

MESTIZA POWER

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translated by Virginia Grise

The mestizas (indigenous hipil-wearing women with long black hair, fancy hair combs, and filigree jewelry) are part of the everyday landscape in Mérida, Mexico. Many of them come from their villages to sell fruit and merchandise on the streets. These women resist modernity and treasure their indigenous education, their rites, myths and dignity in a way that is urgent. Their idiolect is a seamless mix of Maya and Spanish. The original text moves between Maya, Spanish and idioms and slang from the Yucatan and is structured in two parts: snippets of loose dialogues meant to have the effect of walking through a market where the voices come through the hustle and bustle and the second part is structured as a series of monologues.

Three mestizas dressed in hipiles. In the market. Merida, Mexico.

MESTIZA 1: I have a ton of anxiety, a real bad case of the nerves. When I look, my mouf had gone to one side. I'm drinking water and it goes out my mouf. *Jach*-like this...sssssssh. Massashing it. Massashing it. That's what cured it.

MESTIZA 2: Skinny. That's how I looked. *Manitas me quedó!* When the bad illness came over me I was gonna die. We sold the turkeys and they took me to the doctor.

MESTIZA 3: These black *manchas* came out on my face. I smeared some *huix* on em and poof! they went away. I don't need no doctor. I don't need no nothing.

(break) MESTIZA 3: You aren't going to *las becas*?

MESTIZA 1: *A las Vegas*?

MESTIZA 3: *Las becas* not Las Vegas. The government's giving out *becas* right now.

You gonna go?

MESTIZA 2: Ay no! They gonna think *que* I'm dying of hunger, that I don't have any money.

MESTIZA 3: But you *don't* have money.

MESTIZA 2: *Si*, but they don't need to know all that.

MESTIZA 3: *Ay fo!* You're so proud. *Yo si voy* because I don't have a husband that's gonna take care of me.

MESTIZA 1: The government will help you all right. They give you an itty bitty tiny house as small as a bird's house, *casita chiquitita como de paloma, pero si te la da*. Don't say they didn't give you anything.

(break)

MESTIZA 2: My *mamá* insisted on hitting me but I told on her to my dad. "Hey *papá*. *Esa mi mamá*, we don't even have enough to eat and on top of that, now she's hitting me."

MESTIZA 3: I was sure enough scared of my mom. She's only gonna tell you how it was once. One time. And it's on you to get it right. Especially because we were all girls.

MESTIZA 1: You are women. Tomorrow or the next day, you will all get married. If you end up with a bad husband whose all sorts of wrong, how you gonna raise your children right?

MESTIZA 2: *Palabra de mi mamá era santa palabra*. Her word was golden. You could be looking at a tree but if she said it was a rock then it was a rock or she'd give it to you good until you saw it her way.

(break)

MESTIZA 3: *Jach*-we were poor, real poor. My mom would divide up one egg into four pieces because we were four sisters. That's what we're gonna eat *o si no*, grab an *hoja de chaya*, roast it on the *comal* with a little bit of orange and salt. That's your entire meal!

MESTIZA 2: “*Mamá* what are we going to eat?” She gives you a fistful like that of food. The same thing, same thing. I got tired of it...I said, “I might as well get married. I’d be better off.” *Ahita asi* I got married with this man and *ya de casada* I ate *panucho*, beans with pork. Good foods. He had *mayiz*, meat. That man had everything. *Todo traia el viejo*. When my son grew up, I found out that my husband had other women too and I left him. I came to work in Merida.

(break)

MESTIZA 1: When my mom taught me how to make tortillas, I turn the tortilla and a piece breaks off, uas, another, uas another, *asi hasta que* she came back and she saw it tsssss she burned my hand on the *comal* but look, look how quick I learned.

MESTIZA 3: What had happened was, we were eight girls and all our names started with an “L.” When my mom wanted to call us she started with lu, la, ley, liz, let, lo... a ti *pelaná*. (to MESTIZA 2) what’s your face, you, I’m calling you.

