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Identity trouble

Disidentification and the problem of difference

Abstract This paper uses the conceptual apparatus of Wittgenstein's later philosophy to tackle a foundational issue in the philosophical literature on group identity, namely, the problem of difference. This *problem* suggests that any appeal to a collective identity is oppressive because it imposes a shared identity on the members of a group and suppresses the internal differences of the group. I develop a Wittgensteinian view of identity that *dissolves* this problem by showing the conceptual confusions on which it rests. My Wittgensteinian view of identity tries to establish two main theses: first, that identity is bound up with difference and presupposes heterogeneity; and second, that the solidarity of identity groups, far from being obstructed by differences, actually requires diversity. Drawing from gender and sexuality studies, I use the mechanism of *disidentification* to show how there can be shared identities and identity-based solidarity without the erasure of differences.

Key words community · difference · ethnicity · familial view · gender · identity · race · sexuality · solidarity · Wittgenstein

The 20th century witnessed the development of different movements of liberation: racial and ethnic movements, the women's movement, and the gay movement. These different movements found a common cause in the fight for the recognition of *difference*; and they were subsumed under the label of *identity politics*, being thus conceived as different fronts of the struggle for the liberation and empowerment of those whose identity had been subject to oppression. So one might think that the problem of difference has led to the unification of different movements within identity politics. But in fact it has been as much a source of

divisions as a source of solidarity. There are many who find it ill-advised for movements of liberation to form alliances because, they argue, these alliances sacrifice differences for the sake of a misconceived solidarity. They protest against a self-defeating *homogenizing* tendency in identity politics that forces us to treat *all differences as the same*, suppressing the specificity of each singular difference and of the distinctive movement mobilized for its liberation. Alliances between different racial and ethnic movements are frequently resisted in this way. For instance, some have argued that the problems facing Hispanics are substantially different from the problems of African-Americans and that overlooking these differences does a disfavor to both groups.¹ On the other hand, it has also been argued that it is a mistake to think that the gay movement is engaged in the same kind of political struggle as racial and ethnic movements, for the latter are emancipatory movements that try to change socio-economic conditions of exploitation while the former is not.² Many other forms of resistance to the unification of identity politics could be cited. It is not unusual to hear in different quarters of identity politics that the different battles against (social, economic, and legal) oppression are indeed so radically different that they are better off if each of them goes its own separate way, without relying on compromising alliances.

The problem of difference, therefore, seems to have been as much a source of unity and solidarity as a source of cross-fighting among the different movements of identity politics. Moreover, within each of these movements the problem of difference triggers the same dynamics, functioning both as a force of unification and as a source of much in-fighting. It has been argued that difference goes all the way down and that any appeal to a shared identity is oppressive. The very labels used as banners in these movements ('woman', 'African-American', 'Hispanic', 'gay', 'lesbian', etc.) have been deemed oppressive because they tacitly impose a common identity on a diverse group, overlooking internal differences. Within each of the political movements that fight for the recognition of difference we find a good number of its members protesting that their differences are not being acknowledged, sometimes to the point of their being forced to strip themselves of these differences in order to participate in the shared identity postulated by the movement. Women who belong to minority racial and ethnic groups have argued that they have not been given a voice in the feminist movement and they have emphasized their failure to identify with the subject of this movement; gays and lesbians have complained that they are excluded from (or at best left at the fringes of) racial and ethnic movements; and the gay movement has been criticized for being male-dominated and white-dominated. Some have gone as far as to say that the problem of difference gives rise to a paradox, the Paradox of Identity, that undermines the very foundations

of identity politics: any political movement for the liberation and empowerment of a group requires that the identity of the group be fixed, for such movement is predicated on the interests of the identity shared by all the members of the group; but by forcing people into fixed molds of group identity, these movements end up repressing and oppressing the very identities that they set out to liberate.³

In what follows I try to show that the so-called *problem of difference* in all the forms it takes within and across political movements rests on fundamental misconceptions about identity. The first misconception involves treating *identity and difference as opposites*, which forces us to assume that identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity must be (at least to some degree) *homogeneous*. That is, it is assumed that the various aspects of identity on which political movements are predicated must have a certain amount of homogeneity (and to that extent exclude differences) if they are going to have any stability at all. The second misconception that my diagnosis of the problem of difference will reveal has to do with treating identity as composed of *discrete* components or dimensions. It is of course universally acknowledged today that gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are interrelated in complex and interesting ways. But it is still widely assumed that these different aspects of identity can be separated out *analytically* so that we can account for each one in abstraction from the others, and *strategically* so that the different political battles associated with each of them can be carried out independently. This unidimensional logic is pervasive in the academic disciplines for the study of identity and in the practices of identity politics. I submit that, despite its apparent innocence, this logic is conceptually and politically suspect.

As I develop my diagnosis and critical assessment of the misconceptions that give rise to the problem of difference, I will argue for two main theses. First, I will argue that *identity is bound up with difference* and that all identity categories are intrinsically heterogeneous and necessarily unstable (for they keep within themselves the source of their own instability, always having a process of destabilization up their sleeve, no matter how rigidly fixed they become). Second, I will argue that identity is a *multifaceted* phenomenon that requires a pluralistic or multidimensional logic. On my view, the different aspects of identity are not developed discretely, one at a time or in coordination; the processes that shape gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are inextricably interwoven in such a way that their separation (even if only analytic or strategic) is distorting and politically dangerous, for it occludes relations of interdependence and it blocks paths for resistance and subversion. In order to develop both of these theses I will draw on the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and on a body of literature that is at the crossroads of gender studies, queer theory, and critical race theory. In

particular, I will use ideas derived from the performativity theory of gender and sexuality that has been developed at the intersection of feminist theory and queer theory.⁴ I will build on the critical challenges to feminist theory raised by women of color.⁵ And I will also draw on the interdisciplinary studies of critical theorists who work simultaneously on gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity.⁶ My goal in this paper is to bring together different ideas and arguments in this body of literature in order to solve, or rather *dissolve*, the so-called *problem* of difference.

1 'We are family!'

What is the relevant notion of *identity* that is invoked when we talk about gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity? It is certainly not the absolute identity of indiscernibles: identity in every respect. (It is far from clear that *any* living thing can be identical to itself in this absolute way.) When we talk about people of the same gender, the same sexual orientation, the same race, or the same ethnicity, we are talking about *relative* identity, that is, identity in some respect. But even this notion of relative identity needs to be further qualified if we want to avoid an overly strong reading of identity-claims. When identity is relativized to specific respects, it does not preclude difference in other respects. But does a relative identity entail the absence of difference in the relevant respect? It depends. Sometimes we say that two things are identical – for example, in color – in a *strict* sense: they have exactly the same shade of color, with the same brightness, the same intensity, etc. But sometimes we ascribe identity of color in a *lax* sense even if there are differences in shade, brightness, intensity, etc. This lax sense of relative identity is intimately related to the notion of *similarity*. Things that are similar in some respect can nevertheless be somewhat different in that respect (let alone in others); but their differences are overlooked in a context in which they are brought close enough to each other so that they can be grouped together and treated as members of the same category or *family*. So similarity operates in a context of difference in a *double* sense: things are regarded as similar against the background of differences in other respects as well as differences in the relevant respect that are considered negligible and are in fact neglected. We can *see* (the relevant) similarities only insofar as we make ourselves *blind* to (the irrelevant) differences. And this sight and this blindness presuppose each other and cannot be understood independently: they are both required by the perception of similarity.

