

Catalina
Barroso-
Luque
FEVER
SWELLS
INTO
A
FENCED
CYCLONE

I fell ill on February 7, 2020. I was immersed in a cloud of sleet. Shivers pierced through my skin for ten days; fever swelling into a cyclone. Ellen, Dennis, Jorge, one storm after the other; body drenched, flailing side to side. Gales and heavy downpours battered the UK, the island experienced the wettest February since records began.

I wake up. The day is dark, livid. I feel weightless. Pale yellow, four kilograms lighter. I match my gold MacBook Air.

I turn it on. A self-asserting noise beacons from the onyx mirror. Within seconds it is coquettishly glistening with light.

I wait. Click on the green red yellow blue circle.

Slowly, overly aware of myself, I tiptoe across the keyboard.

Images of mass graves dug up for New York City's COVID-19 victims lay spread-eagle across the screen. Brown earth. Rows of empty pine boxes. Individual. Morbid. A distant hyper-managed picture that is crystal clear, highly rendered on my retina 13" screen.

60,053 people have disappeared in Mexico since 2006. Bin-bags stuffed with limbs lay in secret pits, waiting for company. Thousands more are soon to come. Malnutrition, diabetes, pneumonia, SARS COVID-19, extortion, rape, drug crime, gun crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, femicide.

I left Mexico City in 2008. I lived alone surrounded by strangers. 8526.466 km lay between me and my friends and family. I haven't spoken to anyone for over a month. I don't understand the accent. The food is bland. Produce is wrapped in plastic. Divested of all vitality, my physical organism sheds away fat, flesh, muscle mass. I am a 1.66m 38kg female alien on a UK student visa.

May 2020. I am a 1.66m 50kg immigrant residing in the UK on a temporary Creative Worker visa. In the words of Paul. B. Preciado, "Everything will forever retain the new shape that things had taken ... [the confined] would now have to forever live with the impossible anticipation of a physical encounter that would never take place. Those who had chosen to travel would forever stay on the other side of the border".¹

South of the USA-Mexico border, houses boast of ornate iron gating strewn over windows and doorways. Love hearts and metal spirals safeguard fragile family lives. Concrete walls, geo-political mesh fencing shelter the North's middle class. Unwelcome illegal immigrant children are kept in cages. But evil trespasses cutaneous boundaries. The threat becomes viral, breaking through mucous barriers and injecting its own genetic material into our cells. The battlefield is extended to the body. The body becomes a prison.

1) Paul B. Preciado, translated by Molly Stevens, *The Losers Conspiracy (On life after COVID-19)* in "Artforum", 26 March 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/slant/paul-b-preciado-on-life-after-covid-19-82586>, last accessed 13 May 2020.

My brother was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in 2008. Depression hit hard. The image of the immune system as the iconic means for maintaining the integrity of the one in the face of the many, implodes. His immune system persistently attacks the myelin coating his nerve fibers, mistaking this fatty sheath for a noxious intrusion on the central nervous system. The body turns against its own strange parts, creating a hostile environment that leads to the collapse of how one sees, moves, thinks and feels.

A similar dynamic to auto-immune pathologies is recognisable in the political body through the unbridled policing of borders and individuals, constituting a danger to itself.² The UK's Home Office Biometrics (HOB) programme consists of three main modalities: DNA, fingerprint identification, and facial recognition. My biometrics joined the database in 2008. Throughout the next twelve years, each time I applied for a new visa, updated face shots and scans of my fingerprints, were added to the system.³ During this period my body formed a chrysalis. I cut all my hair off. Lost my hips, my tits. I stopped bleeding. All corporeal changes were numerically tracked. A blood test confirmed my organism's dwindling levels of oestrogen, progesterone, and the total absence of luteinising hormone (LH). Ascetic fasting creates a depletion of Gonadotropin releasing hormone, LH and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH).⁴ Fueled by an unconquerable corrosive focus I experienced an endocrinal reprogramming that disrupts the definition of being female and tugs at life's edge.⁵

The performative compulsion for efficiency and a Protestant work ethic, both necessary to achieve cosmopolitan salvation, runs deep in my family's mestizx blood—soiled by a Catholic indigenous house servant and *washed* by a white American expat.⁶ “We now know that conversion is the favourite

2) Roberto Esposito, translated by Zakiya Hanafi, “Biophilosophies of immunity” and “War games” in *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge/Oxford UK, 2011, pp. 180-90.

