

Dangerous Loyalties and Liberatory Politics

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While communities engaged in liberatory struggles have valued group loyalty and condemned betrayal, loyalty itself may be problematic, because remaining loyal to a community may require that one refrain from deconstructing the group identity on which the community is based. This essay investigates what loyalty is and whether loyalty is a virtue, and considers why, if loyalty is indeed a virtue, it may be one that is difficult to maintain in a context of oppression.

Is loyalty a virtue, that is, a disposition that contributes to human flourishing? More narrowly, should loyalty be considered to be a virtue within “oppositional communities,” communities involved in liberatory struggles?¹ Should members of an oppressed group (or groups) be loyal towards one another, particularly when they are engaged together in a liberatory movement? For instance, should women hope for loyalty from one another, or at least, should feminists? Should members of oppressed racialized groups expect each other to show loyalty towards the racialized group, or more specifically should those who are engaged in liberatory racial movements show racial loyalty? Do loyal dispositions enable people in these contexts in their collective strivings for the good life?

To begin with, I will clarify what it means to ask whether loyalty is a virtue, by borrowing Robert Paul Wolff’s distinctions among four different ways in which the term “loyalty” could be used, namely: 1) as a disposition of character, 2) as an ascribed legal status, 3) as an orthodoxy, and 4) as “remaining true, being faithful, honoring a moral commitment” (Wolff 1968, 59). To distinguish between the first and fourth senses of “loyalty,” Wolff notes: “To have a character trait is to be disposed to respond in certain ways to situations of a specific type. These responses are spontaneous and issue from inclination, not an awareness of duty. A man may be of a faithful disposition without having contracted a moral commitment to the object of his loyalty; conversely, he may

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loyally fulfill his obligation without feeling an unforced inclination to do so” (Wolff 1968, 59). Given Wolff’s distinctions, it is the first sense of loyalty—as a disposition of character—that I am considering. Wolff elaborates on this sense of loyalty:

A loyal person is loyal to something. The proper object of loyalty is either another person, a group of persons, or an institution. The loyal man [*sic*] comes to the aid of the object of his loyalty when its interests are threatened; he identifies himself with its career, making its successes his successes and its enemies his enemies. He is prepared to sacrifice for it, even to the extent of giving his life in order that it may be safeguarded. The loyal man takes pride in his loyalty object and expresses solidarity with it through ritual acts which evoke and reinforce his emotional identification with it . . . Strictly speaking, loyalty conceived as a personality trait is the disposition or tendency to exhibit a pattern of action which includes many of these particular acts. (Wolff 1968, 55)

While others have considered the question of whether loyalty is a virtue in a general way,² my interest in the question is motivated by the concern that within the discourses of both feminist movements and liberatory racial movements—as well as some discourses from racialized groups of people of color, whether or not in explicitly politicized contexts—loyalty is treated as an excellence of character when perhaps it should be understood as a disposition that is morally suspect.³ My sense is that within the context of an oppositional community, a virtuous disposition will be one that contributes to a conception (or conceptions) of human flourishing that is implied by, or is at least consistent with, the community’s liberatory vision, though there will certainly be contestation about what this vision is; a disposition should not be considered to be a virtue if it functions as a barrier to the group’s liberatory aims. Because I worry that loyalty may function in just this way, I want to highlight some of the implications, indeed some of the dangers, of accepting loyalty as a virtue, though ultimately I am unwilling to deny altogether that loyalty is a virtue.

I.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* chooses as its sample sentence to illustrate the definition of “loyalty” a quotation from J. P. Donleavy: “Loyalties flow deep between girl friends until they want the same man.” Against such a background, where women cannot be imagined to have primary loyalties to one another, the concept of “loyalty” and its companion concept, “betrayal,” have been potent ones in feminist thought. Failures of loyalty between women have

been seen as terrible transgressions of a feminist ethics, transgressions springing either from false consciousness (causing one to be loyal, but to the wrong community) or from a dreaded weakness of the will (in which case one knows whom one should be loyal to but “sells out” to satisfy one’s own individual self interest or desires). Within this discourse, the charge of betrayal holds extraordinary power because calling someone a traitor names her as bad to the core; she has not just committed a wrong action, but rather she suffers from a deficiency of character. In racialized communities of color—particularly in politicized contexts—the charge of betrayal also functions powerfully. Those who are traitors to their race are invoked as vilified figures within, for instance, some of the literature on passing, where again, those doing the passing are taken to be either mistaken about who their people truly are or, more likely, to suffer from a weakness of character whereby they do not have what it takes to stand honorably by their people and are tempted instead into the benefits procured by abandoning their people and individually escaping racial oppression.

However, some of what are taken to be acts of betrayal may not in fact arise either from false consciousness or from weakness of the will; they may be critically chosen departures from the hegemonic beliefs or practices of a community, departures that require other strengths of character.⁴ Such critical acts may actually serve liberatory purposes—and thus, I shall assume, the purpose of enabling human flourishing—better than loyalty does. Could fostering loyalty as a virtue, then, stand in the way of the development of the habits of an unrestrained critical thinking and acting and thus, prevent people from thinking and acting outside of what can be experienced as the confining, homogenizing unity of a political group or an identity-based community such as a racialized or a feminist community? Could it be that no form of loyalty is a virtue in an oppositional political context in which critical thinking and acting must be fostered? But before jumping to answer “yes” to these questions, I also ask: Can one imagine engaging in committed, oppositional politics without the loyalty of one’s comrades? Can one imagine the possibility of surviving, let alone flourishing, as a member of a persecuted or marginalized community without depending on the loyalty of one’s people?

II.

