

# **PERSPECTIVAS**

HISPANIC THEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE

EIGHTEENTH ISSUE – 2021

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# PERSPECTIVAS

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EIGHTEENTH ISSUE, 2021

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# P E R S P E C T I V A S

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# P E R S P E C T I V A S

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**EIGHTTEENTH ISSUE | 2021**

**Editorial [ENGLISH VERSION]**

Almost a year and a half ago, the world embarked on a rollercoaster of social uncertainty and death caused by the then-novel Coronavirus. Since its inception, COVID-19 has been part of the common parlance of the world. Knowing about the rapid spread of the Coronavirus was made possible by the exponential growth of communications technology and a new generation of people whose preferred mode of interaction is through digital devices. Through that same technology, we saw the emergence of the struggles of the Black Lives Matter movement. We found out about the death of several Black and racialized peoples at the hands of the police and immigration authorities. We learned about the profound systemic social, political, and economic inequities that shape our societies, including access to COVID-19 vaccination. And we also got to watch and listen, in real-time, the captivating and challenging poem of Amanda Gorman, as she spoke during the inauguration of newly elected USA President Joe Biden. We found out about multiple changes in the political arena across the world and the unjust war that Israel carries against Palestinians. Our digital devices also allowed us to be virtual eyewitnesses of the unmarked burial site where 215 children were buried on the grounds of the Catholic Indian Residential schools at Kamloops, British Columbia. Meanwhile, human existence is increasingly threatened by the potential of an environmental apocalypse and by the emergence of super viruses resistant to drugs.

The news about incidents, tragedies, or emerging movements in the world quickly become old news because of the neck-break speed at which we are bombarded with information. At no point in human history have we been aware of the fast-changing pace of reality and of our cultural traditions to the degree we are now. It seems we have become enthralled by the “latest” and the “newest” piece of news and information by staying connected. Yet, this same wealth and accessibility to communications technology also contribute to our reduced ability to concentrate, to pay attention, and to connect at a personal human level. These many questions are undoubtedly the result of the new reality we confront as the world has continued to shrink and as we become painfully aware of our own destructive power in this planet of ours. These multiple issues I mention are not just topics for further discussion and exploration; they are part of the very processes of the undergoing cultural reconfiguration we are experiencing across the globe. These topics are also part of the complex array of interconnected social forces emerging as the world becomes more aware of the legacy of colonization, and the efforts of collective struggles for justice around the globe.

Amidst this jungle of social issues, cultural concerns, and human challenges, religious devotion and spiritualities seem to be gaining ground. But these are no longer dominated by Christianity. A new interreligious ferment is emerging as new digital churches, mosques, and centers of spirituality are popping up everywhere, even while scandals of religious leaders continue to emerge, and entire tragedies can be directly connected to religion and theology. It seems we are finally coming to grips with the fact that theology can be counted as yet another accomplice in the colonizing project. For religious scholars and theologians, it is no longer

business as usual. As people wrestle with the many losses of loved ones whose lives have been cut short due to the Coronavirus, questions about the meaning of life are resurfacing. Not surprisingly, liberation theologies and decolonizing attitudes are gaining ground with renewed force in their dis-covering of the multiplicity of issues of which theology must be mindful, besides being aware of the necessity to think about the reality on the ground—where people live life and weave their religious traditions in their everyday life.

On that note, and as part of this mix of emerging issues today, we are happy to offer you the 2021 issue of *Perspectivas*. Each of the articles helps us amplify our visions and understanding of the Latina/o/x religious experience in response to contemporary issues pertinent to these communities. In the first article, Neomi DeAnda presents a rich interlacing of historical events, mythological accounts, and popular religious customs in the devotion of María de la Leche in two different sites. De Anda retraces some of the historical aspects that contributed to the emergence of such devotions, how they have changed over time, and how they have endured the test of time. Indeed, Latinas/os/xs are not unfamiliar with hope and hopelessness, as the second article by César Baldelomar's exemplifies. Taking a robust philosophical approach, he engages the field of ethics and the pervasive emphasis of a Christian hope for an otherworldly reality. Baldelomar challenges romantic and utopic notions of hope with what he calls a "realist" stance, claiming the rich tradition of Afro-pessimism and Latina/o/x hopelessness. He draws on these rich traditions to reorient our ethical imagination toward future possibilities. It is precisely that future that Hanna Kang, in the third article, invites us to reconsider even as we revise our past. Much in line with the work of Breny Mendoza by claiming the Arabs as part of the mix of *mestizaje* in Honduras, and much in the way of Ricardo Feierstein claiming the Jewish presence in Argentina, Kang amplifies our vision of *mestizaje* yet again by registering the Asian presence both in Latin America and among Latinas/os/xs. She further broadens our vision of this contested term carving out spaces where we can reclaim the Asian presence among us.

In this 2021 issue of *Perspectivas*, we are particularly honored to also offer the presentations celebrating Peter Mena's HTI 2020 Book of the year award. We are happy to provide these presentations by Jacqueline Hidalgo, Luis Rivera Pagán, and Kristi Upson-Saia, including Mena's response to these presentations. Each of these presentations and Mena's response illustrate the growing edges of Latina/o/x theologies and their versatility in engaging critical theoretical frameworks and ancient texts.

We offer this issue as a resource and invitation to continue our work across academic and non-academic plains.

Néstor Medina, Senior Editor

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# P E R S P E C T I V A S

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**NÚMERO DECIMO-OCTAVO | 2021**

**Editorial [SPANISH VERSION]**

Hace casi año y medio, el mundo se embarcó en una montaña rusa de incertidumbre y muerte causada por el entonces nuevo Coronavirus. Desde su comienzo, COVID-19 se han hecho parte del vocabulario común en el mundo. Saber acerca de la propagación del Coronavirus fue posible por el crecimiento acelerado de tecnologías de comunicación y de una nueva generación de personas quienes prefieren interactuar por medio de dispositivos digitales. Por la misma tecnología vimos el surgimiento del movimiento Black Lives Matter; supimos de la muerte de personas afrodescendientes y racializadas a manos de la policía y las autoridades de inmigración; aprendimos acerca de las profundas inequidades sociales, políticas, y económicas que forman nuestras sociedades, incluyendo acceso a la vacuna para COVID-19; pudimos ver y escuchar, en vivo, el poema cautivador y desafiante de Amanda Gorman, cuando habló durante la inauguración del electo nuevo presidente de los E.E.U.U. Joe Biden; y supimos acerca de cambios múltiples en la arena política alrededor del mundo y de la guerra injusta que lleva Israel contra palestinos. Nuestros dispositivos digitales también nos permitieron ser testigos virtuales del descubrimiento de una tumba no identificada donde 215 niños/as Indígenas fueron enterrados en los terrenos de las escuelas residenciales católicas indias en Kamloops, British Columbia. Mientras tanto, la existencia humana se ve crecientemente amenazada por el potencial de un apocalipsis ambiental y por el surgimiento de super virus que se resisten a las drogas.

Las noticias de incidentes, tragedias, y movimientos emergentes en el mundo rápidamente se convierten en noticias viejas por la alta velocidad en la que somos bombardeados con información. En ningún momento en la historia humana hemos estado tan conscientes del ritmo rápidamente cambiante de la realidad y de nuestras tradiciones culturales en la medida de lo que ahora somos. Parece que nos hemos quedado cautivados por las noticias e información “más recientes” y “más nuevas” al mantenernos conectados/as. Sin embargo, esa misma riqueza y accesibilidad a la tecnología contribuye a nuestra reducida habilidad de concentrarnos, a no poner atención, y a no poder conectarnos en los niveles personales humanos. Estas muchas preguntas son sin duda el resultado de la nueva realidad que confrontamos a medida que el mundo sigue encogiéndose, y a medida que nos volvemos dolorosamente conscientes de nuestro poder destructivo en este nuestro planeta. Estos asuntos múltiples que menciono no son solamente temas para mayor discusión y exploración; estos son también parte de los mismos procesos de reconfiguración cultural que estamos experimentando en todo el mundo. Estos temas son también parte del complejo abanico de fuerzas sociales entrelazadas que están surgiendo en la medida que el mundo se hace más consciente del legado de la colonización, y de los esfuerzos colectivos de lucha por justicia en todo el globo terráqueo.

En medio de esta jungla de problemas sociales, preocupaciones culturales, y desafíos humanos, la devoción religiosa y la espiritualidad parecen estar ganando terreno. Pero estas ya no más son dominadas por el cristianismo. Un nuevo fermento interreligioso está emergiendo al grado que nuevas iglesias, mezquitas, y centros de espiritualidad digital surgen por todos lados, aun cuando continuamos viendo escándalos de líderes religiosos, y de completas tragedias directamente influenciadas por la religión y la teología. Parece que finalmente estamos preparados para aceptar el hecho que la teología puede ser contada como otra fuerza cómplice en el proyecto colonizador. Para estudiosos/as/xs de la religión y teólogas/os/xs ya no se trata de continuar normalmente. A medida que las personas luchan con la pérdida de seres queridos cuyas vidas fueron truncadas por el coronavirus, resurgen las preguntas del significado de la vida. No es sorprendente que las teologías de la liberación y discursos decoloniales están ganando espacio y cobrando fuerza, des-cubriendo la multiplicidad de asuntos que la teología debe tener en cuenta, además de la necesidad de pensar acerca de la realidad desde las bases—donde las personas viven la vida y tejen sus propias tradiciones religiosas en su cotidianidad.

En ese sentido y como parte de esa combinación de asuntos emergentes hoy, nos complace ofrecerles la edición 2021 de *Perspectivas*. Cada uno de los artículos nos ayuda a ampliar nuestra visión y entendimiento de la experiencia religiosa latina/o/x, en respuesta de asuntos contemporáneos pertinentes a estas comunidades. En el primer artículo, Neomi DeAnda presenta un rico entrelazamiento de eventos históricos, recuentos mitológicos, y de costumbres religiosas acerca de la devoción de María de la Leche en dos diferentes sitios religiosos. DeAnda traza algunos de los aspectos históricos que contribuyeron al surgimiento de dichas devociones, cómo éstas han cambiado con el tiempo, y cómo han resistido la prueba del tiempo. Ciertamente, latinas/os/xs están familiarizados con la esperanza y la desesperanza, como lo muestra el segundo artículo por César Baldelomar. Tomando un acercamiento filosófico robusto, el interactúa con el campo de la ética y el énfasis omnipresente de una esperanza cristiana otromundista. Baldelomar desafía nociones de Esperanza románticas y utópicas con lo que él denomina una postura “realista”, reclamando las ricas tradiciones del Afro-pesimismo y la desesperanza latina/o/x. Él toma de estas ricas tradiciones para reorientar nuestra imaginación ética hacia posibilidades futuras. Es precisamente ese futuro el que Hanna Kang, en el tercer artículo, nos invita a reconsiderar mientras revisamos nuestro pasado. Como lo haría Breny Méndoza al clamar los árabes como parte de la mezcla mestiza en Honduras, y mucho en la manera de la que Ricardo Feierstein reclama la presencia judía en Argentina, Kang amplifica la visión del mestizaje una vez más, registrando la presencia asiática tanto en Latinoamérica como entre los/as/xs latinas/os/xs. Además, ella amplía nuestra visión de este término tan discutido para crear espacios donde podamos recobrar la presencia asiática entre nosotros/as/xs.

En esta edición 2021 de *Perspectivas*, también nos sentimos honrados/as/xs al poder ofrecer las presentaciones celebrando el Premio de HTI al libro del año 2020 otorgado a Peter Mena. Nos sentimos orgullosos de proveer estas presentaciones por Jacqueline Hidalgo, Luis Rivera Pagán, y Kristi Upson-Saia, incluyendo la respuesta a estas presentaciones por Peter Mena. Cada una de estas presentaciones y la respuesta de Mena ilustran algunos de las áreas de crecimiento de las teologías latinas/os/xs y su versatilidad al abordar marcos teóricos críticos y textos antiguos.

Ofrecemos este tomo como fuentes de trabajo e invitación a continuar nuestro trabajo en los espacios académicos y no académicos.

Néstor Medina, Editor Principal.

*Images of María de la Leche 1600- Present*

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Neomi De Anda

Associate Professor, University of Dayton

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Abstract

This paper traces two images of nursing and lactating Madonnas and their devotions from two geographical locations currently parts of the USA with Spanish Colonial histories to provide a more complicated history. In the first, Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Bethlehem) in Puerto Rico presents a devotion to the image that has been constantly present on the island since the image first appeared. The second location examines Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto (Our Lady of Milk and Happy Delivery) in St. Augustine, Florida. The paper also highlights an overview of times Pope Francis has used this image in his own teaching. Finally, the paper presents themes which may be considered from these images.

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• VEA LA PÁGINA 16 PARA LEER ESTE ARTÍCULO EN ESPAÑOL •

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With news about Pope Francis asking women to feed their nursing children during baptisms held in the Sistine Chapel and highlighting the goodness of breastfeeding;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. "Catechesis: 11. *The prayer of the Psalms 2.*" General Audience, The Vatican, October 21, 2020. <https://youtu.be/soyMzH6F7Ow?t=645>; English voiceover <https://youtu.be/X3BUPEraoSU?t=645>; Spanish voiceover <https://youtu.be/uKyJp6AJ3Hg?t=645>; Original Italian text <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/it/2020/10/21/udienzagenerale.html>; English text translation [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201021\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201021_udienza-generale.html); Spanish text translation [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201021\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201021_udienza-generale.html). Accessed January 21, 2021.

Maggie Penman, "Pope Francis Once Again Encourages Mothers to Breastfeed in the Sistine Chapel" National Public Radio, January 7, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/07/576319476/pope-francis-once-again-encourages-mothers-to-breastfeed-in-the-sistine-chapel?fbclid=IwAR3DbhryXdg2WW4Nn6dmPM9gV5lvPXyNPqesZEHc33geMTIU6bS414pgM2E> Accessed January 21, 2021.

Angela Rupchock-Schafer, "Pope Francis and the Blessings of Breastfeeding", Church World Service, January 30, 2014. <https://cwsglobal.org/blog/pope-francis-and-the-blessings-of-breastfeeding/> Accessed January 21, 2021.

with a number of blogs<sup>2</sup> and religious article stores appearing around artistic images of Mary;<sup>3</sup> and with prayers (re)appearing around this image<sup>4</sup> the importance of breastfeeding and lactation has been globally highlighted in church and society. Additionally, with the publication of *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750* (2008) by Margaret Miles and *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts: The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism* (2012) by Ellen Davina Haskell, we see a rise in the historical research and use of the breast and breast milk in theological imaginaries.

Recovered, lost, and recreated images surround the stories of lactating and nursing Madonnas eventually made their way to the Americas. This paper will trace these images and their devotions from two geographical locations currently parts of the USA with Spanish Colonial histories to provide this more complicated history. In the first location, I will present Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Bethlehem) in Puerto Rico. In the second location, I will examine Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto (Our Lady of Milk and Happy Delivery) in St. Augustine, Florida.

### **Nuestra Señora de Belén**

The original devotion to Nuestra Señora de Belén, a María de la Leche or lactating/nursing Madonna was first introduced to Puerto Rico through a painting from the Flemish school of Rogier van der Weyden.<sup>5</sup> José Campeche (1751 – 1809), one of the most famous and most revered Puerto Rican artists, painted a number of copies of the image of Nuestra Señora de Belén, which hung in the church of San José in Old San Juan. This original image was thought to come from a Flemish artist. Numerous of these images still exist today. Many of the Campeche paintings are held in private collections but one belongs to the Smithsonian.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kaitlin Hardy Shelter, “sometimes I wonder”, Poem for Friday and Longwood Conservatory, December 20, 2019. <https://littlereview.livejournal.com/1742224.html> Accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Matias, Untitled. April 5, 2012. [https://scontent-iad3-1.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t31.0-8/465151\\_3341110961029\\_1610954556\\_o.jpg?nc\\_cat=100&ccb=2&nc\\_sid=cdbegc&nc\\_ohc=CVodOJnS4QAX-l8hku&nc\\_ht=scontent-iad3-](https://scontent-iad3-1.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t31.0-8/465151_3341110961029_1610954556_o.jpg?nc_cat=100&ccb=2&nc_sid=cdbegc&nc_ohc=CVodOJnS4QAX-l8hku&nc_ht=scontent-iad3-)

[1.xx&oh=8c342fda18a1a4d449dda67835b1b93a&oe=602FC13F](https://scontent-iad3-1.xx&oh=8c342fda18a1a4d449dda67835b1b93a&oe=602FC13F). Accessed January 22, 2021.

“Our Lady of La Leche” Tiny Saints. <https://www.tinysaints.com/collections/charms/products/our-lady-of-la-leche> Accessed January 21, 2021.

“Our Lady of La Leche” Pax.Beloved. <https://paxbeloved.com/products/our-lady-of-sheshan-print> Accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Aneudy De Jesus. “Nuestra Señora de Belén”, in Neomi D. De Anda, Mary Apparitions. Dayton, OH: University of Dayton, 2018. <https://sites.google.com/a/udayton.edu/maryapparitions/puerto-rico/nuestra-senora-de-belen-puerto-rico> Accessed January 21, 2021.

Tony Alonso, “Letanía a la Madre de las Americas” in Caminemos con Jesús. Atlanta, GA: GIA Publications, Inc., 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBYpno1HvEI> Accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Luis González Vales. *Historia de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan de Puerto Rico V Centenario*. Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2011, 225.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=35439>. Accessed December 16, 2014.

The Flemish image was central to devotions of Nuestra Señora de Belén until 1972 when someone stole the image.<sup>7</sup> The chapel remained imageless but still holding the name of Nuestra Señora de Belén. This chapel is currently undergoing restoration and not regularly open to the public.<sup>8</sup> One special song from a Puerto Rican perspective relates to the devotions of this image. The words follow:

Beautiful flowers I bring to Mary  
And to her venerated son  
And I ask that she extend her hand  
Over our Boriquen (Land of the Valiant Lord).  
White lilies, from my land,  
Picked on a cool morning  
I bring to this beloved Virgin  
To this Virgin of Bethlehem.<sup>9</sup>

On January 3, 2012, an image of Nuestra Señora de Belén, a copy of the original, was returned to Old San Juan and placed in the Cathedral<sup>10</sup> where she now hangs in a small chapel in the oldest part of the Cathedral. Daily devotions to her seem rare. I spent a period of hours over three days in this small chapel of about three meters by three meters and found most devotions/prayers dedicated to the very large crucifix on the opposite wall with a few glimpses toward Nuestra Señora de Belén. Since her return in 2012, a celebration on or around January 3<sup>rd</sup> has been held in this Cathedral. Also, an active parish, established in 1960<sup>11</sup> in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico,<sup>12</sup> carries her name.

In addition to the Flemish school and Campeche images, the Acosta private collection in Puerto Rico holds two images of María de la Leche/Nuestra Señora de Belén. Both of these images were created in the Viceroyalty of Peru. The larger image is part of an altar piece and is tempera on wood. The other painting, also from the

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<sup>7</sup> Miguel Norbert Ubarri. "La Virgen de Belén, Protectora," *El Visitante Online Periódico Católico de Puerto Rico*, vol. 52, 2009 at <http://www.elvisitante.biz/visitante-web/2008/evwebed5208/enfoco5.php?tab=enfoco&heading=../images/enfoco480.gif> Accessed December 16, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Restoration panels outside of La Iglesia de San José. Visited and photographed August 21, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> ¡Flores bellas le traigo a María  
y a su Hijo venerado  
y le pido que tienda su mano  
sobre nuestra Borinquen.  
Lirios blancos, de mi tierra,  
recogidos en fresca mañana  
yo le traigo a esta Virgen amada,  
a esa Virgen de Belén.

Miguel Norbert Ubarri. "La Virgen de Belén, Protectora," *El Visitante Online Periódico Católico de Puerto Rico*, vol. 52, 2009 at <http://www.elvisitante.biz/visitante-web/2008/evwebed5208/enfoco5.php?tab=enfoco&heading=../images/enfoco480.gif> accessed December 16, 2009. (My translation)

<sup>10</sup> Adolfo Pérez-Comas. *Regreso de la imagen de la Virgen de Belén a Puerto Rico, pilar del marianismo boricua* at <http://users.skynet.be/fb673885/final/RegresoVirgendeBelén%2001312012.pdf,42>.

<sup>11</sup> Luis González Vales. *Historia de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan de Puerto Rico V Centenario*. Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2011, 225.

<sup>12</sup> Parish website <https://sites.google.com/site/senoradeBelén/>. Accessed December 16, 2014.

Viceroyalty of Peru is thought to have hung over María de Jesús de Acosta y García's crib. Both paintings date between the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

### **Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto at Misión Nombre de Dios, Saint Augustine, Florida, USA**

The history of Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto in St. Augustine, Florida has been traced back to a story from Madrid, Spain. The story goes something as follows:

In the year 1615, a drunk and rather crazy soldier carried through Arenal street an image of Our Lady made of old wood which he was hauling with a rope. He had brought it from other areas of Europe where many Protestants lived and more than likely from where he came. He had brought it to Spain with the charge to give it to a man of the court. But, when the soldier arrived, the man was not in Madrid.

The soldier did not have any devotion to the image and was dragging it with a rope. He had the image solely for financial gain and was only thinking about his compensation.

Seeing how he was handling the image with such disrespect, a woman gave him an ounce of gold to buy it and took it home where she venerated it with much devotion.

On her deathbed, she ordered that this image be given to the Monastery of St. Martin where she was venerated as the Virgin of Milk and Happy Delivery and Pregnant Women.

This famous image was one of the ones that the queens of Spain venerated when they found themselves in a state of pregnancy.<sup>14</sup>

This story should be understood as a narrative account rather than an historical account because the date of 1615 seems later than the original date of the arrival of the image in Saint Augustine, Florida around 1606 when the image is thought to have reached Mission Nombre de Dios.

A copy of this little statue of a nursing Mary was believed to have been brought over with the mariners in one of the ships that docked in St. Augustine. A small area of land on Mission Nombre de Dios, now known as America's most Sacred Acre, was the home to this devotion by those Spaniards as well as the indigenous who were converted to Christianity and lived on and off of the mission.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Stolberg Acosta. *Retablos, joyas, platería y arte: Colección Acosta de San Juan, Puerto Rico (1695 – 2010)*. San Juan, PR: Editorial Revés, 2011, 20 – 21 & 27. Also, interview with Robert Stolberg Acosta, September 11, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> "Information from Spain," Diocese of St. Augustine, Archives, 650. Retrieved October 28, 2014. (My translation)

This original statue is believed to be in Cuba, where it was sent due to impending British invasion, since St. Augustine was part of the Cuban Archdiocese at the time. Although multiple searches have been made for this statue, it has never been found. Except for about eighty years when the British colonized this land, the devotion to Nuestra Señora de la Leche has remained at Mission Nombre de Dios.

The current chapel was built in the late nineteenth century with some of the stone from the original indigenous chapel. The devotion continued. A new statue of about 12 inches was placed in the chapel in the 1930s. Nuestra Señora de la Leche was used as the image for “Prayers in the Time of War,” a prayer book for soldiers of World War II.<sup>15</sup> Part of the “Prayer for Our Lady of La Leche in the Time of War” states,

Today as the dark clouds of war envelop us and tragedy strikes in our midst, we come to thee. Mothers, fathers, children – all kneel before thee. O Lady of La Leche, there is no pain, no loss, no sorrow, which your Mother’s Heart does not understand, no child of Jesus whom you will not aid. Look upon us today, O Mother, and offer to thy Holy Child our earnest petitions for the peace of the world, for the protection of our loved ones, for the blessing of our families.

Today, the little chapel at Mission Nombre de Dios dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto is filled with devotions and prayers. The bishop thought the image needed to be larger than the one from the 1930s, so in the 1970s she was replaced with the current image which stands about 24 inches tall. The chapel fills with curious tourists, Catholic school children being indoctrinated into the devotion, as well as with parents, particularly mothers, giving thanks for their children, mostly infants. The tiny chapel in Florida holds quite a bit of warmth as four large candleholders each with a lit candle with additional lit candles on the floor under the holders glow silently, yet powerfully. Many of the candles had people’s petitions written in marker on the actual candle. Some candles were left plain, lit, and accompanied with prayer. One account even told the story of how a woman and her daughter prayed at the chapel almost daily for fifteen years for her daughter to conceive a child. Unfortunately, their prayers were never answered, and this miracle never granted.

At least once a day during my time in the chapel, I heard the word “miracle” with a positive outcome. Some were coming to give thanks or just announce a miracle granted because of their prayers to Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto. The miracles described ranged from the larger expectations of saved lives or thought-to-be impossibly conceived and born children to smaller marks such as the lives of each of the school children.

The current bishop, Felipe de Jesús Estévez, has declared Nuestra Señora de La Leche y Buen Parto the Patron Saint of the Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida. Although he was mostly raised in the USA, he brought his devotion to this Mary from Cuba, his

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<sup>15</sup> *Prayers in the Time of War*. St. Augustine, Fl: National Council of Catholic Women, 1943.

birth country. Because of this move and the desire to spread the devotion: candles, statues, rosaries, pins, prayer cards, note cards, novenas, and more may be found dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto in the gift shop of the mission. Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto was the image used for the Year of Faith (October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013) prayer cards in this diocese.<sup>16</sup> At Mission Nombre de Dios, the breast of Nuestra Señora de la Leche has been covered more and more in the three iterations created for the chapel in the twentieth century.

So, now that I have presented parts of the complicated history of this image as found in Viejo San Juan and St. Augustine, I turn to themes of how the breast as a sacred symbol has been used as both life-giving and for manipulation or social sins.

### **Themes of the Images**

The breast as a sacred symbol finds itself in a non-innocent history regarding class, war, capitalism, colonization, as well as Catholic/Protestant biases and non-tolerance. First, Spanish dominance of Catholicism over any other religious expression including Protestants made this image one of special devotion. The fact that the story from Madrid depicts the man mistreating the little wooden statue as someone hired in Spain from another land, which is filled with Protestants shows both the belief in the superiority of Catholicism in Spain for religious devotion and sacred symbols but not for military aid or construction projects.

Second, the images seem to belong mostly to upper and elite class members. The Puerto Rican images were art by artists considered historically significant and the images in the private Acosta collection were painted for home altars for members of the aristocracy. The image was used at times for those on ships traveling to the Americas to guide their journeys. These journeys, as we all know all too well, were mostly to pillage resources, convert indigenous peoples to Christianity, and to bring African endured servants and slaves to work the land mining for high price commodities.

Third, not-always-positive mixes of indigenous and Spanish ways of life were found around these images, particularly in the songs, prayers, and the cultural perspectives encountering one another. For example, the case of Doña María, a cacica or female Timucua chief stands out because she was an indigenous female ruler of about 3000 Timucua in six different settlements in the early seventeenth century. Doña María married a Spanish soldier and lived on Mission Nombre de Dios, which was also her ruling base. Many Timucua became Christians and had a devotion to Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto but most also retained parts of their traditional religion. (Geiger 2003, 23) Doña María is credited with saving those living on Mission Nombre de Dios, and the surrounding community, with sparing these people of dying from hunger by feeding them corn. Spaniards not only preferred wheat, but thought corn to be food of savages or not fit for reasonable people. The account claims that Doña María was allowed to share her corn because she was of the elite class and it was a time of

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<sup>16</sup> Prayer card from hymnal. St. Augustine Archive. Retrieved, October 2014. Front side of prayer card has image of Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto. Backside of card has Nicene Creed and bishop's signature.

necessity. So, the milk Mary shares with Jesus and with humanity was considered neutral and without socioeconomic class or particular religious influence both on the part of the Spanish and Doña María, but corn, also shared by a woman, needed special commendations or justifications attached, so it may be considered food permissible to be eaten by the Spaniards.

Fourth, and closely related to the previous two, these images seem to stand for more than a relationship of mother and child when considered in sacred spaces and devotions. They affirm women's bodies as bearers of divinity. Yet, all of the images I have seen from both St. Augustine and San Juan have very pale skin and strawberry blonde hair. They resemble what we consider more European features which raises the question as to how the devotion by the Timucua in their time and various devotees today may be engaged in a complex mix of seeing an image that is very natural, a mother nursing her child, and an image that carries imbedded racial and class significations.

Today, the power of devotion to these nursing madonnas seems to attract people in many different ways. The ongoing struggle for life surrounds these images. For most of the images, an image of Nuestra Señora de Dolores (Our Lady of Sorrows) is also found nearby. The tension between the suffering of humans, particularly women and the struggle to birth and nurture life is a theological theme that can be found with these images. Story after story from devotional candles, prayers, placement of the two Marian statues in near proximity to one another continue to show this theme. Also, the appearance of the stars and sun in relationship to the image stands as a recurring theme. As does the theme of the Holy Spirit either surrounding Mary through the color of her dress or acting through Mary in the power of her "Yes" or as the Spouse of Mary, as found in a traditional medieval Trinitarian formulary. Clearly, both these images and devotions to these images still appear in a variety of public spaces, which shows the pervasive role of these images and devotions among people across geographical places.

*Imágenes de María de la leche 1600—al presente*

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Resumen

Este artículo traza dos imágenes de Marías de la leche y sus devociones desde dos ubicaciones geográficas que actualmente son partes de los EE. UU. con historias coloniales españolas para proporcionar una historia más complicada. En la primera, Nuestra Señora de Belén en Puerto Rico presenta una devoción a la imagen que ha estado constantemente presente en la isla desde que apareció por primera vez. La segunda ubicación examina Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto en St. Augustine, Florida. El ensayo también destaca una descripción general de instancias en que el Papa Francisco ha utilizado esta imagen en su propia enseñanza. Finalmente, el artículo presenta temas que pueden considerarse a partir de estas imágenes.

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• SEE PAGE 9 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

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Con las noticias acerca del Papa Francisco pidiéndole a las mujeres que den pecho a sus niños/as durante los bautismos en la capilla Sixtina y resaltando los beneficios de

amamantar,<sup>1</sup> y con una serie de blogs<sup>2</sup> y tiendas de artículos religiosos alrededor de imágenes artísticas de María;<sup>3</sup> y con oraciones (re)apareciendo alrededor de esta imagen,<sup>4</sup> la importancia de la lactancia materna y amamantar se ha destacado a nivel mundial en la iglesia y en la sociedad. Además, con la reciente publicación de los libros *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750* (2008) por Margaret Miles y *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts: The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism* (2012) por Ellen Davina Haskell, podemos ver el crecimiento de imaginarios teológicos en las investigaciones históricas y el uso de los pechos y la leche materna.

Imágenes recobradas, perdidas y recreadas rodean la historia de Madonas lactantes que eventualmente llegaron a las Américas. En este artículo intento rastrear estas imágenes y sus devociones desde dos ubicaciones geográficas que forman parte de los EUA con historias españolas para proporcionar esta historia más complicada. En la primera ubicación examinaré la presente Nuestra Señora de Belén en Puerto Rico. En la segunda localidad, examinaré Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto en St. Augustine, Florida.

