

## Mestizajes and Resistant Alterities

by Omar Rivera, PhD

### English Abstract

Differentiating it from other forms of *mestizaje*, I focus on a “demi-social” *mestizaje* as a way of existing in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In particular, I study it as a non-oppositional mode of resistant alterity to dehumanizing socializations, one that does not fit within modern/colonial determinations of “self” and agency. My elucidation of this form of *mestizaje* is in dialogue with some aspects of Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness,” Aníbal Quijano’s “coloniality of power,” Nelson Maldonado Torres “coloniality of being,” Homi Bhabha’s “hybridity” and Jack Halbertsam notion of the “monster.” My analysis also draws from the poem “Meme Neguito” by the Afro-Peruvian folklorist Nicomedes Santa Cruz and the colonial painting *Nuestra Señora del Cerro Rico de Potosí*.

### Resumen en español

Contrastándolo con otras formas de mestizaje, me enfoco en un mestizaje “demi-social” como una manera de existir en contextos coloniales y post-coloniales. En particular, lo estudio como una modalidad de alteridad no-oposicional que ofrece resistencia a socializaciones deshumanizantes, y que no concuerda con determinaciones del “yo” y de la voluntad práctica con raíces modernas y coloniales. Mi explicación de esta modalidad de mestizaje está en diálogo con aspectos de la “conciencia mestiza” de Gloria Anzaldúa, de la “colonialidad del poder” de Aníbal Quijano, de la “colonialidad del ser” de Nelson Maldonado Torres, de la “hibridad” de Homi Bhabha, y de la noción del monstruo de Jack Halbertsam. Mi análisis también se refiere al poema “Meme Neguito” del folclorista Afro-peruano Nicomedes Santa Cruz y a la pintura colonial *Nuestra Señora del Cerro Rico de Potosí*.

### Resumo em português

Diferenciando-o de outras formas de mestiçagem, aqui concentro-me em uma mestiçagem “demi-social” como uma maneira de existir em contextos coloniais e pós-coloniais. Em particular, estudo tal forma de mestiçagem como uma combinação de um modo de alteridade não-opositivo que se mantém como resistência a socializações desumanizantes; uma mestiçagem que não se enquadra nas determinações modernas / coloniais de “sujeito” e agência. Minha elucidação dessa forma de mestiçagem está em diálogo com alguns aspectos da “consciência mestiza” de Gloria Anzaldúa, a “colonialidade de poder” de Aníbal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado Torres “colonialidade de ser”, “hibridismo” de Homi Bhabha eo conceito de “monstro” vindo do Jack Halbertsam. Minha análise também se baseia no poema “Meme Neguito” do

folclorista afro-peruano Nicomedes Santa Cruz e na pintura colonial Nuestra Señora del Cerro Rico de Potosí.

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Under colonial and postcolonial conditions, the instability of *mestizaje* complicates theorizing the alterity of the oppressed. Yet, in view of liberatory theory, articulating this alterity seems to be essential: it shelters the possibility of critique and identifies those who will carry out the revolution. The oppressed, the poor, the excluded are all figures of alterity that herald the undoing of systems of oppression and intimate a turn to utopian horizons; they are the bearers of liberatory hope. The proletariat, the indigenous peasant, can become transcendent symbols of a struggle that negates global economic and political powers, of forces that oppose the historical sedimentation of oppressive structures, of those whose redemption can lead to other economies, social forms, ecologies, worlds. The study of Latin American philosophy, however, shows that such liberatory figures and transcendent symbols are empty signifiers, theoretical dead ends, even dangerous political artifacts.[1] The reason for this is that within colonial and postcolonial *mestizajes* there is no social force or group that can posit itself as the antithesis of a structure of global domination, as if carving out room for an oppositional negation of it. One of the connotations of *mestizaje* is the impossibility of this movement of negation given the dynamic interweaving of socialities, economies, ethnicities, genders and races with each other, with the colonial enforcement of the difference between the human and non-human, and with complex matrices of power. In this sense, *mestizaje* forecloses the clear differentiation of the oppressed from the oppressors, apparently undermining the revolutionary potency of alterity.

Yet, *mestizaje* also connotes that dominant systems are not closed, total, exhaustive. The fact that there is no space for an oppositional stance toward structures of power does not imply the absence of forces that resist them. It means, rather, that such forces are multiple, oblique, localized, contextual and not defined by the negation of overarching forms of oppression. Aníbal Quijano recognizes this aspect of *mestizaje* in terms of a historical-structural heterogeneity, “In America...for five hundred years capital has existed as the dominant axis of the total articulation of all historically known forms of control and exploitation of labor, thus configuring a historical-structurally heterogeneous model of power with discontinuous relations and conflicts among its components.”[2] This observation suggests that even though it is possible to discern a global colonial/capitalist/patriarchal axis, this axis manifests as an “heterogenous model of power” that includes both oppression and resistance. Localized conflicts cannot, then, be understood in terms of homogeneous forms of domination and of resistant practices. In this sense, even though movements of liberation can identify themselves as anti-colonial or anti-capitalist, their muddled social, historical and economic conditions make them unexportable to other contexts within the same global system. Across diverse, mutable and open contexts of colonial and postcolonial *mestizajes*, the oppressed can

become the oppressor, the racial line can shift, capitalistic economic forms can yield different social formations, identities can acquire different social valences; that is, there is no ultimate social frame or structure that allows for identifying the anti-thetical alterity of a global oppressed or revolutionary.