It is clear that loyalty, as it is conceived in feminist work, is not *always* a virtue.⁵ Loyalty has been cast simultaneously as a virtue—when it is loyalty to an oppressed group that one is a member of, such as loyalty to women *qua* women—and as a vice—when it is loyalty to an oppressor group that one is a member of, such as white women’s loyalty to the white race, or in Marilyn Frye’s (1992) terminology, to “whiteness,” a racial term that she uses as

analogous to the gender term “masculinity.” I will look first at the ways disloyalty has been praised.

A string of works that perhaps begins with Adrienne Rich’s “Disloyal To Civilization”—a phrase that she in turn has borrowed from Lillian Smith—valorizes white women’s refusal to be loyal to a world order that is at once patriarchal and racist. Rich, writing in 1978, claims “we have a strong antiracist female tradition, despite all efforts by the patriarchy to polarize its creature-objects, creating dichotomies of privilege and caste, skin-color and age and condition of servitude” (Rich 1978, 285). She describes a particular white woman’s use of her power as a slave owner as owing to “false loyalty to a system against which she had at first instinctively revolted, and which was destroying her integrity” (Rich 1978, 283), invoking the idea of false consciousness in which the woman failed to see that her true allegiance was to women, not to her slave-owning husband. Minnie Bruce Pratt, in 1984, extends the theme of white women’s betrayal of their white communities, analyzing this betrayal in terms of the fears it brings up for white women involved in anti-racist work. She points out, “We don’t want to lose the love of the first people who knew us; we don’t want to be standing outside the circle of home, with nowhere to go” (Pratt 1984, 48). She describes the feeling of betraying her mother in whose eyes her anti-racist actions were wrong. “She loved me and felt much pain, and shame. I was going the wrong way; I had walked away, and seemed to have turned my back on home” (Pratt 1984, 48). And yet Pratt speaks of this betrayal proudly, perhaps even self-righteously, emphasizing that racial justice demands such betrayal on her part, whether the betrayal be of her home community or of her subsequent chosen political communities. She asks, “can I maintain my principles against my need for the love and presence of others like me? It is lonely to be separated from others because of injustice, but it is also lonely to break with our own in opposition to that injustice” (Pratt 1984, 50).

Mab Segrest’s 1994 *Memoir of a Race Traitor* has a somewhat different tone. Although she, like Pratt, explores the pain of betraying her white family through her very extensive anti-racist work, her reference to herself as a race traitor is simply an acknowledgment that this is what she has (accurately) been named; it is the Klan and neo-Nazi groups that use this term as a label for whites like herself. White race traitors are simply one of the many targets of white supremacist groups. For instance, Segrest cites a declaration by a member of the Neo-Nazi White Patriot Party who writes: “I declare war against Niggers, Jews, Queers, assorted Mongrels, white Race traitors, and despicable informants . . . so fellow Aryan Warrior strike now” (Segrest 1994, 143). While the term “race traitor” is spoken as an insult, Segrest embraces rather than refuses it, proud of her, at times life threatening, work against white supremacists. Meanwhile, however, Segrest recognizes that betraying one’s family by crossing racial boundaries may not, for white people, originate in

anti-racist politics; racial transgression may simply be a convenient way for a white person to rebel against her family. Segrest refers to a Black participant in an anti-racism workshop who made this point: “White people use Black people to draw boundaries in homes where family members’ identities are enmeshed, [the participant] explained, in response to a white woman’s pleased story of how upset she had made her parents in her adolescence by dating Black men” (Segrest 1994, 24-25). Thus Segrest attempts to disentangle her family betrayals from her authentic betrayals of white racial unity. Ultimately, she claims that being a race traitor is not a betrayal of her kin; she writes, “it’s not my people, it’s the *idea* of race I am betraying” (Segrest 1994, 4).

Many women of color who have a politicized sense of their racial communities speak much more ambivalently—not to mention much more frequently—about their betrayals, for when they are accused of racial betrayal, the supposed betrayal is of an oppressed racialized group. A recurrent theme is of being pulled between the demands of racial loyalty and the desire for sexual autonomy, or at least for room to become a feminist critic of one’s home culture. Writings by Chicana feminists often focus on the legacy of Malintzin (also known as La Malinche), the Chicano symbol of the (female) traitor.⁷ Cherríe Moraga writes in “A Long Line of Vendidas,” “The sexual legacy passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of Malintzin Tenepal. As translator and strategic advisor and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of México, Hernan Cortez, Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike La Virgen de Gaudelupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as La Chingada, meaning the ‘fucked one,’ or La Vendida, sell-out to the white race” (Moraga 1983, 99). Because La Malinche is said to have betrayed sexually, the legacy of La Malinche functions to place suspicion on Chicanas’ sexuality as a potential area of betrayal.⁸ Chicanas can prove loyalty to the race only through sexual loyalty to men of their race. As Moraga writes, “even if she’s politically radical, sex remains the bottom line on which she [the Chicana] proves her commitment to her race” (Moraga 1983, 105).

And yet this sexual loyalty—and thus, loyalty to the race—is premised upon Chicanas’ betrayal of each other; because racial loyalty requires putting the men first, it demands of women that they betray one another in favor of the men.

