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Monsters and Mestizos: Mestizaje as White Supremacy and the Monsterization of Indigeneity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Philosophy

by

Saraliza Anzaldúa

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Monsters and Mestizos: Mestizaje as White Supremacy and the Monsterization of Indigeneity

by

Saraliza Anzaldúa

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Alexander Jacob Julius, Chair

The concept of mestizaje as a means to understand racial mixing in so-called Latin America has a long philosophical tradition, and is still used as a means to self identity in many current communities. However, that tradition goes beyond the colonization of the Americas and can be traced back to a Greco-European tradition of thought concerned with monsters. In fact, mestizaje itself parallels the concept of ‘monster’ because it is rooted in a framework of white supremacy that seeks to eradicate what it perceives to be an Indigenous monster. This project has four aims. First, to provide an historical overview of mestizaje as a colonial institution. Second, to trace its roots in the tradition of monster philosophy and illuminate the way it monsterizes people. Third, to explore its latest iteration in the work of the philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa and demonstrate that no amount of positive reimagining will save such a flawed conception of people. Fourth, to offer an alternative way to self-identify in a colonial capitalistic world through community relationships.

The dissertation of Saraliza Anzaldúa is approved.

Joshua David Armstrong

Daniela J. Dover

Calvin G. Normore

Alexander Jacob Julius, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

For my mother and grandmother, y para todas mis antepasadas who endured lifetimes of abuse
yet somehow found moments of beauty and peace, and in those moments planted flowers who
would someday sing.

For my cousin Jillian, whose body and spirit could no longer tolerate the violence.

For my nieces Juliet-Rose and Janelle, may your futures be brighter; may you flower
unoppressed and sing without fear.

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Previous Degrees:

2016 MA, Literature
National Taiwan University

2007 BA, Sociology with Philosophy Minor
University of Texas-Dallas

Academic Publications:

2023 *Mexica Monism and Daoist Ethics in the Philosophy of Gloria Anzaldúa*
Comparative Philosophy, Vol. 14, no. 1, Jan.: 1-12
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Language, Culture, Environment, Vol. 3, Fall (Oct.): 3-19
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<<https://lcekimep.com/>>

2021 *Philosophy as Power*
Ofrenda Magazine, Issue 4: 83-87
<www.ofrendamagazine.com>

2016 *There is No Monster: Monstrosity and the Monstrous in "Frankenstein"*
National Taiwan University
Serial Number: 991023501949704786
<<https://www.lib.ntu.edu.tw/en>>

Introduction

Note: Instead of gendered English pronouns, this text uses the Nahuatl non-gendered pronoun “ya”. For example, “ya said” instead of “she said” and “i-book” instead of “her book”.

Warning: The following project contains material dealing with colonialism, the monsterization of people, and genocide.

In 2022, recordings of LA council member Nury Martinez were released in which ya made racist comments against Black and Indigenous communities. Martinez grew up in the San Fernando Valley and promoted herself as a Latina politician, becoming the first LA council president to be from the so-called Latino community. So it came as a shock to many when she referred to Oaxaqueños (Mexicans from Oaxaca) as “tan feos” (very ugly). Referring to people in i-district, ya said “I see a lot of little short dark people...I was like, I don’t know where these people are from, I don’t know what village they came [from], how they got here”.¹

What escaped many observers of this controversy was how Martinez’s worldview is not only common in so-called Latin communities, it is foundational to the colonial ideology of mestizaje that has and continues to be used as a means of identity in such communities. From its various iterations of Hispanic and la Raza, to its more contemporary one of Latino, mestizaje presents itself as inclusive mixed racial identity that bands communities together. What I aim to show in this project is that in fact such ideology erases identity, in particular Indigenous, Black,

¹ Roche, Darragh. “What Did Nury Martinez Say?” *Newsweek* October 11, 2022. <<https://www.newsweek.com/what-did-nury-martinez-say-los-angeles-1750598>>

and Asian, in favor of white supremacy. Furthermore, by focusing on the racial nature of imposed identity, class differences and the boundary policing that goes along with class privilege are obscured. While many were surprised at Martinez' remarks and had assumed that ya was in solidarity with Indigenous Mexican communities, that assumption ignored the privilege of class and lighter skin that ya enjoyed in the context of a white supremacist American society. Privileges that i-targets, Indigenous migrant and Black communities, don't enjoy.

This kind of identity erasure is woven through the fabric of Mexican and Chicane lives, and mestizaje can be such a slippery concept that rooting one's identity can be extremely difficult. Those of us on the north side of the la frontera (the Mexico-US border) are peppered with sharp questions at a young age such as, "Where are you from?", "Where are your parents from?", "Where are you *from* from?", and "Why don't you go back to where you came from?". On the south side of the wound, various communities fight the label "Mexican" which they view as an erasure of their Indigenous identity, while others use appropriated Indigeneity to legitimize resource theft of tribal land.

The tension of that identity occurs in the context of a particular material history rooted in invasion, interrupted, and genocide. With the arrival of European colonizers and settlers, Indigenous relationships with community and land were interrupted, then reshaped to suit a genocidal project of Indigenous erasure. The first step was conquest and the second colonization. Once colonized, Indigenous communities of Cemenahuac were forced to undergo the processes of de-tribalization and then de-Indigenization. At each step, identities are washed and warped to fit the needs of those in power. Given the contentious nature of identity for such communities,

it's no wonder that there is a long tradition of Mexican existentialism, or as some philosophers call it: "Mex-istentialism".²

However, that history is rooted in a longer tradition of monsters. European philosophy has a branch of thought relating to monsters that is thousands of years old called teratology. It was concerned with a great chain of being, in which the world was order from the highest form of life to the lowest, often naming those at the low end 'monsters' and marking them as deviant entities in need of control or even destruction. One of my principal aims in this project is to show that discussions of mestizaje can't be fully understood outside the context of this branch of European thought, called teratology (the study of monsters).³ The logic of mestizaje (hierarchy based on evil/impurity, essentialism, and hybridity/ambivalent identity) has its origins in teratology, and it has not left the connotation of monstrosity behind in regards to Indigenous people. Rather, colonial thinkers were very much aware of how they were monsterizing the Indigenous people of Mesoamerica because it was well suited to their plan of genocide. So, monstrosity is key to understanding the roots and implications of mestizaje.

Due to the localized nature of mestizaje, this project follows a methodology of prioritizing material conditions. By beginning with the particular conditions of history, we can better understand the source of ideas and hidden assumptions that we might miss if we first began with non-localized and abstract ideas. We might get lost were we to try and find our way back to the world. Given that identity is local, it makes sense to begin with material conditions and resist the urge to abstract away identity.

² A student of Manuel Vargas, Erin Conrad, coined the term in 1998 and it has since spread in usage.

³ The obstetric medical practice of the same name is rooted in this tradition, though the medical practice branched off from philosophy a couple hundred years ago much in the same way other branches of science did as well.

However, because colonizers (and their literati of philosophers/theologians) justified their genocide with a particular ideology that gave rise to mestizaje, it is necessary to engage with the narratives and reasoning used in that justification while seeing those beliefs in their wider context. So the trajectory of this project is a back and forth between rooting in material conditions on the ground, climbing the ladder ideologues wish us to climb, and then coming back down to the ground to show the wider scope of why the ladder was constructed in the first place and why we are being told to climb it. Ultimately, I demonstrate that what we've been given in the concept of mestizaje is a biased system meant to benefit white supremacy and doesn't represent what's going on in actual communities.

In addition to that aim, I will advocate for an Indigenous understanding of identity as an alternative to the dominant narrative of mestizaje that is rooted in white supremacy and the Spanish colonial project. I will demonstrate that mestizaje is unsalvageable, and that by continuing to invest in such discourse is to continue the obscuring of community identities which advances the goals of colonial genocide. Rather, we should abandon that project altogether in favor of relational identity –an identity based on our relationship to land, language, community, and culture.

Importantly, this project is a voice among the many adding to this conversation. Mestizaje is a localized phenomenon and takes many forms in so-called Latin America. While this project may be relevant to other instances in former Spanish colonies and indeed I utilize a variety of sources across those time-places, my focus is mainly on the particular brand of Mexican mestizaje; especially as it concerns the Chicane diaspora. I hope that other scholars will

pick up my work and continue this conversation within their communities across the colonial landscape.

Furthermore, while this project is situated in discussions of race and colonization, I make no claims about how the particularities of mestizaje may be relevant to other racialized communities. For instance, while I will discuss how mestizaje erases Black and Asian identity I make no claims on their particular histories. This is not to further contribute to their erasure in discussions of Indigenous identity and colonization. Rather, due to limitations of space and time I must limit the scope of this project. However, I hope that other scholars will pick up where my work leaves because of the importance of this project for the survival of our communities.

In the first chapter, we will see how mestizaje operates in the world; its various iterations as it grew in colonial Mexico, and its history in relation to Mexican and Chicane communities. In addition to the wider material background, I will introduce some key philosophical players that have helped the concept mestizaje grow and stay relevant despite its sinister undertones.

In the next chapter, we will connect mestizaje to its roots in teratology, a European philosophical tradition aiming to understand the nature of monsters, and how the ideology of monstrosity perpetuates white supremacist by monsterizing Indigeneity. Monstrosity and mestizaje are two sides of the same coin, each using essentialism, hierarchy in the great chain of being based on impurity, and hybridity/ambivalence to mark specific kinds of bodies as deviant. Once marked, under the logic of mestizaje/monstrosity one is justified in being controlled or destroyed.

In the third fourth chapter, we will see how the latest reiteration of mestizaje gained prominence through the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. Writing after the Chicano movement when

many Chicane people were looking to how Mexico for frameworks of identity, history, and philosophy, Anzaldúa built on the work of Mexican philosophers and picked up the idea of mestizaje as a means of positive identity. This chapter will be a conversation between the contemporary feminist work of Anzaldúa and such earlier theorists. We will see how Anzaldúa's modern version (supposedly a more inclusive and liberating version) responds to earlier constructions of the racial category.

The fourth chapter will illustrate how Anzaldúa's reimagining of mestizaje fails to address the underlying issue of an ambiguous identity constructed outside the natural order that parallels monstrosity. Importantly, by promoting mestizaje as the foundation of identity Anzaldúa unknowingly fell into the trap of white supremacy. While ya distanced i-self from mestizaje in later scholarship and attempted to undo the damage done by offering nepantla as a means of Chicane identity, Anzaldúa's new mestiza is still a prominent concept in the community and promoted in classrooms throughout the United States as a feminist framework. To date, there has been no critical philosophical work of the new mestiza and the dangers therein. This project aims to do just that.

In the final chapter, I offer an alternative to mestizaje for understanding group identity. By understanding identity in terms of relationships, we get a more accurate picture of how people experience the world and are related to each other. This kind of understanding is rooted in an Indigenous understanding of a localized world. Importantly, I'm not trying to give an alternative answer to the metaphysical question "What am I?" Such a question misunderstands the nature of identity. Rather, I advocate for replacing categorical identity with a relational one. A much better question to ask is "Who are my people, what is their language and culture, what is

our history, and what is our relationship to land?" While Anzaldúa tried to answer the essentialist question with a non-essentialist answer, I advocate for abandoning the question altogether because people are not categorical kinds.

Chapter One: The Colonial History of Mestizaje

“Malintzin’s history, her legend and subsequent mythic dimensions as evil goddess and creator of a new race – the mestizo race, embroils her in a family quarrel, where many male members often prefer to see her as the mother-whore, bearer of illegitimate children, responsible for the foreign Spanish invasion.”

–Norma Alarcón, *Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-vision through Malintzin*

Mestizaje is a racial concept that has been mythologized. Mythologized, because the concept of the mixed race offspring by Spanish and Indigenous people begins with the romanticized story of Hernando Cortez and Malintzin. The philosopher Justo Sierra in an inauguration at Mexico’s National University spoke of the beginnings of Mexican national identity: “...the persistence of the indigenous soul, coupled but not identical to or fused with the Spanish soul...of the first kiss of Hernán Cortés and Malintzin” (20).¹ Thus, so we are to believe, began the mestizo –a new racial identity that is both Indigenous and Spanish, yet neither of them and with distinct parts. Somehow one and yet two, born out of love and not exploitation.

Importantly, this narrative centers the European man breeding with an Indigenous woman and whitening the offspring, thereby a conquerer. The reverse, an Indigenous woman indigenizing the offspring of a white man never happens. Additionally, this narrative attributes a

¹ Malintzin’s story is one of many romanticized narratives between European colonizers and the women of color they oppressed. Sally Hemmings and her forced relationship with Thomas Jefferson is another example. Often these mythologized narratives portray the relationship as tragic lovers and overlook the women’s lack of agency as enslaved people, and the coercion/exploitation/abuse they suffered at the hands of their “lovers”.

hyper-masculine virility to the European father who is the supposed origin of all Mexican and Chicane mestizos despite the statistical impossibility.²

In truth, there is no one definition of “mestizo” and the application of the label varied across regions of colonial New Spain. At various times, places, and contexts, it could refer to someone of mixed parentage, an indio ladino (Indigenous person who spoke Spanish), a freed person living in an Indigenous community, an Indigenous person living in a Spanish community, or a Spanish person born in Mexico. In some cases, “mestizo” was a linguistic moniker and had nothing to do with ancestry or community (Rappaport 83). Furthermore, the label evolved as relationships within and across colonized communities changed.

Despite such variation, there is one consistency. As Joanne Rappaport notes, mestizaje was not so much a category with its own distinct characteristics as an exclusionary category of “none of the above”: “[mestizos] did not consistently embody a clear set of attributes distinguishing them from others in colonial society; they did not enjoy special rights or obligations defining them as mestizos” (29). What defined mestizos was their “neither-nor” status. In a colonial system that operated according to a logic of purity, mestizaje labeled one as impure and thereby not part of a community.

Mestizos could count Indigenous, African, and Spanish people among their lineage (sometimes mixed and sometimes only one), but colonial officials who kept census records struggled to place them and often relied on dress, class, language, and occupation rather than “race”. These markers were often used as indicators of *calidad* (“quality”), which was taken to be

² Mexican scholars such as the anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (1987) and the historian Federico Navarrete Linares in *México Racista: Una Denuncia* (2016) not only question this initial founding myth of the mestizo, but the ongoing myth that the nation of Mexico is comprised of mostly mestizos.

an “essentialized set of characteristics believed to be carried in the blood” (Rappaport 44). These characteristics were framed in a spiritual sense, and thus one’s supposed virtue or lack thereof was perceived as something inherited. For example, Spanish blood was thought to possess inherent noble qualities like “honor, virtue, trustworthiness, courage, a clear conscience, an orderly and moderate lifestyle, and generosity” (Rappaport 101). In contrast, mestizos were viewed as “incomplete Christians always in danger of backsliding into idolatry, and as being of illegitimate birth” (Rappaport 139). Because of their impurity, mestizos were viewed as dangerous and treacherous. Not only to themselves in the context of Christian salvation, but also to other Christians because of their power to corrupt through their bad virtue and incompleteness. So, part of the Spanish colonial obsession with census records, an obsession shared with its British neighbor to the north, revolved around keeping familial lines “pure” and thereby of “noble” quality.

In the mestizo case where calidades clashed, how someone was identified was often situational and contextual. A mestizo raised in an Indigenous community might be considered Indigenous by colonial officials, and therefore forced to pay tribute or work in gold mines. But that same person might suddenly be labeled mestizo and thus non-Indigenous if they tried to occupy to a position of power.³ The child of a Spanish soldier and an Indigenous woman might be considered Spanish if the father acknowledged and raised them, but their gender often determined whether or not their mestizaje excluded them from elite Spanish circles. Privileged mestizas in particular were often trained by upper class Spanish women or sent to convents in order to “remedy” their situation, i.e. overcome their tainted calidad by learning “proper”

³ Indigenous positions of power were often vetted or chosen by Spanish colonial officials as a way to manage communities.

Spanish customs and norms (Rappaport 99). They began as mestiza and became Spanish through education and later being married to Spanish men. Others were raised in Indigenous communities by their mothers and their mestizaje never surfaced. They lived as Indigenous members of their mother's community, and were forced to pay tributes/work as part of their Indigenous status in a colonial state. As Rappaport notes: 'mestizo,' 'mulatto,' 'indio,' 'negro,' and 'español' operated not as stable categories akin to racial groupings that can be identified physically but as floating signifiers that can only be interpreted situationally" (172).

Though mestizos were in a sense placeless and without a solid status that granted them a particular identity with specific rights, their nebulous position allowed them the flexibility to "game the system" as the need arose and determine their place in the world. For example, some mestizos downplayed their Indigeneity willingly, or even forsook it, in order to get ahead in a Spanish colonial world. Men in particular had an incentive to downplay Indigenous ancestry in order to occupy positions of power like priesthood, which the "stain" of mestizaje would have precluded them from (Rappaport 117-118). The worry being that mestizos would introduce bad habits and vices to the "innocent Indians" that Spain was trying to shepherd and convert (Rappaport 160). Though the official reason given was that mestizos were untrustworthy by definition given their calidad, there is no doubt that material concerns were the actual priority. Spain had every motivation to keep occupied land in Spanish hands, and mixed parentage was a dangerous gamble on loyalties. However, in official documents mestizos were simply labeled "bad Christians" and incapable of managing land and the people on them (Rappaport 116). The irony of course is that Spaniards, given the history, were more incapable given their invader and occupier status. Importantly, this struggle was not always between the "Indigenous victims" and

the “Spanish overlords”. Both mestizos and Indigenous actors sometimes used circumstances to exploit material resources and communities for the sake of personal gain. However, the system of oppression consistently put one population in a powerless position while empowering another, and given that mestizos could be a wild card Spanish authorities were reluctant to take a chance.

While there was some flexibility, there were also restrictions that conditioned when someone was a mestizo and when they were something else. For example, it was a crime for mestizas to wear Indigenous dress in Mexico city and punishable with one hundred lashes (Rappaport 52). This no doubt played a role in de-tribalizing children of mixed communities. One method of colonial assimilation is to control women. By Hispanizing and Christianizing Indigenous women, Spain assimilated further generations.

This situational model was characteristic of early colonialism, but eventually gave way to more strict socio-racial boundaries as colonial institutions solidified and the growth of mestizaje threatened those institutions with growing numbers. During the mid-sixteenth century, colonial anxieties over a possible mestizo-Indigenous alliance grew as mestizos became more armed, educated, and resourced (Rappaport 162). In particular, mestizo literacy was “believed to constitute a tool of violent subversion” given that it provided an inroad to Spanish law and institutions (Rappaport 163-164). Infamously, Mexico’s version of mestizaje was one of the more strict iterations and served the purpose of detribalizing Indigenous communities for land theft while creating a massive uneducated labor class that was excluded from positions of power in both Indigenous and Criollo (Europeans born in Mexico) communities. “Mestizo” became a vague class of people socially excluded and discriminated against (Rappaport 199). As the Indigenous population drastically declined from disease, murder, displacement and forced labor,

as well as being assimilated into other groups, mestizos all of kinds were used to fill the empty space in order to continue the project of colonial capitalism.

The rise of physiognomy contributed to the reframing of mestizaje as a racial category in the late colonial period, which entailed a stronger set of observable characteristics that could be used to rigidly classify someone as part of an inflexible racial category. Skin color, facial hair, and so forth were used to infer “inner qualities” tied to lineage. For example, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala wrote that “middle-sized men and women of good figure and visage, large eyes, spirited, wise, and lettered, always served God and Your Majesty [Spanish crown] and gentlemen with their judgement” (535). This kind of taxonomy helped colonial officials make classification decisions in order to control groups and tax them (Rappaport 197). While self-presentation like language and dress still played a role, biological characteristics were given greater weight.

At the turn of the 20th century, mestizaje became an important political tool for the Criollo controlled Mexican government to consolidate national identity separate from Spain. In order to unite disparate groups, it was necessary to obscure community identification in favor of an ambiguous ancestry that could be mythologized with national fervor. By making mestizaje a political identity in addition to its biological implications, the ruling class claimed an Indigenous ancestry for the justification of independence from Spain. As Josefina Saldaña-Portillo writes, “Creole elites, seeking independence from Spain, revalued the trope of the Indian in search of a justification for their own nationalist struggles” (405). Doing so allowed the ruling class ideological justification for a separate national identity from Spain, while also distancing them from Indigenous and tribal populations whose land they took.