One of the lessons we can learn from Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that most of the concepts we use to describe ourselves and the world around us are not applied according to fixed criteria of strict identity.

When we use a concept such as ‘game’ or ‘chair’, we treat all kinds of different things as *the same* although they are not strictly identical in any respect; that is, in our categorizations different things are treated as instances of the *same* category even though there is no feature (or set of features) that they all have in common: many different kinds of activities are called games and many different kinds of artifacts are called chairs; and we can always add new items to the list of things that fall under these concepts (we can always invent new kinds of game and produce new kinds of chair). Wittgenstein suggested that these concepts are like *families*, whose members resemble one another in many different ways: some may have similar hair, others similar noses, others may share particular ways of talking, or similar laughter, etc. Families are composed of heterogeneous elements; there is nothing in particular that all their members must have: they simply exhibit some similarities, they share certain ‘family resemblances’,⁷ but there is no fixed set of necessary and sufficient conditions that determines membership. As Wittgenstein puts it, what brings together and keeps together the members of those categories that function like families is ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing’.⁸ Wittgenstein’s analogy between the strength of a concept and the strength of a thread illustrates this point: ‘we extend our concept . . . as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.’⁹

Since, as we just saw, similarity is bound up with differences in a twofold sense, this network of similarities in which the familial identity of the members of a concept consists must be accompanied by *two distinct networks of overlapping and criss-crossing differences*: one network of differences that sets apart the members of the family from the members of other families; and another network composed of those differences among the members of the family themselves that lurk in the background and are disregarded for the sake of familial identity. It is important to note that the relationship that holds between these networks is a *dynamic* one: differences that today set apart one family from another may become inconsequential tomorrow; and, on the other hand, internal differences that are considered negligible today may grow to be important differences tomorrow, even to the point of excluding individuals from membership in the family. At the same time, these dynamic fluctuations between the networks of differences correspond to transformations in the network of similarities that sustains familial identity, for all these networks are mutually dependent and they are shaped simultaneously. Thus the analogy between families and concepts underscores change: a family is a living unit whose members come and go; and, similarly, what is covered by a concept is subject to change and

must be left open. Moreover, even when the extension of the concept does not change, even when the membership in the family remains the same, the relations among the members of the family (as well as their relations with other families) change as differences become visible and family ties are relaxed.¹⁰

The familial view of identity based on Wittgenstein's account of categorization suggests two points: namely, that identity can be thought of as something *heterogeneous*, based on diversity, and as something *unstable*, subject to fluctuation. This familial view of identity has been recently applied to ethnic identity in order to show that the quest for ethnic purity is misguided. This quest presupposes the homogeneity and fixity of ethnicity; but when ethnic groups are conceptualized as families, it becomes clear that the homogeneity and fixity of ethnic identities are nothing but myths. In this vein, in his familial account of Hispanic identity, Jorge Gracia emphasizes that families are not homogeneous wholes composed of pure elements: 'They include contradictory elements and involve mixing. Indeed, contradiction and mixing seem to be of the essence, for a living unity is impossible without contradiction and heterogeneity.'¹¹ Gracia argues that this is particularly true of the Hispanic family that has been constituted through mixing or *mestizaje* at all levels: it is *mestizaje* that characterizes all aspects of Hispanic life from language, art, and religion to music, cuisine, and clothing. Given this heterogeneous character, it is not surprising that all attempts to reduce the shared identity of Hispanics to common properties fail. These failures have led many to conclude that we should give up Hispanic identity and retreat to national identities (Mexican, Cuban, Argentinian, etc.) – but, as it turns out, these collective identities pose the same problems. This reaction is based on the essentialist assumption that there is no shared identity when there are no common features. But this assumption is a misconception. The unity of Hispanics as an ethnic group cannot be established at the expense of diversity, but on the basis of it. As Gracia puts it, the unity of Hispanics is 'a unity in diversity', not a unity of commonality, but a *unity of community*: the unity of a *family* formed by 'a unique web of changing historical relations'.¹² This familial-historical view calls our attention to the contingencies of the past that have contributed to the formation of our Hispanic identity; and it underscores that the future of our identity remains open and therefore presents us with a task for which we have to take responsibility. According to this view, an ethnic identity is something dynamic that is always in the making and can never be fixed once and for all.¹³

This familial view can be extended to apply to other dimensions of identity that involve a bond between an individual and a group. Gender,

sexuality, and race seem to be amenable to this treatment; they seem to involve a shared identity that can be analyzed in terms of membership in a community or family. But before I try to show how the familial view can be used to shed light on identity categories, two caveats are in order. First, as used in my Wittgensteinian view, the notion of a family should not be understood as a purely biological concept, but, rather, as a hybrid notion that contains *social and political* elements as well as biological ones. Families are not just biological groups, but social structures and legal institutions. It would be a mistake to think that only biological features constitute adequate criteria for familial membership. (Indeed, people can gain and lose parental rights on the basis of non-biological considerations.) Second, we have to keep in mind that there are all kinds of family and, therefore, only a *pluralistic* notion of 'family' can be useful for the analysis of collective identities. My Wittgensteinian approach does not rest on any specific conception of the family; in particular, it is not dependent upon the patriarchal familial model that has been dominant in the West. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, for one, has noted,¹⁴ given the social, political, and legal institutions of the USA, the appeal to family values typically involves a rhetoric of custody and protection that has been at the service of a masculinist ideology.¹⁵ However, power can be distributed among the members of a family in many different ways: there may or may not be a head of the family; there may or may not be differential authority among family members at all. Far from being complacent with the patriarchal model of family relations, the genealogical approach and the comparative perspective behind my familial view are intended to subvert this model and to be critical of oppressive familial structures in general. In this sense, my familial view connects with ongoing efforts in the literature on identity (especially in feminist theory¹⁶ and queer studies¹⁷) to rearticulate the very notion of a family and to subvert what is typically understood by 'family values'.

