

POSTCOLONIAL
THEOLOGIES
DIVINITY *and* EMPIRE

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Who Is Americana/o?

Theological Anthropology, Postcoloniality, and the Spanish-Speaking Americas

Michelle A. Gonzalez

The West is painfully made to realize the existence of a Third World in the First World, and vice versa. The Master is bound to recognize that His Culture is not homogenous, as monolithic as He believed it to be. He discovers, with much reluctance, He is just an other among others.¹

For centuries Christian authors have attempted to articulate the nature of humanity, created in the image and likeness of God. Theological anthropology is the area in theology that strives to understand humanity's relationship with God and its implications for the human community. In modern history, this area (and theology in general) has been elaborated predominantly through the lens of European and Euro-American philosophers and theologians, with a heavy emphasis on the individual. This has produced a vision of the human that is highly individualistic, a self-contained, monolithic subject. An emphasis on the subject as an autonomous, active historical agent is a hallmark of modern notions of selfhood.² The implications of this construction of identity are vast. As noted by Roberto S. Goizueta, "As autonomous, the modern self was not only alienated from its own life, and other human lives, but from God as well."³ The relational and complex nature of humanity has consequently been greatly underplayed.

¹T. Minh-Ha Trinh, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 98-99.

²Roberto S. Goizueta, "Fiesta: Life in the Subjunctive," in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Miguel H. Diaz (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 85.

³*Ibid.*, 86.

In addition, humanity's relationship with God suffers when such an independent vision of the human is perpetuated.

In the past forty years a strong critique of this abstract individualism has entered into the halls of the theological academy. Feminist, African, Asian, Latin American, and U.S. minority theologians have contested this Eurocentric individualism, demonstrating the power dynamics operative in every theological construction.⁴ This critical engagement of modern Western anthropology emphasizes the contextual and constructive nature of theology. There are various strands that inform this critique: liberationist struggles, critical theory, postmodern philosophy, and postcolonial studies. Every theological statement is nourished and limited by the contours of its environment. It is no longer possible to speak of *a* theological anthropology, but instead *various* theological anthropologies that reveal the messiness, ambiguity, and beauty of humanity.

Increasingly, theologians are turning to theoreticians as a crucial resource for theological elaboration. These interdisciplinary ventures broaden the scope and nature of theology. One such dialogue partner for theology is postcolonial studies. For theologians working in the area of anthropology, postcolonialism in particular offers key insights on the question of identity. This article will explore the ambiguity of identity and its relationship to theological anthropology within two specific and intimately related communities, U.S. Latino/as and Latin Americans. Connecting the postcolonial notion of hybridity to *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, I will demonstrate that in order to speak of the diversity of the human community, theological anthropology must ground itself in theoretical paradigms that address the complexity of humanity. Far from falling into self-enclosed categories, human identity is much more porous than imagined by modern Western anthropologies.

The Latin American condition challenges certain assumptions about identity and colonialism. As this essay will argue, Latin American / Latino/a identity and history confront particular notions of colonial subjectivity and present-day identity. This is seen most dramatically in the categorization of Hispanics in the United States as a monolithic race. Far from fitting neatly into the identity-categories that dominate U.S. discourse, the complexity of Latin American and Latino/a peoples challenges oversimplified typologies of race and ethnicity. Within the realm of theological discourse, this is of special concern for the locus of theological anthropology. Far from accepting the unified subject of Western European philosophy and theology, the anthropology underlying Latin American and Latino/a communities is mixed, hybrid, and contentious. At the historical root of this subjectivity is the birth of

⁴For a "classic" example, see James H. Cone, "The Social Context of Theology," chap. 3 in *God and the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1975).

an “American” colonial subject that resulted from the violent meeting of African, indigenous, and European cultures within the Americas. In this essay, I begin by briefly examining postcolonial reflections on identity. Second, I turn to the Latin American context and its particular colonial construction. In my third section I examine contemporary understandings of Latino/a identity. After exploring the nature of this subjectivity, I conclude with an examination of theological anthropology, focusing on Latino/a theological constructions.

Postcolonialism and Identity

Central to postcolonial studies is the question of identity. This is linked to the focus on interpretive power within this field. Biblical theologian R. S. Sugirtharajah understands postcolonialism as referring to “representation, identity, and a reading posture, emerging among the former victims of colonialism. Postcoloniality involves the once-colonized ‘Others’ insisting on taking their place as historical subjects.”⁵ While sharing some characteristics with postmodernism, Sugirtharajah notes that its Third World origin is one central feature that sets postcolonials apart from their postmodern *compadres*.⁶ Also distinguishing postcolonialism is its emphasis on empire, ethnicity, and nation from the perspective of those who have been historically subjugated by the male Western subject. Let me make clear from the outset that *postcolonialism*, as a term, remains contested. This is the fate of all terms that seek to categorize identity and “movements,” for as Trinh T. Minh-ha notes, “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.”⁷

Although in this essay I cannot cover the breadth of postcolonial reflection, I would like to emphasize the area of identity. One cannot speak of identity in postcolonial studies without mentioning Homi K. Bhabha’s writings on hybridity. I have specifically chosen Bhabha’s work,

⁵R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 16.

⁶Both, for example, contain a heavy suspicion of modernist thinking and all the implications of modernist thought. Postmodernism, however, remains heavily Eurocentric. “It is found wanting from a third world perspective on several fronts: its lack of a theory of resistance; its failure to cultivate a transformative agenda due to its detached attitudes; its revalidation of the local and its celebration of differences, which are liable to lead to further alienation of subalterns thus assigned to their own space and concerns; its repudiation of and skepticism toward grand-narratives, which fail to take into account liberation as an emancipatory metastory and as a potent symbol for those whose rights have been negated, circumvented, or put in abeyance.” *Ibid.*, 15. Also, as Ania Loomba emphasizes, for many Third World scholars postmodernism, unlike postcolonialism, does not contribute to concrete political praxis. “Post-modernism in this view is a specifically Western malaise which breeds angst and despair instead of aiding political action and resistance.” Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, The New Critical Idiom (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), xii.

