Inter-American Philosophy as Identity Therapy

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English Abstract

Philosophers have recently debated whether the social identity category "Latinx" picks out a race (Alcoff 2006), an ethnicity (Gracia 2008), or something else altogether (Arango and Burgos 2021). Rather than defending one or several of these ways of understanding US Latinx as a political or social group, my paper focuses on the *personal* social identity turmoil young US Latinx people feel and explores the history of inter-American thought to seek a remedy for it. Three prominent American philosophers – José Martí, Alain Locke, and Emilio Uranga – combine to teach us that, while the US Latinx strives for belonging, they find themselves in a situation of unbelonging. The tension that results from the desire to belong but the reality of unbelonging produces a deep-seated anxiety that has come to characterize the US Latinx condition. I suggest that an effective tool for coping with this anxiety, affirming our identity, and building community is the activity of doing inter-American, Latin American, and Latinx Philosophy.

Resumen en español

En los últimos años, ha surgido un debate sobre si la categoría 'latinx' se refiere a una raza (Alcoff 2006), a una etnia (Gracia 2008) o a algo completamente distinto (Arango y Burgos 2021). En vez de defender una o varias de estas formas de entender la categoría, mi artículo se concentra en la crisis de identidad que sienten los jóvenes latinx estadounidenses y investiga la historia del pensamiento interamericano para buscar una manera de remediarla. Tres destacados filósofos - José Martí, Alain Locke y Emilio Uranga - nos enseñan que, mientras los latinx estadounidenses aspiran a pertenecer, se encuentran en una situación de no pertenencia. El contraste entre lo que desean y su realidad genera una tensión que, a su vez, produce una ansiedad profunda que ha llegado a caracterizar la condición latinx estadounidense. Propongo que una forma eficaz de combatir esta ansiedad, afirmar nuestra identidad y construir comunidad es la actividad de hacer filosofía interamericana, latinoamericana y latinx.

Resumo em português

Nos últimos anos, surgiu um debate sobre a questão de saber se a categoria 'latinx' se refere a uma raça (Alcoff 2006), a uma etnia (Gracia 2008) ou a algo completamente diferente (Arango e Burgos 2021). Em vez de defender uma ou mais destas formas de entender esta categoria, o meu artigo centra-se na crise de identidade sentida pelos jovens latinx explora a história do pensamento interamericano para encontrar uma forma de a remediar. Três filósofos importantes - José Martí, Alain Locke e Emilio Uranga - ensinam-nos que, enquanto os latino-americanos lutam para pertencer, encontram-se numa situação de não-pertencimento. A tensão resultante do desejo de

pertença, mas a realidade da não-pertença, produz uma ansiedade profunda que veio a caraterizar a condição latino-americana. Proponho que uma forma eficaz de combater esta ansiedade, afirmar a nossa identidade e construir uma comunidade é a atividade de fazer filosofia interamericana, latino-americana e latinx.

"Empty is the argument of the philosopher by which no human disease is healed; for just as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not drive out bodily diseases, so there is no benefit in philosophy if it does not drive out the diseases of the soul." Epicurus, U. 221, translated by Inwood and Gerson, p. 97

Introduction

Recently there has been a surge of columns and op-eds pondering the question "What is the US Latinx"? At first glance the question seems innocuous, and answers are forthcoming. The US Latinx is anyone born, raised, or residing in the United States who claims Latin American provenance. Just as the Italian who, born in Italy and tracing their ancestry back to Italian soil for generations immemorial, proudly proclaims "I am an Italian!" so too can the *estadounidense* whose parents, grandparents, and beyond hail from El Salvador confidently proclaim, "I am a Latina!"

But matters are not this simple for the US Latinx. Oftentimes, the US Latinx feels like they live with one foot on either side of the border. Though they possess clear ties to the United States, their (and their families') customs, culture, heritage, language, and more are those of another land. In response to this situation, US Latinxs today often express that they feel caught between two places and comfortable in neither. As Angela Geraci notes in a piece containing one-on-one interviews with Latinxs of Cuban descent born in the United States, "The pull of both cultures, Cuban and American, can put a strain on these Cuban-Americans and makes it difficult to identify themselves" (Geraci, n.d.).[1] What is unique about US Latinx identity is not its ambiguity. Rather, what is unique is that this ambiguous situation produces a deep-seated *identity anxiety* which is so rampant that it practically characterizes the lived experience of the US Latinx person.