## Nuestra Señora de Belén

La devoción original a Nuestra Señora de Belén, una María de la Leche o Madona lactante fue introducida a Puerto Rico por medio de una pintura de la escuela flamenca

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. "Catechesis: 11. *The prayer of the Psalms 2.*" General Audience, The Vatican, October 21, 2020. <https://youtu.be/soyMzH6F7Ow?t=645>; English voiceover <https://youtu.be/X3BUPEraoSU?t=645>; Spanish voiceover <https://youtu.be/uKyJp6AJ3Hg?t=645>; Original Italian text <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/it/2020/10/21/udienzagenerale.html>; Spanish text translation [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiencias/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201021\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiencias/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201021_udienza-generale.html), accessed January 21, 2021. Maggie Penman, "Pope Francis Once Again Encourages Mothers to Breastfeed in the Sistine Chapel" National Public Radio, January 7, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/07/576319476/pope-francis-once-again-encourages-mothers-to-breastfeed-in-the-sistine-chapel?fbclid=IwAR3DbhryXdg2WW4Nn6dmPM9gV5lvPXyNPqesZEHc33geMTIU6bS414pgM2E>, accessed January 21, 2021. Angela Rupchock-Schafer, "Pope Francis and the Blessings of Breastfeeding", Church World Service, January 30, 2014. <https://cwsglobal.org/blog/pope-francis-and-the-blessings-of-breastfeeding/>, accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Kaitlin Hardy Shelter, "sometimes I wonder", Poem for Friday and Longwood Conservatory, December 20, 2019. <https://littlereview.livejournal.com/1742224.html> Accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Matias, Untitled. April 5, 2012. [https://scontent-iad3-1.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t31.0-8/465151\\_3341110961029\\_1610954556\\_o.jpg?nc\\_cat=100&ccb=2&nc\\_sid=cdbec9c&nc\\_ohc=CVodOJnS4QAX-l8hku&nc\\_ht=scontent-iad3-1.xx&oh=8c342fda18a1a4d449dda67835b1b93a&oe=602FC13F](https://scontent-iad3-1.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t31.0-8/465151_3341110961029_1610954556_o.jpg?nc_cat=100&ccb=2&nc_sid=cdbec9c&nc_ohc=CVodOJnS4QAX-l8hku&nc_ht=scontent-iad3-1.xx&oh=8c342fda18a1a4d449dda67835b1b93a&oe=602FC13F), accessed January 22, 2021. "Our Lady of La Leche" Tiny Saints. <https://www.tinysaints.com/collections/charms/products/our-lady-of-la-leche>, accessed January 21, 2021. "Our Lady of La Leche" Pax. Beloved. <https://paxbeloved.com/products/our-lady-of-sheshan-print>, accessed January 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Aneudy De Jesus. "Nuestra Señora de Belén", in Neomi D. De Anda, Mary Apparitions. Dayton, OH: University of Dayton, 2018. <https://sites.google.com/a/udayton.edu/maryapparitions/puerto-rico/nuestra-senora-de-belen-puerto-rico>, accessed January 21, 2021. Tony Alonso, "Letanía a la Madre de las Américas" in Caminemos con Jesús. Atlanta, GA: GIA Publications, Inc., 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBYpno1HvEI>, accessed January 21, 2021.

de Rogier van der Weyden.<sup>5</sup> José Campeche (1751 – 1809), uno de los más famosos y reverenciados artistas puertorriqueños, pintó un número de copias de la imagen de Nuestra Señora de Belén las cuales fueron colgadas en las paredes de la iglesia de San José en el Viejo San Juan. Se pensaba que esta imagen original venía de un artista flamenco. Numerosas de estas imágenes existen aún hoy. Muchas de las pinturas de Campeche son parte de colecciones privadas, pero una de ellas pertenece al Museo Smithsonian.<sup>6</sup>

La imagen flamenca era clave para las devociones de Nuestra Señora de Belén hasta 1972, cuando alguien se robó la imagen.<sup>7</sup> La capilla permaneció sin imagen, pero aún conserva el nombre de Nuestra Señora de Belén. Actualmente esta capilla está siendo restaurada y no está abierta al público regularmente.<sup>8</sup> Una canción especial desde una perspectiva puertorriqueña relata la devoción a esta imagen. Las palabras siguen:

¡Flores bellas le traigo a María  
y a su hijo venerado  
y le pido que extienda su mano  
sobre nuestra Borinquen  
Lirios blancos, de mi tierra,  
recogidos en fresca mañana  
yo le traigo a esta Virgen amada,  
a esa Virgen de Belén.<sup>9</sup>

En enero 3 del 2012, una imagen de Nuestra Señora de Belén, una copia de la original, fue devuelta al Viejo San Juan y colocada en la catedral,<sup>10</sup> donde ella se encuentra en una pequeña capilla en la parte más antigua de la catedral. Devociones diarias a ella parecen raras. Yo estuve un período de horas durante tres días en esta pequeña capilla de aproximadamente tres metros por tres metros, y encontré que la mayoría de las devociones/oraciones eran dedicadas a un crucifijo grande en la pared opuesta con unos pocos destellos hacia Nuestra Señora de Belén. Desde su regreso en el 2012, una celebración en o cerca a enero 3 ha sido celebrada en esta catedral. Además, una capilla activa establecida en 1960<sup>11</sup> en Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, lleva su nombre.

Además de la escuela flamenca y las imágenes de Campeche, la colección privada de Acosta en Puerto Rico tiene dos imágenes de María de la Leche/Nuestra Señora de Belén. Ambas imágenes fueron creadas en el Virreinato del Perú. La imagen más grande

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<sup>5</sup> Luis González Vales. *Historia de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan de Puerto Rico V Centenario*. Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2011, 225.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=35439>, accedido abril 30, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Miguel Norbert Ubarri. “La Virgen de Belén, Protectora,” *El Visitante Online Periódico Católico de Puerto Rico*, vol. 52, 2009, 12, [https://issuu.com/davidsantana/docs/5208\\_edreg](https://issuu.com/davidsantana/docs/5208_edreg), accedido abril 30, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Restoration panels outside of La Iglesia de San José. Visited and photographed August 21, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Ubarri, “La Virgen de Belén, Protectora”.

<sup>10</sup> Adolfo Pérez-Comas. *Regreso de la imagen de la Virgen de Belén a Puerto Rico, pilar del marianismo boricua* at <http://users.skynet.be/fb673885/final/RegresoVirgendeBelen%2001312012.pdf>, 42, accedido abril 30, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Luis González Vales. *Historia de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan de Puerto Rico V Centenario*. Strasbourg, France: Éditions du Signe, 2011, 225.

es parte de una pieza de altar y es t mpera sobre madera. Se piensa que la otra pintura, tambi n del Virreinato del Per , colgaba sobre la cuna de Mar a de Jes s de Acosta y Garc a. Ambas pinturas datan entre fines del siglo diecisiete y principios del siglo dieciocho.<sup>12</sup>

### **Nuestra Se ora de la Leche y Buen Parto en la Mis n Nombre de Dios, St. Augustine, Florida, EUA**

La historia de Nuestra Se ora de la Leche y Buen Parto en St. Augustine, Florida se remonta a una narrativa de Madrid, Espa a. El relato sigue de la siguiente manera:

En el a o 1615, a trav s de la calle Arsenal, un soldado borracho y bastante loco arrastraba con una soga una imagen hecha de madera vieja de Nuestra Se ora.  l la hab a tra do de otras  reas de Europa donde viv an muchos protestantes y lo m s probable de d nde  l era.  l la hab a tra do a Espa a con el encargo de d rsela a un hombre de la corte. Pero cuando el soldado lleg , el hombre no estaba en Madrid.

Dado que ten a la imagen  nicamente para obtener ganancias financieras, pensando en su compensaci n, y porque no encontr  al hombre para quien estaba destinada, el soldado estaba arrastrando la imagen con una cuerda.

Al ver como manejaba la imagen con tanta falta de respeto, una mujer le dio una onza de oro para comprarla y se la llev  a su casa donde ella la veneraba con mucha devoci n.

En su lecho de muerte, ella orden  que esta imagen fuese dada al Monasterio de San Mart n, donde fue venerada como la Virgen de la Leche y Feliz Parto y de Mujeres Embarazadas.

Esta famosa imagen era una de las que las reinas de Espa a veneraban cuando se encontraban en estado de embarazo.<sup>13</sup>

Queda claro que esta historia deber a ser entendida como un relato narrativo y no como un recuento hist rico porque la fecha de 1615 parece posterior a la fecha original de la llegada de la imagen a Saint Augustine, Florida alrededor de 1606, cuando se piensa que la imagen lleg  a la Mis n Nombre de Dios.

Se cree que una copia de esta peque a estatua de una Mar a amamantando fue tra da por los marineros en uno de los barcos que atracaron en Saint Augustine. Una peque a  rea de tierra en Mis n Nombre de Dios, ahora conocida como el Acre m s Sagrado de Am rica, fue el hogar de esta devoci n tanto por los espa oles como los ind genas que se convirtieron al cristianismo y vivieron adentro y fuera de la misi n.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Stolberg Acosta. *Retablos, joyas, plater a y arte: Colecci n Acosta de San Juan, Puerto Rico (1695 – 2010)*. San Juan, PR: Editorial Rev s, 2011, 20 – 21 & 27. Tambi n, entrevista con Robert Stolberg Acosta, septiembre 11, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> "Information from Spain," Diocese of St. Augustine, Archives, 650. Retrieved October 28, 2014. (mi traducci n)

Se cree que esta estatua original se encuentra en Cuba, donde fue enviada por la inminente invasión británica, ya que St. Augustine era parte de la arquidiócesis de Cuba en ese momento. Aunque se han hecho búsquedas múltiples para esta estatua, nunca se ha encontrado. Excepto por cerca de ochenta años de cuando los británicos colonizaron esta tierra, la devoción a Nuestra Señora de la Leche se ha mantenido en Misión Nombre de Dios.

La capilla actual fue construida a finales del siglo diecinueve con algunas de las piedras de la capilla indígena original. La devoción continuó. Una nueva estatua de aproximadamente 12 pulgadas fue colocada en la capilla en los 1930s. Nuestra Señora de la Leche fue usada como la imagen para “Oraciones en tiempos de guerra,” un libro de oraciones para soldados de la segunda guerra mundial.<sup>14</sup> Parte de la “Oración para Nuestra Señora de la Leche en tiempo de guerra” dice,

Hoy cuando las nubes oscuras de la guerra nos envuelven y tragedia golpea en medio de nosotros, venimos a ti. Madres, padres, hijos – todos nos arrodillamos ante ti. Oh Señora de la Leche, no hay dolor, ni pérdida, ni tristeza, que tu Corazón de Madre no entienda, no hijo de Jesús a quien tu no ayudarás. Míranos hoy, oh Madre, y ofrece a tu Santo Niño nuestras sinceras peticiones por la paz del mundo, por la protección de nuestros seres queridos, por la bendición de nuestras familias.

Hoy, esa pequeña capilla en Misión Nombre de Dios dedicada a Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto está llena con devociones y oraciones. El obispo pensó que ella necesitaba ser más grande que la de los 1930s, así que en los 1970s la reemplazó con la imagen actual que mide cerca de 24 pulgadas. La capilla se llena con turistas curiosos, niños estudiantes católicos siendo inductados en la devoción, como también con padres, particularmente madres, dando gracias por sus hijos/as, en su mayoría bebés. La pequeña capilla en Florida tiene un poco de calidez ya que hay cuatro grandes velas encendidas en los candeleros y en el piso debajo de los candeleros otras velas brillan en silencio, pero poderosamente. Muchas de las candelas tienen las peticiones de las personas escritas con marcador en la misma candela. Algunas de las candelas fueron puestas sin nada, encendidas, y acompañadas con una oración. Un recuento narra la historia de cómo una mujer y su hija rezaban en la capilla casi a diario por quince años para que su hija concibiera un hijo/a. Desafortunadamente sus oraciones nunca fueron respondidas y este milagro nunca fue concedido.

Sin embargo, al menos una vez al día durante mi estadía en la capilla, yo escuché la palabra “milagro” con un resultado positivo. Algunas personas venían a dar gracias o sólo a anunciar un milagro otorgado por sus oraciones a Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto. Los milagros descritos variaban desde las expectativas mayores de vidas salvadas o la concepción y nacimiento de niños/as hasta cosas más pequeñas como la vida de cada uno de los niños/as en la escuela.

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<sup>14</sup> *Prayers in the Time of War*. St. Augustine, FL: National Council of Catholic Women, 1943.

El obispo actual, Felipe de Jesús Estévez, ha declarado a Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto la Santa Patrona de la diócesis de Saint Augustine, Florida. A pesar de que fue criado principalmente en los EUA, él trajo su devoción a esta María de Cuba, su tierra natal. Por esta decisión y el deseo de difundir la devoción, candelas, estatuillas, rosarios, alfileres, tarjetas de oración, libretas de notas, novenas y más se pueden encontrar dedicados a Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto en la tienda de regalos de la misión. Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto fue la imagen usada para las tarjetas de oración durante el Año de Fe (octubre 11, 2012 a noviembre 24, 2013) en la diócesis.<sup>15</sup> En Misión Nombre de Dios, el pecho de Nuestra Señora de la Leche se ha cubierto cada vez más en las tres iteraciones creadas para la capilla en el siglo veinte.

Entonces, ahora que he presentado partes de la complicada historia de la imagen que se encuentra en Viejo San Juan y Saint Augustine, me dirijo a discutir los temas de cómo el pecho como símbolo sagrado ha sido usado como dador de vida y para manipulación o pecados sociales.

### **Temas de las Imágenes**

El pecho como símbolo sagrado es parte de una historia no inocente con respecto a clase social, guerra, colonización, como también prejuicios e intolerancia católica/protestante. Primero, el dominio español del catolicismo sobre cualquier otra expresión religiosa, incluyendo los protestantes, convirtió de esta imagen en una de especial devoción. El hecho que la historia de Madrid representa al hombre maltratando la pequeña estatua de madera como alguien contratado en España, de otra tierra la cual está llena de protestantes, muestra la creencia tanto en la superioridad del catolicismo en España por la devoción religiosa como en los símbolos sagrados, pero no por la ayuda militar o proyectos de construcción.

Segundo, las imágenes parecen pertenecer principalmente a las clases más altas y miembros de la élite social. Las imágenes puertorriqueñas fueron obras de pintores considerados históricamente significativos, y las imágenes en la colección privada Acosta fueron pintadas para altares hogareños, para miembros de la aristocracia. La imagen fue utilizada a veces por aquellos en los barcos viajando a las Américas, para que guiara sus viajes. Estos viajes, como sabemos muy bien, fueron en su mayoría para saquear recursos, convertir pueblos al cristianismo, y para traer sirvientes africanos y esclavos para trabajar la tierra en las minas por productos de alto precio.

Tercero, las mezclas no siempre positivas de formas de vida indígena y español se encuentran alrededor de estas imágenes, particularmente and las canciones, oraciones, y las perspectivas culturales que se encuentran entre sí. Por ejemplo, el caso de Doña María, una cacica se destaca porque ella era una mujer gobernante de cerca de tres mil Timucua en seis asentamientos diferentes a principios del siglo diecisiete. Doña María se casó con un soldado español y vivieron en Misión Nombre de Dios, que era su base de

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<sup>15</sup> Prayer card from hymnal. St. Augustine Archive. Retrieved, October, 2014. El frente de la tarjeta de oración tiene la imagen de Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto. Atrás, la tarjeta tiene el credo Niceto y la firma del obispo.

gobierno. Muchos Timucua se convirtieron al cristianismo y tenían una devoción a Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto pero la mayoría también retuvo partes de su religión tradicional. (Geiger 2003, 23) A Doña María se le atribuye el haber salvado a las personas que vivían en Misión Nombre de Dios y las comunidades circunvecinas, de rescatarlas de morir de hambre alimentándolas con maíz. Los españoles no solo preferían el trigo, sino que pensaban que el maíz era un alimento de salvajes no apto para personas razonables. El recuento dice que a Doña María se le permitió compartir su maíz porque era de la clase élite y porque era tiempo de necesidad. Así que la leche que María comparte con Jesús y con la humanidad era considerada neutral o sin clase socioeconómica ni influencia religiosa particular por parte de los españoles y de Doña María, pero el maíz, también compartido por una mujer, necesitaba ser acompañado por una recomendación o justificación, para que fuera considerado alimento permitido a comer por los españoles.

Cuarto, y muy relacionado con los dos puntos previos, estas dos imágenes parecen representar algo más que una relación de madre e hijo cuando se consideran en espacios sagrados y devociones. Ellas afirman el cuerpo de las mujeres como portadoras de divinidad. Sin embargo, todas las imágenes que he visto en Saint Augustine y San Juan tienen piel bien pálida y cabello rubio rojizo. Se asemejan a lo que consideramos facciones europeas, lo que plantea la cuestión de cómo la devoción por los Timucua en su tiempo y varios devotos de hoy entran en una mezcla compleja de ver una imagen muy natural, una madre amamantando a su hijo, y una imagen que lleva incrustados significados raciales y de clase.

Actualmente, el poder de devoción de estas madonas dando pecho parecen atraer a las personas de muchas maneras diferentes. La continua lucha por la vida rodea estas imágenes. Para la mayoría de las imágenes, una imagen de Nuestra Señora de Dolores también se encuentra en las cercanías. La tensión entre el sufrimiento humano, particularmente el de las mujeres y la lucha por nacer y nutrir la vida es un tema teológico que se puede encontrar con estas imágenes. Historia tras historia de velas devocionales, oraciones, y la colocación de las estatuas de estas dos Marías cerca una de la otra, continúan mostrando este tema. También, la aparición de las estrellas y el sol en relación con la imagen es un tema recurrente. Como lo es el tema del Espíritu Santo ya sea rodeando a María a través del color de su vestido, actuando a través de María en el poder de su “Si”, o como el Esposo de María, como se encuentra en el formulario trinitario tradicional medieval. Claramente, tanto estas imágenes como la devoción a estas imágenes todavía aparecen en una variedad de espacios públicos.

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**A Reimagined Ethical Imagination:  
Considering Epistemological Nihilism And Afro-Pessimism  
As A Corrective To Ethics Of Hope**

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Abstract

This essay argues that to imagine truly different (and transgressive) ethical selves and worlds, hope (as presented in Western secular and religious narratives) should be decentered, in order for ethical characters to face reality without utopian illusions of the future as touted by humanist and liberal myths of progress and by Christian salvation narratives. How would ethical imagination be different were it to hold hopeful and wishful thinking in tension with a realist and pessimist stance that takes seriously melancholia, the tenets of Afro-pessimism, and the realities of Latinx hopelessness? More importantly, how would ethical imagination shift were it to embrace (rather than simplistically glide over) the specter of nihilism, that is, that the world truly might be meaningless and collectively progressing toward catastrophe at the hands of the world’s most privileged?

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• THIS ARTICLE IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

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**A. Introduction: Notes on Hope, Ethical Dreams, and Ethicists**

Hope is always forward looking; it is an expectation that circumstances will change for the better at some future point in time. On the macrolevel, hope allows vulnerable and marginalized groups to envision a future with less racial and gender injustice and economic inequality, as well as heightened civil rights protections and a healthier, more vibrant community. Indeed, during a 1968 speech in Washington, DC—just two months before his assassination—Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “We must accept finite

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disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”<sup>2</sup> Accept the daily setbacks inherent in human existence, King urges us, while remaining focused on the goal—on the telos represented by an alternative (presumably “better”) state of being. In his I Have a Dream speech, he says: “The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our *hope*.”<sup>3</sup>

For those concerned with ecological devastation, despite almost five decades of futile talk and inaction, hope in a more sustainable world fuels the fight to protect vulnerable species, preserve forests, and reduce waste and carbon emissions.<sup>4</sup> Back in 1982, physicist Fritjof Capra prophetically stated that “[f]or the first time we have to face the very real threat of extinction of the human race and of all life on this planet.”<sup>5</sup> Among the many threats to life, he cited the mass production of nuclear weapons, the then multi-billion dollar global defense budget, and the various environmental threats enveloping the planet, such as blankets of smog covering cities and the plethora of harmful chemicals found in food, water, and the air. The deterioration of the environment, Capra mentioned, resulted in declining physical and mental health.<sup>6</sup> Has much changed in the almost 40 years since Capra’s work?

And even supposing that this world comes crashing down, some Christians can hang their hope in another world (heaven) or in a future cataclysmic event like the Second Coming, the End Times, or the Rapture.<sup>7</sup> Hope seems to be leading one toward another destination—whether existential, metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, cosmic, or physical. Hope is change for the better. Hope is also a state of being, often inspired by one’s faith in a redeemed world. Indeed, since hope may strengthen resilience amid catastrophe, hope could undoubtedly spark agency for a better world—or at least a world the agents consider better.<sup>8</sup> Hope is the fuel that keeps the engine running toward destination progress—and possibly destination utopia.

But what happens when the fuel (itself a finite resource) runs out, when the needle inside the fuel gauge hovers over empty? What happens when the destination (the telos) turns out, at best, to be even farther than expected or, at worst, totally unreachable and thus illusory? As a thought experiment, this essay argues that to (re)imagine ethics and truly different ethical selves and worlds, hope (as understood by Western minds) should be *decentered* (although not completely discarded) through the acknowledgement that the world might be meaningless and collectively progressing toward catastrophe at the hands of the world’s most privileged. How different would ethical imagination be if it

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://people.com/politics/martin-luther-king-jr-s-powerful-quotes/>

<sup>3</sup> To access the full speech, see <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>

<sup>4</sup> For a sobering account of how the ecological crisis exceeds human ability to “fix” it, see Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Capra, *The Turning Point*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> See César J. Baldelomar, “A Seed Awaiting Cultivation: Pope John Paul II’s Theological Ecology,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 33, vol. 1 (Spring 2019): 65-82.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2016/07/13/the-left-behind-series-was-just-the-latest-way-america-prepared-for-the-rapture/>

<sup>8</sup> My thanks to Néstor Medina for this insight.

were to hold hopeful and wishful thinking in tension with a realist stance that takes seriously Afro-pessimism and Latinx hopelessness? Theological or social ethics cannot continue peddling simple hope when billions of humans barely cling on to life, living in daily uncertainty amid deep material and emotional deprivation, and when billions (most forgotten in historical narratives) have already met their ends, their own apocalypse.

Undergoing ethical reimaginings requires undergoing a *deep epistemological reorientation via epistemological decapitation*—the result of painful introspection, which should lead to fragmentation of long-held views and cherished assumptions of oneself, community, humanity, the Divine, and existence. The possible result of fragmentation: meaninglessness, but perhaps a meaninglessness that could open up imagination to what never was, is, or will be. What is needed is imagination unconstrained by the comforts of hope and thoroughly grounded in the here and now, with little expectation for a better tomorrow. It is an imagination steeped—*but not constrained by*—hopelessness and even pessimism in the face of personal and social catastrophe. Simply envisioning a “tomorrow”—and surviving another day—is a victory for many.<sup>9</sup> And not acting could also be a silent victory in the face of hopelessness.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Ethicist in Context***

Often omitted from ethical discussions is the responsibility of the ethicist. Producers of ethical knowledge should exercise care when proposing “solutions” to conundrums, especially to complex or deeply personal quandaries. Accordingly, throughout, this essay discusses how producers of ethical knowledge should acknowledge our own contextual limitations all the while always having an eye toward contributions from other hermeneutical communities. The essay thus assumes ethical contexts as firmly within “*lo cotidiano*” (the quotidian), which serves as a theoethical<sup>11</sup> locus or habitus.<sup>12</sup> Introduced by *mujerista* theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *lo cotidiano* privileges ordinary living “as source, provides content, particularizes context, and marks the spaces and place(s) from which Latin@s do theology,” Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández writes. “Such theologizing [and ethical thinking] avoids abstraction and is admittedly polyvocal and fluid.”<sup>13</sup>

Polyvocality, pluriversity, and fragmentation are the immediate goals: considering every viewpoint—even Western-based idealized abstractions—is essential to eclectic

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<sup>9</sup> See Jessica Coblenz, “The Possibilities of Grace and Persistent Depression,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (September 2019): 554-571.

<sup>10</sup> Mark D. Jordan, “Jesus Acted Up and Any Possible Future of ‘Queer Theology,’” *Theology and Sexuality* 21, no. 3 (2015): 198-204.

<sup>11</sup> I use the term theoethical to explicitly reject the traditional separation of theology and ethics as two distinct disciplines. For me, the two are intimately connected, since theological and ethical reflection and imagination are always political, with real consequences in the lived realities of humans, non-human animals, and the earth itself.

<sup>12</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 371.

<sup>13</sup> Carmen N. Nanko-Fernández, “*Lo Cotidiano* as Locus Theologicus,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 15.

social and personal ethical thinking and (in)action beyond hopeful imagination. Ethical reflection and imagination should avoid flat-out rejections (exclusions) of any viewpoint (even controversial, politically incorrect ones), but ethics should also avoid centering any one narrative as normative and universal. The basic questions in ethical reflection should always be: Whose ethics are under consideration? And what telos does a particular ethical imagination seek, especially when employing hope narratives?

## **B. Whose “Hopeful” Ethics? Widening Ethical Imagination**

In ethics, presuppositions (the starting points) matter. Beginning ethical reflections with the presumption that one’s identity and context are static and even eternal will lead to different considerations from those who understand ethics as responding to shifting and ephemeral positionalities and contexts. One’s religious and ethical sources, and the interpretation of those sources (filtered through one’s epistemic and affective communities, as well as one’s socioeconomic and political persuasions), form a significant portion of one’s ethical imagination, and, by extension, one’s character.<sup>14</sup> Assuming that moral character formation occurs by doing rather than by learning maxims or reciting formulas,<sup>15</sup> any ethical paradigm should consider the characters (and their characteristics) in addition to scenes of instruction and sources. Taken together, characters (those held up as exemplary or not), scenes of instruction (the contexts upon which ethical actions take place and where they are learned or not), and sources (texts, commandments, laws, stories, etc...) constitute the ingredients of any ethical imagination.

In ethics, the end goal (the *telos*) also matters. One’s expectations of ethical deliberation (outcomes) restrict how one imagines ethics. Consider how any ethical text or idea—which leads to the igniting of ethical imagination in students—is imagined and taught with the assumptions and expectations of a particular teacher, whose own experiences and academic background in turn inform her assumptions and expectations. For example, one of Catholicism’s—indeed, Western civilization’s—most influential moral texts, the *Summa Theologica*, has “effect only when the full figure is supplied by the teacher’s public anticipation of the coherence and continuity of a divine teaching.”<sup>16</sup> A teacher’s or reader’s assumptions animate the text, which in turn restrict the paths its ethical lessons might take. Reflecting ethically with a predetermined goal is similar to entering an address into a GPS. Teachers of ethics set a common address for students, and even though some students may take different avenues and travel in distinct cars, the end point remains the same. According to Mark Jordan, even with the same unchanged words as the starting point, different readings through the centuries have produced radically different notions of a concept like natural law, prompting Jordan to note that the “same passages are not the same.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Christina A. Astorga, *Catholic Moral Theology and Social Ethics: A New Method* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Mark D. Jordan makes this assumption in *Teaching Bodies: Moral Formation in the Summa of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Jordan, *Teaching Bodies*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Jordan, *Teaching Bodies*, 94.

Besides an ideological endpoint, telos also functions temporally. Does the ethical action take place in the future (when the situation is not immediately pressing) or in the present (when it is knocking on one's doorstep)? Is it one ethical act or a series of acts—with or without interruption? Is ethics imagined on a Eurocentric linear timeline toward some ultimate progress, or is ethics imagined as disparate, perhaps circular acts that might lead to no specific end?

Other questions of purpose surface. For what purpose does one think and act ethically? Are the acts social or personal;<sup>18</sup> does it matter who sees? On a social level, does ethical/moral behavior mean observing purely subjective socio-cultural mores, usually constructed by those in epistemological power (society's knowledge producers)?<sup>19</sup> Can ethical behavior lead to unethical outcomes? And does ethics apply differently to distinct sectors of society? What is the ethical responsibility of the social ethicist proposing ethical solutions to specific and broad issues? (I will address this last question in the conclusion.)

Decolonial and critical theory scholars remind us to always ask practical questions with theoretical consequences. Questions include: who is producing ethical knowledge (the sources or scripts), which characters are held up to the denigration (or erasure) of others, which scenes of instruction remain privileged to the detriment of other scenes, and what are the political consequences of ethical formation and knowledge? Going further, one may ask whether comprehensive ethical formation is at all possible? Perhaps an honest ethical response is to imagine letting go of long-held ethical paradigms—usually formulated by elite knowledge producers—in favor of piecemeal, fragmented responses to life's messy situations. In his latest book, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, David Tracy argues that “[s]trong fragments shatter, fragments negate any closed totality system. In the course of fragmenting all closed totalities, the most powerful fragments also show themselves not as substances but as events and positively open to liminal infinity.”<sup>20</sup>

Of course, to Western-trained minds (including my own), fragmenting knowledge might seem counterintuitive to the taxonomic nature of ethical texts. At the risk of generalizing, there indeed exists a Western obsession with the urge to formulate answers to every conundrum—to the point where responses are often forced, like thrusting puzzle pieces into incongruent voids. Cultural theorist Marcelo Diversi pleads with his readers: “Tell your Western-trained mind to stop looking for details or categories. You do not need them.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I agree with Lisa Cahill that “all ethics is social ethics.” Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Feminism and Christian Ethics*, in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 218.

<sup>19</sup> On the social construction of roles and even morals, see Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Times: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira, *Between Talk: Decolonizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: Lest Coast Press, 2009), 59.

But need and desire are different. While we certainly do not “need” to be analytical and categorical, producers and consumers of ethical knowledge (indeed, any knowledge) tend to imagine ethics within the confines of academic norms. This essay is itself a practice in academic knowledge production, with the expectation that its consumption will be of use to others in the academy and possibly beyond. Academic practice stems from a long genealogy with roots in the scholastic universities of medieval Italy and France (and even before that in great Islamic and monastic centers of learning).<sup>22</sup> As a site of knowledge production, the modern university itself—as heir to a rational, Enlightenment methodology—can restrict ethical imagination, as evident by schools of thoughts and methods particular to universities, such as the Chicago method, or the Harvard way, or the Jesuit pedagogical method.<sup>23</sup> Ethical thinking depends on assumptions put into practice by the producer or the consumer of knowledge within epistemic communities.

That knowledge is contextual, that it shifts according to the intellectual context,<sup>24</sup> might be obvious to some. But that theoethical knowledge, with its vice of conceiving itself as a timeless science,<sup>25</sup> is contextual might be less obvious. Indeed, because of Christian theology’s theorizing on the Divine (theology) and on humanity’s relationship to the Divine and to each other (ethics) for almost two millennia, the discipline might be especially prone to the vice of conceptualizing its knowledge as transcendent, universal, and teleological.

### ***Methodologies of Fragmentation: Decolonial Thought, Epistemologies of the South, and Queer Theology***

Yet a claim to universality should be debunked by applying a decolonial lens. Upenyu S. Majee and Susanne B. Röss define a decolonial methodology as one that “allows for the systematic interrogation of the global asymmetries that constituted imperial power by challenging longstanding Euro-American claims to a universal, neutral, objective, and disembodied epistemology.”<sup>26</sup> Central to a decolonial methodology is a hermeneutics of suspicion, that is, an interpretive lens that does not readily assume the validity of any proposals for meaning making, especially when such meaning making elevates some meanings to the denigration of others often excluded.