In this paper I trace different senses of *mestizaje* in terms of colonial and postcolonial power dynamics.[3] I show the instability of this term by relating it to the colonial difference between the human and the non-human (as it appears in the “coloniality of power” and the “coloniality of being” in particular). After an analysis of the oppression and dehumanization that accompanies the modern/colonial formation of the social, I develop a “demi-social” *mestizaje* in dialogue with Gloria Anzaldúa (especially aspects of the *Coatlicue* state and the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative).[4] I explore this kind of *mestizaje* as a psychic and communal mode of alterity and resistance that are not oppositional and negating. My discussion also draws from an Afro-Peruvian poem and a religious colonial painting, and offers a comparative analysis of notions of “hybridity” and “monstrosity.”[5]

### Racial Suspicion and Demi-Sociality

The famous *casta* paintings of the Spanish colonial era depict numerous racial mixings as hierarchized social categories. On the one hand, they reflect what Aníbal Quijano identifies as the modern/colonial investment in the classification of racial groupings.[6] Such a classification, a manifestation of the “coloniality of power,” reflects the colonial intent to support a particular distribution of labor along racial lines (which implies the distribution of rights, political power, nobility, humanity, rationality). On the other hand, the *casta* paintings also reveal the nonsense of such a project: the arbitrariness and contingencies of racial differences and the absence of social and visual comprehensive logics for racial classification. They also show anxieties about racial and social mixtures.[7] This latter point reflects more accurately the lived experience of social uncertainty and racial suspicion of mixed peoples with colonially fabricated identities within situated and shifting negotiations of power.[8] This way of being is another connotation of *mestizaje*.

This *mestizaje* does not erase what Nelson Maldonado Torres calls the “coloniality of being.” He understands colonialism as normalizing an “ethics of war,” where the colonized are the enemy, that is, their lives are dispensable and bodies are receptacles for legitimized violence. This normalization and legitimacy rely on a principle of differentiation between the human and non-human understood as a racial difference. I see the “coloniality of being” as having to exist under the sway of that difference, but (going beyond Maldonado Torres’ analysis) within social conditions of *mestizaje*, and the indeterminacy of racial differences they imply. In other words, the “coloniality of being,” in my terms, implies a contradictory existence that is deprived of modern/colonial social intelligibility while still being submitted to social categorizations that determine one’s

humanity. Coloniality, given the *mestizaje* it is entwined with, is a contingent mechanism for justifying the disposal of oppressed lives.[9]

At this juncture, Maldonado Torres notion of “suspicion” is helpful. I understand it to mean that one of the racist legacies of colonialism is an obsessive suspicion about the other’s status as human, something that I find accentuated by the lack of coherent racial logics. The line between human and non-human can be rigidly enforced in some contexts due to socialized markings. Yet, as the *casta* paintings show, the overriding historical and social forms of colonialism—particularly in the Andes and Mesoamerica—confuse such markings. Instead of rendering this racial line senseless, *mestizaje* can trigger a drive to constantly delineate it, find it, reveal it, even in terms of gender, ability, and other socialities; this is a fragile social truth-making in which power and life are at stake.

The “coloniality of being” and racist suspicion shed light on the complexity of colonial and postcolonial socialities in relation to the modern formation of the self. Complementing the ways in which Descartes’ metaphysical doubt leads to a constitution of an Ego invested in attaining self-transparency and universal rationality, Maldonado Torres proposes that the colonial “suspicion” is another form of doubt that is at work in the constitution of such a modern self. As he puts it: “I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)” is a more “philosophically and historically” accurate grounding of the modern self.[10] For me this reveals a self under siege, obsessed with the preservation of its own humanity (and of “humanity” as such) in the face of others, and the desire to draw out racial differences so as to attain social transparency and experience intelligible agency and reasoning. Attaining certain dominant social positions allows the epistemic and existential illusions of such a self to be more robust. Such illusions (like truth being self-certainty and “human” reasoning being disembodied, transcending the opacity of social determinants) both inform modern senses of agency that transcend social determinations of the self (I will discuss these below) and direct suspicions about the capacity to be human outward rather than inward, that is, toward the oppressed. For most of those supposedly depicted in the *casta* paintings, their selves are subjected to colonial suspicions.

Discourses of *mestizaje* can conceal the “coloniality of being” and practices of racial suspicion by reducing differences within colonial contexts to those between cultures, classes, genders, without engaging the difference between human and non-human that determines them. This kind of *mestizaje* is emblematic of nationalist movements, as well as of superficial gestures of cultural recovery, appropriation and ornamentation. I call this a “pro-social” *mestizaje*, which has to be understood in terms of the social formations of the “coloniality of power.” In particular, the modern/colonial entwinement of race, gender and capitalism deems “non-human” lives dispensable yet tasked to produce wealth, and “human” lives to be preserved because they not only produce wealth but also embody the social formations that secure modern/colonial systems of power. The latter are human lives that are valued for inhabiting and

protecting the socialities complicit in institutions such as the nuclear family, the university, the corporation, and other institutions that ensure the continuance of global capitalist economies. In these institutions, such lives contribute to a continuous effort to delineate the difference between the human and non-human. Through this delineation, the “human” becomes the modern “social,” and is necessarily “pro-social.” The “human” is what gets recorded in history, what allows for the smooth transmission of knowledge and a monolithic tradition, what facilitates the management of peoples in a developmental trajectory and global expanse, and what legitimizes the dominance of a few liberal cartesian selves. From this perspective, practices, cultures, religiosities, sexualities, or desires that do not contribute to the global order are deemed unproductive, secondary, ornamental - to be worn and disposed. This submission, sacrifice and sterilization of culture to modern/colonial imperatives (via secularism, individualism, cartesianism, etc) to preserve its socialities can be aligned with a “pro-social” *mestizaje*, with an empty celebration of “differences.”