One popular response to this situation is to go political. Many thinkers seek an understanding of what it means to be a "US Latinx" by inquiring whether this term represents a racial category (Alcoff 2006), an ethnic category (Gracia 2000 & 2008), or something else altogether (Arango and Burgos 2021). Equipped with a clearer political or social label, we may be less inclined to feel anxious about who we are. I want to take a different approach. Rather than offering a new proposal for the US Latinx at a political register, my paper aims at a therapeutic prognosis for the US Latinx individual

that is grounded in the history of inter-American thought and consistent with contemporary approaches in Social and Political Philosophy. Three prominent American philosophers – José Martí, Alain Locke, and Emilio Uranga – prove especially insightful when imagining what this therapeutic program might look like. They teach us that, throughout the Americas, the US Latinx has historically lived with the tension of desiring to belong while finding themselves in a situation of unbelonging. This tension produces the deep-seated anxiety that has come to characterize the US Latinx condition. It is difficult to answer outstanding identity questions about the US Latinx precisely because the depth and pervasiveness of this anxiety has not yet been fully understood. In what follows, I offer other US Latinxs a way of peacefully incorporating this deep-rooted anxiety into our identity.

My paper proceeds as follows. The first section announces several key intuitions and assumptions that guide my search for an identity-therapeutic program. I then turn to the historical perspectives of three American philosophers – José Martí, Alain Locke, and Emilio Uranga. Read together, these three thinkers announce three desiderata for a US Latinx identity therapeutic program. With these desiderata on the table, I evaluate relatively contemporary tools that may serve as promising avenues for identity therapy – Carlos Sánchez's concept of nepantla, José Medina's concept of disidentification, and Mariana Ortega's "hometactics." The final section complements the set of tools these thinkers offer the US Latinx person with a newly proposed one; I suggest that doing *Inter-American, Latin American, and Latinx Philosophy* represents one effective strategy for coping with our identity anxiety.

Some guiding intuitions

Before exploring historical approaches and contemporary perspectives on this identity anxiety, I share a few intuitions guiding my inquiry. The first is that Inter-American Philosophy, Latin American Philosophy, and Latinx Philosophy are distinctive in the sense that they comprise both political and personal horizons. The vast majority of literature on the topic of the US Latinx takes place along the political horizon, asking questions about what this social identity group or category is and offering answers for the sake of political solidarity and in the hopes of promoting social progress. In what follows I focus on the personal horizon of these philosophies. Here, I am concerned with the lived experience of US Latinx people, with the anxiety that they *feel* upon reflecting on their identity. My aim is to offer tools that may help us (and people in similar situations) cope with this identity anxiety. This is not to say that these personal lessons *cannot* render political fruits—indeed, what the history of inter-American thought teaches us is that the personal and the political often interweave.

The second is that we stand to lose something of significance if we assimilate to the dominant culture of the United States and abandon the customs, language, cuisine, and so forth handed down to us by our ancestors. This loss is something graver than a sin against our ancestors. In many, if not all, cases, I assume that we lose a significant

part or potential part of who we are and who we can become if we do not examine our ambiguous situation as US Latinxs.

The third is that the pursuit of a "US Latinx" identity is similar to, but meaningfully different from, other related identity pursuits. This identity differs from that of the first-generation immigrant to the United States and from the Latinxs living across the rest of the Americas. There is something unique about the tension that this group experiences and the project they undertake to understand themselves. As such, many of the available tools will be helpful, but not entirely appropriate. For instance, Gracia's (2000) Common Bundle View stipulates that a parent born and raised in South America versus their children who are born and raised in the United States partake in the same Hispanic/Latinx identity insofar as they share a similar, but not identical, bundle of properties that profess to their Latinidad. What this view, and many like it, miss is that the father and his US-born children partake in fundamentally different projects when attempting to understand their own Latinidad. With respect to the US-born children, there are a unique set of questions and problems that simply do not arise for their parents, and we have to take this into account before considering what kinds of properties or qualities authorize their claim to belong to one group or another.