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<sup>22</sup> See M. Shawn Copeland, “Turning Theology: A Proposal,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 753-73.

<sup>23</sup> Julie Cupples notes that the “Westernized university is a site where learning and the production, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge are embedded in Eurocentric epistemologies that are posited as objective, disembodied and universal and in which non-Eurocentric knowledges such as Black and indigenous knowledges are largely ignored, marginalized or dismissed.” Julie Cupples, “Introduction: Coloniality Resurgent, Coloniality Interrupted,” in *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University*, eds. Julie Cupples and Ramon Grosfoguel, (London: Routledge, 2019), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Jordan, *Teaching Bodies*, 93.

<sup>25</sup> See Terrence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Upenyu S. Majee and Susanne B. Röss, “Colonial Legacies in Internationalization of Higher Education: Racial Justice and Geopolitical Redress in South Africa and Brazil,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* (2018), 4.

Epistemologies of the South should also temper theoethical vices (or fantasies) of orderly, universal maxims. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that “epistemologies of the South deal with knowledges present in or emerging from the resistance to and the struggle against oppression, knowledges that are ... embodied in concrete bodies, whether collective or individual.”<sup>27</sup> These epistemologies take seriously embodied existence, not for its categorical use in an academic theoethical exercise that seeks to formulate some principles, but as crucial precisely because bodies exist in a particular place and time. They also serve as a consistent reminder that other bodies have been killed, forgotten and disposed as meaningless shells of once-expendable humans.

Epistemologies of the South accordingly focus on “nonexistent knowledges, deemed as such either because they are not produced according to accepted or even intelligible methodologies or because they are produced by absent subjects, subjects deemed incapable of producing valid knowledge due to their subhuman condition or nature.”<sup>28</sup> Epistemologies of the South search for unauthorized knowledges and imaginations, for those thoughts and nuggets of wisdom not sanctioned by secular or religious police powers.

One example of this form of knowledge is queer theology, introduced and pioneered by Marcella Althaus-Reid in her books *The Queer God*<sup>29</sup> and *Indecent Theology*.<sup>30</sup> By placing queer subjects—queer bodies—at the center of theoethical knowledge production and consumption (and yet ensuring that their scripts remain elusive and shifty), Althaus-Reid sought to expand the canvass of theoethical reflection by working toward a “new theological epistemological break.”<sup>31</sup> Althaus-Reid includes as subjects of ethical production and formation those ignored or shamed by authorized, “decent” theoethical imagination: women lemon vendors without underwear, or theologians who danced the night away at seedy gay clubs, or sex workers shamed (and yet desired) by normative societal gazes. While queer theology remains marginal in the academy, there is no doubt that Althaus-Reid and her intellectual progeny have broadened theoethics for many within and outside the academy, including me.<sup>32</sup>

Theoethics should seek to include as many voices as possible, especially unorthodox ones. If ethics takes excluded voices as its starting point, the possibilities for character formation become endless. On the academic side, the politics of citation—who one cites and why—matters, especially if the scholar is also a teacher.<sup>33</sup> Teachers, as noted earlier, activate meaning for students. Attentive students take note of whom the teacher

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<sup>27</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 87.

<sup>28</sup> De Sousa Santos, *End of Cognitive Empire*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> One of my fondest memories as a master's student in theological studies was casually reading (if that's even possible) Althaus-Reid's work on a Cambridge, MA park lawn over the course of several summer days with doctoral and other master's students.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Delgado, “The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 132, no. 3 (March 1984): 561-78.

cites in the syllabus and in her work. A teacher seeking to expand ethical pallets will acknowledge the limitations inherent in her textual selections and will avoid token representations of “scholars of color” or women or queer theorists. At the same time, the teacher should exercise caution by not limiting her texts to scholars from one particular racial or gender group—for that would reify the practice of exclusion and set a bad example to students. Again, theoethical reflection is about qualified inclusion and the concoction of eclectic ethical brews from several ingredients never before mixed. Fragmenting and mixing: that is how ethical imagination can best disrupt and resist claims to ideological and ontological purity—that is, fantasies of universal maxims.

Yet, the epistemologies of the South must themselves undergo decolonial scrutiny. It appears De Sousa Santos believes in change, progress, and liberation. Might his vision be too utopian, just another narrative of hope? How about we introduce some new ingredients into this evolving ethical *paella*? How would mixing in ingredients usually dismissed in theoethical narratives of hope change its flavor? Enter Afro-pessimism and Latinx hopelessness as necessary to a broader theoethical recipe of imagination—to a constantly evolving and shifting ethics. I envision an ethics that resists finalized proposals or fantasies of solving enduring ethical dilemmas once and for all.

### **C. Mixing in Some More Ingredients: Afro-Pessimism and Latinx Hopelessness**

In my years as a student of Christian (specifically Catholic) ethics, and as a frequent attendee at lectures and conference presentations on ethics, I often see ethicists tout “African cosmology” as a viable source of non-Western ethical wisdom. African cosmology, these ethicists argue, can provide much-needed insight into humanity’s connection to each other, the natural world, all living beings, the cosmos, and the Divine. Ethicists employ the seemingly ubiquitous term “*ubuntu*” to capture African cosmology’s insistence on human-nature interconnectivity and interdependence. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, for example, explains that “the human person and the cosmos have a vital connection.”<sup>34</sup> Such connection should lead to a concern with holistic well-being—that is, concern for the vitality of the community and all its living creatures, as well as for the natural environment.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, for Orobator, African worldviews should lead to “an understanding of life that is expansive and inclusive” and that “encompasses the universe of plants, animals, and nature.”<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in *Resurrection Song*, Flora Wilson Bridges presents African cosmology and spirituality as unified around these themes: the universe is profoundly spiritual; heaven and earth are not separate; the universe is circular and moral, justice balances relationships; and time is circular or continuous, without discreet moments.<sup>37</sup> She also

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<sup>34</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confession of an Animist* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 51.

<sup>35</sup> See Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 53-56

<sup>37</sup> Flora Wilson Bridges, *Resurrection Song: African-American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001). See especially chapter 1, “The African Legacy—A Unified Worldview,” 14-43).

notes that the unified African worldview “led people toward a spiritual definition of the self as self-in-community.”<sup>38</sup> She then applies this African understanding of self-in-community to the African American struggle for freedom in their everyday existence.

Both Orobator and Bridges assume that Black peoples are “humans” who, through enslavement and subsequent racist ideologies and policies, suffer from a degraded (a subhuman) status that African (from Africa) worldviews ultimately negate. Indeed, African cosmology and spirituality—neatly packaged by scholars for the consumption of Western categorical minds—present the depth and dignity of African peoples. Western and Christian ethics can learn from African cosmology—so the reasoning goes.

But seldom have I seen, heard or read Christian ethicists engage with pessimistic voices.<sup>39</sup> In fact, in Christian ethics circles, I do not think I have ever heard mention of Afro-pessimism, much less of the prospect of ontological nonexistence for Blacks. Why place so much emphasis on *ubuntu* and other African concepts when Black thinkers in the United States have developed a sophisticated critique of the dominant hope narratives employed by ethicists and politicians? From Orlando Patterson to Derrick Bell to present Afro-pessimists (some of which this essay discusses), US Black social critics have asked whether Blacks can have life in an anti-Black world.<sup>40</sup> The new generation goes as far as asking: “is the Black, in fact, a human being? Or can blackness ground itself in the being of the human?”<sup>41</sup> Whereas Orobator and Bridges *de facto* assume blackness as human, thinkers like Calvin Warren, Frank Wilderson III, Steven Finley, and Biko Mandela Gray assume that blackness equals nonexistence, a non-human (as opposed to sub-human) status. For Afro-pessimists (especially Warren and Wilderson), therefore, hope for a just world of racial equality through social and political action is but a liberal fantasy spurred by linear notions of time and progress, by faulty anthropological assumptions, and by limited (Western) ethical imagination.

### ***On the Uses of Pessimism Generally***

I suggest that Christian ethicists should introduce pessimism as an antidote to social and self-deception. In the *Uses of Pessimism*, Roger Scruton notes that human attempts to predict and control the future for human advantage is pure folly—a collective irrationality (and even delusion) that continues to plague even the most “advanced” civilizations.<sup>42</sup> Scruton, however, acknowledges that disrupting the “collective unreason” of hope in a utopian future is a futile exercise. “You may enjoy [the book] and agree with it, but it will have no influence whatsoever on those whom it calls to account,” states

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<sup>38</sup> Bridges, *Resurrection Song*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> One exception is Miguel A. De La Torre’s book *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). I explore his contributions later in this essay.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Uses of Pessimism and the Dangers of False Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

Scruton. “The irrationalities that I explore are ... ‘hard-wired’ in the human cortex, and not to be countered by anything as gentle as an argument.”<sup>43</sup>

Telos sustains the ideal of socio-political progress; a goal entails an ideal of what will be, of what one is aiming for, even if that goal is not initially clear.<sup>44</sup> Thus, notions of progress depend on various teleological ideals for organizing society: communism, capitalism, commune-living, a world of pure equality and justice, or any of the other multiple failed utopian social and political experiments undertaken by human communities throughout history. But once reality unfolds, even social-justice-focused social and political groups seem to succumb to greed, corruption, and the use of violent military repression to quell dissidents.

An example that hits home comes to mind: the Nicaraguan revolution. In 1979, the Sandinistas, led by Daniel Ortega, toppled the US-backed Somoza regime with the promise of a Nicaragua that would place liberation theology ideals at the center, including the redistribution of wealth to benefit “oppressed” peasants and the end of state-sanctioned repression and corruption. Fast forward to today. Not only is Ortega still in power (he even appointed his wife vice president), but his wealth is well into the millions, his national guard has killed and tortured countless dissidents, and the Nicaraguan people still find themselves in dire economic straits. A dream-turned-nightmare. I wonder if perhaps that is what collective populations need to wake up to reality. Examples of failed state utopias abound, including the United States—a point explored below. Pessimism could serve, then, as an antidote to social deception, to empty rhetorical promises of some future constructed around liberal social-justice principles or the common good.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Afro-Pessimism: Tempering White Liberal Fantasies***

Wholesale progress, especially social progress, is a fantasy—but a fantasy with negative consequences, nonetheless. Frank Wilderson notes, “In its critique of social movements, Afro-Pessimism argues that blacks do not function as political subjects....”<sup>46</sup> Instead, all sorts of political sectors mobilize Blacks to achieve other ends, such as the nomination of politicians who might even hold interests adverse to Black communities. Each and every political campaign is fueled by hope, by some ideal goals.<sup>47</sup> What happens when “politician A” reaches her goals through her policies? Has utopia come true? Or should “politician A” wisely anticipate setbacks to her agenda, whether through future legislation, legal maneuvering, or lackluster implementation—or a combination

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<sup>43</sup> Scruton, *The Uses of Pessimism*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> James Tartaglia writes, “An ideal gives us something to aim for; a dream we can strive to realize or at least approximate.” James Tartaglia, *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life: A System of Nihilism, Consciousness and Reality* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 147.

<sup>45</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption,” *Humanities Future* <https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/afro-pessimism-end-redemption/>

<sup>47</sup> On this point, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

of all three? Should not “politician A” divulge these setbacks to her supporters so that can they strategically prepare?

Collective belief in hope is a powerful political tool, whether employed for perceived rollbacks or progress. Hope preys on desires for a world not yet here.<sup>48</sup> But any action in the real world—even actions geared toward “justice”—can never fully satisfy all within marginalized communities. Joseph Winters, in his summary of W.E.B. Du Bois’ essay “Of the Meaning of Progress,” underscores Du Bois’ tempered view of progress, especially market-based progress that measures success in terms of new structures, technological innovation, and expansive economic choices for producers and consumers. Winters writes that “progress actually relies on the isolation of certain communities, the unequal distribution of resources, the maintenance of harmful power relationships, and the often-slow elimination of beings, objects, and ways of life that stand in the way of progress.”<sup>49</sup> Progress, according to Du Bois, refuses to look back to acknowledge those lost on the path toward utopia. And progress rhetoric does not allow for discussions of setbacks, suffering, pain, death, and pessimism. Social and economic progress relies on a manifest-destiny-like vision of what a particular community deserves (usually to the exclusion of other communities). Progress also depends on masculine rhetoric of striving for and shaping the world at all costs.<sup>50</sup> Any questioning or tempering of this vision and rhetoric can result in social death within the community—a costly prospect for those who depend on the community for spiritual sustenance, financial security, and identity formation.

Yet Afro-Pessimism demands that courageous community members temper hope by resisting to be used or mobilized for political projects that seek to “uplift” the masses but that ultimately benefit the state and its elite citizens. Winters argues that Du Bois’ reflections “show that black American strivings for a better future must be informed, shaped, and haunted by the memories of loss, neglect, alienation, exploitation, and suffering.”<sup>51</sup> These memories, in turn, should open up spaces for pessimism and melancholia—a type of suffering that does not leave room for redemption. Pessimism sees existing political states as incapable of changing their dominant socioeconomic paradigms to benefit those upon whom the states were built. The state’s redemption, in other words, is impossible, especially if its redemption is for the benefit of those who matter negatively.

What do I mean “matter negatively”? At first blush, dear reader, you might be thinking that everyone matters, or even that no one can matter negatively. Does not mattering mean that one is important to someone else? In their essay “God Is a White Racist,” Stephen Finley and Biko Mandela Gray tell us that “mattering is a question of where and how someone *shows up*, how something appears within the context of

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<sup>48</sup> Scruton, *The Uses of Pessimism*.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 61.

<sup>50</sup> Winters, *Hope Draped in Black*, 63.

<sup>51</sup> Winters, *Hope Draped in Black*, 64.

collective human existence.”<sup>52</sup> To matter is to show up in a set of relationships—“so much so that the erasure, exclusion, or elimination of something *is still* a form of mattering.”<sup>53</sup> Black lives matter negatively, according to Finley and Gray, precisely because an anti-Black world and its nation-states require the erasure, exclusion, and destruction of Black bodies in order to provide meaning to non-Black bodies and their vision of the world. Black bodies are fungible and disposable, useful only for the physical (and I add, entertainment) value that they provide to the non-Black world. Throughout US history, Black bodies have served as fodder for the city on a hill’s construction, expansion, and survival. Finley and Gray argue that the state functions as a god, “who, as ultimate arbiter of guilt or innocence, wields the near-absolute power and authority to do *imminent* harm to Africana peoples.”<sup>54</sup> To the current state, Black life matters negatively, “emerging as always already guilty in the eyes of a state that sanctions Black death as necessary to the maintenance of social order—in other words, as a theodicy or defense of the goodness and sanctity of the state....”<sup>55</sup> They have in mind the many Black males (and females) shot by police throughout the US during the past decade. The state uses their existences to mark and display its arbitrary power in the name of law and order.

Warren echoes Finley and Gray. He claims that Blacks have undergone a “metaphysical holocaust—the systematic concealment, descent, and withholding of blackness through technologies of terror, violence, and abjection.”<sup>56</sup> This metaphysical holocaust, in turn, has led to Blacks’ facing ontological terror—the “systemic destruction of a spirit, a soul, a psyche.”<sup>57</sup> With such comprehensive ontological destruction and erasure of Black peoples, how can social progress—a future of equality—ever be possible within the confines of a White liberal order? Wilderson asserts that imbuing “state violence with a temporal finitude” is extremely problematic.<sup>58</sup> For him and for other Afro-Pessimists, state violence against Black bodies is necessary to state existence; the violence is therefore inevitable. Indeed, “[h]uman life is dependent on Black death for existence and for its conceptual coherence,” Wilderson writes. “There is no world without Blacks, yet there are no Blacks who are in the world.”<sup>59</sup>

Afro-Pessimism insists that blackness is coterminous with Slaveness; Blacks entered Western legal and anthropological consciousness as fungible chattel and remain so. Since Blacks entered the Western imagination as property, and since the state continues to treat Blacks as disposable physical property (useful only for the state to demonstrate its disciplinary power or for consumer culture to entertain the masses through sports), Blacks have always been and remain absent from the “spatiotemporal structure of

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen C. Finley and Biko Mandela Gray, “God Is a White Racist: Immanent Atheism as a Religious Response to Black Lives Matter and State-Sanctioned Anti-Black Violence,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 4 (2015): 445.

<sup>53</sup> Finley and Gray, “God Is a White Racist,” 445.

<sup>54</sup> Finley and Gray, “God Is a White Racist,” 446.

<sup>55</sup> Finley and Gray, “God Is a White Racist,” 447.

<sup>56</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 169.

<sup>58</sup> Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption.”

<sup>59</sup> Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption.”

narrative.”<sup>60</sup> Blacks do not exist as humans in contemporary narratives, Wilderson claims, for they lack narratives structured around their humanity. Their absence of humanity leads to “no mutual futurity into which Blacks and others will find themselves” on an equal plane.<sup>61</sup> True social change is therefore impossible. “Continuing to keep hope that freedom will occur, that one day the world will apologize for its antiblack brutality and accept us with open arms,” Warren writes, “is a devastating fantasy.”<sup>62</sup>

Afro-Pessimism offers a devastating critique to the liberal-humanist (Christian) ethical logic that Blacks can find true freedom from social, economic, and racial inequality through political, social, and legal means. After all, if the state controls political, social, and legal action, and if the state depends on blackness negatively mattering (if blackness matters at all), why would true social change or progress come via those same state mechanisms? Warren bluntly states: “The fantasy of equality and the humanist imagination can dream about a world of freedom, justice, and equality, but it must continually disavow the nightmare of the metaphysical holocaust, which continues.”<sup>63</sup> The inconvenient truth that Afro-Pessimists attempt to divulge is that Black bodies matter only for their raw production, just as they did during slavery. Blacks do not matter as intellectual subjects with their own narratives and imaginations; they are objects that the state and society use for its own purposes, with many Blacks unknowingly participating in their own objectification for consumption by the White gaze.

So what is the solution, if any? According to Finley and Gray, deconstructing dominant national (state) mythical narratives and symbols in order to free up imagination is one way. But another is “affirming that the current system must be razed in order for a new mode of social being to be collectively developed and maintained.”<sup>64</sup> Finley and Gray are not ready to concede, as are Warren and Wilderson, that change is implausible. Yet by asking to raze the entire current system, Finley and Gray perhaps fail to acknowledge the epistemological and ontological constraints on any imaginations or fantasies of future systems. Razing the current system is as utopian as the prospect of achieving equality and freedom for all within the modern state. Radical Afro-Pessimists push us to reconsider notions of progress and equality within current epistemological and ontological paradigms. Collective imagination, they say, is too infected with narratives that have no place for Black contributions or actions. Perhaps the only thing left is to open spaces for grieving at the realization that some bodies only matter negatively, if they matter at all. Different ethical and social paradigms could emerge by simply allowing grief to take flight.

### ***Latinx Hopelessness***

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<sup>60</sup> Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption.”

<sup>61</sup> Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption.”

<sup>62</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 172.

<sup>63</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Finley and Gray, “God Is a White Racist,” 450.

One glaring omission of Afro-Pessimists is their non-discussion of the invisibility of undocumented immigrants in the US, and of non-European immigrants who remain stateless. In his controversial chapter “F\*ck It,” Miguel De La Torre calls for racial dialogues beyond the Black/White binary. He focuses on Latinx immigrants in the US, noting how they are invisible and therefore subject to legal abuse and death.<sup>65</sup> Immigrants and migrants are especially vulnerable to trafficking for sex and labor, or to physical, emotional, and mental abuse at the hands of their bosses (read: owners). Since migrants avoid law enforcement at all costs (due to their status and mistrust of law enforcement), they must put up with their nightmares in silence. And why would migrants seek law enforcement when “on average, between 2005 and 2012, one border agent was arrested each and every day for misconduct.”<sup>66</sup> In addition, all around the US, Latinx immigrants *and* citizens face the threat of legal and communal harassment and of unlawful detention amid suspicions of drug dealing, stealing, raping, and overall illegality. Legal scholar David A. Harris notes that many Latinos<sup>67</sup> even use the initials DWB (driving while brown) to refer to the unfair treatment they receive from law enforcement and others in the community while undertaking what to most of us would be a mundane activity.<sup>68</sup> This unfair and disparate treatment often results in Latinx peoples finding themselves at the mercy of the vast prison-immigration industrial complex.

From the time Latinos set foot on the nation’s school grounds to the time they enter the workforce, many Latinos are aware of their place within the nation’s socioeconomic and cultural hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> The dominant discourse classifies Latinx peoples as second-class citizens, as border crossers—neither from here nor there, always residing on or near physical and metaphysical borders.<sup>70</sup> De La Torre explains that “Latina/os living on the borders in the United States are disjointed from the culture of their heritage and the culture in which they reside, outsiders and foreigners to both.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that Latinos—especially those who arrived in the US as young children or who are first-generation US citizens—experience deep conflicts regarding their identities. “Am I American? Am I Nicaraguan? Or Am I whatever ethnic group is dominant within my community?” The competing dominant and internal narratives might create a disjointed sense of self, a broken identity,<sup>72</sup> which could in turn result in self-loathing and the placing of whiteness and White cultural hegemony on a higher

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<sup>65</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 128.

<sup>66</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 138.

<sup>67</sup> For ease of style, I refer to Hispanics interchangeably as Hispanics, Latinx, or Latino.

<sup>68</sup> David A. Harris, *Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 130.

<sup>69</sup> See Marco Portales, *Crowding Out Latinos: Mexican Americans in the Public Consciousness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>70</sup> De La Torre reminds us that “borderlands are more than just a geographical reality—they symbolize the existential reality of all U.S. Latina/os. Regardless of where Hispanics live, how long they have lived there, or how they or their ancestors came to find themselves in the United States, they all live on borders.” Miguel A. De La Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 73.

<sup>71</sup> . De La Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics*.

<sup>72</sup> De La Torre notes the importance of reflection on identity for Latino communities: “The daily lucha for survival causes any ethical Latina/o reflection to stress and emphasize identity—an identity shaped by a history of cultural, political, and economic conquest and subjugation.” *Latina/o Social Ethics*, 75.

plane of desirability.<sup>73</sup> “The marginalized often shape themselves in the image of the dominant culture,” De La Torre writes, “learning to mimic the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and actions they have been taught to see as superior.”<sup>74</sup> De La Torre unapologetically comments that resistance is futile in the face of ideological systems that seek to survive at all costs: “dismantling these eco-political structures is truly hopeless.”<sup>75</sup>

If the system depends on the wholesale destruction of both Black and Brown (and queer) bodies to sustain itself, perhaps one viable ethical response is to challenge prevailing notions of hope—whether secular or religious—by embracing *epistemological nihilism*. Dislodging ethical imagination from the very secular and religious structures that depend on Black and Brown bodies mattering negatively is no easy feat. Just as redemption by the state is impossible, so too is redemption solely within a Christian-capitalistic-liberal framework a fantasy that should be deconstructed and decentered before others continue to fall prey to restricted ethical imaginations based on hope in what is perhaps already a hopeless world to many.

## **D: A Suggestion: Toward Nihilism**

This essay has explored certain strands of Afro-Pessimism and only briefly aspects of Latinx hopelessness as possible alternatives to dominant secular and religious narratives of hope, which do inform ethical imagination. I am not arguing for churches or civil-rights leaders to discard narratives of hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable personal and social catastrophe. But I do think it is necessary to take seriously narratives of hopelessness amid irredeemable social and structural suffering and loss. Churches and secular society should open spaces for individuals to engage in honest conversations about the present and future, especially when the present (and past) makes cheerful thoughts about the future absurd.

Spaces of grief and melancholia over how racial and other hierarchical dynamics shape identity must also open within the academy and church.<sup>76</sup> These spaces are not meant to help others “cope” with reality; they should instead serve a cathartic purpose. One cathartic purpose—and the one central to this essay—is epistemological reorientation. Ethicists who seek to inform ethical subjects must themselves undergo a comprehensive epistemological death before they allow new imaginations and broader circles of truth to surface. As Joan Didion notes in the preface to her collection of essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, “If I was to work again at all, it would be necessary for me to come to terms with disorder.”<sup>77</sup> If ethics is to speak to a new generation that no longer accepts dreams of a rainbow-painted, cheerful future, it must come to terms with

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<sup>73</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 147.

<sup>74</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 147.

<sup>75</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 150.

<sup>76</sup> See Anne A. Chang, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), xii.

the disorder—the chaos—that underwrites law and order and fantasies of secular and religious metanarratives of hope.

When writing, Gloria Anzaldúa thinks about how the moon illuminates her house. In Aztec religion, Coyolxauhqui represents the moon. Coyolxauhqui led her brothers in an attack against her mother, Coatlicue, whose miraculous pregnancy (via an inseminated feather) brought embarrassment to the family. The attack was thwarted by Coatlicue's baby, who emerged a grown man from her womb as the legion was moving in on Coatlicue. Huitzilopochtli decapitated Coyolxauhqui and threw her body down the side of Coatepec (serpent mountain); her body fractured into pieces as it tumbled down the mountain's side. Coyolxauhqui's body littered the mountain. "I envision her muerta y decapitada (dead and decapitated), una cabeza con los parados cerrados (eyes closed)," Anzaldúa says. "Writing is a process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and conocimiento (insight)."<sup>78</sup> In a similar vein, unlearning what one has learned in order to expand one's circles of truths requires a sort of death: a decapitation of one's epistemology and ontology as learned from Western knowledge and belief systems.<sup>79</sup> Anzaldúa calls this the "Coyolxauhqui imperative," which is "the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us."<sup>80</sup> The Coyolxauhqui imperative requires a "new theological epistemological break"<sup>81</sup>—what Ray Hart calls "unbecoming."<sup>82</sup> As mentioned, such break, such unbecoming, is painful: "A person's unbecoming is both a doing and a knowing, but a painful and arduous doing and knowing, because requiring self-conscious adjustments to ways of ordinary knowing and doing."<sup>83</sup>

Given our pluralistic context, the unbecoming of the idealized subject within a totalizing Western paradigm is not only necessary, but ethically required if other knowledges (from the wretched of the earth, from the borderlands) are to inform the multiple ways of being human today. Through the realization of "unbecoming, imagination fixes upon the range of what is unfinished in human being."<sup>84</sup> Simply put, dislocating subjects from a fixed imaginary frees subjects to envision new characters and new scenes of instruction that are informed by the multiplicity of human experiences across time and space. These scenes and the characters who inhabit them present a new moment for the ethical formation of subjects from across contexts.

### ***Epistemological Nihilism***

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<sup>78</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>79</sup> Rubem Alves suggests that "[t]o return to God one has to undergo a great deal of forgetting. One has to unlearn what was learned." Rubem Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>80</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Ray L. Hart, *God Being Nothing: Toward a Theogony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 178.

<sup>83</sup> Hart, *God Being Nothing*, 178.

<sup>84</sup> Hart, *God Being Nothing*, 178.

Dislodging epistemology and ontology from Western paradigms (especially ethical ones) is nonetheless a daunting task. In proposing to decenter long-held views and narratives (particularly of hope), I propose tentatively embracing epistemological nihilism. Epistemological nihilism seeks to redress the epistemological and ontological violence caused by simplistic ethical scenes of instruction and the characters held up as normative by theological and political police powers. According to Leo Luks, “nihilism is the logical outcome of the end of Western metaphysics.”<sup>85</sup> By metaphysics, Luks is thinking of speculative metaphysics, that is, “thinking of the sort that attempts to consider the entirety of being as a single system, from a single foundation, and deems it possible to provide an answer to the question what is being as a whole?”<sup>86</sup> Further, and perhaps in line with Afro-Pessimist thought, Gianni Vattimo argues that nihilism cannot be overcome and so should be accepted.<sup>87</sup> Truth with a capital “T” presumes some unified concept that remains valid across time and space for all peoples. But, as already noted, all knowledge is always contextual. It stems from the imaginations of particular peoples living in particular times and places, and trained in particular universities and methods. In a post-metaphysical intellectual climate, what remains are fragments of knowledge; each fragment (or configuration of fragments) should be questioned, especially when said fragments are attempting to dictate how societies should operate or how one should be in the world.

Nihilism tends to evoke deeply negative feelings, especially in a religious context. How can there be no meaning in a world created by God and redeemed by Jesus, is the common counter. Nihilism—that pesky possibility that nothing has inherent meaning—can be a useful anecdote to the rehashed prospects of some future hope for a utopia of pure ideals (whether liberal or conservative) that purport to have inherent meaning for all at some point in time. In the words of abolitionist Wendell Phillips, “Nihilism is the righteous and honorable resistance of a people crushed under an iron rule. Nihilism is evidence of life ... the last weapon of victims choked and manacled beyond all other resistance.”<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, Nolen Gertz, following Nietzsche, identifies two forms of nihilism: active and passive. On the one hand, the former seeks to “destroy the present to create the future, to destroy the destructive ideals of the present in order to create new ideals and bring about the future that we want.”<sup>89</sup> Passive nihilism, on the other hand, entails completely retreating from any impulse to steer public discussion or morals in order to allow the present to unfold, even if it means the destruction of others or society. Passive nihilism might find theological parallels in apophatic (or negative) theology, which urges silence and retreat when considering the Divine or even human agency.<sup>90</sup> Nihilism is not synonymous with pessimism or cynicism, though a nihilist may definitely hold

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<sup>85</sup> Leo Luks, “The Fusion of Philosophy and Literature in Nihilist Thought,” *Problemos* 77 (2010): 130.

<sup>86</sup> Luks, “The Fusion of Philosophy and Literature in Nihilist Thought,” 130-31.

<sup>87</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> “Wendell Philipps Justifies Nihilism,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 28, 1881, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Nolen Gertz, *Nihilism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), 162.

<sup>90</sup> See William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

pessimist or cynical views. Perhaps nihilism can force a fundamental rethinking of whether there is a future worth striving for in the first place.

Active nihilism can be very useful to those excluded from ethical imagination and even from humanhood. Instead of privileging what Nietzsche saw as Christianity's life-denying impulses for an afterlife where all will be made just and right, or the secular state's supposed progress toward equality and freedom for all, active nihilism demands that one honestly acknowledge and confront the incessant violence undergirding human existence. M. Shawn Copeland reminds us that "[w]e owe all that we have to our exploitation and enslavement, removal and extermination of the despised others."<sup>91</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr also exclaims that "all human life is involved in the sin of seeking security at the expense of other life."<sup>92</sup> Life depends on the death of other beings—whether human or non-human animals. Without sacrificial flesh and blood, life cannot go on. Nihilism calls us to task, to confront how things have been, are currently, and will be without the pretenses of false hope or the social or personal delusion of a better world. Nihilism can thus rupture what creates meaning (narratives) and what holds subjects and objects in place (scripts) to enact that meaning. The death of stagnant imaginations and narratives is an essential step before moving on to imagining and creating other worlds, identities, and scripts. Out of death emerges new life. And this is precisely what ethics should acknowledge.