There is also a “demi-social” sense of *mestizaje*, one that responds to the contingency of racial suspicion and of the difference between the human and non-human, especially as it enacts racializations and attempts to differentiate the oppressed from the oppressor. The guerrillero rises against the Latin American oligarchy, but his victims also include peasants who do not join the cause. The upper middle-class gay man can frame queer genders within classist, elitist and racist social frames. The “barrio-raised Latino” can oppress Latina women and hate Latinx sellouts. The brown academic appropriates and exploits the culture of “barrio-raised Latinos.”[11] Even though there is much critical and political value in analyzing social categories so as to trace the structural forms of oppression enacted globally, the lived experience of those deemed oppressed attests to radical fluctuations of their occupation of that positionality and of Quijano’s “heterogeneous model of power.” I call “demi-sociality” the state of being that undergoes such fluctuations, it is the non-intentional blurring of the difference between human and non-human, breeching into modern pro-socialities. It is being and not-being social, that is, human—being assailed by colonial suspicion. It yields a form of *mestizaje* that is not about celebrating differences or strictly pro-social in-between states. Instead, it is lived with reflective and pre-reflective awareness that in these liminal states the difference between human and non-human is operative yet fickle and elusive, even turning the de-humanized oppressed into gatekeepers of humanity. This is the disorienting *mestizaje* that, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes.[12]

“Demi-social” *mestizaje* does not mean to enter into and perform the social or human, and then return to another realm. It is to inhabit social identities and institutions while being drawn into a multiplicity of social forces that do not harmonize, into the heterogeneity of models of power, into the indetermination of being an object of racial suspicion. It is a sense of social compression, of choking, of disorientation. *Mestizaje*, in this sense, is to embody implosions/explosions of the social that happen mostly invisibly, and to implode/explode, losing foundational senses of self and community. It is also to exist after the implosion/explosion, not only having been transformed and rebirthed, but also having discovered that suppressed forms of living by “pro-social”

investments, including queer desires, and non-ableist physicalities and mental states, provide sustenance to exist in the aftermath, tapping into a movement of life that transpires entangled with the social/human but with certain detachment from its demands and values. “Demi-social” *mestizaje* implies being compelled to reach toward the implosion/explosion of senses of humanity that offer both recognition and dismemberment because it senses the possibility of a germinative aftermath where modes of living that are neither human or non-human come to pass.

This aftermath is a borderland in Anzaldúa’s sense and is not a place where one is locked into an oppositional stance to one’s oppressions. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* she writes about the *Coatlicue* state: about the paralyzing fear of losing one’s senses of self, of being left without social grounding; but also, about a movement whose bearings exceed modern social determinations and self-reflection, and are manifest with desires and ways of living born in “demi-social” dynamics: “Frozen in stasis, she perceives a slight/ Movement—a thousand slithering serpent hairs,/ *Coatlicue*. It is activity (not immobility) at its/ most dynamic stage, but it is an underground/ movement requiring all her energy. It brooks no/ interference from the conscious mind.”[13] The “demi-social” *mestiza* cultivates a mode of being through fear as she sustains the implosion/explosion of the social as self-fragmentation, but she remains without seeking absorption into a new sense of “pro-sociality” and humanity. She is “...never alone. That which abides: my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid.”[14]

Drawing from Quijano and Maldonado Torres, race, in modern/colonial frames, is not only a social category. It expresses the principle for the distinction between the human and non-human that delimits the social in the first place. Or, to put it in other terms, it is a border zone: it is and it is not social at the same time. Racialized non-human selves are not identified as such because they are perverted, abnormal, deviant, immoral. In fact, one can be all of these and still be human, and even be ultimately redeemed into modern/colonial socialities. The difference between the socially “normal” and “abnormal” does not apply to that of the “human” and “non-human.” The non-human, in fact, denotes a border logic. This seems to be the secret of *Coatlicue*: both social and non-social, both normal and perverted, and none of them; it is the mode of being of mestizas, *castas*, selves that cannot be fully excluded or integrated into the social because they are enmeshed in it rather than outside of it. They are not projections of social transgressions either, controlled by their unconscious, by the realm of restrained desires and drives. “Demi-social” *mestizaje* is not overdetermined by the unconscious. It also draws from other dimensions of the psyche.

### “Acuricuricandonga”

Nicomedes Santa Cruz (1925-1992), an Afro-Peruvian folklorist and poet, recovers African slave histories, languages, music and religiosities in order to re-frame nationalist notions of *mestizaje* that were primarily focused on the mixtures of creoles

and indigenous peoples. In my view, he undermines a “pro-social” *mestizaje* and enjoins a more hidden Peruvian “demi-social” *mestizaje* with a lineage that includes Guamán Poma de Ayala, José María Arguedas and César Vallejo. In the text “El Negro en Iberoamérica,” (1988) Santa Cruz relates the history of early chattel slavery to the formation of languages between slaves and their traders and owners. He is interested in “el negro bozal,” namely, the slaves that arrived in the coast of Peru without having learned Spanish and suffered the worst conditions of forced labor. Through the work of Fernando Ortiz, he brings forth characteristics of a language formed to support colonial domination and the exploitation of slave labor and adopted by slaves as a necessary condition for their subsistence. The first characteristic of this language is repetition as a form of mimesis of colonial and imperial languages: “It was composed of a few words generally formed by the duplication of modified roots of the English language.”[15] Examples of these are “luku-luku” (“to look”), “guasi-guasi” (“to wash”), and “napi-napi” (to sleep or nap). This kind of mimesis also refers to Spanish, as in “finofino” (“well done”). The second characteristic is onomatopoeia, a simplification of wording to an infant or subhuman level, such as in “ñami-ñami” (“to eat”) or “fon-fong” (“to whip”). A third characteristic is the incorporation of words and sounds from multiple African languages reflecting the diversity of the slaves’ lineages with words such as “capiango” (“thief”) and “musenga” (“to cut sugar cane”).[16]