You are a traitor to your race if you do not put the man first. The potential accusation of “traitor” or “vendida” is what hangs above the heads and beats in the hearts of most Chicanas seeking to develop our own autonomous sense of ourselves, particularly through sexuality. Even if a Chicana knew no Mexican history, the concept of betraying one’s race through

sex and sexual politics is as common as corn. As cultural myths reflect the economics, mores, and social structures of a society, every Chicana suffers from their effects. And we project the tear onto each other. We suspect betrayal in one another—first to other men, but ultimately and more insidiously, to the white man. (Moraga 1983, 103)

Some feminist discussions of La Malinche and her legacy focus on refuting the accusation of betrayal, emphasizing, for instance, that in fact La Malinche was not a traitor because she did not act under her own agency; rather, she was sold into sexual slavery and raped. Furthermore, the myth counts as racial loyalty only acts of loyalty toward men, thus precluding the possibility that loyalty between Chicanas—as lesbians, for instance—would count as racial loyalty. In such a context, any feminist critique on the part of Chicanas becomes a betrayal of the Chicano male and as such a betrayal of the race. As Norma Alarcón states simply, “as Chicanas embrace feminism they are charged with betrayal *à la Malinche*” (Alarcón 1981, 188). For Chicana feminists, betrayal, understood as any critical stance towards the men of their race, becomes inevitable. Moraga thus refuses this understanding of betrayal, insisting that “to be critical of one’s culture is not to betray that culture” (Moraga 1983, 108).

Despite her recognition of how accusations of betrayal are, for Chicanos, intertwined with sexist and heterosexist assumptions, Moraga uses the history of La Malinche as a springboard to discuss her real acts of betrayal, admitting, “I *have* betrayed my people” and telling a childhood story of ending a friendship with a darker-skinned girl after her mother had warned her against this girl (Moraga 1983, 97). Betrayal pains Moraga, for true loyalty to her race is undoubtedly a virtue for Moraga. In 1993, she writes proudly of her own loyalty and admiringly of the “breed-boys ever loyal to the dark side of their *mestizaje*,” noting that the “blondest of the bunch writes it blue-veined into his skin: *Viva la Raza!* A life-long mark of identity, of loyalty to his mother’s and to his own people” (Moraga 1993, 126). But her own loyalty to *la raza*, a culturally nationalistic loyalty symbolized in the Chicano movement by allegiance to Aztlán, becomes possible for Moraga only when she critically revises the conception of the nation to which she will be loyal, reconceiving it as “Queer Aztlán,” “a Chicano homeland that could embrace *all* its people, including its *joteria*” (Moraga 1993, 147). This critical revision is, for Moraga, still an act of loyalty, and loyalty is still unquestionably considered to be a virtue.

Gloria Anzaldúa also insists on being profoundly critical of her culture and does not accept that such a stance justifies her being called a traitor. Instead of embracing the term “traitor” or “vendida” to underscore her critical stance, she refuses the description of her actions as traitorous. For her, too, loyalty is

still a virtue, as long as what counts as loyalty can be revised. So, she turns the accusation of betrayal around and claims that she is not the traitor but rather the betrayed, insisting, “not me sold out my people but they me” (Anzaldúa 1987, 21).

III.

While some feminists of color have expressed ambivalence towards the concept of loyalty because the accusation of racial betrayal is so often based on misogynist assumptions of a loyal woman as the woman who supports her man, other discussions of racial betrayal focus on passing, on selling out one's own racialized-of-color people for the sake of one's own gain. Blacks who marry or have relationships interracially may get characterized as traitors; people of color who do not support the liberatory struggles of their people may be seen as betraying their race, being “Uncle Tom”; mixed-race people may be thought of as traitors if they do not identify with a racialized-of-color group (Funderburg 1994). As Naomi Zack writes, “Black people are likely to perceive the person who is culturally or ethnically white, but racially black, as an inauthentic black person, someone who is disloyal to other black people or who evades or denies racial discrimination by attempting to pass (for white)” (Zack 1992, 8). Similarly, blacks who assimilate, make it into the middle class, or become intellectuals are often considered traitors. Bell hooks responds to the charge that black intellectuals are traitors by noting that sometimes they are and sometimes they are not—it depends on the work that they do. She writes: “Black intellectuals who choose to do work that addresses the needs and concerns of black liberation struggle, of black folks seeking to decolonize their minds and imaginations, will find no separation has to exist between themselves and other black people from various class backgrounds. This does not mean that our work will be embraced without critique, or that we will not be seen as suspect, only that we can counter the negative representations of black intellectuals as uppity assimilated traitors by the work we do” (hooks 1995, 234-35).

In feminist and particularly lesbian communities, “traitor” gets applied with perhaps the most vehemence to those that “sleep with the enemy”—even though that phrase is seldom said out loud any more.⁹ Lesbians frequently question bisexuals' loyalty to women. Paula Rust's (1995) sociological study of lesbians' and bisexual women's attitudes about bisexuality reveals the prevalence of lesbians' belief that bisexuals are not loyal: “When asked directly to agree or disagree with the statement ‘Bisexuals are not as committed to other women as lesbians are; they are more likely to desert their female friends,’ 61% of lesbian respondents agreed. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement ‘It can be dangerous for lesbians to trust bisexuals too much, because when the going really gets rough, they are not as likely to stick around and fight

it out,' 53% agreed (Rust 1995, 77-78).¹⁰ Rust comments on the lesbians in her study who spontaneously expressed "the most bitter feelings toward bisexual women": "At best, they see bisexual women as weak-willed and, at worst, as traitors to the lesbian community because they are unwilling to own their lesbianism" (Rust 1995, 85). Bisexual writers frequently focus on the experience of being called a traitor,¹¹ lesbians who get involved with men or "go back to men" are characterized as treasonous, sometimes by being called "hasbians"—just a creative word for traitor.¹² For instance, Ruth Gibian describes having "internalized the politics of a community that said by loving a man I was a traitor taking the easy— that is, straight—way out" and having to struggle against this image of herself (Gibian 1992, 4); one of her fears about falling in love with a man is that "*the lesbian community will think I've defected*" (Gibian 1992, 12, italics in original). Amanda Yoshizaki reports the same experience: "when I come out in the lesbian community as having married a man, I am often viewed as a traitor at best and leper at worst" (Yoshizaki 1992, 156).