With these caveats, I propose to use the notion of a family as a metaphor in order to analyze identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. By way of determining whether it is helpful to think of these different aspects of identity in familial terms, I propose to focus on the following two questions. How does one become a member of these families; and how are these families related to one another? It does not seem implausible to suggest that the capacity of the familial view to give good answers to these questions will be tantamount to its capacity to shed light on gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. It is also my belief that the familial view of identity can have political benefits as well as analytical ones, for a better understanding of identity categories can facilitate the development of political formations for the liberation of identity.

2 To be *and* not to be: this mess that is called my identity

How does one become a member of those 'families' designated by identity categories such as 'woman', 'lesbian', 'Hispanic', etc.? A first step toward a Wittgensteinian answer to this question is to point out that membership in these categories is not *determined* by facts. This is not to say that facts are irrelevant to the question of membership. There are indeed facts of many kinds (biological, historical, social, biographical, etc.) that bear on this question. The point is that these facts do not speak for themselves; we speak for them. And we can do so only in discursive *contexts*, by means of discursive *practices*, and according to discursive *norms*. This claim, that familial identity is shaped in and through normatively structured and situated practices (or 'language games'), already contains the three crucial ingredients of Wittgenstein's view: *contextuality*, *performativity*, and *normativity*. Only in specific contexts, through chains of performances, and through the norms constantly re-enacted in them, can the membership of particular things in particular families be decided. As Wittgenstein argues,¹⁸ if we abstract from contexts, practices, and norms, the question of membership becomes indeterminate and cannot be answered: on an absolute perspective, everything is similar to everything else and also different from everything else in an indefinite number of respects, and familial identity appears as utterly arbitrary. But the question of membership is not indeterminate and arbitrary when it is properly conceptualized as something context-dependent, action-based, and normatively regulated. As we saw, familial identity is sustained by interrelated networks of similarities and differences; and these networks become alive through practices (or 'language games') in which certain things are treated as similar and others as different. These practices do not take place in a vacuum, but in concrete contexts in which things are identified and grouped together; and these contexts are structured by tacit norms (or normative expectations) that are exhibited in the behavior of the participants. By being trained into these practices one develops an eye for similarities and differences (which, as we saw, involves both sight and blindness). One's grasp of familial identities is thus domesticated.

What are the mechanisms that shape our sight and blindness with respect to similarities and differences? More specifically, we want to know the particular mechanisms at play when we are not simply grouping things into families, but we are being identified and identifying ourselves as members of certain families. There are two obvious candidates that seem to go along with the perception of similarities and differences respectively: *identification* and *counter-identification*. We can ascribe a familial identity to someone (or to ourselves) by identifying this person with the members of that family, that is, by construing her identity

through her participation in the network of similarities that tie the members of that family together: thus we can see someone as a woman by stressing her similarities with other women. But one can also acquire a familial identity in opposition to the members of other families, by having one's identity looked at through the network of differences that separates one family from others: thus we can see someone as a woman by stressing her differences from men. Both the perception of similarity involved in identification and the perception of difference involved in counter-identification are crucially dependent on a corresponding *blindness*. We are certainly different from those we identify with in many ways; and we are certainly similar to those we counter-identify with in many ways. But we are blind to these differences and similarities in the contexts of, and for the purposes of, identification and counter-identification. If the blindness of these mechanisms of identity-formation was absolute and irreparable, we would fall neatly into identity categories; and our 'families' or identity groups would be completely rigid and monolithic, with clear-cut relations of inclusion and exclusion at their foundations. But our familial identities are far messier than that, often involving relations of inclusion and exclusion at the same time, and sometimes falling into the cracks between identification and counter-identification. Who has not had the experience of not fitting completely into a pre-established mold of identity, of feeling left out while being included?

There is identity trouble everywhere. There are all kinds of identity trouble that afflict our 'families'. The most radical kind of trouble is that of those whose identity is systematically excluded from all families, those invisible orphans whose identity is not recognized at all. But the members of identity groups are not free from trouble. The sources of these troubles are as varied as the troubles themselves. Identity trouble can be caused by a failure to identify (counter-identifying with the members of one's family would be an example). It can also be due to a failure to counter-identify (not seeing one's oppressor as different from or in opposition to oneself is a trouble of this kind). But identity trouble persists even when processes of identification and counter-identification are in place and working at their best. The kind of identity trouble that I am interested in for the purpose of this paper is that which is rooted in the *blindness* to similarities and differences that accompanies familial identity and the relations of exclusion and inclusion on which it is built. This blindness hides the structural messiness that is inscribed in the very core of familial identity, a messiness that consists in the heterogeneous and fluctuating character of the interlocking networks of similarities and differences that sustain identity. This messiness can come to the surface at any given time and often does. When it does, we feel ill at ease with the members of our family, we feel that we 'don't quite belong'. This

occurs when our sight is restored and we are no longer blind to our differences from our family members and our similarities to members of other families. This is what feminist theorists and queer theorists have termed *disidentification*. Judith Butler describes it as the ‘experience of *misrecognition*, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong’.¹⁹

Disidentification could be described as a particularly lucid kind of identification or counter-identification; that is, as a way of identifying with the members of a family without losing sight of one’s differences with them, or a way of counter-identifying with the members of other families while seeing one’s similarities with them. However, it would be wrong to construe disidentification as a mere special case of identification and counter-identification. This construal would miss what is most characteristic about the relation of disidentification, namely, that it brings both similarities and differences simultaneously to bear on one’s identity. Disidentificatory relations highlight the messiness of the process of identity-formation, which is not reducible to simple relations of identification and counter-identification. The mechanism of disidentification messes things up and creates trouble for the established networks of similarities and differences that sustain familial identities. As José Muñoz puts it, ‘to disidentify is to read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to “connect” with the disidentifying subject’.²⁰ Muñoz is quick to point out that this is not simply ‘to pick and choose what one takes out of an identification’ (or of a counter-identification), but it involves a much deeper transformation of one’s identity and one’s identity relations with others. For example, in his analysis of different instances of disidentification in performance art, Muñoz examines ways in which gay Latinos disidentify with cultural images of Hispanic masculinity and how their subversive rearticulations of these images can contribute to the transformation of cultural paradigms of identity.