⁷Trinh, *Woman Native Other*, 94.

for it offers a helpful segue into Latino/a and Latin American identity. This is due to the language of hybridity and *mestizaje* that is found in the work of many Latino/a and Latin American scholars. I hesitate to bring in Bhabha's name, for too often the theoretical reflections of a marginalized group (namely Latino/as and Latin Americans in postcolonial studies) are only legitimated when a recognized academic scholar states a similar theoretical position. Although Bhabha's notion of the hybrid is an important moment in postcolonial studies, for peoples of Latin American descent this understanding of identity is nothing new. Bhabha has in fact alluded to the anticipation of these theoretical moves in the colonized countries. He writes, for instance, "My growing conviction has been that the encounters and negotiations of differential meanings and values within 'colonial' textuality, its governmental discourses and cultural practices, have anticipated, *avant la lettre*, many of the problematics of signification and judgment that have become current in contemporary theory."⁸ Bhabha is thus a good starting point for understanding multiplicity and ambivalence within postcolonial identity. For Bhabha, the hybrid is the product of colonialism. Colonial authority is the source of hybridity, where authority is subverted into a space for marginalized intervention. Hybridity lifts the fluid nature of identity. The colonial subject and the colonial authority are shrouded in ambiguity. Bhabha highlights the ambiguous nature of the colonial process when he writes, "Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference."⁹ For Bhabha, the hybrid is a product of colonial culture's inability to replicate itself in a monolithic and homogenous manner.

The hybrid is born in the colonial process. As Gyan Prakash indicates, this is a result of the dialogical nature of colonialism. "But if the colonial rulers enacted their authority by constituting the 'native' as their inverse image, then surely the 'native' exercised a pressure on the identification of the colonizer...Compelled to mix with, work upon, and express their authority in repressed knowledges and subjects, the colonial categories were never instituted without their dislocation and transformation."¹⁰ However, as Bhabha clearly indicates in his writing, the dialogue is not merely between a "You" and an "I," but takes place in the "Third Space," representing the shared communicative strategies and the implications of this interaction. This Third Space is what creates ambiguity within interpretation. "The meaning of the utterance is quite

⁸Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 173.

⁹*Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰Gyan Prakash, "Introduction: After Colonialism," in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

literally neither the one nor the other. This ambivalence is emphasized when we realize that there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of its positionality; no way that context can be mimetically read from the content."¹¹ This Third Space also obliterates the possibility of merely a duplication in the colonial process, for within this space something new is created. There is not a mere reflection of colonial attitudes imprinted on a recipient. Instead, the reception of colonialism is just as active as the colonialism itself. This challenges the assumption that cultural identity can be a homogenizing force within colonialism. Thus, the very notion of "pure" culture is contested by the active receptivity of colonialism by the colonized. For Bhabha, it is "the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture."¹² Identity is constantly in a state of flux, always unstable, and the notion of a unified self is undermined. An example of this is seen in contemporary Latino/a culture. Far from being the homogenous collective that they are grouped as by dominant culture, Latino/as constitute a variety of ethnicities, nationalities, and races that vary dramatically. A Cuban-American in Miami has a very different cultural and historical background than a Mexican-American in Los Angeles. Nonetheless, these differences are glossed over with the general label of Latino/a or Hispanic. In a similar vein, the "life on the hyphen" (e.g., Mexican-American) that marks the daily lives of many Latino/as demonstrates the ambiguity of identity. As Argentinean-born Latina philosopher María Lugones thoughtfully states, "The door to an untroubled identity always closed."¹³

Bhabha's understanding of hybridity, however, is far from uncontested. This notion has been critiqued, for example, for universalizing the colonial encounter. Gender, class, and other elements of social location hardly play into the picture. "Thus, ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogenous—that is to say he could exist anywhere in the colonial world. Hybridity seems to be a characteristic of his inner life (and I use the male pronoun purposely) but not of his positioning."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Bhabha's emphasis on the element of resistance by the colonized maintains the dominant colonialist forces as central. Critiquing Bhabha from another angle, Alfred J. López argues that Bhabha's notion of hybridity undermines the concrete political praxis of marginalized peoples. "Bhabha's emphasis on hybridity, ambivalence, and difference in his writings represents an implicit

¹¹Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 36.

¹²*Ibid.*, 37.

¹³María Lugones, "Boomerang Perception and the Colonial Gaze: Ginger Reflections of Horizontal Hostility," in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, ed. María Lugones (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 151.

¹⁴Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 178.

rejection of modernist, progressive metanarratives of liberation and resistance, most prominently Marxism, in favor of the concepts and language of postmodernism."¹⁵ Indeed, by offering a theory that is held to be applicable to colonialism broadly conceived, the historical manifestations and contours of colonialisms are lost. Also, as López highlights, the language of the hybrid rings eerily reminiscent of abstract academic jargon versus terminology embraced by concrete historical people in their daily lives. Thus, Bhabha's notion of hybridity, while a good starting point for addressing the complexity of subjectivity within colonialism, becomes an abstraction when it is not rooted in the daily lives and histories of peoples. Turning to the Latin American context, we find a concretization of Bhabha's ideas, yet occurring in a particular fashion that both expands and affirms Bhabha's hybridity.