3) Home Office Biometrics Strategy Policy Paper, GOV.UK, 28 June 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-biometrics-strategy>, last accessed 24 May 2020.

4) *Amenorrhea in Anorexia Nervosa. Neuroendocrine Control of Hypothalamic Dysfunction*, “International Journal of Eating Disorders”, Wiley Periodicals, Inc., A Wiley Company, July 1994, pp. 53-60.

5) Preciado conceptualizes the dissident consumption of testosterone as a micro-political intervention into the production of the materiality of gender, comparing this to Felix Guatarri's attentiveness, in *La Révolution moléculaire*; to changes enacted through the consumption of drugs and sexual conduct during the French May 1968 student revolt. Without oestrogen, LH and progesterone, the body assigned female at birth stops having a period and the size of their mammary glands and hips is reduced. Is purging the body of hormones, then, a form of ascetic dissidence which stands against biological narratives tied to the cultural construction of gender? To what extent is self-starvation driven by the depression that ensues immigration, a continual fear of an indefinite settlement status, social isolation, language and cultural barriers? This is an intersectional issue that is seldom spoken off, one that is entangled with desire, capital, power and submission, and (neo)colonialism. Like in a revolution the risk of death is high—one in twenty people with anorexia die from the illness and this is not taking into account the countless many womxn caught in the trap of Western immigration/asylum systems.

Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, Feminist Press, New York 2008, pp. 139-143.

6) My father's grandmother, Ignacia or Mamá Nachita, was an indigenous woman from Puebla who worked as a house servant at my great grandfather's house. Ignacia married Luis Barroso II, her *mestizo* employer. Together they had a number of children. Two generations later, my father (Luis Barroso IV) married my *güerita* mother (Catalina Luque), the light skinned daughter of a white American fashion model and a Mexican doctor. *Mestizo/meztizx* is a Hispanic term which refers to a person of mixed ancestry with a white European and indigenous background. According to Mexico's illegal yet socially ingrained caste system, the genes Ignacia inherited to her children equates to further darkening the Barroso family blood. In contrast, my maternal American grandmother introduced ‘good looking [white] genes’ equated to washing the family's blood. Popular and official projects of *mestizaje* have been used to flatten differences and are “grounded in hetero-masculinist narratives and highly stratified categories of racialized gender.” Similarly, notions of beauty and femininity are intrinsically linked to Euro-centric values inherited from Spanish colonialism, imported contemporary Anglo-European culture and white American propaganda. Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, New York University Press, New York 2003, p. 13.

tool of colonialism. Conversion to consumerism was America's twentieth-century soft power gambit. Oh, how it worked out well."⁷ About, 80 percent of all goods manufactured in Mexico—cars, flash memories, flat screens and clothes produced with cheap labor—are shipped to the US, making the Mexican economy largely dependent on gringo consumers.⁸

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes the situation of an internalised colonialism in Bolivia, a situation mirrored in Mexico, as being so entrenched that we have become artifices of our own subjugation.⁹ “*Todos tenemos que cooperar con la empresa*” my father would say, enticing us children to help with household chores by referring to our family as a company. Kinship is a business. The house is a factory. The desire to approximate neoliberal whiteness is a high energy density fuel.

My brother and I determinedly carry on despite any bodily protestation interrupting our ability to work. I then spend weeks in bed. My body dematerializes between feverish delusions. With the continued support of modern medicine, he builds the necessary strength to emigrate to California. The male mind appears to power over the body. He is now a Ph.D candidate conducting doctoral research into the use of lithium in electronic device batteries. He is a hispanic immigrant passing as white and able bodied.