Butler has characterized the subversive potential of disidentification better than anybody. On her view, disidentification contributes to the destabilization of the signifiers of identity and triggers a process of resignification. As Butler puts it, ‘to be constituted’ by a signifier of identity is ‘to be compelled to cite or repeat or mime’ the signifier itself, whose future depends on a ‘citational chain’, that is, a chain of signification that operates through an insistent citing of the signifier. But this performative iterability of the signifiers of identity involves *resignification*, that is, ‘a repetition that fails to repeat loyally, a reciting of the signifier that must commit a disloyalty against identity – a catechresis – in order to secure its future’.²¹ For Butler, disidentification is the source of resistance to the sedimentation of signifiers; and as ‘a site of rearticulations’, it offers a ‘discursive occasion for hope’.²² In her exploration of

'the possibilities of politicizing *disidentification*', Butler emphasizes the importance of being 'critically queer'.²³ The political vindication of disidentification is the critical affirmation of queerness within an identity group: 'the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference'.²⁴ Repeated disidentification can progressively open up an identity group to difference and diversity. But it is important to note that the work of disidentification always remains unfinished, for 'there can be no final or complete inclusivity'.²⁵

From the standpoint of the familial view that I am developing in this paper, the transformative potential of disidentification is of crucial importance. Disidentification messes up the relations within and across families, inviting the rearticulation of the networks of similarities and differences that sustain familial identities. In this way disidentification is an occasion for subversion,²⁶ for disrupting established relations of similarity and difference and the unifications and divisions they create. In order to illustrate how disidentification can transform the articulation of an identity category and the community organized around it, let us consider the development of the category *woman* in Anglo-American feminism.

As Norma Alarcón has argued,²⁷ the first stages of the Anglo-American feminist movement were characterized by the logic of identification and counter-identification. In a first stage, feminist liberation presupposed the identification with men: women tried to appropriate the idea of 'an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject', thus claiming for themselves something that had traditionally been the prerogative of men. A second stage was dominated by the logic of counter-identification: women defined themselves in opposition to men, developing different aspects of their identity oppositionally by contrasting 'women's ways' with 'men's ways'. It was soon objected that this form of oppositional thinking sustained the very binary logic that feminism was supposed to subvert. The logics of identification and counter-identification forced the feminist movement either to assimilate or to oppositionally resist assimilation to male-dominated configurations of identity, thus forcing the movement to remain parasitic on a masculinist ideology. Feminist debates repeatedly expressed the need to develop a new discourse for the unified subjectivity or shared consciousness of women. Different 'common denominators' that unite women were proposed and challenged. But, more importantly, this very idea of *unity* through gender was problematized by radical feminists of color who argued that the search for the unitary subject of feminist theory was misguided. In *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) these feminist thinkers claimed that by subsuming all women under a unitary category without thematizing racial, ethnic, sexual, and class differences, the subject posited by feminist theory had been, by default, the

middle-class straight white woman. And they went on to argue that gender identity cannot be understood independently of racial, ethnic, sexual, and class identity. Until this is recognized, they claimed, it will be impossible to overcome the deep divisions that exist within the feminist movement, for: 'one becomes a woman' in ways that are much more complex than in a simple opposition to men. In cultures in which 'asymmetric race and class relations are a central organizing principle of society', one may also 'become a woman' in opposition to other women.²⁸

As Alarcón puts it, the challenges raised by feminists of color in *This Bridge* derived from 'a process of *disidentification* with prevalent formulations of the . . . theoretical subject of feminism'.²⁹ Writing nine years later, Alarcón argues that these challenges have not yet been met, mainly because the standard strategy in feminist theory for dealing with internal differences has been to acknowledge them only to set them aside: 'The difference is handed over with one hand and taken away with the other.'³⁰ An example of this strategy can be found in Teresa de Lauretis who, after stressing that 'an identity [is] made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class', still insists on unity through gender by saying that 'the female subject is always constructed and defined in gender, starting from gender'.³¹ But a free-standing account of gender will not do. By treating racial, ethnic, sexual, and class differences as secondary and analytically detachable from gender identity, feminists are imposing an artificial unity on all women. Unity, far from being demanded by *solidarity* (as traditionally assumed), actually becomes an obstacle for it. The kind of solidarity that is required has to be based on diversity, not on unity. The disidentifications of women of color with the unitary subject postulated by feminist theory call for a new form of solidarity and a transformed community. As Alarcón puts it, the challenges raised by radical feminists show that we are dealing with a 'struggle of multiple antagonisms' and that the battles against 'antagonistic relations between races, classes, and gender[s]' cannot be fought independently.³² These challenges cannot be met by the unitary logics of identification and counter-identification. They require a *pluralistic* logic of disidentification which can effect the diversification and pluralistic transformation of identity groups. The diversity and plurality disclosed by disidentification need to be accommodated not only in the structure of those communities that are built for this 'struggle of multiple antagonisms', but also in the very identities of those who participate in these communities. This pluralistic view of the self can be found in the writings of feminists of color such as Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Anzaldúa talks about the self as a plurality, as a site of multiple voices that give expression to

multiple registers of existence. The pluralistic nature of the self is apparent in the multi-voiced subjectivity of those who live at the borders between two cultures. But this internal multiplicity of our identity is hindered and handicapped by an implacable profiling that imposes homogenized categories. Current political practices in the USA subject our identity to rigid categorizations and silence the voices of those whose identity is extended over different cultural domains (those who belong to different families). This is the situation that Anzaldúa aims to transform by placing the emphasis on multiplicity.

The writings of María Lugones also aim at a similar subversion. She calls our attention to the fact that it is everywhere demanded of us that we be *one*, that all the different aspects of our personality be integrated in a unified center. This general anxiety about being one induces in us the fear of duplicity or plurality, which are depicted as a loss of self or as fractures of the self. Lugones proposes ambiguity as 'a creative strategy of resistance' against this unified picture of the self.³³ Her view suggests a pluralistic logic for identity categories, emphasizing the fluidity of identity and the relationality between one's selves and those of others. She also recommends 'playfulness' and 'world-travelling' as ways of overcoming the obstacles that block cross-cultural and cross-racial identification.³⁴ On Lugones's view, 'world-travelling' involves the exploration of phenomenal domains in which different identities can flourish; and being 'playful' involves having an experimentalist attitude with respect to one's self and the 'worlds' one inhabits. Through playful explorations we can develop a loving empathy toward those who are significantly different from ourselves, thus transforming our relationship with them; and at the same time we can transform and enlarge our own selves.

From the insights and challenges developed by feminists of color we can learn as much about the complex nature of (familial) identity as we can learn about the complex relations between identity groups or families. Indeed their complaints about how the feminist family has failed so far to accommodate internal differences are complaints about how this family has failed to take into account its relations with other families or identity groups.

There are clear dangers in compartmentalizing the lives of families. Minimally, construing the life of one family as independent of the life of another breeds mutual indifference between the members of these families. But the situation is typically worse, for it is often the case that compartmentalization not only blocks paths of identification but also builds on relations of counter-identification; and, therefore, compartmentalized groups are often not just separated from each other, but placed in opposition to one another, which establishes and consolidates antagonistic relations. So, when familial groups become compartmentalized, the relations among them are either ignored or construed oppositionally;

and as a result, there is either indifference or animosity. This situation cries out for change, and the change requires the subversion of the strategy of compartmentalization (which weakens familial groups and keeps them in check, contributing to their domestication). Disidentification is one of the tools that can be used for such subversion. For example, the artificial separation of Hispanic identity from Asian and African identities is resisted in various ways by the disidentifications of Hispanic Filipino/as and Afro-Caribbeans.

