

The Development of Casta Painting as Visual Genre in New Spain and the Production of Ethnoracial Stereotypes

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to analyze the ways in which the development of the casta pictorial genre contributed to the production and stabilization of racializing and racist stereotypes. These racial stereotypes still persist in cultural imaginaries in and about Latin America as part of the long duration of coloniality. Casta painting from New Spain is analyzed here as a pictorial genre and as a colonial discourse in connection with situated social and racial concepts, such as Creole, caste, and *calidad*. The analysis develops through a dialogue with perspectives from Semiology of Art, Visual studies, Postcolonial studies, and Latin American Critique of Coloniality. In this regard, this essay intends to create a conversation among different disciplines and fields of study in order to develop a complex, transdisciplinary approach to a problem from colonial times: the production and circulation of ethnoracial stereotypes and their impact on social relations, lived experiences, and subjectivities.

Keywords: casta painting, *Criollos*, *mestizaje*, racialization, stereotype.

At the beginning of the 18th century, Creole² artist Manuel Arellano produced four portraits, currently considered prototypes of casta painting. Arellano represented different inhabitants of New Spain: a *Mulata* woman (Fig. 1), a *Mulato* man with a boy, an Indigenous *Chichimeco* man, and a *Chichimeca* woman with a child. An ethnographic inflection characterizes these works. Mainly, they represent human figures that stand out against solid backgrounds painted in broken colors (brown, grey/green, beige) and include inscriptions and visual prompts that operate to classify, situate, and mark the represented subjects with an array of attributes. Throughout the 18th and into the 19th century, other painters reproduced, sustained, and expanded on these aspects and contributed to the development of a true genre of painting. Over time, more possible types of mixtures and classifications were construed, and more racializing markers were added.

The aim of this essay is to analyze the ways in which the development of the casta pictorial genre entailed the production and stabilization of racializing and racist stereotypes. Etimologically, the term “stereotype” refers to the Greek *stereós* (solid) and *typos* (impression, mold, a visual form, a pattern). As it developed as a genre, casta painting produced the visual repetition of specific associations between imagined ethnoracial types and certain conditions, materialities, attitudes, and social situations. The visual repetition of these associations, as the genre developed over time, consolidated a series of stereotypes.

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² Creole, *Criollo in Spanish*, refers to those descendents of Spaniards that were born in the colonies.

Figure 1

Manuel Arellano, *Diceño de mulata*, [Oil on canvas], México, 1711. Denver Art Museum, Frederick and Jan Mayer Collection.



The relevance of the analysis is determined by the fact that the stereotypes that casta painting portrayed and codified visually have contributed to the formation of a persistent racial imaginary about Latin America, during the long duration of coloniality (Quijano, 2008). With this observation in mind, I propose to analyze casta painting in New Spain as pictorial genre and as colonial discourse, and to dialogue with critical perspectives from different fields: Semiology of Art, Visual Studies, and Postcolonial Studies. Just as visual artifacts require us to deploy adequate methods to analyze specific ways in which meaning is construed and transmitted by visual language, colonial visual discourses require the use of analytical approaches that contemplate aspects that are specific to the colonial situation in which they were produced. This essay creates a dialogue among different disciplines and fields of study in order to propose a complex approach to Spanish colonial racialization in visual discourses, specifically with regard to the production and circulation of ethnoracial stereotypes. Given that in Latin America these stereotypes continue to impact on relations, lived experiences, and subjectivities in multiple ways, the intent here is that the analysis and proposed methodological shift may contribute to promoting anti-racist initiatives in and from the fields of study mentioned above. It also aims to contribute to the larger critical debate on race and racism by discussing specific aspects of Latin American racial formations (Omi & Winant 2015, p. 109) from the perspective of racial formations and cultural imaginaries (Catelli, 2018).

