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Purity, Impurity, and Separation

Maria Lugones

Note to the reader: This writing is done from within a hybrid imagination, within a recently articulate tradition of latina writers who emphasize mestizaje and multiplicity as tied to resistant and liberatory possibilities. All resemblance between this tradition and postmodern literature and philosophy is coincidental, though the conditions that underlie both may well be significantly tied. The implications of each are very different from one another.

VOY A EMPEZAR en español y en la cocina. Two uses of the verb *separar*. El primer sentido. Voy a separar la yema de la clara, separar un huevo. I will *separate* the white from the yolk. I will *separate* an egg. I crack the egg and I now slide the white onto one half of the shell and I place the egg white in a bowl. I repeat the operation till I have separated all of the egg white from the yolk. Si la operación no ha sido exitosa, entonces queda un poquito de yema en la clara. If the operation has not been successful, a bit of the yolk stains the white. I wish I could begin again with another egg, but that is a waste, as I was taught. So I must try to lift all the yolk from the white with a spoon, a process that is tedious and hardly ever entirely successful. The intention is to separate, first cleanly and then, in case of failure, a bit messily, the white from the yolk, to split the egg into two parts as cleanly as one can. This is an exercise in purity.

It is part of my interest in this article to ask whether separation is always or necessarily an exercise in purity. I want to investigate the politics of purity and how they bear on the politics of separation. In the process I will take neither the dominant nor the "standard" tongue as my anchor in playing with "separation," as those who separate may do so not in allegiance to but in defiance of the dominant intention. As I uncover a connection between impurity and resistance, my Latina imagination moves from resistance to mestizaje. I think of mestizaje as an example

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of and a metaphor for both impurity and resistance. I hold on to the metaphor and adopt *mestizaje* as a central name for impure resistance to interlocked, intermeshed oppressions.¹ Much of the time, my very use of the word *separate* exhibits a form of cultural *mestizaje*.²

If something or someone is neither/nor, but kind of both, not quite either,

if something is in the middle of either/or,

if it is ambiguous, given the available classification of things,

if it is mestiza,

if it threatens by its very ambiguity the orderliness of the system, of schematized reality,

if given its ambiguity in the univocal ordering it is anomalous, deviant,

can it be tamed through separation? Should it separate so as to avoid taming? Should it resist separation? Should it resist through separation? Separate as in the separation of the white from the yolk?

Segundo sentido. Estoy haciendo mayonesa. I am making mayonnaise. I place the yolk in a bowl, add a few drops of water, stir, and then add oil drop by drop, very slowly, as I continue stirring. If I add too much oil at once, the mixture se separa, it separates. I can remember doing the operation as an impatient child, stopping and saying to my mother "Mamá, la mayonesa se separó." In English, one might say that the mayonnaise curdled. Mayonnaise is an oil-in-water emulsion. As all emulsions, it is unstable. When an emulsion curdles, the ingredients become separate from each other. But that is not altogether an accurate description: rather, they coalesce toward oil or toward water, most of the water becomes separate from most of the oil—it is instead, a matter of different degrees of coalescence.³ The same with mayonnaise; when it separates, you are left with yolky oil and oily yolk.

Going back to mestizaje, in the middle of either/or, ambiguity, and thinking of acts that belong in lives lived in mestizo ways,

thinking of all forms of mestizaje,

thinking of breaching and abandoning dichotomies,

thinking of being anomalous willfully or unwillfully in a world of precise, hard-edged schema,

thinking of resistance,

¹ I thank Marilyn Frye for her criticism of the choice of *interlocking* in *interlocking oppressions*. I agree with her claim to me that the image of interlocking is of two entirely discrete things, like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, that articulate with each other. I am not ready to give up the term because it is used by other women of color theorists who write in a liberatory vein about enmeshed oppressions. I think *interwoven* or *intermeshed* or *enmeshed* may provide better images.

² This is the same form found in my use of *operation*, *apparatus*, and *individual*. Providing linguistic puzzles is part of the art of curdling.

³ For this use of *emulsion*, see *Pharmaceutica Acta Helvetiae* 1991.

resistance to a world of purity, of domination, of control over our possibilities,

is separation not at the crux of mestizaje, ambiguity, resistance? Is it not at the crux both of its necessity and its possibility? Separation as in the separation of the white from the yolk or separation as curdling?

When I think of mestizaje, I think both of separation as curdling, an exercise in impurity, and of separation as splitting, an exercise in purity. I think of the attempt at control exercised by those who possess both power and the categorical eye and who attempt to split everything impure, breaking it down into pure elements (as in egg white and egg yolk) for the purposes of control. Control over creativity. And I think of something in the middle of either/or, something impure, something or someone mestizo, as both separated, curdled, and resisting in its curdled state. Mestizaje defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. In this play of assertion and rejection, the mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable. She has no pure parts to be “had,” controlled.