Epistemological nihilism embraces the eschaton. To acknowledge that the world might be meaningless (in the face of dominant narratives) is to acknowledge that humans themselves assign the world meaning through their imaginations, which evolve into myths and symbols that later form a narrative logic around which civilizations coalesce.<sup>93</sup> Finley and Gray note that the US operates in "bad faith and is able to perpetuate a narrative of innocence, equality, and fundamental fairness contrary to its history...."<sup>94</sup> Nihilism allows one to see any narrative as the product of pure imagination instead of something divinely ordained. In demystifying any narrative, nihilists pierce through any sacrosanct veils to reveal contradictory actions and empty rhetorical deployments. And in deconstructing and destroying ideas, imaginations, and narratives, nihilists precipitate the end of the epistemological and ontological myths holding the world together to the benefit of a few. In effect, nihilism indeed calls for the end of the world as understood through the narrative logics that emerged from the powerful matrix of Christendom and empire (god and mammon) many centuries ago.<sup>95</sup>

Post-metaphysical ethics and theoethics, then, is open to constant speculation, approximations, paradoxes, ambiguity, and ongoing revision. No word or world is ever final, no imagination is ever the "one." A bricolage of imaginations, of fragments from

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<sup>91</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 100.

<sup>92</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol 1, Human Nature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 169.

<sup>93</sup> Burton L. Mack, *Christian Mentality: The Entanglements of Power, Violence, and Fear* (London: Equinox, 2011), 7.

<sup>94</sup> Finley and Gray, "God Is a White Racist," 450.

<sup>95</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).

particular lived experiences is what constitutes a post-metaphysical theoethics.<sup>96</sup> For some, hopelessness is all they can fathom after intergenerational traumas or in the face of incessant human brutality throughout history but that continues in the present. “Hopelessness is an act of courage to embrace reality,” De La Torre states, “and to act even when the odds are in favor of defeat.”<sup>97</sup> Passive nihilism, however, also requires the virtue of self-discipline (though it can often be mistaken as escapism or simple passivism). To not act when one’s scripted identity requires one to act is itself a form of resistance. For example, if one is Black or queer (or both), society expects one to speak up against any ongoing racial or sexual injustice. One’s role is as social-justice warrior. But cannot resistance to injustice also entail not acting when one is cued by scriptwriters?<sup>98</sup> What does a “silent poetry in the midst of this world’s political chatter” look like, anyway?<sup>99</sup> If an effective theoethical imagination is an eclectic brew of fragments, what about those bodies or imaginations that refuse emplotment in any narratives? Epistemologies of the South, you will recall, call for turning absent subjects into present ones. Yet Afro-Pessimists insist that Blacks cannot ever be subjects within dominant narratives. Blackness equals non-existence, and as non-existent objects that only matter negatively, can Blacks truly enter theoethical narratives as moral subjects in formation? It is not enough to remember communities and peoples who have already met their end times, since remembering can easily turn into romanticizing and eventually forgetting. Nihilism calls for a hopelessness that may (or may not) perhaps be overcome only when collective populations begin to understand the relativity of all knowledge, values, and morals that have and continue to order Western-liberal societies.<sup>100</sup>

### ***E. Tentative Closing Thoughts: Silence Amid Not Mattering***

During the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard, Toni Morrison identified various forms of “goodness,” with one as a form of narcissism, as ego enhancement.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, true goodness—as a response to evil—does not always win. Biko Mandela Gray writes, “Evil is loud and captures our attention—it is a spectacle.”<sup>102</sup> Goodness is usually lurking backstage, trying to surface at various moments, but authentic (non-narcissistic) goodness is never as loud as evil. In fact, goodness is silent and will manifest within individuals who have undergone intense and serious introspection—a dark night of the

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<sup>96</sup> Silas C. Krabbe, *A Beautiful Bricolage: Theopoetics as God-Talk for Our Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock 2016).

<sup>97</sup> De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness*, 140.

<sup>98</sup> Jordan, “Jesus Acted Up,” 203.

<sup>99</sup> Jordan, “Jesus Acted Up,” 203.

<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche powerfully exclaims: “People erect a concept of morality, of virtue, of holiness upon this false perspective on all things; they base good conscience upon defective vision; they argue that no other sort of vision has value anymore, once they have made their own views sacrosanct with the names of ‘God,’ ‘salvation’ and ‘eternity’.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist and Fragments from a Shattering Mind* (Creation Books, 2002), 23.

<sup>101</sup> Toni Morrison, “Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination,” in *Toni Morrison: Goodness and the Literary Imagination*, eds. David Carrasco, Stephanie Paulsell, and Mara Willard (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 17.

<sup>102</sup> Biko Mandela Gray, “Going Backstage: Soaphead Church and the (Religious) Problem in *The Bluest Eye*,” in *Toni Morrison: Goodness and the Literary Imagination*, eds. David Carrasco, Stephanie Paulsell, and Mara Willard (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 179.

soul and mind, what I have called here an epistemological decapitation. Through “our attention to the silent nature of goodness, we create possibilities for no longer silencing it, encouraging it to speak and no longer bite its tongue.”<sup>103</sup> Perhaps it is time to be silent about the Divine, ethics, and morality—and allow goodness to emerge from its backstage role. Good intentions can pave the way to hell. Embracing meaningless—meaning letting go of epistemological and ontological “roots”—can kickstart a fresh imagination that will actually allow goodness to speak. And maybe even louder than evil, for once.

In that vein, the ethical ethicist perhaps needs to learn silence. Allowing others to speak from their lived experience of the mundane will hopefully expose ethics itself as a problematic discipline insofar as it attempts to categorize and ontologize all human experience in order to offer neat rules and maxims. Ethical imagination should be collective and always unsteady, reflecting the constant on-the-move, borderlands-survival existence of populations that matter negatively. *Lo cotidiano* matters, for it informs how people see the world and themselves and how they act. Since it is impossible to catalogue everyone’s experience for later theoethical reflection, *lo cotidiano* should remain elusive to academic and other consumerist ventures. Ultimately, diverse experiences—especially the experiences of those who matter negatively—offer a glimpse of “what is already available as well as a hint of the endless possibilities open to creative as well as practical imaginations.”<sup>104</sup>

Tentatively embracing nihilism, though a scary and difficult prospect, can help prevent future paralyzing disappointments at the realization that hope for a better “Western-liberal” world comes at a cost. Paving the way for fresh theoethical imaginations requires decentering hope for a while, respecting everyday experiences of hopelessness amid unquelled grief and melancholia, and accepting the arbitrary nature of imposed meanings. It also means respecting seemingly radical anthropological views of nonexistence while seeking to resurrect the dead. In the end, nihilism and hopelessness call attention to living (and dying) in limbo—a reality that billions already face(d), and that if not challenged, could cost the lives of billions more in a world seemingly without end.

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<sup>103</sup> Gray, “Going Backstage,” 196.

<sup>104</sup> Nanko-Fernández, “*Lo Cotidiano* as *Locus Theologicus*,” 30.

**Mestizos/as with an Asian Face**

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• VEJA A PÁGINA 61 PARA LER ESTE ARTIGO EM PORTUGUÊS •

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the identities of the so-called Asian Latinos/as through the analytical lens of mestizaje. Mestizaje is one of the most explored terrains in Latino/a studies and is also a fundamental analytical lens through which the history and the realities of Latinos/as and Latin Americans come to light. Surprisingly, however, Asian Latinos/as are almost absent from the discourse on mestizaje and even from the general perception when people think about Latinos/as. The intention behind this paper is to create a platform for the voices of Asian Latinos/as as mestizos/as, which have gone unheard for a long time, both within academic discourse and in the minds of Latino/a communities. In doing so, the concept of mestizaje as a universal category that alludes to a harmonious coming together of two or more cultures and that promotes the inclusion of races while radically rejecting racial violence is demystified. Instead, the argument is for a conceptual category of mestizaje that is intentionally messy, ever-changing, and open-ended.

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**A. Introduction**

1847, 1899, and 1925: these are the years the first immigrants from continental East Asia—China, Korea, and Japan—arrived in the Latin American countries of Peru, Brazil, and Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Even though it is still hard for many people to associate Latinos/as with an Asian face, Asians have been on the continent since the 19th century, with their descendants now in their third and fourth generations. Many have settled down permanently, while others have left for new destinations, such as the United States of America, their ancestral countries in Asia, or other parts of the world, for various reasons and purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian H. Hearn, “Harnessing the Dragon: Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs in Mexico and Cuba,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 209 (March 2012): 111; Won K. Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 21, 28.

I focus on the identities of the so-called “Asian Latinos/as” through the analytical lens of *mestizaje*<sup>2</sup> to create a platform for their voices, which have gone unheard for a long time in *mestizaje* narratives. In doing so, the concept of *mestizaje* as a universal category that alludes to a harmonious coming together of two or more cultures, and that promotes the inclusion of races, while radically rejecting racism and ethnocentrism, is demystified. Instead, my argument is for a conceptual category of *mestizaje* that is intentionally messy, ever-changing, and open-ended. This understanding of *mestizaje* confuses and questions a dominant stereotypical image of *mestizos/as* that still relies heavily on visual perception and biological ancestry. At the same time, it persistently asks whose presence is not being recognized in the complex, multilayered reality of the term.

Certainly, *mestizaje* is one of the most fundamental concepts for describing the dynamic racial diversity and multicultural realities flourishing in Latin America. It is also an exceptional analytical tool for exploring the realities of various Latino/a immigrant communities living in the U.S.A. and an identity marker with which many Latinos/as can resonate. Although it would be a serious mistake to use *mestizaje* as a single, universal title that represents Latin America and its people, as well as the numerous Latino/a communities in the U.S.A., *mestizaje* is still one of the most explored and contested terrains in Latino/a studies. Surprisingly, however, Asian Latinos/as, whose presence can be traced back to the nineteenth century, are almost entirely absent from the discourse on *mestizaje* and even from the general perception when people think about Latinos/as.

I first explore the meaning and scope of the term *mestizaje*. Since the term has been widely employed by various scholars both in the U.S.A. and the rest of the American continent, I mainly draw on definitions from U.S. Latino/a theology as well as from social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. I then analyze whether the term, or the common ground shared by different opinions regarding *mestizaje*, applies to the realities of Asian Latinos/as. Lastly, I explore some of the implications of this inclusion of Asian Latinos/as into *mestizaje* discourses and debates.

Some caveats should be noted. Since *mestizaje* is a contested concept, no attempt will be made to reach a universal definition that can encompass all the different uses of the term. Such a process is not only impossible but carries the danger of creating a conceptual barrier that ultimately excludes those who “fall short of” the fixed definition. Moreover, since *mestizaje* is highly context dependent, both in the U.S.A. and Latin America, there needs to be an intentional effort not to impose a single perspective upon the diverse realities that the term suggests. Finally, it is important to note that the *mestizaje* identity of Asian Latinos/as is not a recent invention, nor is this an attempt to

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<sup>2</sup> The term *mestizaje* has different connotations. While the term originally centers on the miscegenation of indigenous and European people in Latin America, here I stress the inclusive and exclusive nature of the term to suggest a recognition of the complex and heterogeneous Latino/a identities and raise awareness of underexamined communities in *mestizaje* debates. Instead of “in-between,” “hyphenated,” or “hybrid” Latinos/as, I use the word *mestizos/as* to intentionally stress Asian Latinos/as’ strong embeddedness in, and attachment to, Latin America, both historically and emotionally.

add another race to the *mestizaje* concept. On the contrary, it is a rediscovery of the presence of people who have been there for longer than most people realize but who remain generally absent from *mestizaje* debates as well as greatly under-represented and mis-represented in conversations regarding Latina/o identities.

## **B. Asian “Latinos/as”**

It is important first to clarify the use of the term Latinos/as. As Néstor Medina rightly points out, U.S.A. Latino/a does not refer to Latin American or Latin American immigrants in the U.S.A., though they might form part of the Latino/a population. Instead, most Latinos/as are U.S.A. citizens whose regional and ancestral roots predate the independence of the United States of America.<sup>3</sup> In other words, although the terms “Hispanics” or “Latinos/as” are employed as an artificial pan-ethnic identity marker imposed by the dominant culture to broadly designate individuals and communities who are related to Latin America or Spain, Latinos/as are U.S.A. communities who have various ethnoracial, cultural, and national ancestral origins but which have been in the U.S.A. for generations. In this regard, Daisy Machado notes that the U.S.A. is the only country where the word “Hispanics” is used. Moreover, people who belong to this artificial category unwillingly carry certain negative stereotypes that come with that name.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps no single term is adequate to speak of the diversity of Latino/a communities. Bearing in mind the power inequality that lurks behind this umbrella term and its inadequacy to reflect the variety of U.S.A. Latino/a communities, I use “Asian Latinos/as” to intentionally stress the embedded connection of Asian Latinos/as to Latin America, as well as some common ground with other Latinos/as concerning their *mestizo/a* identity, whether Asian Latinos/as live in Latin America, the U.S.A., or somewhere else. However, great care should be taken not to lump their cultural particularities together, nor to generalize the experiences of Asian Latinos/as. For instance, the cultural baggage that Japanese Brazilians bring might be significantly different from that of Korean Argentinians. When it is employed carefully, a loose and broad category such as Asian Latinos/as is useful for highlighting the shared experience of intermixture by East Asian immigrants and their descendants.

## **C. Classical Definition of *Mestizaje***

### *1. Virgilio Elizondo, Double Marginalization, and the Emergence of the New People*

Most Latino/a scholars and theologians recognize Virgilio Elizondo as a pioneer who conducted the initial theological reflection on *mestizaje*. Motivated by liberation theology, especially that of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Elizondo sought to understand the socio-cultural realities of the Mexican-American presence, its religious expressions, and its identity and dignity, in the dominant U.S.A. culture, by employing *mestizaje* as his

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<sup>3</sup> Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Daisy Machado, “Voces de Nepantla. Las Teologías Latinas/Hispanas en los Estados Unidos,” *Religión y Género*, no. 3 (March, 2004): 137-138.

analytical tool.<sup>5</sup> Here, I briefly present two of his main arguments on *mestizaje*—double marginalization and the emergence of the new race—in order to assess his contribution and its limitations in relation to Asian Latinos/as.

In his influential work, *The Galilean Journey*, Elizondo talks about two stages of *mestizaje*, which both involve great suffering and violence, yet also possess the positive potential of transcendence. Elizondo notes that while *mestizaje* as a biological phenomenon of intermixture is a common natural process in the evolution of humankind, in the case of the Americas, however, miscegenation occurred through military conquest, colonization, and religious imposition, accompanied by horrendous abuses and repression. This first experience of *mestizaje* was then followed by the Anglo conquest and invasion of Mexico.<sup>6</sup> The first *mestizaje* took place as a result of the Spanish-Catholic military conquest of Mexico, and came at the cost of the atrocious dehumanization of the people inhabiting the Americas and the uprooting and enslavement of black Africans. A new people thus emerged during the Spanish-Catholic conquest of the Americas, with all its wounds and scars.

The second *mestizaje* is one that is still occurring in the U.S.A. Mexican-American *mestizos/as* were born from the U.S.A. Anglo invasion of northern Mexico, which culminated in the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaty in 1848. After those historical events a new people—the Mexican American population—began to emerge, who have been the target of public and private violence and discrimination, including their labeling from the dominant Anglo perspective as inferior, lazy, and deceitful.<sup>7</sup> In *The Future is Mestizo*, Elizondo stresses the suffering of the mixed population through each conquest. He claims that in the first conquest, the Spaniards tried to suppress everything native. In the second, the Anglo Americans tried to suppress everything Mexican. He writes “we had been twice conquered, twice victimized, and twice mestitized” to portray *mestizos* as people who emerged from this double marginalization.<sup>8</sup>

However, the experience of double marginalization is not the end of the story. Elizondo says that being himself a *mestizo* has a painful side to it, but there is also an enjoyable side: he can move easily in and out of two worlds.<sup>9</sup> It is here that he finds the potential of *mestizos/as* as a new people. The tension between being an insider and an outsider gives birth to a people with the potential for transcending established worldviews to create one of their own. The *mestizo/a* does not fit into the analytic categories used by either parent group. However, as insider-outsiders, they have closeness to and distance from both parent cultures. They can see and appreciate characteristics in their parent cultures that they see neither in themselves nor in each other.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey J. Sindima, *The Gospel According to the Marginalized* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 192-193.

<sup>6</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 18.

One of Elizondo's major contributions is that he describes the realities of discrimination and marginalization of *mestizos/as* in the U.S.A. while, at the same time, acknowledging the painful internalization of oppression on the part of the oppressed. He also uses the term *mestizos/as* to emphasize their potential for encompassing the characteristics of two parent cultures and races despite rejection, and to seek justice for the marginalized using theological imagination. His bold representation of Jesus as a *mestizo/a* who identified himself with the marginalized, and the reinterpretation of Jesus' salvific work in the gospel with Galilean, Jerusalem, and resurrection principles, function as a theological foundation upon which to reclaim the dignity of the dishonored. The marginalized are liberated not by becoming more like the oppressors, but by embracing their unique *mestizo/a* identity of two cultures and initiating "a new unity," not only for themselves but for others as well.<sup>11</sup>

Elizondo provides a footing for those who give *mestizaje* a theological interpretation. The transition of *mestizos/as* from marginalization to liberation creates room for appreciating one's identity, something that is not limited to Mexican Americans, but applies to other minoritized groups who share a similar experience of marginalization by being *mestizos/as* in other contexts. Also, by offering a theological affirmation of *mestizo/a* identity, Elizondo stresses the divine mission involved in *mestizaje* and the potential to transcend both cultures.

There are limitations to Elizondo's contribution, however. By focusing solely on the social location of Mexican Americans this identification has become the most quintessential image and standard for all *mestizos/as*. Such approach ultimately overlooks the multiethnic and multiracial realities of *mestizaje* and the different nuances that the concept receives in other contexts. For instance, the strong emphasis on a European-Amerindian intermixture runs the risk of belittling the *mestizo/a* identity of people who do not have a mixture with either of the two groups, here Asian Latinos/as. Thus, while Elizondo stresses the inclusive aspect of *mestizaje*, which transcends two parental cultures, his emphasis on the biological *mestizaje* of Mexican American people produces an unintended side-effect for other *mestizos/as*.

## 2. *Isasi-Díaz: Mestizaje-Mulatez as a Moral Choice:*

Ada María Isasi-Díaz takes Elizondo's concept of *mestizaje* and broadens it to the realities of other Latino/a communities. As the term *mestizaje-mulatez* suggests, she includes the intermixture of European and African people in the Caribbean. Her definition of *mestizos/as* refers to the mingling of Amerindian and African with European blood and she extends the scope of the term by including "the present-day mixtures of people from Latin American and the Caribbean both among ourselves and with people of other ethnic/racial and cultural background here in the U.S."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 101-102.

<sup>12</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 70.

Although Isasi-Díaz agrees with Elizondo's understanding of *mestizaje* as a new people, she goes further and conceptualizes it as a moral decision. *Mestizaje-mulatez* is not merely a *locus theologicus* emerging from the everyday experience of Latina women, and from which she develops theological reflection. In her view, it is also an ethical option, a choice that one must make repeatedly, and a way of relating with others. She claims that *mestizaje-mulatez* is important for three reasons. First, it proclaims a living reality based on the intermixture of Amerindian, African, and Spanish cultures as they come together, and the new cultures that have emerged as a result. Second, it vindicates the cultural mixtures and diversity that the dominant culture tries to belittle. And three, *mestizaje-mulatez* offers a new understanding of pluralism and a new way of valuing difference.<sup>13</sup>

It is in the marginalized reality of *mestizaje-mulatez* that Isasi-Díaz finds an alternative way of understanding difference. While the dominant culture defines difference in terms of opposition and exclusion, she argues for an understanding of difference that is relational, which refers to specificity rather than opposition. She claims that this new understanding of difference that emerges from the diversity of *mestizaje-mulatez* reality can transcend prejudicial understandings of difference and promote conversation with other marginalized communities in the U.S.A.<sup>14</sup>

Aside from Isasi-Díaz's contribution of a gendered interpretation of *mestizaje-mulatez* through *mujerista* theology, her overall understanding of the concept is more inclusive than Elizondo's, as it refers to the creation of a new culture that embraces elements from African, Amerindian and Spanish culture.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the way Isasi-Díaz conceptualizes the term often becomes subject to criticism for leaving the power asymmetry and racial hierarchy within the Latino/a population unchallenged. As Miguel de la Torre observes, such a reductionist view on *mulatez* creates a false sense of racial equality between black and white Latinos/as identity and fails to address the privilege that white Latinos/as have over non-white Latinos/as.<sup>16</sup> However, the fact that Isasi-Díaz recognizes the African heritage of Latino/a identity and incorporates it into her theological discourse is particularly significant. The turn to the African contribution to the formation of *mestizaje* transcends the traditional binary of native inhabitants and European colonizers and opens spaces for other races and communities, especially those that arrived on the continent as part of a diaspora, and as a consequence of European colonization elsewhere. She does this without downplaying their oppression or romanticizing their integration in the process of *mestizaje*.

Also, by refusing the prevailing understanding of difference as oppositional, she reveals the practice of the dominant culture in belittling everything Latino/a as too different to be considered American, a practice that ultimately forces Latinos/as to diminish themselves. Hence Isasi-Díaz interprets *mestizaje-mulatez* as a moral choice for justice, substantiated by an alternative definition of difference. However, her critique

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<sup>13</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 64-65.

<sup>14</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Miguel de la Torre, "Rethinking Mulatez," in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, ed. Miguel A. de la Torre and Gaston Espinosa (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 167.

of difference as oppositional (Latina/o-Dominant culture) seems to overlook the fact that such violence happens within Latino/a communities as well. This is the case with Asian Latinos/as, who, despite being present for more than a century, are considered perpetual immigrants or at best descendants of immigrants. Additionally, their *latinidad* is mostly obscured because their ethnic cultures and appearance are considered too different to be authentically Latinos/as.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, while the inclusion of *mulatez* expands the understanding of *mestizaje* and gives room for other races and ethnic groups to represent their Latino/a realities, it omits the system of exclusion and ethno-racial hierarchy within Latinos/as, which ultimately excludes some ethnic and racial communities from Latino/a reality.

Since Elizondo's examination on *mestizaje* identity through the theological prism of the *mestizo* Jesus and Isasi-Díaz's *mestizaje-mulatez* as a moral choice, other scholars—such as Fernando Segovia, who envisioned a more inclusive theology of mixture and otherness (*mezconlanza y otredad*)<sup>18</sup> and Daniel Orlando Álvarez, who introduced *hibridez* to the discourse of *mestizaje* to stress the liminal spaces in the identity formation of Latinos/as and to explore the intra-Latino/a tensions and their relationships with other communities<sup>19</sup>—have broadened and contextualized the meaning of *mestizaje* from multiple perspectives.

#### **D. *Mestizaje*, a Contested Field**

However, several scholars have problematized the overuse of the concept of *mestizaje*. In his groundbreaking book, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latino Catholicism*, Néstor Medina harshly criticizes the often-romanticized, glorified expression of *mestizaje* as a default ideology of mixture among Latinos/as. He problematizes the idealized understanding of *mestizaje* adopted by many Latino/a theologians, who see it as a single process that upholds inclusion and cultural diversity and rejects homogenizing and racist tendencies. Medina claims that such an uncritical

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<sup>17</sup> A meticulous analysis of the notion of *latinidad* (Latino/a-ness) is Marta Caminero-Santangelo's *On Latinidad* who traces the development and the various ways of understanding *latinidad* in the U.S.A. context. She rightly concludes that *latinidad* as a panethnic category is truly an "elastic" term and that "there is not one understanding of the term that is sufficient to explain people's various identifications with it." (Marta Caminero-Santangelo, *On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 29). Given the various understandings of the notion, I follow Juana María Rodríguez' definition of *latinidad* for my research as a social construct of the collective Latino/a identity that stresses "a particular geopolitical experience but it also contains within it the complexities and contradictions of immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, color, legal status, class, nation, language, and the political location." Thus, while the term points to the commonalities of people whose countries of ethnic origin are the countries of Latin America, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to the experience of *latinidad* and it needs to be examined considering its fluid, multiple, and contradicting nature. See Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in Hispanic American Theology," in *Mestizo Christianity*, ed. Arturo Bañuelas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 35-39.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Orlando Álvarez, *Mestizaje and Hibridez: Latin@ Identity in Pneumatological Perspective* (Cleveland, OH: CPT Press, 2016), 7-8.

adoption and use of *mestizaje* is problematic in several ways. For instance, it overlooks the fact that the history of violence and discrimination in which *mestizas/os* were born is not simply something of the past. On the contrary, it is an ongoing situation in the Latin American context, where the dominant notion of *mestizaje* hides the violence perpetrated against indigenous and African peoples, and against immigrants.<sup>20</sup>

The glorification of the concept of *mestizaje* also runs the risk of further alienating minoritized groups. The essentialist understanding of race within the notion of *mestizaje*, coupled with a siege mentality that develops in minoritized communities, can lead to radically isolated *mestizo/a* societies. That is, as Rubén Rosario Rodríguez rightly points out, *mestizaje* serves as a religious and nationalist symbol that risks further insulating marginalized minority populations.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, the elision of the internal tensions within the diverse U.S.A. Latino/a populations and the broader debates in Latin America turn the notion of *mestizaje* into a monolithic category, which obscures racism and racial hierarchies among *mestizos/as* themselves. It denies the existence of different cultural groups within the Latino/a population, both in the U.S.A. and Latin America.<sup>22</sup>

When it comes to Asian Latino/a narratives, the point that Medina raises regarding the indiscriminate adoption and use of the term is of vital importance. Indeed, without a critical engagement with the sociohistorical contexts where *mestizaje* emerge and a more nuanced use of the term—one that is mindful of the gaps in *mestizaje* realities between communities and countries—*mestizaje* becomes an artificial and hegemonic concept that lumps the multiple and often contested realities of *mestizos/as* in the U.S.A. and Latin America into a single process of supposedly harmonious intermixture and inclusion. Such understanding of *mestizaje* obscures the practice of exclusion that privileges a specific type of *mestizos/as* by constructing stereotypical images (the indigenous-Spanish intermixture), while excluding those who fall short of the category. It also omits the internal tensions and gender inequalities among Latinos/as in the U.S.A. and the problem of *mestizo/a* supremacy in Latin America that oppresses those who do not belong to the *mestizo/a* majority.

*Mestizaje* in the U.S.A. context is not the same as *mestizaje* in Latin America. However, in both cases it is important to approach the term as an essentially “messy” concept that should never be over-exalted. Instead, it must be examined as denoting a fluid identity and a multiple reality of intermixture that does not always involve a harmonious coming together of two or more cultures. As Medina puts it: “*mestizaje* is not one thing, or one experience of intermixture shared by all peoples. *Mestizaje* must be seen in the plural sense and qualified in light of the historical contexts from which they emerge.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Medina, introduction to *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*, xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Medina, *Mestizaje*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Néstor Medina, “U.S. Latina/o Theology: Challenges, Possibilities, and Future Prospects,” in *Theology and the Crisis of Engagement: Essays on the Relationship Between Theology and Social*

One example of a contextualized understanding of *mestizaje* comes from Manuel A. Vásquez, who examines *mestizaje* from a Central American perspective. Rejecting a unifying discourse of *mestizaje* across Latino/a populations, he argues for a more nuanced use of the term to show the “interplay of lights and shadows that accompanies this notion.”<sup>24</sup> He claims that the ideology of *mestizaje* in El Salvador often neglects the 1932 massacre of more than ten thousand Salvadoran peasants, many of indigenous descent, and the socio-economic and racial division in the country. The intertwining of the ideology of *mestizaje* as a nationalist symbol with liberal democracy legitimized the destruction of the indigenous population. In other words, the concept served the interests of the powerful as it was associated with dark to light-skinned hybrids and Euro-American elites in opposition to foreigners and indigenous others whom they portrayed as primitive and inferior.<sup>25</sup> Such a racialized dichotomy created by the elites legitimizes the oppression and exclusion of the poor and the indigenous people in Latin America. *Mestizaje* in El Salvador, and perhaps elsewhere too, has been a political ideal used by the elites to systematically alienate those who are not *mestizos/as* under the false banner of racial equality and inclusion.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason, acknowledgement of different or even contradictory landscapes of *mestizaje* across the continent should come first when dealing with any specific narrative of *mestizaje*. A diverse and plural reality challenges the epistemological privilege that a specific interpretation of *mestizaje* has held over others, while also dismantling the homogenous, imaginary representations of *mestizos/as*. Furthermore, considering multiple aspects of *mestizaje* provides a footing for other narratives of *mestizaje* that have thus far been excluded.

In this regard, the use of *mestizaje* in Argentina, which offers a different picture from El Salvador, allows room for a further critical assessment and a contextualized interpretation of the concept. *Mestizaje* in Argentina has a close connection with “whitening.” Lea Geler, an Argentinian anthropologist and historian, maintains that the binominal racial categories in Argentina that still strongly favor whiteness do not allow *mestizaje* to emerge in that society. Whiteness in Argentina today is not necessarily limited to phenotypical traits, but is a way of life that is opposite to what is indigenous and non-*criollo/a*. That is, a white person is a *criollo/a*, who assumes a certain social class and economic status that separates her/him from the racially, socio-economically peripheral *provincianos/as*, *extranjeros/as*, and indigenous.<sup>27</sup>

Based on three case studies of Afro-descendant Argentinian women who are all socially and racially identified as “white,” Geler claims that in a country like Argentina,

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*Sciences*, ed. Jeff Nowers and Néstor Medina (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 152. Also, Medina, *Mestizaje*, 132-134.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel A. Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, ed. Miguel A. de la Torre and Gaston Espinosa (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 130.

<sup>25</sup> Álvarez, *Mestizaje and Hibridez*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” 145-151.

<sup>27</sup> Lea Geler, “Categorías Raciales en Buenos Aires: Negritud, Blanquitud, Afrodescendencia y Mestizaje en la Blanca Ciudad Capital,” *Runa* 37, no. 1 (2016): 74-76.

which identifies itself as a white, European country in South America, blackness or anything that does not fit into Argentinian whiteness is seen as foreign (*extranjero/a*), and thus inferior. Examining the story of one of her interviewees, who said her family “had been black,” Geler argues that the concept of *mestizaje* does not have a space because the intermixture of people identified as racially white and black does not result in “*mestizos/as*” or “*mulatos/as*.” Instead, they are to be “diluted” into whiteness eventually, until they meet all the requirements for being white, the dominant race in the country.<sup>28</sup> Her case study suggests that, in contrast to other *mestizaje* realities mentioned above, in Argentina, the term needs to be understood in light of a transition (or absorption) to that which is *criollo/a*. Biologically speaking, *mestizaje* describes the intermixture of two or more races. Socially, however, it represents a transitory terrain through which a person is to move from his/her racial, socioeconomic, and cultural blackness to a strict category of *criollo/a*. Regarding this point, Marilyn Grace Miller ingeniously describes *mestizaje* in Argentina using the metaphor of the tango: a dance originated by African slaves in the country, now absorbed by and promoted as a sophisticated dance of Euro-American *criollos/as*, who have successfully removed its African backdrop.<sup>29</sup>

Geler claims that this absence of *mestizaje* is due to a national ideology that has long promoted immigration from Europe as an “improvement” to the nation via biological and cultural intermixture, thus enhancing binominal racial categories that make it impossible to develop the middle ground of *lo mestizo/a*.<sup>30</sup> In other words, *mestizos/as* in Argentina are caught in the robust dichotomy of black and white, supported by the country’s strong preference for whiteness, and are thus unable to remain in the middle ground and claim their space, but must move to one or other extreme sooner or later. However, even though Geler skillfully problematizes this binominal category, she omits the reality of Asian Argentineans in the country, who are neither black nor white, but perpetual immigrants, regardless of their nationality. Although Asians are not racially black, their Asian phenotypes and “inassimilable” cultural baggage exclude them from Argentinean whiteness and even from the transitory stage of *mestizaje*, unless they diminish all their Asianness. Thus, *criollos/as* lump them into the artificial category of immigrants, among Jews and Arabs, for example, because while they do not fit into the strict dichotomy, they are also too different to be in the transitory stage of *mestizaje* either.