Studies on Casta Painting and the Creole Perspective

The study of casta painting as a pictorial genre is a relatively recent phenomenon. Initial works focused mostly on questions about the function of these secular paintings.³ More recent research, such as Ilona Katzew's *Casta painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth Century Mexico* (2004), argues that casta painting should be interpreted in connection with the context in which it was produced, and takes distance from the field's early focus on function. With regard to context, it is widely known that the Spanish (and later Creole) dominated social regime was preoccupied with a *Mestizo* or mixed population that was difficult to classify and control. Magalí Carrera (1998, 2003) took this into consideration when she examined the ways in which pictorial representation in casta painting portrays *Mestizo* bodies in fixed positions in colonial Spanish social space. Carrera's dynamic analysis (2003) of the relations between the paintings and legal, literary, and religious documents allowed her to claim that "casta paintings do not illustrate race but instead *locate* it in the intersection of certain physical, economic, and social spaces of late colonial Mexico" (p. 38).

This shift in critical perspective on these paintings, from the question of function or utility to the question of their significance in colonial social discursivity, is significant insofar as casta painting was produced mostly by painters that belonged to the Creole (descendants of Spaniards) social sector.⁴ In this regard, my essay is particularly attentive to the colonial discourse and visuality of the Creole social sector. My contention is that casta painting allows us to *see* how Creole colonial discourse located *mestizo* or mixed bodies in colonial social space, and marked those bodies with certain characteristics. The information that was continually added to the paintings corresponds to a developing Creole imaginary about its perceived "others": the *casta*⁵ or caste population. This imaginary acquired depth and density throughout the 18th century.

Displacing the analytical focus from function to *visuality*⁶ makes it possible to suspend the historicist approach to casta paintings, to go beyond the question of their function in a particular period, and to formulate new questions about the effects on social imaginaries that the images in these paintings set off. Thus, the paintings may be seen not just as historical objects but as elements in a signifying field, crisscrossed by multiple discursive, subjective, and institutional configurations, and by European and Creole ways of seeing the colonial "others."

³ To date, no consensus has been reached regarding such function. In the field of Art History, María Concepción García Sáiz's *Las castas americanas: un género pictórico americano* (1989) pioneered cataloguing extant paintings, and argued that these works were produced to be exported for a Spanish audience.³ In the same field, Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero related casta paintings to the *Relaciones geográficas* ("Geographical Letters of Relation") produced by the Council of the Indies during the 16th century (1994). The *Relaciones geográficas* compiled miscellaneous information about the colonies through specific written questionnaires that were often supplemented with drawings and paintings. Thus, Estrada de Gerlero attributed casta painting with a descriptive and informative function.

⁴ I have made this argument extensively (2012), (2020). Katzew (2004) has indicated the close relationship between the genre's development and the painter's guild system (p.9).

⁵ In the Latin American context, the term *casta* (caste) refers to lineages in a complex social system of classification and racialization that was originally based on Iberian notions of blood purity, or *limpieza de sangre*. These notions were redeployed in the colonies in the context of *mestizaje*, or miscegenation, among Spaniards, "Indians", and Blacks. See Martínez (2008) for an extensive study of blood purity or *limpieza de sangre* in Spain and the colonies, and Catelli (2018, p.58-62) for *casta* in connection with colonial and *Criollo* cultural imaginaries.

⁶ Jay (1993) defines visuality as "the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes", by which observation "means observing the tacit cultural rules of different scopic regimes" (p.9).

Exploring visuality in relation to casta paintings entails focusing on the discourses that operated through these artifacts as part of the discursive weft of 18th-century New Spain. Nonetheless, because colonial visual discursivity continued to operate and exceeded the specific locations and time in which the paintings were produced, we could also think about the circulation of these images in the present, in museums and different media, and how they continue to produce effects on social imaginaries and power relations.

The Creole condition of Arellano and other painters is a relevant factor with regard to caste as the central theme of these works. In colonial times, the conception of caste in Spanish America involved a combination of a person's racial condition, *calidad*,⁷ and rules of social hierarchy. As María Elena Martínez (2008) observed, during the 18th century, notions of blood purity came into contact with ideas of social status and class, so that *calidad* and *casta* were often used indistinctly, and discourses on blood purity fused with "bourgeois concepts of diligence, work, integrity, education, and utility to the public good" (p. 247). The sociopolitical and economic context of the Bourbon Reforms (which centralized political and economic power around Peninsular Spaniards and displaced Creole sectors to benefit Peninsular Spaniards), the incidence of Enlightened thought,⁸ the colonial substrate of Creole imaginaries, and Creole obsession with blood purity, are all factors that coalesce in the casta genre.