Inside the world of the impure

There was a muchacha who lived near my house. La gente del pueblo talked about her being una de las otras, “of the Others.” They said that for six months she was a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up. They called her half and half, mita’y mita, neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted. [Anzaldúa 1987, 19]

*and Louie would come through—
melodramatic music, like in the
mono—tan tan taran!—Cruz
Diablo, El Charro Negro! Bogart smile (his smile as deadly as his
vaisas!) He dug roles, man,
and names—like “Blackie,” “Little Louie . . .”
Ese, Louie . . .
Chale, man, call me “Diamonds!”*

[Montoya 1972, 173]

Now my mother, she doesn’t go for cleanliness, orderliness, static have-come-from-nowhere objects for use. She shows you the production, her production. She is always in the middle of it and you will never see

the end. You'll have to follow her through her path in the chaotic production, you'll have to know her comings and goings, her fluidity through the production. You'll have to, that is, if you want to use any of it. Because she points to what you need in her own way, her person is the "here" that ensures her subjectivity, she is the point of reference, and if you don't know her movements, her location, you can't get to the end of the puzzle. Unless she wants you to, and sometimes, she'll do that for you, because she hasn't stored that much resistance. She doesn't have names for things (oh, she has them somewhere, but uses them very little), as if she always saw them in the making, in process, in connection, not quite separable from the rest. She says "it," "under that," "next to me." "These go in the thing for things." And if you follow her movements up to the very present, you know just what she means, just what her hand is needing to hold and just where she left it and her words are very helpful in finding it. Now, clean, what you call clean, you will not see clean either. You'll see half way. Kind of. In the middle of either/or. She doesn't see things as broken, finished, either. It's rather a very long process of deterioration. Not a now you see it, now you don't, gone forever. Just because it fell on the floor and broke in half and you glued it and you have to fill it half way, so stuff doesn't drip from the side, it doesn't stop being a tureen (or a flower pot for "centros de mesa," or maybe it'll be good as one of those thingamajigs to put things in). It's still good. And it hasn't changed its "nature" either. She has always had multiple functions for it, many possibilities. Its multiplicity has always been obvious to her.

Getting real close, like a confidence, you tell me, "Because certain individuals can get too accustomed to being helped." That snatch of mestizaje—"certain individuals"—the Southamerican use of "individuos" chiseled into your English. Makes me feel good, in the know. I know what you mean mujer, Southamerican style. Just like my "operation." Claro que se dice real close, it's not just for everyone's ears. You make me feel special. I know, I know about "certain individuals." Like the "apparatus" you borrow from me or I borrow from you.

"Culture is what happens to other people." I've heard something like that. I'm one of the other people, so I know there is something funny there. Renato Rosaldo helps me articulate what is peculiar, paradoxical. As he is critiquing classic norms in anthropology marking off those who are visible from those who are invisible in a culture, Rosaldo articulates the politics underlying them: "Full citizens lack culture, and those most culturally endowed lack full citizenship" (1989, 198). Part of what is funny here is that people with culture are people with a culture unknown by full citizens, not worth knowing. Only the culture of people who are

culturally transparent is worth knowing, but it does not count as a culture. The people whose culture it is are postcultural. Their culture is invisible to them and thus nonexistent as such. But postcultural full citizens mandate that people with a culture give up theirs in favor of the nonexistent invisible culture. So, it's a peculiar status: I have "culture" because what I have exists in the eyes of those who declare what I have to be "culture." But they declare it "culture" only to the extent which they know they don't know it except as an absence that they don't want to learn as a presence and they have the power not to know. Furthermore they have the power to order me to cease to know. So, as I resist and know, I am both visible and invisible. Visible as other and invisible as myself, but these aren't separable bits. And I walk around as both other and myself, resisting classification.

Rosaldo criticizes the "broad rule of thumb under classic anthropological norms . . . that if it's moving it isn't cultural" (1989, 209). "The blurred zones within a culture and the zones between cultures are endowed by the norms with a curious kind of hybrid invisibility" (1989, 209). Paradoxically "culture" needs to be both static, fixed and separate, different from the "postcultural" (1989, 199) to be seen. So, if it's different but not static, it isn't "culture." But if it's different, if it's what "other people do," it's cultural. If the people who do it are other but what they do is not static, it is and it isn't culture. It's in the middle, anomalous, deviant, ambiguous, impure. It lacks the mark of separation as purity. If it's hybrid, it's in the middle of either/or twice.

The play between feminine and masculine elements that we contain in heterosexist eyes;

the parody of masculin/feminine, the play with illusion that transgresses gender boundaries, the "now you see 'it' now you don't" magic tricks aimed at destroying the univocal character of the "it" that we disdain with playful intention;

the rejection of masculin/feminine in our self-understanding that some of us make our mark;

all contain a rejection of purity.

In every one of these examples there is curdling, *mestizaje*, lack of homogeneity. There is tension. The intentions are curdled, the language, the behavior, the people are *mestizo*.

I. Control, unity, and separation

Guide to the reader: I will presuppose that as I investigate the conceptual world of purity, you will keep the world of mestizaje, of curdled

beings, constantly superimposed onto it, even when that is made difficult by the writing's focus on the logic of purity. Sometimes the logic of purity dominates the text, sometimes the logic of curdling does. But at other points both worlds become vivid as coexisting and the logic of what I say depends on the coexistence. The reader needs to see ambiguity, see that the split-separated are also and simultaneously curdled-separated. Otherwise one is only seeing the success of oppression, seeing with the lover of purity's eyes. The reader also needs to, as it were, grant the assumptions of the lover of purity to understand his world. The fundamental assumption is that there is unity underlying multiplicity. The assumption is granted for the sake of entering the point of view and for the purposes of contestation. The questioning is done from within la realidad mestiza and the intent of the questioning is to clarify, intensify, aid the contestation between the two realities. As I enter the world of purity, I am interested in a cluster of concepts as clustered: control, purity, unity, categorizing. Control or categorizing in isolation from this network are not my concern.