Latin American Colonialism

The historical manifestation of colonialism in Latin America complicates postcolonial identity constructs. Often ignored by postcolonial scholars, Spanish colonialism took on a different guise from its British counterparts with their Asian orientation.¹⁶ Non-Latin American scholars rarely note this fact, for it contests some of the very foundations of postcolonial discourse. Latin American scholars, in turn, question the viability of the term *postcolonial* to describe the Latin American context. In an excellent article discussing the difficulties of describing Latin America in terms of the rubric of postcolonialism, Santiago Colás critiques Edward Said's notion of colonization on various fronts. First, it does not take into serious consideration the historical, socioeconomic, and global factors that shape different manifestations of colonization—for example, sixteenth-century Spanish colonialism versus eighteenth-century British colonialism. Second, it does not value cultural specificity of the colonized. Third, and perhaps most glaring, Said argues that the world was in fact, for the most part, decolonized after World War II. He writes, "Then, stunningly, by and large the entire world was decolonized after World War Two."¹⁷ This is a stunning claim, for as Colás

¹⁵Alfred J. López, *Post and Past: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 12.

¹⁶This neglect is shrewdly raised by Walter D. Mignolo, who notes that, "The critique of what today is grouped under the label of 'colonial discourse' has a long tradition in Latin America, which can be traced back to the 1950s when the writings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger began to catch the attention of Latin American intellectuals. The most spectacular example to my mind is that of Mexican historian and philosopher Edmundo O'Gorman. His *La idea del descubrimiento de America* (1952) and *La invención de América* (1958, English translation 1961) represent the early dismantling of European colonial discourse. O'Gorman wrote much before the poststructuralist wave, although he had a similar foundation and perspective." Walter D. Mignolo, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse: Culture Critique or Academic Colonialism?" *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 3 (1993): 122.

¹⁷See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 198.

emphasizes, "The 8 million square miles and 29 million inhabitants of Latin America were decolonized by 1826 (with the single exceptions of Cuba and Puerto Rico)."¹⁸ Latin American identity is therefore much more complex than Said's paradigm. For Latin Americans, the question of European colonialism is not a twentieth-century question. In addition, given the hybrid nature of Latin American identity, the line between colonizer and colonized is not always so clear. This is one of many obvious constructs that demonstrate the disregard for Latin America within certain forms of postcolonial studies. Until a thoughtful analysis of Latin American colonialism occurs, "a partial, false concept of postcoloniality will dominate postcolonial studies."¹⁹ The historical difference of Latin America must be explored. Though in this article I cannot offer a comprehensive vision of Latin American colonialism, I can present a few major elements that shape this era.

The colonial era is one of the least examined eras of Latin American history. This is in spite of the fact that the colonial era and its accompanying baroque sensibilities is one of the most influential periods in Latin American history. As Latin Americanist Mariano Picón-Salas notes, "Consequently, this part of our past is the least known and the most misunderstood of our whole historical and cultural evolution...Indeed, in spite of nearly two centuries of rationalism and modern criticism, we Spanish Americans have not yet fully emerged from its labyrinth."²⁰ The historical imagination surrounding Latin American history and culture often jumps from the Conquest to the modern era. The colonial era was a time when the *criollo/a*, the "American"-born Spaniard, was developing his/her consciousness and identity. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are thus an extremely formative period for identity in the Americas, as it distinguished itself from European Spanish culture.

Racial, biological, and cultural mixture characterizes the Latin American colonial subject. Depending on one's skin tone and ancestry, historically one could fall into different levels of the colonial social hierarchy. Some colonial subjects, for example Spanish-born elites living in the Americas, did not experience colonialism in a manner similar to subjects of African and indigenous descent, or even *criollo/as*. In New Spain, at the top of the social hierarchy was the European-born Spaniard. Below them were the *criollo/as*, who rarely held positions of power and were extremely resentful of the Spanish. *Mestizo/as* and *mulato/as* came

¹⁸Santiago Colás, "Of Creole Symptoms, Cuban Fantasies, and Other Latin American Postcolonial Ideologies," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110, no. 3 (May 1995).

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Mariano Picón-Salas, *A Cultural History of Spanish America: From Conquest to Independence*, trans. Irving A. Leonard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 87.

next, and their skin color often determined their social standing, with light-skinned peoples able to have more opportunities than darker mixed peoples. Blacks, also depending on their skin color, were able to occupy varying social levels, though always submissive to the *criollo/as*, *mestizo/as*, *mulato/as*, and Spaniards. The *indios* were the lowest rung of the social ladder. This complex picture of identity is in sharp contrast to the monolithic manner in which Latino/as and Latin Americans are often categorized. Underlying this categorization is the tendency to create a monolithic "other" in contrast to the unified, dominant subject.

Latin American scholar Irving Leonard emphasizes the social immobility of this era. "This blending process in a relatively immobile society placed so indelible a stamp on Hispanic America that the Baroque pattern lingered long after the close of the colonial period and traces of it are visible today."²¹ Factors that contribute to this include Spain's isolation of the New World in its formative years; the Roman Catholic Church's massive influence and control in the New World, even of its "secular" society; the Church's role as patron of the arts. Colonial Latin American scholar Margo Glantz likens the rigidity of the Baroque to an *armoire*, where each individual had his or her proper place based on his or her social standing.²² In spite of this rigidity, intermarriage with indigenous people was much more accepted in the Spanish-speaking Americas than in the British colonies. One must remember that, even the so-called "white" Spaniards were a mix of "Latins, Moors, Visigoths, and Jews." The Spanish were "darker" than their European neighbors.²³ In addition, one cannot reduce one's social identity to race within Latin America. "Racial identity was more complex in Spanish America because color alone was not enough to locate an individual's identity in one race or another. Instead, race came to be identified with religion, culture, and behavior."²⁴ Nonetheless, *mestizo/a* and *mulato/a* peoples were held rather low in the social hierarchy, only above black and indigenous peoples. While the dominant social ethos emphasized this social rigidity, in the daily lives of colonial Latin American peoples the social (and sexual) practices were not as unyielding. This is coupled with the fact that in the early years of the Conquest intermarriage with indigenous women occurred due to a lack of Spanish women in the Americas. This began to change as early as the mid-sixteenth century. As colonial Latin American scholar Asunción Lavrin notes, "The arrival of more women from Spain after the 1550s made marriage with equals in race more feasible. As

²¹Irving A. Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico: Seventeenth-Century Persons, Places, and Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 31.