In *Arqueología del Mestizaje. Colonialismo y Racialización (Archaeology of Mestizaje. Colonialism and Racialization)* (2020) I argued that casta painting is a Creole visual/textual formulation that precedes the verbal concept of *mestizaje*, a 19th-century neologism (pp. 41–46). The genre, its paintings, the variations, the academies and cabinets of curiosities where some of these series were exhibited, are all elements of the same long-lasting *dispositif*⁹ that, some decades later, reproduced and instituted the 19th century concept of *mestizaje*, or miscegenation. To further understand these profuse and persistent visual and discursive disseminations, it is helpful to engage with the field of Visual Studies, where images are approached as cultural practices, and the object of study lies at the intersection of visibility and social power (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 5). The configuration of a Creole racial, cultural, and identity imaginary in the 18th century is axial in the formation of *mestizaje* as a modern concept. This imaginary is also axial in my analysis of the development of the casta genre because it allows me to critically explore the articulation of certain modulations of colonial socioracial visibility and the construction and exercise of Creole social, political, and cultural power.

The analysis of the casta painting genre in terms of the power effects it produced as Creole visibility reveals the dimension of casta ideology in sociocultural imaginaries (Catelli, 2018, pp. 53-66). I conceive the formation of racial and gender imaginaries of Creole elites as a process that involved *imagining* (putting into images) their own positions of power in terms of a hierarchical distribution of differences organized by patriarchal whiteness. This complex formation produced a narrative of ethnoracial mixture as degeneration, and portrayed contact among "different" bodies as a social problem. Throughout the 18th century, this narrative sustained and justified Creole aspirations to obtain positions of power and eventually govern the colonies. Simultaneously, it produced and stabilized distinct socioracial stereotypes (Catelli, 2020, pp. 197-251) that, in turn, also shored up the vision of a social (and political) hierarchy.

⁷ Literally, a person's "quality", understood in relation with their social condition.

⁸ For more on *Criollos* and the construction of the sector's social power in the domains of science and culture, see Cañizares-Esguerra (1999, pp. 33-68); Castro-Gómez (2010); Lepe-Carrión (2016).

⁹ For a theorization of *mestizaje* as a colonial *dispositif*, see Catelli (2020; 2021).

Casta Painting and Pictorial Genre

The intent of this section is to show that, as the casta painting genre developed, the repetition of certain elements, in spite of stylistic variations, contributed to the stabilization of beliefs about the Black, Indigenous, and mixed (casta) populations, and produced racializing effects that continued to operate as instituted imaginaries, from the 18th century onward. Analyzing casta painting as a genre allows us to observe patterns of systematic repetition that are largely related to its development as a *pictorial genre*. For this analysis, I will follow Oscar Steimberg's semiological definition of the pictorial genre (1993).¹⁰ According to Steimberg, the notion of genre in itself refers to a thematic content, a rhetorical component, and multiple enunciative components (pp. 43-44), all three of which I will explore in connection with casta painting.

First, the *thematic component*¹¹ that casta painting's particular discursive construction develops is that of castes and the diversity of *calidades* of the inhabitants of the New World, especially those of New Spain.¹² *Calidad*, as mentioned above, is a specific term that combines an idea of the lineage (understood in the colonies as *limpieza de sangre* or blood purity) and the social condition of a given person. In Ignacio María Barreda's depiction (Fig. 2), we can observe the thematic component of casta painting. Barreda's unusual rendition depicts a complete series of sixteen scenes on a unique surface. It is unusual because the majority of the series were painted on separate canvases, which is not the case here. Barreda's painting is a synthetic depiction of the main theme.