My aim is to distinguish between multiplicity (mestizaje) and fragmentation and to explain connections that I see between the terms of this distinction and the logics of curdling (impurity) and of splitting (purity). Fragmentation follows the logic of purity. Multiplicity follows the logic of curdling. The distinction between fragmentation and multiplicity is central to this essay. I will exhibit it within individuals and within the social world.⁴

According to the logic of curdling, the social world is complex and heterogenous and each person is multiple, nonfragmented, embodied. 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. According to the logic of purity, the social world is both unified and fragmented, homogenous, hierarchically ordered. Each person is either fragmented, composite, or abstract and unified—not exclusive alternatives. Unification and homogeneity are related principles of ordering the social world. Unification requires a fragmented and hierarchical ordering. Fragmentation is another guise of unity, both in the collectivity and the individual. I will connect mestizaje in individuals to mestizaje in groups and thus in the social world, and I will connect fragmentation within individuals to the training of the multiple toward a homogenous social world.

I do not claim ontological originality for multiplicity here. Rather both the multiple-mestizo and the unified-fragmented coexist, each have

⁴ It is important to problematize the singularity of "social world" and the distinction between social world and individual.

their histories, are in contestation and in significant logical tension. I reveal the logics underlying the contestation. Sometimes my use of language strongly suggests a claim of originality for the multiple. I speak of the multiple as trained into unity and of its being conceived as internally separable. I could say that to split-separate the multiple is to exercise a split imagination. But if what is imagined is to gain a powerful degree of reality, unity must be more than a reading or interpretation. It must order people's lives and psyches. The becoming of the order is a historical process of domination in which power and ideology are at all times changing into each other.

Monophilia and purity are cut from the same cloth. The urge to control the multiplicity of people and things attains satisfaction through exercises in split separation. The urge to control multiplicity is expressed in modern political theory and ethics in an understanding of reason as reducing multiplicity to unity through abstraction, categorization, from a particular vantage point.⁵ I consider this reduction expressive of the urge to control because of the logical fit between it and the creation of the fragmented individual. I understand fragmentation to be a form of domination.

I see this reduction of multiplicity to unity as being completed through a complex series of fictions. Once the assumption of unity underlying multiplicity is made, further fictions rationalize it as a discovery. The assumption makes these fictions possible, and they, in turn, transform it from a simple assumption into a fiction.

The assumption of unity is an act of split separation; as in conceiving of what is multiple as unified, what is multiple is understood as internally separable, divisible into what makes it one and the remainder. Or, to put it another way: to conceive of fragmentation rather than multiplicity is to exercise a split-separation imagination. This assumption generates and presupposes others. It generates the fictional construction of a vantage point from which unified wholes, totalities, can be captured. It generates the construction of a subject who can occupy such a vantage point. Both the vantage point and the subject are outside historicity and concreteness. They are both affected by and effect the reduction of multiplicity. The vantage point is privileged, simple, one-dimensional. The subject is fragmented, abstract, without particularity. The series of fictions hides the training of the multiple into unity as well as the survival of the multiple. It is only from a historical enmeshing in the concrete that the training of

⁵ I have based this description of the connection between the urge to control and modern political theory and ethics on Iris Marion Young's "Impartiality and the Civic Public" (in Young 1990b). Much of what I say in Sec. I is a restatement and elaboration on secs. 1 and 2 of Young's article. I have also benefited from Mangabeira Unger 1975 and Pateman 1988 in coming to this understanding.

the multiple into fragmented unities can be seen; that is, it can be seen from a different logic, one that rejects the assumption of unity. The ahistoricity of the logic of purity hides the construction of unity.

In understanding the fictitious character of the vantage point it is important that we recognize that its conception is itself derivative from the conception of reality as unified. If we assume that the world of people and things is unified, then we can conceive of a vantage point from which its unity can be grasped. The conception of the vantage point follows the urge to control; it is not antecedent to it, because unity is assumed. The vantage point is then itself beyond description, except as an absence: "outside of" is its central characteristic. The vantage point is not of this world, it is otherworldly, as ideal as its occupant, the ideal observer. It exists only as that from which unity can be perceived.

The subject who can occupy such a vantage point, the ideal observer, must himself be pure, unified, and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity.⁶ He must not himself be pulled in all or several perceptual directions; he must not perceive richly. Reason, including its normative aspect, is the unified subject. It is what characterizes the subject as a unity. A subject who in its multiplicity perceives, understands, grasps its worlds as multiple sensuously, passionately as well as rationally without the splitting separation between sense/emotion/reason lacks the unidimensionality and the simplicity required to occupy the privileged vantage point. Such a subject occupies the vantage point of reason in a pragmatic contradiction, standing in a place where all of the subject's abilities cannot be exercised and where the exercise of its abilities invalidates the standpoint. So a passionate, needy, sensuous, and rational subject must be conceived as internally separable, as discretely divided into what makes it one—rationality—and into the confused, worthless remainder—passion, sensuality. Rationality is understood as this ability of a unified subject to abstract, categorize, train the multiple to the systematicity of norms, of rules that highlight, capture, and train its unity from the privileged vantage point.

The conception of this subject is derivative from the assumption of unity and separability. The very "construction" of the subject presupposes that assumption. So, though we are supposed to understand unity in multiplicity as that which is perceived by the rational subject occupying the vantage point of reason, we can see that the logic of the matter goes the other way around. Control cannot be rationally justified in this manner, as the urge to control antecedes this conception of reason. Part of my claim here is that the urge for control and the passion for purity are conceptually related.