The mechanism of disidentification diversifies a group and strengthens the relations between groups. This mechanism has the capacity to bridge the gulf between families and to bring to the fore the internal diversity of each family. The basis of this capacity can be found in three aspects of the process of disidentification. In the first place, disidentification underscores the interrelations between the networks of similarities and differences that constitute familial identities, making it difficult to sever the ties between families or to construe these ties in purely oppositional terms (as it is done through counter-identification). In the second place, disidentification reminds us that the similarities and differences that unite and separate families are subject to fluctuations; and indeed disidentification itself is an occasion for the rearticulation of these similarities and differences. In the third place, our uneasy feeling that we do and do not belong to a family reveals that our identity is never exhausted by membership in one family, that there is always an excess in us, a surplus of identity that comprises parts of ourselves that participate in other familial associations as well as orphan aspects of our identity. The multifaceted character of identity indeed requires the simultaneous membership in multiple families.

In order to understand properly this fundamental phenomenon of multiple familial associations, it is important to issue a warning against a possible misconception that can result from a dangerous simplification of the familial metaphor. The danger is to use this metaphor to construe identity as composed of *discrete* elements that can be individually explained in terms of familial associations added on to one another. This would suggest that one's identity could be sorted out, as it were, by looking for membership cards in one's wallet. But this simplification hides the fact that the different aspects of one's identity are fused together. It belies the messiness of identity and the inseparability of one's ties to different families. That one's memberships in different families are inextricably intertwined with each other can be shown through a cursory look at the three features of the formation of familial identity emphasized above: contextuality, performativity, and normativity.

In the first place, our families or identity groups do not occupy different territories. They are not like clubs that have their own spaces.

There may be specific contexts that are of particular importance for our gender identity, or have special significance for our ethnicity. There are indeed contexts in which one aspect of our identity is brought to the fore and other aspects are relegated to the background. But by and large the different aspects of our identity are formed and developed simultaneously in a whole range of situations that cannot be neatly classified into gender contexts, racial contexts, class contexts, etc. In the second place, there are no discrete practices that contribute individually to the formation of different aspects of our identity. It is not as if we developed our identity by doing a bit of gender, and then a bit of race, etc. The performativity of identity is multifaceted and does not admit divisions of this kind. Our gender performance is not separable from the performances of race, ethnicity, or sexuality; and any separation here would be artificial. Finally, the normativity of identity also seems to leave little room for compartmentalization. The norms or normative expectations that pertain to different aspects of our identity overlap and intersect one another in complex ways (not always consistently); and they are typically blended together in an undistillable mix. The things expected of a middle-class straight white woman or of a working-class gay Latino man are thrown at them in amorphous piles of expectations (not piece by piece in manageable bits) across different contexts and activities.

The normative frameworks that shape the different aspects of our identity interpenetrate each other, forming a normative blend that regulates our practices and structures the contexts in which they take place. It has been emphasized in the literature on gender and sexuality that gender normativity and sexual normativity are indistinguishable, for gender and sexual norms work together in the domestication of identity. It has also been argued that racial norms have to be added to the mix. Racist, masculinist, and heterosexist ideologies pervade the normative expectations that shape our identities. And the more one's identity deviates from this blend of normative frameworks, the more disempowered one is. It is therefore understandable that, initially, the different movements within identity politics tried to liberate one difference at a time, considering it impossible (or suicidal) to fight too many battles at once. It is indeed no accident that certain groups were given a privileged position within these movements: middle-class straight white women in the feminist movement, or middle-class white gay men in the queer movement, for example; for, in virtue of their (relatively) minimal deviations from established normative frameworks, they appeared as (more) valid interlocutors with the rest of society. Today we still hear these considerations voiced as pragmatic arguments to elevate people to positions of leadership within identity politics. I hope I have said enough to show that these arguments are suspect because they buy into a dangerous strategy of compartmentalization – a strategy that involves complicity

with an exclusionary logic of domination and makes identity groups internally oppressive. (This logic is to blame, among other things, for the systematic exclusion of transgendered people in the queer movement.) Times have changed (a little bit at least); and the movements of identity politics have entered a new stage: a stage in which they can mutually support each other in 'a struggle of multiple antagonisms'; a stage in which embracing internal differences does not endanger, but actually strengthens, solidarity. It seems to me that my discussion has offered good reasons to think that the different movements of liberation within identity politics *not only can but must work together*. It is now time to fight multiple battles.

It seems fair to conclude that the familial view of identity developed in this section has a story to tell about how we become members of a family and how different families are related to one another, thus answering the two questions I posed. Therefore, this view might be able to shed some light on different aspects of our identity, their interrelations, and the communities built around them; and it might also help us come to terms with the *problem* of difference. But before I bring my discussion of identity and difference to a close, let me offer a brief illustration of how a discursive practice or 'language game' can contribute to the formation of familial identities and to the regularization of their relations. I choose this particular illustration for various reasons: it involves the simultaneous formation of different familial identities; it leaves room for disidentifications of various kinds; and it illustrates how identity can be shaped through the domestication of desire. Although this last element has not been thematized in the familial account offered here, it must be integrated in it. The erotic can be used to elaborate the familial account further and to invite new developments. For indeed desire is an important source of messiness; and it can certainly mess up family relations.

3 An illustration: the Triana 'Negro' as a site for a common fight

As an illustration I will use a story that belongs to the local folklore of my native town, Sevilla, in Andalucía (southern Spain). Whether or not there is any factual basis for the story, it is typically told with an air of secrecy as a piece of dark local history.³⁵ The story is the narrative accompaniment of a strange ritual now extinct that was performed until the late 1990s in the church of Santa Ana, the principal church of Triana, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Sevilla. The ritual started in 1845 with the discovery of a peculiar sepulcher in the back of the

church. The sepulcher has a tombstone composed of 32 ceramic tiles that depict the distinguished figure of a young man of dark complexion dressed in noble attire. The tombstone has an inscription that reads 'This image and this sepulcher are those of Iñigo Lopes, slave. 1503 A.D.'; and it is signed by Francisco Niculoso Pisano, the most famous European ceramist of all times. As a child growing up in Triana, I was fascinated by this tombstone and the figure depicted in it. My fascination was not due to Iñigo's youth or color, but to the fact that a slave would be buried inside a church, for in Andalucía only those who have been officially beatified or declared saints receive that privilege. But fascination soon gave way to horror when I witnessed the ritual performed on this tombstone. I was horrified when I saw women fiercely kicking Iñigo in the face several times, seven to be exact. I was informed that this ritual of the seven kicks was performed by women (mainly low-class women, often gypsies) to secure a good marriage. This did not bring much peace to my mind. It is indeed not immediately obvious how kicking a tombstone seven times is supposed to get you a 'good husband'. There is a story that is said to shed light on this ritual. I've heard different versions of it, but they all have the same essential ingredients. I will relate what I take to be a standard version of the story, which was published in the cultural pages of the national newspaper *EL PAIS* on 12 August 2000, soon after the ritual was finally prohibited by the church of Santa Ana.³⁶