### **E. Can We Find Common Ground?**

The various perspectives of *mestizaje* point to the fact that it is a Janus-faced<sup>31</sup> term that cannot be reduced to a single, monolithic category representing entire Latino/a populations in the U.S.A. and Latin America and their diverse and complex identity

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<sup>28</sup> Geler, “Categorías Raciales en Buenos Aires,” 76.

<sup>29</sup> Marilyn Grace-Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) 86.

<sup>30</sup> Grace-Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race*, 76-80.

<sup>31</sup> I use the term “Janus-faced” to indicate that *mestizaje* has sharply contradictory aspects, depending on the contexts in which the term is employed.

formations.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, *mestizaje* seems impossible in a country like Argentina, where the racial categories are firmly binominal, and where white favoritism is prevalent. On the other hand, *mestizaje* involves political ideals employed by the elites and a process of assimilation and whitening that often obscures the alienation of indigenous people. In the U.S.A., *mestizaje* as developed by numerous Latino/a theologians is used to denounce the marginalization and oppression of Latinos/as and encourage their empowerment, by calling for a liberative praxis of solidarity and resistance against the established system of oppression.

I can conclude, then, that *mestizaje* is a highly contextual concept that brings a lot of problems to the table. However, such complexity does not mean abandoning the concept, or replacing one standpoint with another. On the contrary, acknowledging the significant contributions of Latino/a theologians and scholars, the contested field of *mestizaje* suggests that the concept should be employed with great care and in a contextualized way, keeping in mind that due to its complex and changing nature, lacunae will remain. As Vásquez rightly points out, there must be an acknowledgement of “the silences, exclusions, and power asymmetries that crisscross any *mestizo/a* discursive and institutional formation.”<sup>33</sup>

At this point, I could carefully suggest that despite its variety and complexity, the concept of *mestizaje* assumes an intermixture of two or more races and cultures and a state of liminal identity on the part of *mestizos/as* in most cases. Depending on context, the concept eventually serves as a tool for reclaiming dignity for the marginalized group, or as a symbol justifying their oppression.

## **F. The Realities of Asian Latinos/as**

Interestingly, except for the works of a few Latino/a theologians and scholars who briefly mention the Asian contribution to the composition of Latino/a communities in very broad strokes, Asian Latinos/as have not received significant attention in the debates on the subject. However, as mentioned above, the presence of Asian immigrants in the Americas traces back to the nineteenth century, and even to the 1560s, when the first instances of Filipino landing in the North American continent were recorded.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez claims that the initial concept of *mestizaje* in the U.S.A. became so normative and homogenized that excluded other voices, such as those of Muslim Latinas/os. Similarly, Juan Francisco Martínez problematizes the common assumption that all Latinos/as are Catholics, which leaves Protestant Latinos/as in the U.S. doubly marginalized: first for being Latino/a in the U.S.A, and second for their belonging to Protestantism in the predominantly Catholic Latino/a communities. See Juan Francisco Martínez, *The Story of Latino Protestants in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 186-188; Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez, “The Act of Remembering: The Reconstruction of U.S. Latina/o Identities by U.S. Latina/o Muslims,” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 127.

<sup>33</sup> Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” 152.

<sup>34</sup> Joaquin Jay Gonzales III, *Filipino American Faith in Action: Immigration, Religion, and Civic Engagement* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 21.

Does the concept of *mestizaje* also apply to the realities of Asian Latinos/as in Latin America and the U.S.A.? In the following, I describe three cases of Asian Latinos/as in different parts of Latin America to argue for their *mestizo/a* identity. The criteria for evaluating whether the concept applies to them are based on the loose common ground of *mestizaje*: despite complexities and contested usage, *mestizaje* assumes the encounter of two or more races and cultures and a state of liminal identity for most *mestizos/as*. Given the diversity of Asian Latinos/as, the following cases are not intended to represent the entire Asian Latino/a population. Also, although the article presents the three cases jointly, they are not to be lumped into a single category. On the contrary, each of them deserves a thorough examination and analysis in a contextualized way, given their historical and cultural particularities and differences.

### 1. *Japanese Immigrants and their Descendants in the Country of Miscigenação*

In examining the return migration of Brazilian Japanese and the role of religion in their identity negotiation, anthropologist Suma Ikeuchi describes the arrival of Japanese immigrants in Brazil back in 1908 to substitute for European immigrants as plantation field laborers. Although her book, *Jesus Loves Japan*, is primarily about Japanese-Brazilian return migrants, she also analyses the ambiguous social status of Japanese immigrants at the beginning of their immigration flow, something that continues even today. The general racial structures of the country allowed for them to be seen as whiter and more desirable than blacks, yet at the same time as unassimilable, because of their Asian phenotypical and cultural traits.<sup>35</sup>

Today Brazil is well known for upholding ethnic *miscigenação* (miscegenation) as its national ideal, which stems from the richly diverse cultures, ethnicities, and cuisines in the country. In fact, Brazil, along with Mexico, has promoted *mestizaje* ideology and strengthened its positive values in the country, which has resulted in a lesser degree of racism and a “strong version of multiculturalism.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, even though *Nikkei* Brazilians (Japanese-descent Brazilians) now see themselves primarily as Brazilian rather than Japanese, and interracial marriage has become more common than it was for older immigrants, the Brazilian majority still conflate *Nikkei* Brazilians with “Japanese.” That is, the word “Japanese” in Brazil includes both *Nikkei* Brazilians and Japanese nationals living in Japan.<sup>37</sup> Such a conflated term reflects their *mestizo/a* identity: it suggests that although many *Nikkeis*, now in their third and fourth generation, have achieved significant upward mobility and consider Brazil their homeland, they are still often perceived as hyphenated Brazilians or even as “the unassimilable Oriental Other” by the majority.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, even though some of them decide to migrate to Japan, they still carry their *mestizo/a* identity, as they experience severe hostility from native Japanese and cultural and linguistic discomfort. In other words, their Asian Latin American *mestizaje* is reinforced: Brazilians by birth, Japanese by blood.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Suma Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Telles and Denia Garcia, “*Mestizaje* and Public Opinion in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 3 (2013): 133.

<sup>37</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 8.

## 2. Chinese Immigrants and their Descendants in the Country of Mestizaje

Chinese immigration to Mexico also has a long history. In 1899, China and Mexico signed the *Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation*, allowing for the entry and naturalization of Chinese laborers in Mexico. In fact, Chinese immigration to Mexico closely relates to the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1882, and the 1943 Bracero Program in the U.S.A. The *Chinese Exclusion Act* obstructed the entry of Chinese into the country, except for certain classes, which diverted a flow of Chinese immigration to Mexico. However, they were not welcomed there either. Racial discrimination and xenophobia, coupled with anti-Chinese legislation passed in Mexico, targeted Chinese immigrants at the national level from 1916 to 1934. For instance, even though the Bracero Program allowed thousands of Mexicans to work in the U.S.A.—creating a path of social mobility for themselves and their families, Chinese Mexicans were typically excluded from the program. This exclusion was because many of the Chinese immigrants who remained in Mexico—despite the anti-Chinese campaign there—lacked proper documentation either to reside in the country or to travel to the U.S.A. Also, the Mexican government considered Chinese Mexicans undeserving of higher wages and potential uplift.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their cultural adaptation and language proficiency, Chinese Mexicans were treated as inassimilable. As an example, marriages between Chinese and Mexicans were not only rare but faced severe racist attitudes. Mexican women married to Chinese men suffered from social marginalization.<sup>41</sup> Strikingly, such a conviction of the incompatibility of Chinese in Mexico comes from the idea of *mestizaje*. Fredy Gonzales argues that for Mexicans, “Chinese were inassimilable, particularly in a country built on the *mestizo/a* national ideal of racial mixture between Spaniards, indigenous Indians, and Africans.”<sup>42</sup> Put differently, the ideal of *mestizaje* based on biological ancestry and phenotype did not include Chinese Mexicans as part of the *mestizo/a* nation. Similarly, Chinese and Mexican marriages faced accusations that the Chinese were not only threatening the honor of Mexican women, but that such marriages were also threatening the Mexican race by producing “weak and degenerate children.”<sup>43</sup>

Although conditions have much improved since their first arrival and settlement, the marginalization of Chinese Mexicans is ongoing—their Mexicanness is not being recognized. For instance, as Adrian H. Hearn claims, Chinese communities and their dealings with business partners in China are seen as a threat to national interests. Many Chinese communities face public hostility and accusations in the national media, where they are perceived as a homogenous other, regardless of their ethnic, political, and economic diversity.<sup>44</sup> This antagonistic attitude illustrates that, no matter how long they have lived in the country or however they might define their nationality and belonging,

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<sup>40</sup> Fredy Gonzales, “Chinese Braceros? Chinese Mexican Workers in the United States During World War II,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 2017): 138, doi: 10.1093/whq/whx002.

<sup>41</sup> Julian Lim, “Chinos and Paisanos: Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands,” *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (February 2010):72-73.

<sup>42</sup> Gonzales, “Chinese Braceros,” 142.

<sup>43</sup> Lim, “Chinos and Paisanos,” 72.

<sup>44</sup> Hearn, “Harnessing the Dragon,” 111.

Chinese Mexicans are, to a significant extent, not fully accepted as Mexicans. On the contrary, they are considered immigrants or descendants of immigrants, and are often associated with the negative image of China's commercial invasion of Mexico.<sup>45</sup> This intentional rejection reveals the exclusionary aspect of *mestizaje* where *mestizos/as* are measured on strict phenotypical and biological criteria, which result in refusing the entry of foreign races to the category.

### 3. *South Korean Immigrants and their Descendants in the "White European" Country*

In contrast to Mexico, where the national ideology focuses on *mestizaje*, and Brazil of *miscigenação*, Argentina has historically been regarded as a "white European" country of the South cone. Furthermore, compared to their Chinese and Japanese counterparts, South Korean (hereafter Korean) immigration to Argentina began much later, dating back only to the mid-1960s, with a fiftieth anniversary celebrated in 2015.

It is well known that Argentina's national narrative was that of "the Europe of South America." As sociologist Won K. Yoon rightly points out, efforts to emulate Europe are revealed in the way the country dealt with immigration and non-European immigrants. The government wanted to preserve European culture, and as a result, immigrants from Africa and Asia were considered the least desirable as they were most different from the "superior" Europeans.<sup>46</sup> This European favoritism embedded in the Argentine history, coupled with a generally unfavorable impression of Koreans created by the Argentinian media promoting a negative association of Koreans with labor exploitation, tax evasion, and dog-eating habits, among others, did not create a welcoming atmosphere for Korean immigrants and their descendants. Unsurprisingly, Korean Argentinians report a higher incidence of discrimination in public spaces, such as schools and government offices, compared to their counterparts in Brazil. Such conditions exacerbate their isolation in ethnic ghettos and limit their interaction with local people.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, in her study of the strong white favoritism ingrained in the Argentinian national identity and public discourse, Junyoung Verónica Kim analyzes the liminal position of *mestizaje* that Korean immigrants and their descendants occupy in terms of the gap between their political citizenship and social belonging.<sup>48</sup> Although many of her Korean-Argentinian interviewees responded that they were Argentinians holding Argentinian passports, and that their relation to Korea was mostly restricted to Koreans in Argentina, in the national imagery it is still their "Koreanness" or "Asianness," with all its associated stereotypes, that comes first, rather than their "Argentinianness" despite decades of immigration history.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hearn, "Harnessing the Dragon," 124-126.

<sup>46</sup> Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires*, 106-111.

<sup>48</sup> Junyoung Verónica Kim, "Desarticulando el 'Mito Blanco': Inmigración Coreana en Buenos Aires e Imaginarios Nacionales," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 34, no. 71 (2010): 170.

<sup>49</sup> Kim, "Desarticulando el 'Mito Blanco,'" 170, 185-186.

It is worth pointing out that, although the above cases focus on the challenges that Asian Latinos/as experience exclusively, I do recognize that part of the negative image of certain Asian communities comes from their intentional isolation from, and lack of commitment to, the local community. Also, as this paper is about the *mestizaje* identity of Asian Latinos/as, the narratives were selected to best demonstrate the existing yet severely unrecognized *mestizo/a* identity of Asian Latinos/as and Asian Latin Americans in different national contexts. Lastly, it is important to mention the contribution made by the unique experience of Asian Latinos/as in the aforesaid cases: their reality reveals that racism and ethnic hierarchies are serious issues in Latin America, even in countries where *mestizaje* serves as the centerpiece of national ideology. The presence of Asian Latinos/as and Asian Latin Americans thus problematizes a romanticization of the term that downplays marginalization. Finally, while they open the path to other under-represented Latino/a realities, they also challenge any naïve assumption of *mestizaje* as a harmonious coming-together of different cultures and races.

### **G. *Mestizo/a* identity**

As mentioned above, the criteria for *mestizaje* have to do with the intermixture of two or more races and cultures, and a state of liminal identity on the part of *mestizos/as*. In the following, I intend to show that the realities of Asian Latinos/as, or at least the ones presented above, meet such criteria, and to examine their particular type of *mestizo/a* identity through the prism of triple consciousness, an analytical concept formerly explored by Néstor Medina.

Segovia is right in claiming that *mestizaje* often implies “two places and no place on which to stand.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the experience of the intermixture of races and cultures from Asia and Latin America gives birth to a unique space of identity and culture, on which *mestizos/as* can confidently stand. However, as seen above, the process of such an encounter is not always smooth and harmonious. On the contrary, the process of intermixture takes place in the precarious space of liminality or the state of “neither-nor,” which is created by the exclusivist and demeaning attitude against *mestizos* from the majority of the host land, as well as *mestizos/as*’ lack of self-identification and connection with their ancestral lands.

I suggest that the intermixture and liminality of Asian Latinos/as is generally composed of two elements. One of these is the persistent rejection on the part of the majority of their host countries regarding their national identity (i.e., their Argentinianness, Mexicanness, or *Latinidad*) and, due to their phenotypical traits and stereotypes, a reluctance to accept them as *paisanos/as* (countrymen/women) in the full sense, despite their political citizenship. The other element is the geographical and emotional remoteness of their ancestral lands. This alienation is particularly acute among second and later generations whose passports indicate their nationality is no longer Asian but Latin American, whose mother tongue is not necessarily that of their

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<sup>50</sup> Segovia, “Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand,” 29-43.

parents, and whose connection with their ancestral land is, in most cases, limited to an ethnic community in their birth country.

In such a complex intermixture of underrepresented *Latinidad* and immigrant *Asianidad*, a new consciousness arises, or as Elizondo puts it, a new people appear with the potential of embracing both cultures. Often, Asian Latinos/as' self-awareness of their *Latinidad* and *Asianidad* becomes more vivid in a third space. As Homi Bhabha states, a third place is an area of negotiation where multiple forces that shape a person's identity come into play. Even though I do not employ the term in a strictly postcolonial context, where complex forces of colonizers-colonized are involved, I do emphasize the liminality of the geographical third space, in this case the U.S.A., where the creativity and complexity of Asian *mestizos/as* fully come to light, and the renegotiation of elements of their identity takes place. It is in this space where their *mestizo/a* identity, the coming together of their *Latinidad* and *Asianidad* simultaneously come to the fore and are reexamined. This concept becomes clearer when seen in connection with triple consciousness.

In his analysis of *mestizaje*, Medina claims that Latino/a consciousness can be defined as a triple consciousness, rather than the double consciousness first articulated by Du Bois. U.S.A. Latinos/as share much in common with, but many times feel rejected by Latin Americans. Also, they are born in the U.S.A. but are denied social participation by the dominant Anglo-European culture. Most importantly, they are aware of this ambiguous existence.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, Asian Latinos/as share this triple consciousness, but in a slightly different way. In the third space, they become aware of their specific Asianness. Although they are automatically categorized as Asian by the dominant culture, their Asianness might be different from those with whom they share the same race and ethnicity. For instance, in a society where racial categorization is based on appearance, such as the U.S.A., Asian Latinos/as automatically fall into the broad category of "Asian" with all its stereotypes, despite the significant gap between their self-identity and the society's racial categorization. Such a monolithic category misses that their biological Asianness is not directly related to Asia, but to a particular ethnic community in Latin America. They are Asians in a certain way, but are not from Asia, nor do they belong to the existing category of Asian American as deployed in the U.S.A. In the third space, Asian Latinos/as become aware of their specific Asianness, and how dissonant it is from the category created and imposed by the dominant society, which reduces the term to people from Asia or U.S.A. citizens with Asian backgrounds.

While there is some difficulty identifying their unique Asian identity in the third space, the seemingly invisible *Latinidad* of Asian Latinos/as gains prominence. Many are born or spent more time in Latin America than in Asia, yet the dominant culture rejects their national identity as Mexican or Argentinian, for instance. In the third space, even though their Mexican or Brazilian identity is hidden under their Asian phenotype, their fluency in Spanish or Portuguese, familiarity with the customs of their Latin

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<sup>51</sup> Medina, "U.S. Latina/o Theology," 146.

American country, popular religious practices, and consumption of ethnic food, reveal and reinforce their flexible identity. Regarding this point, Erika Lee argues that Asian Latinos/as have contributed to creating new communities and identities in the U.S.A. In Los Angeles, for example, she claims that “these Asian Latinos can draw from a high concentration of multilingual services and express their *Latinidad*, or “Latinoness,” as they try to honor and express both their Asian and Latino heritage in the United States.”<sup>52</sup>

Put another way, in the third space, Asian Latinos/as find themselves in a unique position, where they can call both Latinos/as and Asians or Latin Americans and Asians their *paisanos/as*. Even though their *Latinidad* is far from finding representation among U.S.A. Latino/a communities, let alone in public perception, they still maintain their Latino/a heritage linguistically and culturally, and possess the capacity to identify themselves as Latinos/as *and* Asians, as a result of the intermixture of the two worlds within them. At the same time, even though the category of “Asian” imposed by the dominant society does not encompass their specific Asian background, their Asian heritage enables them to blend in with the Asian communities in the United States of America.

Finally, they are also aware of being “something else.” Examining Korean Argentinian transnational immigrants who remigrate to a third country, and the tension of identity that such geographic mobility evokes, Carolina Mera contends that these transnational immigrants challenge the idea of national identity based on territoriality and a sedentary lifestyle. Their complex identity negotiation, which is the result of what she calls “a double exodus,” first from Korea and then from Argentina, creates a self-awareness that the simplistic binary of Asian or Latino/a cannot fully capture.<sup>53</sup>

However, as the idea of *mestizaje* in the U.S.A. context stands, being something else does not necessarily mean being defective or inferior. On the contrary, it means, echoing Elizondo somewhat, the emergence (or rediscovery) of a new people. The triple consciousness of Asian Latino/a *mestizos/as* not only creates new identities in the U.S.A. as Lee claims, but questions the mechanism of racial measurement and categorization of our society assessed by phenotypes only, and which disregard a person’s self-identification, which ultimately leads to stereotypes and racial inequality.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, Asian Latinos/as possess the potential for transcending such imposed racial categories and cultural stereotypes, while at the same time challenging homogenizing notions of *mestizaje*.

## **H. Asian Latinos/as as *Mestizos/as*: *Una Mancha Mas al Tigre*?**

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<sup>52</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 367.

<sup>53</sup> Carolina Mera, “Coreanos en Argentina, 50 Años Después: Un Modelo Alterativo de dialogo intercultural transnacional,” in *La Inmigración Coreana y su Diáspora*, ed. Paula Iadevito (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2017), 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Feliciano, “Shades of Race: How Phenotype and Observer Characteristics Shape Racial Classification,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 4 (2016): 391.

Some important caveats should be mentioned. First, the concept of Asian Latinos/as as *mestizos/as* carries the danger of becoming another monolithic category that creates a false sense of unity among the numerous groups of East Asian Latinos/as in the Americas, thus occluding their ethno-cultural particularities. Viewing Asian Latinos/as as a single, unified group seriously neglects the fact that not all descendants of Asian immigrants identify themselves as “*mestizos/as*.” In this regard, it should be remembered that such a danger does not necessarily relate to Asian Latinos/as exclusively but is something with which every *mestizaje* discourse must grapple.

Also, such generalization fails to account for the differences between Asian Latinos/as in different contexts, as well as intra-Asian-Latino/a and intra-Asian-Latin American conflicts. For instance, the experience of Korean immigrants in Brazil, where the country is more racially inclusive, might be significantly different from those in Chile or Argentina. Also, Chinese Cubans, who have one of the most extended settlement histories of Asians in Latin America, necessarily have a different social status than Chinese with a relatively short history in other parts of Latin America.

Lastly, my primary intention is to create a platform for the voices of Asian Latinos/as who would otherwise not be heard, by employing their possible shared ground of *mestizaje*, although keeping in mind that not every Asian Latino/a or Asian Latin American will feel the same way about their identity or their context. Therefore, it is about commonality, a concept that resonates with many, and not universality, as if *mestizaje* were a must-have feature of every Asian Latino/a to the exact same degree.

Therefore, I do not mean to add another race to the discourse *como una mancha más al tigre* (another stripe to the tiger). On the contrary, I intend to challenge homogenizing categorization of any *mestizo/a* group and reject an easy classification and hegemonic image of *mestizaje* determined by visual conception and biological ancestry. Eventually, I hope to create an impetus for representing the voices of other *mestizo/a* groups, such as the diverse Jewish and Arab *mestizos/as* and invite them to narrate their own histories of *mestizaje*.

*Mestiço/as com um rosto Asiático*

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Abstract

Este ensaio foca nas identidades dos chamados Asiáticos Latinos/as através do prisma analítico da mestiçagem. Mestiçagem é um dos campos mais explorados nos estudos Latinos/as e constitui prisma fundamental pela qual a história e realidades de Latinos/as vem a tona. Surpreendentemente, no entanto, Asiáticos Latinos/as estão quase sempre ausentes dos discursos sobre mestiçagem e até da percepção geral quando se discute a respeito do que é ser Latinos/as. O propósito deste ensaio é criar uma plataforma para dar voz aos Asiáticos Latinos/as acentuando suas identidades mestiços/as, que ficaram por bastante tempo caladas tanto dentro da academia quanto que nas mentes de comunidades Latino/as. Ao fazer isso, o conceito de mestiçagem, que alude a junção harmoniosa de duas ou mais culturas e que promove a inclusão de raças ao passo que rejeita radicalmente a violência, é desmistificada. Pelo contrário, o argumento apela para uma categoria conceitual de mestiçagem que é intencionalmente suja, constantemente mutável, e aberta para múltiplos significados.

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**A. Introdução**

1847, 1899, e 1925: estes são os anos em que os primeiros imigrantes do leste continental asiático—China, Coreia, e Japão—chegaram nos países Latino Americanos de Peru, Brasil, e Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Embora ainda seja difícil associar Latinos/as com um rosto Asiático, os Asiáticos estão no continente Sul Americano desde do século 19, com seus

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian H. Hearn, “Harnessing the Dragon: Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs in México and Cuba,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 209 (March 2012): 111; Won K. Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 21, 28.

descendentes agora indo para a terceira e quarta gerações. Muitos tem se estabelecido permanentemente, ao passo que outros tem partido para novos destinos nos Estados Unidos da America, seus países de origem na Ásia, ou outras tantas partes do mundo, por várias razões ou motivos.

Meu estudo se concentra nas identidades dos chamados “Latino/as Asiáticos” por meio da lente analítica da *mestiçagem*<sup>2</sup> a fim de criar um espaço onde suas vozes possam ser ouvidas, já que tem sido silenciadas por muito tempo nas narrativas de mestiçagem. Ao fazer isso, a categoria universal de mestiçagem que alude a junção harmoniosa de duas ou mais culturas e que promove a inclusão de raças, ao rejeitar radicalmente o racismo e etnocentrismo, é desmistificada. Portanto, meu argumento defende uma categoria conceitual de *mestiçagem* que é intencionalmente complicada, fluída, e aberta. Este conceito de *mestiçagem* contesta e questiona a imagem estereotipada de mestiço/as que ainda depende excessivamente de percepções visuais e ancestralidade biológica. Ao mesmo tempo, constantemente pergunta quem está sendo excluído/a da realidade complexa e multifacetada do termo.

Certamente, *mestiçagem* é um dos conceitos mais basilares para descrever a dinâmica diversidade racial e realidades multiculturais que estão aflorando na America Latina. Também é uma ferramenta analítica excepcional para explorar as realidades de várias comunidades de imigrantes Latino/as nos Estados Unidos e como marco identitário com o qual muitos Latinos possam se associar. Embora seria um grande erro usar a mestiçagem como etiqueta única e universal que represente a America Latina e seus povos, assim como inúmeras comunidades Latino/as nos Estados Unidos, mestiçagem ainda é um dos terrenos menos explorados e mais contestados em estudos Latino Americanos.

Primeiramente, começo explorando o significado e limites do termo mestiçagem. Visto que o termo tem sido amplamente empregado por vários eruditos tanto nos Estados Unidos quanto que no restante do continente Americano, eu principalmente dependo de definições da teologia Latino/a assim como das ciências sociais e antropológicas. Depois analiso se o termo ou o ponto em comum compartilhado por diferentes opiniões a respeito de *mestiçagem* se aplica a realidade dos Latino/as Asiáticos. Finalmente, exploro algumas das implicações desta inclusão de discursos e debates a respeito da mestiçagem na realidade dos Latino/as Asiáticos.

Antes de mais nada, algumas qualificações precisam ser feitas. Visto que *mestiçagem* é um conceito contestado, nenhuma tentativa será feita para chegar a uma definição universal que possa captar todos os usos diferentes do termo. Tal processo não

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<sup>2</sup> O termo mestiçagem possui conotações diferentes. Enquanto que o termo originalmente se detêm com a miscigenação de povos indígenas e europeus na America Latina, aqui eu também enfatizo a natureza inclusiva e exclusiva do termo que abarca o reconhecimento de identidades complexas e heterogêneas de identidades Latino/a e trazer a tona comunidades que não foram anteriormente discutidas nos debates de mestiçagem. Ao invés de Latino/as “no meio de” “hifenada,” ou “híbrido,” eu utilizo a palavra mestiço/as para intencionalmente enfatizar a ligação e conexão de Latino/as Asiáticos com a America Latina tanto historicamente quanto emocionalmente.

é apenas impossível mas como também corre o risco de criar uma barreira conceitual que em última instância possa excluir aqueles que “não alcancem” uma definição fixa. Além do mais, como a mestiçagem é um conceito que depende de contexto tanto o Norte Americano quanto que o Latino Americano, é necessário um esforço intencional para não impor uma única perspectiva nas diversas realidades que tal termo sugere. Finalmente é importante notar que a identidade mestiça de Asiáticos Latino/as não é invenção recente, nem é uma tentativa de acrescentar outra raça ao conceito de mestiçagem. Pelo contrario, é uma redescoberta da presença de povos que tem vivido na America Latina por mais tempo do que a maioria das pessoas pensam, mas que permanecem geralmente ausentes dos debates de mestiçagem assim como pouco representados e mal retratados in conversas sobre identidades Latino/a

## **B. “Latino/as” Asiáticas**

É importante clarificar primeiramente o uso do termo Latino/as. Como Néstor Medina propiciamente notou, Latino/as Norte Americanos não se refere à Latino Americanos ou imigrantes da America Latina nos Estados Unidos, embora estes façam parte da população Latino Americana. Pelo contrário, a maioria dos Latino/as são cidadãos dos Estados Unidos cujas raízes ancestrais e regionais precedem a independência das Estados Unidos da America.<sup>3</sup> Em outras palavras, embora o termo “Hispano” ou “Latino/as” sejam empregadas como marco identitário artificial pan-étnico imposto pela cultura dominante para designar de forma ampla indivíduos e comunidades que estão relacionadas com a America Latina e Espanha, Latino/as são comunidades Norte Americanas que possuem várias origens étnico-raciais, culturais, e de origens ancestrais nacionais, mas que viveram nos Estados Unidos por gerações. Nesta perspectiva, Daisy Machado aponta que os Estados Unidos é o único país onde a palavra “Hispano” é utilizada. Além do mais, pessoas que pertencem à esta categoria sintética involuntariamente carregam estereótipos negativos que surgem com este termo.<sup>4</sup>

Talvez, nenhum termo seja unicamente adequado para falar a respeito da diversidade de comunidades Latino/a. Tendo em mente a desigualdade de poder existente por detrás deste termo amplo e sua incapacidade de reflexão com relação a variedade de comunidades Latino/as Norte Americanas, eu utilizo “Asiáticos Latino/as” para enfatizar intencionalmente a conexão fixa de Asiáticos com a America Latina, assim como também salientar um ponto em comum destes com outros Latino/as acerca de suas identidades *mestiço/as* caso seja na America Latina, Estados Unidos ou outros lugares. No entanto, consta-se que é preciso ter muito cuidado não mesclar suas particularidades juntas, nem generalizar as experiências de Latino/as Asiáticos. Por exemplo, a bagagem cultural que Brasileiros Japoneses carregam pode ser significativamente diferente da experiência vivida por Argentinos Coreanos. Quando empregada cuidadosamente, uma categoria ampla como Asiáticos Latino/as é útil para

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<sup>3</sup> Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Daisy Machado, “Voces de Nèpantla. Las Teologías Latinas/Hispanas en los Estados Unidos,” *Religión y Género*, no. 3 (March, 2004): 137-138.

salientar as experiências compartilhadas da mistura de imigrantes do Leste Asiático e seus descendentes.

### C. Definição Clássica de Mestiçagem

#### 1. Virgilio Elizondo, *Marginalização em dobro e o surgimento de um Novo Povo*

A maioria dos eruditos e teólogos Latino/a reconhecem Virgilio Elizondo como pioneiro que conduziu a reflexão teológica inicial sobre mestiçagem. Motivados pela teologia da libertação, especialmente aquela de Gustavo Gutiérrez, Elizondo buscou entender as realidades sócio-culturais da presença Mexicana-Americana, suas expressões religiosas, e sua identidade e dignidade, na cultura dominante dos Estados Unidos, utilizando a mestiçagem como ferramenta analítica.<sup>5</sup> Aqui, apresento sumariamente dois de seus argumentos principais sobre mestiçagem— a marginalização dupla e o surgimento de uma nova raça— a fim de avaliar sua contribuição e suas limitações em relação ao contexto dos Asiáticos Latinos/as.