The idea of betrayal may be used even more widely than this in feminist communities. It may be used to speak of separatists who become nonseparatist, radical feminists who change their views (or their practices!) of sex to include expressions of sexuality that were forbidden by their former political convictions, and, more broadly, anyone who shifts the primary focus of their political work—whether that work had been anti-pornography work, anti-racist work, the work of building vibrant lesbian community, and so on; when one's political work defines one's community, one may be called a traitor for moving away from whatever that work is, for by doing so, one breaks with the community whose members' identities are constituted through this work.

IV.

So far I have been interested primarily in taking note of the widespread assumption within both feminist communities and the communities of racialized groups involved in liberatory struggles that certain acts constitute betrayal, that there is such a thing as a traitor to such communities, and that this is a terrible thing to be. I am not interested here in whether there is a legitimate critique of the actions or characters of those who are called "traitor" (for instance, in whether there is something problematic about a lesbian relating sexually to men), rather, I am interested in the fact that one can criticize (or condemn) another member of an oppositional community by calling her or him a traitor. The implication of this is that loyalty to such a community is a virtue. While there is much disagreement over what does and what does not constitute treason, one thing seems clear within this discourse: to be called loyal is to be praised, as long as one's loyalty is to those on the side of the right and the good. One might at this point say that indeed, loyalty is a

virtue when it is loyalty to those struggling for liberation, and disloyalty is a virtue when it is disloyalty to the oppressors. Thus, for instance, Black racial loyalty is a virtue, and white racial loyalty is morally and politically reprehensible. However, this answer comes too fast, for it is not yet clear that loyalty is unproblematic even when it is loyalty to oppositional groups.

Had I not cited some places in the literature from feminist communities and communities of color where the concept of betrayal is invoked, and had simply asked, "is loyalty a good quality for a member of an oppositional political community?" a likely response might have been: "no, such a community needs to prioritize its members' abilities to continually subject the community's beliefs and practices to criticism, and such criticism is incompatible with loyalty. Loyalty fosters a dangerously uncritical stance." Due to this it is quite surprising to find communities of feminist politics and of liberatory racial politics treating loyalty as a virtue, because these are communities that have emphasized the necessity of critical thinking for being able not only to break with the status quo of the mainstream but also to resist duplicating in political communities of resistance the dynamics of oppressive forms of political organization that call for loyalty in, for instance, the form of patriotism. Thus, it is necessary to now consider whether being loyal is compatible with exercising one's critical faculties. Can one be critical and loyal at the same time, and if so, how deeply critical?

For Alasdair MacIntyre, patriotism, which he takes to be a species of loyalty, does not require completely unconditional and uncritical acceptance of the status quo.¹³ He develops a careful distinction between the varieties of criticism that patriotism permits and those that it does not, and in so doing outlines a version of patriotism in which one can be critical and yet still be bounded in one's moral thinking by the ties one has simply because one has been constituted through the particularities of one's own family, community, or nation.

MacIntyre's understanding of patriotism is that ". . . patriotism is one of a class of loyalty-exhibiting virtues (that is, if it is a virtue at all). . . . All [of which] exhibit a peculiar action-generating regard for particular persons, institutions or groups, a regard founded upon a particular historical relationship of association between the person exhibiting the regard and the relevant person, institution or group" (MacIntyre 1994, 308). MacIntyre emphasizes some of the communitarian bases for considering patriotism to be a virtue. For instance, by noting that the very foundation for all morality resides not in impartial thinking—which he considers to be impossible for humans as social creatures—but rather in what one learns as a being situated in very particular relationships, he points out that if the communities that constitute our selves depend for their existence on their members' loyalty, disloyalty destroys the ground on which morality rests. In destroying one's community, he thinks, one destroys one's moral self.¹⁴ Such communitarian thinking has resonated with some feminists, though feminists have also been highly critical of communi-

tarian thought for endorsing only traditional and often oppressive communities. Feminists have argued with communitarians that while constitutive communities are indeed necessary for one's identity, one needs to have space to critique or leave communities that are damaging to one's self.¹⁵

In his discussion of patriotism, however, MacIntyre appears to address this concern, though not from a feminist perspective. He writes, "Patriotism turns out to be a permanent source of moral danger" (MacIntyre 1994, 315), for he is concerned that patriotism does not allow for thoroughgoing criticism of the object of loyalty—in this case, the nation. He admits that "the morality of patriotism is one which precisely because it is framed in terms of the membership of some particular social community with some particular social, political and economic structure, must exempt at least some fundamental structures of that community's life from criticism. Because patriotism has to be a loyalty that is in some respects unconditional, so in just those respects rational criticism is ruled out" (MacIntyre 1994, 313-14). However, MacIntyre argues, it is not the case that everything about the nation must be unconditionally accepted by the patriot. It is, he thinks, an essential task of those defending patriotism to distinguish between what may and what may not be subjected to criticism and possibly rejected by the patriot (or, analogously, by anyone who exhibits one of the other varieties of loyalty). Here is MacIntyre's distinction: "Whatever is exempted from the patriot's criticism the status quo of power and government and the policies pursued by those exercising power and government never need be so exempted. What then is exempted? The answer is the nation conceived *as a project*, a project somehow or other brought to birth in the past and carried on so that a morally distinctive community was brought into being which embodied a claim to political autonomy in its various organized and institutionalized expressions" (MacIntyre 1994, 314, italics in original).