⁶ The ideal observer, unified subject is male. This fictitious subject is not marked in terms of gender for reasons explained below.

If the modern subject is to go beyond conceptualizing the reduction to actually exercising control over people and things, then these fictions must be given some degree of reality. The modern subject must be dressed, costumed, masked so as to appear able to exercise this reduction of heterogeneity to homogeneity, of multiplicity to unity. The modern subject must be masked as standing separate from his own multiplicity and what commits him to multiplicity. So, his own purification into someone who can step squarely onto the vantage point of unity requires that his remainder become of no consequence to his own sense of himself as someone who justifiably exercises control over multiplicity. So his needs must be taken care of by others hidden in spaces relegated outside of public view, where he parades himself as pure. And it is important to his own sense of things and of himself that he pay little attention to the satisfaction of the requirements of his sensuality, affectivity, embodiment.

Satisfying the modern subject's needs requires beings enmeshed in the multiple as the production of discrete units occurs amid multiplicity. Such production is importantly constrained by its invisibility and worthlessness in the eyes of those who attempt to control multiplicity. To the extent that the modern subject succeeds in this attempt to control multiplicity, the production is impelled by his needs. Those who produce it become producers of the structuring "perceived" by the lover of purity from the rational vantage point as well as its products. So in the logic of the lover of purity they exhibit a peculiar lack of agency, autonomy, self-regulating ability.⁷

As the lover of purity, the impartial reasoner is outside history, outside culture. He occupies the privileged vantage point with others like him, all characterized by the "possession" of reason. All occupants of this vantage point are homogeneous in their ability to comprehend and communicate. So "culture," which marks radical differences in conceptions of people and things, cannot be something they have. They are instead "postcultural" or "culturally transparent."⁸

Since his embodiment is irrelevant to his unity, he cannot have symbolic and institutionalized inscriptions in his body that mark him as someone who is "outside" his own production as the rational subject. To the extent that mastering institutional inscriptions is part of the program of unification, there cannot be such markings of his body. His difference cannot be thought of as "inscriptions" but only as coincidental, nonsymbolic marks. As his race and gender do not identify him in his own eyes, he is also race and gender transparent.

⁷ See Smith 1974 and Hartsock 1988 for arguments backing this account.

⁸ See Rosaldo 1989, 200 and 203, for his use of *postcultural* and *culturally transparent*. I am using *postcultural* as he does. His use of *culturally transparent* was suggestive to me in reaching my own account.

Paradoxically, the lover of purity is also constituted as incoherent, as contradictory in his attitude toward his own and others' gender, race, culture. He must at once emphasize them and ignore them. He must be radically self-deceiving in this respect. His production as pure, as the impartial reasoner, requires that others produce him. He is a fiction of his own imagination, but his imagination is mediated by the labor of others. He controls those who produce him, who to his eyes require his control because they are enmeshed in multiplicity and thus unable to occupy the vantage point of control. They are marked as other than himself, as lacking the relevant unity. But the lack is not discovered, it couldn't be, since the unity is itself assumed. The lack is symbolically produced by marking the producers as gendered, racialized, and "cultured." The marking signifies that they are enmeshed in multiplicity and thus are different from the lover of purity. But he must deny the importance of the markings that separate them.

If women, the poor, the colored, the queer, the ones with cultures (whose cultures are denied and rendered invisible as they are seen as our mark) are deemed unfit for the public, it is because we are tainted by need, emotion, the body. This tainting is relative to the modern subject's urge for control through unity and the production and maintenance of himself as unified. To the extent that he is fictional, the tainting is fictional: seeing us as tainted depends on a need for purity that requires that we become "parts," "addenda" of the bodies of modern subjects—Christian white bourgeois men—and make their purity possible. We become sides of fictitious dichotomies. To the extent that we are ambiguous—non-dichotomous—we threaten the fiction and can be rendered unfit only by decrying ambiguity as nonexistent—that is, by halving us, splitting us. Thus we exist only as incomplete, unfit beings, and they exist as complete only to the extent that what we are, and what is absolutely necessary for them, is declared worthless.

The lover of purity is shot through and through with this paradoxical incoherence. When confronted with the sheer overabundance of the multiple, he ignores it by placing it outside value when it is his own substance and provides his sustenance. So, he is committed both to an overevaluation and to a devaluation of himself, a torturing of himself, a disciplining or training of himself that puts him at the mercy of his own control. The incoherence is dispelled through separation, his own from himself. As he covets, possesses, destroys, pleases himself, he disowns his own urges and deeds. So he is always rescued from his own incoherence by self-deception, weakness of the will, aggressive ignorance. After he ignores the fundamental and unfounded presupposition of unity, all further ignoring becomes easier. He shuns impurity, ambiguity, multiplicity as they threaten his own fiction. The enormity of the threat keeps him

from understanding it. So, the lover of purity remains ignorant of his own impurity, and thus the threat of all impurity remains significantly uncontained. The lover of purity cannot see, understand, and attempt to control the resistance contained in the impure. He can only attempt control indirectly, through the complex incoherence of affirming and denying impurity, training the impure into its “parts” and at the same time separating from it, erecting sturdy barriers both around himself and between the fictional “parts” of impure beings.

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (1989) sees the impulse toward unity as characteristic of social structures, and she understands pollution behavior—behavior to control pollution, impurity—as a guarding of structure from the threat of impurity. According to Douglas, impurity, dirt, is what is “out of place” relative to some order. What is impure is anomalous and ambiguous because it is out of place. It threatens order because it is not definable, so separation from it is a manner of containing it. She also sees power in impurity. But it is not her purpose to distinguish between oppressive and nonoppressive structuring. My purpose here is precisely to understand the particular oppressive character of the modern construction of social life and the power of impurity in resisting and threatening this oppressive structuring.