Finally, although we may never find *the* solution to our identity crisis, it is still worthwhile to take up the task of examining who we are and who we ought to be. In general, I do not believe that, in order for our inquiry to be a valuable one, we need some antecedent guarantee that there will be a conclusive verdict or a settled, unquestionable truth at the end of the road. Rather, what promises to be valuable about our pursuit is that, along the way, we may refine our questions about who we are, develop better methods for questioning who we are, and make some progress on understanding ourselves. As far as I know, the process of questioning, inquiring about, and constructing our identity will be an indefinite one. To me, the most worthwhile and important projects are open-ended ones – these are the kinds of pursuits that suffuse our lifetimes with meaning from start to finish.

I now turn to some historical perspectives from the history of Inter-American thought that might help us better diagnose the condition that the US Latinx faces and the project that lies ahead of them.

José Martí on unity, autonomy, and originality

José Martí's vision for Latin America (and America as such) is guided by overarching principles of unity, autonomy, and originality.

In his seminal essay "Nuestra América", Martí announces *unity* as the great American guiding ideal: "the urgent need of Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent" (1891).[2] There is a similar call at the outset of "Mi Raza", where Martí writes, "Everything that divides humans, everything that categorizes, separates or herds humans, is a sin against humanity" (1893). To Martí, it is a brute fact that anything that

divides arbitrarily is repugnant and that unity of "spirit and intent" is unconditionally good. This is so for both sociopolitical and moral reasons. Sociopolitically, Martí wants Cuba to break away from Spain's imperial domination and to escape the reach of the burgeoning empire just north of him. Morally, Martí is profoundly egalitarian. Humans by nature want unity, and anything that divides is an affront to this basic human desire – that much is palpable in his writings from the early 1890s:

> America began to suffer and still suffers fatigue from having to reconcile the hostile and discordant elements inherited from a despotic and malicious colonizer, and the imported ideas and forms which have been hindering logical government because they lack a basis in local reality. (Martí 1891)

> To insist on racial divisions and differences when a nation [*un pueblo]* is naturally divided is to hinder the public and individual pursuit of happiness, for these two ventures are best pursued by bringing components meant to coexist closer together. (Martí. 1893)

To persistently divide and differentiate is not only to undermine social and political progress, but to violate moral laws of unity and equality. Ultimately, the human's inbuilt desire toward unity prevails: "the similarities across a variety of characters decide and govern the formation of political factions, as these similarities are more powerful unifying factor in comparison to differences in – sometimes even opposition of – skin tones" (Martí, 1893).

In the face of division, Americans must consciously make unity their main principle. Optimistically, Martí notes that this autonomous spirit is beginning to develop: "The American youth is rolling up its sleeves, working the dough with their own hands, and making it rise with their sweat as yeast. They understand that there is too much imitation, and that path to salvation lies in creation" (1891).[3] Imitation drains the spirit of a nation and its people, preventing them from finding their true identity and rallying around a common cause. The key to self-government and unity is intimate familiarity with one's own roots. The importance of autonomy, in this sense, resonates through Martí's opinion of who should be governing the Americas: "The government must born within the country. The spirit [*El espíritu*] of the government must be that of the country. Its form of government must reflect the constitution of the country itself. Governing is nothing more than a matter of balancing the country's natural elements" (Martí 1891).

It is my view that Martí's principles of unity, autonomy, and originality still resonate in the heart of the US Latinx today. The US Latinx does not want to dwell on division and difference but wants to reconcile any "hostile and discordant elements inherited from a despotic and malicious colonizer." Moreover, as Martí helps us see, we desire to partake in a shared project that is *original* and that reflects our unique spirit. If we were content to assimilate to the ways of dominant cultures, this anxiety would not arise in the first place.

Alain Locke on walking the tightrope between cultural parochialism and homogenization

In a series of lectures delivered in Haiti in 1943, Alain Locke sketches the contribution that Black people across the Americas have made to American culture. Ideally, Jacoby Carter writes, Locke's vision for American culture is one of a "culture of democracy," of democracy as a "cultural pathos sufficient to constitute a way of life" (2016, 2). Part of that vision is very useful for our purposes: namely, in accordance with Locke, the path forward for Latinx culture should aim to walk the tightrope between cultural parochialism and outright cultural homogenization. That is, the label Latinx should be expansive enough to include all without blotting out the differences within a group.

