland do, what she does call for can be characterized as a series of temporary separations into distinct caucuses. Those who are thick members in each of these caucuses are fragmented as they move from group to group, erased in each separate group. The very problem that Young aims to solve by ensuring representation of oppressed social groups seems to be replicated within the social group: participation in the group requires assimilation to the hegemonic ways of transparent members; the unity that Young rejected as a desideratum for the polity resurfaces within the social group as the group articulates "its" concerns and positions. As a form of identity politics, Young's mechanisms for identity-based group representation still require the conceptual separability of "features" of one's identity; while the subject can be multiplicitous for Young--that is, one can belong to and be constituted within several different social groups--thick subjects are fragmented. As Lugones notes, Young "lacks a conception of a multiple subject who is not fragmented" ("Purity" 473).

* * *

In this context, a return to the Combahee River Collective's conceptualization of identity politics looks very appealing, for they are aiming to avoid this very problem of fractionalization while not abandoning the concept of collective identity. They insist upon their identities as Black women (they also alternately describe themselves as "Black feminists and lesbians"), and state that they cannot separate the features of their identity. They explicitly refuse to walk from one of their groups to another (such as from a Black caucus to a women's caucus), as thick members in each group, "being mistreated, misunderstood, engaging in self-abuse and self-betrayal for the sake of the group. . ." (Lugones, "Purity" 473); instead, they insist upon the group in which they see themselves as not being thick members, the group of Black women.

While I think that The Combahee River Collective is aiming to address the very problem of fractionalization which they name, I believe that their approach can be further complicated if one presses the question of whether there are still thick and transparent members in a group of Black women. The Combahee River Collective has addressed one of the ways in which complex identity can be distorted. That is, identities can be seen through the additive analysis; their identities could be seen as the identity of a (generic, but really male) Black person plus the identity of a (generic, but really white) woman, and so on. They have rejected this fractionalizing way of characterizing identity. They guard against being marginalized (as thick members) in the various wider groups in which they might be placed: among Black people, among women, among lesbians, and so on. However, they are still positing a unity <u>within</u> the identity they have named: the identity of Black women. This insistence upon unity can serve to systemically marginalize others who do not fit squarely within any such identity; to posit a unity of "Black women" may just set up another norm to contend with that marginalizes those within or on the borders of this group who do not quite fall into place: for instance, Black Latinas or other mixed-race women, Blacks who are gender-ambiguous, Black women who in some other way fall outside the defining or hegemonic features of the unity, whether by being urban, elderly, Caribbean, a gang-banger, rural, non-English-speaking, Southern, and so on. That is, despite the narrowing by the Combahee River Collective of their group to those identified as Black women, there may be more and more forms that thickness and transparency can take within such a group.

There are, then, at least two distinct ways in which essentialist constructions of identity are problematic for or harmful to those who are marginalized by these constructions (and one can experience both of these ways at once). The first is the problem of not fitting the norm of the separate, distinct lines of group difference from which one's "composite" identity is derived. Recognition of this problem leads the Combahee River Collective to focus on their own oppression <u>as Black women</u>. However, there is a second problem that

persists even when identity is characterized as free from this sort of fractionalization: the assumption of commonality of identity within a group such as Black women misses the indeterminacy, "impurity," hybridity, or *mestizaje* present within even such a precisely specified identity. It is not just that there are gender differences within a group defined along lines of race, for instance; there are also racial ambiguities or mixtures within Blackness, gender indeterminacy amongst those generally called women, and so on. Unity of group identity is not reached by specifying more narrow categories of identity, especially when the illusion of such unity is created by marginalizing those who will never be the ones defining the norm of the category. This is the marginalization faced by those who are gender ambiguous--"born in the wrong body"--and do not fit the two gender categories offered, as described for instance by Leslie Feinberg; it is the marginalization of the mixed race person, as Naomi Zack (among many others) describes, or the *Mischling* that Adrienne Rich writes about being in "Split At The Root"; it is the marginalization of the *mestizo* and the *mestiza*, terms used by Chicana/Latina/*mestiza* theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones and Linda Alcoff as they draw on the Latin American tradition of acknowledging the mixing of peoples into what José Vasconcelos named "*La Raza Cósmica*"; it is the marginalization of the hybrid, to use a term from Trinh T. Minh-ha's work; it is the marginalization of the assimilated who are not considered "authentic," and of the survivors or descendants of imperialism, whose subjectivity reflects the cultures both of the colonizer and the colonized, as described, for instance, by Edward Said.[68]

The Combahee River Collective's solid identity as Black women--or any other clearly defined category of identity--is not always available to those who are on the borders

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[68]See Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (Ithica, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1993); Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple U.P., 1993); Adrienne Rich, "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity" in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1986); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*; María Lugones, "Purity, Impurity and Separation"; Linda Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity" (unpublished paper, presented at the Eastern Division of the Society for Women In Philosophy at Binghamton University, April 1994); José Vasconcelos, "La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la Raza Iberoamericana" in *Obras Completas* (Mexico: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957-1961); Trinh T. Minh-ha, "From A Hybrid Place" in *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

of or who straddle the defining lines of difference of categories of identity. And yet, there is clearly a value to naming the collectivity of identity. Just because the lines of difference which would delineate categories of identity cannot be drawn clearly, nevertheless we are not, underneath it all, all the same as one another or only idiosyncratically different from one another; thus I want to hold on to Young's commitment not to ignore group difference or promote an undifferentiated, supposedly impartial public. I will return, then, to the question of how to have collectivity which does not define by a systemically exclusionary norm and marginalize the rest, how to name an identity which recognizes the sociality of experience and subjectivity without reducing that sociality to a circumscribed category. To ask the question using Lugones' terms, how can there be a collectivity within which there is no one who is a thick member, no one who is "relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestation" ("Purity" 474)?

## D. From Identity to Politics: Where Does the Hybrid Go?

Trinh T. Minh-ha comments that "'[i]dentity' has now become more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle" (Framer 140) and Linda Alcoff suggests that we understand the identity politics that the Combahee River Collective developed as indicating that "one's identity is taken (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action, and as a delineation of one's politics" ("Cultural Feminism..." 431-432). I think this is a positive interpretation of the political implications of the Combahee River Collective's formulation of identity politics, for it is one which focuses not on the marking off of categories which define the identity out of which work is done, but rather on the work to be done itself, and it takes the direction of this work to be open-ended, not decided *a priori* by the givens of one's identity; the work of politics is itself a source of the constitution of identity, a process through which identity changes. The sense of identity as a point of departure is echoed by June Jordan, who comments in an interview with Pratibha Parmar about "issue-oriented unity among different kinds of people, women, black people,

or black women" that "it may be enough to get started on something but I doubt very much whether it's enough to get anything finished" (qtd. in Parmar, 109-110).

Even so, it is not enough to say that identity is a point of departure, for the question remains: where, given a certain conception of identity, is one compelled to depart to, and what conception of identity leads one to depart to engage in a politics that does not erase hybridity? While I will return to this question momentarily, I first want to discuss briefly how particular assumptions about identity may lead to a politics that enables one to maintain one's identity based on clearly delineated categories--a politics that enables one to never quite depart from an essentially defined identity.

The political question about whom to "do politics" with (that is, one version of the "who are my people?" question) is often framed as a debate between "separatism" and "coalition-building." However, I believe that <u>both</u> of these forms of oppositional politics can presuppose the distinctness and separability of social identities. With separatist politics it is perhaps most clear that one must be able to isolate one feature of identity as definitive of the line along which separation is to take place. But coalitions can also invoke a conception of social identity as fractionalized or composite, if the coalition is understood to be a coming together of previously distinct and separate groups or "caucuses" that remain distinct throughout the coalition process. Bernice Johnson Reagon's proposal for "coalition politics" presupposes a "home" to which parties to the coalition can return. Reagon's insistence that coalition and home be separate can be problematic, precisely because one must ask who gets "relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestation" (Lugones, "Purity" 474) <u>within</u> the "home." While Reagon thinks of the coalition she proposes as an alternative to separatism (imagined as "barred rooms"), in fact the separate "homes" that sustain or revitalize participants in the coalition also can be places of marginalization of "thick members."

Coalition politics is consistent with the conception of identity put forth by the Combahee River Collective. Such a coalition is envisioned by the authors of <u>Yours In</u>

Struggle, a collection of three essays, by Minnie Bruce Pratt, a white Christian-raised Southerner, Barbara Smith, an African-American, and Elly Bulkin, an Ashkenazi Jew. The authors preface the book by saying "we believe our cooperation on this book indicates concrete possibilities for coalition work" (9). And yet the coalitions are conceived of as coalitions between distinct groups--for instance, people of color and Jews. The illusion of the distinctness of these groups is created by dismissing or downplaying the existence of those whose identities are mixtures, or are not the norm of either group. Barbara Smith writes in her essay: "Almost all Jews in the United States are white people of European backgrounds" (80), dismissing as a "minority" those who do not fit this description. Elly Bulkin asserts that "Jewishness is not, as many assume, equivalent to whiteness" and comments on the inadequacy of the language available to describe the racialization of Jews (especially Sephardim); however, her commitment to coalition and perhaps the persistence of an image of coalition as taking place between distinct groups leads her to announce that her focus "is primarily on relations between white-skinned Jews and non-Jewish people of color in this country" (97). Jews who are not white are left outside of the focus of Bulkin's analysis, fitting into neither of the groups that comprise the coalition. Thus the "thick members" of each of the caucuses have their identities fragmented by the conceptual separability of the various groups to which they might claim membership, even as these groups come together in coalition.

Coalition politics, then--such as the Rainbow Coalition that informs Iris Young's description of the heterogeneous public or the coalition that grounds the idea of Yours In Struggle--can require clean categorization of group difference just as much as separatism can. This indicates to me that one needs to conceive of coalition differently, that one needs to envision a genuine coalition in which the distinctness of seemingly separate identities dissolves without the group differences themselves disappearing.

Here the suggestion that we conceive of identity as a point of departure is pertinent. If identity is a point of departure, could coalition be a destination (albeit an ever-changing

one) instead of a temporary engagement from which one then returns home? One can imagine a coalition in which one's identity would be changed in the coalition process, where the coalition work itself would be a practice constitutive of identity. In fact, Bernice Johnson Reagon's description of coalition suggests that extraordinary change in identity might take place in the process; if this is so, however, one would end up without, in Reagon's sense, a home to go back to, for one would not end up as the same person--fitting into the same home community--as the person whom one was when one entered the coalition. When identity is understood as including hybridity and including the possibility (and perhaps desirability) of consciously (re)-constituting oneself as hybrid, there can be no homes in Reagon's sense.

### E. Partnership in Misery or Partnership for Change?

Who might be partners in a coalition that would be understood to be transformative of identity? What sorts of partnerships could acknowledge that identities have been made in complex ways by intersecting group differences but also see identities as points of departure, not limiting facts?