Lithium is a highly reactive alkali metal. Light. Energy dense. A crucial component to our increasingly networked lives and privileged wellbeing. This soft silvery-white metal binds my family and Cusicanqui's Bolivia and its greatest lithium deposits together.¹⁰ Mobile phones, contact tracing, APIs codeveloped between Apple and Google that enable interoperability between Android and iOS devices using apps from public health authorities.¹¹

7) Sophia Al-Maria, ‘We swing out over the Earth’ in *Sad Sack Collected Writings*, Book Works, London 2019, p. 82
For further reference see Mexican-Equatorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría's *Modernity and Whiteness* which goes into great depth into the Americanisation of Modernity and Latin America's ties to American and European capitalist expansion.

8) Revista Expansión published a report on products and exports sold and bought between Mexico and the USA. Note that the report was published prior to the coronavirus pandemic and the United States' decision to close off its borders. In April 2020, however, companies and US government officials urged the Mexican government to keep maquiladora factories running in the face of the public health emergency. Maquiladoras along the Mexico-USA border along with car manufacturing plants were amongst the last to close and the first business to open, despite the counting hundreds of COVID-19 deaths amongst its workers. More information can be found here: Alejandro Rosas, *Los 5 productos que México le vende y compra más a Estados Unidos (The 5 most sold and bought products by Mexico and the United States)*, “Revista Expansión” 7 June 2019, <https://expansion.mx/economia/2019/06/07/los-5-productos-que-mexico-le-vende-y-compra-mas-a-estados-unidos> last accessed 23 May 2020
Maquiladoras de la Frontera Norte consideradas no esenciales reactivan actividades in “Animal Político”, 5 May 2020 <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2020/05/maquiladoras-frontera-norte-no-esenciales-reactivan-trabajo/>, last accessed 21 May 2020.
Dora Villanueva, *Arranca la industria automotriz en México con semáforo en rojo* in “La Jornada”, México, 1 June 2020 <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/economia/2020/06/01/arranca-la-industria-automotriz-en-mexico-con-semaforo-en-rojo-5148.html>, last accessed 3 June 2020.

9) Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*, Tinta y Limón, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2018, p. 30.

10) Robert Draper, *This metal is powering today's technology—at what price?* in “National Geographic Magazine”, 9 April 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/2019/01/metal-powering-todays-technology-what-price>, last accessed 23 May 2020.

11) *Apple and Google partner on COVID-19 contact tracing technology* in Apple News Room, 10 April 2020, <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2020/04/apple-and-google-partner-on-covid-19-contact-tracing-technology/>, last accessed 28 May 2020.

A low immune system makes today's neoliberal cosmopolitan individual susceptible to contagion. This subject has no skin, so to remain immune it must be untouchable.¹² It has no limbs, only digits. It wears a face-mask to cover its faceless features. It makes contactless payments. It doesn't speak out, but types out messages. It uploads 300 ppi images of a sterile avocado plant to Instagram using an iPhone SE that runs on rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. It travels the world on a Tinder date without leaving the comfort of a home never hit by power cuts. It uses lithium-quartz crystals to bring into harmony swelling waves of information overloaded with anxiety.

Cusicanqui presents the mestizx intellectual as an intelligent subject that is schizophrenic and bipolar. It is a subject living in a perpetual *double bind* which lacks a tongue tied to a patria (fatherland).¹³ The mestizx intellectual seeking neoliberal cosmopolitan salvation speaks in borrowed tongues, conjuring a vulgar agglomeration of citations by North-Atlantic thinkers. Postcolonialism, feminism, xenofeminism, privacy, bio-politics, cyborg, citizenship, identity, immunity—these words are crystals, each filled with their own mind healing abilities. The hollow enunciation of such terms casts a spell of universality.