When mapping out his conception of cultural democracy in the first lecture of the series – "Race, Culture, and Democracy" – Locke observes that across the Americas there are glaring cultural similarities. The religion, social and political institutions, scientific methods, modes of thought, art forms, and moral and aesthetic values seem to transcend borders. Nevertheless, a pernicious force stands in the way of embracing these inter-American commonalities – "Only cultural parochialism stands between us and this larger perspective; and when we finally outgrow such subjective limitations, a new panorama of the past and of the future of mankind will open out before our eyes" (Carter 2016, 11). In one important respect, there is an excessive focus on the particularities and differences between cultures, and this parochialism obstructs the project of inter-American cultural democracy.

Locke's lecture "The Negro in the Three Americas" helps us understand an opposed but related obstructing in the way of inter-American unity. This lecture includes a call for a cross-cultural democracy that represents a spiritual successor to Martí's call for all nations of the Americas to band together. However, when evaluating the prospects of a Pan-American democracy, Locke notices the following about the current state of things:

> Here the realism of the situation forces us to admit that unlike our cultural differences, which may even attract, our differences of social culture really do, in most instances, seriously divide. We know full well that there are great differences between the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin codes of race and the social institutions and customs founded on each. Not only do we have this as a matter of divergence between the Northern and the Southern segments of the hemisphere, but in the West Indies, we have these divergent traditions facing each other across the narrow strips of the Caribbean. But let us face the facts. Is there any way of looking at these differences constructively? Can we in any way relate them for the constructive reinforcement of democracy in America? (2016, 100)

To Locke, there is radical difference across the Americas. We see these differences across cultures in part because of the "codes of race" implemented by those in power

throughout the Americas. The "Anglo-Saxon code" seeks to divide on the basis of race, creating a barrier to democracy. Locke continues,

> On the other hand, it is equally evident that the Anglo-Saxon code of race does base itself on a priori prejudice, and really, as the term itself indicates, pre-judges the individual on the arbitrary basis of the mass status of his group. It makes its exceptions grudgingly and as exceptions, and often cruelly forces the advancing segments of the group back to the level and limitations of the less advanced. Certainly no one would say it was justifiable either in principle or practice, no one that is, who believes basically in democracy. Nor can one say that it is democratic in intention: far from it. (ibid)

The Anglo-Saxon code is based on prejudices, sorting individuals into fixed groups on the basis of them. Here, we see echoes of José Vasconcelos's distinction between the Anglo and Spanish means of colonizing the Americas.[4] While the latter tolerated (in some cases encouraged) mixing of races, cultures, religions, and ideas, the former sought to create a hierarchy of races and assert the dominance of one.

Locke's observations are especially apt when evaluating the character of the Latinx in the United States. What we find in the case of Latinidad in the United States is a great deal of difference *within* a particular group. Such difference is inimical to the Anglo-Saxon ideology that has come to characterize the United States *ethos*. Faced with difference, the Anglo-Saxon code strives to homogenize and sort individuals into a single, readymade group.[5] We can understand homogenization as a kind of defective unity in this context, a unity that is not freely undertaken but forcefully imposed on a group. As Locke notes, "The Anglo-Saxon practice of race seriously handicaps the individual and his chances for immediate progress, but forges, despite intentions to the contrary, a binding bond of group solidarity, an inevitable responsibility of the élite for the masses, a necessary though painful condition for mass progress" (2016, 101).

The unity brought about by forcefully homogenizing a group is counterproductive, as the case of the US Latinx vividly illustrates. The demographic category "Hispanic/ Latino" only punts on the questions that vex the US Latinx. Locke argues that moving "forward in our democratic efforts with a sense of collaboration and a common ultimate objective. For the more democracy becomes actually realized, the closer must our several societies approach a common norm" (2016, 102). Progress requires a group to assent to some guiding ideal freely and willfully – the common pursuit of which will bind the group together. The US Latinx situation has become problematic because the diversity within this group has either been ignored or forcibly homogenized. The US Latinx's earnest desire for unity stands at odds with this push towards a fake unity. But, as Locke insists in earlier lectures, the reaction cannot be excessive particularization, for there are similarities across difference that we cannot deny.