Em sua obra influente, *The Galilean Journey*, Elizondo discorre sobre as duas fases de *mesticagem*, que envolvem grande sofrimento e violência, mas também possuem o potencial positivo de transcendência. Elizondo aponta que ao passo que a miscigenação como fenômeno biológico de mistura seja um processo cultural normal na evolução da humanidade, no entanto, no contexto das Américas, a miscigenação ocorreu através de conquistas militares, colonização, e imposição religiosa seguida por abusos terríveis e repressões. Esta primeira experiência de *mesticagem* foi seguida pela conquista Anglo e invasão do México.<sup>6</sup> A primeira *mesticagem* ocorreu como resultado da conquista Espanico-Catolica do México e às custas da desumanização horrorosa dos povos que habitavam as Américas e a escravidão e transplantação de negros Africanos. Um novo povo surgiu durante a conquista Espanico-Catolica das Américas, com todas suas chagas e cicatrizes.

A segunda mestiçagem foi uma que ainda está ocorrendo nos Estados Unidos da America. *Mestiços/as* Mexicanos Americanos nasceram da invasão Anglo-Saxônica do norte do México que culminou com o tratado Guadalupe-Hidalgo de 1848. Depois destes eventos históricos, um novo povo— a população México-Americana — começou a surgir. Eles foram alvos de violência pública e privada e de discriminação inclusive sendo taxados pela perspectiva dominante Anglo-Saxônica como inferiores, preguiçosos e enganadores.<sup>7</sup> Em seu livro, *The Future is Mestizo*, Elizondo enfatiza o sofrimento de populações de origem misturada no decorrer do processo de conquista. Ele diz que na primeira conquista, os Espanhóis tentaram suprimir tudo que fosse de origem nativa. Na segunda conquista, os Anglo-Saxões tentaram suprimir tudo que fosse Mexicano. Ele escreve “nos fomos duas vezes conquistados, duas vezes vitimizados, e duas vezes

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey J. Sindima, *The Gospel According to the Marginalized* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 192-193.

<sup>6</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 14-16.

misturados” para descrever *mestiços* como pessoas que surgiram desta marginalização dupla.<sup>8</sup>

No entanto, a experiência de marginalização dupla não foi o fim da história. Elizondo diz que ser *mestiço* tem um lado doloroso, mas há também um lado proveitoso: pode se mover por dois mundos diferentes.<sup>9</sup> Percebe-se aqui que ele enxerga o potencial de *mestiço/as* como povo novo. A tensão entre ser alguém de dentro e alguém de fora gera um povo com potencial para transcender cosmovisões estabelecidas a fim de criar um mundo próprio. O *mestiço/a* não se encaixa em categorias analíticas usadas por qualquer um dos grupos dos quais é misturado/a. No entanto, como indivíduos que estão tanto dentro quanto fora, eles possuem uma proximidade e distância de ambas as culturas. Eles podem ver e apreciar características de ambas as culturas que eles não vêem em si nem nos outros.<sup>10</sup>

Um das contribuições principais de Elizondo é sua descrição das realidades de discriminação e marginalização de *mestiço/as nos EUA*, ao passo que reconhece a internalização dolorosa de opressão por parte dos oprimidos. Ele também usa o termo *mestiços/as* para enfatizar seus potenciais para englobar características de ambas as culturas e raças apesar da rejeição e de buscar justiça para os marginalizados por meio da imaginação teológica. Sua representação incisiva de Jesus como *mestiço/a* que se identificava com os marginalizados e a reinterpretção da obra redentora de Jesus no evangelho com princípios da Galiléia, Jerusalém e ressurreição, funcionam como base teológica para reconquistar a dignidade dos desonrados. Os marginalizados são libertos não se tornando mais como seus opressores mas abraçando sua identidade distinta mestiça de duas culturas e começando uma “nova unidade,” não apenas para si mas para os outros também.<sup>11</sup>

Elizondo propicia uma base para aqueles que dão a miscigenação uma interpretação teológica. A transição de *mestiços/as* da marginalização para a libertação cria espaço para a apreciação de sua identidade, algo que não está limitado somente para Mexicano Americanos mas também se aplica a outros grupos minoritários que compartilham uma experiência semelhante de marginalização por ser *mestiços/as* em outros contextos. Além do mais, ao afirmar de maneira teológica a identidade *mestiço/a*, Elizondo enfatiza a missão divina inserida na mestiçagem e seu potencial para transcender ambas as culturas.

No entanto, há limites para a contribuição de Elizondo. Ao focar-se apenas no local social de Mexicanos Americanos, esta identificação tem se tornado a imagem mais distintiva e padrão para todos *mestiços/as*. Tal abordagem ignora as realidades multirraciais da mestiçagem como as diferentes nuances que tal conceito recebe em outros contextos. Por exemplo, a forte ênfase na mistura Europeia e Ameríndia corre o

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<sup>8</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 101-102.

risco de diminuir a identidade de povos *mestiço/as* que não possuem mistura de qualquer um dos grupos, aqui no caso, Latino/as Asiáticos. Então, embora Elizondo enfatize o aspecto inclusivo da *mestiçagem*, que transcende duas culturas maternas, sua ênfase no aspecto inclusivo da miscigenação de povos Mexicanos Americanos produz um efeito não intencionado para outros mestiço/as também.

## 2. Isasi-Díaz: *Mestiçagem-Mulatez* como escolha Moral

Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz se apropria do conceito de Elizondo de *mestiçagem* e a amplifica para as realidades de outras comunidades Latino/as. Conforme o termo *mestiçagem-mulatez* sugere, ela inclui a mistura de povos Europeus e Africanos no Caribe. Sua definição de *mestiços/as* se refere a mistura de sangue Ameríndio, Africano e Europeu e estende os limites do termo ao incluir “a presente mistura de povos da América Latina e do Caribe tanto entre nós quanto entre povos de outras origens étnicas/culturais aqui nos EUA.”<sup>12</sup> Embora Isasi-Díaz concorde com a compreensão de Elizondo de *mestiçagem* como um novo povo, ela vai além e a conceitua como decisão moral. *Mestiçagem-mulatez* não constitui apenas um *locus theologicus* surgindo da experiência diária de mulheres Latinas a partir do qual ela desenvolve sua reflexão teológica. Ao seu ver, este conceito também possui uma opção ética, uma escolha que deve ser feita repetidamente e uma maneira de se relacionar com os outros. Ela assegura que *mestiçagem-mulatez* é importante por três motivos. Primeiro, proclama a realidade vivida baseada na mistura de culturas Ameríndias, Africanas e Espanhóis que se uniram formando novas culturas. Em segundo lugar, ela reivindica as misturas culturais e a diversidade que a cultura dominante tenta diminuir. E em terceiro lugar, *mestiçagem-mulatez* oferece um novo paradigma de pluralismo e um novo modelo para valorizar a diferença.<sup>13</sup>

Consta-se que é na realidade marginalizada de *mestiçagem-mulatez* que Isasi-Díaz encontra uma maneira alternativa de compreender a diferença. Embora a cultura dominante defina diferença em termos de oposição e exclusão, ela propõe uma compreensão de diferença que seja relacional que se refira à especificidade ao invés da oposição. Ela ressalta que é a nova compreensão da diferença que surge da diversidade da realidade de *mestiçagem-mulatez* que transcende compreensões de diferença preconceituosas e promove diálogo com comunidades marginalizadas nos EUA.<sup>14</sup>

Além da contribuição de Isasi-Díaz de uma interpretação de gênero de *mestiçagem-mulatez* por meio da teologia *mujerista*, sua compreensão geral do conceito é mais inclusivo do que a de Elizondo, ao passo que se refere a criação de uma nova cultura que abarca elementos da cultura Africana, Ameríndia e espanhola.<sup>15</sup> De fato, a forma como Isasi-Díaz conceitua o termo comumente se torna alvo de críticas por permitir a assimetria de poder e deixar a hierarquia racial da população não contestado. Como Miguel de la Torre menciona, tal visão reducionista de *mulatez* cria a falsa impressão de

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<sup>12</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 64-65.

<sup>14</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 70.

igualdade racial entre a identidade negra e branca dos Latinos/as.<sup>16</sup> No entanto, o fato de que Isasi-Díaz reconhece a herança Africana de identidade Latino/a e a incorpora em seu discurso teológico é particularmente notável. A virada para a contribuição Africana na formação da *mestiçagem* transcende o conceito binário tradicional dos habitantes nativos e colonizadores europeus abrindo espaço para outras raças e comunidades, especialmente aquelas que chegaram no continente como parte da diáspora, e como consequência da colonização Europeia pelo mundo afora. Ela faz isso sem diminuir sua opressão ou romantizar sua integração no processo formativo de *mestiçagem*.

Além do mais, ao recusar a compreensão hegemônica de diferença como antagonica, ela demonstra que a prática da cultura dominante em menosprezar tudo Latino/a como diferente demais para ser considerada Americana, uma prática que em última instância força Latino/as a se diminuírem. Portanto, Isasi-Díaz interpreta *mestiçagem-mulatez* como uma escolha moral por justiça, apoiada numa definição alternativa da diferença. No entanto, sua crítica da diferença como antagonica (cultura Dominante Latino/a) parece ignorar o fato de que tal violência ocorre dentro de comunidades Latino/as também. Este é o caso com Latino/as Asiáticos, que, apesar de estarem presentes por mais de um século, são considerados imigrantes perpétuos ou na melhor das hipóteses descendentes de imigrantes. Inclusive, sua *latinidade* é na maioria das vezes obscurecida porque suas culturas étnicas e traços físicos são considerados muito diferentes para ser autenticamente Latinos/as.<sup>17</sup> De fato, embora a inclusão de *mulatez* expande o conceito de *mestiçagem* e abra espaço para outras raças e grupos étnicos representar suas realidades Latino/a, ele exclui o sistema de exclusão e hierarquia étnico-racial dentro de Latino/as que em última instância exclui algumas comunidades étnico raciais da realidade Latino/a.

Desde a examinação de Elizondo a respeito da identidade de *miscigenação* através do prisma teológico do Jesus *mestiço* e a *mestiçagem-mulatez* de Isasi-Díaz como escolha moral, outros eruditos—tais como Fernando Segovia, que vislumbrou uma teologia de mistura e do outro mais inclusiva (*mistura e alteridade*)<sup>18</sup> e Daniel Orlando

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<sup>16</sup> Miguel de la Torre, “Rethinking Mulatez,” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, ed. Miguel A. de la Torre and Gaston Espinosa (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 167.

<sup>17</sup> Uma análise metódica do conceito de *latinidade* (Latino/a-ness) é Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s *On Latinidad* que traça o desenvolvimento e as formas variadas de compreender *latinidade* no contexto dos EUA. Ela conclui de maneira propícia que *latinidade* como categoria panétnica é realmente um termo “elástico” e que “não há um conceito do termo que seja suficiente para explicar as diversas intensificações das pessoas com ele.” (Marta Caminero-Santangelo, *On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 29). Dado as várias compreensões deste conceito, eu sigo Juana María Rodríguez’ definição de *latinidade* para minha pesquisa como uma construção social da identidade Latino/a que enfatiza “uma experiência particular geopolítica mas também contém dentro de si as complexidades e contradições da imigração, (pós)(neo)coloniais, raça, cor, status legal, classe, nação, linguagem, e o local político.” Portanto, embora o termo aponte para as comunidades de povos cujos países de origem étnica sejam países da América Latina, não existe um padrão universal para a experiência de *latinidade* e se faz necessário examina-la considerando sua natureza fluída, múltipla, e contraditória. Veja Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, “Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in

Álvarez que introduziu o conceito de *hibridez* no discurso de *miscigenação* a fim de enfatizar os espaços intersticiais na formação da identidade de Latino/as e explorar as tensões intra-Latino/as e suas relações com outras comunidades<sup>19</sup>— expandiram e contextualizaram o significado de *mestiçagem* de múltiplas ângulos.

#### **D. Mestiçagem, uma Area Contestada**

No entanto, muitos eruditos polemizaram o uso exagerado do conceito de *mestiçagem*. Em seu livro seminal, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latino Catholicism*, Néstor Medina criticou duramente a expressão geralmente romantizada e glorificada de *mestiçagem* como uma ideologia fixa de mistura entre Latino/as. Ele problematiza a concepção idealizada de *mestiçagem* adotada por muitos teólogos Latino/as, que a conceituam como processo singular e único que afirma a inclusão e diversidade cultural rejeitando tendências homogêneas e racistas. Medina assevera que uma adoção e aplicação superficial de *miscigenação* é problemática por vários motivos. Por exemplo, ela ignora o fato de que a história da violência e discriminação na qual *mestiços/as* nasceram não foi algo somente do passado. Pelo contrário, é uma situação contínua no contexto Latino Americano onde o conceito hegemônico de *mestiçagem* esconde a violência perpetuada contra povos indígenas e Africanos e imigrantes.<sup>20</sup>

A glorificação do conceito de *mestiçagem* também corre o risco de alienar ainda mais grupos minoritários. A compreensão essencialista de raça dentro do conceito de *mestiçagem* em conjunto com uma mentalidade fechada que se desenvolve em comunidades minoritárias, pode criar sociedades *mestiços/as* radicalmente isoladas. Assim, como Rubem Rosario Rodríguez afirma corretamente, *mestiçagem* serve como um símbolo religioso nacionalista que arrisca isolar ainda mais populações minoritárias marginalizadas.<sup>21</sup> O mais importante, porém, é que a elisão das tensões internas dentro das diversas populações Latino/a dos EUA e os debates mais amplos na America Latina transformam a noção de *mestiçagem* em categoria monolítica obscurecendo o racismo e as hierarquias raciais dentro dos mestiços/as em si. Consequentemente, isso nega a existência de grupos culturais diferentes dentro de populações Latino/a tanto nos EUA quanto que na America Latina.<sup>22</sup>

Ao se tratar das narrativas de Latino/as Asiáticos, o ponto que Medina salienta com respeito da adoção e do uso indiscriminado deste termo é de importância vital. De fato, sem uma abordagem crítica com os contextos sócio-históricos onde a *mestiçagem* emerge e um uso mais aprofundado do termo— um que está ciente das brechas das

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Hispanic American Theology,” em *Mestizo Christianity*, ed. Arturo Bañuelas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 35-39.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Orlando Álvarez, *Mestizaje and Hibridez: Latino Identity in Pneumatological Perspective* (Cleveland, OH: CPT Press, 2016), 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Medina, introduction to *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*, xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Medina, *Mestizaje*, 59.

realidades mestiças entre comunidades e países— *mestiçagem* se torna um conceito artificial e hegemônico que amontoa as múltiplas contestadas realidades dos EUA e America Latina em um processo único de suposta mistura harmoniosa e inclusiva. Tal compreensão de *mestiçagem* esconde a prática exclusivista que privilegie um tipo específico de *mestiços/as* construindo imagens estereotipadas (a mistura indígena-espana), enquanto que exclui aqueles que não se encaixam nesta categoria. Também omite tensões internas e desigualdades de gênero dentro dos Latino/as nos EUA e o problema da supremacia *mestiço/a* na America Latina que oprime aqueles que não fazem parte da maioria *mestiço/a*.

*Mestiçagem* no contexto dos EUA não é sinônimo de *mestiçagem* na America Latina. No entanto, em ambos os casos, precisa-se abordar o termo como um conceito essencialmente “sujo” que nunca deveria ser exaltado de maneira exagerada. Pelo contrário, deve-se examina-la como denotando uma identidade fluída e uma realidade múltipla da mistura que nem sempre envolve a junção harmoniosa de duas ou mais culturas. Como Medina nota: “*mestiçagem* não é somente uma única coisa, ou uma experiência da mistura compartilhada por todos os povos. *Mestiçagem* deve ser vista no sentido plural e qualificada á luz dos contextos históricos do qual ela emerge.”<sup>23</sup>

Um exemplo de um conceito contextualizado de *mestiçagem* vem de Manuel Vasquez, que examina *mestiçagem* de uma perspectiva da America Central. Rejeitando um discurso unificador de *mestiçagem* ao redor de populações Latino/a, ele apela para um uso mais preciso do termo para demonstrar o “contraste de luzes e sombras que acompanham esta noção.”<sup>24</sup> Ele enfatiza que a ideologia de *mestiçagem* em El Salvador muitas vezes ignora o massacre de 1932 de mais de dez mil camponeses Salvadorenhos, muitos de ascendência indígena, e as divisões sócio-econômicas e raciais no país. A ideologia mesclada de *mestiçagem* como símbolo nacionalista com democracia liberal legitimou esta destruição de populações indígenas. Em outras palavras, o conceito serviu aos interesses dos poderosos se associando à híbridos e elites Euro-Americanas de complexidade escura até clara em sua oposição aos estrangeiros e outros indígenas que eles retratavam como primitivos e inferiores.<sup>25</sup>

Tal dicotomia racializada criada por essas elites legitimou a opressão e exclusão de pobres e povos indígenas na America Latina. Em El Salvador e talvez em outros lugares *mestiçagem* também tem sido um ideal político utilizado pelas elites para sistematicamente alienar aqueles que não são *mestiços/as* debaixo de uma falsa bandeira de igualdade racial e inclusão.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Néstor Medina, “U.S. Latina/o Theology: Challenges, Possibilities, and Future Prospects,” in *Theology and the Crisis of Engagement: Essays on the Relationship Between Theology and Social Sciences*, ed. Jeff Nowers and Néstor Medina (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 152. Also, Medina, *Mestizaje*, 132-134.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel A. Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, ed. Miguel A. de la Torre and Gaston Espinosa (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 130.

<sup>25</sup> Álvarez, *Mestizaje and Hibridez*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” 145-151.

Por este motivo, o reconhecimento destes fatos e até mesmo os retratos contraditórios de *mestiçagem* ao redor do continente devem ser tratados em primeira instância ao lidar com qualquer narrativa específica de *mestiçagem*. Uma realidade diversa e plural contesta os privilégios epistêmicos que uma interpretação específica de *mestiçagem* tem exercida sobre os outros. Além disso, considerar os aspectos múltiplos de *mestiçagem* propicia uma palanca para outras narrativas de *mestiçagem*, que até agora foram excluídas, serem ouvidas.

Neste contexto, o uso de *mestiçagem* na Argentina, que propicia um retrato diferente daquele de El Salvador, permite espaço para uma avaliação crítica e uma interpretação contextualizada do conceito. *Mestiçagem* na Argentina possui fortes laços com o “embranquecimento” da raça. Lea Geler, uma antropóloga Argentina e historiadora ressalta que as categorias raciais binomiais na Argentina, que ainda estão em favor da branquitude, não permitem que a *mestiçagem* surja nesta sociedade. Branquitude na Argentina hoje não é necessariamente limitada a características fenotípicas, mas é um estilo de vida que está em oposição a qualquer coisa que seja indigna e não-criollo/a. Isto é, uma pessoa branca é *criollo/a*, quando assume uma certa classe social e status econômico que o/a separa dos racialmente e sócio-economicamente periféricos *provincianos/as*, *estrangeiros/as*, e indígenas.<sup>27</sup>

Baseado em três estudos de caso de mulheres de ascendência Africana que foram socialmente e racialmente identificadas como “brancas,” Geler afirma que em um país como a Argentina, que se identifica como o país branco e Europeu da America Latina, a negritude e tudo que não se encaixe na branquitude Argentina é visto como estrangeiro (*extranjero/a*), e portanto inferior. Examinando a história de uma de suas entrevistadas ao relatar que sua família “tinha sido branca,” Geler argumenta que o conceito de *mestiçagem* não possui espaço porque a mistura de povos identificados como racialmente brancos e negros não resulta em “*mestiços/as*” ou “*mulatos/as*.” Pelo contrário são “diluídos” eventualmente pela branquitude até que preenchem todos os requisitos para ser branco, a raça dominante do país.<sup>28</sup> Seu estudo de caso sugere que, ao contrário de outras realidades de *mestiçagem* mencionadas anteriormente, na Argentina, o termo precisa ser compreendido à luz de uma transição (ou absorção) para aquilo que é *criollo/a*. Biologicamente falando, *mestiçagem* descreve a mistura de duas ou mais raças. Socialmente, no entanto, representa o terreno transitório pelo qual uma pessoa transita de sua negritude racial, socioeconômica, e cultural para uma categoria estrita de *criollo/a*. Neste ponto, Marilyn Grace Miller genialmente descreve *mestiçagem* na Argentina com a metáfora do tango: uma dança que originou com escravos Africanos no país mas que foi absorvida e promovida como dança Euro-Americana de *criollos/as* que sucederam em remover suas origens Africanas.<sup>29</sup>

Geler afirma que esta ausência de *mestiçagem* se deve à uma ideologia nacional que

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<sup>27</sup> Lea Geler, “Categorías Raciales en Buenos Aires: Negritud, Blanquitud, Afrodescendencia y Mestizaje en la Blanca Ciudad Capital,” *Runa* 37, no. 1 (2016): 74-76.

<sup>28</sup> Geler, “Categorías Raciales en Buenos Aires,” 76.

<sup>29</sup> Marilyn Grace-Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) 86.

por muito tempo tem promovido a imigração europeia como uma “melhora” para a nação por meio da mistura biológica e cultural melhorando desta forma as categorias binômias raciais que impossibilitam o desenvolvimento espaço intersticial *mestiço/a*.<sup>30</sup> Em outras palavras, *mestiços/as* na Argentina estão inseridos em uma dicotomia robusta entre negro e branco, sustentada pela forte preferência do país pela branquitude e assim não podem permanecer no *meio termo* e assumir seu próprio papel, mas precisam se mudar para um ou outro extremo mais cedo ou mais tarde. No entanto, embora Geler habilmente problematiza esta categoria binomia, ela omite a realidade de Argentinos Asiáticos no país que são nem brancos ou negros, mas imigrantes perpétuos apesar de sua nacionalidade Argentina. Embora Asiáticos não sejam racialmente negros, seus fenótipos asiáticos e bagagem cultural de “não assimilação” os excluem da branquitude Argentina ou até mesmo da fase transitória de mestiçagem, a menos que diminuam suas características Asiáticas. Portanto, *criollos/as* os categorizam na categoria artificial de imigrantes dentro deles Judeus e Árabes porque não se encaixam na dicotomia estrita e são muito diferentes para se encaixar na categoria de *mestiços*.

### **E. É Possível Encontrarmos um Ponto em Comum?**

As várias perspectivas de *mestiçagem* apontam para um fato de ser um termo com duas caras como o rosto de Janus<sup>31</sup> que não se pode reduzir à uma categoria monolítica que represente todas as populações Latino/as nos EUA e America Latina e seus diversos e complexos processos de formação identitária.<sup>32</sup> Por um lado, *mestiçagem* parece impossível em um país como a Argentina onde as categorias raciais são firmemente divididas e onde o favoritismo branco é prevalente. Por outro lado, *mestiçagem* envolve ideais políticos empregados por elites e um processo de assimilação e embranquecimento que muitas vezes obscurece a alienação dos povos indígenas. Nos EUA, *mestiçagem* conforme desenvolvida por diversos teólogos Latinos/as é utilizado para denunciar a marginalização e opressão de Latino/as e promover seu empoderamento, chamando a uma práxis de solidariedade e resistência contra sistemas estabelecidos de opressão.

Portanto, posso concluir que *mestiçagem* é um conceito extremamente contextual que traz a tona vários problemas para discussão. No entanto, tal complexidade não

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<sup>30</sup> Grace-Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race*, 76-80.

<sup>31</sup> Eu utilizo o termo “face de Janus” para indicar que a mestiçagem possui vários aspectos contraditórios dependendo do contexto em que o termo é utilizado.

<sup>32</sup> Por exemplo, Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez afirma que o conceito inicial de mestiçagem nos EUA se tornou tão normativo e homogêneo que excluiu outras vozes tais como aquelas de Muçulmanos Latinas/os. De maneira semelhante, Juan Francisco Martínez problematiza a pressuposição comum de que todos/as Latinos/as são Catholicos, o que deixa Latino/as Protestantes nos EUA marginalizados de maneira dupla: primeiro por ser Latino/a nos EUA e segundo por pertencer ao Protestantismo em comunidades Latino/as predominantemente Catholic Latino/a communities. Veja Juan Francisco Martínez, *The Story of Latino Protestants in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 186-188; Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez, “The Act of Remembering: The Reconstruction of U.S. Latina/o Identities by U.S. Latina/o Muslims,” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 12.

significa ou substitui um ponto de vista por outro. Pelo contrário, reconhecer a contribuição importante de teólogos e eruditos Latino/as, o campo contestado de *mestiçagem* sugere que o conceito deve ser empregado com muito cuidado e contextualmente tendo em mente que devido à sua natureza complexa e maleável, lacunas vão permanecer. Conforme Vásquez propiciamente notou que deve haver um reconhecimento dos “silêncio, exclusões, e assimetrias de poder que perpassam todo e qualquer processo discursivo formativo de mestiços/as.”<sup>33</sup>

Neste ponto, eu poderia sugerir que a despeito de sua variedade e complexidade, o conceito de *mestiçagem* assume uma mistura de duas ou mais raças e culturas e um estado de identidade intersticial da parte de *mestiços/as* na maioria dos casos. Dependendo do contexto, o conceito eventualmente serve como ferramenta para resgatar a dignidade de povos marginalizados, ou como um símbolo justificando sua opressão.

## **F. As Realidades de Asiáticos Latino/as**

É interessante que salvo poucas obras de alguns teólogos e eruditos Latino/a que mencionam corriqueiramente as contribuições Asiáticas para a composição de comunidades Latino/a, Asiáticos/as Latino/as não receberam a merecida atenção nos debates a respeito deste assunto. No entanto, conforme mencionado acima, a presença de imigrantes Asiáticos nas Américas remonta ao século 19 e até mesmo aos anos 1560, quando as primeiras instâncias da chegada de Filipinos ao continente Norte Americano foram registrados.<sup>34</sup>

Será que o conceito de *mestiçagem* se aplica as realidades de Asiáticos Latino/as na America Latina e nos EUA? Nas paginas seguintes, descrevo três casos de Latino/as Asiáticos em diferentes partes da America Latina para fazer o argumento em favor de sua identidade *mestiço/a*. O critério para avaliar se o conceito se aplica a eles é baseado no conceito popular e comum do termo *mestiçagem*: apesar da complexidade e uso contestado, *mestiçagem* pressupõe o encontro de duas ou mais raças e culturas e um estado de identidade intersticial para a maioria de *mestiços/as*. Dado a diversidade de Asiáticos Latino/as, os casos seguintes não servem como casos representativos de toda população de Latino/as Asiático. Além do mais, embora este ensaio apresente os três casos de maneira conjunta, não devem ser amontoados em uma categoria única. Pelo contrário, devido a suas particularidades históricas e culturais, cada um merece uma análise contextual e uma examinação mais precisa.

### *1 Imigrantes Japoneses e seus descendentes no País da Miscigenação*

Examinando o retorno de Brasileiros de ascendência Japonesa e o papel da religião em suas negociações com sua identidade, o antropólogo Suma Ikeuchi descreve a chegada dos imigrantes Japoneses no Brasil em 1908 sendo substitutos por imigrantes

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<sup>33</sup> Vásquez, “Rethinking Mestizaje,” 152.

<sup>34</sup> Joaquín Jay Gonzales III, *Filipino American Faith in Action: Immigration, Religion, and Civic Engagement* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 21.

européus como trabalhadores assalariados de campo. Embora seu livro, *Jesus Loves Japan*, seja sobre o retorno de migrantes Nipo-Brasileiros, ela também analisa o status social ambíguo de imigrantes Japoneses no início de seu fluxo migratório, algo que continua até os dias de hoje. A estrutura racial geral do país permitiu que fossem vistos como mais brancos e mais desejáveis do que negros, mas ao mesmo tempo incapazes de ser assimilados por causa de sua origem Asiática fenotípica e traços culturais.<sup>35</sup>

Hoje o Brasil é bastante conhecido por apoiar a *miscigenação* étnica como seu ideal nacional que brota das ricas e diversas culturas, etnias, e comidas do país. De fato o Brasil, junto com México tem promovido a mestiçagem e fortalecido seus valores positivos no país, o que tem resultado em formas menores de racismo e “uma visão robusta de multiculturalismo.”<sup>36</sup> No entanto, embora os *Nikkei* Brasileiros (Brasileiros de ascendência Japonesa) se vêem primariamente como Brasileiros antes do que Japoneses e casamentos interracialis são mais comuns entre estes do que com imigrantes mais velhos, a maioria Brasileira ainda confunde *Nikkei* Brasileiros com “Japoneses.” Isto é, a palavra “Japonês” no Brasil inclui tanto Brasileiros *Nikkei* quanto cidadãos Japoneses que vivem no Japão.<sup>37</sup> Este termo ambíguo reflete a identidade *mestiço/a*: Isto significa que embora muitos *Nikkei*, agora em sua terceira ou quarta geração conseguiram alcançar uma significativa mobilidade social e consideram o Brasil sua pátria, eles ainda são percebidos como Brasileiros hifenizados ou até mesmo como “o Outro Oriental inassimilável” pela maioria.<sup>38</sup> Além do mais, embora alguns escolham migrar para o Japão, eles ainda carregam sua identidade *mestiço/a* ao sofrerem hostilidade de Japoneses nativos e desconforto linguístico e cultural. Em outras palavras, sua mestiçagem Asiática e Latino Americana é ressaltada: Brasileiros de nascença, Japoneses de sangue.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Imigrantes Chineses e seus Descendentes no País da Mestiçagem

A imigração Chinesa ao México possui longa precedência histórica. Em 1899, a China e o México assinaram o *Tratado de Amizade, Comercio e Navegação*, permitindo a entrada e naturalização de trabalhadores Chineses no México. De fato, a imigração Chinesa ao México se assemelha ao *Ato de Exclusão Chinesa* Norte Americano de 1882 e o *Programa Bracero* dos EUA de 1943. O *Ato de Exclusão Chinesa* obstruiu a entrada de Chineses no país salvo certas classes, o que divertiu o fluxo migratório Chinês ao México. No entanto, eles também não foram bem-vindos ao México. Discriminação racial e xenofobia em conjunto com legislação anti-Chinesa passada no México alvejaram imigrantes Chineses na esfera nacional de 1916 à 1934. Por exemplo, embora o Programa Bracero permitisse milhares de Mexicanos trabalharem no México—criando um caminho para a mobilidade social para estes e suas famílias, Sino-Mexicanos era geralmente excluídos do programa. Este ato de exclusão deve-se ao fato

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<sup>35</sup> Suma Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Telles and Denia Garcia, “Mestizaje and Public Opinion in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 3 (2013): 133.