This process involved massive displacement, forced labor, and re-education programs. For example, the historian Federico Navarrete Linares in *México Racista: Una Denuncia* (2016) found that by the 1930 Mexican census 30% of the Indigenous population had been relabeled as “mestizo” due simply to language. Massive Spanish literary programs in conjunction with land displacement, colonized labor, and violence washed away Indigenous languages generation after generation. Whole communities that maintained ties to each other and with little mixing were labeled mestizo because generations of forced education in Spanish had eradicated Indigenous language from these communities. The change was one of language, not ancestry, and yet a racial label was attached to reflect an ancestral change. As Batalla notes, “De-Indianization is not the result of biological mixture, but of the pressure of an ethnocide that ultimately blocks the historical continuity of a people as a culturally differentiated group” (17). From a historical standpoint, this identity displacement had/has a role in consolidating Criollo power through Indigenous erasure. Whole communities changed status, and because of this status change were no longer categorized as Indigenous. No longer Indigenous, the Mexican government had a legal pathway to forcibly remove communities from their land so that resources could be exploited.

The Porfirio administration, from the end of the nineteenth-century to the beginning of the twentieth-century, sought to nationalize Mexican identity by erasing real Indigeneity and replacing it with a symbolic one. Communities were recategorized as “mixed” and displaced from their land, and Criollos were made Indigenous because of their proximity to Indigenous culture. The national flag was given a Meshika (Aztec) symbol, an eagle atop a nopal with a snake in its mouth, and national efforts were made to preserve Indigenous history while simultaneously ignoring actual living Indigenous communities. As Rappaport notes, “romantic

myths of racial mixing have been central to nationalist discourses across Latin America, functioning as a unifying symbol that conceals the discrimination that regularly took –and takes– place” (71). Thereby, Indigeneity abstracted from particular tribes was nationalized –made ubiquitous and homogenous, and made something ahistorical –a relic of the past to be bought in shops or enjoyed at restaurants, but not something present and living with imminent political relevance. Batalla describes this distillation of Indegeneity in Mexican mestizaje:

There is a circumstantial pride in a past that is somehow assumed to be glorious, but that is experienced as something dead, a matter for specialists and an irresistible attraction for tourists. Above all, it is assumed to be something apart from ourselves, something that happened long ago in the same place where we, the Mexicans, live today. The only connection is based on the fact of *them* and *us* occupying the same territory, but in different time periods (emphasis original, 3).

Through this process, the Indigenous is “killed off” by becoming mestizo and the mestizo becoming Mexican. Indigenous identity remains situated in the long past because tribal communities were racialized, and that racial identity was made into a national identity by the imposed concept of mestizaje– thereby conflating multiple identities in one.

Jose Revueltos speaks to this role of material historicism in the construction of national Mexican identity. In the essay, *Possibilities and Limitations of the Mexican* (1958), ya notes three phases by which Indigenous communities were homogenized into a Mexican nationality. After the Spanish invasion of Anahuac (Mexico) and subsequent colonization, Spain enforced a

system of *encomienda* that placed communities (and their descendants) into servitude of a Spanish settlers while still allowing them to live on their land. As Arnoldo Vento describes, “the Lord was owner of a number of natives who would become victims, along with their children, of forced labor for the rest of their lives. Its consequence was the vicious cycle of inheriting debts from one generation to another, creating a labyrinth of slavery” (49). This system exploited the labor of communities and stole resources through a type of feudal system that allowed them to remain in place, but with a heavy price. Thousands died in mines and haciendas. Importantly, the Catholic Church fully supported this system as a way to “civilize” Indigenous populations through Christianization, slave labor, and cultural colonization.

The next phase, *repartimiento*, began in the sixteenth-century and essentially functioned as *encomiando*, but was legally distinct because labor was controlled directly by the Spanish crown and not by Spanish settlers as an effort to curb the ongoing genocide. The change had little impact on the actual suffering of Indigenous communities. Hard labor in gold and silver mines, forced relocation, and disease continued to decimate populations.

The last official phase of the Spanish labor system was *hacienda*, in which settlers on occupied land employed local Indigenous populations that had been displaced. This system continues today unofficially, through the privatization of land and the exploitation of migrant Indigenous communities. No longer grounded in relation to the land, these communities found themselves de-tribalized and vulnerable to further colonization through “re-education” programs, Christianization, and exploitation.

Historically, the loss of identity had more to do with land displacement than the kind of mixed breeding romanticized by *mestizaje*. That loss of identity is the basis by which the Porfirio

dictatorship and subsequent regimes formed national Indigeneity. The loss of tribal identity signaled the end of Indigenous communities, and with that came the opportunity by those in power to claim a hegemonic Indigenous ancestry in which no one is Indigenous, and yet everyone is. If everyone is, this effectively silences the cries of Indigenous communities who are still fighting the ongoing genocide and allows the federal government to do as they wish with resources. In fact, it is quite telling that though mestizaje is purportedly an understanding of mixed ancestry, African or Asian lineages are never mentioned. Those ancestries are notably absent from discussions of mestizaje and reaffirm that the concept has more to do with the goals of blanqueamiento and the weakening of Indigenous communities for resource theft rather than providing a framework for understanding identity. Furthermore, the fact that the Spanish themselves were “already a *Mestizo* [sic] with Moorish, Roman, Phoenician, Iberian, Jewish, and Visigothic blood” further puts into question the racialization of so-called mestizos (Vento 92-93). As Revueltos notes, “In sum, mestizaje appears in Mexican history not as a racial phenomenon, but as an economic phenomenon” (224).

Alongside the material construction of mestizaje was the philosophical justification that constructed a world in which mestizaje was evident and inevitable. Early Spanish and Catholic officials used essentialism and hierarchy according to a white supremacist framework to justify their colonization of Cemenahuac and their treatment of Indigenous communities. More will be said about this in coming chapters. For now, we will just note that the early use of *calidad* as an essential distinction among people for the sake of ordering them had early roots and did not die out. It evolved and is still present in modern day instances of mestizaje.

During the politicization of mestizaje, two groups of Mexican thinkers were instrumental in the construction of mestizaje as a full ideology with philosophical implications. The first, Los Científicos, was a group of positivists thinkers that advanced a position of social evolution grounded in scientific/pseudo-scientific theory through modernization, education, and force if necessary.⁴ They advised the Porfírate (dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz), and Justo Sierra was their leading intellectual who served in various government positions, including Secretary of Public Education. El Grupo Hiperión (the Hyperion group) from the National Autonomous University of Mexico opposed the positivists in favor of an existentialism rooted in Mexican reality which would illuminate Mexico's future. Members of El Grupo included Leopoldo Zea, Jorge Portilla, Ricardo Guerra, Emilio Uranga, and Luis Villoro. José Vasconcelos, not a member of either group and rumored to have a foul personality that favored isolationism, heavily critiqued Los Científicos and began the aesthetic movement of Mexican philosophy that gave rise to El Grupo, thus serving as a link between the two schools of thought with the publication of *La Raza Cósmica* (1925). During this period of transitioning from positivism to aesthetic/existential theory, Samuel Ramos published the controversial book *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) which applied European psychoanalytic theory to the "Mexican personality". Throughout each era, the philosophy of mestizaje was promoted as a kind of social evolution, and used race as a "barometer of the health of nations and a prognosticator of potential future advancement" (Vinson 20-21).

⁴ I use the term "scientific theory" loosely here, as it was often the case that these thinkers used science as a means to promote their ideology rather than engaging with the field of science itself. Importantly, such theory was used in relation to the Mexican nation as a whole in favor of social progress and the slogan of the Porfírate was "order and progress" which had sinister undertones as it implied the eradication of Indigenous communities.

Despite the fundamental differences of theory, these schools contributed to the construction of a Mexican identity in two ways. First, by erasing living Indigenous and tribal communities in favor of a romanticized narrative of the past. Second, by equating a national Mexican identity with a delocalized Indigenous ancestry. Thus, both schools arrived at the same conclusion: we are all Indigenous because we are Mexican, and to be Mexican is to have an Indigenous past. So it is not surprising that we see the same idea echoed across thinkers:

“We Mexicans are the sons of two countries and two races. We were born of the Conquest; our roots are in the land where the aborigines lived and in the soil of Spain. This fact rules our whole history; to it we owe our soul” (Sierra 62).

“Spanish colonization created mixed races, this signals its character, fixes its responsibility, and defines its future” (Vasconcelos 17-18).

“The Indian is involved in history without knowing it. Over there and from above, mestizos and criollos decide on his roles, distribute his performances, his historical situation... This is how he ended up being the enemy of the Spaniard in light of Providence, the ally of the criollo in light of history, and of the mestizo in light of sociology” (Villoro 162-163).

The conflation of Indigenous identity, specifically Mesihka (Aztec) from which we get *Mexican*, with national identity made identity especially problematic for nortehños (northern

Mexicans) after the War of American Aggression in the mid nineteenth-century.⁵ After the annexation of lands that would later become California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, Indigenous communities found themselves in another existential quandary. No longer Mexican nationals, the American government was reluctant to acknowledge them as Americans. In many cases, local authorities refused to recognize land titles and forcibly removed communities from land in order to make way for waves of American settlers. This would be the second time that communities were displaced on a national scale, and yet kept around for labor exploitation as second-class citizens with barely recognized rights that were mostly symbolic. Norteños, who would later become called Chicanos to distinguish from the new northern Mexico below the Rio Grande river, form one of the most fractured communities after centuries of de-tribalization, de-Indigenization, land displacement, and genocide. This complex history has led to a common phrase among these communities: “Not Mexican enough for the Mexicans, not American enough for the Americans, and not Indian enough for the Indians.”

It is in this wider historical context that Gloria Anzaldúa found herself grappling with questions of identity. Ya was a modern Chicana philosopher and represents a turning point in the mestizaje conversation that began centuries prior. With the rise of the El Movimiento (Chicano movement) in the United States beginning in the 1940s and continuing today, broad coalitions of Indigenous communities have sought redress at all level of society, from school integration to higher pay and safer working conditions for migrant farmers. Amidst struggles for basic human rights and violent clashes with armed colonial forces, Anzaldúa sought to find a place in a world

⁵ Sometimes called the “Mexican-American War” in the US and “American Intervention in Mexico” in Mexico, “War of American Aggression” highlights the fact that the conflict began with the American invasion and annexation of northern Mexican territory.

that constantly displaced and erased i-community – a community twice colonized, first by the Spanish and then by the Americans, having lost language and many pieces of their culture. In the third chapter, we will look at how ya constructed identity in the face of this ongoing genocide, its engagement with the philosophical tradition of mestizaje, and i-attempt to empower Chicane communities by reframing what it means to be a mestiza. For now though, we will look at the pernicious roots of mestizaje and its connection to monstrosity.

Chapter Two: Monsters and Mestizos

At the root of the *mestizaje* is the transformation of people into monsters for the purpose of their annihilation. People are split down the middle in which one half targets the other for erasure, and only through a process of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) in which one half defeats the other can such monsters be “saved”, i.e. destroyed. To see how we got to such a point, we need to explore what it is to be a monster and the long philosophical history that built up such a fantastical story. But first, I will lay out the map of both the monster and *mestizo* so that we can track those features as they have been built up over the centuries.

A monster has three primary features: it has an impure nature by which it contaminates or an evil nature by which it physically threatens (essentialism), it is an anomaly outside the perceived natural order (hierarchy) and thus marked as deviant, and it breaks categorical distinctions as a hybrid which gives it an ambiguous identity. First, though monsters may take many varied and strange forms, they all embody either contamination or threat because it is their nature. For example, a monster may be cruel and bloodthirsty, such as in the case of a vampire. Or it might be spiritually threatening as in the case of a demon. Even those that don't intend harm can't help but do so as in the case of monstrous parasites that need host bodies to reproduce or mindless blob monsters that destroy everything they touch. The very existence of a monster causes sufferings and contaminates the world around them with impurity.

Second, a monster has no place in the natural order presupposed by the Great Chain of Being. More on this in a moment, but for now we will note that a monster is aberration of the

natural order. It's not a plant, mineral, or animal, or anything within those categories. The monster exists outside the taxonomy of science and is a shock to those who encounter it.

This second feature is a consequence of the third: it is a boundary crosser that defies strict categories through its hybridity. Take for example the modern Romero zombie. It is both alive and dead, an impossibility because what is alive can't also be dead. Those two categories are mutually exclusive, and yet the zombie occupies both as a dead-alive hybrid. Thus, the monster's identity is rooted in ambivalence.

The mestiza functions in the same fashion as a monster and parallels its construction. First, the mestizo is essentialized as having an impure nature prone to evil as we saw in chapter one. Indigenous blood makes the mestizo unpredictable and liable to fall back into "primitive idolatry" associated with cannibalistic and Satanic practices from the Christian perspective. As Vento notes, "Everyone outside the Catholic religion was considered a heretic, belonging to the domain of hell and, consequently, condemned" (55). Ironically, given the promotion of Spanish calidad as the highest and strongest virtue, Indigenous nature is so impure that the supposed mix of Spanish blood is unable to overcome it.

Second, the mestizo has no place in the natural order of racial ideology because it does not occupy a category. It is between categories, as evidenced by the casta system which we will look at more in depth later in this chapter. Briefly, mixing is an anomaly in a white supremacist taxonomy that demands purity of one's ancestry. So, the mestizo is an aberration within such a system and marks those who embody that identity for destruction.

Third, that displacement outside of the natural racial order depends on the mestizo's interstitial nature which defies strict categorical distinctions. Racial ideology dictates that races

are mutually exclusive. Yet the mestizo, like the monster, amalgamates two mutually exclusive categories as a hybrid. It is both Spanish and Indigenous in the way that a mantichora is man, lion, and scorpion. In the context of colonial racial ideology, the mestizo is an ambivalent monster – both human (Spanish) and non-human (Indigenous). So it is no surprise that the mestizo is often the target of resource theft, displacement, incarceration, oppression, and violence, because it is a liminal identity of ambiguity and hybridity that threatens the purity of the white supremacist system.

Now that we have our two concepts mapped out, let's begin with one of the earliest mentions of monstrosity in European history. The philosophical tradition of monsters and monstrosity is a long one, beginning with Aristotle who in *On the Generation of Animals* claims females to be the first monster as a deviation from the original male (Book IV, 767B, p. 75-76). This claim stems from Aristotle's metaphysics of hylomorphism, a presupposition that the world is composed of matter and form. For example, a bowl is composed of earth formed into the shape of a bowl.¹ However, 'form' for Aristotle is not merely the shape of an object. It is the essence, what it is to be, the entity or object. A statue and a person may have the same shape, but their essences are different. Such essences are tied to their capacities and functions. For the person, their capacity to imagine, walk, and digest tacos are functions not shared by the statue. Going back to the monster, Aristotle thought that a monster was a deviation of form. So what should have been a male form plus matter, went awry in the woman who was literally *malformed*. Grounding such distinctions was Aristotle's *Great Chain of Being*, in which all things were ordered from the lowest to highest forms. The lowest forms of life had simple capacities such as

¹ Aristotle believed in all matter being composed of one or more of four elements: earth, water, wind, and fire.

plants, then up to animals who had additional capacities of movement and reproduction, and then people occupied the highest position with their capacity to reason. Monsters, as malformations, were anomalies on this hierarchy and marked as dysfunctional deviants of nature.

This idea of monstrosity as deviation from nature continued with medieval Christian philosophers in Europe. They continued Aristotle's concern with taxonomy and hierarchy, but given their theological position were especially concerned with existential questions concerning the monster. In particular, they wondered why Yahweh, supposedly a benevolent and perfect creator, allowed monsters to exist at all, and if monsters truly existed outside a natural order which would imply that something had a non-divine cause. For example, to the latter question Aquinas writes "Therefore since the order of nature is given to things by God; if He does anything outside this order, it is not against nature" (Ia q.105. a.6, reply to objection 1). Confusingly, Aquinas believes that nothing exists outside Yahweh's established order but if it did then it was because Yahweh willed it to be so.

Importantly, these philosophical ideas didn't remain abstract concepts limited to ecclesiastical rhetoric. For example, we can see its influence in medicine during this period. The royal doctor Ambroise Paré who served the French monarchy during the sixteenth-century wrote *On Monsters and Marvels*, in which he states "The aforementioned ancients estimated that such marvels often come from the pure will of God, to warn us of the misfortune with which we are threatened, of some great disorder, and also that the ordinary course of Nature seemed to be twisted in such unfortunate offspring" (6). Monsters thus had a divine origin, and each entity was assigned a moral/spiritual value corresponding to their position on the hierarchy. Despite that divine origin, which Paré thinks is either to punish or demonstrate divine glory, the monster's

nature is a deviation of the nature order, i.e. twisted (3). This position was reiterated in bestiaries, which were encyclopedic texts that often conflated real animals with fantastical ones and described some animals as monsters with Satanic associations while others were associated with Christian ideals. For example, reptiles are associated with Lucifer through the parable of the snake tempting Eve and the dragon is considered the most evil of all reptiles who menaces the Christian dove.²

The early modern period of European medicine would see a return to a natural, rather than supernatural or divine explanation, of monstrosity. Medicine, breaking away from its ties with natural philosophy, sought a medical explanation of monsters and what caused abnormalities during development. Many books, articles, and journals were dedicated to such a question, and perhaps the most famous case of concern was that of Joseph Merrick who was dubbed “the elephant man”. Merrick was born unremarkable, but as he aged developed hard lumps that engorged his entire body. His body became the site of medical debates ranging from maternal impression theory in which the mother’s mental states influenced the development of a fetus, to hybridism in which an unnatural coupling was assumed to have taken place (implying that Merrick’s mother was impregnated by an elephant) (Agnell 144-145). However, such debates still assumed a deviant nature in which something had gone awry. In this respect, these discussions were indistinguishable from the earlier positions of Aristotle and medieval theologians and philosophers.

It has only been recently in the modern period that philosophers abandoned thinking of monsters in terms of deviants of the natural order, and became concerned with understanding

² *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*: <https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast262.htm>

monsters in relation to human atrocity. In *Less than Human* (2011) and *Making Monsters* (2021), David Livingstone Smith associates the monsterization of people with a specific kind of de-humanization as a way to understanding how genocides occur. He notes that while essentialism and hierarchy act to de-humanize, the additional quality of ambivalence plays an important role in monsterization because it disturbs the natural order presumed by a specific view of the world. That ambivalence creates anomalies in the world order, and “these anomalous things are experienced as powerful and dangerous, and must therefore be segregated, marginalized, controlled, or destroyed” (*Making* 249). To understand this extreme reaction, we must understand what kind of threat the monstrous human embodies.

Monsterizing is a process that makes people simultaneously human and not human, not merely deviant humans (which would still be human) or non-human (simply de-humanized). This is an important point, because these are three different types. The deviant human would still be recognized as human despite exhibiting deviance, for example dressing or behaving in a non-normative way. The non-human includes things like animals, baked goods, and books but none of these things are inherently threatening. The third kind however, is inherently threatening to the human experience. We can’t fail to see people as human in the sense that one belongs to our species. Our brains are hardwired to recognize people as such, even to the point of recognizing a human face in a tortilla. But through essentialization and hierarchy, we are able to associate people as non-human entities. We characterize them as having a quality not typically associated with the epitome of human, and rank such people as below that standard. For example, associating people with a vermin-like impurity has the effect of making them non-human because people aren’t categorically vermin (insects, rats, etc.). Yet they are clearly human bodies.

So this strange thing happens in which such monsterized people are simultaneously on one place in the hierarchy (the human position) and on another place in the hierarchy (the non-human position), which effectively writes them off the natural order entirely as an anomaly. They are human and yet below the human standard, they are *less than human*.

This ambivalence invokes a kind of horror and disgust that seeks to eradicate the threat. We don't target non-human species for genocide or invest in the kind of institutional power needed to justify their eradication. Yet this is precisely what we do with groups of people deemed less than human. This kind of reaction is the bread and butter of horror films, and parallels the reaction of monsterized people in real life. For example, consider the different reactions garnered between a fly and the protagonist of *The Fly* (1958) who is mutated with fly DNA. It is the ambivalent nature of the protagonist who is simultaneously human and non-human that elicits the horror of those around him and warrants eradication. The fly, strictly non-human, is incidental.

This kind of border crossing is one of core features of the monster. Noël Carroll notes "Horrific creatures are impure...the most basic structures for representing horrific creatures are combinatory in nature" (43). Monsters are categorical violations that blend normalized distinctions assumed in a particular world view. We will see that such ambivalence is not only present in *mestizaje*, it is highlighted as a key feature of that identity. Under the colonial system of white supremacy, such an identity becomes a target of oppression and annihilation much in the same way that the ambivalent monster becomes the target of the villagers with their torches and pitchforks.