Interestingly, in a similar example (Katzew, 2004, p. 36), also painted on a single surface, the inscription "*Expresión de las Castas de gentes de que se compone este Reyno de Mexico; los motivos porque resultó la diversidad; y los nombres con que se distinguen todas las calidades: Hecha en Puebla de los Angeles, ca. 1750*" [Expression of the Castes of peoples of which the Kingdom of Mexico is composed; the reasons why diversity resulted; and the names that distinguish the qualities: Made in Puebla de los Angeles, ca. 1750], anchors¹³ the general meaning at the bottom of the pictorial surface. This legend explicitly names the theme of casta painting, which remained unaltered in the numerous versions of the series that were made throughout the 18th century.

Furthermore, in her analysis of casta painting and scenes of customs (*escenas de costumbres*) from late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, Guadalupe Álvarez de Araya Cid (2009) defines the visual semiosis of these genres as:

el conjunto de mecanismos y procedimientos a través de los cuales tanto el artista —en la distribución de figuras sobre la superficie pictórica— como el espectador —en el acto interpretativo— operan sobre la base de un conjunto de convenciones de carácter sintáctico-semántico que administran el espacio y que posibilitan tanto la narración de la historia como la interpretación de las mismas. Este tipo de convenciones contemplan una dimensión jerárquica del espacio, así como una dimensión metafórico-metonímica que posibilita la interpretación de las obras en cuanto discurso. [The combination of mechanisms and procedures by which the artist—in the

¹⁰ Different pictorial genres exist, such as landscape, still life, or physiognomic portrait. These have developed into subgenres. Casta painting could be analyzed first as physiognomic portrait in tension with landscape, and as a subgenre that would best be defined as ethnographic portrait (which I discuss below).

¹¹ I use the expression *thematic component* here to refer to a combination of themes, like landscape or still life, in relation to certain motifs, on one hand, and to a narrative, on the other.

¹² These types of paintings were also made in Peru, though less prolifically. See Romero de Tejada et al. (2000).

¹³ In Semiotics, anchorage occurs when a text fixes and stabilizes the meaning of an image.

process of distributing figures on the pictorial surface- as well as the spectator –in the interpretative act- operate on the basis of certain syntactic-semantic conventions that administer space and make possible the narration of the story, as well as its interpretations. Such conventions contemplate a hierarchical dimension of space, as well as a metaphorical-metonymic dimension that make it possible to interpret the works as discourse] (p. 138, *translation mine*).

Figure 2

Ignacio María Barreda, *Las castas mexicanas* [Oil on canvas], 1777. Real Academia de la Lengua Española, Madrid. Wikimedia Commons.



Álvarez de Araya Cid claims that casta painting reflects two compositive regimes that are key for the genre’s specific semiosis: battle scenes and hagiography (2009). Her article also points out a possible connection with 19th-century Creole discursivity. In a more recent

article, Álvarez de Araya Cid (2019) convincingly argues that casta painting:

se propone no como un inventario de una sociedad ‘variopinta’, como se la ha descrito, o como expresión de un rígido ordenamiento estamental [...] sino que, mediante la aplicación de las prescripciones retóricas, nos encontramos con uno de los primeros casos de construcción de escenas de género en América Latina [sic] en las que las prescripciones para la sátira y la comedia, ocultan la sabiduría popular e incluso refranes –por qué no-, de los que ya no tenemos noticias [...] Para ello, los artistas recurrieron a los tópicos del género cómico y, en lo que concierne a la administración de la superficie pictórica, a las categorías aristotélicas.

Proposes not an inventory of a multicolor society, as it has been described, or as the expression of a rigid estamental order [...] but, through the application of rethorical prescriptions, we come face to face with one of the first cases of construction of genre scenes in Latin America, where prescriptions for satire and comedy hide popular knowledge, and (why not?) even proverbs, that have been otherwise lost [...] To achieve this, artists used topics of the comic genre and, as far as administering the pictorial surface, Aristotelic categories. (p. 25, *translation mine*)

In connection with these observations, we should be attentive to the fact that, in the present, casta painting often operates as a visual reference to illustrate the notion of colonial diversity or the history of diversity in Latin American societies. Is it not questionable that the contemporary idea of diversity, as it circulates in social imaginaries and is visually “illustrated” with images of casta paintings, is imbued and organized by a deeply hierarchical form of social thought in terms of both ethnicity-race and gender? Are colonial ideas about social and racial hierarchies re-entering into social imaginaries in the present through the use of images from casta paintings to illustrate diversity?