<sup>37</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ikeuchi, *Jesus Loves Japan*, 8.

de que muitos Mexicanos permanecerem no México—apesar da campanha anti-Chinesa neste país—não possuíam a documentação necessária tanto para residir no país quanto para viajar para os EUA. Além disso, o governo Mexicano considerava os Sino-Mexicanos como imerecedores de salários mais altos ou de mobilização social para melhores condições.<sup>40</sup>

Apesar de sua adaptação cultural e fluência linguística, Sino-Mexicanos foram tratados como inassimiláveis. Por exemplo, casamento entre Chineses e Mexicanos não eram somente raros mas sofriam preconceitos raciais. Mulheres Mexicanas casadas com homens Chineses sofriam marginalização social.<sup>41</sup> Surpreendentemente, tal convicção da incompatibilidade do Chinês no México brota da própria ideia de *mestiçagem*. Fredy Gonzales afirma que para os Mexicanos, “os Chineses eram inassimiláveis, particularmente em um país construído no ideal mestiço/a de mistura racial entre Espanhóis, Índios nativos e Africanos.”<sup>42</sup> Em outras palavras, o ideal de *mestiçagem* baseado em ancestralidade biológica e fenotípica não inclui Sino-Mexicanos como parte da nação *mestiço/a*. Semelhantemente, casamentos entre Chineses e Mexicanos sofreram acusações de que os Chineses não somente estavam ameaçando a honra de mulheres Mexicanas, mas que tais casamentos também estavam ameaçando a raça Mexicana por produzir “fracas e degeneradas crianças.”<sup>43</sup>

Embora as condições tenham melhorado significativamente desde sua chegada e estabelecimento, a marginalização de Sino-Mexicanos continua— Sua Mexicanidade não tem sido reconhecida. Por exemplo, como Adrian H. Hearn afirma, comunidades Chinesas e seus negócios com parceiros comerciais na China são vistos como ameaça aos interesses nacionais. Muitas comunidades Chinesas se deparam com hostilidade pública e acusações na mídia nacional onde são percebidos como um outro homogêneo, a despeito de sua diversidade étnica, política e econômica.<sup>44</sup> Esta atitude antagonista demonstra que a despeito de quanto tempo eles viveram no país ou como eles definam sua nacionalidade e pertencimento, Mexicanos Chineses são até certo ponto não completamente aceitos como Mexicanos. Pelo contrário, eles são considerados imigrantes ou descendentes de imigrantes, e são muitas vezes associados à imagem negativa de invasão comercial Chinesa.<sup>45</sup> Esta rejeição intencional revela o aspecto exclusivista de *mestiçagem* no qual *mestiços/as* são medidos de acordo com categorias biológicas e fenotípicas fixas que resultam na recusa de entrada de raças estrangeiras nesta categoria.

### 3. Imigrantes Sul Coreanos e seus descendentes no País “Branco Europeu”

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<sup>40</sup> Fredy Gonzales, “Chinese Braceros? Chinese Mexican Workers in the United States During World War II,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 2017): 138, doi: 10.1093/whq/whx002.

<sup>41</sup> Julian Lim, “Chinos and Paisanos: Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands,” *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (February 2010):72-73.

<sup>42</sup> Gonzales, “Chinese Braceros,” 142.

<sup>43</sup> Lim, “Chinos and Paisanos,” 72.

<sup>44</sup> Hearn, “Harnessing the Dragon,” 111.

<sup>45</sup> Hearn, “Harnessing the Dragon,” 124-126.

Ao contrário do que se percebe no México, onde a ideologia nacional foca na *mestizaje* ou do Brasil da *miscigenação*, a Argentina tem sido historicamente considerado um país “Branco Europeu” do cone Sul. Além do mais, comparada com Chineses e Japoneses, a imigração Sul Coreana (daqui em diante Coreanos) para a Argentina começou muito mais tarde em meados dos anos 60 com seu aniversário de cinquenta anos sendo celebrado em 2015.

É bem sabido que o discurso nacional Argentino foi a de uma “Europa na America do Sul.” Como o sociólogo Won K. Yoon notou, tentativas em imitar a Europa se revelam na maneira que o país lidou com a chegada de imigrantes não europeus. O governo queria preservar a cultura Europeia e, conseqüentemente, imigrantes da Ásia e África foram considerados os menos desejáveis visto que eram os mais diferentes ao contrário dos “superiores” Europeus.<sup>46</sup> Este favoritismo europeu presente na história Argentina em conjunto com uma imagem geralmente negativa dos Coreanos criado pela imprensa Argentina, que promoveu uma associação negativa entre Coreanos e exploração de trabalho, evasão de impostos, e hábitos de comer cães dentre outros, não criou uma atmosfera favorável aos imigrantes Coreanos e seus descendentes. De maneira não surpreendente, Argentinos Coreanos relatam um índice maior de preconceito em espaços públicos como escolas e oficinas estatais comparado aos seus conterrâneos no Brasil. Tal condição aumenta seu isolamento em guetos étnicos e limita sua interação com a população local.<sup>47</sup>

Semelhantemente, em seu estudo do forte favoritismo branco inculcado na identidade nacional Argentina e no discurso público, Junyoung Verónica Kim analisa a posição intersticial de *mestiçagem* que imigrantes Coreanos e seus descendentes ocupam em relação a brecha entre cidadania política e inclusão social.<sup>48</sup> Embora muitos de seus entrevistados Coreanos Argentinos respondessem que fossem Argentinos com passaporte Argentino e que sua relação com a Coreia se restringisse preponderantemente a Coreanos da Argentina, no imaginário nacional, ainda é sua identidade Coreana e Asiática com todos os estereótipos associados que vem primeiro ao invés de sua identidade Argentina apesar de décadas de história de imigração.<sup>49</sup>

Vale a pena notar que embora os casos acima se concentrem exclusivamente no desafios que Latinos/as Asiáticos vivenciam, eu reconheço que parte da imagem negativa de certas comunidades Asiáticas é devido ao seu isolamento intencional e falta de compromisso com a comunidade local. Além disso, como este ensaio se limite à identidade *mestiça* de Asiáticos Latino/as, as narrativas foram selecionadas para demonstrar da melhor forma possível a presente e severamente não reconhecida identidade *mestiça* de Latinos/as Asiáticos e Latinos Asiáticos em diferentes contextos nacionais. Finalmente, é importante mencionar a contribuição feita pela experiência única de Asiáticos Latinos/as nos casos anteriormente mencionados: Suas realidades

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<sup>46</sup> Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Yoon, *Global Pulls on the Korean Communities in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires*, 106-111.

<sup>48</sup> Junyoung Verónica Kim, “Desarticulando el ‘Mito Blanco’: Inmigración Coreana en Buenos Aires e Imaginarios Nacionales,” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 34, no. 71 (2010): 170.

<sup>49</sup> Kim, “Desarticulando el ‘Mito Blanco,’” 170, 185-186.

revelam que hierarquias étnicas e raciais são problemas sérios na América Latina até mesmo em países onde mestiçagem serve como ponto chave da identidade nacional. Portanto, a presença de Asiáticos Latinos/as e de Asiáticos Latino Americanos problematiza a romantização do termo que ignora a marginalização. Finalmente, embora abrem o caminho para outras realidades Latino/as não representadas, também desafiam qualquer pressuposição ingênua de *mestiçagem* como uma união harmoniosa de diferentes raças e culturas.

## G. Identidade Mestiço/a

Conforme mencionado acima, os critérios de *mestiçagem* se tratam da mistura de uma ou mais raças e culturas e um estado de identidade intersticial da parte dos *mestiços/as*. Em seguida, tentarei mostrar que as realidades de Asiáticos Latinos/as, ou pelo menos aquelas apresentadas acima preenchem esses critérios e examinar suas identidades *mestiço/a* em particular através do prisma de uma consciência tripla, um conceito analítico explorado anteriormente por Néstor Medina.

Segovia está certo em dizer que *mestiçagem* geralmente implica “dois lugares e nenhum lugar onde se possa fixar.”<sup>50</sup> De fato, a experiência de mistura de raças e culturas da Ásia e América Latina deu origem à um espaço único de identidade e cultura onde *mestiços/as* puderam se situar. No entanto, conforme visto acima, o processo de tal encontro nem sempre foi pacífico e harmonioso. Pelo contrário, o processo de mistura ocorre em um espaço precário intersticial ou em um estado de “um ou o outro” que é criado pela atitude exclusivista e humilhante contra *mestiços* pela maioria da terra nativa assim também como a falta de identificação própria e conectividade de *mestiços/as* com suas terras nativas.

Eu sugiro que a mistura e intersticialidade de Asiáticos Latino/as é geralmente composta por dois elementos. Um deles é a rejeição persistente por parte da maioria das pessoas de seus países de moradia com respeito a suas identidades nacionais (i.e., sua Argentinidade, Mexicanidade, ou *Latinidade*) e, devido a suas características fenóticas e estereótipos, uma relutância em aceitá-los como compatriotas no sentido pleno, apesar de sua cidadania política. O outro elemento é a distância geográfica e emocional de suas terras ancestrais. Esta alienação é particularmente aguda na segunda e subsequentes gerações cujos passaportes indicam que sua nacionalidade não é mais Asiática mas Latino Americana, cuja língua materna não é necessariamente aquela de seus pais e cuja conexão com sua terra ancestral, na maioria dos casos é limitada a uma comunidade étnica em seu país de nascença.

Em tal complexa mistura de *Latinidade* pouco representada e *Asianidade* imigrante, uma nova consciência surge, ou como Elizondo sugere, um novo povo aparece com o potencial de abraçar ambas as culturas. Muitas vezes, a auto percepção de Asiáticos Latino/as de sua *Latinidade e Asianidade* se torna mais visível em um terceiro espaço. Conforme Homi Bhabha diz, um terceiro espaço é uma área de negociação onde múltiplas forças que formam a identidade de uma pessoa venham a tona. Embora eu

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<sup>50</sup> Segovia, “Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand,” 29-43.

não utilize o termo no sentido estritamente pós-colonial, onde forças complexas de colonizador e colonizado estão embutidas, eu enfatizo a intersticialidade de um terceiro espaço geográfico, neste caso os EUA, onde a criatividade e complexidade de *mestiços/as* Asiáticos vem plenamente à luz e a renegociação dos elementos de sua identidade ocorre. É neste espaço onde sua identidade *mestiços/as*, a junção de sua *Latinidade* e *Asianidade* simultaneamente emergem e são reexaminadas. Este conceito se torna mais nítido quando é visto em conexão com uma consciência tripla.

Em sua análise de *mestiçagem*, Medina afirma que a consciência Latino/a pode ser definida como consciência tripla ao invés de consciência dupla conforme articulado primeiramente por Dubois. Latinos/as dos EUA compartilham muitas semelhanças com Latino Americanos embora rejeitados por estes. Além do mais, são nascidos nos EUA, mas são negados participação social pela cultura dominante Anglo-Europeia. Acima de tudo, estão cientes de sua existência ambígua.<sup>51</sup>

De fato, Asiáticos Latinos/as compartilham desta consciência tripla, mas de uma maneira um pouco mais distinta. No terceiro espaço, eles se tornam conscientes de sua identidade Asiática específica. Embora sejam automaticamente taxados de Asiáticos pela cultura dominante, sua identidade Asiática poderá ser diferente daqueles com os quais eles compartilham da mesma raça e etnia. Por exemplo, em uma sociedade onde categorização racial possa ser baseada em aparência como nos EUA, Asiáticos Latino/as automaticamente são taxados na categoria ampla de “Asiático” com todos seus estereótipos, apesar da brecha significativa entre sua auto identificação e as categorias raciais da sociedade. Tal categorização monolítica esquece que sua característica biológica Asiática não está relacionada diretamente com a Ásia, mas com uma comunidade particular na America Latina. Eles são Asiáticos de certa forma, mas não são da Ásia, nem pertencem a uma categoria existente de Americanos Asiáticos conforme empregada nos EUA. No terceiro espaço, Asiáticos Latinos/as se tornam conscientes de sua identidade Asiática particular, e quão dissonante esta é da categoria criada e imposta pela sociedade dominante que reduz o termo somente a pessoas da Ásia ou cidadãos Americanos de ascendência Asiática.

Embora haja certa dificuldade em identificar sua identidade Asiática particularmente no terceiro espaço, a aparente invisibilidade da *Latinidade* de Asiáticos Latinos/as assume proeminência. Muitos nascem ou passam mais tempo na America Latina do que na Ásia, mas a cultura dominante rejeita sua identidade nacional de Mexicano ou Argentino, por exemplo. No terceiro espaço, embora sua identidade Mexicana ou Brasileira seja escondida detrás de seu fenótipo Asiático, sua fluência em Espanhol ou Português, familiaridade com os costumes de seu país Latino Americano de origem, praticas religiosas populares, e consumo de comidas étnicas, reforça sua flexibilidade identitária. Com respeito a este ponto, Erika Lee argumenta que Latinos/as Asiáticos tem contribuído para a criação de novas comunidades e identidades nos EUA. Em Los Angeles, por exemplo, ela afirma que “estes Asiáticos Latinos podem extrair de uma alta concentração de serviços multi-linguísticos e expressar sua *Latinidade*, ou ‘Latinounicidade’ ao tentar honrar e expressar tanto sua herança Asiática quanto Latina

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<sup>51</sup> Medina, “U.S. Latina/o Theology,” 146.

nos Estados Unidos.”<sup>52</sup>

Em outras palavras, no terceiro espaço, Latinos/as Asiáticos se encontram em uma posição singular na qual podem ser chamados tanto de Latinos/as e Asiáticos ou Latino Americanos e Asiáticos como seus *conterrâneos*. Embora sua *Latinidade* esteja longe de encontrar representação dentro de comunidades Latino/as nos EUA, muito menos na percepção pública, eles ainda mantêm sua herança linguística e cultural Latino/a e possuem a capacidade de se identificarem como Asiáticos e Latinos/as, como resultado da mistura de dois mundos dentro deles. Ao mesmo tempo, embora a categoria de “Asiático” imposta pela sociedade dominante não inclua seus traços Asiáticos específicos, sua herança Asiática os permite se integrar nas comunidades Asiáticas dos Estados Unidos da América.

Finalmente, eles também estão cientes de que há “algo mais.” Examinando imigrantes Coreanos Argentinos transnacionais que migraram para um terceiro país, e a tensão de identidade que tal mobilidade geográfica evoca, Carolina Mera afirma que estes imigrantes transnacionais desafiam a ideia de identidade nacional baseada na territorialidade e estilo de vida sedentário. Sua complexa negociação de identidade, que é resultado do que ela chama de “Êxodo duplo,” primeiro da Coreia e depois da Argentina, cria uma auto-consciência que o binômio implista de Asiático ou Latino não possa plenamente capturar.<sup>53</sup>

No entanto, conforme a ideia de *mestiçagem* no contexto dos EUA é estabelecida, ser diferente não necessariamente implica ser defeituoso ou inferior. Pelo contrário, significa, nas palavras de Elizondo, de certa forma, o surgimento (ou redescoberta) de um novo povo. A consciência tripla de Asiático Latino/as *mestiço/a*, não apenas cria novas identidades nos EUA como Lee afirma, mas questiona o mecanismo de mensuração e categorização racial da nossa sociedade avaliada apenas por fenótipos, e que negligencia a maneira como uma pessoa se percebe, o que em última instância leva a estereótipos e disparidade racial.<sup>54</sup> Finalmente, Asiáticos Latino/as possuem o potencial para transcender tais categorias raciais e estereótipos culturais impostos, ao passo que contestam noções homogêneas de *mestiçagem*.

## II. Asiáticos Latino/as como Mestiços/as: Um pingo no Oceano

Algumas importantes qualificações precisam ser mencionadas. Primeiramente, o conceito de Asiático Latinos/as como mestiços/as corre o risco de se tornar mais uma categoria monolítica que cria o falso senso de unidade dentro dos numerosos grupos de Latinos do leste Asiático nas Américas, e assim ignora suas particularidades étnico-culturais. Enxergar Asiáticos Latinos/as como um singelo grupo uniforme ignora

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<sup>52</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 367.

<sup>53</sup> Carolina Mera, “Coreanos en Argentina, 50 Años Después: Un Modelo Alterativo de diálogo intercultural transnacional,” in *La Inmigración Coreana y su Diáspora*, ed. Paula Iadevito (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2017), 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Feliciano, “Shades of Race: How Phenotype and Observer Characteristics Shape Racial Classification,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 4 (2016): 391.

seriamente o fato de que nem todos os descendentes de imigrantes Asiáticos se identificam como “*mestiços/as*.” Neste aspecto, deve ser lembrado que tal risco não tange necessariamente somente os Asiáticos Latinos/as exclusivamente mas é algo com o qual todo discurso de mestiçagem precisa lidar.

Além do mais, tal generalização não leva em conta as diferenças entre Asiáticos e Latinos/as nos diferentes contextos, assim como os conflitos intra-asiáticos-latino/a e intra-Ásia-América Latina. Por exemplo, a experiência de imigrantes Coreanos no Brasil, um país mais racialmente inclusivo, pode ser significativamente diferente daquela no Chile ou na Argentina. Além disso, Cubanos Chineses, que possuem historicamente um dos mais extensos assentamentos de Asiáticos na América Latina, necessariamente possuem um status social diferente dos Chineses com relativamente pouca história de passagem em outras partes da América Latina.

Finalmente, minha intenção primária é criar uma plataforma para as vozes de Asiáticos Latino/as que de outra forma não seriam escutadas empregando seu aspecto comum de *mestiçagem*, embora tendo em vista que nem todo Asiático Latino/a ou Asiático Latino Americano sentirá da mesma forma com respeito a sua identidade ou contexto. Portanto, a palavra chave é comunidade, um conceito que ressoa com muitos e não universalidade, como se a mestiçagem fosse característica que todo Asiático Latino/a precisa ter na mesma medida.

Portanto, eu não pretendo acrescentar outra raça ao discurso de uma gota no mar. Pelo contrário, pretendo desafiar concepções homogêneas de qualquer grupo *mestiço/a* e rejeito uma classificação simplória e a imagem hegemônica de *mestiçagem* determinada pela concepção visual e ancestralidade biológica. Eventualmente, eu espero criar um ímpeto para a representação das vozes de outros grupos *mestiço/as* como os diversos *mestiços* Judeus e Árabes e convida-los a narrar suas próprias histórias de *mestiçagem*.

**SPECIAL EDITION/EDICIÓN ESPECIAL: HTI BOOK PRIZE  
WINNER ROUNDTABLE**

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ROUNDTABLE CONTRIBUTORS:

Jacqueline M. Hidalgo; Luis N. Rivera-Pagán; Kristi Upson-Saia; Peter Anthony Mena

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Introduction

In this 2021 issue of *Perspectivas*, we are particularly honored to also offer the presentations celebrating Peter Mena's HTI 2020 Book of the year award. We are happy to provide these presentations by Jacqueline Hidalgo, Luis Rivera Pagán, and Kristi Upson-Saia, including Mena's response to these presentations. Each of these presentations and Mena's response illustrate the growing edges of Latina/o/x theologies and their versatility in engaging critical theoretical frameworks and ancient texts. – Néstor Medina, Senior Editor.

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Introducción

En esta edición 2021 de *Perspectivas*, también nos sentimos honrados/as/xs al poder ofrecer las presentaciones celebrando el Premio de HTI al libro del año 2020 otorgado a Peter Mena. Nos sentimos orgullosos de proveer estas presentaciones por Jacqueline Hidalgo, Luis Rivera Pagán, y Kristi Upson-Saia, incluyendo la respuesta a estas presentaciones por Peter Mena. Cada una de estas presentaciones y la respuesta de Mena ilustran algunos de las áreas de crecimiento de las teologías latinas/os/xs y su versatilidad al abordar marcos teóricos críticos y textos antiguos.

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ROUNTABLE ESSAY #1

**An Amasamiento:** Reflecting on Peter Mena's Place and Identity  
in the Lives of Antony, Paul, and Mary of Egypt: Desert as Borderland

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Jacqueline M. Hidalgo

Williams College

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I offer my gratitude to the Hispanic Theological Initiative for all the hard work that went into organizing the panel in honor of this wonderful book so that we could have an hour of joy during these difficult times, and I am grateful to the team at *Perspectivas* for working to bring our oral remarks into written form. I am so pleased to be among those reflecting on this year's HTI Book Prize winning text, and it is an even greater pleasure to honor the work of someone who is not only a brilliant scholar but who is also a generous colleague and wonderful human being.

In his first published monograph, Dr. Peter Anthony Mena invites us into rich and contested textual spaces, not empty deserts but diversely populous terrains. Mena forges a conversation between the work of iconic lesbian Chicana scholar and poet, Gloria Anzaldúa, and three hagiographies of the late ancient Mediterranean, Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of Antony*, Jerome's *Life of Paul the Hermit*, and the *Life of Mary of Egypt*. Mena's work is at once about the ways textual spaces and imaginaries construct and get constructed in relationships between people and places, but Mena too has fashioned a textual space, one in which the US borderlands, mestizaje, queerness, and nepantla are enmeshed, in an amasamiento with late ancient deserts, ascetics, demons, animals, and conflicting possibilities. It is a polyglot space, where English, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and Tejano Espanglish meet.

A thorough discussion of the many exciting facets of Mena's book would require more than the brief space allotted here. My remarks will focus on this conjunction of place, identity, and the possibilities of textual choques, of those textual spaces of collision where seemingly disparate worlds connect, conflict, and enable other possibilities in how we think and how we inhabit the multiple worlds we move between.

On the one hand, Mena's work follows a shift in the study of the ancient Mediterranean, one that is more open to the interdisciplinary bridging of contemporary theory and the ancient world, to a recognition that no human identities have ever been neatly fashioned in uncontested isolation. As Mena asserts in his introduction and conclusion, he is not interested in questions about the "realness" of the deserts depicted in late ancient hagiographies. Instead, these textual deserts can offer us windows into the interrelated ways that identities and places are constructed and remade

interrelationally. Mena is less interested in whether authors intended to give us a graspable ascetic identity. Rather, Mena shows how

these authors conceived of a desert space that functioned as a place of possibility, open to fluidity and malleability and instead produced a Christian ascetic who resists identity. ... Ultimately, we are left with spaces of possibility in which queer renderings of Christian saintliness are perceived saintliness that is mixed, ambivalent, and always in progress. The description of desert space demonstrates the tension between our desire as readers to identify and the text's refusal to allow identification.<sup>1</sup>

Mena offers an inventive way of understanding the interconnection of human subjectivity and the places humans inhabit and imagine. Mena is not afraid to examine the messy, and at times violent, ways in which identities get made, contested, and refashioned. He revisits Anzaldúa's work on a variety of topics, especially *la frontera*, *mestizaje*, *nepantla*, queerness, the virgin/whore dichotomy, excess, and homelands so as to open up a different perspective on the "new humanity" that late ancient hagiographies made of desert ascetics.<sup>2</sup>

### **Choque #1: Frontier/Frontera**

Mena transformed my thinking about the role of the desert in these texts. I realized I had too often taken for granted a frontier construction of the late ancient desert instead of seeing it as a *frontera*. The interconnection of space and identity is, in one way, a norm of classical American Studies as epitomized in Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 description of the foreclosed frontier as the space of US settler colonial self-fashioning. For Turner, the frontier is the frontline of Americanization where "wilderness" would remake European men (his descriptions were not very inclusive of women or non-binary people) into a new humanity.<sup>3</sup> In the back of my mind, Turner's imaginary "frontiersmen" echoed the imaginary late ancient desert ascetics, figures who marched to the boundaries of human empire in a fictively empty space and remade themselves with no regard for others.

Of course, that view of the US frontier is false and completely elides the Indigenous and Mexican peoples whose homelands the US invaded, and even Turner could not help but remark on Native American presence even as he wrote in ignorance of Indigenous agency. European men did not simply go and remake the frontier. Mena also helped me to see how that false imagination of the US West had made me misread these hagiographies. Antony, Paul, and Mary broke with their families in pursuit of a new homeland in the desert and new ways of being human, to be sure. But they did not find

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Anthony Mena, *Place and Identity in the Lives of Antony, Paul, and Mary of Egypt: Desert as Borderland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 216.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, excerpts from "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," a paper read at the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago, 1893, ed. National Humanities Center, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text1/turner.pdf>, 2.

this homeland in an empty frontier. Instead, as Mena shows, the frontera is a space of excess that cannot be constrained, a space of identity making that refuses identification, a violent choque, a collision, a shock that took place between many inhabitants, human, non-human animal, plant, land, and time, and new ways of being human may have indeed emerged.

## **Choque #2: mestizaje/hybridity**

Mena articulates these new humanities found in the late ancient desert through a turn to mestizaje, which he describes as a “multi-dimensional approach to understanding the mixedness of identity.”<sup>4</sup> I was especially drawn to his use of mestizaje in discussing Jerome’s *Life of Paul*. Mena describes a saint whose mestizaje is fashioned in relationship to other non-human animals, in sometimes shocking ways, and Mena points to the power dynamics that are inscribed in mestizaje, hindering a naive and romantic viewing of it. He describes how “In the frontier zone of the desert, as Jerome depicts it, the lines drawn so strongly between truth and falsehood, man and monster, human and beast, begin to blur. In the process, a potent new source of authority emerges—the mestiza, the desert ascetic...Jerome places himself at the center of this newfound authority.”<sup>5</sup> In depicting the new mestizx Paul, Jerome also locates himself as an authority, not in spite of, but because of his capacity to blur boundaries. Here mestizaje and the nepantlero who crosses borders is not a derided identity but a source of authorizing power.

I would be interested to know more about the challenges to Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of mestizaje that Mena discusses in his second chapter. As described within the work of a previous recipient of the HTI book prize, Néstor Medina’s *Mestizaje*, contemporary Latinx studies has critiqued mestizaje from a variety of perspectives, not the least of which is the historical tendency of some mestizx Latinx writers and activists to romanticize mestizaje, a mixing of Spanish and Indigenous peoples in ways that erase AfroLatinx and Asian Latinx histories, even as they appropriate Indigenous Latinx forms while eliding living Indigenous communities.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, historically mestizaje, as articulated by figures like José Vasconcelos, relied on a fantasy of heteronormative love amid white cis-male patriarchal colonizing and enslaving domination and sexual violence.<sup>7</sup> Mestizaje has, at times, relied on a romanticization of the power of some people to cross and blur boundaries that others cannot. Structuring power dynamics serve to determine who is allowed to cross

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<sup>4</sup> Mena, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Mena, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008). See also his recent insightful blog post that provides a helpful distinguishing of hybridity and mestizaje: Néstor Medina, “On the Ethics and Perils of Engaging Critical Theories: Let’s Keep It Real,” *Contending Modernities*, October 9, 2020, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/ethics-peril-critical-theory/>.

<sup>7</sup> See some of Vasconcelos’ writings, translated into English by John H.R. Polt and with a more contemporary commentary from Ilan Stavans in Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

boundaries, who should remain stuck in place, and who should be criminalized for transgressing boundaries that dominant powers have inscribed.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Vasconcelos, Anzaldúa's reactivation<sup>9</sup> of mestizaje roots itself in queer Tejana displacement, and like Mena, she turns to mestizaje and fashions something other than its worst histories.<sup>10</sup> As Richard T. Rodríguez has illuminated, so many queer Chicana, Chicano, and Chicanxs have queered the words and worlds we have inherited. In a time of "neo-essentialist politics,"<sup>11</sup> we must reckon with histories of mixture as messy, complicated, and enmeshed in violent systems. Akin to Mena, Puerto Rican critic Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez has argued that Anzaldúa's understanding of la frontera can help us to see how "sanguinary ruptures across modernity and coloniality contain the makings of new worldviews, or worlds/otherwise, with the potential to reimagine the human and humanity."<sup>12</sup> Thusly, by employing mestizaje rather than just hybridity, Mena refuses to ignore the violence that often undergirds the making of identities, even as he depicts the frontera as a space that opens up other human possibilities, and I would love to hear more from him on how critiques of mestizaje impacted his book.

### **Choque #3: Latinx Studies/Study of Late Antiquity**

In writing this book, Mena has likewise created a space of collisions, some of them quite fraught, that open up new possibilities. Too often, when scholars of the ancient world turn to contemporary theorists, they simply poach from them in order to offer a seemingly innovative exegesis of ancient texts. Now that Dr. Mena has this marvelous book behind him, I wonder what he would propose for a fuller interdisciplinary engagement, what would it look like to do more work that meaningfully bridges Latinx Studies with the study of late ancient Mediterranean religions? What might he propose that the study of late ancient Mediterranean religions could offer those of us who study Anzaldúa?

I ask these questions with gratitude for Mena's work and the new possibilities he has given us with this book. Thank you and congratulations Dr. Mena on this well-deserved celebration of your work!

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<sup>8</sup> Cristina Beltrán, *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 29.

<sup>9</sup> I draw this notion from Damián Baca's work to distinguish this sort of Chicano/a/x cultural work from other terms like retrieval or cultural memory. See Damián Baca, *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 79.

<sup>10</sup> As Mena points out in his second chapter, people too often focus only on Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* at the expense of other writings. However, in all texts, she is quite pointedly clear about the specificities with and from which she writes. See Mena, 15-20.

<sup>11</sup> Term drawn from Jeffrey I. Israel, email to Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, October 18, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez, *Decolonizing Diasporas: Radical Mapping of Afro-Atlantic Literature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 148.

ROUNTABLE ESSAY #2

**Peter Anthony Mena, Transgressing the Frontiers/Fronteras of  
the Traditional Histories of Early Christianity**

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Luis N. Rivera-Pagán

Princeton Theological Seminary

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The theme of this book is highly surprising: an imaginative, exciting, and revealing dialogue between Gloria Anzaldúa, the author of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987/1999) and three classic hagiographic texts—Athanasius’s *Life of Antony* (4<sup>th</sup> century), Jerome’s *Life of Paul the Hermit* (4<sup>th</sup> century), and Sophronius’s *The Life of Mary of Egypt* (7<sup>th</sup> century). The main theme of that dialogue is the crucial exchange between the desert, as a *borderland*, and the mestiza holiness of those consecrated figures of early Christianity.

Reading the book, I kept thinking of the verbal reaction of Albert Einstein when warned, in the summer of 1939, by several Hungarian physicists of Jewish genealogy exiled in the United States [Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner and Edward Teller] about the possibility of Nazi Germany developing nuclear bombs: “Daran habe ich gar nicht gedacht!” [“That never crossed mi mind.” I must confess that five decades ago when I was doing my doctoral theological studies, likewise on early Christianity, it wouldn’t have crossed anyone’s mind to consider a subject like that of Mena’s book.

In this book, in a rather surprising but scholarly way Peter Mena develops a novel dialogue between Anzaldúa and the queer holiness of those three worshipped saints. The academic and surprising queerness of Mena’s writing is amazing! It is also extremely original. Not many theological books have chapters with titles like “The Holy Harlotry of *Mestizaje*” (p. 85).

Is this book relevant to our times? In my view, absolutely. Others might consider it highly heretical, mainly those people who have not yet overcome their homophobia and dogmatic rigidity. Thank heaven that today a theologian can publish this kind of book and not end up in the flames of the Holy Inquisition!

Patristic texts such as those Mena discusses surged in popularity after martyrdom had ceased to be a privileged road towards redemption and sainthood. After the Nicaean council, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. How to assure salvation and holiness if martyrdom is excluded? As a place where urban temptations might be averted, and where the hours and days might be devoted to meditation and prayers, the desert could be the road to sainthood. As Mena rightly observes, “transitions

from a Christian-as-martyr identity to a Christian-as-desert ascetic identity were on the minds of late ancient authors” (p. 12).