Emilio Uranga on the anxiety of living in-between

Martí announces a call for unity achieved through autonomous and original action, but Locke notices that, throughout the Americas, bad reactions to the differences between people of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, and so forth represent a stark impediment to such unity. Thus, the American situation broadly construed is a deep tension – there is a desire for a self-conscious unity in the face of rampant division. Moreover, the situation across the Americas necessitates a solution that does not involve forceful homogenization or gratuitous atomization.

At this juncture, I want to suggest that the US Latinx is a microcosm of this tension. We are, in many cases, striving for a well-integrated, unified identity, but encounter trouble when we realize that we contain clashing multitudes. What ensues from this realization is a set of feelings perhaps best captured in Emilio Uranga's "Essay on an Ontology of the Mexican," which reaches the seemingly dour conclusion that Mexican existence is fundamentally marked a melancholy [*melancolía*] and feeling of *zozobra* that in turn reveal them as an "accident."

Melancholy represents the "psychological reflection of our [the Mexican] ontological constitution, of the precarious structure of our being, a being that is the ground of its own nothingness and not of its own being" (2017, 172). The melancholic individual despairs because they realize the "groundlessness" of their existence – that is, they realize that there are no outside, overarching, or objective arbiters of value and meaning. Value and meaning come from within, from the individual. This realization alone does not lead to melancholy – rather, melancholy is a certain (characteristically Mexican) response to this fact about our existence: "The melancholic individual is trapped in his interior abode from whence he brings to the life of the imagination a thousand worlds to which he bestows value and sense while never losing sight of the fact that those worlds are grounded on nothingness, that they are suspended over nothingness" (2017, 172). A melancholic individual realizes that the projects that create meaning and value in their life are funded solely by them, that there is no truth independent of the life they construct from their imagination, and their reaction is to turn inward, ruminate, and despair over this. Melancholy is a fundamentally maladjusted attitude towards this fact of existence, it is "a sickness that belongs more to the imagination than to the body" (2017, 171).

If melancholy is an attitude that characterizes the Mexican's inner life, *zozobra* characterizes the Mexican's reaction to the outside world. This preoccupation with the inner world of the imagination leaves the outside world undetermined, and so "There exists for the Mexican the possibility, which is always open, that the world gives itself as "friend" or "enemy, as a danger or salvation, as threat or ally" (2017, 173). Zozobra is the feeling one has in response to this great unknown: ""*Zozobra*" is the state in which we find ourselves when the world hides its fragility or destructibility; zozobra is the state in which we are not sure if, at any moment, a catastrophe will overwhelm us or if we will be secured in the safety of asylum. In zozobra we remain in suspense, in oscillation, as

its etymology clearly announces" (2017, 173). Unsure if the outside world will reveal itself as supportive of or inimical to them, Mexican consciousness becomes disposed to a fear of "neutrality" (2017, 174). This fear only reinforces their withdrawal from the outside world and retreat inward.

This melancholic and restless character finally reveals the Mexican as "accident." Apprehensive about the groundless of their being and wary of the outside world, the Mexican is not "substance", or that which fundamentally acts and determines, but "accident", or that which is fundamentally acted upon and determined. As accident, the Mexican chooses to be "saved by others" (2017, 175). To say that the Mexican is fundamentally an accident is to say that they have not justified their own existence or declared their own identity precisely because they feel unsure about themselves and about the world around them. As a result, the community resorts to imitating other cultures or shuns the task of justifying its own existence.

But these are not the only ways of responding to the fact of accidentality. At the end of the "Essay," Uranga suggests that the project of binding the community can be achieved as long as Mexicans change their attitude towards the ontological characteristics that have come to define them: "Unwillingness, dignity, melancholy, and zozobra expose us to the field or, better yet, the abyss of our existential possibilities; they unmask and reveal us to our fundamental project" (2017, 176). Embarking on this revised fundamental project requires the community to ""scratch" and reopen a scar that has inconveniently healed" (2017, 177). What it means to scratch and reopen this scar and whether we ought to do so are questions we are left to answer for ourselves.