In this regard, it seems controversial that the theme of casta painting is often defined as *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* is a neologism that emerged in the 19th century in the field of biological anthropology (Catelli, 2020, pp. 43-44). Thus, it should be noted that using this term to name the thematic component of casta painting is anachronic at the very least. In any case, the fact that the theme of casta painting is frequently described with the term *mestizaje* indicates a problematic relation between the imaginaries associated with *mestizaje* and contemporary Latin American conceptions of ethnoracial diversity. These imaginaries tend to cover up long-lasting dynamics that continue to produce hierarchical differences, and they do so partially by circulating through these images. It is not my intention to suggest or much less propose that the images in casta painting stop circulating or be canceled. Moreover, it is necessary to understand the conditions in which they were produced in order to comprehend the effects of their circulation over time and to debate and question the ideas and beliefs their uses may (re)deploy in social imaginaries. Once again, the focus here is on the ways in which the development of this pictorial genre contributed to stabilizing certain stereotypes about the Indigenous, Black, and Caste populations so as to pry open a critical *locus* for discussing and questioning their racializing effects.

Second, the presence of a *rhetorical component* should also be considered when defining genre. This element comprehends all the formal categories as well as the treatments of the representation. “These elements cannot be broken up without abandoning certain

expectations of recognition (for example, the spatial relation among the elements of a still life or the absolute preponderance or isolation of a figure in a portrait" (Steimberg, 1993, p. 49).

In casta painting, the rhetorical component can be understood in terms of the spatial relation among the human figures represented in the scenes, generally father/mother/son-daughter. The figures are situated in varied spaces, from urban to rural to domestic settings. Despite the varying surroundings, the spatial relation among the human figures in the paintings does not change. Even in later depictions, in which more than three or four figures appear, the spatial relation among the figures that make up each group is maintained.

A second rhetorical component (associated with the first) is the inscription that anchors the ethnoracial identities attributed to each of the figures. In some cases, these inscriptions add a particular sense, especially in relation to a varied set of elements that the painters included as the genre unfolded over the 18th century. The majority of the paintings contain inscriptions that anchor the ethnoracial identities of the figures that, in turn, maintain a particular spatial relationality and distribution. The inscriptions, in combination with the sustained spatial relations among the figures, produce a tense yet stable hierarchy that involves ethnoracial and gender relations, always within a strictly heteronormative matrix.

How did this rhetorical component develop over time? The 1701 portrait by Manuel Arellano, considered a prototype, "Mulata hija de español y negra" (Fig. 1), forms a pair with a portrait of a *Mulato* man. This suggests that the idea that the figures work relationally is, indeed, part of the early design of casta painting (and another reason to argue that these portraits are genre prototypes). Some years later, in portraits from 1715 attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, a painter who was very close to Arellano (Katzew, 2004; Catelli, 2012, 2020), three figures (sometimes four), are spread out on the pictorial surface. The spatial distribution creates different relations among the figures. Each painting contains a number and an inscription, "1. A Spanish man and an Indian woman produce a Mestizo"; "2. A Spanish man and a Mestizo woman produce a Castizo"; "3. A Spanish man and a Black woman produce a Mulatto". In another example from 1725 by José de Ibarra, another of the genre's referents, the spatial distribution of the figures is maintained, though here no inscription is included in the paintings. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that the rhetorical component is not compromised, as the distribution of the figures on the pictorial surface is maintained, along with their ethnoracial identities and their *calidad*.

Third and last, casta painting involves *multiple enunciative components* (Steimberg, 1993, p. 50). Different elements and variations may occur beyond stylistic variation (for example, in titles or compositional characteristics), but the genre itself limits these. A multiple enunciative component can be seen in early works by Arellano, Rodríguez Juárez, and Ibarra. In Rodríguez Juárez's works, a broken color predominates as background, except in the fourth painting of the series, where a few utensils situate the figures in a kitchen. The other paintings by Rodríguez Juárez do not specify location. In Ibarra's example (Fig. 3), we can see the wall of a city or a building that indicates a semi-urban space, but in the fourth painting of the series (Fig. 4), a kitchen appears again as the setting where the relation between the Spanish man and the Black woman is situated. Even when there is no inscription (a particularity that could be considered as a variation), we would not say that these paintings do not belong to the casta genre.