Part of what is interesting in Douglas is that she understands that what is impure is impure relative to some order and that the order is itself conventional. What is impure is anomalous. Douglas describes several ways of dealing with anomalies, but she does not emphasize that rendering something impure is a way of dealing with it. The ordering renders something out of place. Its complexity is altered by the ordering. The alteration is not only conceptual since its “life” develops in relation to this order. So, for example, the multiplicitous beings required for the production of the unified subject are anomalous as multiple. Unity renders them anomalous. So they are altered to fit within the logic of unification. They are split over and over in accordance with the relevant dichotomies of the logic of unity. As anomalous, they remain complex, defying the logic of unity. That which is multiplicitous metamorphoses over and over in its history of resisting alteration and as the result of alteration. Both the logic of control and unity and the logic of resistance and complexity are at work in what is impure. That is why I have and will continue to use *impure* ambiguously both for something complex that is in process and thus cannot really be split-separated and for that which is fragmented.

When seen as split, the impure/multiplicitous are seen from the logic of unity, and thus their multiplicity can neither be seen nor understood. But splitting can itself be understood from the logic of resistance and countered through curdling separation, a power of the impure. When seen

from the logic of curdling, the alteration of the impure to unity is seen as fictitious and as an exercise in domination: the impure are rendered uncreative, ascetic, static, realizers of the contents of the modern subject's imagination. Curdling, in contrast, realizes their against-the-grain creativity, articulates their within-structure-inarticulate powers.⁹ As we come to understand curdling as resisting domination, we also need to recognize its potential to germinate a nonoppressive pattern, a *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia mestiza*.¹⁰

Interrupción

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, border-dwellers, "world"-travelers, beings in the middle of either/or. They are all people whose acts and thoughts curdle-separate. So as soon as I entertain the thought, I realize that separation into clean, tidy things and beings is not possible for me because it would be the death of myself as multiplicitous and a death of community with my own. I understand my split or fragmented possibilities in horror. I understand then that whenever I desire separation, I risk survival by confusing split separation with separation from domination, that is, separation among curdled beings who curdle away their fragmentation, their subordination. I can appreciate then that the logic of split-separation and the logic of curdle-separation repel each other, that the curdled do not germinate in split separation.

II. Split selves

Dual personality

What Frank Chin calls a "dual personality" is the production of a being who is simultaneously different and the same as postcultural subjects, a split and contradictory being who is a product of the ethnocentric racist imagination (1991). It is one way of dealing with the anomaly of being cultured and culturally multiplicitous. The case I know best is rural

⁹ See Douglas 1966: "In other words, where the social system is well-articulated, I look for articulate powers vested in the points of authority; where the social system is ill-articulated, I look for inarticulate powers vested in those who are a source of disorder" (99).

¹⁰ See Anzaldúa 1987, esp. 41–51, on the Coatlicue State, and 77–91 on la *Conciencia de la Mestiza*.

Chicanos. *Chicano* is the name for the curdled or mestizo person. I will name the dual personality *mexican/american*, with no hyphen in the name, to signify that if the split were successful there would be no possibility of dwelling or living on the hyphen.¹¹

The rural *mexican/american* is a product of the anglo imagination, sometimes enacted by persons who are the targets of ethnocentric racism in an unwillful parody of themselves. The anglo imagines each rural *mexican/american* as having a dual personality: the authentic *mexican* cultural self and the *american* self. In this notion, there is no hybrid self. The selves are conceptually different, apparently contradictory but complementary; one cannot be found without the other. The anglo philosophy is that *mexican/americans* should both keep their culture (so as to be different and not full citizens) and assimilate (so as to be exploitable), a position whose contradictoriness is obvious. But as a split dual personality, the authentic *mexican* can assimilate without ceasing to be "cultured," the two selves complementary, the ornamental nature of the *mexican* self resolving the contradiction.

The *mexican/american* can assimilate because the *mexican* in *mexican/american* is understood to be a member of a superfluous culture, the culture an ornament rather than shaping or affecting *american* reality. A simple but stoic figure who will defend the land no matter what, the *mexican/american* will never quite enter the twentieth century and will not make it in the twenty-first, given that in this scheme for the next century the land will no longer be used for farming but for the recreation of the anglo upper class. The authentic *mexican* is a romantic figure, an anglo myth, alive in the pages of John Nichols's *Milagro Beanfield War* (1976): fiercely conservative and superexploitable.

As *americans*, rural *mexican/americans* are not first-class citizens because the two sides of the split cannot be found without each other. The complementarity of the sides becomes clearer: the assimilated *mexican* cannot lose culture as ornamental and as a mark of difference. So a *mexican/american* is not a postcultural *american*. The promise of postculturalism is part of what makes assimilation appealing, since the *mexican/american* knows that only postculturals are full citizens. But assimilation does not make the *mexican/american* postcultural. So making the anglo ideals of progress and efficiency one's own serves one only to become exploitable but not to achieve full participation in anglo life. Anglos declare *mexican/americans* unfit for control and portray them as men and women of simple minds given to violence, drink, and hard work, accustomed to hardship and poverty, in particular.