The story is the tale of how Iñigo Lopes was killed by a marquis whose name, we are told, 'should remain unmentioned in order to protect his descendants'. This is how it goes. In 1493 Columbus asked the chief of a tribe in the Caribbean island of Borinquén (Puerto Rico) to allow a young native to go back with him to the Old World. The chief gave Columbus his own son; and upon his arrival in Sevilla Columbus gave the custody of the boy to Franciscan monks with whom the child lived for eight years until his tragic death. Enter the unnamable marquis, benefactor of the monastery, who from the beginning took a strong interest in this child from the New World. It was the marquis who gave him the name of Iñigo Lopes, becoming his godfather. He also acted as Iñigo's mentor, teaching him classic languages and science in his daily afternoon visits. The marquis convinced the prior of the monastery to sell Iñigo to him as a slave. One afternoon, after becoming his master, the marquis urged Iñigo to sleep with him, but Iñigo refused. The marquis insisted and his advances became increasingly violent. Not being able to break Iñigo's resistance, the marquis beat him to death. We are not told what happened to the marquis after that. It is unlikely that killing Iñigo earned him a good reputation in the community; but it is not unthinkable that his deed went unpunished since it was the life of his own property that he took. We know that Iñigo received the honor

of being buried in a prestigious church and his death was commemorated by a tombstone that is the work of a world-famous artist (already well known at the time).

Now, how is this story supposed to explain (let alone justify) the ritual of the seven kicks? In the light of the story the ritual appears as a ceremonial murder, the ritualized reiteration of the killing of Iñigo, for the parishioners' kicks on the symbolic representation of Iñigo's body re-enact the violent acts that the marquis inflicted on his actual body. In fact, the repeated re-enactment of this ritualized murder came close to the literal destruction of Iñigo's symbolic body. The constant repetition of this murder ritual damaged the tiles so severely that it almost succeeded in erasing the face of Iñigo (today it takes some effort to make out his features and even his color). It appears that the purpose the ritual served was to *kill the memory* of Iñigo, to commit what C. Morris has termed a *mnemonicide*.³⁷ But why? Why should the memory of Iñigo be considered a shameful memory? If there is shame in the tale of his death, why should this shame be attached to the symbolic body of Iñigo? What did he do to deserve this treatment after 1845 (which clearly tries to undo the honors he received in 1503)? Was he guilty of anything? The very fact that he was buried in a church among saints suggests that he was not guilty of any sin. He was not the one who succumbed to homosexual desire and transgressed sexual norms. In fact, it is Iñigo's purity and innocence that seem to have gained him a posthumous saintly treatment. He could even be considered a sacrificial lamb of heteronormativity.

However, although Iñigo did not violate norms of sexual decorum, his defiance clearly appears as an act of insubordination that violates the normative expectations associated with his social status and racial condition. He refused to satisfy the marquis. And how dared he? A slave, and a 'Negro'! The story and the ritual seem to intimate that Iñigo committed an act of hubris that deserves punishment. But what else could Iñigo have done? Should he have consented to the marquis's wishes? Perhaps. After all, a homosexual affair can be given a place in a heterosexist economy: a homosexual relation (especially with a slave) can be regarded as compatible with compulsory heterosexuality if it does not obstruct one's marital duties. But in our story the object of homosexual desire could not be integrated in a heterosexist economy in this way and was severely punished for it. In the ritual of the seven kicks women re-enact this murder, repeatedly killing the object of homosexual desire. This ritualized version of the murder performed by women could be construed as an attempt to free the desiring subject from homosexual temptations so that he can perform his marital duties, or even as a way of getting rid of competition: if they can make Iñigo (or his beauty) disappear, perhaps they will get the marquis!

I do not have room in this paper to explore all the possible identifications, counter-identifications, and disidentifications that can be associated with the story of the Triana 'Negro' and the ritual of the seven kicks. Without trying to give an exhaustive analysis, I will simply comment on a few interesting points that can be used to illustrate the argument developed in this paper.

First, it is important to note that ethnic and racial identities are shaped in a particular way in the story and the ritual. To begin with, assimilation occurred as soon as the Caribbean native arrived in Sevilla: he is baptized and educated in the Western canon; and as portrayed in his tombstone, his physical appearance (including his clothes, haircut, and manicured nails) became distinctively Castilian. Sevilla is thus presented as a culturally homogeneous space, as a place in which there is room for one way of life only. On the one hand, it is surprising that Spanish life is described in culturally homogeneous terms, since so many different cultures coexisted in the Iberian peninsula; and of course this ethnic diversity was particularly accentuated in southern Spain, which was mainly populated by Arabs until 1492 and also had a very strong Jewish community. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the cultural life of Sevilla is depicted as dominated by the severe assimilationist attitude of Castilians. What else should we expect from the Castilians who expelled Arabs and Jews from the peninsula and forced those who stayed to convert to their religion and to assimilate to their culture? This is the time when the Castilian construction of Spanish identity began. As Gracia for one has argued,³⁸ there was no such thing as a single Spanish identity before 1492. The territories that were ultimately unified under the Spanish crown were occupied by peoples with rather different languages and customs (Galicians, Catalans, Basques, etc.) and they had no conception of themselves as one people. (For centuries to come people will refer not to a single Spain but to many Spains, 'Las Españas'.) The construction of Spanish identity was facilitated by two violent historical processes: the process of unification of the peninsula led by Castilians; and the conquest of American lands. The colonization of America gave Iberians the opportunity to define themselves as a people by contrast with the peoples of the New World. This oppositional definition of Spanish identity created a myth of purity, the myth of a pure Spanish identity that existed prior to the encounter with America.