Importantly, the human imagination plays a role in the monsterization of people as something ambivalently human and yet not-human. While people may look human, they are imagined to be boundary crossers that are associated with non-human categories. As Stephen Asma, another philosopher interested in questions of the monster, notes “The racist person imagines that the human form before him is more like an animal or an insect than a brother” (259). Someone must distort reality by imagining fictional taxonomies in which people as monsters, those less than human, can be placed (Asma 263). This process involves creating a less than human nature that is imposed on real people. For example, by imagining that a group of people is more bug-like and possessing an impure nature that infests the world in the same way that cockroaches infest an apartment building. Logically and literally we know that people aren’t cockroaches, and yet the mind of the racist/xenophobic will perform magical feats of the imagination to superimposed this identity onto human beings. The end result being the creation of a monster, usually with horrific consequences for the people targeted by such a dark mind.

This process occurs with the mestiza, who has specific taxonomies and an ambivalent identity projected onto *ya* by the colonial imagination that constructs the world according to white supremacists fantasies. First, this “mix” is not qualitatively equal.³ Each part of the combination is assumed to have a different nature, one being superior to the other. The Indigenous part is assumed to be of a lower nature (almost atavistic), while the European part embodies the quintessential human. This juxtaposition of two natures occurs throughout European and Mexican philosophy. For example, el Científico Justo Sierra wrote in *The Political*

³ One key part of mestizaje as a type of racial mixing, is an old concept of heredity called “blending inheritance theory”. Such a theory misunderstands inheritance as a kind of blending in which the “hereditary contribution of each parent dissolves and merges, as dye mixes into water, uniformly” (Porter 125). This view is scientifically unsound and yet remains popular among racial theorists. Because of the scope of this project, I can only note the influence of blending theory on the construction of mestizaje and its roots in a flawed biological understanding.

Evolution of the Mexican People, “We need to attract immigrants from Europe so as to obtain a cross with the indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization that has produced our nationality from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution” (368). Here Sierra worries that after the initial infusion of European *calidad* post-invasion, Indigeneity might rear its primitive head again and therefore it’s necessary to keep the steady flow of superior European blood coming. Not only is European nature needed to elevate Indigeneity, it is needed to keep it at bay. We can see what positions on the Great Chain of Being the European and the Indigenous each occupy from the colonial position.

This idea, that Indigenous people are inherently diminished in some way, implies a kind of impurity. As we saw in chapter one, mestizos are thought to embody impurity and threaten the spaces they occupy by potentially relapsing into Indigeneity. It is Indigeneity itself that anchors this threat and Luis Villoro expands this idea through a discussion of the forsaken Indigenous identity. The Indigenous, evil and impure as it is, must be relegated to the past so that “it does not harbor any evil” (159). In other words, Indigeneity must be ahistorical, something of a romanticized past that is never looked through the lens of actual past or current communities. To do so would bring Indigeneity, and the threat it harbors, too close. This idea is widespread in a popular culture that fetishizes the Indigenous yet refuses to acknowledge the presence of actual Indigenous people still currently living under colonial oppression. While the Mexica calendar can be found in gift shops around the world, actual Mexica people are still fighting for sovereignty against colonial oppression. This distancing of “the primitive Indian” that should remain in a mythological past is a colonial tool used against all Indigenous people. You can buy an Anishinaabe spider charm or “dream catcher” at your local gas station, but would be hard

pressed to locate the nearest tribe or know anything about them. In each case, the Indigenous is something removed from the daily reality of the present to be thought of a-historically and packaged to sell. As Villoro states, the reason for this need to distance Indigeneity is the essentialized nature attributed to them that threatens to contaminate colonial spaces. It is therefore no accident that colonial authorities fear the “dirty Mexican” who is viewed as “filthy, unsanitary, their habits repulsive” under the guise of germ theory (Vento 183). Similarly, such impurity is categorically expressed through the view that Mexicans as mestizos have “an inborn tendency to criminal behavior and to crimes of violence” (Vento 185). Such rhetoric dominates American discussions concerned with anti-immigrant positions, border control politics, and cultural obsession with narcos. While colonial ideology voices the horrors of the primitive and savage Indian who threatens civilization, a more accurate reason for mythologizing Indigeneity is that not doing so would bring the realities of genocide (and the relationships of power and oppression inherent therein) too close to home.

Alongside such discourse denigrating Indigeneity, European *calidad* is aggrandized. Philosophers like José Vasconcelos and Samuel Ramos thought that Europeans brought reason and “civilization” to Anahuac. For example, Ramos believed that the introduction of European thought brought so-called Hispanic Americans to the highest social evolutionary level they could aspire to and that their “spiritual growth would have been impossible without the nourishment of

European culture” (76).⁴ Elsewhere ya claims, “We shall never be able to decipher the mysteries of our being unless we can illuminate its depths with a guiding ideal that can come only from Europe” (107). In other words, the reason and culture of Europeans (which Ramos takes to be evidence of psychological/spiritual superiority) allowed the mestizo/Indigenous to flower intellectually –assuming they could not and did not before the invasion. Indigenous were/are viewed as incapable of reason and without the capacity to build “civilized” societies. In fact, Ramos repeatedly questions the ability of thought in Indigenous and Mexican persons. The Spanish however, are viewed with a superior nature that allowed them to develop above the Indigenous and construct complicated social institutions. So while the Indigenous remains in a state of nature without civilization and reason, the Spanish represent the full development of those markers of civilization.

Not only does this position echo Aristotle’s hierarchy, it echoes the justification of that hierarchy. Going back to the capacities of entities as the means to position them on the hierarchy, Aristotle believed that the highest function was reason and that only humans possessed such a capacity. Sometimes dubbed the “reasoning soul”, anything without it was automatically given a lower status in the Great Chain of Being. The conflation of reason and soul, and the consequences of such, will be addressed later. For now, it’s important to note that the doubt cast on Indigenous people’s inability to reason put them in a less than human category. Without the

⁴ Throughout *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934), Ramos qualifies his statements and implores the reader not to believe that the psychological/spiritual inferiority of the Mexican is a real or innate inferiority, but rather the result of historical circumstances. However, ya repeatedly undermines his own position by appealing to essential differences between the European and the Mexican, in particular the Indigenous person, as the result of “disproportionate magnitude[s] of nature” (56). Ramos believes the Mexican/Indigenous person possesses no culture and a “spiritual void” by virtue of being Mexican/Indigenous (111-113). In fact, ya seems to blame the Indigenous person for being unable to escape such a nature and for contaminating the rest of the population with their “primitivism” (75). Furthermore, his anti-essentialist position is contradicted by essentialist claims. For example, that Mexicans are the “most romantic race on earth” (135).

core defining feature of humanity (according to Aristotle), the humanity of Indigenous people was questioned.⁵

The core feature of mestizo identity is its hybridity. The mestizo is a mix of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry ostensibly, yet doesn't seem to be either of them. How is it possible to be something and yet not be that thing? Before answering that question, it would be helpful to differentiate between a mixture, which the mestizo supposedly is, and hybridity, what it actually is. A mixture is a blended substance constituted by mixing other substances in order to form something new. For example, we mix flour, eggs, milk, and so forth to make a cake. Each ingredient on its own won't give us a cake, but they come together and make something new by losing their uniqueness as an ingredient.

On the other hand, a hybrid is a made by combining different elements into a whole yet each part doesn't lose its original identity. For example, a manticore is a hybrid of a lion, scorpion, and man. Those three elements don't blend to make something new, though they do produce a new entity in combination. While "mix" and "hybrid" may be used interchangeably in daily rhetoric, I reserve the term "mix" only when blending occurs.

So is a mestizo a mix or a hybrid? While it may seem that mestizo is a mix because it produces a new entity through blending, it functions and is treated as a hybrid. Let's return to our cake and manticore examples to see this distinction. When I have my cake, I'm unable to pick out the individual ingredients that it is comprised of. Yet in the case of the manticore, I can point to its human head, its lion body, and its scorpion tail. While it may seem that I'm unable to point

⁵ One way this view has expressed itself historically, the conflation of reason with hierarchical status, is the name given to the elite Criollo class who control land through the exploitative cacique/hacienda system: "gente de razón" (people of reason) (Vento 161). The Indigenous, as people without reason, continue to be viewed as intellectually limited and pose a particular problem for colonial public education systems that characterize the population as "non-achieving" (Vento 196).

to the mestizo's various parts, after all I can't point to the Spanish or Indigenous ingredient of a person, we point to ancestry through the proxies of culture and physiognomy as was discussed in chapter one. For example, when we wish to highlight Spanish ancestry, we point to language and evidence of European influence. When we wish to highlight Indigenous ancestry, we point to features of the body like facial features, hair, and skin color. This makes the concept of mestizo slippery. I may claim it is a mix if I'm thinking in biological terms according to blending inheritance theory, but you may claim hybridity by thinking in terms of culture or racialized features. In this way, the mestizo moves across boundaries of culture and race to be both Spanish and Indigenous and yet neither because it is a new mixture all together.

That a mestizo contains two conflicting essential natures, one of the virtuous Spanish human and the other an impure Indigenous sub-human, generates a complicated hybrid identity. Such hybridity, or more specifically the ideology of hybridity, is demonstrated in the colonial racial caste system (*casta*)— a complex socio-racial system that eventually evolved into the more simplistic and homogenized *mestizaje* racial concept. The *casta* reflected a “pluralized understanding of socio-racial complexity” that tracked culture, religion, and the perceived elements of Blackness, Indigeneity, and Whiteness (Vinson 35-36). Though historians debate the degree to which the *casta* system governed the lives of people in colonial Anahuac and how rigid the system was, we don't need the legal specifics in order to know what the *ideal* racial system was envisioned to be by the colonial powers. As we saw in chapter one, there were legal and social sanctions that ranked *calidad* and governed the lives of mestizos based on their proximity to whiteness.

Mexican and Spanish paintings during the eighteenth-century depict vivid racial hierarchies in which the whitest Europeans occupy top positions while the darkest Indigenous occupy the bottom tiers. For example, a painting by Ignacio Maria Barreda in 1777 depicts sixteen racial groups ranked in such a hierarchy. The seventeenth group, completely Indigenous, is depicted outside the ranking system at the bottom of the painting in a stereotyped state of nature denoting “savage” and outside the natural order of humanity. The mestizo groups occupy the middle of these racial hierarchies, and range from the lightest tan at the top to dark brown at the bottom. It is the strength, determined by abundance, of their Indigeneity that pulls them towards the bottom, and the strength of their Spanish-ness that floats them towards the top. Each part, Indigenous and Spanish, is tied to a different nature and it is the prevalence of each component that determines the rank of the hybrid in the racial system. Returning to our manticore example, if there is more lion than human or scorpion one might suppose that the creature is a lion with the head of a man and the tail of a scorpion. However, if the body was a scorpion with the head of a man and the mane of a lion one would be inclined to think of the creature as a scorpion with a strange head. Likewise, each component of the hybrid determines the overall quality of the whole depending on the relative quantity of each part.

We’ve seen how essentialism functioned in respect to the parts of the mestiza and how hierarchy generated a rank system, but what was the general attitude towards the mestiza as a whole? Emilio Uranga laments the melancholy of the mestizo characterized by sentimentality and fragility in the face of “the threat of falling into non-being” (167). The mixture is inferior because it is caught up in its own accidental nature, which leads to the condition of *zozobra*. Both an epistemological and phenomenological concept, it likens one’s being to the tilting of a

boat back and forth. Just as a boat pitches on the waves because of tumultuous water, a person vacillates back and forth between precarious worlds (concepts, knowledge, norms, etc.).

Alluding to the precarious position of being a new race due to forces beyond control, the combination of Indigenous and Spanish through conquest and genocide, Uranga believed that the mestizo was in a constant state of existential crisis and thus paralyzed. As accidents, they “do not experience themselves as having relatively stable or unified packages of commitments about norms, values, and meanings” (Vargas 394). On the one hand, mestizos seem to have packages available: Spanish values, Indigenous values, models of behavior from both cultures, etc. Yet, those packages don’t seem to work in present circumstances.⁶ Mexico is not Spain, and given the trajectory of colonization the Indigenous packages weren’t valid forms of reference under the oppressive nationalist system. So mestizos were/are in this ambiguous existence in which they are constantly being undermined as to the nature of their reality. This, Uranga believed, turned Mexican mestizos into melancholic existentialists who assimilated into nationalism with either malinchismo (Europeanness) or indigenismo (Indigenousness), and either way negated their being for fear of non-being (the condition of *zozobra*). On this account, mestizos are viewed as ontologically incomplete because they lack substance (stable experiences).

Jorge Portilla builds on Uranga’s work, but softens the latter’s position. Rather than an accidental nature that suggests incompleteness and instability, Portilla suggests that fragility constitutes the life of the Mexican. Fragile, because our lives are affected by things beyond our control. Ya concludes that acutely aware of this fragility, Mexicans tend towards introversion, rumination and “are existentialists from birth” (186). By embodying two conflicting parts, one

⁶ Importantly, Uranga believed that philosophy should arise from present conditions and ya was writing with mid-twentieth century Mexico in mind.

superior and one inferior, the mestizo is against themselves and constantly in conflict. That conflict constitutes a fragile nature stemming from a confluence of historical forces, and exists in a state that fears further interference. Such tension makes the mestizo self-defeating because its parts are in competition to overcome one another, and this liminal identity makes one an incomplete being. This kind of incompleteness through hybridity lends itself to ambiguity as a neither-this, neither-that, almost-this, almost-that. As noted earlier, ambiguity is a key marker of the monster and is the source of its threatening power. Straddling boundaries as an ambiguous entity is a dangerous business in the context of white supremacy that demands purity and eradicates border crossing, literally and figuratively.

We've deconstructed the mestiza into its three features, and seen how those features parallel the three features of a monster: impure (evil) natures and ambiguous hybridity that threaten the natural order imposed by a specific world view. But there may still be some doubt as to how closely intertwined these two concepts were and are in the mind of white supremacist. To remove such doubt, we now turn to an example of the colonial-minded philosopher with explicit genocidal aims whose thinking was/is widely shared by white supremacists: Juan Gines de Sepulveda.

Sepulveda supported the Spanish crown's right to colonize on the basis of inferiority of Indigenous people. Ya wrote that among the Indigenous, "you will scarcely find any vestiges of humanness. These people possess neither science nor even an alphabet, nor do they preserve any monuments of their history...nor do they have written laws, but barbarous institutions and customs" (1). Sepulveda goes on to describe the Indigenous as cannibals and pagans who worship false idols, common accusations made by colonial Europeans to demonize Indigenous

populations (2). Should they not submit to Spain's "just war" in the name of Yahweh, they are to be annihilated Sepulveda advised.

Sepulveda grants them little humanity. Ya gives as evidence for their lack of reasoning capacity a dearth of science and social institutions, even basic language. Given his expertise on Aristotle (which includes translations and commentaries), it is not a stretch of the imagination to think that ya was familiar with Aristotelian definitions of humanity and the prioritization of the reasoning soul in the chain of being. Because of their lack of humanity, i.e. reasoning, the Spanish are justified in controlling, managing, and slaughtering the people of Anahuac.

It is very telling that Sepulveda "scarcely" acknowledges the humanity of the Indigenous. Remember that this is one of the key features in the process of monsterizing people. A person is simultaneously a human in the technical sense, and yet essentialized as a non-human through the imagination. Resulting in a less-than human monster. We can see ambivalence of monstrosity in operation because rather than categorizing Indigenous people as either human or non-human, Sepulveda is attributing a *sub-human* (less than human) nature to Indigenous people. All the things that one needs to be fully human according to Sepulveda, such as language, history, and science, the Indigenous lack.⁷ Yet Sepulveda is invested in their conversion to Christianity, something he presumably won't be so invested in if they weren't human. Christian missionaries have neglected chickens, cows, and fish in their proselytizing so far. Humanity exists in some fashion within Indigenous people, and yet they are not considered human. The explanation is that they are given a sub-human nature through their hybridity in the manner discussed earlier and laid out by David Livingstone Smith. Sepulveda was/is not alone in this position. As the scholar

⁷ This is of course not true, and points to the willing ignorance of one with ulterior motives who chooses to discard any evidence contrary to one's goals.

Roberto Cintli Rodríguez notes, the reduction of Indigenous people to sub-human entities prone to evil was/is pervasive:

[A]ll things Indigenous were reduced by Spanish friars to being evil and Satanic, including Indigenous narrative histories and cosmovision. The codices, murals, and architecture were burned, destroyed, discredited, or badly misinterpreted throughout the entire three-hundred-year colonial era – though actually the misinterpretations continue (19).

As for the Spanish, Sepulveda goes on to compare the virtuous good Spanish who possess fortitude, humanity, and a love of justice and religion, with the ignorant and immoral “savage” (1). Whereas the Indigenous are painted as sub-human entities with evil natures, the Spanish are lauded as the epitome of humanness through traditional virtues. If the Spanish are fully human and the standard by which to judge, then the Indigenous fail to meet this standard and are less-than human rather than non-human. After all, when comparing a love of justice/legal institutions one doesn’t compare people with chickens.

Importantly, we should note that though Sepulveda uses cultural markers as evidence of humanity or lack thereof, ya is not merely denigrating Indigenous culture. One could theoretical hate a particular culture while still believing that those individuals are human and granted all the courtesies, dignities, and rights therein. Nor is one committed to the belief that such a culture is characterized by essential biology. Rather, Sepulveda is first claiming that such communities lack humanity and pointing to what ya takes to be evidence of that fact. Ya begins with a specific

belief and then uses ad hoc reasoning to justify that belief. Furthermore, ya believes that the lack characterized by negative *calidad* is biological and inherent.

This is the position of what Jane Caputi calls “the foundational fantasy” from which all other beliefs about the world stem: “the colonizers imagine themselves as clean, advanced, white, pure, and progressive and those they subjugate, exploit, foist their psychological waste upon, and *depend upon* [emphasis original] for sustenance as foul, dirty, smelly, dark, and backward” (306-307). From this position, one is forced to create a false dichotomy between the pure and impure with devastating consequences. As Caputi notes, for “all those who are seen to embody these—*cleansing* [emphasis original] emerges as the most apt metaphor for genocide” (377). We can see Sepulveda make this move when ya contrasts the pure Spanish with the impure Indigenous. What does one do with impurity? Control it and make it go away in the same manner one does with trash or sewage in order to keep a space pure. Horrifically, it’s the case that the trash Sepulveda wants to eradicate are people.

One might wish to be charitable to Sepulveda and point out that by definition, even if only technically (scarcely) acknowledging the humanity of Indigenous people Sepulveda must recognize their capacity of reason. Ya began with the colonization project and ended with the genocidal one, so Sepulveda appears to treat them as a kind of not-fully human in the way one might think of a child who needs to be managed in order to bring out their full capacity. Many philosophers of the period speaking from the abolitionist position often took such a paternal approach. Perhaps Sepulveda is just an extreme and authoritarian father.

First, I would point to the unreasonableness of such thinking: an entire category of people are not fully formed humans. One is assigning an inherently diminished capacity (or lack of

capacity) to millions without any evidence and with the potential consequence of genocide. That is quite a gamble to make on some one else's behalf.

Second, as I noted earlier one can think of a person as both human and non-human. In fact, Aristotle believed one could be technically human without being fully human because one lacking reasoning capacity. Ya thought that such people were born to be slaves: “for he that can foresee with his mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and he that can do these things with his body is subject and naturally a slave” (*Politics* I.1252a). The latter kind of individuals lacked the reasoning soul (they are unable to use their mind) and therefore weren't human in the full Aristotelian sense. Yet they were somehow still human because the slave had a human body. Such contradiction (ambiguity) is built into the Aristotelian position of who is a natural slave and it is in all likelihood that Sepulveda held such a view given his commentary on Indigenous people. That position motivates his monsterization of Indigenous people and is the same move. Being “technically” acknowledged as human does nothing for those who are simultaneously imagined to be non-human because what you get is a monster of the imagination.