¹¹ Sonia Saldivar-Hull used the expression "living on the hyphen" in the panel discussion "Cultural Identity and the Academy," tenth annual Interdisciplinary Forum of the Western Humanities Conference on Cultures and Nationalisms, University of California, Los Angeles.

The dual personality is part of the mythical portrait of the colonized (Memmi 1967). The split renders the self into someone unable to be culturally creative in a live culture. Thus “authentic” mexican craft shops exhibit santos, trasteros, colchas, reredos. Mexican artists cannot depart from the formulaic; they are supposed to be producing relics for the anglo consumer of the picturesque. The mythical portrait therefore has acquired a degree of reality that both justifies and obscures anglo dominance. The portrait does not lack in appeal. It makes one feel proud to be raza because the portrait is heroic. It also makes one stilted, stiff, a cultural personage not quite sure of oneself, a pose, pure style, not quite at ease in one’s own cultural skin, as if one did not quite know one’s own culture, precisely because it is not one’s own but a stereotype and because this authentic culture is not quite a live culture: it is conceived by the anglo as both static and dying. As Rosaldo says, part of the myth is that “if it moves, it is not cultural” (1989, 212). This authentic mexican culture bears a relation to traditional culture. It is tradition filtered through anglo eyes for the purposes of ornamentation. What is anglo, authentically american, is also appealing: it represents progress, the future, efficiency, material well being. As american, one moves; as mexican, one is static. As american, one is beyond culture; as mexican, one is culture personified. The culturally split self is a character for the theatrics of racism.

The dual personality concept is a death-loving attempt to turn raza into beautiful zombies: an attempt to eradicate the possibility of a mestizo/a consciousness, of our infusing every one of our possibilities with this consciousness and of our moving from traditional to hybrid ways of creation, including the production of material life.

As split, mexican/americans cannot participate in public life because of their difference, except ornamentally in the dramatization of equality. If we retreat and accept the “between raza” nonpublic status of our concerns, to be resolved in the privacy of our communities, we participate in the logic of the split. Our communities are rendered private space in the public/private distinction. Crossing to the anglo domain only in their terms is not an option either, as it follows the logic of the split without the terms ever becoming our own, that is the nature of this—if not of all—assimilation. So, the resistance and rejection of the culturally split self requires that we declare our communities public space and break the conceptual tie between public space and monoculturally conceived anglo-only concerns: it requires that the language and conceptual framework of the public become hybrid.

Fragmentation

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990a) and “Polity and Difference” (in 1990b), Iris Young highlights the concept of a group as central to her understanding of the heterogenous public, a conception of

the civic public that does not ignore heterogeneity through reducing it to a fictitious unity. Instead of a unified public realm "in which citizens leave behind their particular group affiliations, histories, and needs to discuss a general interest or common good," she argues for "a group differentiated citizenship and a heterogeneous public" (1990b, 121).

She understands a social group as "a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life" (1990a, 43). Groups become differentiated through the encounter and interaction between social collectivities that experience some differences in their way of life and forms of association as well as through social processes such as the sexual division of labor. Group members have "an affinity with other persons by which they identify with one another and by which other people identify them" (1990b, 122). Group identity partly constitutes "a person's particular sense of history, understanding of social relations and personal possibilities, her or his mode of reasoning, values and expressive styles" (1990b, 122). Their similar way of life or experience prompts group members "to associate with each other more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way" (1990a, 43). A social group is not something one joins but, rather, "one finds oneself as a member of a group whose existence and relations one experiences as always already having been" (1990b, 122). But groups are fluid, "they come into being and may fade away" (1990b, 123). Though there is a lack of clarity in how Young identifies particular groups, as I understand her, Black Americans, lesbians, differently abled women, Latinas, and Navajo are examples of social groups.

Young thinks that the "inclusion and participation of everyone in public discussion and decision making requires mechanisms of group representation" (1990a, 115). The "ideal of the public realm of citizenship as expressing a general will, a point of view and interest that citizens have in common and that transcends their differences . . . , leads to pressures for a homogeneous citizenry" (1990a, 116–17). In arguing for group representation as the key to safeguarding the inclusion and participation of everyone without falling into an egoistic, self-regarding view of the political process, Young tells us that "it is possible for persons to maintain their group identity and to be influenced by their perceptions of social events derived from their group specific experience and at the same time to be public spirited, in the sense of being open to listening to the claims of others and not being concerned for their own gain alone" (1990a, 120). She sees group representation as necessary because she thinks differences are irreducible: "People from one perspective can never completely understand and adopt the point of view of those with other group-based perspectives and histories" (1990a, 121). Though differences are irreducible, group representation affords a solution to the homogenization of the public because "commitment to the need and desire

to decide together the society's policies fosters communication across those differences" (1990a, 121).

In her conception of the heterogenous public, "each of the constituent groups affirms the presence of the others and affirms the specificity of its experience and perspective on social issues," arriving 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" (1990a, 123).

Young sees that each person has multiple group identifications and that groups are not homogenous but rather that each group has group differences cutting across it (1990a, 123; 1990b, 48). Social groups "mirror in their own differentiations many of the other groups in the wider society" (1990a, 48). There are important implications of group differences within social groups. Significantly, "individual persons, as constituted partly by their group affinities and relations, cannot be unified, themselves are heterogenous and not necessarily coherent" (1990a, 48). Young sees a revolution in subjectivity as necessary. "Rather than seeking a wholeness of the self, we who are the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we are heterogenous and multiple in our affiliations and desires" (1990a, 124). Young thinks the women's movement offers some beginning models for the development of a heterogenous public and for revolutionizing the subject through the practices it has instituted to deal with issues arising from group differences within social groups. From the discussion of racial and ethnic blindness and the importance of attending to group differences among women "emerged principled efforts to provide autonomously organized forums [for women] who see reason for claiming that they have as a group a distinctive voice that might be silenced in a general feminist discourse" (1990a, 162). Those discussions have been joined by structured discussion among differently identifying groups of women" (1990a, 162–63).