In this colonial language of slave labor, slaves are seen as having only the capacity to imitate speech; as if theirs is a speech without intention, an arrogated language that naturally submits to the intentions of the slave owners. This is a language that incorporates and channels the power of the slave owner by positioning the slave only as the receiver of commands. “Luku-luku,” for example, seems to echo the imperative “look! look!” Moreover, a parroting mimesis is sounded in the repetitive character of slaves’ words, constantly dissociating them from “proper” language. The onomatopoeic aspect infantilizes slaves as if they were barely able to speak, and the haphazard incorporation of African languages enforces a linguistic fragmentation that undermines linguistic identity. Ultimately, this language of slave labor is violent and dehumanizing, it reduces slaves to their ability to continue to endure their forced labor, and denies their claim to living outside of their enslavement. It secures and legitimizes the dependency of slaves on their owners. Not surprisingly, Santa Cruz thinks of the colonial intersection of labor and language as a form of “deculturation.”

Santa Cruz’s poetry has to be understood in light of his historical and linguistic interests. Rather than denying or opposing the formation of the language of slave labor, he transforms it by letting it sound with experiences, lineages and memories of afro-descendants in Peru, and repositions its enunciation. He poetizes the language of slave labor by remembering the social and political conflicts of its inception in Peru (the denied presence of diverse African cultures and languages, the dehumanizing global practices of slave trade, the enforcement of new forms of labor and economies, and slave songs and rhythms through which the humanity of slaves was conjured in resistance), as well as the oppression of Afro-Peruvians in an emerging nation-state, including their exposures to Andean indigenous peoples. Through this poetizing, the

language of slave labor is submitted to compressions and implosions/explosions releasing sonic, linguistic, and memorial remnants that give subtle bearings to a “demi-social” *mestizaje*. In this way, Santa Cruz’s poems do not seek recognition and intelligibility within dominant linguistic expectations, rather, they create a sonic and rhythmic environment that allows remembrance and expression within oppressed “demi-social,” *mestizo* communities.

In “Meme Neguito” (1960), for example, he poetizes the death of a black child:

¡Ay canamas camandonga!  
¿qué tiene mi cocotín?  
Mi neguito chiquitín,  
acuricuricandonga...  
Epéese que le ponga...  
que le ponga su motaja.  
Meme meme ahí en su caja  
pepita de tamarindo.  
Duéimase mi nego lindo:  
¡Meme meme, há-ha... há ... ha...![17]

Even though a Spanish speaker could decipher a story in the poem, it is not “in” Spanish. Santa Cruz’s words metamorphose so as to be barely recognizable. Vowels consume consonants, and consonants shrink into beats. The result of this is a song in which spoken Spanish enmeshes with African languages. “Acuricuricandonga” is a non-word, a contracting of languages imploding/exploding linguistic orders of colonial relations of power. It is also an untranslatable, untamed, non-socializable sonic creation. The imploding/exploding poem offers a chamber of sounds in which words of oppressed communities echo, vitalizing remnants of memories in a non-universal dimension of language that is not contained within one language. Like a crumpling fabric or paper, its compressions crease and accentuate linguistic and other colonial borders toward a distinct, sensuous and concrete galvanizing moment of the community that enunciates it.[18] The linguistic implosion/explosion also exposes “border” zones in its aftermath, where the poem picks up remnants of enmeshed cultures, memories and socialities as architectures for ways of living that do not assimilate into “pro-social” arrangements.” The death of a black child in Santa Cruz poem is unsayable in dominant and colonial languages. At the same time, the poem does not transport one to a context in which such a death could be said. This death is a “demi-social” event, and so is the *mestizo* community that mourns it.[19]

My discussion so far resonates with a moment in Anzaldúa’s *Luz en lo Oscuro/ Light in the Dark*: “The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage. For me, this process is represented by *Coatlicue*’s daughter, *Coyolxauhqui*, la diosa de la luna [the goddess of the moon]” (49). In this text, Anzaldúa theorizes with an aesthetics of moonlight, of reflected light that coexists with the dark. This kind of light that accepts darkness, that is not the “other” of darkness, guides the theorization of border zones



and of what I have called “demi-social” *mestizaje*. The pairing of *Coyolxauqui* and *Coatlicue* manifests ruptures, dissociations from the modern “pro-social,” from fixations of identities in terms of gender, race, class, ability; all of which are determined by the colonial difference between human and non-human. Yet the implosions/explosions of these social orderings do not lead to new constructions of the modern human/social. Rather, they usher processes of assembling fragmentary remnants without fusing them, creating a sort of fragile mosaic in which every piece does not quite fit or blend with another. Economies, socialities, cultures, identities as fragments after implosions/explosions are not part of fixed systems but are distinctly heterogeneous, as if already set for a plurality of possible assemblages. This process that does not quite congeal, that moves toward destruction as rebirth, is illuminated by a kind of moonlight: neither light or obscure, in this light the differences between the social/asocial, human/non-human are temporarily suspended. In this sense, “demi-social” *mestizaje* is of *Coyolxauhqui*. In my view, so is Santa Cruz’s poem “Meme Neguito.”