Speaking of paternalism, why chose an example like Sepulveda over someone like Bartolomé de Las Casas? These two prominent Catholic philosophers took different positions over Spain's domination of Indigenous communities in Cemenahuac. Sepulveda, as noted above, believed the virtuous Spanish were given a Catholic mission by Yahweh to dominate the “savages” by any force necessary. De Las Casas on the other hand, saw Spanish domination not only as harmful to the Catholic project of Christianizing the natives, but also as detrimental to the spiritual wellbeing of the Spanish. Ya portrays Indigenous communities as “naturally gende [gentle], so peace-loving, so humble and so docile” and at the mercy of those who “drench the

Americas in human blood” for the sake of “stealing treasures beyond compare” (6-7). While both Sepulveda and de Las Casas advocated for Christianization, their methods differed extremely and the latter was one of the few official voices that spoke out against Spanish atrocities, albeit from a patronizing and paternalistic position.⁸

I give space to Sepulveda for two reasons. First, i-position is explicit about the kind of racism that characterized Spanish colonization over other kinds like the northern British version. Sepulveda’s view is foundational to understanding how mestizaje functioned in colonial New Spain and the ground it lay for future versions of mestizaje. The Spanish crown actively promoted mestizaje as a way of Christianizing Indigenous communities, while simultaneously maintaining a strict classism related to notions of “calidad” or quality from lineage. As Joanne Rappaport notes in *The Disappearing Mestizo*, middle and upper class mestizas were carefully married to Spaniards “in the belief that over the course of several generations indigenous blood would be entirely diluted –“redeemed” –by Spanish blood” (133). While British colonialism maintained strict racialized boundaries towards a vision of racial purity, Spanish colonialism diluted those boundaries as a way to “conquer” racialized communities through generations of biological white-washing. Key to Spanish colonialism was the belief in the inherent defect of Indigeneity which is not present in de Las Casas’ paternalistic position. In order for us to get a

⁸ It’s important not to glorify de Las Casas however. Not only did ya adopt a patronizing paternalist attitude towards Indigenous communities, ya also suggested the importation of enslaved African people as a means to shore up an increasingly diminishing Indigenous population for the purposes of colonial economic exploitation (Paulino 14). At one point de Las Casas even owned slaves. While de Las Casas spoke out against the oppression of Indigenous people (often remarking that the cruelty of Spanish soldiers/settlers were inspired by the devil) and recognized their ability to reason (thus granting them humanity), ya did not think they were equal to the Christian Spanish. De Las Casas believed they required management in order to be converted to Christianity. Even then, they would need to be controlled lest they fall back into worshipping “idols”. He was in favor of the colonization of Indigenous populations.

better understanding of mestizaje, we need to look at the ideological thinking that reflects such conditions.

For example, this type of essentialism can be seen in the way a nursing mother's milk, viewed as a kind of blood, was perceived depending on the colonial taxonomy. Such "blood" had the potential to pass on essential characteristics even if the child was not born from the mother, and that's why Guaman Poma cautioned Criollos that infants "fed with the milk of Indian or black women, or the aforementioned mestizos [or] mulattos, are angry and arrogant, lazy, liars, gamblers, miserly, of little charity, contemptible, [and] deceitful" (539). Guaman Poma was not alone in this belief and Fray Reginaldo de Lizárraga writes that when a Criollo infant is born "he is handed over to a dirty, lying Indian or a black woman, who nurses him...How will this boy turn out? He will get his inclinations from the milk he drank...He who drinks a liar's milk is a liar, he who drinks a drunkard's milk is a drunkard, he who drinks a thief's milk is a thief" (101).⁹ Negative *calidad* was viewed as inherent in one's blood and passed on, whether through birth or ingestion. As was good *calidad* characterized by virtuous Christian-Spanish blood. Such is the view that Sepulveda and other prominent colonial scholars held, and which overwhelmingly reflected the colonial world of New Spain.

Thus, Sepulveda provides us with clearer picture of the motivations and ideology that led to centuries of specific legal and economic systems. Indigenous communities were viewed as inferior sub-humans populations to be exploited for their labor and resources. As far as Sepulveda was concerned, their Christianization was an added bonus but not necessary for the

⁹ The irony of course is that many enslaved Indigenous and African women had no choice. One can only imagine the horror and despair as these women were forced to nurse the children of their oppressors while watching their own infants starve to death, and then suffering the indignity of these essentialists beliefs.

divine right of subjugation given to the Spanish crown. We can see this position in the various iterations of the encomienda system that followed in the centuries after the initial invasion. Were we to focus on someone like de Las Casas, whose position represented a minority voice, we risk losing sight of this fact in the way that someone looking into our current century would misunderstand the dominant ideas that govern American racist institutions and their material impact if they read anti-racist philosophers assuming these ideas had equal power. Given that the particular Catholic mission system of Cemenahuac began with labor exploitation and the enslavement of local populations, rather than their supposed spiritual well-being, our analysis should reflect that history and Sepulveda gives us that particular insight.

Importantly, though mestizos are supposedly made better through European blood the label “mestizo” carried a derogatory connotation during the early colonial period. Because they often occupied intermediary positions between communities, such as translators and hacienda supervisors, the socio-racial category became synonymous with “abuser” (Rappaport 89). Furthermore, they carried the “savage” essence of Indigeneity without its romantic idealism of the “noble savage”. This was especially true when viewed in the context of colonial law. The calidad of particular classes, such as mestizos, Indigenous and Africanx people, was believed to make them more prone to criminal activity (Rappaport 222). Calidad was noted in judicial documents because it was taken to be evidence as for or against someone’s case. Notably, it is the fear of impurity that wins out. The “Spanish blood” does nothing for the mestiza despite all the talk about its noble and purifying qualities when it came to trials under colonial law.

The monsterization of Indigenous identity is something tacitly acknowledged and carried in the heart of every Chicane person. One of the ways we express it is in the popular mythology

of la Llorona which makes explicit the connection between the monster and mestizo as impure/evil entities. Artists, writers, and scholars alike have made such a connection and express the pain of being made a monster through la Llorona. For example, in *Llorona Coyolxauhqui* Gloria Anzaldúa writes “I am the daughter of La Llorona and I am La Llorona herself, I am the monster’s child and monstrous” (2009 295).

La Llorona is often used in conjunction with or as a stand in for Malintzin, discussed in chapter one. Though the legend of La Llorona varies by community, ya is always an Indigenous woman whose mixed children are killed in some way and as a consequence is forced to roam the earth looking for them. Variations include killing the children i-self out of revenge after finding out i-partner was already married to a Spanish woman, the children being killed by the Spanish man in order to tie up loose ends before marrying a Spanish woman, and the children being killed by Llorona’s tribal village because they are “illegitimate”.¹⁰ Variations also include ya killing i-self or being killed. All stories end with Llorona searching endlessly for i-children, snatching up any children ya can find, and terrorizing men who drink too much or abuse their partners.

Both La Llorona and Malintzin are women that met with an ill-fate in association with the Spanish invaders, and are seen as traitors to their people by virtue of producing mixed children with Spanish men. It is this act of mixing, and the ambiguity therein, that marks them as monsters: La Llorona as a child-snatching ghost and Malintzin as a Judas-like figure that causes a genocide. Their ambiguous children are monstrous, in that they are the embodiment of trauma

¹⁰ Given that few Indigenous communities in the early colonial period performed Christian marriages, this version is questionable and most likely evidence of narrative influence from the position of assimilated Spanish communities. La Llorona’s tribe would have no reason to kill i-children and it was common for “mixed” children to live with their mother’s tribe.

and genocide. Anzaldúa notes that this kind of projection of fear is often targeted at children, who are reshaped into evil entities through association (2009 88). “Malinche”, the Spanish spelling of Malintzin, has come to mean traitor and is used derogatorily. Rather than viewing ya as an enslaved person with little agency trying to survive, Malintzin is viewed as the self-serving traitor that doomed a continent and produced bastard children. Similarly, mestizas are seen as embodying this original sin and are thereby viewed as entities tainted with evil that both produce their communities through birthing future generations and destroy them by birthing more mixed “bastard” children. The Chicana, being impure in the eyes of colonialism and i-colonized community, passes along such impurity to future offspring; ya is imagined to beget monsters. Anzaldúa notes how this type of self-hatred and internalized racism breaks apart communities:

There have always been those of us who have “cooperated” with the colonizers. It’s not that we have been “won” over by the dominant culture, but that it has exploited preexisting power relations of subordinations and subjugation within our native societies. The Great White Ripoff—and they are still cashing in. Like our exploiters who fixate on the inferiority of the natives, we fixate on the fucked-upness of our sisters. Like them we try to impose our version of “the ways things should be”; we try to impose one’s self on the Other by making her the recipient of one’s negative elements, usually the same ones that the Anglo projected on us. Like them, we project our self-hatred on her; we stereotype her; we make her generic (Keating 112).

Indigenous women in Chicane communities are imbued with a kind of essentialism that strips them of their subjectivity and imposes upon them a twisted identity that is taken to be the source of community suffering. They are “fucked-up” in the sense that they are the embodiment of La Llorona/Malintzin to their communities, and they “fucked-up” to colonizer/settler communities for their being non-white women who can be targeted for abuse and exploitation. This kind of projection mirrors the various levels of violation that communities, women in particular, were/are forced to endure. One that is physical, cultural, and spiritual:

One of the reasons for this hostility among us is the forced cultural penetration, the rape of the colored by the white, with the colonizers depositing their perspective, their language, their values in our bodies. External oppression is paralleled with our internalization of the oppression, and our acting out from the oppression. They have us doing to those within our own ranks what they have done and continue doing to us—Othering people. That is, isolating them, pushing them out of the herd, ostracizing them. The internalization of negative images of ourselves, our self-hatred, poor self-esteem, makes our own people the Other (Keating 112).

External oppression constricts communities to submit, and under such constraint communities internalize that oppression which results in the further constraint of certain individuals which are

Othered.¹¹ Machismo, the particular form of misogyny that Mexican/Chicana patriarchy takes, is exercised on the bodies of women as catharsis for the violence inflicted by colonizers on those same communities. Women, as the fucked-up Other, is a threat to be managed through control and abuse. As such, the Chicana is reduced to that which is the ultimate obsession of patriarchy to control and abuse: the cunt. Caputi writes, “The idolization of the phallus has dire effects linked to both misogyny and violence, causing many men to scapegoat women as revolting, profane, and the ‘most low’ and to allot to despised men that same fate, deeming them ‘bitches,’ ‘pussies,’ and ‘cunt’” (374). By holding the white man (and his virile colonizing phallus) as the standard for pure humanity, the brown woman becomes the impure monster. From both inside and outside the community, the Chicana is objectified and the target of violence; from employers and fathers, to teachers and uncles, friends and husbands, and yes, even mothers and sisters who’ve internalized such hatred for the mestiza as a monster to be despised. So, it is no wonder that Malintzin, the mother of those communities, has been made into the monster La Llorona said to haunt and take the very children ya produces. It is also no surprise that between 35-50% of Chicanas (and other Hispanicized Indigenous women varying by community) have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.¹²

Before we move onto the next chapter, let me deal with a two objections. First, proponents of mestizaje are quick to point to the benefits of mestizo identity. For example, it’s claimed that this mixed identity allowed Indigenous identity to transform and thereby survive in

¹¹ In response to an interview question about rifts within communities, Anzaldúa replied “The underlying cause is systemic racism and internalized racism. The in-fighting manifests itself as verbal and emotional violence. What’s particular about this violence is that it doubles back on itself. Instead of joining forces to fight imperialism we’re derailed into fighting with each other, into maneuvering for power positions” (Keating 285).

¹² National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010) <https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf>

a system that sought its eradication. This position, per Vasconcelos, will claim that mestizaje is the opposite of monstrosity because it is an evolutionary step. A common symbol of this process used in the Mexican/Chicane community is the Virgen de Guadalupe. For example, Alma Zaragoza-Petty writes in *Chingona* (2022):

I think, too, of Tonantzin, the divine mother of the Mexicas and Nahua people, who reinvented herself as the Virgin Mary and appeared to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, a Chichimec peasant, in the sixteenth century. In doing so, Tonantzin, who some know as Our Lady of Guadalupe, brought hope and faith amid forced religion conversion. She still inspires Indigenous people to claim hope in the middle of occupation and conquest. For many, Tonantzin and the Virgin of Guadalupe are one and the same. Just like La Malinche and Tonantzin, chingonas survive unspeakable harm and live to tell about it. They become nepantleras: boundary-crossers, border-dwellers (11-12).

The story of the Lady of Guadalupe begins with Indigenous peasant who saw the Christian virgin Mary who asked that a church be built in i-honor. Importantly, Mary appeared as a mestiza and the site on which the church was to be built was the former site of a Mexica temple dedicated to Coatlicue – the mother creator. This narrative is taken to illustrate the way that Indigenous identity and history survived through syncretism, and that in fact such evolution is given as natural or with divine sanction. Furthermore, so the reasoning goes, la Virgen gives communities hope for a better future.

My response is that it's not clear that Indigenous identity survived at all. Taken from another perspective, the story of la Virgen illustrates how Indigeneity is erased through appropriation and cooption. Whenever Indigenous people try to enact spiritual authority, it is done so in the context of a disorienting colonial reality. To think that the imposed metaphysical worldview of a Christian authority that holds a dualistic and essentialist view has no deleterious effect is not only naive, it is dangerous. As Audre Lorde notes, "In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change" (53). What advocates of mestizaje promote as synergy, is actually a spiritual distortion that undermines Indigenous agency so as to hamper efforts of resistance and sovereignty.

Second, while I'm not disputing that there is a relationship between narrative and reality, whatever that might be, more tangible evidence from current communities would be needed to illustrate that the supposed benefits of mestizaje outweigh its consequences. One could easily think of numerous disadvantages and material consequences to being labeled mestizo. For example, decades after the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed in 1848 the US refused to recognize the rights of mestizos to naturalize because "the road to U.S. citizenship had Black and white lanes only. Mexicans were neither." (Hernández 100). It wasn't until 1897 that a federal judge recognized that right, even though it had been required by the Treaty. During this time, many were driven from their homes or outright murdered because mestizos were viewed as "half breeds not adequate for assimilation into a superior Anglo-Saxon dominant group (Vento 158). No amount of rhetorical devices or compelling narratives can cover up the facts of mestizaje's history nor its deadly consequences.

Third, this position often relies on assumptions of the future without providing any evidence or reason to believe in such a future. Vasconcelos claimed that people would evolve to only select the most aesthetically pleasing partners, without saying why; or what those features would be and what makes them so pleasing. La Virgen story likewise promises a beautiful future without any explanation, and tells ardents to cling to hope that such a future awaits them. While I will not reject the right of oppressed communities to hold hope sacred, in whatever form they can find in the midst of despair, I also believe they deserve more than narratives. They also deserve material conditions that give them safety and allow them to thrive.

A second objection made by mestizaje proponents is that rather than an imposed identity by a colonial system, mestizaje is a response by Indigenous communities to assert their own agency. That in fact, as a way to survive eradication Indigenous communities created a mixed identity in order to become a part of the very system that oppresses them.

First, it seems to me that this is just a restatement of the first objection: that there are benefits to the mestizo identity. The second objection just specifies what the possible benefit of mestizaje would be, a possible way to survive by gaming the system.

Second, a cursory perusal of literature both in and out of the philosophical field will show this claim to be false. Mestizo identity, and its promotion, is commonly associated with European colonizers, the privileged classes of Criollos, and enfranchised urban Mexican/Chicana individuals with mixed ancestry. Texts from Indigenous communities and authors typically mention mestizaje in negative terms, and view mestizos with suspicion because they often collaborate with oppressors towards Indigenous assimilation and annihilation. For example, Comandanta Ester of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) writes, “The mestizos

and the wealthy mock us indigenous women because of our way of dressing, of speaking, our language, our way of praying and of curing, and for our color, which is the color of the earth we work. We are always in the land, because we live there. Nor do they allow us to participate in any other work. They say we are filthy, because, since we are indigenous, we do not bathe” (Hayden 200). Here the mestizo is associated with external threat and oppression, not as an Indigenous response associated with agency and survival. This suspicion of the mestizo is no surprise, because so-called mestizos were/are often collaborators with Criollos in “the westernization plan” that seeks to eradicate Indigenous communities (Batalla xv-xvi).¹³

We’ve explored the construction of monstrosity in the European tradition of teratology and seen its relationship to mestizaje. Both are ambivalent entities that threatened the natural order of a particular white supremacist world view, and are marked for destruction. In the next chapter, we will explore the newest version of mestizaje constructed by the queer Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa and how it is in conversation with early modern versions constructed by Mexican philosophers. Anzaldúa’s version attempts to reimagine mestizaje as the *new mestiza*, and offer a positive means of identity for Chicane communities under the oppression of colonial white supremacy.

¹³ As the historian Alexandra Stern notes, such a plan explicitly ties white supremacist eugenics and mestizaje together, and favors an “urban, white, literate, and middle class” (189).

Chapter Three: Gloria Anzaldúa and the New Mestiza

“‘Don’t go out in the sun,’ my mother would tell me when I wanted to play outside. ‘If you get any darker, they’ll mistake you for an Indian. And don’t get dirt on your clothes.

You don’t want people to say you’re a dirty Mexican.’ It never dawned on her that, though sixth-generation American, we were still Mexican and that all Mexicans are part Indian.” –Gloria Anzaldua, *La Prieta*

Gloria Anzaldúa is the most notable example of reimagining the mestizo for the modern era. Rather than seeing mestizaje as a mix that erases identity by virtue of being mixed, Anzaldúa claimed that it is through mixing that identity is achieved. Ya writes, “At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool” (99). For Anzaldúa, the flexibility and diversity of one’s ancestry is a strength that intersects communities and not a weakness that excludes one from communities. Hybridity allows movement across borders and breaks down categories. Rather than being constrained by categories, the mestiza is free to roam between them. Ten years later, ya reiterates this point:

Mestiza, which is actually an old term, speaks to our common identity as mixed bloods. I have been exploring this as a new category which is more inclusive than a racial mestizaje. Most Chicanos, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are

mixed bloods. Many are half and half: half Chicano/half white, half Japanese/half white, and so on. The new mestiza is a category that threatens the hegemony of the neo-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels, and theories means punching holes in their walls (Keating 205).

Rather than weakening one's identity, mixing weakens the constructed categories of white supremacy. Anzaldúa aims to broaden the scope of mestizaje beyond the original half Indigenous/half Spanish constructed by colonial thinkers in order to challenge the values and implied hierarchy of that system.

There are three key features of Anzaldúa's new mestiza: anti-essentialism, hybridity, and ambiguity. First, we will look at Anzaldúa's brand of anti-essentialism supported by *nos/otras* and its engagement with Vasconcelos' essentialism in *La Raza Cósmica*. Second, we will compare Anzaldúa's harmonious hybridity with Vasconcelos' negating hybridity. Finally, we will take a look at Anzaldúa's *nepantla* for constituting an ambiguous identity and its similarities to Uranga's *zozobra*.

Before moving on, I need to specify what part of Anzaldúa's philosophy we will be discussing. Since the influential work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, mestizaje analysis has taken two routes. The first sees mestizaje as a racial question and engages with earlier works by Mexican philosophers. This route is concerned with understanding the nature of mixed identity in the context of metaphysics and plural ancestry. The second route is concerned with questions of phenomenology and epistemology: how does the mestiza move through the

world and what knowledge does ya accumulate? An example of this tradition is Mariana Ortega's *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* and it rarely engages with earlier Mexican thinkers. While I don't dispute the entangled relationship between these two routes, after all how your nature is perceived will inevitably affect the spaces you occupy and Anzaldúa is an example of how those traditions intersect, I will continue to focus on the mestizaje question as a one of racial identity stemming from the earlier colonial tradition.

First, this will allow us to see the dialogue between earlier and more modern traditions so we can see the evolution of mestizaje. We will be able to see more clearly how each approached the mestizo question, their similarities and differences, by tracing Anzaldúa's response to older conceptions of mestizaje.

Second, we are trying to trace how Anzaldúa's metaphysical understanding is predicated on earlier metaphysical constructions, and then dig even deeper to uncover assumptions which I will demonstrate to be problematic stemming from the even earlier tradition of teratology. Trying to add phenomenology and epistemology into the mix, while relevant, will complicate the route we are taking and led us off course.

Additionally, there are three perspectives of mestizaje that we will be working with. First, the ideology of the colonizers and how they framed mestizaje. Second, the ideology of the colonized and their responses to mestizaje. Third, the shared ideology of colonizers and the colonized (both past and present), and how those perspectives operate in synthesis. These positions can be difficult to trace, especially given that mestizaje in a "middle" position that claims to be all at once. I will not be explicitly tracing which is which, because it would add an additional layer of complication that would take us off track. After all, Anzaldúa claims to

occupy multiple positions and to deconstruct i-philosophy into separate components in order to trace the origin of each element would be an impossible task. If we are both colonizer and colonized, as mestizaje purports to be, being explicit about how our gaze is situated undoes the mixing Anzaldúa wishes us to do. Though I will demonstrate in the next chapter that whatever gaze we take under mestizaje, it is from a colonial one that views the world through the lens of monstrosity, for now we will adopt Anzaldúa's gaze.