Young's complex account suggests the problem but not the solution to what I understand as the fragmentation of the subject, a consequence of group oppression where group oppression follows the logic of unity, of purity. I think 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. Young lacks a conceptual basis for a solution because she lacks a conception of a multiple subject who is not fragmented. I think she does not see the need for such a conception because she fails to address the problem of the interlocking of oppressions. Fragmentation is conceptually at odds with seeing oppressions as interlocked.

I am not disagreeing with Young's rejection of the individualism that follows from thinking of social groups as "invidious fictions, essentializing arbitrary attributes" (1990a, 46), nor with her rejection of an ideal of interests as common, of the universal, homogeneous subject, and of assimilation. I do not disagree with her account of social groups either nor with her account of the problematic nature of one's subjectivity when formed in affiliation with a multiplicity of groups. But her account leaves us with a self that is not just multiplicitous but fragmented, its multiplicity lying in its fragmentation. In order to explain this claim I need to introduce the concepts of thickness and transparency.

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. So, as transparent, one becomes unaware of one's own difference from other members of the group.

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. The interlocking of memberships in oppressed groups is not seen as changing one's needs, interests, and ways qualitatively in any group but, rather, one's needs, interests, and ways are understood as the addition of those of the transparent members. They are understood with a "pop-bead logic," to put it as Elizabeth Spelman does in *Inessential Woman* (1988). The title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982) captures and rejects this logic. White women are transparent as women; black men are transparent as black. Black women are erased and fighting against erasure. Black women are fighting for their understanding of social relations, their personal possibilities, their particular sense of history, their mode of reasoning and values and expressive styles being understood as neither reducible to anything else nor as outside the meaning of being black and of being Women. Black and women are thus conceived as plural, multiplicitous, without fragmentation.

The politics of marginalization in oppressed groups is part of the politics of oppression, and the disconnection of oppressions is part of these politics. Avoiding recognition of the interlocking of oppressions serves many people well, but no one is served so well by it as the pure,

rational, full-fledged citizen. So I see a cross fertilization between the logic of purity used to exclude members of oppressed groups from the civic public and the separation and disconnection of oppressions. Liberatory work that makes vivid that oppressions must be fought as interlocked is consistently blocked in oppressed groups through the marginalization of thick members.

So unless one understands groups as explicitly rejecting the logic of fragmentation and embracing a nonfragmented multiplicity that requires an understanding of oppressions as interlocked, group representation does most group members little good. It indeed fails at safeguarding the "inclusion and participation of everyone" in the shaping of public life. The logic of impurity, of *mestizaje*, provides us with a better understanding of multiplicity, one that fits the conception of oppressions as interlocked. I mean to offer a statement of the politics of heterogeneity that is not necessarily at odds with Young's, but its logic is different. Hers, though formulated in rejection of the logic of purity, is oddly consistent with though not necessarily tied to it. Mine is inconsistent with it. Communication across differences in her model may well fail to recognize that one is listening to voices representative only of transparents, voices that embody the marginalization of thick members and contain their fragmentation.

Social homogeneity, domination through unification, and hierarchical ordering of split social groups are connected tightly to fragmentation in the person. If the person is fragmented, it is because the society is itself fragmented into groups that are pure, homogenous. Each group's structure of affiliation to and through transparent members produces a society of persons who are fragmented as they are affiliated to separate groups. As the parts of individuals are separate, the groups are separate, in an insidious dialectic.

Heterogeneity in the society is consistent with and may require the presence of groups. But groups in a genuinely heterogenous society have complex, nonfragmented persons as members, that is, they are heterogenous themselves. The affiliative histories include the formation of voices in contestation that reveal the enmeshing of race, gender, culture, class, and other differences that affect and constitute the identity of the group's members. This is a very significant difference in direction from the one suggested by the postmodern literature, which goes against a politics of identity and toward minimizing the political significance of groups.¹² The position presented in this article, a position that I also see in the literature on *mestizaje*, affirms a complex version of identity politics and a complex conception of groups.

¹² Two examples that come vividly to mind are the positions suggested in Butler 1990 and Haraway 1990.

Interrupción: Lesbian separation

When I think of lesbian separation I think of curdle separation. In this understanding of separation I am a lesbian separatist. We contain in our own and in the heterosexist construction of ourselves all sorts of ambiguities and tensions that are threatening to purity, to the construction of women as for use, for exploitation. We are outside the lover of purity's pale, outside his conceptual framework. Even the attempt to split our selves into half man/half woman recognizes our impurity. In our own conception we defy splitting separation by mocking the purity of the man/woman dichotomy or rejecting it.

But "Watchale esa!" doesn't resonate in its impurity implicitly in all lesbian ears, and not all lesbian hips move inspired by a latin beat.

Lesbians are not the only transitionals, impure, ambiguous beings. And if we are to struggle against "our" oppression, Latina Lesbian cannot be the name for a fragmented being. Our style cannot be outside the meaning of Latina and cannot be outside the meaning of Lesbian. So, our struggle, the struggle of lesbians, goes beyond lesbians as a group. If we understand our separation as curdle-separation, then we can rethink our relation to other curdled beings. Separation from domination is not split-separation.