June Jordan writes that "partnership in misery does not necessarily provide for partnership for change" ("Report" 82). Hannah Arendt expresses a similar idea when she distinguishes between on the one hand a sort of humanity present in "dark times"[69]--that is, a fraternity based on the intimacy and unity of the persecuted and characterized by what she calls worldlessness--and on the other hand a friendship whose discourse "belongs to an area in which there are many voices and where the announcement of what each 'deems truth' both links and separates men, establishing in fact those distances between men which

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[69]"Dark times," for Arendt, are times when the public realm disappears. She writes in the preface to Men In Dark Times: "If it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what they can do, then darkness has come when this light is extinguished by 'credibility gaps' and 'invisible government,' by speech that does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that, under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth to meaningless triviality" (*viii*).

together comprise the world" ("On Humanity" 30-31).[70] José Vasconcelos also speaks of the unity or patriotism within his *raza*, a patriotism that is necessary in resistance to the effects of imperialism, but that is not the ultimate end, since in his teleological fashion, Vasconcelos sees history leading towards the ultimate emergence of "la Raza Cósmica futura" (904), *una raza mestiza*. Here the racial nationalism is necessary under present conditions of domination by stronger nations, but is itself limited. Vasconcelos writes:

> Para no tener que renegar alguna vez de la patria misma es menester que vivamos conforme al alto interés de la raza, aun cuando éste no sea todavía el más alto interés de la humanidad. Es claro que el corazón sólo se conforma con un internacionalismo cabal; pero, en las actuales circunstancias del mundo, el internacionalismo sólo serviría para acabar de consumar el triunfo de las naciones más fuertes. . . . El estado actual de la civilización nos impone todavía el patriotismo como una necesidad de defensa de intereses materiales y morales, pero es indespensable que ese patriotismo persiga finalidades vastas y trascendentales.[71] (912)

All of these three theorists, then, have a double-edged recognition of the place of the collective identity of oppressed peoples. Categories of social identity are created from systems and conditions of oppression that give rise to a certain solidarity, partnership, fraternity or collective identity. Such an identity cannot be denied without denying the reality of the conditions of oppression or of the "dark times" that form the context for it. As Arendt writes:

> I cannot gloss over the fact that for many years I considered the only adequate reply to the question, Who are you? to be: A Jew. That answer alone took into account the reality of persecution. As for the statement with which Nathan the Wise (in effect, though not in actual wording) countered

[70]Thanks to Bat-Ami Bar On for suggesting the relevance of this essay to me.

[71]In order to not at some time have to renounce the very fatherland it is necessary that we live according to the high interest of the race even when that is not yet the highest interest of humanity. It is clear that the heart only conforms to complete internationalism; but, in the present circumstances of the world, internationalism would only serve to finish perfecting the triumph of the strongest nations. . . . The present state of civilization still imposes patriotism on us as a necessity of defense of material and moral interests, but it is indispensable for that patriotism to pursue vast and transcendental ends.

the command: "Step closer, Jew"--the statement: I am a man--I would have considered it as nothing but a grotesque and dangerous evasion of reality. ("On Humanity" 17-18)

While to ignore or miss the importance of the solidarity and collective identity of the oppressed would indicate a denial of the reality of persecution, the politics of such a collective identity are limited, for they forestall the possibility of fully embracing and developing human hybridity or *mestizaje*.[72] The identity politics which I have been considering in this chapter have in various ways manifested this limitation, as they have tried to build "partnership for change" out of oppressed identities.

For Arendt, the refusal or inability to cross lines of difference is part of what it means for a people to have their collective identity forged through persecution in dark times. The "fraternity" of the persecuted is dependent upon a retreat from the public realm where true discourse--the contestation of meaning--takes place. She speaks of the "powerful need men have, in such [dark] times, to move closer to one another, to seek in the warmth of intimacy the substitute for that light and illumination which only the public realm can cast. But this means that they avoid disputes and try as far as possible to deal only with people with whom they cannot come into conflict" ("On Humanity" 30). But the true humanity of discourse in the public realm also cannot be gained by ignoring the context of persecution and acting as if group difference did not exist, that is, by crossing over lines of difference without acknowledging that the lines were ever there. In the context of persecution, to deny the relevant lines of difference along which group identity are formed would be both dangerous and a denial of reality; while Arendt wants the true humanity of friendship rather than the forged intimacy of fraternity, the friendship cannot be one that fails to acknowledge the context in which it takes place, a context in which we are not all

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[72]It is important to distinguish between *mestizaje* which is free from domination and U.S.A.-style melting-pot, assimilationist ideology, which is tied to domination. This distinction is thoroughly discussed by Linda Alcoff in "Mestizo Identity." It is also addressed by Carlos A. Fernandez in "La Raza and the Melting Pot: A Comparative Look At Multiethnicity" and by José Vasconcelos in his development of the idea of "La Raza Cósmica."

just human beings. Rather, any friendship in the context of persecution must be one that fully recognizes the context. She writes:

> [I]n the case of a friendship between a German and a Jew under the conditions of the Third Reich it would scarcely have been a sign of humanness for the friends to have said: Are we not both human beings? It would have been mere evasion of reality and of the world common to both at that time; they would not have been resisting the world as it was. A law that prohibited the intercourse of Jews and Germans could be evaded but could not be defied by people who denied the reality of the distinction. In keeping with a humanness that had not lost the solid ground of reality, a humanness in the midst of the reality of persecution, they would have had to say to each other: A German and a Jew, and friends. ("On Humanity" 23)

Without endorsing the retreat into the collective identity of the persecuted as a persecuted people, Arendt finds a way to maintain in view the relevance of group difference.

Her account is suggestive of an alternative to an identity politics that depends upon "partnership in misery" to ground the shared identity. Even under persecution, where identity seems to be something that is imposed or given by the oppressive system, a resistant identity can be claimed or created within a coalition that transforms identity rather than accepts it as given by the oppressive system. The transformation must be tied to a re-introduction of the contestation of meaning within the collectivity, that is, a re-introduction of what Arendt shows is missing from the "fraternity" of the persecuted. The transformation takes place both in the assertion of the identity as a collective and contested political commitment--a commitment that recognizes and defies the identities as created through oppression--and in the treatment of identity as a starting point --in part shaped by a context of oppression--but not as an immutable fact. To be somewhat metaphorical about identity, one can contrast Bernice Johnson Reagon's characterization of "home" as a stable place of return to recuperate from coalition work, with June Jordan's characterization of "home" encapsulated in her remark that "everybody needs a home so at least you can have some place to leave which is where most folks will say you must be coming from"

("Notes" 123). Jordan's "home" is a point of departure; in a coalition in which identity were transformed through political practice, one would not return to the same home.

Linda Alcoff notes that "people of mixed races and cultures. . . have had to choose in some sense their identity" ("Cultural Feminism" 432) precisely because what was given as an identity could not easily be defined within the parameters of the available categories; being in this position of choosing compels one to treat identity as a point of departure. In contrast to the communitarian account of the social construction of identity that tends to be deterministic because it takes the subject to simply inherit a set of values as given within one unified history or community, I would like to claim that since the person who is socially constituted as hybrid exists within complex and intersecting communities, and these communities may pull on her self identity in various and perhaps conflicting ways, there is always the need to exercise agency in navigating one's own self identity. Thus for someone who does not quite "fit" the category as it is defined by a system of oppression such as the racial state, there must be a political act of identification, either with the category she does not quite "fit" in (and thus she transforms the category by inserting herself into it, by insisting that she does fit, as Sojourner Truth did with the category 'woman' by asking, "ain't I a woman?"), or with an identity which resists the categories, an identity as impure, hybrid. Thus a racially mixed person might identify with one race: Black, or Latino, for instance--or might identify as hybrid; the assimilated Jew might choose politically to identify as Jewish, and so on. When infused with agency in this way, an act of identifying holds the possibility of being resistant; the collectivity can be conceived of through terms used to denote those who are "partners for change" rather than "partners in misery." Think, for instance, of the difference between the term 'Chicano'--a politically claimed identity--and the term 'Mexican-American'--a category of identity given by the racial state; along similar lines, think of the difference between 'queer' (or 'gender resistant') and 'bi-sexual,' the difference between '*mestizo*' (or 'hybrid') and 'mixed-race' (or 'bi-racial'), and the difference between 'dyke' and 'gay/homosexual woman.' The terms "Chicano,"

"queer," dyke" and so on keep alive the contestation of meaning among those to whom the term applies (which is itself indeterminate) as long as the meanings of the terms are themselves contested. As Cherríe Moraga comments on some of the other terms, ". . . I have always hated the terms 'biracial' and 'bisexual.' They are passive terms, without political bite. . . They are a declaration not of identity, but of biology, of sexual practice" (126). That is, these terms refer to something that is taken to be a given or a neutral fact; they do not declare identity as political commitment, as identification.

The solidarity named by these terms of identity is the solidarity of a political commitment, but a commitment that, as Arendt urges us to do, takes into account the context of persecution in which the relationship is formed. It is not as "human beings" that a community resists together, but it is not necessarily as a group whose members all belong to the same given category of identity. The creation of identities within such communities would require an act of identifying to be cognizant of how the starting-point identities of those involved have been formed under oppression, but not to take these identities to ever be finished. Under this conception, rather than having or being a certain identity, one engages in political acts of identity, acts that take identity, as Linda Alcoff suggests, as a point of departure but also as a continually evolving possibility; "identifying" with someone, then, is one way of affirming them as one's own, where this affirmation is always understood as a purposeful political act, and one which does not need to reinforce or line up in accordance with given categories of identity, but cannot ignore them, either. That is, it is not simply that our identities, as given, are what dictate what our politics should be (as some identity politics imply), but that our identities are themselves also formed through our politics, since our political practice is itself an arena of (re)habituation, or re-constitution of identity. While some identity politics such as cultural feminism take identities as they are formed through persecution (or, in fact, as naturally given) to determine one's politics and one's political community, the politics of identity I am

suggesting here takes identity to be created through all social practice, including through the continuing work that we do in political communities or coalitions.

Given this understanding of identity as created through political acts, no unity is fixed or unchanging; communities who politically forge their sense of unity maintain this unity only through the continued struggle of collectively developing and maintaining their political commitments. Basing one's solidarity on shared resistance, however, requires full consciousness of the real possibilities for this resistance being actualized together; that is, one must not underestimate the importance of how deeply our social constitution has shaped our experiences and values differently, perhaps in ways which make us at odds with each other even as we commit to engage in resistance together. We are not all equal candidates for being each other's "people," and yet the affirmation of someone as "one's own" can still go against the grain, and must go against the grain if one is to disrupt essentialist constructions of identity while maintaining a communitarian sense about one's political life.

If one takes as a starting point the sort of multiple social groups that Iris Young has proposed for the heterogeneous public, one must focus on the departure from this place of multiple group identities that result in fragmentation. I am not denying the significance that the existence of such social groups has for guarding against forced assimilation into an undifferentiated public. I am suggesting a rethinking of Young's heterogeneous public with attention given to what happens within each group and in the very defining of the parameters and characteristics of the group. If Lugones is correct, there is a forced assimilation that still takes place within each group, an assimilation of the thick members to the norm defined by the transparent members. I am suggesting that one reconceive of the social groups such that their coherence depends not on the categories of oppression but rather on the contested terms of political commitment. When it is the categories of oppression that define social groups, these categories lend authority to transparent members as they make their own ways and concerns seem to represent those of the whole group;

without these categories of identity there is less to back this hegemony. If one takes identity as a point of departure and never as itself a given, defining norm of a social group, all emerging norms can be contested and one can depart from given identities even within a collectivity by taking collectivities or coalitions to be places of re-constitution of identity. To understand one's identity as in part formed through political practice allows one to purposefully resist the re-emergence of new forms of thickness and transparency. I envision a process where within any collectivity members aim to remake themselves in the direction of hybridity, for it is a hybrid self that will develop when the meanings of the collectivity in which identities are forming are contested meanings. In this process one may draw on the group differences that have been sustained through groups like those that Young suggests, but treat these social groups and the identities that were sustained in them as contestable without being dispensable, that is, one can treat them as points of departure.