²²Margo Glantz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz ¿Hagiografía o Autobiografía?* (Mexico, D.F.: Grijalbo: UNAM, 1995), 42.

²³Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 28.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

colonial society became more stable, the promiscuity of the first decades gave place to more orderly patterns of marriage."²⁵

The colonial era in the Spanish-speaking Americas was very syncretic and eclectic. Latin American literary scholar Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel highlights that in New Spain the Baroque took on a particular characteristic based on the economic, social, and epistemological crises that are part of this era. She interprets this as a time when the modern colonial subject was in the process of developing his or her consciousness, at the intersection of the European and the American. It was a subject that was always attempting to legitimate its voice in the face of the European-born Spaniard.²⁶ This is an important historical moment in the constitution of an "American" subjectivity, found at the intersection of Spanish, indigenous, and African cultures, religions, and worldviews.

Too often the story of the Conquest and colonial era in Latin America is ignored, and history is constructed with little attention to the millions of people living in these areas. In *The Invention of the Americas*, Enrique Dussel offers a sharp critique of philosophical constructions of modernity for their utter disregard of Latin America. He argues that underlying European and North American understandings of modernity is the myth of placing Europe at the center of history, among other social and political factors. Perhaps one of the greatest myths perpetuated by Europe is that of the discovery of the Americas, where in fact civilizations were destroyed and covered over. "Europe claimed falsely that the covered one (*el cubierto*) had been dis-covered (*des-cubierto*). *Ego cogito cogitatum*, but this *cogitatum* was Europeanized and immediately covered over (*en-cubierto*) with respect to its otherness. The Other was thus constituted as part of the Same."²⁷ However, instead of replacing the culture of the indigenous with Spanish culture, a *mestizo/a* people was born, a hybrid race and culture.

The ambivalence and violence of this moment is especially graphic in light of the rape of indigenous women. Through the sexual exploitations of the male Spaniards, two social classes were created, the marginalized *mestizo/a* offspring of the Spanish and indigenous and the legitimate *criollo/a* born of a European wife. Dussel warns against sanitizing the horror of this moment.

The new syncretistic, hybrid, predominantly mestizo culture was born neither from a freely entered alliance nor from steady

²⁵Asunción Lavrin, "In Search of the Colonial Woman in Mexico: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), 31.

²⁶Yolanda Martínez San Miguel, *Saberes americanos: Subalternidad y epistemología en los escritos de Sor Juana* (Pittsburg, Pa.: University of Pittsburg, 1999), 31–33.

²⁷Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the 'Other' and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 35–36.

cultural synthesis, but from the originary trauma of being dominated. If one wishes to affirm authentically this new Latin American culture, conceived in such ambiguous origins, it is imperative never to forget the innocent victims, the Indian women, the overworked ones, and the crushed autochthonous culture.²⁸

Mestizo/as, in order to secure their political power and racial privilege, often distanced themselves from their mother's indigenous blood and culture. The idea was to model their culture and behavior after the lighter-skinned Spanish *criollo/as*. They thus supported the use of the Spanish language, embraced Christianity, downplayed indigenous communities, and argued for a new ethnicity that united the *mestizo/a* and the *criollo/a*.

It is for these reasons that Latin American scholar J. Jorge Klor de Alva holds that *postcolonial* is an inappropriate term for non-indigenous Latin Americans. "In short, the Americas, as former parts of empires which, after a series of civil wars, separated themselves politically and economically, but not culturally or socially, from their metropolises, cannot be characterized as either another Asia or Africa."²⁹ The leaders of the wars of independence were not the subalterns of Latin America; they were not blacks and indigenous peoples; they were *criollos*, *mestizos*, and *mulatos*. Even in countries such as Cuba, where blacks fought in the war of independence, quickly after independence from Spain was gained (and neocolonialism from the United States began), a white elite seized power and excluded black Cubans from positions of leadership.³⁰ As Roberto Fernández Retmar echoes, "While other colonials or ex-colonials, in metropolitan centers, speak among themselves in their own language, we Latin Americans continue to use the language of the colonizers."³¹ This is also why, in turn, *mestizaje* and *mulatez* can be problematic notions, for they can privilege the Spanish. Claiming a *mestizo/a* or *mulato/a* identity is a manner of "whitening" one's racial identity, gaining privilege over black and indigenous peoples. They remain, nonetheless, important categories that speak to the mixture and ambiguity that characterizes Latino/a peoples. While problematizing *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, I have no desire to dispose of them as viable and important categories for Latino/a discourse.

²⁸Ibid., 55.

²⁹J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "The Postcolonialization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje,'" in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 247.

³⁰See Alejandro De la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001).

³¹Roberto Fernández Retmar, "Calibán: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America," *Massachusetts Review* 15 (1974): 10.