Anzaldúa wrote about mestizaje for nearly thirty years, and during that period further refined her philosophy of racial identity. So we will need to broadly assess i-works to get a clear picture on the finished idea. If we were to look at only the first major works, *This Bridge Called My Back* and *La Frontera*, we would come away with an incomplete understanding of Anzaldúa's mestizaje. Though i-work evolved, there are three fundamental positions found throughout i-philosophy: anti-essentialism, harmonious hybridity, and deconstruction of boundaries. Our engagement will take two phases. First, we will look at each of these ideas in turn and see how they respond to earlier Mexican philosophers. In the next chapter, we will engage with Anzaldúa from our contemporary position and uncover problems with the foundation of mestizaje regardless of reimagining with the best of intentions.

Anzaldúa's position is anti-essentialist in that ya doesn't think there are innate features that determine racial identity. While discussing the advantage to being ostracized, ya notes:

...daring to make connections with people outside our 'race' necessitates breaking down categories. Because our positions are nos/otras, both/and, inside/outside, and inner-exiles – we see through the illusion of separateness. We crack the shell

of our usual assumptions by interrogating our notions and theories of race and other differences. When we replace the old story (of judging others by race, class, gender, and sexual groupings and using these judgements to create barriers), we threaten people who believe in clearly defined mutually exclusive categories (Moraga 264).

Here Anzaldúa challenges the idea that exclusive racial categories exist, and that such categories hold innate differences. Importantly, the movement of breaking down categories Anzaldúa alludes to a physical identity that transitions between spaces. Identity is not merely a descriptive identity in which labels are adopted and discarded. In *La Prieta*, Anzaldúa reiterates this point:

Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web (Moraga 205).

It is not that one adopts this identity and that identity. Rather, identity intersects with many worlds, i.e. physical spaces, that highlights different facets of an identity and transforms it. Thus, identity is always changing depending on context and is an ambiguous endeavor. Elsewhere in *La Frontera*, she writes "We must be wary of assimilation but not fear cultural mestizaje. Instead we must become nepantleras and build bridges between all these worlds as we traffic back and

forth between them, detribalizing and retribalizing in different and various communities” (Moraga 264). The individual moves across boundaries to occupy different spaces, and it is this movement that shifts identity.¹ Not a change of some essential feature or the decision to adopt a label from the armchair. This is what Anzaldúa means by having “one foot on brown soil, one on white”. The shift of identity comes with movement of the body across borders and the occupation of spaces.

The “nos/otras” is a key to understanding Anzalduan philosophy. It is the split feminine of the Spanish word for “we” (nosotros) and signals that the we (nos) is fundamentally composed of what we take to be the “other” (otros). By using the feminine spelling, Anzaldúa further signals that it is illusionary to think of the Othered, in particular women and LGBTQAI+, as something separate. Within the we, there is them, within the masculine, there is a feminine, and so forth. This position is anti-essentialist because what composes something is not strictly that within itself. For example, on this reading it would be difficult to say that what makes you your gender is something fundamentally intrinsic because using Anzaldua’s framework you carry both male and female features. Neither of which are something intrinsic to a category you occupy.

For example, in *This Bridge Called My Back* Anzaldúa writes of the books challenge to assumed notions of racial identity: “It [the book] questions the terms “white” and “women of color” by showing that whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color-consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness. This book intends to change notions of identity, viewing it as part of a more complex system covering a larger

¹ “Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Náhuatl word meaning tierra en medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries” (Keating 243).

terrain...” (Keating 244). Here Anzaldúa speaks to racial identity as a form of consciousness not intrinsically tied to a biological feature, like blood/calidad or DNA, but something that one can acquire through intentional awareness. It is something that one may develop or lose over time. Tellingly, ya views racialization as “a structure that dominant groups use to produce forms of inequality that exclude other groups from access to education, jobs, and other resources...” (Keating 302). On Anzaldúa’s view, race is an identity that arises as a social feature by virtue of adopting a particular mindset with a set of values, experiences, beliefs, etc. rather than an intrinsic feature that arises because one possesses an essential quality of some sort.

In contrast, Anzaldúa thinks that colonial racial identities are formed according to oppositional distinctions used to create social hierarchy.² In one of Anzaldúa’s final works, ya writes “Identity becomes a cage you reinforce and double-lock yourself into. The life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication. So, you reason, if it’s all made up, you can compose it anew and differently” (2002 558). What the essentialist takes to be innate, such as race and gender, are in actuality a social construction that finds root in the mind. Being so, identity is mutable and subject to change.

Anzaldúa’s view of racial identity and mestizaje is in opposition to the essentialist view held by José Vasconcelos, who Anzaldúa read and quoted.³ In *La Raza Cósmica (The Cosmic*

² “When marginalized groups fall back on defending identity as a strategy of resistance, when we cling to our identity as ‘disabled,’ ‘immigrant,’ or whatever and use identity as a basis for political mobilization, we inadvertently enforce our subordination. Our identification is based on an oppositional distinction from another group, the ‘normal.’ The social transformations we produce are not free from the identity/disability-based divisions/inequalities that we oppose...Both remain stuck in the limits of their identity groupings” (Keating 302).

³ Anzaldúa mentions Vasconcelos in “The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement” and refashions a popular quote of ya at the beginning of Ch.7 “La conciencia de la mestiza” in *La Frontera*.

Race), Vasconcelos believed in the aesthetic superiority of Europeans, and that with more European-ness added to the mestizo mix, the mestizo would generate a “cosmic race”:

The advantage of our tradition is that it has greater facility of sympathy towards strangers. This implies that our civilization, with all defects, may be the chosen one to assimilate and to transform mankind into a new type; that within our civilization, the warp, the multiple and rich plasma of future humanity is thus being prepared. This mandate from History is first noticed in that abundance of love that allowed the Spaniard to create a new race with the Indian and the Black, profusely spreading white ancestry through the soldier who begat a native family... (Vasconcelos 17).

In Vasconcelos’ vision of the future, as more intermixing happened between the races a superior mestizo race would be produced. It would have the best features of each race and have done away with lesser features of “ugliness” and “poverty”. Thereby, mestizaje is progressive means of bio-social evolution towards perfection. Importantly, as a fundamental feature of this vision ya assumed each race to have intrinsic features which were passed on to the next generation by virtue of their attractiveness. The stronger, i.e. white, features would pass on while the weaker features, i.e. non-white, would become extinct because breeding would occur through a spiritual reasoning that was attracted to these stronger aesthetic features (such as beauty, “higher mind”, etc.). Ya is explicit that “the Black could be redeemed” through voluntary extinction by removing themselves from the gene pool and speeding up this process, and that “[t]he Indian, by grafting

onto the related race [mestizo]” could join in the progress of aesthetic eugenics (Vasconcelos 32). Thus, so we are to believe, in the utopian future there will be a mixed global (cosmic) race that lives in beauty and perfection because it has evolved beyond the weaknesses of some races, which have been annihilated through assimilation or left to go extinct on their own. For Vasconcelos, mestizaje is a eugenics project motivated by white supremacy and through which the Indigenous Mexican can participate in the evolution towards a utopian future.

Adding more white European-ness to the mix in order to diminish the Indigenous, and eventually annihilate it, is an idea called “blanqueamiento” in Mexican/Chicana communities. An idea still very much alive today with colloquialisms like “mejorar la raza”, which means to better the race by having white partners and whiter children. It is a concept both literal, breeding lighter children, and cultural, adopting Anglo-European culture. Importantly, blanqueamiento was and is an institutional policy adopted by colonial governments. Schools adopt European based curriculums and white immigrants are favored over darker ones as a way of “progress” and “civilization”. Even census data is altered to reflect a “whiter” population, such as in the case of the Dominican Republic whose government adopted an anti-black policy (Paulino 150). It is no accident that the Porfiriato with its anti-Indigenous policies adopted “order and progress” as its slogan, signaling that the world was to be ordered in a particular way for the sake of progress. That order and that progress was intimately intertwined with blanqueamiento.

On the one hand, it is very curious that Anzaldúa was drawn to Vasconcelos given the horrendous tone of i-philosophy. It is difficult imagining Anzaldúa, a queer Chicana with a disability, supporting a eugenics project that would target ya for annihilation. But on the other hand, given that ya was writing during El Movimiento perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. In the

face of identity erasure, Chicane people took up Vasconcelos' work and it became a slogan to join people in the diaspora as part of one community. The Spanish title of *The Cosmic Race* is *La Raza Cósmica*, and the phrase "La Raza" is still used in reference to Chicane communities. In fact, one of the first national political parties for Chicane people in the United States was La Raza Unida (The United Race), and the slogan of "La Raza" is still a shouted at political rallies and protests today.

Another explanation offered by Andrea Pitts in "Toward an Aesthetics of Race", who views Anzaldúa's citationality as part of a larger literature trend by Indigenous/Latin American authors. Such authors, in a crisis of authority by virtue of challenging dominant institutions and yet wanting to legitimize themselves in the context of those authorities, used citation in a way that "simultaneously conflates and distinguishes one's authorial position" (84). Perhaps Anzaldúa, wishing to frame i-writings in the tradition of Mex-istentialism, used Vasconcelos in this way.

The two philosophies are not only different in relation to essentialism, but also in how they view hybridity. Both Anzaldúa and Vasconcelos view hybridity as an asset, not a flaw, and perhaps this is what appealed to Anzaldúa given i-interest in the social construction of an inclusive identity. But while Vasconcelos views pieces of hybrid identity as negating each other, Anzaldúa saw them as harmonious. In the essay "To(o) Queer the Writer", ya writes:

Often I am asked, "What is your primary identity, being lesbian or working-class or Chicana?" In defining or separating the "lesbian" identity from other aspects of identity I am asked to separate the "lesbian" identity from other aspects of

identity. I am asked to separate and distinguish all aspects from one another. I am asked to bracket each, to make boundaries around each so as to articulate one particular facet of identity only. But to put each in a separate compartment is to put them in contradiction or in isolation when in actuality they are all constantly in a shifting dialogue/relationship –the ethnic is in conversation with the academic and so on. The lesbian is part of the writer, is part of a social class, is part of a gender, is part of whatever identities one has of oneself. There is no way that I can put myself [sic] through a sieve, and say okay, I’m only going to let the “lesbian” part out, and everything else will stay in the sieve. All the multiple aspects of identities (as well as the sieve) are part of the “lesbian” (Keating 167).

Anzaldúa goes a step further beyond intersectional identity theory, to say that identities constitute each other. “The lesbian is part of the writer” and so on. It’s not merely that when one speaks of race, one must also speak of gender. Instead, ya proposes that identities are formed in harmonious hybridity. Race is in part *constructed* by gender and so on. The “harmony” highlights the idea that these identities are not contradictions in kind, nor do they merely work together or intersect. Rather, identities come to be and exist in part of/with one another.

Importantly, Anzaldúa is not proposing that identities are never in tension with one another. In the essay “Border Arte”, ya writes about the tension between Indigenous ancestry and having “other races running in my veins, other cultures that my body lives in and out of, and a white man who constantly whispers inside my skull” (Keating 185). Identities are not always comfortable with each other, but they do not negate each other.

This contrasts with Vasconcelos who saw the progress of aesthetic eugenics inherently as negating. The offspring of mixed pairs would be a hybrid whose identity was constructed of negated parts: the white civilizing identity negating the “savage” Indigenous identity, and so forth. Each race contributing a piece that negated some other piece until the perfect global race finally evolved. This fundamental difference produces very different outlooks for mestizaje.

Whereas Vasconcelos saw the final cosmic race as only embodying those beautiful pieces of each race with the “ugly” to becoming extinct, Anzaldúa’s vision of identity incorporates all aspects of identity. As ya writes in *La Frontera*: “nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” (101). Vasconcelos’ picture assumes an evolution of identity based on extinction and in which certain identities based on their essential characteristics are negated. In contrast, Anzaldúa’s picture assumes a picture of identity in which multiple identities exist together and construct each other.

Anzaldúa’s harmonious hybridity view is undergirded by Mexica metaphysics. At various points in the evolution of i-writing, ya refers to “nepantla” as an in-between state and a way to understand the fluidity of identity that deconstructs boundaries. Importantly, nepantla allows one to move through multiple spaces and cross supposedly rigid categories. In a footnote of the foreword to *This Bridge We Call Home* entitled “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces”, ya writes: “I use the word *nepantla* to theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds, whom I’ve named nepantleras. I associate nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (Keating 248, emphasis original).

In conjunction with Anzaldúa's anti-essentialism and harmonious hybridity, the new mestiza is situated in the liminal space of *nepantla* that constructs an ambiguous identity. Whereas Vasconcelos wants to leave some races behind and build something new entirely, Anzaldúa sees mixed identities carried into the future and occupying a place where they flow across spaces. Returning to "To(o) Queer the Writer", ya writes:

Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river – a process. Contained within the river is its identity, and it needs to flow, to change to stay a river – if it stopped it would be a contained body of water such as a lake or a pond. The changes in the river are external (changes in environment – river bed, weather, animal life) and internal (within the waters). A river's contents flow within its boundaries. Changes in identity likewise are external (how others perceive one and how one perceives others and the world) and internal (how one perceives oneself, self-image). People in different regions name the parts of the river/person which they see (Keating 166).

Tellingly, Anzaldúa views identity as mutable in response to external spaces and internal movement. For example, a Chicana may not identify as "Mexican" until they are labeled as such in an all-white space. Likewise, such identification may occur if one has gained an intuitive awareness beyond the self that incorporates history, narrative, and circumstances –what Anzaldúa called "la facultad". Perhaps that same mestiza never encounters racism. Instead, they

are browsing a bookstore one day and stumble upon a decolonized history book, through which they learn about Indigenous genocide in the US and the oppression of so-called mestizos. It may dawn on the mestiza that they are the outcome of these circumstances and this realization facilitates an internal change of identity –from merely “American” to “Mexican-American,” to “Chicana,” and so forth.

In these examples, the process of *nepantla* has occurred: an in-between state or point of crisis that facilitates the crossing of identity boundaries. Anzaldúa writes, “It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and haven’t left the old identity behind either – you are in a kind of transition. And that is what *Nepantla* stands for. It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation” (276 *Borderlands*, emphasis original). This liminal state is ambiguous, a place between identities such that you are neither this nor that and yet you are somehow both simultaneously. It is this framework that supports Anzaldúa’s anti-essentialism and harmonious hybridity. With *nepantla*, one doesn’t have an essence because movement occurs between identities and therefore identity isn’t something innately essential. With *nepantla*, one can occupy multiple identities that seem in contradiction and yet they don’t negate each other.

This challenges the logic of purity under white supremacy, which demands that one’s racial identity is fixed and unchanging as an intrinsic feature that one possesses. While *mestizaje* as a concept promotes hybridity and therefore ambiguity in mixed-race individuals, Anzaldúa goes further to highlight the process of identity itself as an ambiguous endeavor. Even ostensibly pure race individuals have ambiguous identities because identity is a process in constant

negotiation with external and internal factors. For Anzaldúa, identity is not something you possess but something you become and unbecome mediated through a variety of factors. As such, identity is hard to pin down and describe in the way the logic of purity would have us do. It is telling that ya uses the river as a metaphor for identity, because it would be equally as difficult to scoop up water from a river and say “this is the river”. The river is both the flow and the environment, the process and its context.

Though we can't be sure, it's possible that Anzaldúa read the work of Emilio Uranga because ya read José Gaos who was Uranga's teacher (Alessandri 3). Uranga was a member of Los Hiperiones rather than Los Científicos, and i-concept of zozobra might have influenced Anzaldúa's vision of nepantla given how eerily similar they are. Zozobra is “a kind of oscillation between being and nonbeing, what we might think of as a state teetering between, on one side, the impulse to accept a problematic framework of meanings, norms, and values and, on the other side, the urge to abandon that framework in light of its inadequacy at providing answers the person experiences as ready, reliable, and unreflectively apt” (Vargas 400). This kind of phenomenological and epistemological ambiguity arises from what Uranga called accidentality – an intervention of circumstances beyond one's control and in which one is the outcome of such circumstances. Mexican philosophers were concerned with understanding Mexican identity in the context of accidentality, specifically the invasion of the Spanish and the colonization of the Indigenous, as was discussed in chapter one. What is striking between nepantla and zozobra, is the kind of tension (or “back and forth”) that characterizes the new mestiza's ambiguous state, *ni de aquí, ni de allí*, which forces one to occupy an uncomfortable space between spaces – unsure of belonging to either.

Through Anzaldúa, we can see the evolution of Mex-istentialism and its concern with mestizaje. A shift from racial essentialism to the anti-essentialism of *nos/otras*, from negating hybridity to harmonious hybridity, and from a logic of purity to ambiguity. In the next chapter, we will uncover the fundamental problems with mestizaje that remain regardless of Anzaldúa's reimagining. Unaware of the parallels and origins with teratology, Anzaldúa was oblivious to the dangers of promoting mestizaje as a form of Chicane identity.

Chapter Four: Problems with the New Mestiza

As we've seen, the mestizo occupies a state of ambiguity that is at the core of monstrosity. The mestiza is both virtuous and impure, human and less than human. Anzaldúa pushed such ambiguity even further as a decolonial tool, but didn't realize the role ambiguity plays in the long history of teratology and colonial white supremacy. When undergirded by essentialism and hierarchy, ambiguity becomes a trap in the context of that system. Ambiguous entities that crosses categorial boundaries are labeled monsters and marked for genocide. Anzaldúa unknowingly contributed to that colonial project by continuing the rhetoric of mestizaje. Importantly, the problem is not that Anzaldúa used a concept with problematic origins, but that ya invested in a concept that is fundamentally essentialist and promotes a hierarchical hybridity that targets people for annihilation. No amount of reimagining or re-engineering can redeem such a flawed conception of people.

The danger of the mestizo lies in its ambivalence, in conjunction with an essential nature split in half (both evil and good) and a lower place in hierarchy, in the context of colonial white supremacy. Each alone may not lead to the monsterization of Indigenous people, but all together in a rigged system that looks at the world in a certain way (white Euro-Christians at the top of the chain of being because they are the paradigm of the reasoning human) it is a disaster that promotes annihilation. That Anzaldúa's new mestiza relies on this structure for identity, and thereby unknowingly promotes it, is dangerous. Ya explicitly picks up mestizaje as a banner for boundary crossing just as Vasconcelos picked it up for the sake of eugenics, and there is little difference between the two in terms of consequences. Rather than averting the disasters of

mestizaje, the new mestiza inadvertently plays into the goals of colonialism and leaves us with three problems.

First, Anzaldúa repeatedly falls back on essentialism though ya explicitly seeks to avoid it. Anzaldúa views identity as a process in terms of context and agency, in relation to the Other – the nos/otras. On the surface, this might seem like an anti-essentialist position because there is nothing inherent in the individual that one could point to without going outside that individual. However, looking closer at Anzaldúa’s discourse reveals that ya often relied on essentialist language that appeals to ancestry: “When the Spaniards conquered the Indians – gave us the Spanish language, and took over the whole of Mexico and the Southwest – perhaps they really did not ‘conquer’ the Indians? After all, Chicanos are about 80% Indian, and almost everything in our culture is Indian. There is very little Spanish. That’s history” (Keating 105). The new mestiza, on this view doesn’t break down categories as Anzaldúa intended, but rather goes back and forth (zozobra) between essentialist parts. The new mestiza travels between worlds by merely climbing over the walls.

One might be tempted to be charitable and question Anzaldúa’s investment in essentialism as merely linguistic rather than metaphysical. It might be the case that Anzaldúa didn’t have the language available to describe the new understanding of identity ya envisioned. However, when using essentialist tools (even linguistic ones) one can’t help but be invested in metaphysical foundations of essentialism. One can’t understand hybridity, or nepantla (in-betweenness) as Anzaldúa called it, without a biological assumption of essentialism. An “in-between” socio-racial identity can’t be constructed without an assumption of being between two or more identities. There must be places one is traveling between.