One might have thought that loyalty, functioning like any other Aristotelian virtue, would name the mean, in this case the mean between the deficiency of disloyalty and the excess state of blind loyalty, where blind loyalty would include completely uncritical acceptance of and support for its object. Thus one response to the claim that loyalty requires that one suspend one's critical faculties could be that in fact only the excess—blind loyalty—requires this, while proper loyalty can include a moderate amount of criticism. But MacIntyre's distinction between different *kinds* of criticism is more helpful. Instead of claiming that loyalty is compatible with moderate criticism, one can claim that loyalty is compatible with any degree of criticism, as long as the criticism does not aim to destroy or even to call into question the existence of the group, *qua* group, to which one is loyal. In MacIntyre's discussion of patriotism, the "group" whose existence one is forbidden to critically undermine is the nation; however, an analogy can be made to "groups" or communities constituted by the projects of liberatory politics and by the moral or

political identities of its members as they are related to such projects. Thus, following MacIntyre, I will proceed under the assumption that one cannot be said to be loyal to a group if one calls into question or undermines its basis for existence. One might, of course, shift one's loyalty to a different object as one undermines the existence of a group *qua* group; one could remain loyal to individual members of the former group, for instance, or to a liberatory ideal that one came to see the group as failing to promote. However, the group itself cannot be said to be the object of one's loyalty while one acts to deconstruct it.

Given an understanding of loyalty based on MacIntyre's distinction, it seems that loyalty is problematic for feminist communities and for communities of liberatory racial politics, for indeed sometimes the continued existence of that which defines the community as a community (for instance, the continued existence of a gender term or a racial designation)—and thus, the continued existence of the community itself as a community—does need to be questioned, and this is precisely what loyalty forbids, according to MacIntyre. Movements that aim to deconstruct or subvert identity could in fact be characterized as a politics that necessarily involves betrayal of the identities—and communities—that are undermined. Betrayal that leads to undermining or subverting identity-based communities or movements can be important for liberatory politics because it permits communities to change in accordance with changing political challenges and material conditions; furthermore, it serves to continually disrupt the exclusions that result from a more static definition of a community. Thus, there are times when betrayal may be exactly what is called for.

For instance, a term such as "lesbian" may function well both to give definition to a political project (such as resisting compulsory heterosexuality) and to delineate the bounds of a community, but at some point lesbian politics and community might (partially or fully) give way to differently constituted politics and communities. The understanding of "lesbian" is under constant contestation; some critiques aim to subvert the identity "lesbian" or at least to make the enactment of "lesbian" only one among a grand proliferation of possible gender/sexual performances such that it no longer serves as a unifying identity (Butler 1990). Such critiques would count under MacIntyre's distinction as disloyal, because they aim to dissolve a certain collectivity as a collectivity.

The emergence of the term "queer"—where queerness "includes the impulse to take apart that identity from within" (Gamson 1996, 397)—perhaps best exemplifies a politics that actually calls for "disloyalty" precisely because of the way acts of disloyalty do the work of abandoning or relinquishing the defining terms of a community. As Judith Butler writes, "If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that

which is, in the present, never fully owned—but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate—without domesticating—democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance” (Butler 1993, 228).

However, I think one must use caution in evaluating whether critical moves to question or reject the foundations of particular communities are in fact liberatory moves, because quite often they are not. Joshua Gamson argues that “the logic and political utility of deconstructing collective categories vies with that of shoring them up: each logic is true, and neither is fully tenable” (Gamson 1996, 396). Taking gay and lesbian identity-based politics as an example of the strategy of shoring up identities, he points out that the advocates of this strategy “do not do justice to the subversive and liberating aspects of loosened collective boundaries” (Gamson 1996, 408). On the other side, however, are the failures of a politics focused on subverting identity: “queer theory and politics tend to run past a critique of the particular, concrete forces that make sexual identity, in stabilized and binary form, a basis for discipline, regulation, pleasure, and political empowerment” (Gamson 1996, 408); deconstructive strategies do not pay attention to “the very concrete and violent institutional forms to which the most logical answer is resistance in and through a particular collective identity” (Gamson 1996, 408). Thus disloyalty may serve a deconstructive strategy by undermining an identity or a community but may simultaneously be politically dangerous if it risks in concrete ways the welfare of the members of the community.

For instance, in racial politics the role of racial identities has become contested in such a way that theorists like Naomi Zack (1992) who argue for a position of deracination (that is, the refusal of all racial designations) are, according to MacIntyre’s distinction, disloyal because they question the actual existence of the racialized collectivity to which they are in one way or another expected to show allegiance. While Zack could argue that undermining the foundation of the racialized community designated by the term “Black” will help undermine racism itself, others such as Lewis Gordon would not agree that Zack’s disloyalty is to a collectivity that ought to and can dissolve. Rather, she and those who agree with her position of deracination—for instance, other mixed-race people who refuse to accept any racial designations or at least refuse the designation of Black—are engaging in the perpetuation of racism by rejecting Blackness, while their darker-skinned kin do not have the option of doing so. While those who identify as mixed-race cannot be said to be buying into whiteness, Gordon writes, “to reject the importance of being white in no way addresses the social revulsion with being black” (Gordon 1995, 392).

Because Gordon believes that racist ideology is premised on two principles, namely "(1) be white, but above all, (2) don't be black" (Gordon 1995, 389), a disloyalty to Blackness through a refusal to accept it as a racial designation is consistent, for him, with the premises of racism. The disloyalty could be further characterized as an abandonment of others to a form of oppression that a select few, through their disloyalty, can escape individually. While Zack, then, intends for her critical position of deracination to serve liberatory aims even if it is disloyal to a racial collectivity that asks for loyalty from her, there is good reason for questioning whether liberatory aims really are served.