The desert is also a dramatic symbol, sometimes tragic, at other times redemptive, for the Mexican-Americans who inhabit the south of the United States. There they live, despised as mestizo strangers, as human beings who are constantly accused of staining the integrity of white citizens. That is an accusation in the minds not only of common uneducated American citizens. Let us not forget what distinguished Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington wrote regarding those immigrants crossing the desert: they constitute, he insisted, “a major potential threat to the cultural and possibly political integrity of the United States” [*Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (2004), p. 243].

The desert, according to Peter Mena, might be a point of connection between the mestizo queerness of Anzaldúa and the Christians who pursued holiness and redemption after the Nicaean council. The desert becomes the source of a new identity, a novel kind of humanity, a mestizo queer holiness. I am certain that Anzaldúa would have been happily surprised if she had been able to read Mena’s book. (Unfortunately she died in 2004).

Ancient hagiography was many times located in the desert understood as a borderland between the jungle and the cities. Survival in the desert was neither easy nor assured. In the Bible the desert was the place where the Hebrews had to survive their pilgrimage from Egyptian serfdom to a free and independent nation. The desert was the place where Jesus faced devilish and dangerous temptations and prepared himself for a life that would end on a cross. The originality of Peter Mena’s book lies in masterfully linking the desert of the Bible and of the early Christianity monks with the desert and the diverse Borderlands of Gloria Anzaldúa. Again, this is something that Jaroslav Pelikan, the magnificent historian of Christian theology and the director of my doctoral dissertation at Yale, would never have conceived much less have approved.

The desert is the place where the subjects of the three hagiographies that Mena carefully analyzes strive to find and design a novel identity, a mestiza queer desert identity. This *mestiza* consciousness is, as Mena writes, “always already associated with a history of violence and shock” (p. 63). In the case of Anzaldúa, let us not forget, the violence and rejection come not only from white Americans. She also suffered them from her own community—and even from her own family who would not accept her, a queer daughter and sister. She once wrote a poem that neither her family or her native community probably ever approved:

“Compañera,  
¿Volverán esas tardes sordas cuando nos amábamos?...  
Esas tardes, islas no descubiertas...  
Mis dedos lentos andaban las lomas de tus pechos,  
Recorriendo la llanura de tu espalda  
Tus moras hinchándose en mi boca  
La cueva mojada y racima.

Tu corazón en mi lengua hasta en mis sueños  
Tus pestañas barriendo mi cara  
Dormitando, oliendo tu piel de amapola  
Dos extranjeras al borde del abismo...  
¿Volverán,  
Compañera, esas tardes cuando nos amábamos?"<sup>1</sup>  
(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, pp. 168–69).<sup>1</sup>

Mena designs a peculiar, and for me highly surprising, similarity between Anzaldúa's "entering into the serpent" (meaning her peculiar identity as a mestiza queer inhabitant of a cultural desert, crossing forbidden borderlands) and the life of those Christians who migrate to the desert in search of a novel identity, a queer identity of a human who leaves behind secular civilization and has to face not a serpent but centaurs and satyrs. Again, as Einstein exclaimed in 1939: "Daran habe ich gar nicht gedacht!" ["That had never crossed my mind!"]

Discussing Sophronius' *Life of Mary of Egypt*, Mena describes a harlot saint (in a parallel to Anzaldúa's "The Holy Harlotry of *Mestizaje*")—a harlot saint, according to Mena, "of unrestrained eroticism that transforms a devotion to sex into a divine devotion no less erotic" (p. 86) and who experiences "the sanctity of sex" (p. 112). He concludes by affirming that "the undermining of the virgin/whore dichotomy is an important part of mestiza consciousness" (p. 112).

Mena ends his book with a brief and upbeat conclusion in which he describes the surprising thematic similarities between Gloria Anzaldúa's writings, especially her most read book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and three of the main hagiographies of early Christianity. His conclusion, in which the main thesis of the book is adeptly expressed, is that

The conventional privileging of history and subject... continues to oppress and keep hidden the spaces of the margins where radical openness can work to end oppression. As Anzaldúa has made evident, a *mestiza* consciousness leads to new epistemology that in turn works to bring an end to the violence and injustices of racism, sexism, and homophobia. (p. 119)

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<sup>1</sup>"Partner,  
Will those deaf afternoons come back when we loved each other? ...  
Those afternoons, undiscovered islands ...  
My slow fingers walking the hills of your breasts,  
Traversing the plain of your back  
Your blackberries swelling in my mouth  
The wet cave and cluster.  
Your heart on my tongue even in my dreams  
Your lashes sweeping my face  
Dozing, smelling your poppy skin  
Two female foreigners on the edge of the abyss ...  
Will they come back  
Partner, those afternoons  
when we loved each other?"  
[My translation]

My gratitude and recognition to Peter Mena for this surprising and superbly written book! My hope is that he will keep developing the ideas and specifically the challenging analytical and hermeneutical perspectives that prevail in this, his first book. His hermeneutical perspective intersects, in a surprising and transgressive way, the borderlands, the *fronteras*, of the traditional history of early Christianity.

ROUNTABLE ESSAY #3

**Anzaldúa, Latinx theory, and Late Ancient Studies**

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Kristi Upson-Saia

Occidental College (Los Angeles)

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It is an honor to participate in this forum honoring Dr. Peter Mena and his book, *Place and Identity in the Lives of Antony, Paul, and Mary of Egypt*. As a former colleague (Dr. Mena and I taught together at Occidental College several years ago), I bring the hearty congratulations of the Oxy family. As a fellow historian of ancient Mediterranean religion, I commend Dr. Mena for a rich, intellectually-stimulating, and compelling book. It is an example and portent of the productive ways in which knowledge in our field can flourish when we center Chicanx scholars and theory. In short, it is my sincere pleasure to celebrate this book.

As I was re-reading the book for this event, I again marveled at the many new observations and insights Dr. Mena is able to extract from the *Lives of Antony, Paul, and Mary* when the late antique narratives were put in conversation with the queer Chican@ feminist theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa. In my brief remarks today, I would like to offer two responses. First, I would like to think about theory generally, and to reflect on why Gloria Anzaldúa is such a potent theorist with which to think. And second, I would like to offer a few more specific comments on Dr. Mena's analysis of late ancient desert ascetics. In each part, I'll pose a set of questions to which Dr. Mena might respond or perhaps for later scholars to pick up.

**The theoretical purchase of Gloria Anzaldúa and Latinx thinkers**

We all have intuitions about when theory works and when it does not. We have all encountered theory-heavy scholarship that fails: in which theory is plastered onto sources and arguments in ways that feel unproductive, distracting, or even distorting of our sources and the people we study. And yet we have also encountered scholarship that is enlivened by theory: the theory attunes us to previously unrecognized details, the theory opens up new ways of thinking or widens our perspectives about our sources or the people we study. We all know the experience of reading excellent scholarship, made more excellent because of the chosen theoretical lens or frame.

Rereading this book, I was struck again by how well the theory works, especially in the hands of a skilled scholar like Dr. Mena. It provided me an occasion to spend some time thinking about what it means for theory to work well and, in particular, it gave me time to clarify in my own mind the relationship between theory and what I take to be the

goals of historical work. As an historian, my goal is first and foremost to deepen and enrich my understanding of people of the past. I want to understand the nuances of their experiences and their relationships with one another. I want a deeper sense of their interests, hopes, fears, anxieties, desires, joys, etc., and how these factors inform how they see the world, what they think and what they do. I want to know more intimately how people of the past are shaped by and shape their societal, communal, and material contexts. In short, for me “doing history” is a deeply humanistic enterprise.

Given these goals, productive theoretical frames serve as a bridge across the distance between us and people of the past. Good theorists facilitate our understanding of and connection with people of the past (even if and when--or most importantly if and when--we don't share the same experiences or interests). It is in this way, I think, that Gloria Anzaldúa proves to be such a productive companion to the historian, helping to bridge the distance between scholars and people of the past and helping to forge connection across time. She too is interested in engaging a deeply humanistic enterprise and she sharpens our sensibilities regarding the specificity, complexity, messiness, and variety of the human experience. And, when we read her alongside sources from late antiquity, she attunes us to see the specificity, complexity, messiness, and variety of the premodern people we study.

When I was struggling to articulate how Anzaldúa triggered new insights from late ancient sources, I found kept returning to two metaphors. First, her theory opens up late ancient sources like a flower that is blooming and emitting a fragrance I've never smelled before. In other words, her theory activated our late ancient sources such that I sensed them in a new way. Second, looking at late ancient sources through Anzaldúa's theoretical frame is like looking through a kaleidoscope, multiplying our perceptions of the people we are studying. In both of these ways, she is a valuable ally to the historian.

We are indebted to Dr. Mena for inviting Gloria Anzaldúa to be an interlocutor with scholars in late ancient studies. And, even more so, we are indebted to him for paving the way forward: showing us how to deftly and respectfully mobilize theorists like Anzaldúa to better understand people of the past.

I am interested to learn if Dr. Mena understands Anzaldúa to be activating pre-modern sources—or enhancing scholarship of late antiquity—in other ways. And I am also interested to hear his thoughts about the potential for employing Chicanx or Latinx scholars in the field of late ancient studies. Are there topics or issues or aspects of human experience Anzaldúa or Latinx feminist thinkers are especially well-poised to help us unpack? Are there research questions or projects Dr. Mena would encourage graduate students and scholars pursue?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mena has himself already moved in another new direction in his fantastic article “Scenting Saintliness: The Ailing Body, Chicana Feminism, and Communal Identity in Ancient Christianity” (*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33.2 [Fall 2017]: 520). In the article, Dr. Mena pairs the ideas of Chican@ feminist writers with the late ancient *Life of Syncretica* to think about how sickness informs relationality and community.

## Remarks on Dr. Mena's Anzaldúan analysis of late ancient desert ascetic narratives

In chapter 3 of his book, Dr. Mena interrogates the desert asceticism of the famed ascetic Antony. With the help of Anzaldúa's reflections on the internal tensions, fractures, and clashes of mestiza consciousness—and as related to space, place, and especially homeland—Dr. Mena explores the tensions Antony is said to experience as he is torn away from his land of upbringing and his familial commitments to his orphan sister, and drawn to a spiritual life in his new homeland: the desert. In his analysis, Dr. Mena homes in on one aspect of Antony's mestiza consciousness: rejection.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mena guides us through a careful analysis of how Antony's rejection of and movement away from family and home are necessary for the creation of his new desert ascetic identity. In other words, even as Antony feels connections to what he has left behind, his rejection of home and family are the *conditions of possibility* for his new identity formation or, in Dr. Mena's words, "the rejection of homeland creates a subject available for transformation..." (p. 37). Dr. Mena's reading of Antony's identity through this Anzaldúan frame of rejection is compelling and insightful.

As Dr. Mena introduced Anzaldúa's insights related to rejection, identity, place in the story of Antony, it also opened up for me new questions about another character in the *Life of Antony*: his sister, who (in my past readings) seemed to be a prop who is introduced into the story merely to make some sort of meaning out of Antony's experience, and then left behind. When reading the narrative again paired with Anzaldúa, however, I wondered how we might think about the formation of ascetic identity depending on which *side of rejection one stands*: whether the ascetic is *doing the rejecting* or *being rejected*. Anzaldúa herself—as Dr. Mena explains (p. 30)—reflects not only on the conditions of subjectivity created by actively rejecting and leaving behind, but also by being the object of rejection. Being turned over to a monastery by Antony as he left for the desert, Antony's sister's ascetic identity began as a result of *being rejected* by a family member. I wondered how Anzaldúa might help us think about rejection forming *her* mestiza consciousness.

Beyond the *Life of Antony*, many ancient sources tell us about children whose families brought them to monasteries to be raised, whether they, like Antony's sister, were orphans or their families were simply unable to support them. And in fact, a few chapters later in Dr. Mena's book, we come across just one such character: the ascetic Zosimas in the *Life of Mary*, who was "taken from his parents' arms as a child and left with the monastery in which he resided for 53 years" (p. 89). Late in life, Zosimas travels to a monastery near the Jordan River, and then he travels even deeper still into the innermost reaches of the desert. When Zosimas encounters the ascetic Mary there (whom he believes to be a male ascetic), his reaction is extreme: he runs after her, he weeps, and he wails. The end of the chase takes place at a dry riverbed, and here Dr. Mena makes an astute observation. Dr. Mena writes: "As Zosimas runs through a river that is no longer and could never have been, he does so in pursuit of what he has longed

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<sup>2</sup> Rejection is a theme throughout the book. Dr. Mena sustains a thorough analysis of how rejection functions in the production of ascetic identity, as destructive yet also creative, throughout the book.

for: a father that is no longer and could never have been” (p. 93). Again, I wonder if Anzaldúa’s reflections on being the *object* of rejection might help us understand this particular ascetic exchange, as well as more generally how being the object of rejection might be shaping the quality of Zosimas’ journey or pursuit (seeking some specific quality of holiness or spiritual relationship or religious reconciliation, etc. etc.). It seems to me that in this scene we witness a different form of mestiza consciousness in Zosimas, one charged with desire for reintegration with another pseudo-family figure.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, Dr. Mena engages a robust analysis of Mary’s ascetic identity shaped by rejection (as she is barred from entering a church by divine power, a rejection that seems to amplify her desire for that which she cannot grasp) and she engages Zosimas by relating with him through her tale. Dr. Mena’s analysis of Mary’s rejection is sharp and incisive. Might that analysis help us also understand the ascetic formation and the mestiza consciousness of ascetics like Zosimas and Antony’s sister whose relationship to asceticism was grounded from the start by rejection. And, still more, if we might understand different features, aspects, or elements to the ascetic identity and mestiza consciousness of ascetics depending on which side of rejection they stand.

I will end my remarks with some reflections on a provocative passage from Anzaldúa that piqued my interest, a passage in which she describes hers as a “life on the borders, a life in the shadows” (p. 56). Throughout the book, Dr. Mena explores meanings and identities activated by borders, borderlands, or frontiers. When reading this passage from Anzaldúa, though, I wondered what more, if anything, Anzaldúa might have said about shadows and if those reflections have potential to further open up our late ancient sources.

Dr. Mena cites this passage from Anzaldúa early in the book, so the frame of shadows was reverberating in my head as I read later chapters. And because the Greek and Latin terms for shadow<sup>4</sup> have several related meanings—including the protective shade cast by shadows and the spectral shades or ghosts of the deceased—I was primed to be thinking about shadows, shades, and ghosts when I encountered Dr. Mena’s chapter on the *Life of Paul*. In this *Life*, Antony journeys to meet the first desert ascetic, Paul, in his mountain cave dwelling. The story describes Paul’s cave as having “a large hall, open to the sky, but shaded (*contexterat*) by the branches of an ancient palm,” (p. 70). I wondered: what might it mean that the author draws attention to the shadows or shade of the place where the ascetic Paul lives? Might there be something significant about the nature of shade: as a thing that is always in flux, depending on the movement of the sun’s rays? Or that it is the absence or obfuscation of the sun, such that it is the negation of a thing with substantial matter? And—keeping in mind Dr. Mena’s project of thinking through how desert ascetics are constituted by the spaces and places in which they reside—how might Anzaldúa help us unpack further the relationship between the shadows and shade of this particular *place* and the *identity* of the ascetic Paul who lives under it?

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Mena observes that Zosimas is “described in terms of lack” (p. 96). Might this “lack”—and his ascetic *desire* to bridge the gap or lack—be shaped or formed by his ascetic formation and foundation?

<sup>4</sup> Most common are σκιά in Greek and *umbra* in Latin.

Still more, Dr. Mena also discusses a later scene of the *Life of Paul*, whereupon the death of Paul, the ascetic Antony moves into Paul's cave. Mena writes: "Now Antony sees that his place in this life is to occupy the space immediately next to the older ascetic's remains. Remaining here, Antony would die in close proximity to his teacher, both eventually dissolving into skeletal remains and becoming parts of the land on which they remain" (p. 79). This scene elicited for me the meaning of "shade" as the ghost of the deceased. And just as the shade of the palm tree fell atop the presence of the living Paul, in this later scene of the narrative Antony positions his body to occupy the place of his teacher's presence. Shadows and shades—in their various forms in this narrative—are overlaid atop one another. Might Anzaldúa's concept of shadows help us disentangle this merging and mingling of human bodies and features of the landscape?<sup>5</sup> And, even more generally, how might Anzaldúa's discussion of shadows help us analyze other aspects of the narrative, or other elements of early Christian sources?

It is my pleasure to be a part of this celebration of Dr. Mena's extraordinary project and I add my congratulations to a richly deserved honor of the Hispanic Theological Initiative annual book prize. Dr. Mena has written an intellectually stimulating book that has proven how our sources—and the field of late ancient studies—can be enriched by the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa and Latinx theorists. He should be applauded not only for his masterful execution and analysis, but for paving the way for future scholars to follow in his footsteps.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Mena reproduces Anzaldúa's striking reflection on her merging and becoming one with a snake to analyze this mixing and mingling. I wonder if her discussions of shadows might produce additional insights.

RESPONSE ESSAY

**Bridging the Gap: Autohistoria-teoría and the Late Antique  
Imagination**

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Peter Anthony Mena

University of San Diego

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I want to express my deepest gratitude for having been selected to receive HTI's annual book award; thanks to all of the HTI *familia* for this very special honor. When I think of the list of previous recipients of this award, I can only feel moved and simultaneously undeserving of this honor. It feels as if it was not long ago that I, as a doctoral student, watched several recipients receive this award—never anticipating that I too, would one day receive this monumental honor. What I can anticipate now is that this will be one of the greatest distinctions of my career and of my life. I also want to express a deep appreciation for my colleagues, friends, and mentors, who have taken time and given energy (particularly in this moment when time and energy are precious and heavily taxed resources) to engage with my work. As many of us affiliated with HTI are well aware of, scholarship is not done in a vacuum; we work *en conjunto* with one another. Always. My ideas have continued to be sharpened and shaped by the thoughtful and engaging responses given here by Professors Hidalgo, Rivera-Pagán, and Upson-Saia. I cannot, in the space here, respond to all of their thoughtful and provocative insights, but I will respond to where I see resonances in their ideas and hope to offer some further connective thoughts .

What a moment to be attentive to the idea of space and its literary, political, and material manifestations and articulations. As we sit in Zoom *rooms*—attending conferences, meetings, classes, book award talks, even—we are forced to reckon with what space is, how it is idealized, politicized, contested, and even undermined. We are forced to reckon with both the *real* and *imagined* contours of space, as well as with questions about our need to do such a reckoning: what does it mean to call a virtual platform a *room* as I have just done?; and what are we to understand about our roles and who we are in these spaces?<sup>1</sup> My book is an attempt to think about many aspects of identity, but it is most explicitly attuned to the entanglements of space and identity—the ways in which they are in constant and continuous processes of co-production of one another: space producing identity while simultaneously being produced by it. It was this attention to space, the articulation of the desert in late ancient hagiographies, that

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<sup>1</sup> See Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

allowed me to pause and question the role of space and its attendant identity-making in the literary imagination of ancient Christians.

As space theorist Edward Soja has called her, Gloria Anzaldúa is one of the leading theoreticians of space and therefore her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* gave me ample and fruitful ground to stand on as I began to consider how space might be functioning in ancient texts.<sup>2</sup> What Anzaldúa gives us in her ground-breaking work is an identity in flux, in process, never whole, and yet rendered whole via its process. And so, her *new mestiza*, as she names this identity, resonated with me and my reading of an ascetic subject made visible in ancient hagiographies. Still, this term, *mestiza* or *mestizaje* has, as Jacqueline Hidalgo reminds us, its own storied and contested history. Rightly so, *mestizaje* is critiqued for its perceived collapsing of the particularity of identities into a monolith and its concomitant erasure of (especially!) Afro- and Asian-Latinxs as well as Indigeneity. Again, as Hidalgo notes, previous HTI book award winner, Néstor Medina, articulates this problem in his book, *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*.<sup>3</sup> He writes: “There is a sense, however, in which [Anzaldúa’s] postmodern approach betrays her proposal in some significant ways...there is a sense of inevitability in her notion of new *mestizaje*.”<sup>4</sup> Medina goes on to note how Anzaldúa uses the image of Coatlicue—the Nahuatl sacred feminine which creates and destroys—as a cosmic force—or, similar to José Vasconcelos, a “divine energy” that animates *mestizaje* as an idealized goal.

Again, while I am in agreement that *mestizaje* must be nuanced and contoured to resist the lure of erasure in the service of hybridity and mixture, I don’t read Anzaldúa participating in the latter. Instead, I read her differently than Medina. I want to quote a passage from Anzaldúa that resonates with what I think she is attempting to activate with her usage of *mestizaje*. I quote her at length because while she plays with the idea of *mestizaje* throughout her work, what she offers in the following lengthy passage gives me pause in critiquing Anzaldúa as having a problematic or romanticized notion of *mestizaje*. And indeed, as Hidalgo notes, I share a critical and unromantic notion of *mestizaje* that I believe is exemplified by the desert saint in the literature of late-ancient Christians. Anzaldúa writes:

The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered—we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves. The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people.

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<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Medina, 78.

Before the Chicano and undocumented worker and the Mexican from the other side can come together, before the Chicano can have unity with the Native American and other groups, we need to know the history of their struggle and they need to know ours. Our mothers, our sisters and brothers, the guys who hang out on street corners, the children in the playground, each of us must know our Indian lineage, our *afro-mestizaje*, our history of resistance.

To the immigrant *mexicano* and the recent arrivals we must teach our history. The 80 million *mexicanos* and the Latinos from Central and South America must know of our struggles. Each one of us must know basic facts about Nicaragua, Chile and the rest of Latin America. The Latinoist movement (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Spanish-speaking people working together to combat racial discrimination in the marketplace) is good but it is not enough. Other than a common culture we will have nothing to hold us together. We need to meet on a broader communal ground.

The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the border towns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.<sup>5</sup>

What I read Anzaldúa doing in this passage is not simply erasing or collapsing multiple identities into one, but rather, she recognizes and situates several racialized identities within their own, often overlapping, historical processes. I read Anzaldúa as pushing for what she calls a “*mestiza* consciousness” through education and awareness. I read Anzaldúa calling for a collective awakening far before the term *woke* entered the current zeitgeist with all its meanings and significations.<sup>6</sup>

Anzaldúa, more than any other thinker I have encountered, is not encumbered by linear time and chronology. Her ruminations on her writing as *autohistoria-teoría*, make me think that we, as readers of Anzaldúa, are not yet able to see her vision because of how radical it truly is. I remain open to the idea that I am missing something or not still seeing what critics of Anzaldúa’s *mestizaje* are pointing to. Still, I read in Anzaldúa a hope that is not rooted in a politics of sameness but rather one demonstrative of the capacity to find community in our diverse humanness.

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<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 108-109.

<sup>6</sup> According to Webster’s Dictionary, “Stay *woke* became a watch word in parts of the black community for those who were self-aware, questioning the dominant paradigm and striving for something better. But stay *woke* and *woke* became part of a wider discussion in 2014, immediately following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The word *woke* became entwined with the Black Lives Matter movement; instead of just being a word that signaled awareness of injustice or racial tension, it became a word of action. Activists were *woke* and called on others to stay *woke*.”

Professor Hidalgo's third and final *choque* that she names is one I am deeply invested in: considering further bridges between Latinx Studies and the various disciplines that make up the study of Late Ancient religions of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. And this question resonates with much of what Luis Rivera-Pagán and Kristi Upson-Saia offer in their remarks as well. Both Hidalgo and Rivera-Pagán remind me of the spaces within academia in which my work is welcomed as well as those in which it is not. I still recall a very early conference presentation in the first years of my doctoral program when I read a paper that was a far more cursory exposition of what inevitably became my chapter on St. Jerome's *Life of Paul the Hermit*. At the conclusion of my presentation, one audience member (perhaps similarly to how we might imagine Jaroslav Pelikan responding) did not approve of what I had done. He went on to list his perception of issues of historicity, authenticity, and even made an odd suggestion that someone like Jerome—a 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian writer—could never, *would never* (!), anticipate that his writings be framed through the lens of a queer Chicana thinker, to which I could only reply in agreement. It wasn't lost on me then, and it still is not lost on me now, that a turn to literary theory in the study of late antiquity was only (sometimes) permissible if the theorists utilized have last names like: Foucault, Irigaray, Lacan, Derrida, or Butler.

I was fortunate enough to be mentored by historian of Christianity, Virginia Burrus. She was able to see that my reading of late ancient hagiographies paired with the writings of a Chicana poet and thinker, would be a fruitful and novel endeavor. As I say in the acknowledgements of my book, I am deeply indebted to Burrus, not simply for her mentorship, support, and all that I learned from her, but also because she nourished the ideas in my mind and helped me see them to fruition. Of course, Anzaldúa is as apt a thinker to pair with late ancient textual analysis as any of the European or US American thinkers I name above. But in academia, as many of us know, there remain investments in maintaining strict borders. What counts as history versus what doesn't should lead us to a host of other valuable questions, about the kinds of assumptions and worldviews that are held by those who maintain these borders. Still, I am grateful to have found and also carved out generative academic spaces for myself.

I love Professor Rivera-Pagán's use of Albert Einstein's reaction to the group of Hungarian physicists' cautions that his work could inadvertently lead to arming the Nazi regime with nuclear weapons. I like it because it primarily reminds me of the unknown and unimagined possibilities of the reach of one's scholarly work. Secondly, I love the story because it reminds us of the importance of scholarship done *en conjunto* and the need for more diverse voices and worldviews in the trade of ideas, histories, methodologies, and theories—the thing we call academia. I would be remiss to leave unnamed the fact that beyond my book, much of my scholarship continues to rely on the voices of Chicanx, Latinx, queer, women, and other minoritized voices in what we consider to be the enterprise of creating knowledge. I have continued to rely on these voices because of their absence from scholarly canons and endeavors beyond the idiosyncratic niche corners of the academy to which they/we have far too often been relegated. What I hope to continue seeing in the study of Christian Late Antiquity (a discipline that is my own particular and primary academic home) is an ongoing

development and use of other theories, methods, and epistemologies from non-white backgrounds or origins. The academy must wake up, as Anzaldúa calls for, and realize that there are far more ways of *knowing* and *be-ing* than it has allowed for.

This leads me to thinking, alongside Professor Upson-Saia, about theory and what it offers historians and especially historians of antiquity—with fewer sources and great lacunae in those we do have. I completely agree with Upson-Saia’s observations on the uses of theory as well as how it can be used well and used poorly. Because of how theory helps us to see through fractures and fissures—or perhaps better said, like the kaleidoscope Upson-Saia describes, it can help us to see the fractures and fissures in interesting ways—theory remains a useful tool for reading ancient literature anew—regardless of the push by some scholars of antiquity who wish to see the application of literary, poststructuralist, postcolonial, and other cultural theoretical interventions, diminish in their application to the various studies of the ancient world.<sup>7</sup> I also agree that theory can use ancient literature and figures as props for a reflection on a contemporary moment. In my own courses related to the study of early Christianities, I go to some lengths to try and distance myself from such presentist applications of theory (I often tell my students to be cognizant of the anachronisms implied when suggesting that, for example, one particular ancient moment is just like our current moment, as if we can neatly map one context onto another). Of course, the historical moments that animate the thoughts and writings of ancient writers are separated by the gulfs of space and time from the one animating Anzaldúa’s. But, as Upson-Saia notes, theory gives us a different language from which we might extract other meanings from our histories. In response to the question of *why Anzaldúa*, I’ve said a bit about this already; I am attuned to and desire the incorporation of more minoritized voices in the study of Christian late antiquity. Anzaldúa, to my mind, gives us a new language for thinking about the relationships between space and identity. And as I think about the ancient Roman Empire—with its own iteration of manifest destiny (now I am intentionally being anachronistic)—there are indeed parallels for how we might consider space conditioning identity and vice versa.

But similar to Upson-Saia’s larger points about the goals of history and the historian, I share with her a desire to “understand the nuances of [ancient peoples’] experiences and their relationships with one another. I want a deeper sense of their interests, hopes, fears, anxieties, desires, joys...and how these factors inform how they see the world, what they think and what they do. I want to know more intimately how they are shaped by and shape their societal, communal, and material contexts.” I also share with her the belief that the act and process of *doing* history is far more than the recovery of an unbiased, accurate (dare I say, *more* truthful?!) story of the past, using only the sources and materials available to us from that same past. Or at least I think it should be. For me too, history is indeed a humanistic enterprise.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example, Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witness: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The bridge between Chicana studies, Latina studies, Queer studies (and certainly others that Anzaldúa's thought is representative of), and the history of Late Antiquity might be the shared human experiences that span centuries.

The ongoing histories of othering, histories of power, privilege, and oppression, histories of resilience and community—these histories have occurred, continue to occur, in various spaces and at various times, but something integral about being human resonates loudly between these moments regardless of the particularity and contextual contours that differentiate them. Of course, the particularities of difference must not be lost. But seeing one moment through another might help us understand each differently. Anzaldúa developed an important way of knowing and thinking through her concept of *autohistoria-teoría*. Anzaldúa describes the concept of *autohistoria-teoría* as “cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth and other forms of theorizing paired with lived experiences.”<sup>8</sup> For Anzaldúa, this deep understanding of our stories—the stories we tell ourselves as we reflect on ourselves and all the histories of which we are heirs—are a method to thinking outside of the oppressive mechanism of most history-writing. As Ana Louise Keating and Kakali Bhattacharya have written, “[m]ore than writing self into existence, a move made by many minoritized scholars, *autohistoria-teoría* represents a hybridized space of creativity and bridge building, in which we use our life stories to develop deep critical, spiritual, and analytical insights, to boldly theorize experiences and insights against the broader landscape of specific sociocultural discourses.”<sup>9</sup> For me, the method of *autohistoria-teoría* has been not only useful, but vital for minoritized scholars to find their voices in the work they do. Additionally, and importantly, it is not just a method for using our own knowledge and personal histories to tell stories about the past, but also Anzaldúa's story—her life, her *mythos*, her *autohistoria*—also become woven into the tapestry of my retelling of the history of Christianity in late antiquity. It is the case that Anzaldúa's stories as a queer, Chicana, person from south Texas, have resonated deeply with me and helped me know and tell my own story as queer, Chicana person from west Texas. It is with this knowing and being that I have not only been able to, but also wanted to, tell the stories of late ancient Christians and the spaces they inhabited.

I know that I have not responded to all the fruitful queries and provocations that Professors Hidalgo, Rivera-Pagán, and Upson-Saia have offered me. As previously said, I will continue to ruminate and consider deeply all of their wonderful insights and interpretations of my work. But what I offer here are some connective considerations on the role of history, theory, and identity in the work so many of us do. I am again, incredibly grateful for this engagement with my work and for the great honor of this award.

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<sup>8</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge Press, 2000), 235-250.

<sup>9</sup> Kakali Bhattacharya and AnaLouise Keating, “Expanding Beyond Public and Private Realities: Evoking Anzaldúan *Autohistoria-teoría* in Two Voices,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 5 (2018): 345.