The next move to save Anzaldúa might be to say that such parts, or places one is traveling between, as a hybrid are socially constructed rather than biologically real. While this might seem appealing, and in fact Anzaldúa does claim to hold a constructionist view of identity, she takes such a claim to the extreme that it's difficult to reconcile with the identities of actual people and communities because it flattens them. Remember that Anzaldúa claims to belong to multiple worlds (brown, white, straight, queer, and so on) without giving us an explanation as to why this is the case. It is just taken as a brute fact that individuals can belong to multiple spaces simultaneously and equally because of their ability to cross boundaries. On this view, an urban Criollo with Indigenous ancestry could claim Spanish and Indigenous identities equally due to their ability to occupy multiple spaces. For example, Anzaldúa writes: "The new mestiza queers have the ability, the flexibility, the malleability, the amorphous quality of being able to stretch this way and that way. We can add new labels, names, and identities as we mix with others" (Keating 174). However, the reader is given no further answers as to how the new mestiza is able to accomplish this or if even they have the right to do so. Identity becomes a homogenous feature under Anzaldúa's viewpoint because an individual is multiplicitous, and all individuals are multiplicitous in the same way. Yet, surely a Yaqui individual with Spanish ancestry fighting against the genocide of their tribe does not have an equivalent identity to the Criollo mining executive that hires a militia to stamp them out. Surely something has gone wrong if that ends up being the case. There are real material conditions that help shape our identities: the communities we are born into and the resources available, the communities we adopt over the course of our lives and have a real stake in, etc. Each tied to a longer historical context of material conditions. One can't simply choose to pick up an identity like a dressing

crab. Perhaps this tension between wishing to be anti-essentialist in an effort to decolonize identity and yet feeling the real stake we have in our communities/identities is why Anzaldúa goes back and forth between these views. Despite best efforts and good intentions, Anzaldúa is trapped in the paradigm of essentialism, that one is born a mestizo, half this-half that, and belongs to more than one and no worlds.¹

Second, Anzaldúa's notion of harmonious hybridity relies on racialized parts without taking in consideration how racialization and in particular hybrid-racialization is dangerous in a white supremacist system. The mestizo as a hybrid is threatening to the established colonial world order that demands racial purity. Even if that hybridity is viewed positively by some like Anzaldúa, the mestiza is still in danger because the larger context systemizes its destruction. Ya even admits this fact: "we are frustrated by those who step over the line, by hybridities and ambiguities, and by what does not fit our expectations of "race" and sex" (Keating 245). Mestizaje is dangerous because it distinctly monsterizes people as a hybrid with an ambiguous quality, and in a white supremacist world that values racial purity hybridity is threatening.

In order to mark you for certain treatment (access to resources, spaces, etc.), a system needs to be able to label you. Unable to, you are viewed as a threat to that system. We can see this narrative play out through conservative reactions to transgender use of bathrooms. Or the fact that though racial anti-miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional with the case of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), couples in seven states are still required to declare their racial background when applying for a marriage license. There are even current efforts to bring back

¹ For example: "Progressive whites who have friends from different worlds and who study different cultures become intellectual mestizas. They may not be emotional mestizas and certainly are not biological mestizas. But there can be empathy between people of color and progressive, sensitive, politically aware whites" (Keating 210). Here Anzaldúa believes that there is a biological distinguishing feature of the mestiza, and yet that there is also something of the mestiza that can be picked up by non-biological mestizas.

anti-miscegenation laws. The monitoring, regulation, and enforcement of boundaries is necessary for the sustaining of a racist system.

Yet Anzaldúa repeatedly appeals to the belief of racial *mestizaje*, essentially half this and essentially half that, as a virtue because of its quality of being formed of racialized parts that have supposedly crossed such boundaries. In the essay “The New Mestiza Nation”, ya writes:

Mestiza, which is actually an old term, speaks to our common identity as mixed bloods. I have been exploring this as a new category which is more inclusive than a racial *mestizaje*. Most Chicanos, Latins, Asians, and Native Americans are mixed bloods. Many are half and half: half Chicano/half white, half Japanese/half white, and so on. The new mestiza is a category that threatens the hegemony of the neo-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels, and theories means punching holes in their walls (Keating 205).

I-rational goes: if the system wants us to be unambiguous, then we will be ambiguous as a form of resistance. But missing from this logic are two key points. First, *mestizaje* is a special kind of hybridity used by a white supremacist system to racialize in order to monsterize. Second, what is racialized as a monster is justified by its being a monster, via hybridity, in its destruction. So the rational fully fleshed out is: the system wants unambiguity and will destroy the ambiguous. It wants this particular group to be destroyed, so it makes them ambiguous regardless of whether they view such identity as positive or negative. Therefore, it would be a disaster to play into the

system's ambiguous racialization. Yet, this is precisely what Anzaldúa commits to and in doing so unknowingly plays into the hands of a centuries old concept born out of a genocidal eugenics project.

Furthermore, such racial hybridity is doomed to self-negate by virtue of its essentialized parts in a hierarchy. The Spanish half will always win out over the Indigenous half. We can see this play out in *blanqueamiento*, discussed in chapter one. The white half negates by whitening the brown half. It's never the other way around in a system of white supremacy that views the essential feature of whiteness as stronger than all other features. For this reason, the system demands an assimilation of what it deems lesser through culture and literal breeding out. In the logic of white supremacy, it is a step towards annihilation because the *mestiza* identity destroys itself. Reframing such a process as positive, while it may have the benefit of individual empowerment and the healing of one's self-esteem, does not divert the process from its horrific conclusion if the system itself is still in place.

Third, by leaning into the ambivalence of *mestizaje* Anzaldúa inadvertently contributes to the erasure of Indigenous identity. While she notes that all Mexicans are in some part Indigenous, the opaqueness of that identity contributes to the weakening of tribal communities and the danger of colonial annihilation. Blood quantum is a white supremacist tool that threatens Indigenous relationships. Children of mixed parents in some tribal communities aren't able to officially enroll because of arbitrary rules, and due to colorism are viewed as less-Indigenous. Since early colonial rule, officials depopulated tribes by removing mixed children who were ostensibly considered spiritual dangers in missionary efforts despite the willingness of those tribes to incorporate such children as members (Rappaport 73-74).

Ironically, the same quantum that keeps Indigenous people from fully participating in their communities is used by non-Indigenous individuals to claim Indigenous ancestry in order to co-opt resources like academic positions, funding, and land. Furthermore, Anzaldúa fails to address the overlooked fact that many so-called “mestizos” have no European ancestry, and are in fact detribalized Indigenous people that have been displaced from their land who have been forced to assimilate thus losing pieces of their culture like language. This erasure aligns with Vasconcelos’ project of a cosmic race, and the broader project of colonial blanqueamiento, in which past identities are displaced for the sake of future ones. In this case, Indigenous identity is obliterated to make room for movement towards a whiter identity more in standing with colonial and capitalistic aims.

Additionally, Anzaldúa’s new mestiza erases Indigeneity by making identity an ambiguous project that occurs delocalized from the ongoing colonial project: “You’re never only in one space, but partially in one, partially in another, with nepantla occurring most often” (2002 545-546). Ironically, given that *ya* speaks to the necessity of locality and the need to address circumstances with concepts like *la facultad*, by continuing mestizaje Indigenous communities are pushed towards assimilation. As noted in the chapter one, mestizaje is not strictly an identity based familial or community relations. Whole tribes were labeled “mestizo” by colonial governments in order to accelerate assimilation for the sake of resource theft. There is nothing ambiguous in the deliberate erasure of a people’s identity in order to destroy them. It seems as though Anzaldúa has been caught up in the narrative of mestizaje and the virtue of hybridity to the detriment of living people fighting against their extinction. For example, Anzaldúa claims that “From the in-between place of nepantla, you see through the fiction of the monoculture, the

myth of the superiority of the white races” (2002 549). However, there is no further explanation as to why that’s the case or how it’s the only alternative. I take Anzaldúa to mean that by stepping outside one’s presumed place on the racial hierarchy, one can see that it’s an artificial construction. However, one can also do this firmly rooted in one’s identity by adopting an anti-racist position, or seeing white supremacy for what it really is: an ideology justification resource theft and control. By focusing on the virtues promoted by the Mexican nationalist project, Anzaldúa ignores how mestizaje has been used as a weapon and continues to be dangerous by privileging the colonial position of dilution –that white ancestry dilutes Indigenous families because whiteness is stronger than family and community.

Perhaps one might be tempted to save the new mestiza by relegating it only to people of biologically mixed families. In that case, the criticism of Indigenous erasure need not apply because mestizaje wouldn’t apply to Indigenous people. However, while this may make analytic sense it remains to be seen as to how we are to make such a distinction and whether mestizaje as a concept reflects people’s actual experience/identities. Remember, according to the myth of mestizaje the whole population of modern “Mexicans”, including those north of the border, have been rendered mestizos. How are we supposed to distinguish fully Indigenous people who have been forced to culturally assimilate and been labeled mestizo, and mixed family mestizos who have managed to remain incorporated into their tribes and thus consider themselves fully Indigenous? How are we to distinguish the cases in-between?

Anzaldúa seems to want both a hybrid with discreet parts (one foot on white soil, one on brown) and an ambivalent mixture. Neither concept accurately reflect the realities of living communities. Remember, earlier I made the distinction between a mix and a hybrid. While both

are combinations, in the former we are unable to make out distinct parts while in the latter we are. Anzaldúa makes no distinction between the two, and treats mestizaje as both which leads to a contradiction. This confusion is a trap of settler discourse in which Indigenous identity is unable to find ground because the ground is always shifting, whether through recognition by treaties, blood quantum, or cultural performance like being able to speak your Indigenous language. Identity becomes an abstract concept removed from the very people it is supposed to be embodied by, because definitions are determined by colonial authorities which render Indigenous populations without agency and subjectivity through their localized identity. This kind of erasure is dangerous in a world that seeks to eradicate Indigenous identity for the sake of colonial accumulation and privatization. Annihilation comes in the form of groundlessness, in which people find their selves forever just beyond their reach. While trying to find virtue in disorientation itself, Anzaldúa invests in disorienting communities.²

To be fair, Anzaldúa moved away from mestizaje and its discourse in i-late career in favor of nos/otras, new tribalism, and nepantla. However, to date there has been no critical analysis of i-theory of new mestiza identity in what continues to be i-most popular work *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (1987). When people are introduced to i-work, it is usually through the new mestiza and the concepts continues to be resilient in the Chicane community. If we are to treat i-work seriously as part of an ongoing tradition of Mex-istentialism, such analysis and critique is necessary. We cannot overlook what remains to be a significant aspect of Anzaldúa's work, even

² For example, Anzaldúa writes: "[T]o be disoriented in space is the 'normal' way of being for us mestizas living in the borderlands. It is the sane way of coping with the accelerated pace of this complex, interdependent, and multi-cultural planet. To be disoriented in space is to be en nepantla. To be disoriented in space is to experience bouts of dissociation of identity, identity breakdowns and buildups. The border is in a constant nepantla state and it is an analog of the planet" (Keating 181).

if ya i-self later gave up on it. To do so would be a disservice to Anzalduan scholarship, Anzaldúa i-self, and the communities Anzaldúa was concerned with.

Again, let me be clear that I'm not engaging the tradition of phenomenological-epistemology that arose from Anzaldúa's work. Nepantla, and its other iterations of world traveling, multiplicity, and in-betweenness, may very well work as a model to understand how people experience the world as racialized, gendered, and classed individuals. As an epistemological model, it may even be a useful model to illustrate how people adopt alternative perspectives and understand those experiences.

What I am claiming is that in regards to understanding how the biological concept of race applies to, and has been imposed on, so-called mestizas and its significance in a colonial system, Anzaldua's new mestiza is not only unhelpful, but plays into the pitfalls of the mestizaje tradition. Again and again, Anzaldúa moves between the concepts of biological race and the experience/knowledge of relational identity as if they were the same:

My identity is always in flux: it changes as I step into and cross over many worlds each day – university, home community, job, lesbian, activist, and academic communities. It is not enough for me to say I am a Chicana. It is not enough for me to say I am an intellectual. It is not enough for me to say I am a writer. It is not enough for me to say I am from working-class origins. All of these and none of these are my primary identity. I can't say, this is the true me, or that is the true me. They are all the true me's. Progressive whites who have friends from different worlds and who study different cultures become intellectual mestizas. They many

not be emotional mestizas and certainly are not biological mestizas. But there can be empathy between people of color and progressive, sensitive, politically aware whites (Keating 209-210).

While this quote might seem like a clear distinction between the different aspects of identity such as race, job, sexuality, etc., Anzaldúa flattens and obscures them while simultaneously treating them as inherent features which can be prioritized in the individual. Ya begins by claiming that one doesn't have a primary identity ("all and none"), which implies that all aspects of identity are equal. So for example, if I'm an activist outside my community then that part of my identity is equal to my ancestral/community identity. Confusingly, Anzaldúa then goes on to reiterate the distinction between various aspects of identity by placing some kind of essential importance on those aspects which can be ordered. It would seem that the reason why "politically aware whites" may only empathize as intellectual mestizas is because there is some kind of essential feature (presumably their so-called race) that prevents them from being biological, perhaps even emotional, mestizas. Throughout the many works Anzaldúa produced, ya repeatedly moves between these two positions (identity as a rigid racial feature and identity as a flexible phenomenological-epistemological construction) and this continues in contemporary discussions built on i-work. The fact that these two traditions, biological race theory and epistemology/phenomenology, are often blurred and treated as one obscures the very nature of mestizaje and its aims. This obfuscation prevents us from dealing directly with the potential harm therein.

Supporters of the P&E tradition might respond that we can keep the phenomenological and epistemological framework of mestizaje without its racial core, and that in fact that is what

the whole tradition stemming from Anzaldúa aims to do. I agree with the second part, that modern scholars working in the tradition of Anzaldúa aim to move away from a biological essentialist discourse of race in favor of a P&E understanding of racialization.

However, it would be naive to think that one could dismantle the master's house using the master's tools.³ Especially when it comes to racialized communities. One can see the varying degrees of success oppressed communities have had in reappropriating identities formerly used against them. The Queer community is a mostly white space in terms of its political presence and visibility in the media, and has taken the term "queer" away from its denigrating origins and towards a positive coherent community identity. In contrast, though Black communities have attempted the same project with "n****r", it is still very much a derogatory racial slur. It is no accident that particular racialized communities are hindered in their identity projects. White supremacy and its institutions seek to control how these communities gather, identify, and relate with one another in order to sabotage any subversive projects that would undermine white power. That is why *mestizaje* has such staying power. It is supported by the system of white supremacy in which it was created and thrives. To attempt to work within that project and change the very nature of a tool used for that purpose is at best futile and at worst in support of that system. Anzaldúa was right to warn "Beware of el romance del *mestizaje*, I hear myself saying silently. Puede ser una ficción. I warn myself not to romanticize *mestizaje* –it is just another fiction" (Keating 181). Alas, ya failed to heed i-own warning.

What proponents of the P&E tradition overlook is that *mestizaje*, and its variants, have a long history of colonial management and erasure. It is a tool created by colonial governments to

³ "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." -Audre Lorde (Moraga 95).

control particular groups and the instrument in itself carries nothing of value. The most striking example of this is how mestizaje rapidly evolved in less than a century in the Dominican Republic, for the purposes of denying blackness in opposition to the black identified Haiti. On official census records, “Mulatto”, a blend of Spanish and African ancestry, was replaced with “Mestizo”, a blend of Spanish and Indigenous ancestry, which was replaced with “Indio” to refer to all Dominicans, which was replaced again with “mulato” [sic]. Tellingly, majority populations remained consistent. It was simply the label that changed as a way to avoid being called “black” during heightened periods of anti-blackness (Paulino 156-158).

Such historical facts undermine the idea that the concept of race, even a mixed or hybrid one, is an essential feature passed along and remains categorically static. Similarly, in other nations with a history of Spanish colonization the concept of mestizaje was fluid and used to serve the purposes of state power at the time. The reason we are “ambiguous” or feel “in-between” is that we’ve adopted a settler logic of race and purity which doesn’t match our reality. We are forced to cross boundaries because colonial powers have put false borders in place and seek to systematically exclude us from spaces/identity for the sake of genocide. Ambiguity is therefore an imposed identity and there is no recourse in it.

Furthermore, proponents of P&E are often unaware of the dangers of ambiguous identity and its genocidal roots in teratology. While there may be those that wish to re-imagine the mestiza, such re-imagining does not occur outside historical circumstances and legacies. One can’t argue for humanity within a system that monsterizes you for the purpose of annihilation. Instead of trying to understand our identity as the question “what am I?” in terms of settler logic which gives us something ambiguous at best, we should refuse to answer such a question and

abandon the project of mestizaje and ambiguous identity altogether. Rather than offer a way out of the hole dug by centuries of racially-concerned identity philosophy stemming from a longer tradition of monsterizing the world, I advocate for understanding identity in terms that better represent experience and helps communities thrive. The next chapter does just that.

Chapter Five: Identity as Community

“The language I speak does not define mi nacionalidad, the little boxes you ask me to check which one of these labels applies is not an accurate interpretation of my ethnicity. The piropos and the whistles I hear you yell down the street do not faze me, for you do not entertain me with your obscenities. ‘That Spanish girl over there’ I hear you say, ‘Hold up, lemme correct that real quick’ is what I say. For I am not Spanish, I speak Spanish.”

–Mariela Regalado, *Yo Soy Latina*

The mestizaje question is part of an ongoing project to locate people that are “ni de aqui, ni de alli” (neither from here, nor from there). People who slide in and out of categories, back and forth between identities. We’ve seen how mestizaje was realized in the world and how Mexican/Chicane philosophers have framed it. Despite Anzaldúa’s desire to reimagine a positive view of mestizaje, ya struggled with the ambiguity that plagues scholars dealing with questions of identity and race: “The question is how much is nature, how much nurture, how much culture. Maybe identity depends more on which community you identify with, how you are reared, and less on the drops of blood in your veins. But roots are important; who was here on this continent first does matter” (Keating 287).

What is notable is that so-called mestizos themselves don’t constitute a distinct category with defined characteristics, but are rather approximated by the communities that surround them. For example, the widespread surprise that mass shooters could be mestizo, or what is now called Hispanic/Latino, is indicative of the ongoing assumption that La Raza has no relationship to

white supremacy because it is its own distinct category (non-white) with an essential set of characteristics. Yet, again and again we find mestizos part of white supremacist communities and often taking leadership roles. These individuals identify as white though they have the identity of Latino (mestizo) imposed on them and hold white supremacist beliefs. Enrique Tarrio (Afro-Cuban descent) was the chairman of the Proud Boys for 4 years, and Nick Fuentes (Mexican descent) is a high profile white nationalist and incel streamer. Salvador Ramos who killed 21 people at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX and Mauricio Garcia who killed 8 people at a mall in Allen, TX are two Latinos who took the next logical step when one holds genocidal beliefs.¹ Their mestizaje, or “Latinadid”, did not preclude them from murdering on behalf of whiteness. Though some people believe that supporting white supremacy is a betrayal of Latinadid and that such individuals are pretending to be white because of self-hatred, as I’ve demonstrated such a position (a self-contradicting identity in which one essentialized part seeks to destroy the other) is built into the concept of mestizaje itself.²

We can see that the stakes of mestizaje cannot be overstated. How mestizaje is framed and the motivating ideology not only arises from the material conditions of the world, but impacts the people of those conditions in atrocious ways. Given the outcome of this project, it might come as no surprise that some advocates of mestizaje also promoted white supremacy. For example, Vasconcelos worked as a paid Nazi propagandist while editor of the Mexican magazine *El Timón*.

¹ Berríos Polanco, Carlos Edill. “Texas Mall Shooting Highlights Links Between Some Latinos and White Supremacy.” *Latino Rebels*. May 10, 2023. <https://www.latinorebels.com/2023/05/10/texasmallshootinglatinowhitesupremacy/>.

² As an example of this position, see: Dominguez, Arturo. “White Latinos Don’t Exist, Wannabes Do (OPINION).” *Latino Rebels*. September 2, 2020. <https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/09/02/whitelatinos/>.