Latino/a Identity

In a recent book, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850–2000*, Suzanne Bost explores the manner in which mixed identities (racial and cultural, for example) complicate universalized notions of subjectivity and demonstrate the complexity of identity.³² Bost sees her book as countering the manner in which mixture has been understood in American racial categories. Both white and nonwhite peoples see the current blurring of the lines as sacrificing political power. Acknowledging that the ambiguity of race can prevent clearly defined racial paradigms, she argues, “Racial mixture has been targeted, perhaps scapegoated, as American media feel panic about the dissolution of essential identity categories.”³³ Although today postcolonial and postmodern studies have made identity fluidity and hybridity in vogue, Bost argues that the mixed-race category has accompanied U.S. constructions of racial identity throughout its history. U.S. categories of racial identity have always included categories that referred to mixed-races, even though they have been historically ignored.

Though it originates from a Latin American context, Bost sees *mestizaje* as a term that encompasses racial identity formation in the entire Americas. “As a ‘metaform’ and an inclusive paradigm, *mestizaje* can serve as a model for the fusions, negotiations, frictions, and border crossings between races in the Americas.”³⁴ While Bost sees *mestizaje* as including the African elements of identity, I disagree and feel that the African is eclipsed if one does not also speak directly of *mulatez*. If one does not name the complexity of identity, the African elements, which are so pervasive in certain Latino/a and Latin American cultures, get ignored. This is especially important in the United States, where black and Latino/a are distinct racial categories. This separation goes entirely against the reality of black Latino/a peoples. The European population in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean was small. This, coupled with the amount of interracial marriage, contributed to the mixed identity of many Caribbean peoples, where African and Spanish became intertwined. One excellent example of this occurred in Cuba, namely Santería. Santería, “the way of the saints,” is a religion that emerged during the colonial era in Cuba amongst African slaves. A combination of Yoruba religion and Roman Catholicism, Santería is now an influential element of Cuban culture, seen prominently in Cuban music. The Santería example is important, for it does not allow *mulatez* to be reduced to race. Race is only one dimension of *mestizaje* and *mulatez*; culture, ethnicity, and nation also participate in these constructions of identity.

³²Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas*, 6.

³³Ibid., 4.

³⁴Ibid., 8.

The mixed nature of Latin American and Latino/a identity is not a new theme in U.S. Latino/a studies. It is especially prominent, for example, in the writings of Chicana feminists. As poet, theorist, and dramatist Cherríe Moraga painfully remembers in her poem, "I Was Not Supposed to Remember,"

I was not supposed to remember being she
the daughter of some other Indian some body some where
an orphaned child somewhere somebody's
cast-off half-breed I wasn't
supposed to remember the original rape.
I, thoroughly hybrid
mongrel/mexicanaqui/oakie girl.
Mongrel is the name
that holds all the animal I am.³⁵

Moraga evokes the mixed nature of Latino/a identity, the violence surrounding it, and the shame that often accompanies being considered a "mongrel" or "half-breed." María Lugones relates the shame of the mixed-person to the celebration of racial purity within the United States. In a society in which unity and purity are idealized, the liminality of *mestiza/mulato* peoples is seen as impure. To affirm them is therefore an act of subversion. "As I uncover a connection between impurity and resistance, my Latina imagination moves from resistance to *mestizaje*. I think of *mestizaje* as an example of and a metaphor for both impurity and resistance."³⁶ In the homogeneity of dominant culture, only the invisible, dominant culture is acceptable. Cultures that seem different are seen as lesser and consequently marginalized. Minority peoples are thus visible in their deviance from the norm. This unified reality implies the construction of a subject who has the vista of this unity. This in turn creates an ahistorical, abstract subject, with a one-dimensional privileged perspective. "If we assume that the world of people and things is unified, then we can conceive of a vantage point from which its unity can be grasped."³⁷ This abstract, ideal subject must be unified and pure (able to see the unity within the multiplicity) and has historically been seen as male. The purity of this subject is demonstrated in his ability to step outside and transcend the multiplicity. For this purpose, he must reject his particularity and embodiment and instead become a "postcultural" or "culturally transparent" individual.³⁸

³⁵Cherríe Moraga, *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 98-100.

³⁶María Lugones, "Purity, Impurity, and Separation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (1994): 458-59.

³⁷Ibid., 465.

³⁸Ibid., 466.

Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa evokes the image of the border as a manner of expressing the struggles of mixed peoples in the United States. "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."³⁹ The borderland is a transitional and undetermined space, inhabited by the marginalized. "*Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.'"⁴⁰ In a manner similar to Lugones, Anzaldúa emphasizes the painful reality of the border, where society's cast-offs find a home. The *mestiza* is an example of this border inhabitant. She is alienated from her maternal culture, alien to the dominant culture. She is caught between the different worlds that form and shape her identity, never at home in any of them. She is thus in a constant state of struggle: to find a cultural home without and her own identity within. This struggle results in what Anzaldúa calls the "*mestiza* consciousness." This consciousness is the product of pluralistic identity, where nothing is rejected and ambivalence and contradictions can be celebrated.⁴¹

This *mestiza* identity is not without its critics. For Klor de Alva, *mestizaje* is a myth that is used to exclude, most specifically darker-skinned black and indigenous Latin American and Latino/a peoples. "It has been effectively used to promote national amnesia about us or to salve the national conscience in what concerns the dismal past and still colonized condition of most indigenous peoples of Latin America."⁴² The *mestiza/o* or *mulato/a* gains a certain amount of privilege in accepting this mixed identity. They remain people of color, yet they also benefit from their identification as lighter-skinned peoples. In addition, many would argue that every culture is in fact mixed in some way, denying the exclusivity of this category for Latino/a and Latin American peoples. Yes and no. As Roberto Fernández Retmar notes, in the United States, for example, in spite of ethnic and cultural diversity, there exists a "relative homogeneity."⁴³ In her most recent work Gloria Anzaldúa has acknowledged that the lines between the marginalized *mestiza* and the dominant culture are not as sharp as they once seemed. "Now I know that 'us' and 'them' are interchangeable. Now there is no such thing as an 'other.' The other is in you, the other is in me. This white culture has been internalized in my head. I have a white man in here; I have a white woman in here. And they have me in their heads, even if it is just a guilty

³⁹Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 3.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 78-79.