It is therefore significant that, in relation to the enunciative component, over time, certain material and spatial markers proliferated and produced distinct scenes that reinforced ethnoracial and gender hierarchies, following associations that were established in the paintings among the represented bodies and their spatial and material contexts. These hierarchies were also reinforced by the genre's serial format through an unaltered order of the scenes and the repeated spatial relations among different bodies in each of the scenes.

Throughout the 18th century, other painters added more information, such as dress, objects, food, rural or urban spaces, domestic settings, attitudes, and gestuality, that connoted moral characteristics of the different represented bodies. The proliferation of new elements can be observed in the works of Miguel Cabrera, a highly recognized Creole painter from the mid-18th century. His paintings cipher extensive information that previous works do not.¹⁴ In terms of my proposed analysis, it is possible to claim that a gradual consolidation of the rhetorical component (the spatial distribution of racialized bodies) developed in articulation and in tension with elements from a material culture that conveyed difference, always in relation to an overarching thematic component where caste, diversity, and *calidad* converged.

Figure 3

Attributed to José de Ibarra, *De español e india, mestizo* [Oil on canvas], ca. 1725. Museo de América, Madrid. Inventory 1995/04/01. Photograph Gonzalo Cases Ortega.



¹⁴ For instance, one line of research for *casta* painting has concentrated on the embroidery, patterns, and types of fabric that Cabrera painted (Katzew, 2004, pp. 106-109). In other words, his works have been used as sources for studying the material culture of New Spain.

Figure 4

Attributed to José de Ibarra, *De español y negra, mulato* [Oil on canvas], ca. 1725. Museo de América, Madrid. Inventory 1995/04/05. Photograph Gonzalo Cases Ortega.



Stereotypes as Racializing Visual Discourse in Casta Painting

In the previous section, I explored casta painting as a genre and teased out its thematic, rhetorical, and enunciative components in relation to the socioracial distribution of bodies in Creole imaginaries. This section will focus on the question of how the images in the paintings operated and operate today as a racist and racializing discourse. This question gives way to a further displacement from the analysis of casta painting as a historical object to an analytical approach that looks at the images in casta painting as Creole colonial visual discourse and as a power practice in a context of domination. My analysis is informed by Homi K. Bhabha's theory of colonial discourse (1994) and his notion of stereotype, specifically, in a sustained dialogue with Visual Studies. In this field, paintings are not only seen as *pictures*, that is, as pictorial objects, but also as *images* (Mitchell, 1986). From this perspective, casta paintings operate as visual artifacts that produce and reproduce discursive

effects beyond those generated in the context of their production (18th century), and still circulate as images through diverse formats, supports, and media.

Bhabha contends that that stereotype is a “major discursive strategy” of colonial discourse. The postcolonial critic explains that colonial discourse, like the stereotype, depends on “fixity” and is “a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic representation” (1994, p. 91). In casta painting, the socioracial stereotype arises as a specific trope of Creole colonial visual discourse, as a cultural practice, and as a way of construing otherness. Creole colonial discourse’s sustained deployment in the context of the development of the casta pictorial genre affords it the attributes mentioned by Bhabha: repetition of scenes, unchanging order, rigidity in the distribution of relations among bodies marked by difference in space, and progressive social degeneration and disorder resulting from *mestizaje*, especially with Black bodies.

Casta painting constructs stereotypes in a particularly sharp manner through images, by codifying, fixing, and repeating certain meanings in the colonial sociocultural imaginary, that emerge from associating skin color to other physical attributes (phenotype), the localization of bodies in social space (resulting in a visual production of *calidad*), moral characteristics, intellectual aptitudes represented through a specific gestuality, and in combination with objects that appear in the paintings to suggest the “nature” of the individuals depicted.

