

Mestiza

The peoples of South America very cunningly used mimicry to adapt to the violent demands of their colonizers—to become “civilized.” Faced with this unspeakable challenge, they developed a new technology of survival without submission, drawing on skills from a significant preexisting performative talent. To know how to read codes, repeat them, and put them on stage is doubtlessly an art, and it is as a result of this skill that mestizaje (miscegenation) came to be. Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Scottish, English, and others who arrived to settle the continent after the first conquerors were surprised to see themselves reflected in bodies that were different from theirs. And from this treacherous coupling encounter, we mestizos were born.

Mestizaje is a form of over-adaptation, a chameleonlike capacity that proved to be sufficiently effective as a short-term strategy but has had far fewer positive outcomes in the long term. At some moment over time, we mestizos forgot that we were merely actors in this representational activity and lost ourselves in attempting to become the other.

Clearly, to be mestizo is not always a quality you can see, but rather something that you live. The mestiza either assumes herself as such or not (a constitutive part of her condition). Miscegenation is therefore a denomination of an act, a way to name a heritage, and finally, a life performance. It has been said that miscegenation can be genetically checked. How futile, when the emblematic feature of mestizo technology is, precisely, the power of mimesis! Micro-scientific findings won't be of any help to me, for it is the use of the nickname mestiza that empowers me, softens the aches of displacement, and offers justice to my crafted existence.

Camila Marambio, “Mestiza,” entry for “An Incomplete Glossary of Latin America,” in *United States of Latin America*, ed. Jens Hoffman (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). p. 100-101. <https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/united-states-of-latin-america/>