There is only one consequence of white eugenics for people of color: annihilation. Whether through “breeding out” the color or extermination, the result is erasure of a people. So it should also come as no surprise that massive sterilization projects, in conjunction with wider practices of sanctioned violence and displacement, have targeted groups racialized as mestiza. In California alone, around 20,000 women underwent forced or coerced sterilization with federal funding in state hospitals through the 1960s and 70s. Those are the ones we know of, because thousands more were sterilized beginning in the 1910s. There are heartbreaking stories of women who didn’t know they were sterilized until years later, as well as young girls sterilized without consent while in state care. In one case, under “diagnosis” for the reason to be sterilized a doctor wrote, “Mexican girl in good physical condition” (Lira 22). The implication being that if one is able to have children and one is mestiza, that is reason enough for sterilization. Sadly, this wasn’t an isolated case. Across the United States and its colonial states like Puerto Rico, thousands and thousands of women were sterilized in order to stamp out future generations and break community relationships. Sterilization was so common in Puerto Rico, it was given the nickname *la operación* (the operation). Whole generations became ghosts due to colonial eugenic fears of overbreeding by non-white people. Even today, the practice continues. In 2020, ICE was accused of performing unnecessary hysterectomies on detainees in Georgia without their consent.³

For Chicanas especially, their bodies become war zones where colonial fears embedded in white supremacy are played out. Nor is such strategic violence relegated to the northern side of la frontera. In *Maquiladora Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics* (1998), Melissa Wright investigates how women navigate maquiladoras (factories in Mexico owned and operated by

³ <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/09/10024657/ice-hysterectomies-immigration-whistleblower-project-south>

American businesses) with a Mexicana identity that marks them as chaotically sexed entities with “pregnancies, her poor children, and their consumption of U.S. social services” antithetical to an American work ethic characterized by a colonial mindset that is inherently Euro-settler-centric (117).

Regardless of performance, these women are marked as bodies to be monitored and suppressed: their clothing and appearance is regulated, and they must never earn more or hold a position over an American (119). One woman, named Rosalía, manages to do just that but the price ya pays is to Americanize: ya adopts American business attire, rarely speaks Spanish, moves north of the border, and allies i-self with corporate interests over those of i-fellow Mexicana workers who are stuck in poverty-level positions on the manufacturing floor. Despite Anzaldúa’s vision of mestizaje which allows people to occupy ambiguous spaces and travel between identities, we see that in colonial institutions, such as healthcare and business, dominant racial narratives structure how one is treated: If mestizo, you are a threat. If mestiza, you are a hyper-sexualized threat that must be eradicated or controlled.

The effects of racialization and mestizaje are very real, and I’m reminded of the comparison Barbara Fields made with “race” and “witch” in *Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America*. The label “witch” maps onto real entities that don’t fit its definition, and yet the word is treated as if it really describes something because the daily lives of people are structured with the very ideology it produces: “Some societies (including colonial New England) have explained troublesome relations between people as witchcraft and possession by the devil. The explanation makes sense to those whose daily lives produce and reproduce witchcraft, nor can any amount of rational ‘evidence’ disprove it...Ideologies do not need to be plausible, let

alone persuasive, to outsiders. They do their job when they help insiders make sense of the things they do and see –ritually, repetitively –on a daily basis” (110).

Importantly, the issue is not about the correct usage of a term. Rather, what Fields speaks to is the power of an ideological system to turn a fiction into reality because the material behavior of people make the idea a *social reality*. The social world, including institutions like laws, were constructed with the firm belief that witches exist as real people because it served specific material aims. In this case, the restructuring of family relations and the role of women for the sake of capital.⁴ The consequence was the murder of countless thousands who were burned, hung, beheaded, and drowned to death. If witches are socially real (explain material conditions and interactions), and the definition of a witch is a person devoted to the devil (the antithesis of good) with the sole purpose of doing evil, then the rational conclusion from a social standpoint is the extermination of witches. It is only when that explanation and the ideological system that supports that explanation, is dropped that we can see the fiction for what it really is. Sadly, this usually happens too late after suffering and bloodshed has taken place. As Fields notes, “[I]deology is impossible for anyone to analyse rationally who remains trapped on its terrain” (100).

Similarly, *mestizaje* is an ideology that arose from material conditions and is reified in the daily rituals of living people. We saw those conditions in chapter one, such as colonial resource theft and the assimilation of Indigenous tribes, and such rituals include the relationships constrained by colonial definitions of Indigeneity. By maintaining the ideological system of *mestizaje*, we uphold what it stands for even if we may disagree with its core concepts: *mestizas*

⁴ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004.

are entities with questionable natures who are anomalies of the natural order and embody contradictions such that they don't belong anywhere.

We have seen the consequences of that system. If we are to prevent genocide, we must acknowledge mestizaje for what it is: a social construction that doesn't inherently reflect reality. Just as there are no witches, there are no monsters or mestizas. We must go beyond the ideology constructed by the colonial imagination and seek out the material context from which it arose. Only then can we see the world and its people clearly, in particular those relationships.

Anzaldúa's vision has its merits and came from the heart with the best of intentions, but I think ya was looking in the wrong place. Rather than focusing on the identity of the individual, I propose that identity is community constructed and is not something that can be found in your ancestry, blood, or DNA. Identity is not something we work out on our own in isolation. It is a dynamic response to the relationships we have and maintain in the world with those around us.

There may be those reluctant to throw out mestizaje as a racial identity, because what would take its place? It's clear that Chicane communities in the Southwest of the United States differ from Anglo communities in New England, which differ from Afro-Indigenous communities in Haiti. But it's also clear that no two mestizo communities are alike. "Mexicans" are not a monolith, and vary by their locality. Being so, I suggest that we use traditional Indigenous relationships rather than static racial categories. Specifically, I advocate for thinking of group identity in terms of kinship relationships to community (interactions with people and shared material socio-history), land, culture, and language. If Mexicans vary according to these relationships, then these relationships are a better indicator of identity than the de-localized concept of race.

Though it is difficult to rely on these relationships because they have been and continue to be the target of colonial genocide, it is precisely that reason that these relationships are so important. Mestizas are groups of particular de-tribalized people, and it is through maintaining and healing these relationships that their identities remain intact. By maintaining community ties, people find strength and resources in each other to maintain relationships to the land of their ancestors which is continually threatened by colonial capitalism. By maintaining relationships with their culture, people maintain identity with their language and ancestors which helps them maintain current relationships with their community. These circles are intimately woven together, and woven with the people we share communities with.

Importantly, identity is locally constructed in relationship to material conditions and not a de-localized project that remains abstract and static. Relationships are dynamic and imminent. Furthermore, these kinships (relationships to community, land, language, and culture) not only constitute the means by which identity is developed and maintained, it is also the road of healing. By re-establishing kinships that have been severed due to colonial genocide, one may heal from colonial trauma and be a good ancestor to future generations. By leaving racial metaphysics behind and focusing on dynamic relations, we are one step closer to the breaking down the false borders of white supremacy that Anzaldúa was concerned with.

I am not alone in this position. Leo Killsback in an article detailing Cheyenne kinships notes the foundational role they play in concept of group identity: “For the Cheyenne, kinship relationships, roles, and responsibilities extended beyond the nuclear family; they were the foundation for their Indigenous identity. Collectively, the kinship relationships, roles, and responsibilities were the foundation for community and nation-building...As Indigenous nations

rebuild and reclaim nationhood and assert sovereignty, they may only need look at their traditional kinship systems to find guidance” (43). While Killback speaks of relationships between people, Robin Kimmerer speaks about the relationship between land and people that constitutes a community: “In our Anishinaabe way, we count trees as people, ‘the standing people’. Even though the [US] government only counts humans in our township, there’s no denying that we live in the nation of maples” (168). Ya goes on to describe the reciprocity between the maples that feed the people, provide homes for animals, and help to manage the ecosystem; and the duties of people who caretake the land in the threatening age of climate change. Enrique Salmon goes further to note how Indigenous self-identity ties all of these relationships (land, language, culture, and community) together: “Self-identity is a result of a developed relationship to the environment as it is perceived by the culture. Cultural perception stems from language and thought. The human-nature relationship intertwines to both the land and cultural histories” (1331).

Such understandings of identity as inherently relational and tied to community are grounded in Indigenous worldview concepts. For example, “in lak ‘ech” from Mayan communities which can be translated as “myself in you” or “you are my other self”. In lak ‘ech manifests in relationships such that for me to understand community and act within the community I must necessarily understand and act in relation to others whom I share a relationship with. Other similar concepts are “ubuntu” from the Nguni Bantu people, and “whakapapa” from the Māori people. All of these concepts place the individual in a web of relationships which generate identity from community in those relationships. Importantly, such concepts are not equivalent to more generic ideas of relationships like “hozhó” from the Diné

people, which call individuals to be more mindful of their wider connections in order to live in harmony with the world. Rather, concepts like in lak 'ech speak to specific relationships that a person may hold which are more immediate in daily interactions and contribute to particular community identity.

What binds communities together is their network of interrelationships to each other (biological and non-biological) and their shared language and culture, with their relationship to their land that forms a particular material socio-historiography. This framework of group identity is reinforced every time Indigenous people are introduced. They are not asked “What are you?”, but instead “Who are your parents?”, “Who do you know?”, and “how do you live in relationship to both land and people?” Thereby, one is located in a system of relationships and not in an abstract category.

One framework to distinguish the difference between thinking about identity in terms of relationships versus racial categories is to liken such a distinction in terms of population versus typological thought. The typologist assumes the world as they see it is the world that has always been and is as it should be, with objects of that world holding specific distinguishing features that give them a unique identity. So if we wish to identify something in the world, it is simply a matter of finding the unique features of a particular object and putting it in its proper taxonomical place isolated from other kinds. In contrast, the population thinker will see the world and know that it is a dynamic system which came to be through a complex evolution of relationships. Furthermore, that the objects of the world while having particular features are not unique in having them. Rather, the objects of the world came to possess such features by virtue of dialectically engaging with other objects with varying features and that the world is

constructed accordingly. That is, objects are a set of relational features that have evolved over time and not a set of essential characteristics that sprung from nowhere.

To make this more intuitive, think of interlocking rings that have evolved to interlock together. Language is a ring that grew over time by virtue of its tie to the ring of a particular community which in turn grew over time to be interlocked with the land of a particular ecosystem. Those rings in turn came to be tied to specific communities of people such as family and friends which grew over time (births, deaths, pairings, meetings, etc.), and which also grew to be interlock with the continually evolving culture of a particular community. These relationships feature particular characteristics that thinking in terms of racial categories often overlooked, such as nuances of languages and dialects that arose because of unique features of the socio-history of the communities in which those languages arose and generational recipes that grew from the availability of specific land resources.

Importantly, identity is a set of relations gifted by communities (families and extended networks with relationships to specific land, unique socio-histories of cultures and language, etc.), and not a 1:1 racial correspondence of particular features that categorize individuals in a taxonomic system. Simply revising the definition of “mestizo” to “a set of particular relationships” will not work. By virtue of being based on imminent and localized relationships that evolve in a particular material history, identity can’t be a de-localized abstraction that is static and universal.

This view of identity might be uncomfortable at first because it abandons racial talk altogether, and yet there is something intuitively appealing about talking about race. One may object that there is certainly a difference between a “white” person born in Austin, TX that eats

both tacos and BBQ, and a “darker” person with the same history. Talking about white versus mestizo points to those differences. My response would be to question what history is being cited. If “darker” is merely taking the place of referring to a lineage within a specific community, say someone descending from a lineage belonging to the Indigenous diaspora resulting from colonization, then the obvious move would be to cite those specific relationships. Distinguishing between “lighter” and “darker” person tells us nothing, and acts as a stand-in/shorthand that obscures what we are actually concerned with.

The benefit of a community based identity is that it captures what Anzaldúa was concerned with, boundary crossing, without the need to rely on racial categories. Ya observed the tensions between communities, such as language communities, and saw how one could be simultaneously inside both yet not quite into each distinctly. On my model, there is no presupposition that one has to neatly fit into colonial settler categories that form the institutionalized borders of oppressed communities. Chicane people from la frontera often lament that they speak Spanglish, neither fitting into one language group perfectly and this characteristic is taken to be yet another form of evidence that they belong nowhere. On my relational view of identity, it is perfectly natural to have evolved a specific form of communication because it is rooted in a particular community history tied to land and culture. In this case, displacement, forced education, and institutional exclusion that necessitated particular ways to code speak. Without the need to make identity a universal category with inherent characteristics, the sense of not belonging disappears because we can accept communities as they are and have evolved once we drop the de-localized standards that form ideological assumptions about the world.

When we abandon the ideology of race, we see that the relational view of identity is how we intuitively view identity in other aspects. For example, one can be both a daughter and a mother at the same time, be one first and then the other second, and perhaps even lose one identity later in life. This is because such identities are relational and evolve over time in a set of material conditions. Furthermore, how one is a daughter or a mother (and the particular features of those relationships) will vary by the community (family) with its own set of material histories. It is only when we begin demanding that identity be static and categorically distinct as an abstract universal, as in the case of racial ideology, without ties to specific material conditions with an evolving history that will fall into problems of contradictions and none-being that fail to represent reality.

My position differs from the *mestizaje* of Mex-istentialism in important ways and avoids the problems encountered by that tradition, while speaking to the positive vision of Anzaldúa. First, my position is concerned with locality rather than a de-localized identity. This avoids the problem of authentic identity, in which one's racial identity is always in question: "Are you really American? You don't look like your parents are from here; Are you really Mexican? You don't speak *real* Spanish; Are you really Indigenous? You don't look "Indian". As noted earlier, non-mixed Indigenous communities have had the *mestizo* label imposed on them for colonial purposes. On the other side, there are cases of "pretendians" who are of full European ancestry and have no ties to Indigenous communities but claim Indigenous identity through *mestizaje*. If we rely on community as identity rather than a racial category, these issues are solved not with DNA tests or discussions of what a *mestizo* really is, but with a look at community relationships.

It can be very difficult to prove ancestry in an oppressive system that displaces and annihilates. It is far easier to point to community relationships and involvement.

Second, because my position highlights culture and language rather than biological essentialism and hierarchy, this removes the racial incentive to ignore African/African-descent individuals within communities. There is strong anti-Black sentiment in Indigenous communities because within the mestizo ideology and its system, one can only be Spanish and Indigenous, and African individuals are another threat of dilution under the rules of blood quantum without providing any benefit (however false that promise) of blanqueamiento. African communities are effectively erased, and then suppressed in order to conform with the ideology of colonial white supremacy. There are common slurs aimed at African-descent individuals that stigmatize their position within Chicane communities. “Pelo malo”(bad hair) is associated with curly African hair and families will straighten the hair of their daughters in order to conform with colonial ideals of beauty that don’t reflect those bodies. This anti-Black sentiment also leads to colorism within families, where lighter children are prized over darker ones, and a fear of association with African bodies. Admonishments like, “Don’t go out in the sun or you’ll turn black,” have a sinister undertone that stigmatizes African bodies within Indigenous communities and reminds them that they don’t belong to those communities. My position not only more accurately reflects the make-up of communities because it includes all individuals within those communities, it further highlights the fact that mestizaje is a particular ideological imposition constructed within a system that wishes to include some and exclude others, despite its superficial tone of inclusion by way of mixing and ambiguity.

Third, while disposing of essentialism and hierarchy, my position offers the flexibility of identity that Anzaldúa envisioned. Communities, and their language and culture, evolve and change. So do the number of communities individuals may become a part of during their lifetime. In a globalized age characterized by displacement and migration, many people will not have the luxury of living in the same community where they were born. On my model, one can be a part of multiple communities simultaneously and many communities over a period of time. It is the strength of one's relationships within those communities, in particular the shared socio-historiography, and involvement in community well-being that determines one's identity, not one's "race". Being tied to the shared material conditions and socio-history of a particular community will heavily influence one's relationships and particular life outcomes. Those community circumstances shaped the lives of one's family members which in turn shape one's life: where we could reside, the occupations we could have, the resources we had, etc. If one is only superficially tied to a community, such as your local sports club that you play with once a month, those weaker relationships will have weaker impact in determining your identity.

Finally, my paradigm prioritizes living communities and their history rather than a romanticized and racialized past. It is no accident that in the racial narrative of white supremacy tribal identity has become conflated with an Indigenous one. By eliding the two, colonial institutions have effectively crystalized the agency of living communities who are relegated to a particular identity better suited to a western novel by a settler author. Communities grow, they expand and contract, they evolve and change over time. This includes cultural shifts of ideas and rituals, language, and ancestry. Tribes have always intermarried, adopted, and even split. Such an identity was characterized by shared community and history, not of race. By replacing tribal

identity with a racial one, colonial governments have granted themselves the power to police the boundaries of community agency: whom marries whom, what children count as “Indigenous”, cultural markers that display one’s Indigenous identity for means of policing, etc. This insures that generation after generation, there will be those effectively cut off from their communities if they chose an alternative life not in keeping with colonial dictates.

The benefit of my position is that communities who have been de-tribalized can still retain an Indigenous identity by virtue of a shared culture and socio-historiography native to a particular land. Furthermore, because my paradigm does away with the false settler logic of race, tribal communities are free to evolve and govern as they should be given that they are autonomous nations. They should not be constrained by blood quantum and the whims of the colonial governments that seek their eradication. Just as any nation is not constrained by racialization and can grant citizenship to members of various colors, so too should tribal nations of Cemenahuac. How they do so is entirely up to them by virtue of their sovereignty.

There may be a few objections to my relational and community view of identity. What about foster children who no longer have ties to their community of birth? Could anyone just learn a language and join a community? How does this community model work in an era of colonial globalization where so many have been displaced from their homeland? How are we supposed to track oppression?

The first objections seems to be concerned with biological relationships. If the biological children of Indigenous communities are taken by colonial forces, through residential schooling and “save the man” foster programs, then they have lost the four relationships I specified earlier of land, language, culture, and community. Yet it would seem bizarre, and disturbingly

unempathetic, to say that those taken children no longer have a claim to reunite with their community of birth. I share that same intuition and think this objection makes a mistake in thinking that relationships are all-or-nothing without any history: either you have a relationship or you don't, they aren't degrees of relationships, nor do relationships have history. I think this is a wrong way to view relationships in general, for they are always dynamic and wax or wane over time in a complex system of evolution. Rather than viewing the four relationships as absent in this example, they should be seen as fractured and fragile. Any part of healing from the trauma of displacement will assuredly be re-establishing those relationships and strengthening them as I have claimed elsewhere.

My answer to the first objection also answers the second. In wanting to allow those that have been displaced from their communities a chance to heal, we also want to keep out those that have no claim to these relationships and wish to exploit those ties. Someone wishing to learn an Indigenous language may do so regardless of community relationships and thus become a part of a broader language community which will take the form of small language circles (people you learn from, interact with, etc.), but it will not grant access to a particular living community with a specific socio-history that binds people in that community. Again, relationships are localized and not de-localized. One does not join an abstract community by being included in a universal category. Learning Mayan does not include someone in a Mayan community, because there are only *specific* living Mayan communities with actual people and histories. It is no accident that many of the outed pretendians, as well as faketas and blackfishers, have no relationships to those communities that they superficially adopt through dress or cultural performance. They have no shared history nor do they wish to contribute to the well-being of a particular community.

They adopt an abstract label that is delocalized from communities and the particular obligations that comes from those relationships in order to benefit from an abstract racial label.

Part of the confusion arises from a prioritization of ancestry in place of the relationships we should be concerned with. Ancestry may be a factor in community relationships, but it is not a cause. One can be part of a community without biological lineage such as in the case of adopted children. What should be prioritized are the relationships I've noted, regardless of ancestry. The problem is that physiognomy is read as a shorthand for these relationships and becomes a criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of people in a particular community. In reality, physiognomy tells us nothing about what we are really concerned with: the relationships of people with their community, land, language, and culture. This leads to all sorts of confusion in settler logic and comes across with the sad, old refrains of "How come you don't speak X? You don't *look* Y!"

One may object that certainly some racial-dressing individuals are involved in those communities they exploit, and therein lies the danger. They work, give, share, and contribute to a community while claiming an identity that is not theirs to claim. For example, Rachel Dolezal who was born to two Euro-settler parents worked as an instructor of Africana studies at Eastern Washington University and was chapter president for a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. None of that may have been problematic, except that ya claimed a Black identity and changed i-appearance to match that newly constructed racial identity. Repeatedly, Dolezal lied about who i-father was in an attempt to cover up i-ancestry. Ya also claimed an Indigenous identity and went so far as to describe living in a teepee as a child.