Desiderata for a US Latinx identity therapeutic program

Uranga leaves open precisely what it means to scratch and reopen an inconveniently healed wound in the case of Mexican existence. His vivid metaphor could be interpreted pessimistically. The Mexican is a product of their circumstances, and their circumstances have rendered them an "accident", something fated to be determined by an outside force that considers itself substantial by comparison. Scratching and reopening the inconveniently healed wound only prolongs this inevitable realization; the Mexican should let the wound heal and resign themselves to their accidentality.

But this metaphor could also be interpreted optimistically. While the Mexican people are, as a matter of fact, "accidental," they have the agency to decide what their attitude towards their accidentality should be. Rather than resigning themselves to this feature of their existence, they should embrace it. Declaring themselves an accident does not confine them to existing under the auspices of some substantial (perhaps imperial) power. Exploring the abyss of existential possibilities ahead of them requires them to *embrace* this fact of their existence and to fashion their projects accordingly. Accidentality is not a prison sentence, but a roadmap charting the future of Mexican existence. I want to suggest that attributing this identity anxiety to the US Latinx does

not confine them to a miserable, nervous existence. Rather, there is a path to peacefully integrating this anxiety into our identity.

In hindsight, Martí, Locke, and Uranga announce three desiderata for an identity therapeutic program for US Latinx anxiety. This program must

1. satisfy our desire to participate in a shared, original project,
2. fend off pressures to atomize or assimilate,
3. and embrace the reality of the current situation.

As long as we adopt an optimistic reading of Uranga's cryptic metaphor, I contend that we can piece together an identity therapeutic program that satisfies these desiderata. Just as the Mexican must embrace their accidentality to see the full extent of existential possibilities before them, contemporary approaches to understanding US Latinx identity help us develop a means of constructively coping with this anxiety.

Some contemporary approaches to alleviating US Latinx anxiety

When imagining what models and ideas can be useful for embracing this identity anxiety, three concepts immediately come to mind: the notion of "nepantla" discussed by Mexican, Latinx, and Chicanx philosophers; José Medina's concept of "disidentification;" and Mariana Ortega's notion of "hometactics."

In a recent piece on the concept of nepantla, Carlos Sánchez attunes us to the ways in which the term helps us understand culture: "A nepantla culture is a culture that is neither here nor there, neither this nor that, but always in transition, always fluid and dynamic, uncommitted to one or another determined way of life. In contemporary culture, Mexican American, Asian American, or Filipino American cultures are nepantla cultures" (2023, 62). In just the same way, we might understand the Cuban-American culture described at the outset of the essay. The young Cuban-American's culture is a nepantla culture in the sense that they do not feel committed to one determined way of life or another. They feel neither fully "American" nor fully Cuban for a variety of reasons. Both the Cuban-American specifically and the US Latinx person more broadly often find themselves in a similar "ontological no-man's land"" (2023, 64), feeling at home neither in the culture of their ancestors nor in the culture of the country in which they currently reside.

While Sánchez does propose that nepantla be thought of in a positive sense, as something like a "preservation strategy to those existing as nepantla in between worlds, cultures, or catastrophes" (2023, 65), it is difficult to see how nepantla is anything more than a description of the current state of the US Latinx condition. That is, it appears that nepantla gives us much in the way of diagnosing our malaise and understanding it. This concept has great descriptive potential, giving a name to the situation that the US Latinx person finds themselves in. It is less clear how identifying oneself as a nepantla individual announces a path to integrating anxiety into the story of US Latinx identity.

José Medina's notion of "disidentification" provides another helpful theoretical tool, allowing us to imagine how we can accommodate different approaches to approaching this common ideal within the group US Latinx. Medina adapts the concept of disidentification from work by Judith Butler for the sake of explaining how social groups can come to understand, tolerate, and build around differences *within* their ranks.[6] Disidentifying with a group entails an awareness of relevant differences and similarities within a group, and uses this awareness as an incentive for action: "Disidentification messes up the relations within and across families, inviting the rearticulation of the networks of similarities and differences that sustain familial identities. In this way disidentification is an occasion for subversion" (2003, 665). But this subversion is not totally destructive. In fact, Medina points to three ways in which disidentification can strengthen the ties that bind a group. For one, it cancels out the need for oppositional terms, because it underscores the fact that there will be similarities *and* differences within a group. Two, it reminds that these differences and similarities are subject to change over time and invites us to talk through those changes. Finally, it teaches us our identity is not exhausted by our membership in one group; parts of ourselves participate in different family associations and parts of ourselves might be "orphans," having no family tie whatsoever (2003, 668). As a concept that reframes and explains how to address diversity within a group, disidentification can increase awareness of the fact that there are and will be different approaches to coping with and overcoming the overarching anxiety characteristic of the US Latinx condition. Still, I worry that this concept leaves things underdetermined. Disidentification will no doubt be a different process for different members of different groups; what we need is a more concrete account of how *our* identity anxiety can be incorporated into our identity.