### **A Detour through Hybridity and the Virgin-Mountain**

I take a detour through “hybridity” because at first it seems closely related to “demi-social *mestizaje*.” Dana Leibsohn and Carolyn Dean in *Hybridity and its Discontents* put forth a critique of “hybridity” as a critical concept in Latin American art history that sheds light on my discussion so far.[20] They distinguish between hybridity and concepts such as syncretism and *mestizaje*. The latter describe conditions of racial and ethnic mixture, and artworks that both represent and emerge out of these conditions. Andean religious colonial paintings can be categorized as “syncretic” or “mestizo,” like the 18th Century painting *Nuestra Señora del Cerro Rico de Potosí*. In it, vastly different religiosities, temporalities, iconographies and global forms of power appear to be brought together: the mountain as an Inka divinity or *Apu* is depicted as both the virgin being crowned and a mine full of silver. The virgin-mountain sustains both the wealth of the Catholic Church and an emergent capitalist economic regime. However, Dean and Liebsohn argue, the terms syncretism and *mestizaje* can suggest a fusion or coalescence that erases concrete colonial relations of power that are thematic and embodied in the painting. In my terms, these concepts inform a “pro-social” *mestizaje* that supports the good conscience of creole oligarchs or nationalist politicians.

Liebsohn and Dean, drawing from Homi Bhabha, recognize that hybridity seems to be a better colonial aesthetic concept since it traces different social and cultural worlds both enmeshed and in tension with one another, and approaches colonialism as a heterogeneous social order predicated on the violent suppression of indigenous lives, histories, communities and traditions.[21] Hybridity, then, does not imply fusion, but layerings and interpenetrations of dominant and oppressed cultures. Bhabha describes hybridity as:

...a form of incipient critique...Hybridity works with, *and within*, the cultural design of the present to reshape our understanding of the interstices—social and psychic—that link signs of cultural similitude with emergent signifiers of alterity. The “difference” that constitutes the subject of hybridity can be temporal, political, racial, sexual, social or economic. These forms of “difference,” reconfigured as spontaneous discrimination or systemic inequality, are neither historically synchronic nor ethically and politically equivalent.[22]

Without erasing axial colonial/modern power dynamics, hybridity emerges as a form of critique that continuously reveals power differentials in shifting colonial and postcolonial orders, re-signifying cultural cohesions and alterities. In this sense, it responds to Quijano’s “heterogeneous model of power” and to variations in the intensity and in the manifestation of the systemic character of oppressions. Applied to the painting *Nuestra Señora del Cerro Rico de Potosí*, a hybrid approach could show colonial violence giving birth to modernity but also coexisting with it, a violence that persists as religious enforcement and disciplining, the suppression of indigenous cultures and epistemologies, and the enslavement and genocide of indigenous lives that both enriches the Catholic Church and intimates its demise through the emergence of a capitalist global order. Moreover, hybridity as a critical concept could reveal heterogeneous processes of social differentiation and locate emerging and passing alterities; alterities that do not abide by overarching and fixed logics of power or progressive temporal projections.[23]

Yet, hybridity also implies tracing mutating linkages between a global racial-gendered- economic axis of oppression, and the “day to day,” ephemeral manifestations of power dynamics. This tracing marks the coordinates of liminal sites for possible insurrections, where tensions are at a tipping point in locations invisible to dominant social cartographies. In this respect, hybridity transitions from a type of critique to an identification and actualization of liberatory agencies. Bhabha continues:

For hybridity, empowerment is about the achievement of agency and authority, rather than the fulfillment of the “authenticity” of identity—however mixed, however “multi,” however intersective or intercultural. This does not deny the obvious importance of forms of civic registration or political recognition—passports, visas, papers, citizenship—that entitle subjects to exercise cultural choice and political agency. Indeed, it is in relation to these “ordering” principles that hybridity derives its agency by activating liminal and ambivalent positions in-between forms of identification that may be asymmetrical, disjunctive and contradictory.[24]

Even though the critical approach of hybridity recognizes the political power bestowed in social defined identities, it does not seek to simply wield such a power nor is it interested in the “authenticity” of identity claims as the basis for liberatory agencies. Rather, hybridity is attentive to the “heterogeneous model of power,” to the sterility of oppositional stances that turn too steady to respond to changing logics of oppression, and to social liminality as the condition for the formation of complex and effective resistant options.

At the same time, hybrid liberatory agencies are derivative of the political valence of consistent social identities, since it is through fissures in “forms of identification” that the heterogeneity of power dynamics becomes manifest, fissures that elicit agencies from “liminal and ambivalent positions.” At this juncture the notion of hybridity reaches a limit. Rather than engaging kinds of resistive praxis that do not gain their bearings from “pro-social” registers, hybrid liberatory agencies seem to remain dependent on modern/colonial modes of social belonging that provide both individual and collective purpose; modes that are necessarily entangled with, or at least oriented toward, the character of dominant social orderings. In this respect, hybrid liberatory agencies ultimately appear and are compelling as potentially “pro-social,” fitting within Maldonado-Torres’ account of the colonial foundations of the modern self discussed above. These delimitations, which restrict hybridity to the configuration of modern/colonial socialities and the agencies arising under their purview, attest to the historical juncture in which hybridity emerges as a critical concept in postcolonial studies in the 20th century.

This historical and geopolitical delimitation of hybridity is a central concern in Dean’s and Liebsohn’s highly regarded critical essay. Hybridity’s retroactive application to colonial Latin American art and social formations becomes problematic as it prompts searching for power differentials in-between delimited and identifiable dominant and marginalized socialities (including racial and ethnic groupings).[25] This critical approach projects modern/colonial kinds of social formations and identities, and even determinations of the “social,” onto foreign contexts, assigning to colonial paintings resistant, hybrid meanings that they did not possess. I glean from this that specific modes of liberatory agencies tied to modern/colonial socialities, and their corresponding constructions of the self, are also deciphered in those paintings as signs of indigenous insurrections in forced conditions of ethnic mixing. I suspect that the appeal of applying hybridity in this way comes from a need to envision the colonized as resisting, yet at the cost of misapplying to them notions of agency, intentionality, resistance and liberation that are amenable to Western modern/colonial parameters.[26] The alternative, however, is to face the possibility of the colonized appearing to be passive, complicit in their oppression. In other words, the misapplication of hybridity Dean and Liebsohn discuss could be seen as an attempt to secure a particular modern form of liberatory agency and critical good conscience.