MESTIZA 2: (to MESTIZA 3) What is it?

MESTIZA 3: (to MESTIZA 2) Take down that um...um...whatcha ma...whatcha ma

call it, that I hung up over there, *y me lo jan traes*. MESTIZA 2: What whatcha ma watcha ma?

MESTIZA 1: You know what watcha ma what-what I’m talking about! Bring me the thing-thing under that thing over there.

MESTIZA 1: Not me.

MESTIZA 2: Uh-uh. Me neither.

(break)

MESTIZA 3: *Yo si*. I did go to school. In fourth grade I dropped out because I was already old. I was 12 years old in the fourth grade. I said I might as well get married. *Pa que siga si yastoy grande*.

MESTIZA 2: (to MESTIZA 3) You don't even know how to read!

MESTIZA 3: (to MESTIZA 2) Who told you that? I can sum things up *and* I can read

you. *Hasta todo lo que veo lo chan leo*.

A stand off between Mestiza 3 and Mestiza 2. Toe to toe, music rises. The stand off erupts into a dance off. The following piece of dialogue is spoken to the rhythm of the song.

MESTIZA 1: *Es que en* the old days, your parents didn't let you study. They thought the only reason you want to learn how to write is so that you could write love letters to your boyfriend.

MESTIZA 3: They'd tell you, don't learn nothing cause you're just gonna end up taking care of some man anyway even though he's the one that's suppose to be taking care of the woman and the woman has to make good with whatever he gives her.

MESTIZA 2: My *mamá* did want me to study but I got fed up. I didn't like it. I didn't go back to school and my *mamá* didn't let me come back inside the house.

MESTIZA 1: (to MESTIZA 3) You don't go to class, you can't come into the house!

MESTIZA 3: She even ran after me with a stick. I climb up in a tree and I don't want to come down.

MESTIZA 1: There comes a snake, it's rolled up in the branch of the tree, it's going to bite you.

MESTIZA 3: Not even that can get me down.

The women dance together awkwardly at first. The music rises. The mestizas "get down." Music lowers.

(break)

MESTIZA 2: My papá, he threw a rock at me. (*Music cuts out abruptly*) I don't know why I'm bad. I grab my sister and I slap her good...(she hits MESTIZA 1)

MESTIZA 1: (to MESTIZA 3) Mamaaa, my sister hit me! MESTIZA 3: (to MESTIZA 1) And what, she killed you? MESTIZA 1: No mamita!

MESTIZA 3: So chut up!

MESTIZA 1: Yes mamita.

MESTIZA 2: *Jach*-I feel like hitting her. *Soy cabrona!* I hit her. I pinch her because she gets everything handed to her. They buy her fancy *hipil*

and because she's not my real sister, she's my half sister, she's not my father's daughter, I hit her more. I think my *papá* wanted to marry my sister cuz ya when my *mamá* was dead already my sister comes and says, "Papá? I'm going to see him." They're alone. They shut the door. Talk-talk like fancy people. He could care less about me, *mentadas de madre me hace*. He even kicks me out.

(break)

MESTIZA 1: I was 12 when my husband asked my father if he could marry me so that we could populate. First he said no '*ta muy chica*, too young to get married. Then he said, "*Si ta bien, que vaya*." I didn't know him...They said, "Here he is." I got married and went off to go populate.

MESTIZA 3: Me, my husband came and he is drunk, he starts to hit me. I tell him "*a me pegas, a me dejas, a te duermes, a te pego*...go on hit me, I'll go on and take it, but you'll go to sleep, I'll hit you back." I wait for him to go to sleep I grab the machete and I cut off the limb...of the tree, where his hammock's hanging.

(break)

MESTIZA 3: (singing) *Salgan, salgan, salgan, animas de pena, que el rosario santo* (praying is interrupted, screaming) *Ese chiquitito* the one that's playing *pesca pesca*, it's a sin that he goes running in front of the altar while I'm praying. I'm gonna pinch him real good so he'll learn (singing) *Rompa sus cadenas*.