The new Spanish-American community was organized along color lines. This is patent in our story where the two central characters are the white marquis and the American native of color. In telling the story or describing the famous sepulcher people typically refer to Iñigo as '*the Negro of Triana*', as if there had been only one Negro surrounded by white Spaniards in this neighborhood at the time. But Iñigo could not

have been much darker than the numerous Arabs and Jews who, after forced conversion, still lived in Sevilla after 1492; or than the gypsies who have traditionally populated Triana and were the most likely audience of the story in the 19th and 20th centuries.³⁹ The story depicts color as a sign of not being a Spaniard. Therefore, it invites Spaniards to think of themselves as white (to identify with the marquis, or the monks, or other secondary characters). And given the white normativity that supports the story, the message it conveys to non-white Spaniards is that they do not quite belong, that they need to assimilate and follow the rules of white Spaniards.⁴⁰ At the same time the white and black poles of identification in the story are clearly color-coding social and class distinctions, setting up a clear-cut contrast between empowered and disempowered subjects. The story of the Triana 'Negro' is the story of a disempowered subject of color who is forced to play by the rules of a white-dominated society and he loses tragically at his first refusal to follow the rules. The message for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder seems to be that the only attitude that is appropriate to their condition is that of absolute submission. They need to submit no matter what. If they do not want to assume the risk of paying with their own lives, they must comply with the commands of those in power, no matter how eccentric these commands may be. It is not accidental that in the story economic possession precedes the attempted sexual possession, as if the former were a precondition of the latter, or as if the latter were just an adequate exercise of subjugation. But I do not want to go as far as to suggest that the story legitimates the (quite common) sexual affairs of wealthy and powerful white men with the low-class inhabitants of Triana (especially women, but occasionally men as well) in the 19th and 20th centuries. (These affairs have been a common phenomenon that was certainly tolerated, but it would be very surprising to find that they were actually encouraged.) Let us not forget the tragic ending of the story, which is re-enacted in the ritual of the seven kicks. The violent death of Iñigo can be read as a warning of the dangers of sexual relations between members of different classes and racial groups. To those who identify with the 'Negro' the story says: 'Beware of becoming the object of desire of a white man, because if you do, you will be forced to total submission, resisting it only at the cost of your life.' To those who identify with the marquis the story says: 'Beware of fixing your desire on a Negro because it can become uncontrollable, forcing your behavior to go to unthinkable extremes.'

In the story of the Triana 'Negro' the domestication of desire and the domestication of identity happen simultaneously. Racial, ethnic, class, and sexual identities are brought under the control of certain underlying tacit norms. These norms are performatively invoked in the

ritual of the seven kicks through the symbolic murder of an object of desire that has a distinctive racial, ethnic, and class identity. But what about gender? How is gender construed in the ritual and its narrative accompaniment? How are gender relations brought under normative control? It is of the utmost importance that the ritual is performed by women, that women are the ones who inflict violence upon the symbolic body of the 'Negro', that is, upon the white man's object of desire. By contrast, women are conspicuously absent in the story: not only are there no female characters, but women are not even in the background. In the story Sevilla is depicted as a purely masculine world, as a place without women. And of course making women invisible is a radical way of disempowering them. On the other hand, the ritual of the seven kicks is only performed by women who thus become, ironically, the executioners at the service of a masculinist ideology that is also sexually, racially, and socio-economically oppressive. The ritual disempowers women who participate in it in a new way by driving them to counter-identify with Iñigo. They are forced to place themselves in opposition to the 'Negro', in competition with him; and thus the place of women becomes coordinate with that of the 'Negro', that is, they come to occupy a submissive position (the position of a disempowered subject who needs to submit). Worse yet, the ritual invites women to adopt this position willingly as their proper place in society, happily giving themselves to total submission and punishing Iñigo for not doing so himself. (Indeed the goal of catching a 'good husband' represents the aspiration of climbing up the socio-economic ladder, but it will not bring about liberation from racial, sexist, and heterosexist oppression.)

I think this illustration supports three points about the discursive formation of identity suggested by my familial view. First, it shows how people can be divided into identity groups or families by stressing certain similarities and differences between them and hiding or erasing others. Through the building of networks of similarities and differences in this way, particular molds of identity are created, which gives us a hint as to how these molds can be broken up. Second, the narrative and ritual I have examined illustrate how particular identifications and counter-identifications can be oppressive and need to be resisted. Here disidentification could be used as a mechanism of subversion. Instead of counter-identifying with Iñigo, women could disidentify with him, thus recognizing the oppression to which they are subject and vindicating an attitude of resistance. This disidentification would involve the refusal to take a submissive role. One could also think of possible racial and ethnic disidentifications that can subvert the marginalization of difference that takes place in the story and is performatively sanctioned in the ritual. It would not be difficult to come up with new versions of the story of the Triana 'Negro' that explicitly invite these disidentifications and the

subversive transformations that go with them. Third, this example also shows how racist, masculinist, and heterosexist normative frameworks can come together in a particular discursive practice, interpenetrating one another and lending support to each other. This illustrates how we are typically confronted with 'a struggle of multiple antagonisms', facing racial, sexist, heterosexist, and class oppression simultaneously. In fighting these different forms of oppression we are fighting a single complex battle of identity troubles. But the fact that these identity troubles can be unified in a common battle for the liberation of differences does not imply that we have to think of all differences as being the same. The discursive practices that contribute to the domestication of identities (such as the one examined in this section) can be thought of as sites for a common fight for liberation without confusing the different forms of oppression that are the object of this fight (i.e. oppression based on class, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity).

4 Conclusion: difference, blindness and open communities

The familial view I have developed in this paper emphasizes that identity is a multifaceted phenomenon and that in all its different dimensions identity is heterogeneous, that is, *bound up with difference*. Identity and difference should not be regarded as antithetical. Difference is not a *problem* for identity. Construing difference as a problem shows our resistance to accept difference as part of who we are, as being constitutive of our identities and the communities we form around them. As suggested above, the attitude that construes difference as a problem exhibits a blindness towards certain aspects of ourselves and our relation to others, that is, towards certain differences that set us apart from those with whom we identify and certain similarities that can bring us closer to those we consider different from ourselves. This analysis of the *problem* of difference in terms of blindness is reminiscent of W. E. B. Du Bois's remarks on the so-called 'Negro problem'. In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois explained the kind of blindness involved in thinking of the Negro as a *problem* with the image of the *veil*:⁴¹ those who live within 'the veil' are to some extent invisible for those outside the veil; their lives are opaque, perceived through filters that depict them in opposition to the lives of those outside the veil, as an obstacle or a problem for them. For Du Bois, the 'Negro problem' does not require a solution (which presupposes the objectifying standpoint of those who live outside the veil), but a *dissolution*; and this can be achieved only by 'piercing' (and eventually 'lifting') the veil. Similarly, my analysis suggest that the problem of difference requires a dissolution that consists in repairing the blindness involved in homogeneous construals of identity categories.

I have suggested that disidentification can be instrumental for the dissolution of the problem of difference, for it is a mechanism that can help us recover our sight with respect to similarities and differences that have been hidden from us. We need mechanisms such as this one that can remove the blindness to differences within each identity group as well as across them. Strategies of disidentification as well as other subversive mechanisms need to be supported by our communities or families. We need to engage in a constant transformation of identity relations in order to guarantee the flexibility and openness to difference of our communities. It is of crucial importance to recognize that the diversification of identity groups is essential not only for the misfits of society but for everybody (since there are no neat fits). Our identities are bound up with the identities of others; they are mutually dependent. Our identities are interactively developed and require community support; and, therefore, they will be handicapped if their differences are not recognized. It is the contention of my familial view that difference does not weaken identity, nor does it threaten the communities organized around identity categories. We need open communities that are not afraid of differences, for we will not be able to celebrate our identities without appreciating our differences.