Hybridity is responsive to the heterogeneity of modern/colonial models of power, dismissive of defined social identities as descriptive of social formations and as anchors of liberatory projects, and focused on social liminalities as sites of resistance. However, there are important differences between it and “demi-social” *mestizaje*. The latter is not a critical concept for the analysis of models of modern/colonial power. It is, instead, an affective, psychic and intersubjective state that is not derivative from modern/colonial determinations of the social and the human, and, in fact, implodes/explodes such determinations through embodied practices of individual and communal transformation. Moreover, this state is not compatible with modes of agency that rely on the support and

appeal of “pro-social,” productive identifications, and calls for philosophical critiques of the centrality of agency as a condition for socio/political resistance.

### The Virgin-Mountain and Monstrosity

What if the virgin-mountain were a monster, a kind of living mythic creature?[27] In this sense, “she” is not fused into a harmonious being and does not reflect a new syncretic social form. Yet “she” is not a hybrid and does not allow for interstices to be opened, even temporarily. If limits between the indigenous and the Spanish, the oppressed and the oppressor, were to be traced in her body so as to reveal heterogeneous power dynamics, they would become gashes that expose nothing, only further mesh. The image is monstrous through and through, to the point that the term “hybrid” ceases to make sense. “She” is a mesh of remnants of iconographies that blur and phase into each other in violation of recognizable forms. She is a living mosaic gathered after an implosion/explosion. The shape of the mountain transitions into the virgin’s dress, and vice versa. This does not entail a complete absence of determinacy in the image, but an imaginal slippage. The virgin-mountain moves, constantly coming together and falling apart, imploding/exploding, coming in and out of determinacy.[28] She is a living monster that is more dreamt or imagined than seen.

By monster, I mean here an image that is able to transport us beyond social delimitations of the “self.”[29] I am interested in this transport as it transgresses the bounds of the modern/colonial social, overcoming fears of social fragmentation and attachments to “pro-social” desires. Anzaldúa’s account of the function of the imagination in “Border Arte” is useful here:

The process of “borrowing” is repeated until the images’ original meanings are pushed into the unconscious, and images more significant to the prevailing culture and era surface. However, the artist on some level still connects to that unconscious reservoir of meaning, connects to the nepantla state of transition between time periods, connects to the border between cultures.[30]

“Images” in this sense are condensations and mutations of cultures and their respective socialities, and they carry affective and memorial registers. Imaginal “borrowing” is a modern/colonial process through which images of oppressed cultures are purged of their lived, embodied significance for the sake of rendering other images supportive of oppressing cultures. “Borrowing,” then, can be a form of mixing or *mestizaje* that conceals yet enforces the difference between the human and the non-human as it contributes to “pro-social” identity formations and senses of political purpose. “Borrowing” can be a mode of “pro-social” *mestizaje*, and it can take the form of syncretism as a nationalist aesthetic. Hybridity, at least as Dean and Liebsohn frame it, can also be a “borrowing” when misapplied to foreign contexts (like colonial Latin America and its legacies), especially as it remains tied to modern/colonial forms of agency.

The imagination of the “border artist” arises in the aftermath of the colonial violence of “borrowing,” it transports one to a depository or “cenote” where imaginal remnants of that violence germinate in forms that do not fit either oppressing/oppressed, human/non-human dichotomies—like the virgin-mountain, I suggest. It is part of the *Coyolxauhqui* process discussed earlier through which remnants of/as images are portals to “demi-social” affects, desires, mental states and communities. These psychic and intersubjective states are not subsumed by the “pro-social” in el cenote. They breach the “pro-social” only to recoil and find sustenance from a “lugar/no lugar,” or Nepantla, in Anzaldúa’s terms. She links Nepantla to the “unconscious,” except that this term is re-determined in her lexicon. If one understands the “unconscious” as the site of repressed desires, of perversions that need to be faced for the sake of integration into the social and acceptable, Nepantla is not the “unconscious.” The images in Nepantla have a life of their own, they form “demi-social” architectures of the psyche that are not “conscious” or “unconscious,” that configure a distinct form of alterity. By this “alterity” I mean the ways monsters, mythical creatures and dreams do not submit to social and physical differentiated orders and determinations of “pro-sociality.” Monsters are not “pro-social.” Yet, they are not abnormal or perverse either. They retreat from modern/colonial, social/human intelligibility, remaining with a haunting, abiding presence—like Anzaldúa’s serpent eyes and the in-stilled movement of the virgin-mountain.[31]