⁴²Klor de Alva, "Postcolonialization of the (Latin) American Experience," 257.

⁴³Fernández Retmar, "Calibán," 8.

little nudge sometimes.”⁴⁴ Anzaldúa adds another layer of complexity to Latino/a identity, blurring the distinctions between dominant and marginalized cultures and races. This ambiguity of Latino/a identity has been a central feature of the work of Latino/a theologians. Turning to their work in theological anthropology, I explore the implications of a Latino/a postcolonial construction of identity for this theological locus.

Latino/a Theology

Latino/a theologians have been writing in the United States since the mid 1970s. A central feature of their work has been an emphasis on context and identity as a starting-point of theological reflection. However, in order to not repeat the many insights explored in the previous section, I wish to proceed directly to Latino/a theologians' theological reflections in light of the *mestizo/a* / *mulato/a* identity of Latino/a peoples. I begin by examining the methodological links between postcolonialism and Latino/a theology. I then turn to explicit writings in the area of theological anthropology.

Perhaps no other Latino/a theologian in the United States has explored the Latino/a condition in light of postcolonial studies more than biblical scholar Fernando F. Segovia. For Segovia, the role of Latino/a theology is to find a middle path, one that highlights the shared roots of Latino/as yet does not eclipse the distinctiveness of each Latino/a group.

Consequently the theology I envision is a theology that must not eschew otherness and alienation, but rather use it as a source of identity and affirmation, comfort and understanding, autonomy and criticism. Such a theology must be ultimately and radically grounded as well in our biological and culture mixture, in our own *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, in our expansive and expanding *raza*...As such, the theology I envision can play the very important role of self-conscious bridge or translator between North and South, first world and third world, English and Spanish, white and every other color under the sun.⁴⁵

Segovia characterizes Latino/a theology as a theology of the diaspora, “born and forged in exile, in displacement and relocation.” The traits of this theology are as follows: “a self-consciously local and constructive theology, quite forthcoming about its own social location and perspective; a theology of diversity and pluralism, highlighting the dignity and values of all matrices and voices, including its own; a

⁴⁴Andrea A. Lunsford, “Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality,” in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, ed. Gary A. Olson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 52.

⁴⁵Fernando F. Segovia, “Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand,” in *Mestizo Christianity*, ed. Arturo J. Bañuelos (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 37.

theology of engagement and dialogue, committed to critical conversation with other theological voices from both margins and center alike."⁴⁶ Segovia defines his diaspora theology as a postcolonial theology that emerges from his condition of exile. He notes that modern theology has been primarily the theology of the hegemonic center, a theology of privilege and elitism. "In recent times, however, this theology of colonization has been called into question and challenged by the children of the colonized, both at the margins and at the center of the empire."⁴⁷ Segovia thus situates Latino/a theology as a form of postcolonial discourse. Underlying the methodology of Latino/a theology is the *mestizaje/mulatez* of the Latino/a condition. *Mestizaje/mulatez*, however, has not only methodological implications for Latino/a theology but also anthropological ones.

A starting point for many of his theological reflections is the hybridity of Latino/a peoples. Segovia characterizes the nature of Latino/a identity as twofold, "on the one hand it is quite distinct and readily identifiable; on the other hand, it is quite varied and thoroughly diverse."⁴⁸ This is due in part to the complex history that informs the culture of Latino/a peoples. On one level, as descendants of the Spanish—which is so readily marked in our language and religion—we are deeply rooted in Western European Roman Catholic Europe. However, our roots are also pre-Columbian American and African. "Thus we are neither European nor Amerindian nor African, but rather *criollos*, the native children of the white and black and the brown, of the conquerors and the conquered, the masters and the slaves, the North and the South."⁴⁹ As polycultural people, Latino/as can find their roots in many places, yet none that they can call home. In addition to their polycultural identity as a collective, Latino/as are distinct based on their nation of origin.

The theological anthropology of Roberto S. Goizueta offers one of the most sustained reflections on this locus in Latino/a systematics. In his essay "Nosotros: Towards a U.S. Hispanic Anthropology," Roberto S. Goizueta highlights the essentiality of community for an understanding of Latina/os. One cannot avoid "the anthropological significance of community, or the role of community as intrinsic to subjectivity. This is

⁴⁶Fernando F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 53. The theme of exile is not exclusive to Segovia's work, but has appeared in the writings of various Latino/a theologians. See Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1990); Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "By the Rivers of Babylon: Exile as a Way of Life," in *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996).

⁴⁷Segovia, "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand," 200.

⁴⁸Ibid., 30.

⁴⁹Ibid., 32.

not to say that the individual subject, or ego, is subsumed within community, but that the subject is constituted by community (more precisely, by communities), which, in turn, functions as a collective or communal subject.⁵⁰ In other words, the community is constitutive of the self while not effacing the self. Our identities, while being individuated, are not autonomous. We are not individuated entities. We are part of the communities to which we belong and which are a part of us. Goizueta situates this communal and relational understanding of the self within the *mestizaje* of Latino/a peoples. In the *mestizaje/mulatez* of Latina/o peoples one finds a new subject, one that is irreducible to the various communities to which s/he belongs.