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Notes

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- 1 See I. Stavans, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). This issue is also touched on in the last chapter of J. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 159ff. See also the comments of his critics in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27(2) (2001): 1–75.
- 2 Consider, for instance, the discussion around the symbolic reconstruction of the image of the Ché Guevara as a queer icon in Augie Robles's documentary

Cholo Joto (1993), which is an attempt to bring together different movements of liberation under a single political vision. An interesting discussion of this queer appropriation of an icon of liberation and the resistance it finds in masculinist liberation ideologies can be found in José E. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 14–15.

- 3 The Paradox of Identity has been exploited by liberals as a knock-down argument that signals the demise of identity politics. A good example of this liberal view is Richard Rorty's in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); see esp. Chapter 3 ('The Contingency of Selfhood') and Chapter 4 ('Private Irony and Liberal Hope'). Rorty argues that the lesson to be learned from (what I have called) the Paradox of Identity is that identity is a purely private choice and that to treat it otherwise is to indulge in an illicit attempt to subject private matters to public control. According to Rorty's liberalism, the only legitimate political task concerning identity is to guarantee privacy, that is, to protect the private realm of imagination and self-expression in which identities flourish. (On Rorty's view, this is already accomplished by Mill's liberties of thought, expression, action, and association.)
- 4 See especially J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and E. Sedgwick: *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- 5 The core papers in which these challenges were raised can be found in two anthologies: C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1981); and G. Anzaldúa (ed.) *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990).
- 6 See, for instance, Muñoz, *Disidentifications* and Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
- 7 This famous Wittgensteinian notion has often been read very narrowly as referring to purely physical similarities. It is unlikely that this is what Wittgenstein had in mind since he introduces the notion to clarify the meaning of terms such as 'game' and 'number' whose application does not seem to rely on a set of physical characteristics. See §§66–7 of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976). In order to avoid the narrow interpretation of the notion of 'family resemblance', I will use instead the broader and more abstract notion of *similarity* to cover all kinds of commonalities that can be indicative of group membership.
- 8 *ibid.*, §66.
- 9 *ibid.*, §67.
- 10 It is important to note that these networks of similarities and differences that become indicative of familial identity have a history: they result from the continued use of certain associations, that is, from treating things in a particular way in our shared linguistic practices. Therefore, these networks

of similarities and differences should *not* be thought of as *unexplained explainers*; they acquire diagnostic value simply because of the (criterial) significance they have been given in our practices, because they have come to be seen as symptoms of membership in a group. On my view, the networks of similarities and differences that sustain familial identity call for a *genealogical* account, that is, a genealogy of their formation through the shared ways of speaking and acting enforced by our practices.

- 11 Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, p. 50.
- 12 *ibid.*, p. 49.
- 13 I have taken from Gracia's familial-historical account those points that support the Wittgensteinian approach sketched above. But there are features of this account (concerning an externalist approach to the historical constitution of ethnicity) that are inconsistent with the view of identity I develop in this paper. For a critical assessment of Gracia's view, see my review in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 17(2) (2003): 139–141.
- 14 See J. Dowd Hall, 'The Mind That Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence', in A. Snitow, C. Stansell, and S. Thompson (eds) *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 302–16.
- 15 In a fascinating analysis of the phenomenon of lynching Dowd Hall (1983) has shown how racial and sexist oppression were connected in an interesting way in the rhetoric of protection that was used for decades to justify lynching: white women were those who needed to be protected by the institutional framework of the family; black men were those they needed protection from. The institution of the family and the rhetoric of protection associated with it were thus used to maintain racist and sexist prejudices (such as the presumption of being a menace just by virtue of being a black man, or the presumption of being vulnerable, defenseless, and desexualized just by virtue of being a white woman).
- 16 See, for instance, N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse, *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 17 See, for instance, Butler, *Bodies that Matter*: 124ff., for interesting remarks on the critical rearticulation of kinship in the film *Paris Is Burning*. This 1991 documentary (produced and directed by Jennie Livingston) is about drag balls in Harlem, which take place in (African-American and Latina) 'houses' that are organized as 'families' with parental figures and role models of different kinds.
- 18 He develops a battery of indeterminacy arguments to this effect in Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*. For an analysis of these arguments, see Chapter 6 of my book *The Unity of Wittgenstein's Philosophy: Necessity, Intelligibility, and Normativity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).
- 19 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 219.
- 20 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, p. 12.
- 21 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 220.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 219.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 219 and pp. 223ff.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 219.

- 25 *ibid.*, p. 221.
- 26 This is not to deny that disidentification can be used for oppression. One can be led to assume a submissive position through disidentifications that accentuate one's differences from those in a position of power and one's similarities with disempowered subjects. Nor do I want to imply that identification and counter-identification are always oppressive, for there are certainly contexts in which they can function as subversive mechanisms.
- 27 N. Alarcón, 'The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism', in Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul*, pp. 356–69.
- 28 *ibid.*, p. 360.
- 29 *ibid.*, p. 366; emphasis added.
- 30 *ibid.*, p. 364.
- 31 T. de Lauretis, 'Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts', in T. de Lauretis (ed.) *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 9 and p. 14.
- 32 Alarcón, 'Theoretical Subject(s)', p. 366.
- 33 María Lugones, 'On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism', in C. Card (ed.) *Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 43.
- 34 See María Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World-Travelling", and Loving Perception', *Hypatia* 2(2) (1989): 3–19.
- 35 The ambiguity between fictional and historical narratives is easier to maintain in Spanish, for the term *historia* means 'history' and 'story' and in most contexts the word conveys both meanings.
- 36 It is interesting to note that, after allowing the ritual for a century and a half, the Church finally took steps to prevent it in order to preserve the ceramic portrait of incalculable value; but there is no indication that the ritual itself was considered offensive and reprehensible by the Church.
- 37 See Charles E. Morris, 'My Old Kentucky Homo: Lincoln and the Politics of Queer Memory', in Kensall R. Phillips (ed.) *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, forthcoming).
- 38 Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, Chapter 5, esp. pp. 90–6.
- 39 In fact, Iñigo looks quite pale in the ceramic portrait of his tombstone, although the original color of the (now heavily damaged) tiles may have been quite different.
- 40 It is not implausible to suggest that this local narrative has contributed to regulate the relations between gypsies and *payos* (non-gypsies) in Triana in the last two centuries.
- 41 See *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 359–60, in W. E. B. Du Bois: *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1986).