Jack Halberstam’s rendition of the monster as a Gothic figure in *Skin Shows* intersects with this discussion. The Gothic monster implodes/explodes socialities and their differentiations, and reveals the oppressions and repressions of the modern/capitalistic articulation of the social. Undergoing processes of composition and decomposition through which dominant socialities are undermined, the monster is reminiscent of *Coyolxauhqui*: “It is the propensity for the monster to deconstruct at any time, to always be in the process of decomposition, that makes it/him/her a fugitive from identity...”[32] In its power to decompose and abide, the monster is horrific. The female monster, due to its potency to reproduce, and thus gain independence from the male, modern gaze, is most horrific. The fear of the monster, its horrific appearance, however, shows that a modern/colonial gaze remains dominant in this account. For this gaze, the monstrous horror is always tied to the fear of losing the support of the modern/colonial social in its clean determinations of race, gender, class and ability. From a “demi-social” perspective, even if this fear is operative, it is overcome by another fear with a different orientation: that of the modern/colonial social itself. “Demi-sociality” and its affective registers, including fear, are informed by remnants of memories and histories of colonial violence, of the disposal of “non-human” lives, of the obliteration of cultures, which are also the materials for the imaginations of the “border artist.” The virgin-mountain is monstrous, but “she” also draws one into an imaginative flight where fear is a portal to a border imagination. Like Santa Cruz’s imagination, perhaps, when he turns the horrors of colonization, the language of slave labor in particular, into a poetic material that resounds in demi-social communities, and that allows for an intractable kind of resistance when mourning a black child.

## Conclusion: Mestizaje, Alterity, Resistance

At least since the 16th century, in the era of Spanish colonial rule in the Americas, texts, artworks and rituals show awareness among different ethnic and racial groups that colonial power did not pit one set of people against another, or create oppositional social dynamics clearly demarcating the oppressors and the oppressed. The axis of colonial power is a compound of race, class and gender as categories of oppression. It is manifest in transitional and mutating conflicts that, instead of mapping onto social categories, fissure them. Rather than galvanizing indigenous peoples as an oppressed group, colonial power both fabricates their identities and fractures them across unstable registers of nobility, ethnicity and gender, to name a few examples. In the post-colonial era, these fractures continues with an emphasis on registers of race, class and access to education. As Quijano puts it, here the model of power is heterogeneous. Moreover, the category of race turns all other social categories with which it is compounded into sites of suspicion about the status of others as humans. Decisions motivated by this suspicion render lives disposable and excluded from “pro-sociality.” The non-human cannot be social, and “its” life has no intrinsic value within a system dedicated to safeguard the social forms and institutions that support a modern/colonial global economic system.

*Mestizaje* emerges as a notion that responds in multifarious ways to this model of power in its entwined heterogeneous social incursions and dehumanizing exploitations. It can be simply a term that describes mixtures of ethnicities, cultures, races, etc. It can be an ideological artifact for the celebration of differences and the occlusion of the difference between the human and the non-human. It can be “pro-social.” It can be an aesthetic concept to classify and enjoy colonial and postcolonial art. Drawing from Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness,” I have focused on a “demi-social” *mestizaje* as a state of being in the fissures, where power fractures orders of social categorization and corresponding bestowals of humanity. The mestiza moves in and through these fissures so as to let these orders implode/explode as conflicts of her psyche and “pro-social” communities. This *mestizaje* is not performative; the mestiza explodes/implodes and is reborn with attunement to the changing ways she is rendered non-human, and to desires, pleasures, knowledges and senses of self and community that arise without seeking to be “pro-social.” She also lets go of therapeutic parameters for perversions and pathologies that are oriented toward normalization, ability, productivity and social recognition. She forms communities from images as remnants of a colonizing, dehumanizing violence, as silenced memories; communities that can breach into the “pro-social” without being absorbed into its projects.

“Demi-social” *mestizaje* does not imply the alterity of the oppressed as a negating, oppositional revolutionary force. It’s alterity, instead, is the lived experience of at the same time being and not being human, oppressed, sane, gendered, able; of imploding and exploding, of being inside and outside the modern/colonial system of power. But, above all, alterity is manifest after the implosion/explosion, in the moment of

rebirth in a “borderland” where one collects remnants of selves and socialities, and is given to unprecedented affects and images, like mutations of fear and abiding virgin-mountain monsters that are guides in a lugar/no lugar, or Nepantla. This alterity is not located in a “self” even if it allows for transformations of it, nor is it reliant on demarcated social identities. Its connection to the imagination does not place it within a “mind,” and it is present with a memory that is not bound by “pro-social” narratives. It is not the alterity of the unconscious, but through it the unconscious can become a habitat where images are “animals,” beckoning for trans-human communities and non-anthropocentric socialities.[33]

Modern/colonial senses of agency get in the way of theorizing the resistance of “demi-social” *mestizaje*, which appears passive from their perspective. Agencies grounded in self-certainty, decision making, clarity of purpose, are all illusions that gain hold when the “pro-social” determinants of the self are unquestioned, normalized and assumed to such an extent that the self appears as transparent. This is the same “self” that, according to Maldonado Torres, is formed through the suspicion of the other’s humanity, and, I add, the concomitant demarcation of the “pro-social” as its natural environment. This “self,” and the agency it wields, is of no use to understand “demi-social” *mestizaje* as resistance. In this respect, resistance means to abide, to walk into an implosion/explosion of the social with serpent eyes and in an affective and psychic state that disavows “pro-social” investments.[34] This movement does not involve a decision because there is no possibility of deliberation, it doesn’t involve a self-certain self because there are no clear socialities that would sustain it. Anzaldúa calls it the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative. It is a constant being-toward transformations across heterogeneous instantiations of power, an alert anticipation of arrivals at unprecedented borderlands, and being sustained by “demi-social” communities in the making.[35]

Omar Rivera PhD.  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
Southwestern University

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## Notes

[1] See Omar Rivera, *Delimitations of Latin American Philosophy: Beyond Redemption* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2019), for a discussion of Latin American political theory in this respect. Also, see the conclusion for an analysis of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Border Arte* that is expanded in this essay.

[2] Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America.” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1.3 (2000): 547. See also Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo

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and Arturo Escobar. (London: Routledge, 2010). See also Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanness as a Concept or the Americas in the Modern World System," in *International Social Science Journal* XLIV, 4 (1992): 549-57.