As extreme a case as this was, it demonstrates the strength of my position. No matter how much certain individuals may want to pass themselves off as a member of a racialized community, there is a fundamental lack of shared history that knits a community together. Importantly, this shared history has nothing to do with race. Rather, the *racialization* of a community is the vehicle through which communities are oppressed and this can't be faked via hair perms or tanning beds. Dolezal claimed to be the victim of racially motivated hate crimes while assuming a Black identity, and thus shares an understanding of what it means/feels like to be a person racialized as Black. I will not engage such claims for veracity. Rather, more salient is that Dolezal will never have that moment of knowing that your ancestors were tortured and murdered for the sake of greed, and that you still live in the system responsible for those deaths that continues to target you and the ones you love. Ya never had the circumstances that necessitates the “race talk”, where parents have to explain American racism and what to do if you're ever pulled over by the police. Again, what matters is not the surface trappings of color and dress, but the foundational relationships that hold an individual within a community. Outsiders may make in-roads, and may even be welcomed to a degree, but they can't conjure relationships that aren't there simply because they wish them to be. Such relationships are borne of specific socio-historiography going back generations that is tied to land and the suffering for it. Eventually, the lack of those relationships will surface no matter how much one may pretend.

Such objections arise from a mistake in thinking that identity is something in the DNA, rather than acknowledging racialization for what it really is: a social ontology constructed according to a particular colonial logic that is then projected onto specific bodies, justified with a metaphysical ideology, and then claims that such a system represents how the world really is.

Taking a DNA test will not give you identity because it is not something to be found at the cellular level. It will only give you the probability of specific phenotypes that may or may not occur. As any geneticist knows, there are more divergences within supposedly coherent racial groups than there are between them. What we track when we claim a group identity related to history and place is a relationship to a community of living people, not a “race” which is the product of white supremacist ideology and can only be found in the colonial imagination.

This leads to the third objection. As mentioned, these four relationships are targeted by colonial institutions that seek their eradication. If we rely on them for our identities, we risk losing ourselves as these relationships are washed away over time. I share this worry, and because of it think that it makes these four relationships all the more important. By relying on an arbitrary racial identity constructed by colonial institutions, we contribute to community erasure. It plays into the hand of white supremacy that seeks to weaken racialized communities so that their resources may be taken. If all I have in common with other members of my racialized group is an abstract label without any force behind it, and which can be revised at the whim of white supremacist institutions, how am I to understand my identity with them for means of solidarity and resistance? It is no accident that each de-tribalized Indigenous generation is given an abstract racial label: from mestizo to Hispanic, from Hispanic to Latino. By staying at an abstract level removed from the daily struggles of our communities, which vary widely in relationships of language, culture, history, and land, it gives colonial institutions more time to erase those relationships and weaken community identity. The solution then would be to recognize the importance of the four relationships and strengthen them for the fight against annihilation, because that is what is at stake for racialized communities. So not only is it important to focus on

the relationships being targeted, it is also important to let go of racial ideology that distracts us from what is really important: our relationships to our land and our people.

A related objection would be the concern regarding the globalization of material conditions and the correlated disintegration of localized conditions. For example, I may live with my community in a particular place but my rent money goes to a corporation in another country. How are we to understand material community relationships in a globalized world? I do not see this objection as a rebuttal to my position, but rather a problem highlighted by my position. When we think of groups only in socio-racial terms, we miss important facts about those groups regarding their particular conditions. When such facts are illuminated, we can then understand the relationships that determine those facts and have a better understanding of those communities. With that understanding, those relationships can be better managed for the sake of those communities. In this example, a more ideal scenario would be local ownership of land held by community members so that those resources can be put back into the community. Rather than having those resources outsourced by a corporation to particular individuals outside the community.

A fourth objection may be that such community relationships are idealized in a time characterized by displacement, migration, and diasporas. How are communities supposed to maintain relationships when they are scattered? First, I do think technology plays a role in connecting and maintaining relationships. Social media has even allowed communities to strengthen their relationships and disseminate vital information when colonial forces, like roaming police patrols, actively hamper gatherings. In the case of protests, technology helps

communities avoid police violence, connect with specific members for resources like first aid, and increase solidarity.

Second, even in migratory diasporas communities gather. For example, specific areas of cities may have a high concentration of a specific community because they have gathered for housing, work, or family. It is not uncommon for members to reach out to those they know and invite them to an area. In this way, communities rebuild themselves despite displacement. While I think communities in the modern world of online technology will inevitably be a mixed of in-person and online relationships, I see no reason to think that more tools at the disposal of communities would weaken them. Communities will find each other and thrive, despite attempts to annihilate them.

Fifth, are all relationships within the community the same? I have been talking so far one dimensionally about community relationships, but surely there is a difference between refugees, immigrants, second generation, and sixth generation members. As I've stated before, relationships are dynamic and localized. They not only differ between people who hold them, they evolve themselves over time. A refugee who experienced war will have a different relationship to the community than their grandchild who hears about the experience, sees the living trauma in their family, and the effects it has on the community. Each experiences a different kind of relationship to that socio-historiography. This model is the same for all other aspects of community relationships, such as language. Given that we still live in a colonial world that values European languages like English and Spanish, Indigenous languages are becoming extinct. That younger generations aren't fluent in their native language doesn't diminish their relationship to their community, it only reflects a different kind of language relationship and

particular circumstances. It would be an odd family that refused to recognize members who were unable to speak their native language. Therefore, community relationships need not be the same across all members for the group to maintain an identity. Only that those relationships exist and that they are living in some form in the people that constitute that community. By paying attention to how particular relationships manifest in a dynamic community, they can be attended to for the benefit of those individuals and that community. In the case of loss of language, the community could devote more resources to fight that loss and strengthen weakening relationships.

Lastly, rather than obscure oppression, community identity brings it into sharper focus. Oppression is not binary, one can oppress while also being oppressed. Furthermore, not all oppressions operate the same or manifest in the same way. By adopting a community based identity, we see that oppression is multifaceted and we can specifically see how oppression operates. For example, if we rely on *mestizaje* to track oppression we miss the fact that mestizos vary by language, community, culture, and their relationship to land; and how oppression intersects with each of those in a particular socio-historical system. An educated mestizo who speaks English in an American urban area is not oppressed in the same way that an uneducated and displaced mestizo who speaks Spanish in a rural area is. Similarly, the mestizos on the north and south side of *la frontera* experience oppression in different ways. The community based identity does not deny the fact that oppression occurs. It goes even further to illuminate how *specific* communities are oppressed in specific ways through imposed racialization, along with other forms of oppression such as gender and class, by particular institutions and people.

Going back to Fields' example, if we continue to talk about witches we obscure the material facts about why a particular community was oppressed. It tells us nothing to say that witches are oppressed because they are witches, nor that people are oppressed because they are thought to be witches. Rather, we can say that a community of women were demonized as witches in order to control the reproductive power of that community for the purposes of primitive accumulation (Federici 88-89).

Similarly, keeping the racial discourse of mestizaje obscures the fact that a community is oppressed in order to take resources and the racialization of their identity comes later as a justification to make them a target. For example, the continued use of la migra (ICE) in communities racialized as mestizaje along la frontera. Such use is meant to intimidate and dislocate communities from the land for the continuation of American settling which necessitates the removal of communities already there. The policing of these communities is tied to their racialization which is used as a visible target and justification, despite their American citizenship by virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe signed in 1848 or the fact that they comprise the latest generation of Indigenous communities who are native to the land prior to colonization. Talk of "illegal immigrants" conceals the real motivation.⁵ After all, la migra is not usually concerned with policing migrants and immigrants from European communities.

I propose talking in terms of community, because by continuing to discuss identity in racial terms we adopt settler logic even if we oppose the system constructed according to that

⁵ The level of intimidation and the strain placed on these communities can't be overstated. At the time of this writing, ICE showed up to police groups of parents waiting outside Uvalde Elementary School on the day of a massacre. I can't imagine waiting to know if your child is still alive while worrying that you will be arrested and deported. Despite ICE claiming they were there to help with the investigation, one should be suspicious of this claim given the history and level of violence ICE enjoys with impunity. <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/93beaa/ice-agents-probably-wont-arrest-people-affected-by-the-texas-shooting>>

ideology. Just as speaking of witches reinforces the reality of them in a Christian system that seeks to eradicate them, so does speaking of race in a white supremacist system. One can only speak in the contradictions of white supremacist racial logic if using racialized language, which obscures the fact that people are marked for oppression not because of their race but because of primitive accumulation and their *color* is used as justification. When speaking in racial terms, we are pushed to forget that oppressed people were first exposed to violence for material reasons. The racial justification came later and was built up through the colonial imagination. Adopting community language helps in the fight against dominant colonial narratives that continue to target racialized communities.

Problems will arise, and I don't mean to imply that by simply changing our language we will end colonialism. Narrative disruption is only part of a larger project that involves reparations in the form of land, income, education, housing, and healthcare, in conjunction with restorative justice practices like acknowledgement, memorial, and integrative healing. For example, communities straddle borders which is a problem for colonial nations that demand strict boundaries. How can communities negotiate nationalistic policing that supplant localized identity with an abstract loyalty to a country?

I'm reminded of border communities in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Though communities have for centuries straddled the borders between the two nations, being a combination of Kreyol and Spanish speaking, a mix of Catholicism and Voudo, intermarrying and blending, the respective governments have sought to break these communities apart in order to instantiate nationalistic ideology of separateness. One of the most heinous acts in recent memory is the Dominican Republic's massacre of thousands of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans

along the border in 1937. Following the ethnic cleanse, the government promoted a cultural cleanse motivated by anti-Haitian ideology in which it renamed towns, built Catholic churches and funded pro-Spanish schools.

Yet, despite all these efforts to break apart communities that straddled borders, such communities continued to thrive. Supposedly distinct groups continued to intermarry, blend customs and languages, trade, use multiple currencies, and cross the border repeatedly. The historian Edward Paulino writes of his experience, “border residents told me the region is the nation’s Alpha and Omega, the cradle of the republic...and that nonborder Dominicans were ignorant of its invaluable contribution...” (166). Rather than the “backwards” war zone that most borders are depicted as by nationalist dialogue, border communities are rich in diversity and collaboration that undermines essentialist ideas of identity.

Similar to the border case, what about communities that are occupied, policed, and confined? For example, Palestinians in Gaza. In both cases, communities maintain identity through the four relationships: socio-historiography with people of their the community, language, land, and culture. Such relationships bind a group of people together despite the efforts of their oppressors to weaken them. Continuing with the example of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, even though border communities were heavily policed they maintained relationships and these relationships were what held them together. In a 1945 Dominican army report, the officer writes “There exists in this town [of Pedernales] and its outskirts a numerous group with Haitian family members...the permanence of these people here is a great obstacle for the development of the Dominicanization of the Border Plan...” (Paulino 146). Despite being targeted for genocide and assimilation, border communities maintained their identity through

their four relationships. It is telling that the officer worries precisely about those relationships, because that is the exact method by which communities maintain identity and by which communities lose identity. Ties to one another is the means by which history, culture, and language is maintained respective to land, and the means by which oppressors are thwarted.

Another issue is how tribal nations forced onto reservations will navigate community identity instead of a racialized one. As sovereign nations, that is for them to decide. Some will have wider doors than others, but each tribal community must decide for themselves how they will grant citizenship if they choose a localized identity. This situation differs from a de-tribalized community who lacks the authority over its members that a nation possesses. As a legal entity who governs, this added complexity must be negotiated carefully for the reasons I mentioned earlier (keeping in community members while keeping out exploiters) as well as the fact that tribes have more at stake. They still have land and resources, albeit limited and not always ancestral.

Last, I want to address the special circumstances between tribal and de-tribalized communities in Cemenahuac. As mentioned in chapter one, “mestizos” have a particular negative association within tribal communities because of their perceived cooperation with colonial states and their perpetuation of abuses against tribes. The tension between these communities is still present and complex, and many are very vocal about who counts as a mestizo, who counts as Indigenous, and what each means in terms of community identity. In an interview, Anzaldúa was asked about the difference between Chicane people claiming an Indigenous identity and “detrribalized urban mixed bloods” who do the same:

I do see a difference. But ‘detribalized urban mixed bloods’ according to whom? Indians, ‘whites’? There are strong pan-Indian, intertribal communities throughout the country. These communities come together to help each other, to remember, to honor, to re-connect. In the case of Chicanos, being “Mexican” is not a tribe. So in a sense Chicanos and Mexicans are ‘detribalized.’ We don’t have tribal affiliations but neither do we have to carry ID cards establishing tribal affiliation. Indians suffer from a much more intense colonization, one that is even more insidious because it is covered up, and white and colored Americans remain ignorant of it. Natives are really invisible; they are not even put on the map unless the U.S. government wants to rip them off. And mixed-bloods are even more invisible. Chicanos, people of color, and ‘whites’ choose to ignore the struggles of Native people even when it’s right in our caras (faces). I hate that all of us harbor este desconocimiento. It’s a willful ignorance. Though both ‘detribalized urban mixed bloods’ and Chicanas/os are recovering and reclaiming, this society is killing off urban mixed bloods through cultural genocide, by not allowing them equal opportunities for better jobs, schooling, and health care (Keating 290).

Rather than seeing all of these communities along the same axis of systemic genocide, there is a tendency to see them oppositionally and in isolation. However, just as I view individual identity in terms of localized relationships within a community, I view community identity in terms of localized relationships with other communities. Both “mestizos” and “urban mixed bloods” came from tribal communities, perhaps even the same one in some cases, that were/are exposed to the

oppression of a colonial capital state fundamentally structured with the ideology of white supremacy. How that oppression is navigated on the micro and macro level determine individual circumstances. For example, whether parents decide to raise their children within the tribe or venture into urban areas in search of better opportunities, or whether those children identify as Indigenous or not. I can say nothing about the particular relationships between such communities, but I can say that it would be a mistake to see them as necessarily oppositional or exclusive. Rather, we should endeavor to see all communities are nuanced interactions with each other under particular material conditions with specific socio-historiography in the context of colonialism. A context that often pits communities against each other in order for colonial institutions to maintain power and control.

Between communities, we can see relationships through shared sensory experience such as food, music, dance, etc. The micro relationships that unite a single community are also present as macro relationships that interconnect communities to form larger communities. For example, the band Las Cafeteras released a Spanglish version of Ray Charles' "Georgia on My Mind" to unite the diaspora of Indigenous communities in Georgia during a election in 2020.⁶ The song, a blend of trap and cumbia sounds, helped motivate a record voter turnout of 65% from a wide variety of communities from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and many others.⁷ While these groups constitute individual communities, their familiarity with such sounds allowed them to share an experience through music which motivated them towards political solidarity –rings of relationships between and amongst communities.

⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/catchy-spanglish-version-georgia-my-mind-calls-latinos-vote-runoffs-n1251740>

⁷ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/georgia-latinos-shatter-runoff-turnout-record-groups-make-last-push-n1252791>

Importantly, though such shared relationships unite communities it doesn't flatten them. For example, while both Mexican and Guatemalan communities have tamal recipes, they are also very different. The Mexican tamal is cylindrical, wrapped in corn husks, and has a tougher dough, while the Guatemalan tamal is more square-shaped, wrapped in plantain leaves, and has a softer dough. Furthermore, there are thousands of varieties depending on the particular region, local communities, and family recipes within those communities. Each tamal is the result of relationships with land resources, generational history, and evolution of recipe; all interlocked with culture and community conditions. Identity is local, rich, and dynamic, not abstract and flat in the way that mestizaje wishes us to be.

Anzaldúa moved us closer to community identity, but misstepped by falling into the colonial trap of mestizaje. By constructing the new mestiza on the bones of earlier philosophers who saw mestizaje as a way to a whiter world, the ambiguous identity of Anzaldúa's new mestiza carried along that project –towards a world of muddled and disoriented individuals.

That's not to say that ya did so intentionally or that i-work is useless. On the contrary, Anzaldúa's work has generated a new tradition in which scholars try to understand how we navigate a colonial world as racialized, classed, and gendered individuals that don't always neatly fit into the categories constructed by white supremacy. María Lugones' theory of world traveling and Mariana Ortega's theory of multiplicity provide valuable insight into how people cross into spaces and hold multiple identities at once. Important research has been done in phenomenology and epistemology that disturbs settler logic and boundaries, and I hope it continues well into future generations. But with that future, I also hope that we can finally put to bed the racial narratives that constrain our lives and make us question our place in the world.

Including those racial narratives that purport to be advantageous. Just as colonial nations break up communities with artificial land borders and displace people from their homes, the colonial narrative of *mesitza* breaks up our sense of self by creating false categories of the self and disorients the way we relate to each other. Such a narrative has never made sense in Indigenous families whose members embody a rainbow of colors, and yet consider themselves one family. What binds them together and to their community is not their “race” or color, but the depth of their relationships which can’t be found in the individual’s DNA.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated why there is nothing to be gained from racially essentializing the group of people that have come to be known as mestizos, and hope that I have lead you, my reader, to three conclusions. First, that mestizaje is racialization as a form of monsterization. It is an imposed ideology rooted in particular material conditions, such that the system is justified in destroying monsters for the sake of resources. Second, that mestizaje serves to detribalize communities for that goal and is beyond saving as an ideology. Mestizaje is fundamentally rooted in a colonial system of annihilation, and serves the system in which it was constructed. Third, that community identity recaptures the agency that mestizaje erases and a localized understanding of identity better reflects the realities and experiences of living people.

Community identity rejects the logic of purity demanded by settler frameworks of identity grounded in racialization. As a final example, one can see community identity operate through healthcare practices of Indigenous communities. Anthropologists argue about the veracity and purity of curanderismo practices, just how much comes from Indigenous knowledge and how much comes from European traditions. Yet, as far as this author knows, there are no similar debates pertaining to the originality of “western medicine”, just how much is Greek, how much is British, how much is German, the influence of Chinese medicine on current vaccination practices, etc. In a world of white supremacy, only settler communities can be pure. Everyone else must be measured against that standard, cut up, dissected, and examined without a chance of achieving that moving goal post. Current curanderismo manifests differently in each community, because it is tied to what the land gives and the particular relationships of the people to that land;

how they've evolved together and with each other. That some traditions incorporate non-native medicine like acupuncture, speaks to the dedication of those healthcare providers that will seek out whatever cure to their ailing patients. To see such traditions under the light of settler purity which sees the world in terms of ideal categories, not only removes the agency and values of those practitioners, but also misunderstands the practice of medicine as a whole: a dynamic and evolving practice situated in a set of relationships. So too with identity.

Finally, I would like to end with a quote from Dr. Kim Tallbear. Ya speaks to the tension between the scientific, one might say pseudo-scientific, impulse to categorize one's identity based on some biological marker of race (phenotypes, blood, DNA) and the identity given by one's community. Because of its powerful reading, I quote ya at length:

The question of how we as Dakota got to where we are has already been answered, and the answer does not lie in genetics. I could reference Dakota creation stories that give us values for living, narrate our common history, cohere us as a people with a common moral framework, and tie us to a sacred land base. But another important narrative exists that, for many of us, is arguably more crucial today. We Dakota people got to where we are in the early twenty-first century largely because of what is known in mainstream historiography as the Dakota Conflict of 1862. A full-blown war from the perspective of Dakota historians and community members, the 1862 war recircumscribed present-day Dakota geography, political economy, family relations, governance, and identity. It was the moment when our ancestors' dispossession from our ancestral lands —

from the life-giving rivers in what is today southern Minnesota—was crystallized. The Dakotas’ pushing back violently against white settlement, and the forced marches, prison camps, and mass execution that ensued, marked a bloody remapping of Dakota life. “Who we really are” is not a question that most, if any Dakota, think can be answered by finding out that they have mtDNA markers that “originated” in Mongolia. All tribal or indigenous peoples have similarly crucial narratives, whether they are creation stories or whether they are those pivotal moments in colonial history that reshaped their lands and thus their land-based identities (152).

Tallbear speaks to the core of Indigenous identity: community. A community that is tied together by specific relationships to each other through history, culture, language, and land. A community that has evolved in, and continues to be oppressed by, a colonial world. For the so-called mestizos, a group displaced from land, community ties are all the more fragile but also that much more resilient. We have survived and continue to survive genocide, with a strength seen in our passion for life, our culture, and each other.

I hope that I have offered good medicine for my communities. Medicine that is greatly needed to heal from the violence and trauma perpetuated by the colonial systems that continue to oppress us. I also hope that other communities find my medicine helpful, and use this model as a way of resistance and restoration. Such a process involves working to re-establish weakened relationships worn away by generations of colonial capitalism. It involves appreciating the communities we belong to and strengthening them. It involves working together with the firm

belief that there are no such thing as monsters, whatever shape, color or ancestry they are purported to be.

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