Certain qualities of the stereotype could be linked to effects produced by the ethnographic portrait, an antecedent and subgenre of casta painting (Catelli, 2020, pp. 227-236). Again, it is possible to interpret the classification of the figures represented insofar as these operate as a rhetorical component of the genre, as part of a mechanism of production and stabilization of differences ciphered in stereotypes, from a Creole perspective (Catelli, 2012, 2020). Rebecca Parker Briennen (2006) has indicated a certain tension between “the real and the abstract” as an essential attribute of this particular subgenre of the human figure:

Herein lies the fundamental tension between the real and the abstract at the heart of the ethnographic portrait: abstract on one level because this person is intended to stand in for the group as a whole or that gender position within the group, and real because of the depiction of authentic artifacts, costumes, hairstyles, and other observable physical characteristics. (p. 91)

All the information that is added over time as part of the development of the genre’s multiple enunciative components produces an effect of verisimilitude that suggests that the human figures and depicted objects *represent an entire group, that colonial society as an ethnoracial group is what the genre depicts*. This is a potent effect related to the stereotype which, as Bhabha (1994) indicates, works as:

A form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. [...] It is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: it ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must

always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (p. 95)

A nuance is in order here as, for Bhabha, colonial discourse generally deploys the stereotypes of colonizer and colonized antithetically (1994, p. 101). In the case of New Spain, a dual model does not suffice to account for a diversity of subjects and a large mixed population with different castes. *Mestizaje* entails a particular level of complexity when it comes to understanding the production of ethnoracial differences and stereotypes. Furthermore, while Creole colonial subjects produced stereotypes about the castes, they were also stereotyped by Peninsular Spaniards, not because of their race but because of their colonial condition. Thus, Creole stereotypes about their colonial “others” involve diverse negotiations and attributions of characteristics that do not simply “fix” otherness. Instead, Creole stereotypes reproduce a hierarchy at various levels that is threatened by an uncontrolled mixture. It would be a mistake to think of these in terms of antithetical or binary oppositions. The idea of “fixity” in the American colonial space, and in relation to casta painting, appears more unstable than the way in which Bhabha conceptualizes it. For this reason, the strategies to achieve the “fixity” effect so characteristic of the stereotype should be seen in locally specific terms, in addition to the relational terms he proposes.¹⁵ While “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 96), in a context of incipient internal colonialism, Creole subjectivities reproduce ethnoracial and gender differences from a more complex locus of enunciation, more ambivalent, than that of Bhabha’s colonizer. This ambivalence is present throughout the genre, as it is not quite clear whether the “Spaniards” depicted in casta painting are Peninsular or Creole (Catelli, 2020, pp. 199-210).

In a painting by Miguel Cabrera (Fig. 5), the “*Español*” man, the “*India*” woman, and their “*Mestiza*” daughter appear in front of a textile shop that, through synecdoche, situates the scene in a market. Material wealth and an image of a prosperous New Spain frame this family scene. The textiles behind the indigenous woman (who, like her daughter, is dressed in fine traditional clothing) are indigenous designs woven by women. In the context of the market, “*India*” is represented as a valuable intermediary figure between cultures in the colonial commercial enterprise. At the same time, if the figures represent characteristics associated with race, the subordination of the women to the Spaniards inscribes them as symbols of indigenous and mestizo subordination to Spaniards (and Creoles). In the paintings, it is not clear whether *Español* refers to Peninsular Spaniards or Creoles, a detail that may very well be interpreted as strategic ambivalent self-representation by Creole painters. The subordination of the *Mestiza* child is represented in relational terms that involve the Spanish man in the painting: her condition as an infant, her gender, and the cultural association that her traditional indigenous dress establishes make her inferior to the man, her Spanish father.

The child positioned in the center of the painting establishes a vertical axis that aligns her in the same position with her *India* mother. The mother caresses the child’s head protectively and holds her left hand. The girl’s gaze moves upwards from below to look at her Spanish father, addressing his superiority. The man draws the child toward himself with one hand, and with the other addresses the *India* woman. Patriarchal power is exerted here on both women, as husband, father, and figure of authority overall. The general sense of Spanish authority is accentuated by the hat’s corner, which also points upward and continues the line of *Mestiza*’s gaze. Notwithstanding the evident asymmetry of the relations this scene depicts, there is a sense of prosperity and harmony that is expressed by the facial expressions and dress of both female figures, who direct their attentive and subjugated gaze to the Spaniard

¹⁵ On the relational construction of whiteness in casta painting, see Catelli (2020, pp. 204-208).

that addresses them both. In this scene, Christian beliefs about gender hierarchies in Creole imaginaries clearly intersect with ethnoracial hierarchies.