(break)

MESTIZA 1: (gesturing to a hump on her back) This what you see here is a curse my husband threw me, when he died he curse-ed me, it landed here, this is swollen. It hurts me a lot. (singing a commercial jingle) "*Me tomo el naproxen se queda bien.*" My husband cursed me. It's ugly when they curse you. I was left hunchbacked. This here is an air. Who knows how it's gonna get out.

MESTIZA 2: It's a little bitty muñequito like this, *neneito*. (referring to aluxes, a mystic Mayab, a type of mischievous dwarf). Like a doll, like...

MESTIZA 3: Chucky.

MESTIZA 2: He's dancing next to my hammock. I burn the incense and he disappeared!

MESTIZA 3: My son is going to waiter on Saturday. I'm waiting for him at the table. It's late. I felt cold. I grab the tablecloth and cover my feet. *Jan*-sleeping like this when someone pulls the tablecloth away. I kept on sleeping when I feel *que me chacalearon* right here. I woke up and say, "Who's messing with me? *Quien me esta chacaleando?* No one's there!"

(break)

MESTIZA 2: All rise. (Singing) *Blessed and praised for all eternity.*

(Chastising) Tell my son that *ya* I'm coming, to wait for me (singing)

And Maria was conceived without Original Sin. Amen. (yelling) He needs

to wait! (singing) *And that's the way it was for centuries and centuries.*

Amen... Good night. Good night. My son didn't want to come in? He's mad because the money he gave me, I spent it all on offerings and

prayers. As if he didn't know, if he gives me the money it's so I can spend it. He shouldn't be mad. Then why does he give it to me? *Ma sino?*

(break)

MESTIZA 1: The neighbor poisoned my dogs because they're female. "Why don't you kill your daughters? They're female too." I took the dead dogs to him and said, "What are you going to do with them? You gonna eat them? Here. I'll leave them for you."

MESTIZA 3: You shouldn't kill a dog because a dog can see with its *ojos de perro* what you can't with your human eyes. My dog is barking loud. I peep my head out the window I don't see nothing but my dog it sees it, with its *ojo de perro*, he's seeing the bad wind, he's seeing the death that wants to take me away. You have to have a dog. I'll give you another three bitches as a gift.

MESTIZA 2: It's true. It's true. My dog *ta xux* as if it were human. The other day I'm washing and the dog is tied up in the patio when suddenly I hear *aumamau*. I got scared. I clearly heard the voice of my *tupito*, but my little boy is standing right there next to me. What was it, ah? What was it?

MESTIZA 1: *Era peck*. MESTIZA 2: Ma! It was the dog? MESTIZA 1: Yes it was. MESTIZA 3: Ma! No it wasn't. MESTIZA 2: Ma! Yes it was.

MESTIZA 1: Yes it was! MESTIZA 3: MM?

MESTIZA 2: MM!

MESTIZA 1: MM

MESTIZA 1&2: Ma...Yes it was!

(break)

MESTIZA 3: My children have it easy. Back in the day...Watch out - if they see you playing or not doing anything, then right away they'd find something to keep you busy.

MESTIZA 2: That little girl ain't doing nothing. Give her something to do.

MESTIZA 1: And they'd mix the beans with grains of rice and stones, throw em on the floor, and you'd have to go grain by grain separating them, till the beans were clean.

MESTIZA 3: My children were all born just fine except for the little girl. She was difficult. I was in Merida when uas! my water broke. A young man says to me, "I'll take you to the clinic, get in my car." I got in but I didn't want to sit down because I was covered in blood, I was gonna mess up his car. I didn't sit down, I went standing. And I held on, *me aguante*, till we got to the hospital.

MESTIZA 2: In Merida there are people that humiliate you at work.

MESTIZA 3: Oh thank God I haven't had to ever work. *Bendito dios*, I don't need for anything...I got my children, my little turkeys...and my hog!

MESTIZA 1: I was poor, real poor, went to go ask for help from a boss lady because there is nothing to eat. The lady says, "I'm going to give