Finally, Ortega's notion of "hometactics" faces up to this ambiguous situation the US Latinx finds themselves in, building the reality of differences within the group into the very project of unifying the group. Ortega states that Latinas in the United States "continually experience not being-at-ease or tears in the fabric of everyday experience while performing practices that for the dominant group are, for the most part, nonreflective, customary, and readily available" (2016, 61-62). Ortega echoes many great thinkers from the history of American thought when she affirms that assimilation is a suboptimal response to this. Adopting the practices and attitudes of the dominant group might create a sense of ease. Likewise, we might tell the anxious Cuban-American to simply Americanize themselves and leave behind the culture of their ancestors. I share Ortega's intuition that this is an inadequate response to the situation. I also find Ortega's alternative approach – the development of "hometactics" that make people of certain groups feel more at home in a foreign space – thought-provoking and helpful. For instance, the example of "switching languages in different contexts or integrating words from familiar languages to feel more at ease" (2016, 207) represents a "hometactic" that could create comfort in an otherwise uncomfortable space. These tactics are deliberately small-scale and improvised, but they can be effective.

Ortega is correct to insist that assimilation is not the answer. There is something inherently valuable about preserving one's ties to a cultural heritage that is familiar to them and a significant part of their upbringing. "Hometactics" can be a source of identity-affirmation and relief to those caught in a cultural no-man's land. I do, however, worry that, conceived of in a certain way, hometactics are not quite the solution for the US Latinx person of our current generation. In our current generation, we are the children of immigrants or the grandchildren of immigrants. We feel deep connections to our ancestral cultures because the customs, language, norms, food, dances, and so on of these cultures were directly handed down to us, structuring our lives from birth. In many cases, US Latinxs of our generation lack what we might consider a *direct* or unmediated connection to our homeland. We were not raised in and, in some cases, have never visited our homelands. These facts themselves create a sense of unease and discomfort—how can I claim that this is a legitimate part of who I am if I have only *indirect* connections to speak of? How can hometactics help me feel more at home in the world if the very hometactics I employ refer to practices that I inherited and were given to me second-hand, so to speak?

We might also worry that these small-scale tactics are *too* small scale. In order to bring about the biggest, most diverse supporting environment, it may be useful to think of our hometactics as deployed within the context of a larger-scale background activity. In jazz, improvised solos usually take place over a chord progression and a steady rhythm, and this musical backdrop provides the soloist with a means of navigating and structuring their own improvisations. In the final section, I contend that there is a chord progression and a rhythm against which the US Latinx person can improvise.

All of this may not amount to a challenge to Ortega as much as it is a challenge to young US Latinx people today. We have to ask ourselves, given our unique position, our distinctive anxiety, what will our hometactics be? What will the shared, original project behind our hometactics be?

A parting suggestion: Doing this as a remedy for Latinx identity anxiety

In this paper, we attempted to confront a lived identity puzzle. People (especially young people) from Hispanic and Latinx backgrounds in the United States report being torn between identities, and this torn-ness produces a particular identity anxiety. By looking at a variety of inter-American perspectives on group identities, we pieced together three desiderata for a group identity that accommodates this feeling. Other, relatively contemporary thinkers offer us tools and approaches for constructing a US Latinx identity that does not shy away from, but embraces, the tension that many US Latinx people feel and makes it an integral aspect of our identity. However, the contemporary tools on offer had drawbacks and limitations of their own. As such, I want to bring forth yet another tool.