Goizueta, however, does not hold a romantic understanding of community. "If the U.S. Hispanic subject is born out of the confluence of communities and cultures, that confluence is initially conflictual and, indeed, violent: it is experienced as non-being, as a rupture, a disjunction, an extinction, and a crucifixion. This historical fact precludes idealistic or sentimental interpretations of either subjectivity or community."⁵¹ He notes that often the idealization of community is accompanied by the idealization of gender roles. Therefore, Latino/a theologians must pay special attention to the voices and contributions of Latinas. Latinas' experiences of marginalization within U.S. Latino/a communities prevent a romantic notion of this community. They also, in turn, preclude the villainization of the Anglo community. This is exemplified in the complex relationships Latina feminists have had with the Anglo feminist community. "Implicit in the ongoing dialogues between Hispanic *mujeristas* and Anglo feminists is the call for a critical, or dialectical appropriation of an Anglo culture that is, for better or worse, an element of our *mestizaje*."⁵² In a similar manner to Anzaldúa, Goizueta argues that Anglo culture has influenced Latino/a culture and vice versa.

At the foundation of Goizueta's communal anthropology is an understanding of the human as relational. We are intrinsically relational, and our relationships are constitutive of who we are. Relationships come prior to the individual. These relationships include our ancestors and the institutions that are a part of or perpetuate our identity; language also highlights the communal nature of human being. Goizueta contrasts this relational understanding of the human to modern liberal anthropologies, in which the individual comes before the community. "Presupposed in this modern liberal anthropology is a dichotomy between the individual and community. That is, the community is always extrinsic to individuality. Community is, at best, an addition or supplement to the

⁵⁰Roberto S. Goizueta, "Nosotros: Toward a U.S. Hispanic Anthropology," *Listening* 27, no. 1 (1992): 57.

⁵¹Ibid., 58.

⁵²Ibid., 61.

individual and, at worst, a threat to and limitation of the individual."⁵³ Community is also often placed in opposition to institutions, and instead of a constitutive idea of community, there is a "sentimental" one. This modern liberal anthropology leads to a dichotomy between the particular and the universal, with an option for the individual.

In the anthropology of Latino/a popular Catholicism, Goizueta argues, community is seen as preexistent and constitutive. Evoking the image of the *via crucis* in Good Friday processions, Goizueta notes, "It is in our common accompaniment of Jesus on the cross that *he* constitutes *us* as individuals and a community."⁵⁴ Popular devotion to Mary is yet another example of this communal, relational anthropology. Mary is also defined by her relationships; she, too, accompanies and is accompanied. Relationship, however, is not some stagnant essence of the human, but is instead dynamic. "The human person is defined, above all, by his or her character as a relational being. Yet this relationality is not merely some static 'essence' of the person, but an *active* relating in and through which the person defines him or herself, in interaction with others."⁵⁵ The dynamic character of relationship brings forth the interactive and interdependent nature of humanity.

This relational community is not only characteristic of inter-human communities, it also marks humanity's relationship with the Divine. For Goizueta, worship expresses this concretely. "The liturgical act of worship is thus a *communal action* of *receptivity* (of the saving love of God) and *response* (praise and thanksgiving)."⁵⁶ The human person is not solely constituted by human relationships; one's relationship with the Divine as giver of life is foundational. As Goizueta emphasizes, our relationship with the God who gives us life—and I would add, the God in whose image we are created—is the foundation of all our other relationships. Using Latino/a fiestas as an entry point, Goizueta puts forth a theological anthropology that "understands the human person as *constituted* by relationships, not only relationship to the human community which precedes and forms the person, but especially by relationship to the primordial, triune Community whose love *is* life."⁵⁷ The caricature of the modern autonomous self is shattered when the giftedness of life is revealed. Similarly, the isolated individual is unmasked to reveal the relational human community. This insight into the relational nature of humanity is a key insight, I argue, that Latino/a theologians contribute to the academy, one that is not exclusive to Goizueta's work.

⁵³Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 60.

⁵⁴Ibid., 68.

⁵⁵Ibid., 72.

⁵⁶Goizueta, "Fiesta," 95.

⁵⁷Ibid., 96.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz's *mujerista* theology resonates with several of the insights found in Goizueta's anthropology. In her essay "Elements of a *Mujerista* Anthropology," she holds three phrases as critical to elaborating *mujerista* anthropology: *la lucha*, *permítame hablar*, and *la comunidad/la familia*.⁵⁸ These are not the only sources, nor are they necessarily exclusive to Latinas. However, "these phrases offer a valid starting point for an anthropological exploration of Latinas."⁵⁹ This is because to speak of these three phrases is to offer an arena for Latinas' theological contributions: Latinas daily lives (*lo cotidiano*), their contributive voices, and their relational conception of selfhood. In her *mujerista* theology, I find Isasi-Díaz's emphasis on the communal dimension of Latina anthropology especially fruitful. "*Familia/comunidad* for Latina/os does not subsume the person but rather emphasizes that the person is constituted by this entity and that the individual person and the community have a dialogic relationship through which the person reflects the *familia/comunidad*."⁶⁰ The community is not emphasized at the expense of the individual. Instead, the two exist in active relationship. One cannot deny, however, that the individual is born into a community. Relationships thus play a central role in the constitution of the individual. Unlike Goizueta, Isasi-Díaz has a stronger emphasis on the role of the individual. Although Goizueta does not argue for the effacement of the self, relationships take primacy over the individual. Isasi-Díaz, in turn, wants to maintain a distinct yet fluid relationship between the self and the community

While both Goizueta and Isasi-Díaz rightly emphasize the importance of community and relationship within theological anthropology, they do not specifically explore what types of communities should be models for human relationships. Recognizing the oppressive realities that can shape communities, especially with regards to gender, neither has a romantic vision of community. They are clear that all communities should not be merely celebrated. I agree; however, it is not enough to state what a community should not be, one must also state what a community should resemble. Here is one area where postcolonial theorists can offer fruitful resources for Latino/a theology. However, some initial insights on the nature of community are also found within Latino/a theology itself.