Anthony Appiah, who like Zack aims not only to expose the fact that racial categorization is scientifically invalid, but furthermore to count this fact as significant for racial politics, could also be said, according to MacIntyre's distinction, to be disloyal in questioning the basis for a racial collectivity. But again, whether or not Appiah's position serves liberatory purposes is under contestation. Against a position such as Appiah's, Gordon has argued that "the anti-race people . . . miss the point. Even if they show that race is a social construction, even if they show that races are no more than cultural or social formations, even if they show that races are pseudo-scientific fictions, they still need to address the ways in which phenomena understood as racial phenomena are lived" (Gordon 1995, 388).

It is not that Appiah disregards the importance of the collective identity of Blacks; he does, however, express a simultaneous wish to be able to break with the collectivity for the sake of a more autonomous self. In the following passages, he describes both the need for the collectivity and his desire to break with it: "An African-American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive black life scripts . . . And if one is to be black in a society that is racist then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough . . . one will end up asking to be respected *as a black*." (Appiah 1996, 98; italics in original). Appiah insists that he is sympathetic to this story and that "it may even be historically, strategically necessary for the story to go this way," but he then says, ". . . we need to go on to the next necessary step, which is to ask whether the identities constructed in this way are ones we can all be happy with in the longer run. What demanding respect for people *as blacks* or *as gays* requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. . . . It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose" (Appiah 1996, 98-99; italics in original). Given the conflict Appiah describes (though he is only in part motivated by his

critique of the concept of race), is loyalty still a virtue when there is some question of whether the collectivity—such as a racial collectivity—that might claim one's loyalty is itself based on a concept that one finds to be suspect and perhaps the very source of oppression? Is it right, in such cases, to work to dissolve or disassociate from the collectivity though doing so constitutes betrayal?

Lucius Outlaw (in part responding to an earlier position formulated by Appiah) argues against undermining the basis for racial collectivities. For two reasons, he believes that races should be “conserved”; first, he notes that in the context of racism and what he calls “invidious ethnocentrism,” shared racial and ethnic identities are necessary for political actions aimed at enabling the well-being of members of oppressed racial and ethnic groups; second, he cites “the wealth of histories and cultures, the wealth of possible contributions, of various groups comprising our multidimensional local, national, international social worlds” (Outlaw 1996, 141), and argues that maintaining constitutive differences enriches collective life because of the contribution each distinctive group may make to it. He concludes “. . . that both struggles against racism and invidious ethnocentrism, as well as struggles on the part of persons of various races and ethnicities to preserve, enhance, and share their ‘messages’ with all humans, require the conservation of races” (Outlaw 1996, 157).

Those who advocate the dissolution of races need to consider the possibility that at the present moment, as Outlaw argues, the conservation of races may still be necessary for liberatory purposes. Furthermore, they must consider whether their questioning the basis for the racial collectivity—which one could think of as an act of betrayal—*could* even serve to dissolve a racial category. I think that in many cases—including cases involving the current racial categories—the collectivity that one betrays does not dissolve as a result; though some people may escape the category to one degree or another by disassociating from it, others are left behind in it. Naomi Scheman makes this point beautifully. She writes:

Though I never chose to be a Jew . . . I can embrace that identity, make it mine, struggle with it, make it fit; or I can ignore it, reject its relevance to what I think matters about me, find myself elsewhere. So it is with being a woman—Jews are the people the Nazis round up; women are the people misogynists target for rape: in either case I can claim an identity informed but not determined by those who define it by their hate, or I can disown the identity and find other ground on which to stand. If social ontology were up to me, I don't think there'd be either Jews or women: I don't think I'd have constructed religion or gender. But the supposition doesn't make sense: social ontology couldn't be up to me, or even us; it's a

matter of history. And, in the light of history, it is a matter of honor not to walk away from the people with whom history has given me "a shared fate." (Scheman 1992, 191)¹⁶

V.

There are times, however, when betraying a community does not leave others behind in a position of *disadvantage* (as leaving a racialized of-color community does) but rather constitutes an attempt to renounce one's own privilege or even to destroy the possibility for privileged membership by anyone in the group by undermining its unity. The betrayal that white race traitors engage in may fit this description. This is the position of Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, editors of the journal *Race Traitor*, which they founded "to serve as an intellectual center for those seeking to abolish the white race" (Garvey and Ignatiev 1996, 10). They speak of the white race as a club and advocate acts of dissent that "aim to dissolve the club, to break it apart," claiming that "the weak point of the club is its need for unanimity" (Garvey and Ignatiev 1996, 11). In gender politics "refusing to be a man" (Stoltenberg 1989) may be a similar form of betrayal.

Even while racialized communities of people of color may pursue liberatory aims by strengthening racial identification, white people may help undermine racism through disloyalty to white racialized communities. As Marilyn Frye points out, there is an asymmetry between oppressed racialized groups and privileged racialized groups with respect to the desirability of their abolishing their respective racial categories. While white women, she claims, should contribute to the "demolition" of the white race, this does not imply that "women of other races should take the same approach to their racial categorization and their races" (Frye 1992, 165). She writes, "the social-constructedness of race and races in the racist state has very different meanings for groups differently placed with respect to these categories. The ontological freedom of categorical reconstruction may be generic, but what is politically possible differs for those differently positioned, and not all the political possibilities for every group are desirable" (Frye 1992, 164).

Whether or not one believes that acts of betrayal by white race traitors—or by males who are disloyal to masculinity—succeed in their aims, they are at least not instances of forsaking others to a suffering that one escapes from individually. In fact, *loyalty*, in these cases, would constitute acquiescence to others' subordination, something that I assume is incompatible with the good life. Because acts of loyalty to whiteness, or to masculinity (or, for that matter, to unjust entities such as governments) entail supporting others' oppression, those who have membership in these oppressor groups but who are committed to refusing to support others' oppression will have to opt for disloyalty towards the oppressor group.

VI.