My parting suggestion is that perhaps *this very activity* – doing inter-American, Latin American, and Latinx Philosophy – is the remedy our situation calls for. Pursuing

research, teaching, advising students interested in, and building reading groups around these areas satisfy the desire to participate in a shared, original project. Moreover, these projects build in measures that help us resist atomization and assimilation. On the one hand, contributing to these fields *can't* be a solitary endeavor; each of us needs others who are passionate about and dedicated to these traditions, especially at this stage of their development. On the other hand, an important part of doing Latin American Philosophy, for instance, is honoring the call for originality by fighting the impulse to assimilate to dominant societies, philosophies, and ways of life.[8]

Most of all, a conscious commitment to doing this together is a powerful act of embracing reality. We might not yet have a clear answer to what Inter-American, Latin American, or Latinx Philosophy are. Still, the process of researching and teaching whatever we take them to be brings us together, welcomes others in, and allows us to affirm who we are (without dismissing our identity anxiety).

To be sure, this suggestion presupposes a particular conception of what philosophy is and can be. If we limit philosophy to the erudite musings of a few academically trained individuals in specific countries, the proposal “Go out and do inter-American, Latin American, and Latinx Philosophy” would only represent a promising route for a select number of people. I want to add the further suggestion that academic philosophy does not exhaust what philosophy is. We are doing the relevant kind of philosophy when we share Martí’s *Nuestra América* with our parents, pointing out to them the special place Martí reserves for authentic self-expression in his worldview. We are doing the relevant kind of philosophy when we include a lecture on Jorge Gracia’s “Identities: General and Particular” in our Introduction to Social & Political Philosophy lecture courses, thereby offering students who might not have any outstanding interest in pursuing academic philosophy some tools for exploring their own identities. We are doing philosophy when we gather as a community and encourage each other to construct and pursue projects that we find meaningful, valuable, and aligned with the truth. *All* such activities do not ignore the US Latinx’s anxiety, nor do they explain it away. Rather, they provide occasions for constructively expressing this anxiety, for sharing it with others, and for supporting each other as we live with it.

Perhaps this way of viewing philosophy can be productive across *both* the philosophical and personal horizons mentioned at the outset. Perhaps this approach allows us to generalize across contexts beyond the US Latinx identity anxiety grappled with here. Perhaps a distinctive feature of Inter-American, Latin American, and Latinx Philosophy just is their ability to play a role in our identity-therapeutic outlooks.[9]

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Notes

[1] A series of interviews with Cuban-American students – "Cuban Identity, Intergenerational Change, and Mobility" – also relays this sentiment of feeling both and neither Cuban and American. A recent editorial in the LA Times titled "Diaspora Baby: What Makes U.S. Latinos So Hard to Define?", columnist Suzy Exposito points out that this sense of unbelonging extends beyond the Cuban-American case and to most Latinxs in the United States. This column also observes that this sense of unbelonging has led many to be skeptical that the category "Latinx" is anything more than a marketing ploy.

[2] Passages from both Martí essays have been translated by me.

[3] This emphasis on calling upon the youth to seize control of their future by determining for themselves is something that we see throughout Martí's writings, also notable in the 1884 piece "Mente Latina."

[4] Compare Locke's contrast here to the contrast José Vasconcelos draws between the Hispanics and Anglo-Saxons in the Preface to *La raza cósmica*.

[5] In this sense, we might say that the Anglo-Saxon code strives to make Latinxs (and any group, for that matter) into what Hannah Arendt would call a "mass." A mass, which is the fundamental unit composing a totalitarian movement, consists of a group held together not "by consciousness of a common interest" nor by "determined, limited, and obtainable goals" (1950, 311). Lacking such consciousness or concrete goals, a mass is a form of political organization characterized by a deep indifference. It is homogenous and subject to manipulation by whatever totalitarian leader comes in and steers the apathetic horde. Thinking about the Anglo-Saxon code as making masses instead of consciously unified groups may be further justified when we consider that this code seeks to effect the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon and the inferiority of all lower, faceless races.

[6] See Medina 2003.

[7] For an illuminating discussion of how hometactics relate to the concept of *zozobra*, see Gallegos 2023.

[8] The work of José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui, José Enrique Rodó, Samuel Ramos, Rosario Castellanos, and countless others testifies to this point.

[9] I would like to thank the audience at the 2024 meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy for their helpful comments and discussion on an earlier draft of this paper. I would especially like to thank Nora Tsou for her pointed suggestions on areas of the paper I could further develop.

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