This departure includes an enactment of a new sense of what it is to be solidary with a group. The idea of solidarity must be constructed so that there is still room for noticing one's differences from those with whom one is solidary, but also so that there is the possibility of recognizing two other intertwined phenomena: first of all, being solidary with a group must be understood to allow for having the status of both being and not being the "other" with whom one is solidary; and secondly, being solidary with a group must be consistent with identities being remade or reconstituted through the experience of solidarity--that is, through the actual work done in the coalition community. This remaking of ourselves in the coalition community does not decrease our differences; rather, it increases the degree of hybridity within all of us.

I will close this chapter with a reminder from Jenny Bourne, who writes: "Identity is not merely a precursor to action, it is also created through action. . . . *What we do is who we are*" (22). And as one asks the question "what do we do?" one must ask which political actions create room for identifying with the hybrid, in oneself and in others.

* * *

In the next chapter I will consider the question of collective identity as it could be grounded in the concept of 'culture' and I will focus in on the question of whether some understanding of 'culture' can allow one to develop and animate hybridity. That is, I will be asking whether the concept of 'culture' provides a basis for a socially constituted identity that could avoid some of the problems that I have outlined in this chapter within identity politics; could 'culture' inform a politics of identity in such a way that did not depend upon essentialist categories of identity that marginalize those on the borders? I will argue that as it is commonly understood and as it has been drawn upon to ground some political communities and oppositional movements, 'culture' has tended to be a reifying notion; however, understood differently, it can include the idea of *mestizaje* and be a framework in which identities are socially constituted and lived as creative possibilities. This conception of 'culture' aims to resist assimilation without reifying the claimed identity.

## CHAPTER VI

## POLITICAL COMMUNITY AND THE CONCEPT OF 'CULTURE'

### A. Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that there is often a problematic link between politics and group identity when the group in question is defined by systemically created and enforced social differences. In this chapter I will take the questioning one step further by suggesting that there is frequently a problem with the concept of 'culture' itself, and it is often culture that either defines *a priori* or later comes to be associated with a group's identity. That is, communities that distinguish themselves from other groups by the ethnicity of their members take shared culture to be, *a priori*, a basis for community membership. And, other constitutive communities (whose members do not share an ethnic heritage)--such as "women's community" or "lesbian community"--often are thought of as becoming, through the development of shared practices and values, the locations of shared 'culture'; for instance, one often hears the terms "women's culture" or "lesbian culture."[73] Such communities "borrow" the concept of 'culture' to attach to what could otherwise be understood simply as a shared identity. It is as if the concept 'culture' adds depth to the degree to which a community is thought of as constitutive of its member's identities; it adds credence to the community <u>as</u> constitutive precisely because to share a culture is to share something that goes deeper than what can be chosen by an unencumbered subject.

However, I believe it is a mistake to fall back on the concept of 'culture'--at least as the term is commonly understood--to ground political communities whose goal is liberatory

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[73]Ann Ferguson's "Is There a Lesbian Culture?" critiques the concept of "lesbian culture" on grounds other than (though compatible with) the ones that will be the focus of my critique. She argues first of all that there are lesbian subcultures, not a universal lesbian culture, and secondly that "we need. . . to conceive of our goal as international political <u>movement</u> building (of interconnected lesbian, gay and feminist movements) rather than <u>culture</u> building" precisely because "those who see themselves as building a political movement are more able to tolerate value disagreement than those who see themselves as building a culture" (82).

change, and so I will be asking what role the concept of 'culture' plays in creating a sense of unity within such communities. I will focus now specifically on political communities that are committed to working to end relations of oppression, that is, of systemically maintained dominance and subordination of people along lines of group difference, such as those of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. I am motivated here by my recognition that it is frequently the concept of 'culture' that provides the conceptual unity among members of such communities, and by my concern that in fact 'culture'--as it is typically understood--is at odds with the project of liberation. Meanwhile, however, the giving up of culture through assimilation may itself perpetuate oppression. Thus for the political communities that I have in mind, both the option of eradicating a non-dominant culture (through assimilation) and the option of preserving a culture in any simple way are problematic options. Furthermore, both of these options are typically suggested or pursued in the context of movements for social change. My contention is that both assimilation (on the one hand) and the attempt to maintain traditional cultures (on the other hand) are inconsistent with liberatory political change. I will point out that when a culture is a stagnant and commodified set of practices and characteristics, that is, a "thing" to be passed down unchanged, it serves to limit the possibilities available to people and as such is a conservatizing force. However, I will argue that a critique of culture should not push those whose cultures are non-hegemonic towards a rejection of their culture. I will end the chapter by suggesting an account of 'culture' that could ground political communities without serving, as I will argue that 'culture' often does, as a reifying notion.

* * *

I will begin by defining the term 'culture' here in accordance with its use by contemporary anthropologists, as including such things as the art, literature, food, and language of a group of people, and also their everyday ways of being--everything from their ways of moving through space, holding their bodies, and gesturing to their ways of

arranging relationships, feeling emotions, and so on.[74] Cultures, in this sense, are most obviously shared by groups who not only have the same heritage or ethnicity but also share their locations; that is, cultures are enacted in particular communities of place, where everyday practices are shared. These practices may develop out of features of the place; for instance, all members of one community of place may share practices that are tied to such things as living in a certain climate, engaging in the same sort of industry or work, speaking the same regional dialect, attending the same synagogue, or using the same reservoir. However, at least in the contemporary U.S., such communities of place are largely obsolete, and yet shared 'culture' continues to cement together what could be called communities or imagined communities in a way that is analogous to how shared culture holds together a community of place. As Gloria Anzaldúa says, "in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because *lo mexicano* is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back" (Borderlands 21). Even without living in a community of place that shares a culture, she belongs to an imagined community of *mexicanos* who continue to share what can still be called a culture. So one can think, for instance, of social movements such as the Chicano movement and their corresponding communities (or imagined communities) of people, as based on a shared culture. In this sense there are many communities that are comprised of those who may think of themselves as "a people": Black communities, Jewish communities, Latino communities. By a further analogy, one can include here communities of people who do not share an ethnic heritage, but who have developed certain practices together or who collectively enact certain ways of being; so there could be shared styles of dressing, attitudes, ritual events, literatures or other artistic expressions, and so on, all of which can be thought of as cultural practices; in this sense, a community (or imagined community) such as a gay and lesbian community can be thought of--and popularly is thought of--as having a corresponding culture.

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[74]See James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture (230-236) and Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, for critical discussions of the history of the concept of 'culture' and the emergence of this contemporary anthropological use of the term.

When a culture is non-hegemonic, and especially when a culture is under a serious threat of annihilation or cooptation under the forces of the hegemonic culture (which in this country is white/anglo culture), it may appear that the preservation of the culture is itself an act of political resistance. The promotion of "multi-culturalism," in fact, is based on the assumption that non-dominant cultures in this society need to be practiced and celebrated in order to resist their erasure in the mainstream or their disappearance into the elusive melting pot. However, the simple preservation of non-dominant cultural practices is not necessarily liberatory. Notice, for instance, that every culture contains practices that perpetuate relations of dominance and subordination along lines of group difference among the members of the culture. Preservation of traditional cultural practices, then, includes preservation of the practices of systematic dominance and subordination. A single cultural practice might be understood both to be oppressive and to be resistant to oppression. For instance, Trinh T. Minh-ha looks at the choice to be made (presumably by women who belong to cultures in which women traditionally wear veils) between wearing or not wearing a veil. She notes that "[i]f the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance" ("Not You" 372). Women's removing a veil may be done "in defiance of their men's oppressive right to their bodies" ("Not You" 372); but putting the veil back on may mark the women with a cultural identity, in resistance to another culture's hegemony.

But the problem with culture goes deeper than the fact that there are specific cultural practices that, in identifiable ways, perpetuate relations of dominance and subordination. If this were the only problem, it could presumably be worked on without calling into question the desirability of culture itself.

Because I think there are deeper problems with conceiving of cultures as unifying political communities, I will turn now to a critical examination of the very concept of 'culture.' I will argue that when political communities are constituted or defined by a

particular shared culture, the possibility for true resistance to oppression depends in part on the possibility of the relevant culture's being one that can be "lived" rather than one that is a stagnant, reified set of practices and characteristics that members can only consume, and have little room for changing. This requires a reconceptualization of 'culture,' for the typical understanding of the concept of 'culture' is that it excludes being "lived." For instance, as Renato Rosaldo points out, the classic norms of anthropology include the belief that "if it's moving it isn't cultural" (209). If it is possible to reconceptualize and work to enact 'culture' as something that is actively "lived", created and recreated, ambiguous and resistant to essentializing definitions, it may turn out to be useful to think of a political community as sharing a culture.

## B. The Spectacle

The Situationists[75] have developed a critique of culture that I will use as a starting point, although I will also reject their assumption that there could be such a thing as doing away with all culture. For the Situationists, the very concept of culture precludes the possibility of its being something which is actively "lived" rather than consumed. Their account highlights the ways in which cultures that are (as the Situationists say) "spectacularized" harmfully limit the possibilities presented to people by their culture. However, the Situationists fail to see societies as anything but spectacularized; they fail to see resistance in how people live their cultures. Furthermore, their call for the destruction--rather than the revision--of all cultures requires them to presuppose some sort of pre-social or unencumbered self, a self that could conceivably exist apart from or without any social context, without any culturally specific way of being. As I will argue, when colonized cultures really do face possible destruction, preventing this destruction requires being able

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[75]The Situationists--that is, members of the Situationist International (S.I.)--were a group who engaged in radical thought and action in France in the 1960's. Their work continues to be actively taken up (and revised) in contemporary anarchist theory and practice. See, for instance, publications such as Anarchy magazine, that draw on and develop some Situationist ideas.

to see resistant ways of revising the culture--of keeping the culture alive and resistant to spectacularization.

The concept of 'culture,' for the Situationists, is related to what they describe as the phenomenon of spectacularization (of society). As the term 'spectacle' is used by the Situationists, it is only through the spectacle that society is presented to its members, and as such society is reified; because it is presented to its members, it comes as a thing outside of themselves that they do not create (although they have the illusion of creating it or of choosing different elements of it from among a truly open range of possibilities). Guy Debord, who was a member of the Situationist International (S.I.), describes the spectacle as a "social relation among people mediated by images" (Society 4). It is "a vision of the world which has become objectified" (Society 5). The spectacle turns what is otherwise lived into something that appears, and can only be consumed--consumed as an image. The concept of the 'spectacle' was used by the Situationists:

> to come to terms with a society in which lived experience had been supplanted by the image. The term 'spectacle' was deployed to describe the idealized representation that commodity culture produces of itself and the alienated position it provides for people as 'spectators' separated from the life they are meant to be living and forced instead to simply consume it ("On the Passage").