Figure 5

Miguel Cabrera, *I. De español y de india, mestiza* [Oil on canvas], ca. 1763. Galería de Castas Mexicanas, Museo de Historia Mexicana, Monterrey. Wikimedia Commons.



Also, Creole casta painting is construed on a stark contrast between *Indios* and *Negros*, the two populations with which Creole Spaniards could have sexual contact and intermix. The genre develops a visual comparison between Indigenous and Black subjects. The scenes that represent different degrees of mixture between Spaniards and *Indias* represent harmonious situations in pleasant environments, both public and domestic, that suggest prosperity, health, cleanliness, and well-being (Figs. 3, 5). The scenes that represent mixtures with Blacks often depict situations of poverty, illness, and negative and violent behaviors (Figs., 4, 6). I interpret this sustained contrast as a symptom of Creole self-racialization and their construction of a deep and lasting anti-Black whiteness. In this regard, it is interesting to

remember that the original sense of the term *Criollo*, from the Portuguese *Crioulo*, was a Black slave born in the Americas.

The repetition of these characterizations is compatible with Araya Cid's (2019) hypothesis about the satirical or "comical" element in the genre that she connects with the customs genre mentioned above. The interpretation that highlights the satirical dimension of the paintings supports my own conjecture that the genre deployed and stabilized racist and racializing stereotypes. The spectrum of ridiculization of the figures and families that convey the principal attributes of each type of undesirable mixture goes from dozy and crabby *Mestizo* children to Spaniards who are victims of physical violence and are emasculated by Black women in front of their *Mulato* children in their own kitchens. In the scenes involving mixtures that contain both Indigenous and Black elements, one finds squabbles, drunkenness, ugliness, dirtiness, disease, vagrancy, etc.

Conclusion

As an effect of its thematic, rhetorical, and enunciative development, the genre of casta painting reproduces a series of stereotypical markers that are based on race, gender, and *calidad*. These markers become more detailed over time. In casta painting, it is possible to see that these stereotypes are stabilized from a Creole perspective during a historical period that was crucial in the consolidation of the sociocultural dominance of this sector over the colonial population. I have argued that analyzing the casta painting genre in terms of visibility and social power allows us to unmask these forms of stereotyping as mechanisms that reproduce these differentiating and discriminating markers. These markers emanate from the ideology of the *casta* system in Spanish colonies and persist for the long duration in sociocultural imaginaries, even into the present.

From this perspective, the formation of the ethnoracial and gender beliefs of the Creole elites are conceived in terms of *imagining*, that is, evoking and creating images of a hierarchical distribution of differences. This imaginary produced and continues to reproduce the symbolic configuration of a patriarchal whiteness, under which a Creole/"White" social identity is conjured. This identitary operation takes place in an imaginary dimension and can be observed in the development of the Creole casta painting genre, in which distinct socioracial and ethnoracial stereotypes were produced and stabilized.

In order to analyze this process, I have made some disciplinary, critical, and methodological shifts. I have approached casta painting from New Spain as a pictorial genre and as colonial visual discourse and articulated critical perspectives from Semiology of Art, Visual Studies, Colonial Latin American studies, Postcolonial studies, and Latin American Critique of Coloniality. The aim of these adjustments was to make visible and analyze part of the tight knot of colonial racialization, which involves the reproduction of discriminatory stereotypes that continue to operate as stable beliefs in Latin American sociocultural imaginaries. This knot is a lasting effect of Iberian colonialism, a process of domination that involved cultural imaginaries and continues to tense relations and lived experiences in the present.

Figure 6

José Joaquín Magón, *De Albarazado, y Salta atrás, sale Tente en el Aire* [Oil on canvas], Mexico, 1766-1772. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Madrid. Inventory CE5241. Photograph Javier Rodríguez Barrera.



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