Oppression seems to produce groups or communities that are problematic as objects of loyalty. This is most obvious in those cases where one's loyalty would be to an oppressor group; however, I have also suggested that there is at least contestation over whether oppositional identities and communities should be "conserved" or should be deconstructed, where the deconstruction would constitute disloyalty. If the deconstructive move is even sometimes called for, then there will be these additional instances in which the best option will be to refuse loyalty. One must, thus, at least be wary of enacting loyalty towards the *communities of liberatory struggles*.

To claim that there are instances—even in the context of oppositional communities—in which one should engage in disloyalty, however, is not to say that loyalty cannot be a virtue, for there is another possibility, namely, that loyalty is a virtue but one that cannot be either developed or exercised (or both) in certain contexts, including, typically, contexts of oppression. It will be important to acknowledge that oppression may yield conditions in which loyalty cannot be properly maintained, for to see this is to recognize one more way in which oppression interferes with flourishing: it bars the full development of the virtues. For instance, acts of group loyalty become wrong for anyone committed to questioning the very foundation of what might otherwise be their object of loyalty, and such questioning may follow from the liberatory ideals that are being used to judge what will count as flourishing. Lacking the opportunity to exercise loyalty, one is also thereby prevented from developing or maintaining a loyal disposition, because having the disposition requires practice. Think, for instance, of the way that a potentially loyal disposition could be eroded by the practices one will engage in if one decides one does not have a proper object of loyalty. There is loss involved in forsaking, after critical questioning, the opportunity for loyalty. Such loss is expressed by some of the white feminists who think of themselves as race traitors, when they describe their deep conflict about the ways that they hurt their families through enacting their betrayals. Even if they consider their acts of betrayal to be morally the best option, they are simultaneously pained by the losses of what accompanies loyalty as a virtue—losses, for instance, of their ability to honor or "stand behind" some of their tightly bonded, loving relationships. These losses may do moral damage to their characters, for if one becomes accustomed to or even numb to the ways in which one hurts one's white family in being a white race traitor, one may also lose one's awareness of how one might hurt, for instance, one's political companions, or others to whom one may aim to be loyal. This damage may be thought of as an erosion of one's character, a way in which one is barred from (fully) developing traits that, under better circumstances, would function as virtues.

Because proper loyalty requires, like any Aristotelian virtue, that one determine when and how much and towards what object one should be loyal, it seems that even if loyalty is appropriate *under some circumstance*, conditions of oppression create all the wrong opportunities for it. And this is simply to apply something that Aristotle recognized: one cannot have perfect virtue—the virtue of what he calls a good man—in a corrupt polis, though one may still be a good *citizen*.¹⁷ Certain virtues may at times simply be unavailable to a person. For instance, for Aristotle, when a citizen is not ruling, that citizen cannot express or develop the virtues associated with ruling, and therefore cannot have complete or perfect virtue. Along similar lines, in the case of loyalty it may be that certain situations—such as those created under oppression—make the virtue of loyalty unavailable because of the absence of a good object of loyalty.

Aristotle makes a point about friendship that is also relevant to this consideration of loyalty. True or perfect friendship is, for him, indicative of virtue; it can only take place between good men who are similar in their goodness.¹⁸ Friendship of this sort both requires virtue of the friends, and it also enhances their virtuous characters. But there are times, Aristotle says, when one may have to leave a friendship—that is, engage in something quite like a betrayal of one's friend. This occurs in the case that one's friend—whom one had taken to be good—turns out to be irremediably bad.¹⁹ In recognizing that one must leave the friendship, one must acknowledge the loss of that hoped-for but unactualizable opportunity for the exercise and development of virtue. And so it is with one's loyalties to any community. If the community is or becomes fundamentally bad, one may be compelled to leave it, in an act of betrayal, and to thus forego the possibility of having those virtues that only a good friendship, or a good community, could foster.

So yes, loyalty is a virtue, but a virtue that like any other virtue requires that it be exercised in the right way. In particular, proper loyalty—at least the sort of group loyalty I have been exploring—presupposes a good community towards which to be loyal. Oppression creates communities that are at best precarious as good objects of loyalty and thereby tends to make loyalty unavailable as a virtue. While feminist communities and the communities of liberatory racial politics may at times be the sort of communities necessary for proper loyalty, maintaining a disposition of loyalty even in these communities does create a “permanent source of moral danger” (MacIntyre 1994, 315), for there is always the possibility of the collectivity's “going bad,” whether in the mild sense of becoming socially or politically obsolete or ineffective under changed conditions, or whether in a more severe sense of becoming thoroughly corrupt.

NOTES

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1 Ann Ferguson describes an “oppositional community” as “not just people who live together or in the same neighborhood, such as in a communal household or progressive barrio or neighborhood, but a network of actual and imagined others to whom one voluntarily commits oneself in order to empower oneself and those bonded with others by challenging a social order perceived to be unjust, usually by working on a shared project for social change. Connecting to an oppositional community is at some level an act of rebellion or resistance. The choice to do so involves a resolve to reconstitute one’s personal identity and, in so doing, to reassess the values to which one is committed and the responsibilities one has for others” (Ferguson 1995, 372). In this paper, I use the term “oppositional community” interchangeably with “community of liberatory politics” (and similar variations).

2 The philosophical work on loyalty has focused on many different species of loyalty, including loyalty to one’s friends, to one’s lover, to one’s family, to one’s country, to a god or gods, to one’s political comrades, to one’s heritage, to a way of thinking, and to a teacher or mentor; Josiah Royce (1908) even suggests “loyalty to loyalty.” George Fletcher’s *Loyalty* (1993) is a thorough, contemporary consideration of the topic of loyalty. He centers the question of whether and when loyalty is a *duty* instead of thinking about it strictly as a virtue, although he does begin with an Aristotelian/communitarian framework that could lend itself to thinking about loyalty as a virtue. Also see Pettit (1988).