According to the Situationists, a society becomes a society of the spectacle when capitalist relations turn everything in the society into a commodity, or treat everything as a commodity. As Debord writes, "[t]he spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life" (Society 42). For instance, in spectacular society, life choices become commodities that one "chooses" to consume based upon the image that they offer. To choose to bear children, for example, is to "choose" to be marked with the spectacular society's image of 'mother.' In this way, spectacular society forces people into passivity, for it allows us to do nothing but choose from among the commodified images--seeming alternatives--that are presented to us. The choice, of course, is limited because only certain images are offered as possibilities, and the

Situationists believe that the images dominate to such an extent that we cannot imagine possibilities outside of their limits. Debord pictures a society of the spectacle as offering only "[f]alse choice within spectacular abundance" (Society 62). Under this account, instead of creating or living our lives, we merely passively consume them. As Carol Ehrlich puts it, "to consume social relationships makes one a passive spectator in one's life" (67). She speaks of the spectacle as a show (of our lives) which we cannot leave; we can passively watch it, but we cannot actively choose to create something different. "The stage is set, the action unfolds, we applaud when we think we are happy, we yawn when we think we are bored, but we cannot leave the show, because there is no world outside the theater for us to go to" (67).

What is important in spectacular society is how we appear, for the value of what we are depends on what we have, which in turn depends on how it appears to have such a commodity. Debord describes the centrality of "appearing" as characteristic of the phase which the society of the spectacle has now reached:

> The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life had brought into the definition of all human realization an obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. (Society 17)

The Situationist critique of spectacularized society relates to their critique of culture in the following way: culture is, for the Situationists, that which delimits the particular forms that the society of the spectacle takes; it is a formulation of the possibilities within a particular society. That is, culture determines the specific structure and character of the "alternatives" that are presented in a society as the possibilities from which we can choose. Debord writes, "[w]hat is termed culture reflects, but also prefigures, the possibilities of organization of life in a given society" ("Report" 17). Culture, thus characterized, does not allow people to actively create or live their lives; rather, culture determines and reflects the

possibilities that are presented to people, who are left only to passively consume or "choose" from those possibilities. The S.I. defines culture as: "[t]he reflection and prefiguration of the possibilities of organization of everyday life in a given historical moment; a complex of aesthetics, feelings and mores through which a collectivity reacts on the life that is objectively determined by its economy" ("Definitions" 46). Elsewhere, the S.I. writes about culture:

> The formative mechanism of culture thus amounts to a reification of human activities which fixates the living and models the transmission of experience from one generation to another on the transmission of commodities; a reification which strives to ensure the past's domination over the future. (Canjuers and Debord 310)

To summarize, the S.I has argued that there are two problems with culture. First of all, culture is inherently conservative, in the sense that it favors the preservation of traditions rather than the creation of new constructions of life; partaking of a culture requires us to repeat past ways of being instead of creating new ones, despite the fact that changing social conditions may call for changed ways of being. Secondly, culture itself has become commodified, such that the existence of culture forces us to be spectators/consumers of culture itself; Debord writes, "[c]ulture turned completely into commodity must also turn into the star commodity of the spectacular society" (Society 193). Culture, as society's image of itself, must be consumed as an image.

In response to these problems with culture, Debord calls for a "revolution in everyday life" which will eradicate all that is termed 'culture' and will create in its place "the conditions in which the present dominates the past and the creative aspects of life always predominate over the repetitive" ("Perspectives" 75). Because they saw culture as something that is entirely without value (or rather, of negative value), the S.I. advocated complete destruction of anything that could be termed 'culture.' This revolution in everyday life is to be begun, the S.I. argues, by what they term the construction of situations (thus their name--Situationists). Constructing situations involves purposefully

and experimentally arranging and enacting situations which, as "unitary ensemble[s] of behavior in time"("Preliminary" 43), create ambiances which take the "players"--or "livers"--outside of the situations that are presented in the spectacle of everyday life. "The situation is . . . made to be lived by its constructors" ("Preliminary" 43). Playing with these constructed situations is done with the aim of both exposing the nature of everyday life as defined by the spectacle, and bringing into view possibilities that the spectacle does not provide; these new possibilities can then be taken into everyday life.

Before I begin to critique the S.I.'s project, it will be helpful to have a more concrete sense of what the spectacle is and how (and whether) one is really affected by it in everyday life. To describe everything about one's life as a consumption of the spectacle--as the Situationists do--is inaccurate; not everything we do is (or is equally) determined by the spectacle, and some of what we do involves resistance to the spectacle. Acting according to the spectacle can be thought of as acting according to a script; our imaginations, to the extent to which we act according to the spectacle, are limited to run along the same lines as the scripts that have been presented to us; when we are spectators watching ourselves act in accordance with this limited imagination, we see ourselves as enacting the authentic version of some image that we have witnessed. One can think of these scripts as being imprinted in our minds, our memories, for we have heard and watched their being acted out before, over and over: in the media, in advertising, in tourist brochures, in literature or stories, and (perhaps more than anything else) in the interactions that we see take place between others. All of these are agents of the spectacle: they are all places where we view others act, and if we do not resist the messages presented to us, we come to believe that these versions of reality comprise the authentic ways of acting and being. Some activities in everyday life are more scripted than others, for it is only certain practices that we see acted out over and over again. Intimate, embodied interactions, for instance, are especially scripted. We have been presented with many seeming variations on these interactions, but the variety is limited. One may joke about how "canned" the typical

sex scene is in a movie or a television show, but these canned scenes form our imaginations: One knows what to expect after the kiss when one is watching a show, but when the show is one's own life one may check one's actions against the script to see if one is doing what qualifies as, for instance, "romance." The minute details of movement in which people engage often follow the scripts. For instance, it is one minuscule part of a sexual script for a man, facing a woman, to take his hand and place it on the neck of a woman, his thumb on her cheek in front of her ear, and to then maintain control by directing the motions of her head with his hand; in particular, he can direct her head towards his for a kiss. Such a motion signals "romance." It is following such scripted interactions that qualifies an activity as one of romance, erotic play, sex. Those who deviate too much from the script may no longer believe themselves to be engaging in authentic romance, erotic play, sex. We act as spectators in our own lives when we step back from what we are doing and view ourselves with an eye that focuses on how we appear, on how well what we are doing qualifies us as engaging in a defined practice. One steps back and from the position of spectator evaluates whether one fits "good mother," or "tough dyke," or "real Jew," or "radical professor," or "profound artist" or whatever other image one might enact. Looking at what is particularly scripted in one's life helps to reveal where resistance is needed, and one can interpret serious deviations from the script as resistance to spectacularization.

The Situationists' project, which is aimed entirely at the creation of new possibilities, is problematic in several ways. Not only do they ignore the possibility that something of value could be lost in the process of destroying all "repetitive"--that is, repetitive of past or traditional--ways of being, but they also fail to recognize that the project they propose is inconceivable unless the self can somehow exist without culture, that is, without any culturally specific ways of being. Perhaps they are so embedded in a hegemonic (French) culture that they never actively recognize or take up the fact that there exist many distinct cultures, that their own culture is only one among many--that they

themselves do not, in fact, avoid enacting culturally specific practices. Perhaps their position as members of a hegemonic culture leads them to mistakenly see as universal those practices which are really their own culturally specific practices. Failing to recognize themselves as having a specific culture allows them to ignore what they might have to lose were their specific culture to be annihilated.[76] Their theory needs to presuppose an unencumbered self, a self free from social construction, separate from any culturally specific social context, capable of creating new possibilities out of nowhere. But no practice--indeed nothing about everyday life--exists outside of a social context, and with the sociality of all practices necessarily comes their cultural specificity, for all social contexts are the arenas in which specific cultures define or inform people's ways of being. There could be no such thing as living without culture as long as what is meant by 'culture' is that which describes not only the artistic and intellectual expressions of a group of people, but also their everyday lived practices, including, for instance, their language.

Furthermore, the Situationists do not consider what might be desirable about cultural survival. I think that the S.I.'s suggestion that we endeavor to destroy culture is a dangerous one, for it is only certain cultures which really are in danger of being lost or destroyed, through the assimilation of their members into other, more hegemonic cultures. It is not possible to live without culturally specific ways of being; however, it is possible to wipe out particular cultures, to have members of a culture replace their cultural practices with practices that are specific to a different culture. If one looks at the contexts of colonization and imperialism--and consequent cultural hegemony--in which spectacularization takes place, one will see the dangers in trying to do away with any culture. The danger becomes evident when one recognizes that it is never culture in general that can be destroyed (the self is always culturally constituted), but only specific (non-hegemonic) cultures that are destroyed.

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[76]Thanks to Amie Macdonald for this point.

## C. Spectacularization and the Relations between Cultures

The Situationists describe the phenomenon of spectacularization as something of which we (namely members of a society of the spectacle) are all victims, no matter what our social position may be within our society and no matter what the relation may be between our own and other cultures. Debord does mention that imperialist societies have the power to define the spectacle of other societies ("The society which carries the spectacle does not dominate the underdeveloped regions only by its economic hegemony. It dominates them as the society of the spectacle" [Society 57]), but this observation only leads the Situationists to see a colonized culture as yet another culture that should be done away with on account of its being spectacularized. They do not also look at how the loss of culture for members of colonized cultures can mean loss of identity, or assimilation into the colonizing society's culture. Indeed, as long as they assume that a self could exist without culture, free from social context, they do not have to recognize the loss of one's culture as a death of one's self.[77] Their look at how colonized cultures are also spectacularized leaves them believing that all cultures--including colonized cultures--should be destroyed.[78] However, it is imperialism and the colonization of some cultures that intensifies or creates the spectacularization of these cultures; but imperialism and colonization also intensifies the need for finding a way of living these cultures.

Imperialism demands that colonized cultures be made consumable, and not only in the sense which the Situationists describe, where members of a society consume their own culture. Colonized cultures are also often made the object of consumption of the members

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[77]Thanks to María Lugones for pointing this out.

[78]For instance, in their "Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria and of all Countries" the (French) Situationists write that although the "movement drawing the Arab peoples toward unification and socialism has achieved a number of victories over classical colonialism," they should still, for instance, "finish with Islam, manifestly a counterrevolutionary force as are all religious ideologies" ("Address" 151). What the Situationists fail to see here are the implications of their (as members of the colonizing society) telling Algerian revolutionaries to abandon their Islamic [and colonized] culture. While it may be true that Islam, as a religious ideology, includes beliefs or practices which under some description of what counts as a revolution would be considered to be counterrevolutionary, it is also true that abandonment of Islam in the context of colonization would just mean assimilation into the colonizers' culture--also quite probably a counterrevolutionary move!

of the colonizing culture. Images of some colonized cultures become artifacts; they become exotic spectacles whose very value derives from their exoticism. For instance, in the U.S. the prevalence of "ethnic food" restaurants and import stores filled with artifacts from Third World countries attests to how readily consumable dominated cultures have been made by U.S. imperialism. The colonized cultures come to be represented by a few symbolic artifacts and images: Mexico (lumped together with the rest of Latin America) is burritos and sombreros, sunny days by warm oceans where smiling brown people serve drinks on a platter, and latin lovers who romance you to the tunes of latin music; China (together with the rest of the "Orient") is fans and little black shoes, egg rolls, swarms of small yellow people, and seductive, willing and deferring women. These artifacts and images can be consumed by members of a dominant society if they are imported (either the actual artifacts, or images of them in media) or through the practice of tourism.[79]

But something must be done to a living culture before it is suitable for consumption. It must be reduced from a continually changing grouping of lived practices--a grouping whose boundaries are never clear-cut and are always in flux--and made into a definable set of characteristics and artifacts which can then be said to constitute a particular culture. Edward Said, in Orientalism, describes the process through which Western Orientalists have made all of the "Orient" consumable. A practice of Orientalism that serves this purpose is "to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts" (86). The actual people who are described by Orientalists must be reduced to spectacles that can be consumed; they must be describable as, for instance, characters in a play that can be watched. As Said writes,

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[79]"Modern mass tourism presents cities and landscapes not in order to satisfy authentic desires to live in such human or geographical milieus; it presents them as pure, rapid, superficial spectacles (spectacles from which one can gain prestige by reminiscing about)" (Canjuers and Debord 308).