III. Impurity and resistance

People who curdle-separate are themselves people from whom others split-separate, dissociate, withdraw. Lovers of purity, controllers through split-separation not only attempt to split-separate us but also split-separate from us in ways I have discussed, such as ghettoization and conceptual exclusion. They also attempt to split-separate us from others who are themselves curdled through the logic of marginalization, of transparency. The logic of transparency shines in the constructed lover of purity himself, the modern subject, the impartial reasoner. He is the measure of all things. He is transparent relative to his position in the hetero-relational patriarchy, to his culture, his race, his class, his gender. His sense is the only sense. So curdled thoughts are nonsensical. To the extent that his sense is the instrument of our communication, we become susceptible to the logic of transparency and see split-separation from other curdled beings as sensical in our resistance to oppression. We also become susceptible to being agents of the lover of purity in carrying out the oppression of other curdled beings, in constructing his made-to-order orderly world. Thus curdle-separation is blocked, barred, made into a hard to reach resistant and liberatory possibility. It is also dangerous because curdled beings may adopt the logic of transparency in self-

contradiction and act as agents of the lover of purity in coercing us into fragmentation and oppression. I think this is a risk that we can minimize only by speaking the language of curdling among curdled beings in separation and living its logic and by listening for, responding to, evoking, sometimes demanding, such language and logic. I think this is a risk we must take because the logic of split-separation does not contain resistance but co-optation. So we have to constantly consider and reconsider the question: Who are our own people?

I don't think we can consider "our own" only those who reject the same dichotomies we do. It is the impulse to reject dichotomies and to live and embody that rejection that gives us some hope of standing together as people who recognize each other in our complexity. The hope is based on the possibilities that the unsettling quality of being a stranger in our society reveals to us, the possibilities that purification by ordeal reveals to us. I think this is Anzaldúa's point in thinking of a borderland: "It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants . . . those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' . . . Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger" (1987, 3–4). For her, "To live in the Borderlands means you are neither hispana india negra espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed . . . [you're] half and half—both woman and man, neither—a new gender. . . . In the Borderlands you are the battleground where enemies are kin to each other" (1987, 194).

But, of course, that is thin ground for thinking of others as "our own": that we might be revealed to each other as possible through the trappings and denials and torturings of our ambiguity. A more solid ground because it is a more positive ground is the one that affirms the lack of constraint of our creativity that is at the center of curdling; that holds on to our own lack of script, to our being beings in the making; that might contain each other in the creative path, who don't discount but look forward to that possibility.

Ambiguous, neither this nor that, unrestrained by the logic of this and the logic of that, and thus its course not mapped, traced already in movements, words, relations, structures, institutions; not rehearsed over and over into submission, containment, subordination, asceticism—we can affirm the positive side of our being threatening as ambiguous. If it is ambiguous it is threatening because it is creative, changing, defiant of norms meant to subdue it. So we find our people as we make the threat good, day to day, attentive to our company in our groups, across groups. The model of curdling as a model for separation is a model for worldly separation—the separation of border-dwellers, of people who live in a crossroads, people who deny purity and are looking for each other for the possibility of going beyond resistance.

IV. The art of curdling

Curdle-separation is not something that happens to us but something we do. As I have argued, it is something we do in resistance to the logic of control, to the logic of purity. Though transparents fail to see its sense, and thereby keep its sense from structuring our social life, that we curdle testifies to our being active subjects, not consumed by the logic of control. Curdling may be a haphazard technique of survival as an active subject, or it can become an art of resistance, metamorphosis, transformation.

I recommend the cultivation of this art as a practice of resistance into transformation from oppressions as interlocked. It is a practice of festive resistance:

- Bi- and multilingual experimentation;
- code-switching;
- categorical blurring and confusion;
- caricaturing the selves we are in the worlds of our oppressors, infusing them with ambiguity;
- practicing trickstery and foolery;
- elaborate and explicitly marked gender transgression;
- withdrawing our services from the pure or their agents whenever possible and with panache;
- drag;
- announcing the impurity of the pure by ridiculing his inability at self-maintenance;
- playful reinvention of our names for things and people, multiple naming;
- caricaturing of the fragmented selves we are in our groups;
- revealing the chaotic in production;
- revealing the process of producing order if we cannot help producing it;
- undermining the orderliness of the social ordering;
- marking our cultural mixtures as we move;
- emphasizing cultural mestizaje;
- crossing cultures;
- etc.

We not only create ourselves and each other through curdling but also announce ourselves to each other through this art, our curdled expression. Thus curdled behavior is not only creative but also constitutes itself as a social commentary. All curdled behavior, thought, and expression contain and express this second level of meaning, one of social commentary. When curdling becomes an art of resistance, the curdled presentation is highlighted. There is the distance of metacomment, autoreflexion, looking at oneself in someone else's mirror and back in one's own, of self-aware experimentation. Our commentary is not straightforward: the commentary underlines the curdling and constitutes it as an act of social creative defiance. We often intend and cultivate with style this social commentary, this meta meaning of our curdling. When confronted with

our curdling or curdled expression or behavior, people often withdraw. Their withdrawal reveals the devaluation of ambiguity *as threatening* and is thus also a metacomment. It announces that, though we will not be acknowledged, we have been seen as threatening the univocity of life lived in a state of purity, their management of us, their power over us.

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