[3] In this paper I suggest that *mestizaje* does not have a coherent meaning. It has, instead a complex lineage given its entanglement with colonialism. The assumption that it only means racial or ethnic mixing is too reductive. For a complementary treatment of *mestizaje*, see Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South* (London: Paradigm, 2014). There is a growing scholarship on *mestizaje* in the colonial era that informs my discussion. In particular, Rolena Adorno, *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). For a historical analysis of mestizo politics and resistance in the colonial era, see Felipe E. Ruan, "Andean Activism and the Reformulation of Mestizo Agency and Identity in Early Colonial Peru," *Colonial Latin American Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (August 2012): 209-237. A claim to *mestizaje* is also operative in the construction of a creole Latin American identity.

[4] I am borrowing the notions of "pro-sociality" and "demi-sociality" from Melanie Yergeau, (the latter is inspired by "demi-sexuality" and "demi-rhetoricity"). See Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). This text offers an approach to Anzaldúa that complements my discussion. I don't intend my discussion to be an interpretation of Gloria Anzaldúa's work. The discussion of the positions put forward here in relation to Anzaldúa's spiritual activism in particular is too extensive to take on in this context. A good starting point for this discussion would be Analouise Keating, "'I'm a citizen of the universe': Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change," *Feminist Studies*, 34:1-2 (2008): 53-69

[5] Here I leave open an engagement with intersectionality in Black Feminist philosophy as it bears on my discussion of *mestizaje*. For texts that may inform this issue, see María Lugones, "Radical Multiculturalism and Women of Color Feminisms," *JCRT* 13, No. 1 (Winter 2014): 68-80, and Emma D. Velez, "Decolonial Feminism at the Intersection: A Critical Reflection on the Relationship Between Decolonial Feminism and Intersectionality," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Volume 33, No. 3, 2019, pp. 390-406.

[6] See Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality."

[7] Other sources that show the complexities of *mestizaje* include the painting "Union of the Inka Royal Family with the Houses of Loyola and Borgia." See also Carolyn Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ* (Durham: Duke University Press), 97-121.

[8] This discussion of *mestizaje* relates to Sandoval's "methodology of the oppressed." See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Chela Sandoval, "New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed" in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray. (New York: Routledge, 1995): 407-422.

[9] My discussion and critique of the "coloniality of being" is focused on Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept." *Cultural Studies* 2:2-3 (2007): 240-70.



[10] Ibid, 260. For a decolonial critique of the modern self, see also Enrique Dussel, "Anti-Cartesian Meditations: About the Origin of the Philosophical Anti-Discourse of Modernity." *Tabula Rasa* 9:9 (2008): 153–98.

[11] María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003): 152

[12] I find an approach to Anzaldúa from the perspective of the "Coloniality of Being" in María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, No. 4 (2010): 742-59.

[13] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books 2007), 69.

[14] Ibid. 73.

[15] Nicomedes Santa Cruz, *Obras Completas II* (Lima: Libros en Red, 2004), 424.

[16] Ibid. 387- 466.

[17] Nicomedes Santa Cruz, *Obras Completas I. Poesía* (1949-1989) (Lima: Libros en Red, 2010), 78.

[18] The term "distinct" here is meant to connect with Dussel's notion of the "distinct" in "exteriority" that sets up a non-dialectical (or analectical) relationship between oppressors and oppressed. Dussel, however, does not think of exteriority in terms of *mestizaje*. See Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la Liberación* (México: Edicol, 1977)

[19] This discussion draws from Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; 75-86.

[20] Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review*, 12:1 (2003): 5-35.

[21] This analysis refers to the work of Homi Bhabha as discussed by Dean/ Leibsohn in "Hybridity and Its Discontents"

[22] Homi K. Bhabha, Foreword. In *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books), ix.

[23] Hybridity, according to Bhabha, draws from Gramsci. Quijano's "coloniality of power" also belongs to a lineage of Latin American Marxism influenced by Gramsci.

[24] Bhabha, xii.

[25] Hybridity is critically discussed in Omar Rivera, Patrick Hajovsky, "Syncretism and Missed Encounters in Cusco." *Latinx Spaces* (Feb. 2017).

[26] I develop this point in Omar Rivera, "Stillness, Aesthesis, Resistance," *Critical Philosophy of Race*, vol. 8, Issues 1-2, 2020; 84-101.

[27] My notion of monstrosity throughout this paper is in dialogue with the development of this term in Amelia Jones, "Clothed/Unclouted: Laura Aguilar's Radical Vulnerability" in *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* ed. Richard T. Rodríguez. (Canada: University of California, 2018): 39-56.

[28] I owe this particular wording to my research assistant, Cat Kelly.

[29] See Omar Rivera, "Stillness Aesthesis, Resistance;" 87-89.

[30] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 182.

[31] In this respect, there are resonances between Anzaldúa's "Nepantla" and Rivera Cusicanqui's "Ch'ixi." See Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "La universalidad de lo *ch'ixi*. Miradas de Waman Puma" in *Sociología de la Imagen: Miradas Ch'ixi Desde La Historia Andina*. (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón Ediciones, 2015)

[32] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*; 37

[33] For a discussion of images as animals, see *Ibid.* p.27-28

[34] For complementary accounts of resistance see María Lugones, "From Within Germinative Stasis: Creating Active Subjectivity, Resistant Agency," in *Entre Mundos/ Among Worlds*, Analouise Keating, Ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). See also Alejandro Vallega, "The Aesthetic-Cosmological Dimension of María Lugones's Decolonial Decolonial Feminism," *Critical Philosophy of Race*, Vol. 8, Issues 1-2, (2020): 73-76.

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