> Underlying all the different units of Orientalist discourse . . . is a set of representative figures, or tropes. These figures are to the actual Orient . . . as stylized costumes are to characters in a play; they are like, for example, the cross that Everyman will carry, or the particolored costume worn by Harlequin in a *commedia dell'arte* play. (71)

When all aspects of a culture can be represented by a few symbolic artifacts and images, the whole culture can be acted out as a play filled with recognizable characters, and so the culture can be consumed as a play is watched.

The characters, of course, must wear a particular costume so that they are recognizable, or the play is ruined. Thus when the Mexican wears a baseball cap instead of a sombrero and plays rock music instead of Salsa, he is no longer "authentic"; the Anglo-American consumer of colonized cultures must either fill in the missing sombrero and fail to see this Mexican as he really is, or must dismiss this character as not really Mexican. Anglo-American tourists very predictably go for experiencing the "authentic" in the culture they are out to view/consume. For instance, the town of Antigua, Guatemala is one of the towns in Guatemala that has been drastically (and visibly) affected by U.S. imperialism: there are many language schools, shops and restaurants that cater to U.S. (and European) students and tourists, and the Guatemalans who live there have been changed (in terms of what they wear, whether they speak English, what goods they produce to sell, etc.) by all of their interactions with these students and tourists. Seeing this, many students and tourists who come from the U.S. decide to spend their time in a different Guatemalan town, one with more "authentic" Guatemalans. The assumption here is that only Guatemalans who exhibit "pre-imperialist" characteristics are real Guatemalans, and therefore they are the only ones suitable for consumption as representatives of a (supposedly disappearing) culture. In another village in Guatemala called Santiago Atítlan, *los indígenas* have discovered how to get a tiny bit of money from the tourists' quest for the authentic: they dress up in what the tourists consider to be the traditional indigenous costume (hand woven and embroidered outfits--*trajes*-- complete with exotic headpiece;

indeed, it is the traditional clothing of the people of this village, but it is not necessarily what they would continue to wear everyday were it not for the effect that tourism has had in creating this image as the spectacle of "authentic indigenous," and in any case, their wearing it now has a different meaning than it would have had their culture not been commodified) and charge a few cents for each tourist who wants to take a photograph. The same person could stand in the same spot in Western clothing and never earn a penny, for it is only the authentic spectacle that makes a desirable photo, and the photo is the perfect way of capturing the spectacle for later consumption.

The colonized culture and its members, then, must fit the proper image to be consumable. Not only is the colonized culture spectacularized to make it consumable by the colonizers, but the particular spectacle must be one that the colonizers find desirable to consume. As Jo Carrillo writes,

> Our white sisters
> radical friends
> love to own pictures of us
> walking to the fields in hot sun
> with straw hat on head if brown
> bandana if black
> in bright embroidered shirts
> holding brown yellow black red children
> reading books from literacy campaigns
> smiling (63)

But if the spectacle is altered a little--for instance if the people in these pictures are not smiling--then the image is less consumable. Carrillo goes on:

> Our white sisters radical friends
> should think again.
> No one smiles
> at the beginning of a day spent
> digging for souvenir chunks of uranium
> or cleaning up after

our white sisters
radical friends (63)

Of course, the spectacle can co-opt almost anything and make it consumable; thus, even if the people in the pictures were not smiling, the image might just become a different brand of consumable spectacle; for instance, pictures of crying babies on the backs of overworked, unhappy mothers become a spectacle of "poverty," which is itself a romanticized and consumable image. In any case, the colonized culture is represented by and for the colonizing culture in order to serve the purposes of colonization; the image of the colonized culture is molded according to its consumability for the members of the colonizing culture. The demands of imperialism and colonization guide the process by which colonized cultures are commodified as they are made suitable for consumption by the colonizers.

One result of the domination and colonization of a culture is an intensification of its tendency to be spectacularized in the sense of being preservative of the past; 'culture' here can only be the preserved, "authentic" ways of being, ways that are repetitious of the past to such an extent that they are no longer creative. Albert Memmi describes colonized society as "calcified"; as he writes in The Colonizer and the Colonized:

> Colonized society is a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures. Its century-hardened face has become nothing more than a mask under which it slowly smothers and dies. Such a society cannot dissolve the conflicts of generations, for it is unable to be transformed. (98-99)

This stagnation of culture comes about in part because the spectacle captures a stagnant image to maintain as the commodity. Said argues that this has happened with the cultures of the Orient; Orientalism "views the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West" (108). The images of the Orient that are consumable by the West are images of the "authentic" and ancient Orient; if a contemporary, and changing, feature of Oriental culture has not been scripted into the

spectacle of the Orient, then it will not be sought after for consumption. Like the indigenous Guatemalan who dons Western clothing, it will not be a proper target of the tourist's camera. Furthermore, cultures that are under attack and that face annihilation from colonization become defensive in such a way that internal criticism may cease to function to make the culture change and grow.[80] Defending a culture from outside attack reinforces the tendency of culture to be conservative, for it appears that the culture cannot risk being open to change, lest it be wiped out completely.

Thus the two problems that the S.I. claim exist for all cultures--that they become commodities under the spectacle, and that they are conservative of past (traditional) ways of being instead of creative of new possibilities--seem to exist at least for colonized cultures (although I will later argue that one can also see resistance to these problems from within colonized cultures). These cultures are particularly commodified for they are constructed to be consumed by the colonizers, and also by the members of the culture to the extent to which the commodified image of the culture is internalized by them. And these cultures may become especially stagnant and conservative both because the spectacle of these cultures sells only if it presents an image of the "authentic" (that is, ancient and unchanging), and because being defensive against outside attacks makes members of these cultures not open to criticizing and changing their cultures. It might seem that because the S.I.'s critique of culture seems to apply to colonized cultures, their call for the eradication of culture should be especially pertinent here.

But at the same time, colonized cultures are the only cultures that really do face possible annihilation. And annihilation of colonized cultures really just means assimilation of the members of these cultures into a hegemonic culture. What, then, is the harm of losing one's culture for members of colonized, or non-hegemonic cultures? The lived experience of losing one's culture in the context of colonization, I would argue, is nothing like what the Situationists imagine to be the liberating possibilities in doing away with

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[80]On this point, see María Lugones' "Hispaneando y Lesbiando."

anything that can be termed 'culture.' Because they presuppose an unencumbered or pre-social self, a self that can exist without culture, they see losing any (spectacularized) culture as an act of liberation. But if, to the contrary, it is the case that the self is constituted in social contexts, and if the term 'culture' describes the everyday practices that form people's self-identities in these social contexts, then the lived experience of losing one's culture is more an experience of death, death of one's self or identity. If this is so, then it is in regard to colonized cultures that there is the most urgent need to conceptualize 'culture' without spectacularization.

## D. Cultural Annihilation and Assimilation

When a non-hegemonic culture is annihilated its members are not left without culture, but rather they become assimilated to the hegemonic culture; this does nothing to release people from the non-liberatory aspects of culture, and it meanwhile forces the colonized people through a loss of identity. The hegemonic culture is never annihilated in this process, it just becomes more thoroughly hegemonic. In this way, the annihilation of some cultures that takes place (or is in danger of taking place) through colonization does not help liberate anyone from the spectacle; instead, it is a replacement of one spectacle with another.

With this in mind, I want to back up now to look at how struggles for cultural survival come out of the recognition that erasure of colonized cultures is a form of oppression--of systematic harm done to a people as a way of subjugating them. Given the effects on people's lives of losing their cultures--and being assimilated into a dominant culture--it is clear to me that struggles for cultural survival are necessary, and that the erasure of colonized cultures is a part of a process of oppression. If one were to fail to see resistance to spectacularization, as the S.I. does, one would be unable to see culture as anything but harmful. One might be led to believe that although struggles for cultural survival constitute ways of resisting colonization and oppression, they are at the same time

simply struggles for something (i.e. culture) that is itself not at all liberatory. I would like to argue that this need not be the case; rather, one can see resistance, and one can find a way of fighting for cultural survival to be fighting for a living culture, not a spectacularized and consumable one.

I will look briefly at an example of what particular cultures can mean for those who, in order to be able to practice their cultures, must fight the effects of colonization. One context where there is an active struggle against cultural colonization and subsequent assimilation is among Chicanos and U.S. Latinos. Many of the ways in which Chicano and Latino cultures are under attack by members of the dominant Anglo culture are clear. Perhaps most obviously, Spanish is not honored as a legitimate language in the U.S.[81] Many Chicano and U.S. Latino children do not learn to speak Spanish. Spanish tends not to be spoken in public contexts, sometimes even when all present are native speakers. While Spanish is a part of Chicano and Latino cultures that it seems that Anglos would like to wipe out completely, other aspects of, for instance, Chicano culture are taken over--bought up--by Anglos who co-opt them for their own consumption. The Southwest is full of "art" which is sold as native or traditional, and Chicano artists' possibilities for artistic expressions become circumscribed by the anglo definitions of authentic Chicano art.[82] Anglos have taken over (and grossly distorted) a tradition of building with adobe, and create out of adobe monstrous buildings to accommodate the vast numbers of wealthy Anglos who are moving to the Southwest. The colonization of Chicano culture creates a situation where that culture must fight to remain alive--it is fighting against being the dead, stagnant, co-opted culture that the Anglos would have it be.[83] Loss of culture is experienced as loss of self. When one cannot eat the food of one's culture, speak its language, go about one's day according to its concept of time, move through space in the way particular to one's culture, and so on, one can experience a death of one's self, one's

[81]Witness, for instance, how many states have passed or are trying to pass "English Only" laws.
[82]See Sylvia Rodriguez, "Art as Racial Inscription," Radical Folk, Winter 1993.
[83]For a description of the effects of colonization on a Chicano community, see Lugones' "Hispaneando y Lesbiando."

whole identity. Culture affects every bit of how the self is formed. As Anita Valerio says of her (Indian and Chicana) cultures, "[i]t's in my blood, my face my mother's voice it's in my voice my speech rhythms my dreams and memories it's the shape of my legs . . . it must even be the way I sweat! Why it's damn near everything!" (42). And as Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity--I am my language" (59). The necessity for cultural survival--and therefore the necessity for finding some way that cultures can be lived and created rather than consumed--is the necessity of keeping as living selves the people whose cultures are under attack.

## E. Culture as Lived

Because I see enforced assimilation as unacceptable, but I also see the conservative maintenance of tradition as unacceptable, I am led to think about the potential for a culture whose possibilities are continually created and recreated out of the lives of the people who practice it, rather than a culture that defines and limits the lives of these people by presenting them with "false choice within spectacular abundance." To do this I will begin by looking at resistance that people already engage in to cultural death: resistance to the stagnation and the commodification of culture. Both Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gloria Anzaldúa present ideas evocative of possibilities for living cultures, particularly cultures that have already been significantly affected by colonization. They offer ways of thinking about traditions and/or cultures as constituted by change and ambiguity or multiplicity of meanings, revisions and indeterminacy, rather than by unchanging essences that allow cultures to be formulated or defined. I will first discuss Gates.