Crisis shatters the crystalline structure of these *magic words*.¹⁴ My surface understanding of what I mean when I use these lexicon splinters. Pressing the laptop's delete key I cut this excessive vocabulary

12) The illusion of skin blindness is unrelenting, spilling into the belief of there being an equal propensity for infection between racial and ethnic minorities. As worldwide lockdown measures begin to lift in studies reveal the disproportionate effect the pandemic has had on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in the UK; and Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asians in the USA. Health differences between racial and ethnic groups are often due to economic and social conditions, including: living conditions, types of work, access to health care, and underlying health conditions. Similar brutal effects, to an extent linked to policies in the North (eg: immigrants returning to their natal villages), have been felt across Latin America where wealth is distributed along color lines with indigenous and afrolatinxs being affected by widespread hunger and poor to no access to health care. The lack of governmental testing and research on these issues in some Latin American countries is due to both lacking national resources and populist political agendas. For further info please visit: COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 June 2020, US Department of Health & Human Services, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>, last accessed 3 June 2020.

Martin de Dios, *Impacto y situación de la población indígena latinoamericana ante el Covid-19* for Programa de Las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo: América Latina y el Caribe, 14 May 2020, <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/blog/2020/impacto-y-situacion-de-la-poblacion-indigena-latinoamericana-ant.html>, last accessed 3 June 2020.

13) The Bolivian theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui defines the mestizx intellectual as a subject living in perpetual *double bind*, carrying the dual, yet unequal, weight of indigenous and European origins. Borrowing from anthropologist Gregory Bateson, a *double bind* situation occurs when two conflicting imperatives arise and neither can be ignored, leaving the individual in an insoluble disjunction. Rivera Cusicanqui views the mestizx *double bind* as an ambivalent power which prevents the subject from being itself. The mestizx is always a wayward version of one or the other: mimicking whiteness, repressing and/or folklorically appropriating indigeneity. Cusicanqui instead advocates for a creative inhabitation of this disjunctive doubling based on the Aymara concept of *ch'ixi*, a motley epistemology which impels the subject to live within contradiction, acknowledging one's own complicity and reviving the indigenous within without succumbing to collective schizophrenia.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*, Tinta y Limón, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2018, p. 41.

14) I borrow this term from Rivera Cusicanqui's own "*palabras mágicas*", which describes words that appear to silence worries by pretending to confront colonial wounds and lived chains of racial and gender discrimination. These are terms often borrowed from European and North American thinkers, superficially applied to throughout Latin America and which ultimately mask deep seated local problematics. This process is further complicated in a contemporary context by the increasing global mandate of English as the official language of scholarship, art and international activism, highlighting the relationship between access to language and access to knowledge and power.

ibid.

out. Purging disrupts neurotransmitter behavior, making grey matter lighter and white matter thinner.¹⁵ Lashing into my frontostriatal and the limbic circuits creates a rush of sickening sensations that make my gut leap and contort. It then swoops. Turns. And explodes! Dividing, dividing and dividing again; my whole anatomy breaks into millions, billions and trillions of cells; bits that form into little swirls and whirls, filled with still smaller curls, which then touch one another. They wrap and writhe onto each other, rising up into concrete walls three meters high lined with electric fencing at their peak.

15) Tone Seim Fuglset, Nils Inge Landrø, Deborah Lynn Reas and Øyvind Rø, *Functional Brain Alterations in Anorexia Nervosa: a Scoping Review* in “Journal of Eating disorders” vol. 4 32. 28 November 2016.

Catalina Barroso-Luque is a Mexican artist, writer and arts programmer based in Glasgow. Her making carries across bodies and territories, and is produced between tongues. Catalina's writing has been published by PSS, potentA Editores, MAP, MaMSIE and Panel. Projects in 2020 include: R-22 an audio narrative and digital collage in collaboration with Feronia Wennborg for Wysing Broadcasts and N₆₁₃ a poetic prose para.site commissioned by the Wellcome Centre for Anti-Infectives Research (WCAIR) (wcairpara.site).