Miguel H. Díaz is yet another Latino theologian who has highlighted the significance of relationship in Latino/a anthropologies. Díaz

⁵⁸Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Elements of a *Mujerista* Anthropology," in *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 129. These phrases are translated: the struggle, allow me to speak, and the community/family.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 143.

privileges relationship, community, and accompaniment as constitutive of the human.⁶¹ Highlighting the Marian story of *La Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity), the patron saint of Cuba, Díaz elaborates an anthropology based on her symbolic accompaniment of marginalized peoples. Díaz highlights five elements of her story that can inform an anthropology: a preferential option for marginalized people, an accompaniment that helps people recall their marginalized cultural identity, an apparition in a marginalized landscape, solidarity with marginalized persons, and an embodied anthropology.⁶² These insights are signposts to the types of community envisioned by Díaz. I would like to draw attention to three dimensions of the five themes. The first is underlying, which is his theological anthropology based on a Marian story. Using the Cuban narrative and devotion, Díaz stays focused on the particular context of Cuba while articulating a broader Christian anthropology. The second dimension is pervasive, found in his emphasis on the marginalized. Clearly, for Díaz community contains within it an ethical imperative. The third element is his emphasis on embodiment. Too often theological anthropology wants to talk about disembodied subjectivity and relationships. Díaz reminds us that we must remain grounded in the flesh, the concrete. His work is grounded in the theological anthropologies of Latinos, with their relational emphasis.⁶³ Díaz situates his anthropology within Trinitarian thought. The relationality of the Godhead is reflective of the relational *imago Dei* of humanity. I agree with his strong point: One cannot understand humanity without understanding the Trinity.

Using the complexity of Latino/a identity as the starting point of their theologies, Latino/a theologians bring forth the importance of relationships in their anthropologies. Because there are various elements that shape and color identity, one must center on the relationships that unite them as the key factor that is constitutive of humanity's *imago Dei*. The Christian God is a God that exists in relationship. As an earlier quote from Goizueta implies, the foundation of the communal understanding of human nature is the Community that is the Trinity. This understanding of the image of God in humanity mirrors the Trinitarian life of relationships, and just as God relates within God's-self and relates to God's creation, so do we humans have relationships with ourselves and our Creator. In a similar manner, the God of Christian faith is a God of community, where the three persons of the Trinity exist as one in

⁶¹Miguel H. Díaz, "Dime con quién andas y te dire quién eres: We Walk With Our Lady of Charity," in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 153–71.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 158–63.

⁶³"The social nature of persons and the social experience of grace and sin are central themes in U.S. Hispanic theological anthropology." Miguel H. Díaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahernian Perspectives* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 57.

relational community. We as humans mirror that communal nature as people who are individuals yet whose individuality can only be understood through the very communities and relationships that form our humanity. As noted by Sixto García, "The Trinity thus stamps its profile on every human being's personal reality and by extension on every human society and political structure."⁶⁴ A postcolonial anthropology must take into serious consideration, however, the ambiguous nature of humanity and the manners in which power and dominance function in communal settings. In these moments the image of the Trinity in humanity is distorted, resulting in communities that do not reflect divine relationship. As García emphasizes, this applies not only to personal relationships but also to social structures. As Díaz comments, "García suggests that because social structures owe their existence to human persons, they can and should image the trinitarian life of God."⁶⁵ The political and social realm is equally as important as the interpersonal. Both, however, must be grounded in the foundation that is God's love for humanity as Giver of life.

Conclusion

What is the Latino/a contribution to theological reflection in light of postcolonial studies? This essay has been a modest attempt to begin to answer that question in an interdisciplinary manner. Drawing from various fields, including literature, history, cultural studies, philosophy, and of course theology, I have begun a conversation about the particular contribution of Latino/as and Latin Americans to postcolonial discourse. From the Latin American experience we learn that colonialism has various particular manifestations, challenging the assumption that it is possible to speak broadly of the postcolonial condition in a monolithic manner. We have seen that the very nature of Latino/a peoples challenges current typologies of race and ethnicity in the United States, given their *mestizo/a* and *mulato/a* identity. This has emerged as a direct consequence of the colonial era in Latin America and the internal social hierarchy within Latino/a cultures that is often eclipsed in the broad category of "Latino/a or Hispanic." I hope I have made clear that Latino/a theologians, though not always explicitly addressing the claims of postcolonial theorists, offer a fruitful starting point for a theological anthropology that takes hybridity seriously.

I would like to end with a word of caution. Too often, the contributions of people of color are parochialized into a subcategory, seen as a quaint exception to the dominant rhetoric, as Trihn Minh-ha

⁶⁴Sixto J. García, "United States Hispanic and Mainstream Trinitarian Theologies," in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 99.

⁶⁵Díaz, *On Being Human*, 57.

warns, "words manipulated at will. As you can see, 'difference' is essentially 'division' in the understanding of many. It is no more than a tool of self-defense and conquest...It is as if everywhere we go we become Someone's private zoo."⁶⁶ One can avoid this only if the challenges posed by marginalized peoples, such as those in the Latin American and Latino/a context, are taken seriously as significant conversation partners. If not, the very people who claim to be empowering these oppressed communities silence their lives and experiences.

⁶⁶Trinh, *Woman Native Other*, 82.