Gates' The Signifying Monkey is in part an account of what constitutes the African-American literary tradition, an account that reflects significant resistance in how the tradition is developed; Gates' account leaves this tradition open to staying alive in the sense of being continually created and recreated, that is, lived by its participants. His account can be useful here, for what he writes about a literary tradition parallels what might be said

about the culture to which this tradition is connected (as well as other colonized cultures). Gates draws on the relation between the black vernacular tradition and the African-American literary tradition because he is particularly interested in seeing how language plays a central role in constituting (and being the realm of revisions within) a tradition. I would like to extend his work by transferring his ideas about what constitutes a literary tradition to make claims about what might constitute a culture. Indeed, his theory of the African-American literary tradition comes out of what is a piece of African-American culture: the black vernacular. As I will argue later, I think that his exclusive focus on language as the realm that is constitutive of a tradition is problematic, for it blinds him to other realms that both provide the basis for the cohesiveness of a tradition and provide the source for changes within a tradition. For instance, social and political forces affecting the lives of those participating in a tradition manifest themselves as changes in the form and content of the tradition. To broaden his theory to allow for a focus on the social and political forces that shape a tradition or a culture, it is necessary to look at more than just language, and to consider the culture, rather than just the literary tradition that springs from the culture.

Gates conceives of the African-American literary tradition as constituted by a chain of revisions that authors make on one another's work, revisions that may either critique or honor and pay homage to (or both) a previous author. I am not going to describe in detail here how (mocking and yet drawing on his academic tradition) he extracts his theory from the myths of Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey--figures from African and African-American (respectively) cultures--but rather will just say that two important features that he sees about these trickster figures are that they deliver meaning figuratively rather than literally, and that their myths are characterized by an indeterminacy of interpretation (ch. 1). The myths reflect on meanings within their cultures, but always leave these meanings ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations; they never deliver one literal meaning.

Furthermore, Gates argues, central to the African-American literary tradition is the practice of "Signifyin(g)," a practice that comes out of the black vernacular and is the focus of the Signifying Monkey tales. Signifyin(g), as Gates applies it to African-American literary theory, can be described as "[r]epetition, with a signal difference" (51). It is "a metaphor for textual revision" (88). To Signify upon someone else's work is to repeat it or redo it both to draw a connection between one's own work and the other author's, and to mark one's own work with a purposeful difference, a difference that might serve as a critique or that might serve to extend and compliment a feature of the other work. Signifyin(g) is a playful and yet critical way in which authors--or participants in a tradition, members of a culture--speak back and forth to one another, repeating and refiguring what others have said, remaining within one identifiable tradition (or culture) by repeating specific shared uses of language (or other shared characteristics), but meanwhile not allowing the tradition (or culture) to be statically defined, for the revision is always done with a difference, a difference that serves to recreate and change the tradition (or culture), to perhaps set it off in a new direction.[84]

Gates wants the African-American literary tradition to be defined by no more than a series of revisions: changes and re-creations. He writes:

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[84]It is interesting that to the extent to which the practice of Signifyin(g)--or revising with signal differences--works against a tradition's (or culture's) remaining static and preservative of the past while meanwhile repeating enough of its antecedents to remain identifiably linked, it is very much like what the Situationists termed 'plagiarism.' The Situationists saw plagiarism as a way of making ideas progress; ideas could be taken up by one thinker where another had left off, and the thinking--changing and recreating--of the idea could thus continue. They counterposed this practice to the practice of quoting and citing authors whose words and thoughts then remain static and unchanged in the process. "Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It sticks close to an author's phrase, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one" (Khayati 171). Similarly, Signifyin(g) takes up an idea and re-presents it, changed. It allows an author to walk a line between being completely without a tradition or antecedents (an impossibility) and being confined within a tradition which is defined and presented by the spectacle (a position which would force the author into producing, for instance, a pre-formulated piece of "authentic" African-American writing). According to Gates, originality--i.e. lacking antecedents--has been a complicated issue for African-American writers, who have frequently been accused of being "imitative" rather than original. It seems that what is really the case is that there is an identifiable tradition within which many African-American authors write, but if Gates is right about the extent to which revision takes place, then the tradition is significantly not one of imitation, i.e. stagnation. Gates cites Zora Neale Hurston: "Hurston proceeds to argue that what we really mean by originality is in fact masterful revision, because 'originality is the modification of ideas'" (118).

> Literary succession or influence. . . can be based on only formal literary revision, which the literary critic must be able to demonstrate. These discrete demonstrations allow for definitions of a tradition. Few definitions of tradition escape the racism, essentialism, or nationalism often implicit in rubrics such as "African" or "Jewish" or "Commonwealth" literature. (120)

It is clear that what he wants to avoid is a formulation of the tradition that forces its participants into an essentially defined set of characteristics or practices. The tradition must come out of the participants' lived practices (that is, their revisions upon one another), out of their shared use of, in this case, language, where that language use is open to change.

Culture, if it is to be conceived along the same lines that Gates conceives a literary tradition, might be constituted by something like a shared universe of meaning--meaning whose basis is found in the historical interactions amongst a people--but where that meaning is open to revision, re-creation and change. Looking at a culture as constituted by its historical changes (within the boundaries of some connections between people, such as shared [but changing] language and practices) instead of by an essential set of practices or characteristics that remain the same over time refocuses one's attention on living a culture in order to be the creators of its revisions, instead of consuming the culture as it is given.[85]

Gates' focus on a literary tradition leads him to single out shared language use as the basis of the tradition. I would argue that if we are looking at other cultural traditions, language may, to some degree, lose its centrality and become one among many defining characteristics of a tradition or a culture. In fact, even in literary traditions, I think that it is a mistake to focus on language to the exclusion of other characteristics; revisions in content, as well as those in form, serve to change and re-create literary traditions. In any case, since Gates' theory calls for revisions, he himself is open to being Signified upon;

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[85]See, for instance, Jewelle Gomez's description of "negritude" as a historically formed shared understanding, not an essential set of practices. "During the Harlem Renaissance writers frequently spoke of their 'negritude': a set of values, a style, a subtext that distinguished them culturally from the rest of American citizens. 'Negritude' was never perceived as a mere essence that could be distilled down to a way of shaking hands or to the food we eat. *It was not only a shout in church, but the entire history of the ability to shout out loud"* (114-115).

and so I will repeat him here with a signal difference--the difference of looking at more than just formal revisions.

Gates provides a theory of how literary works may be indeterminate, without closure, double voiced; he thus generates an idea of how a tradition of such literature (and by extension, the culture to which this tradition is tied) makes itself difficult for the spectacle to present as a packaged, pre-formulated commodity. There are no essential characteristics that can serve as the basis for a formulation--or an image--of, for instance, African-American literature or culture. A member of a culture that is conceived of as constituted by the ambiguity and indeterminacy of revisions upon revisions is not forced to simply consume the culture, for participation in it calls for active participation in the form of carrying out revisions, making critical changes in the culture or tradition. It will be helpful to turn, now, to an example of how such a culture might be lived in practice.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in Borderlands/*La Frontera*, offers a description of living her Chicano culture in a way that is full of resistance. For her, what began as resistance or rebellion to her culture--to a culture that she describes as having betrayed her, directing and limiting her possibilities while ignoring her desires--has transformed into a resistance within her culture, a resistance that instead of throwing away her cultural practices and values serves to both preserve and critically revise and sort through these practices and values. She writes of the initial rebellion: *"Repele. Hable pa' 'tras. Fuí muy hocicona. Era indiferente a muchos valores de mi cultura. No me deje de los hombres. No fuí buena ni obediente."* And then of the transformation of this rebellion:

> *Ya no soló paso toda mi vida botando las costumbres y las valores de mi cultura que me traicionan. También recojo las costumbres que por el tiempo se han provado y las costumbres de respeto a las mujeres.* But despite my growing tolerance, for this Chicana *la guerra de independencia* is a constant. (15)

Her own resistance within her culture produces for Anzaldúa a culture--or perhaps more accurately, a position in between, amongst, or at the margins of several cultures--that is

deeply constituted by change and ambiguity. She is a Chicana tejana, and she writes about a culture of a borderlands world, a community that is located at the Texas-Mexico border. Working against the tendency of some Chicanos to try to preserve old customs--customs that she experiences as oppressive as a woman and a lesbian--she embraces the cultural clashes that continually produce new ways of being. She sees herself as both doing away with culture (that is, with culture that binds her with tradition--the sort of culture that the Situationists would like to annihilate) and as creating culture--lived culture: "I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture. . ." (80-81). Whereas the Situationists advocate the eradication of all culture because they conceive of culture as, by definition, a pre-formulated construction of a society of the spectacle, Anzaldúa experiences possibilities for a culture being otherwise.

One aspect of the culture that is kept alive and changing because of the cultural clashes of the borderlands is its language(s): Chicano Spanish with its many variations, for instance, or Tex-Mex. Where culture is conceived of as that which preserves "authentic" and traditional practices, languages must remain pure and unchanged by social and political forces that affect the nature of people's lives. Chicano Spanish violates this stricture. "Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish" (55). Think, for instance, of the Anglo-American who, enamored of the spectacle of, say, Mexican culture, wants to learn Spanish. This Anglo will typically want to learn an "unadulterated" Spanish--a Spanish whose words are not, for instance, mixed with English words.

> But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguage que corresponde a un modo de vivir.* Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language (55).

The language of this Chicano culture, then, is constituted by changes, changes that correspond to a (changing) way of living. Like Gates' literary tradition that is constituted by revisions with signal differences, the language(s) of Chicano culture(s) are constituted by revisions--new creations and changes--that respond to changing social and political forces, all within the loose boundary of some historically shared understandings and practices among a people.

If culture is, as the Situationists put it, a "reflection and prefiguration of the possibilities of organization of everyday life in a given historical moment" ("Definitions" 46), then what is interesting in the situation that Anzaldúa describes is that there is, for Chicanos, no one given prefiguration of these possibilities; rather, there are several such prefigurations, which are inconsistent with each other. This can leave a Chicano in the interesting--and potentially fruitful--position of being able to see one culture from the point of view of another, and of having to actively create some *mestiza* culture out of the clashes.[86] As Anzaldúa writes:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque,* a cultural collision .(78)

The culture that emerges from this collision emerges out of lived experience. Anzaldúa writes that the "numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas" (79). It seems that such a position--floundering in uncharted seas--is just the position the Situationists were trying to put themselves in when they went about purposely "constructing situations" to take themselves out of the preformulated situations presented by the everyday spectacle. What comes out of this borderlands world is a culture of

[86]By saying that this is a potentially fruitful position to be in, I do not mean to be denying that this position might also be an extremely difficult or painful position to be in.

ambiguity, full of elements that the tourists after the "authentic" will never find described in their guidebooks, for guidebooks cannot formulate the parameters of such a culture enough to present it as a spectacle; out of this borderlands world come practices with multiple meanings, indeterminate origins: "To live in the Borderlands means to / put *chile* in the borscht, / eat whole wheat *tortillas,*/ speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent" (194).