3. Victoria Davion expresses a similar moment of suspicion (which she comes to resolve) about a different assumed virtue—that of integrity—in “Integrity and Radical Change.” Her suspicion is of any concept of integrity that cannot “account for radical change” (Davion 1991, 181), she also notes that “if multiplicitous beings cannot have integrity, this challenges the idea that integrity is always a good thing” (Davion 1991, 180).

4. See, for instance, Ruth Ginzberg, who examines “the courage to dissent” from one’s moral community as a type of “moral courage” (Ginzberg 1991, 136). Such dissenting requires courage precisely because one risks losing one’s moral community. Ginzberg points out that under the assumption that the personal is political, “any decision, by virtue of being political, is fair game for being held accountable by and to my moral community. It is also fair game for becoming grounds for my exclusion from a moral community” (Ginzberg 1991, 137).

5. If one does not recognize that there is a distinction to be made between a consideration of loyalty as a disposition (as one would find in the discourse of virtue ethics) and a consideration of loyal actions (as one would find in either deontological or consequentialist discourses), it is easy to find instances of acts of disloyalty that can be praised, without wondering about the implications for the question of whether loyalty is a virtue. I am reading the feminist discourses that use the language of loyalty

and betrayal for their implications within a virtue ethics approach. Thanks to Bat-Ami Bar On for raising this point.

6. I am not interested here in whether or not Rich's analysis is right; in fact, I think her use of the concept of false consciousness and her highlighting of white women's "instinctive" rebellions against racism is quite problematic. My point is simply that she has given a positive valuation to disloyalty.

7. See Alarcón (1994) for a commentary on some of the feminist, as well as nonfeminist, literature on Malintzin.

8. Alarcón (1994) emphasizes that Malintzin was a traitor not only because of her sexuality (and the fact that she bore Cortez's children) but also because she translated for him.

9. See, for instance, *For Lesbians Only* (Hoagland and Penelope 1988), which contains selections—primarily from the 1970s—that use this language. Thus, the Gutter Dyke Collective writes in 1973: "Separatism, as a position, is the way in which we relate to other lesbians, women and the enemy. . . . Straight/heterosexual women can't be trusted in any real situation because they will sell you out if it gets too heavy for them—men are the focal point of their lives" (Hoagland and Penelope 1988, 27); "Alice, Gordon, Debbie, & Mary" write in 1973: ". . . we see 'straight' feminists, or nonlesbian feminists, to . . . be a contradiction in terms: You cannot be dedicated to eliminating male-supremacy (sexism) and, at the same time, be relating to men, who are the enemy" (Hoagland and Penelope 1988, 35).

10. It is interesting to note that some bisexuals also agreed with these two statements. Rust writes that "a sizable minority of bisexuals actually *agreed* with each statement; one out of nine agreed that bisexuals are less committed than lesbians, and one out of four agreed that lesbians can't trust bisexuals to stick around when the going gets rough" (Rust 1995, 216).

11. See, for instance, Armstrong (1995); Ault (1996); Gamson (1996).

12. Examples of this abound in lesbian publications; Rust (1995) includes a survey of these publications in her study. Stacey Young (1992) reports on similar portrayals of bisexuals in lesbian publications and analyzes the implications of the term "hasbian." It happens that in a recent issue of my local gay, lesbian, and bisexual newspaper, *In Newsweekly*, there is a discussion of the question of betrayal by lesbians who get involved with men: Karen Shoffner, commenting on JoAnn Loulan's (a well-known lesbian sex-counselor and author) announcement that she now has a boyfriend, writes: "She [Loulan] hopes that lesbians will respond to her news with a resounding 'So what.' Hers may be a vain hope, for some lesbians will feel she has betrayed them. She is, after all, a turncoat who has the nerve to continue to identify herself as a lesbian. . . . What if she had denied her feelings for this man for the sake of our community? Wouldn't that be a terrible betrayal, too?" (Shoffner 1997, 9).

13. For a debate initiated by MacIntyre's discussion of patriotism, see Nathanson (1989, 1992) and Gomberg (1990).

14. As Ruth Ginzberg points out, if one has more than one moral community, expulsion from one moral community (or destruction of that community) does not completely destroy one's moral self, because one is not dependent exclusively on that community. She writes: "I risk genuine 'demoralization' when my moral judgments differ enough from those of my moral community for me to be excommunicated, for if I am expelled from my moral community, some piece of my moral agency itself is at stake. I say 'some piece of' my moral agency is at stake because most of us are

simultaneously members of a number of moral communities. One rarely loses one's membership in all of one's moral communities at once" (Ginzberg 1991, 138).

15. See, for instance, Friedman (1993) and Weiss (1995).

16. Scheman cites Evelyn Torton Beck (1982, 175) for the phrase "a shared fate."

17. Aristotle, *Politics* Book III, chapter 4: "... one citizen differs from another, but the salvation of the community is the common business of them all. This community is the constitution, the virtue of the citizen must therefore be relative to the constitution of which he is a member. It, then, there are many forms of government, it is evident that there is not one single virtue of the good citizen which is perfect virtue. But we say that the good man is he who has one single virtue which is perfect virtue. Hence it is evident that the good citizen need not of necessity possess the virtue which makes a good man" (1276b.27-35). This citation is from the Benjamin Jowett translation, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941.

18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VIII, chapter 3. All citations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from the W. D. Ross translation, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941.

19. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book IX, chapter 3. Aristotle also notes that if one friend remains the same but the other "became better and far outstripped him in virtue" (1165b23-24), the virtuous friend would have grounds for terminating the friendship.

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