* * *

It is crucial to welcome the cultural collisions that produce ambiguity and to refuse to base values on what appears as (but cannot actually be) a distinct, clearly bounded culture's set of values. Spectacular thinking calls for the production of only one show; we are asked to believe that there is "no world outside the theater" (Ehrlich 67); but cultural collisions will force us to see many worlds, worlds that cannot all be in the same theater. Communities interested in escaping the spectacle need to welcome the experience of the *mestiza.*

A culture constituted by continual changes and re-creations, or revisions, is resistant to being spectacularized, for it cannot easily be delimited or formulated. Cultural collisions--the effects of cultural domination and colonization--can work to keep a culture continually undergoing such revisions. It may seem strange that even changes in the direction of assimilation work to put members of colonized cultures in the position of having to actively create. There is a line to be walked here between on the one hand assimilating and undergoing a cultural death (an option that simply leaves one to have to act out the hegemonic culture's spectacle), and on the other hand ignoring the reality of the lived cultures that are produced by social and political forces <u>including</u> forces of domination, and recognizing, instead, only the spectacle of ancient and "authentic," stagnant cultures. I am not saying here that there is anything positive about this domination; rather, given the fact of colonization, given that bits of the colonizers' culture force themselves into colonized cultures, recognizing and affirming these colonized cultures <u>as living</u> requires recognizing and living the ambiguity of meaning--and the revisions in

cultural practices--that come out of cultural clashes, even clashes of dominance and subordination.

> The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode--nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 79)

Looking at the position of those caught in the middle of cultural clashes reveals the experience of creating a new culture out of contradictions, double-messages, and ambiguity. One could also work at thinking of how to keep oneself in the position of being an active participant in the creation and recreation of living cultures, without this necessarily taking place in a context of colonization. To the extent to which it creates constantly changing social and political forces and cultural clashes, colonization creates a lived reality that is at odds with consuming an unchanging, "authentic" culture (although colonization also may intensely commodify cultures and cause their stagnation, and compel members of colonized cultures to cling to the unchanging artifacts of their cultures); by throwing those who experience cultural clashes into "uncharted seas," it puts them in the position of having to actively create. But colonization forces the changes in the direction of further hegemony of the dominant culture. I suggest, then, a strategy of consciously, purposefully being the creators of revisions in our cultures, and directing these revisions in liberatory directions without losing the tie between the created culture and the universe of sense from whose tradition it emerges.

* * *

I argued in earlier chapters that it is necessary to reconceive of group identity in such a way that (instead of depending on essential characteristics of group members in order to unify the group) allows or encourages identities to be both hybrid and open to continual change through all constitutive practices, including the practices that come with participation in the political community itself. In this chapter I have extended the argument

so that it applies not only to socially constructed identities, but also to the concept that I believe is frequently taken to ground such identity, namely the concept of 'culture.' As long as a constitutive community understands its identity or its basis for unity to be found *a priori* in its shared culture or even to be describable *a posteriori* in terms of (or analogous to) a shared culture, it will not be enough to simply argue that identity is a problematic basis for political community, for identity may itself by based on another problematic grounds, namely the concept of 'culture.'

Culture, however, is not dispensable, assuming that the self is never unencumbered but is always constituted within a social, and therefore cultural, context (and as long as 'culture' includes everyday practices and ways of being, to be a social being must be to be a culturally constituted being). Furthermore, a community that is truly constitutive--that is, one that affects its members deeply enough to form their practices, their values, and so on--is necessarily culturally constitutive. Thus it has been necessary to consider how a political community that aims at liberatory change should conceive of the ways that its members become constituted culturally within the community. While in earlier chapters I argued that identity must be conceived in a way that allows for hybridity, here I have argued that in order for a group identity to be so conceived, the ground for that identity--if it is described as a cultural ground--must also be significantly revised from the popular understanding of what a 'culture' is.

# CONCLUSION

Sources IV.

*With whom do you believe your lot is cast?*
*From where does your strength come?*

I think somehow, somewhere
every poem of mine must repeat those questions

Which are not the same. There is a *whom,* a *where*
that is not chosen    that is given    and sometimes falsely given

in the beginning we grasp whatever we can
to survive

--Adrienne Rich

I have suggested in this dissertation that it is important to maintain a communitarian conception of the self; following Aristotle and the traditional communitarians, I believe that an account of the self as socially constituted is descriptively accurate, and I also think that there is normative value to recognizing the self as so constituted and to encouraging the development and sustenance of the sorts of communities in which members self-consciously participate in each other's moral lives rather than leave one another alone and isolated in this respect. However, I have also argued against the assumption of or the demand for unity in constitutive communities, and hence I depart both from Aristotle and from the traditional communitarians.

But the call for unity does not end with the traditional communitarians; it re-emerges in contemporary identity politics and also is to be found in the concept of 'culture' and the presumed connection between shared culture and community. I have argued against the call for unity, whether that unity be based on a shared socially constructed identity, or

whether its roots be in a shared culture. In the case of identity politics, the call for unity of identity can be essentializing; if the basis for membership in the community is the sharing of certain essential characteristics of identity, then difference can result in marginalization or expulsion. In the case of a community whose unity derives from its members' shared culture, maintenance of the culture itself can be conservatizing; the culture can remain closed off from changes, preservative of the "traditional" or the "authentic"; furthermore, it can come to be treated as an object outside of the people who live it and as such the changing lived realities of these people do not serve to continually offer new, changing, and ambiguous ways of conceiving of what is shared between members of the community.

What, then, are the alternative models for constitutive community? How can members of a community engage with one another at the level of shaping each other's selves through the practices of the community, and yet allow this process of self constitution to be continually open to change, impossible to predict *a priori*, and fed by elements that are not divided into the essential and the inessential, but that mix and create hybrid selves? The self that is not to be fashioned by a community into a pre-defined "sort" of a self (for instance, a "real" lesbian, a "real" Black, a "real" Jew--where to be "real" or authentic is to embody the essential characteristics) is a self who is unpredictable, and as such, uncontrollable. A community that is not to be based on the conceptual unity of its members must be willing to relinquish control. I suggest, then, resisting the urge to control who one's "people" are, to open wider the possibilities of whom one takes as "one's own."

*　　*　　*

Irena Klepfisz contrasts critically what she calls the "inside"--namely inside the women's movement--and the "outside"--which she finds herself thinking of as the "real" world. The contrast is one of control versus lack of control: the inside is created through carefully controlled choices, or at least there is the illusion of there being such choice, whereas the outside world is a world in which it is obvious that there is little choice and

little control. Though Klepfisz recognizes that the contrast is really a false opposition--the inside is part of the real world too, though characterized by different attitudes--her point is to critique the illusion that is created on the inside of the movement; the illusion is that one can control one's world, that one can control who one's people are, that whom one works with can be carefully chosen, that one can possibly afford to choose. Klepfisz points out that on the outside--particularly in the world of working class people--choice and control are impossible.

Klepfisz first describes the inside of the women's movement, beginning by wondering why she thinks of this world as unreal:

> Not so much unreal as sifted. To some degree. To a great degree. The "movement" world--the inside--is created through choices. We choose the people we want to work with, we choose the causes we want to work on, we choose the feminist institutions we want to create. None of this is absolute, but certainly it seems true to a greater degree than in the "real" world--the outside. Because we are so used to these choices, coalitions are frequently difficult to make. We think we have a choice about whom we work with. And there are people we choose not to work with. (20)

In contrast to what goes on in the women's movement, Klepfisz's life outside of the movement is characterized by a lack of control:

> I have no control over the circumstances in the office I work in. I look for a job and usually take what I can get, hoping for a decent salary or benefits or manageable travelling time--all the considerations surrounding work. But I do not choose the other people in the office, just as I do not choose other members of my family, just as I do not select who can be a Jew or a woman. These all come with birth. And working circumstances come with the job. (20)

In fact, Klepfisz observes, there is a stronger and more unified "coalition" among the people who have just been thrown together without choice (office workers, for instance) than among those in the women's movement. And the unity of workers in an office does

not require sameness, precisely because the office workers are not under the illusion that they could choose each other; they take each other as they come. Klepfisz writes: "Most of us [women workers in an office] know, even if we are very different from each other, who the enemy is. In the office, we rarely mistake what side of the line we are all on" (21). In the women's movement, however, the idea that one can control whom one is willing to take as "one's own" leads to continual fighting within the movement about who belongs and who does not:

> We act as if we always have a choice. We are insulted when asked to associate or join with someone we disagree with or dislike. We try as much as possible to pick and screen those around us.
> This is probably an exaggeration.
> This is probably not an exaggeration. Look at the in-fighting, the pulling apart, the trashing and back-stabbing. We confuse who the real enemy is, frequently fingering each other. We act as if we can afford to pick and choose. And we can't. (21)

If Klepfisz is right both in that movements or communities that attempt to control membership are under a delusion that such control is really possible and that the attempt at such control has a damaging effect on members of the community, then it will be important to give up the delusion of and the attempt at control. Having a controlled community, a community in which members refuse what is just thrown their way but instead want to choose exactly how to create the community (including exercising choice over who may belong) requires, as Klepfisz puts it, a sifting. This sifting stands in contrast to the attitude of Gloria Anzaldúa, when she writes that "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (Borderlands 79). Pre-sifting, or the attempt at careful control, pre-empts the possibility of standing at the conflux of different cultures--of different configurations of the constitutive marks of identity; it interferes with the possibility of identity being made and remade unpredictably in the continued practices of a community, for all has been decided ahead of time; it stifles the growth of a culture,

capturing it in history in a moment of supposed authenticity and allowing nothing thereafter to be real.

Meanwhile, there is another sense in which control cannot be exercised over identity, and that is the sense in which one inherits a past, a people, a set of practices. While on the one hand there is the illusion that control can be exercised as it is manifested in an attempt to preserve a stagnant past and refuse change, on the other hand there is also the illusion that one has no past at all, that one can choose an identity, as if one came unencumbered. According to this logic, if one has no past--if one is not the bearer of any tradition--one is free to self-create. One can entirely choose--and therefore control--one's identity and one's community. "One's people" are whomever one chooses them to be.

But neither of these illusions are tenable. One is neither free of an inherited past nor is one captured by that past in such a way that one can only watch it happen, standing as a spectator as the culture or the defining identity animates itself in oneself.

* * *

It is dangerous to ask the "who are my people?" question if the motivation behind asking is to know whom to associate with, whom to join with, whom to form a movement or a community with. In part this motivation reveals that one does not believe oneself to "come with" any constitutive marks of identity, for it presupposes that all can be chosen. But secondly, this motivation is suspect because it ignores the damage that the exercise of such control can do; the control is a control of people, especially those people who will not fit within the defining limits of a community based on certain essential elements of identity. Furthermore, to live a life outside of the confines of a community that is so defined is to find it impossible to predict what the political callings will be, for they are not given in advance by the defining identity of the community. To live one's life on what Klepfisz is calling the "outside" is to be ready to act politically without having complete control. Audre Lorde makes this point beautifully:

> Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time and the arena and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle wherever we are standing. It does not matter too much if it is in the radiation lab or a doctor's office or the telephone company, the streets, the welfare department, or the classroom. The real blessing is to be able to use whoever I am wherever I am, in concert with as many others as possible, or alone if needs be. (A Burst of Light 120)

Answering the "who are my people?" question cannot serve as a guide in a controlled process of picking one's political companions, precisely because the process of joining together with others cannot be completely controlled if it is to take place within a world where it is necessary to stand and fight wherever one may find oneself and with whomever.

## APPENDIX
## SENTIDOS DE COMUNIDAD/SENSES OF COMMUNITY

A workshop from the summer encuentro of the Escuela Popular Norteña, Valdez, New Mexico, 1993.
This workshop was prepared by María Lugones and Lisa Tessman.

### Sentidos de Comunidad: Herramientas para pensar sobre redes comunitarias y sobre política de base comunitaria

Aquí incluimos algunas palabras útiles para pensar sobre distintos sentidos de comunidad. Varios de los términos se pueden usar juntos para describir a un mismo grupo de gente como formando una comunidad. Usted puede usar cualquiera que le resulte útil, o crear otro término si Usted quiere, para poder caracterizar a la comunidad que Usted tiene en mente.

**Comunidad de apoyo:** un grupo de gente que se apoyan unos a los otros: se ofrecen crítica, ayuda, apreciación en sus projectos; a veces tienen proyectos en común, a veces, los proyectos son individuales. Por ejemplo: un grupo de amigos.

**Comunidad de elección:** un grupo de gente que se junta voluntariamente para un fin común. Por ejemplo: un grupo político, un grupo de intereses comunes. Más concretamente: un grupo de trabajo sobre cuestiones de salud de la mujer, un grupo de ejercicios físicos, un grupo de concientización, una organizatión estudiantil latina.

**Comunidad de residencia:** la comunidad en la cual uno vive y que puede contener diversos grupos de gente. Los miembros de la comunidad pueden vivir en este lugar por razones similares o diferentes, por ejemplo, por elección, por tradición, por necesidad económica o privilegio, pueden estar forzados a vivir en esta comunidad o por otras circumstancias. Por ejemplo: Valdez, Los Angeles Este, El Norte de Springfield, La Prisión de Mujeres de Framingham.

**Comunidad de orígen:** la comunidad en que una nació. Puede haber nacido en un lugar (por ejemplo: Buenos Aires, Valdez, San Juan, el barrio de Phillips, el Bronx), un grupo cultural, un género o raza particulares, una religión (por ejemplo: católica), una familia (por ejemplo: la familia García), etc. Uno no elige la comunidad de orígen.

**Comunidad de destino/comunidad política:** una comunidad que Usted puede formar con otros, o que puede hallar ya formada (aún si Usted entra en una comunidad ya formada, pero participa críticamente la está formando, así que toda comunidad está siempre en un proceso continuo de formación). La comunidad con la cual uno quiere echar su destino. Puede ser que esta comunidad no tenga conciencia de si-misma como comunidad, pero al afirmarla como la comunidad de destino de uno mismo, está afirmando su futuro como una comunidad, y esta afirmación es política. Por ejemplo: las mujeres de color, los pobres rurales, las lesbianas, los Chicanos, Los Angeles Este.

Ofrecemos estas maneras distintas de pensar sobre comunidad porque creemos que el tener un sentido de colectividad--de comunidad--es central para hacer política que no sea individualista. Al pensar sobre los distintos sentidos de comunidad reconocemos que ya pertenecemos a comunidades y que somos afectados por nuestra membrecía en comunidad y reflexionamos sobre como eso nos afecta como personas políticas: ¿Qué conocimiento nos da que poder contribuir a la lucha política? ¿Qué experiencias hemos tenido dada nuestra posición particular en nuestras comunidades? El describirnos a nosotros mismos

dados estos distintos sentidos de comunidad, también nos puede ayudar a pensar si queremos formar nuevas alianzas, o crear y cambiar nuestras propias comunidades. Estamos pensando al mismo tiempo sobre cómo es que las comunidades en las cuales hemos participado nos han formado y como han creado en nosotros un sentido de identificación, lealtad, etc. ; y sobre que comunidad queremos como comunidad política donde encontraremos a nuestras compañeros políticos. Por lo tanto, decir que la política necesita ser comunitaria en vez de individualista no dice lo suficiente, porque aún tenemos que pensar a qué clase de comunidad nos estamos refiriendo. ¿Quiénes son los miembros de nuestras comunidades? ¿Cuál es la base de la comunidad: un pasado común? ¿Un proyecto comun? ¿Un compromiso político? ¿El hecho que los miembros viven juntos? ¿Circunstancias o poderes más allá de su control? ¿Alguna otra cosa? ¿Cómo nos han formado nuestra comunidad? ¿Qué clase de comunidades queremos afirmar como comunidades?

Por lo tanto la idea de estos ejercicios es que somos gente política y queremos tratar de percibir lo que está mal con nuestra sociedad para pensar en como cambiarla. ¿Con quién queremos cambiar a la sociedad?

Nos vamos a dividir en grupos pequeños para hacer estos tres ejercicios que nos van a hacer pensar y hablar sobre los cinco sentidos de comunidad.

1. Descríbase a si misma brevemente usando algunos de estos sentidos de comunidad. Por ejemplo, alguien puede decir, “Una de mis comunidades de origen es la comunidad Católica, pero desde ese entonces he rechazado algunos aspectos del ser católico. O, mi comunidad de lugar es Valdez. Vivo allí voluntariamente con el propósito de hacer trabajo político. Otra gente que vive en esta comunidad incluye a los Hispanos cuyas familias han vivido aquí por muchas generaciones, y anglos que se han mudado para explotar la belleza del lugar, etc. Uno de mis comunidades de elección es la Escuela Popular Norteña, un grupo de gente que he elegido como mis compañeros políticos. Etc.”

2. ¿Quién es Usted en cada una de estas comunidades? ¿Y cómo piensa en cada una de ellas? En particular, ¿hay comunidades que promueven su ser resistente mientras que otras lo atrapan en ser oprimido, en sus roles oprimidos? ¿Hay comunidades que tienen en Usted efectos opuestos a la vez? Por ejemplo, alguien puede decir, “Mi familia es una comunidad pequeña--parte de mi comunidad de orígen--me ayuda a ser resistente a la opresión pero también me hace participar en mi propia opresión y en la opresión de otros. Es un lugar donde me volví la persona que soy culturalmente--mi madre por ejemplo me enseñó el español mientras que otros niños Chicanos no lo estaban aprendiendo--así que es un lugar que me da fuerza en mi compromiso de no dejar que se destruya mi cultura. Al mismo tiempo, es un lugar donde soy testigo de abuso y a veces soy abusada--mi padre maltrata a mi madre y también me ha pegado a mí. Algo que he aprendido de ésto es que ser una mujer significa sufrir una cierta cantidad de abusos y estoy tratando de des-aprender esto. Por lo tanto, trato a veces de estar lejos de mi familia.”

3. ¿Hay alguna comunidad que no tiene en su vida presente que querría tener; por ejemplo, ¿Tiene Usted una comunidad políticay -una conciente de si que la ayuda a mantener un sentido político de Usted misma y de su lugar en la sociedad? ¿A Usted le parece posible crear tal comunidad o trabajar dentro de una comunidad para cambiarla y que sea más como la comunidad de sus sueños? ¿Con quién querría Usted hacer este trabajo? Qué sería necesario para completar este trabajo?

## Senses of Community:
## tools for thinking about networks & community based politics

Below are some terms for thinking about different senses of community. Many of the terms overlap, or can be used together to describe one group of people as forming a community. You can use whichever ones you find to be useful, or create another term if you want to in order to characterize a community you have in mind.

**Community of support**: a group of people whose members support each other: offer critique, help, appreciation in their projects; sometimes their projects are in common, sometimes they are individual projects. Example: a group of friends.

**Community of choice**: a group of people that comes together purposefully and voluntarily for a common end. Examples: a political group, an interest group. More concretely: a group doing work on health issues for women, an exercise group, a consciousness raising group, a Latino student organization.

**Community of place**: the community in which you live and which may, to one degree or another, contain many diverse groups of people. The members of the community may live in this place for similar or for different reasons, for instance, out of choice, out of tradition, out of economic necessity or privilege, out of force, or out of a variety of circumstances. Examples: Valdez, East L.A., North End of Springfield, Framingham Women's Prison.

**Community of origin**: the community you were born to. You can be born into a place (examples: Buenos Aires, Valdez, San Juan, Phillips neighborhood, the Bronx), a cultural group, a particular gender or race, a religion (example: Catholics), a family (example: the García family), etc. You do not get to choose your community of origin.

**Community of destination/political community**: a community that may be formed or found-already-formed, or both (even if you enter an already-formed community, if you engage critically with it, you are in part forming it; so it remains continually in the process of formation). The community with which one wants to throw one's lot. The community may not have a consciousness of itself *as* a community, but in claiming it as your community of destination you are *affirming* its future as a community, and this affirmation is political. Examples: women of color, the rural poor, lesbians, Chicanos, East L.A..

We offer these different ways of thinking about community because we think that having a sense of collectivity--of community--is central to doing politics which are not individualistic. In thinking about different senses of community we can come to recognize ourselves as already belonging to communities and being affected by our community memberships, and we can think about how this affects us as political people: what kind of knowledge does it give us to bring to our political struggles? what experiences have we had because of our locations in our communities? Describing ourselves using different senses of community can also help us see whether our political visions lead us to want to form new alliances to create or change our communities. We are thinking, then, both about how the communities of which we are or have been a part have formed us or created certain senses of identification, loyalty, etc. in us; and about what community of people we want as our political companions. So to say that politics need to be communitarian rather than individualistic does not say enough, for we still need to know *what* sort of community we are talking about. Who are the people in our communities? What are the communities based on: a common background? a shared project? a political commitment? the fact that

members live together? that members have been thrown together by powers or circumstances outside their control? something else? What sort of people do our communities make us into? What sort of communities do we want to affirm as communities?

So the idea of the exercises we are about to do is to say, "okay, so we are political people. We want to work on perceiving what is wrong in our society and going about changing it. But who are we going to make these changes with?"

We will work in small groups to do the following three exercises that will get us thinking and talking about these different senses of community.

1) Describe yourself briefly using a few of the different senses of community. For instance, someone might say, "One of my communities of origin is as a Catholic, but I have since rejected many aspects of being a Catholic. My community of place is Valdez; I live here out of choice, for the purpose of doing political work. Other people who live in this community include hispanos whose families have lived here for many generations, anglos who have moved in to exploit the beautiful surroundings, etc. One of my communities of choice is Escuela Popular Norteña, a group of people whom I have chosen as my political companions. Etc."

2) What "self" does each of these communities or ways of thinking about community bring out in you? In particular, are there some communities that nurture your resistant self and others that trap you into acting out an oppressed or oppressive role, that is, into being an oppressed or oppressive self? Are there some communities that have several different, perhaps contradictory or opposite effects on you? For instance, someone might say, "My family is a small community--part of my community of origin--which helps me be resistant to oppression but also makes me participate in my own and others' oppression. It is the place where I became the person I am culturally--my mother saw to it, for instance, that I learned Spanish even though many other Chicano children weren't learning it--so it is a place which gives me strength in my commitment not to let my culture be destroyed. At the same time, it is a place where I witness and am sometimes subject to abuse--my father mistreats my mother and has hurt me before, too. One thing I have learned from this is that being a woman means suffering a certain amount of abuse. I'm trying to unlearn this, so it helps to stay away from my family."

3) Is there some community that you lack in your present life that you wish existed; for instance, do you have a political community, a community which is conscious of itself as a community and maintains a political sense of itself and its place in society? Can you envision creating such a community, or working within a community of which you are already a part so as to change it to be more like the community you envision? Whom would you do this with? What would it require?

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