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A requiem for hybridity? The problem with Frankensteins, purées, and mules

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Abstract

Hybridity as an interpretive construct in the archaeology of colonialism has encountered many pitfalls, due largely to the way it has been set adrift from clear theoretical anchors and has been applied inconsistently to things, practices, processes, and even people. One of the telltale signs of its problematic nature is the ease with which archaeologists claim to identify the origin and existence of hybridity but the difficulty faced if asked when and how such hybridity actually ends, if it does. In that context, this paper offers a potential requiem for hybridity. If we need not go that far, archaeologists at least need to rein in the “Frankenstein” version of hybridity that permeates archaeology and occludes its variable and problematic origins, acknowledge the dangers of accentuating or even celebrating “purées,” and beware of the creation of cultural “mules” in analytical classifications and interpretations.

Keywords

Hybridity, postcolonialism, historical archaeology, archaeology of colonialism, descend-ent communities, New England

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Introduction

Hybridity as a concept and interpretive lens has started to cause archaeologists, especially those working on colonialism and affiliated issues in historical and Classical archaeology, more problems than solutions (Pappa, 2013; Silliman, 2013; Stockhammer, 2012, 2013; Van Pelt, 2013; Van Valkenburgh, 2013). It is a problem shared with cultural and social anthropology (Palmié, 2013; Stewart, 2011; Thomas, 1996) and postcolonial studies more generally (Prabhu, 2007). Many of these problems stem from the fact that archaeologists have arrived at a concept (or at least the term) of hybridity from different theoretical origin points and are often not clear what—objects, people, practices, etc.—can be hybrid. Archaeologists also have begun to universalize and neutralize hybridity from its once political orientations to power and colonialism and, even after disempowering it, still apply it only to the indigenous, colonized, or subaltern side of the political and cultural equation. These problems may have solutions, but these problems may also signal the end of hybridity as a useful concept.

I became interested in the ideas of hybridity a number of years ago, thinking that it might solve some interpretive dilemmas in the archaeology of colonialism and the practice of collaborative, indigenous archaeology in the legacies of colonialism (Silliman, 2009b, 2013). I was captivated by the power of postcolonial thinking about hybridity, in particular the work of Bhabha (1985, 1994). Hybridity permitted a sophisticated look at the ways that indigenous people and the subaltern could navigate the interstices between colonially imposed or perceived categories of difference. In worlds differentiated into colonized/colonizer or Native/European, the ability to find and commemorate those individuals who did things that drew variably from both sides, while subverting unequal power in discourse and practice, was liberating. These dichotomous worlds were not only the idealized ones imposed by colonizing forces, but also the ones inherited by academic archaeologists as a way to categorize their discoveries. This recognition allowed archaeologists and other historical scholars to talk about people, usually indigenous or subaltern, as strategically toying with those categories, as mimicking those with power over them for some social manipulation, and as finding fonts of cultural creativity.

I kept these ideas of hybridity in mind during my study of the Eastern Pequot indigenous community in southeastern Connecticut (U.S.) spanning many generations on a reservation in a colonial world. Since 2003, I have led a collaborative archaeological project with the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation to study their households and community existence from their installment on the reservation in 1683 to the 21st century (Silliman and Sebastian Dring, 2008). Excavations of several households from the mid-18th century to the mid-19th century have revealed material assemblages indicative of their engagements with the market economy via ceramics, glass, and metal goods (Silliman, 2009b; Silliman and Witt, 2010); their negotiations of food choices among wild resources and available livestock (Cipolla et al., 2007; Hunter et al., 2014; Williams, 2014); their architectural

adjustments to incorporate framed-house building styles reminiscent of English and EuroAmerican settlers (Hayden, 2012; Hollis, 2013); their residence in what seem to be single-home farmsteads with field stone fences and piles rather than villages; their bodily adornment with a variety of objects such as glass beads, metal buttons, metal buckles, and glass paste jewels (Lewis, 2014); and their connections to stone tools through the curation of older objects, some knapping, and application of lithic technology to glass on a few objects. I use this case throughout this article to illustrate how and why hybridity fails to properly account for them, despite my initial optimism and the other postcolonial interpretive spins embedded in the project.

The collaborative, community-based aspects have been fundamental to the project's very existence, as recently advocated more broadly by Atalay (2012), Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008), and Silliman (2008). As part of that larger conviction, I once argued that archaeology could benefit from taking notions of hybridity as applied to the past and reorienting them to collaborative practices in the present (Silliman, 2009a). I suggested that we needed more hybrid practices in archaeology, which meant that we not only needed to work on diversifying the number of identities in the field, but also needed to work on the kinds of practices that these identities deploy. In other words, archaeology could employ more hybridity in its practices—particularly the blending of academic and community perspectives—even if the identities of its practitioners continued unchanged. In a sense, this reversed the hybrid argument, suggesting that Native Americans who became archaeologists were not hybrids (which would have seemingly been the standard interpretation of what indigenous people become when they adopt the tools of the powerful or their colonizers), but were helping a community of archaeologists hybridize practices. For example, my Eastern Pequot collaborators have not taken in archaeology as a colonial practice and become less Native American, but rather have added in a new set of practices as part of remaining Native American.

At this juncture, my feelings are more ambivalent. I acknowledge the role of hybridity in starting important theory and practice conversations in archaeology, but not in finishing them. We need to catch up with some critiques of hybridity outside of archaeology and need to ask why archaeologists seem to have fondness for this concept, especially if it is riddled with contradictions and problems. Further reflections, especially given the strong uptick in writings about hybridity since the 1990s (see Van Valkenburgh, 2013: Figure 1), have led me to what is quite possibly a call for a requiem. Even if that proves to be too harsh a sentence, then archaeologists at least need to confront some fundamental and troubling issues about not just the term, but also the idea of, hybridity. Several questions guide this evaluation: (1) What are the origins of hybridity?; (2) What can be a hybrid and for how long?; and (3) Who gets to practice hybridity and do they know they are doing so? Even though these questions matter across the discipline, especially for those studying colonial contexts, I intentionally engage some of them within the context of historical archaeologies of indigenous people in the Americas.

What are the origins of hybridity?

A clear problem with the use of hybridity in archaeology has been the convergence of multiple theoretical perspectives on the same word. These perspectives range across evolutionary biology, creolization, postcolonial theory, and actor-network-theory approaches, as the recent Card (2013b) volume and other publications have demonstrated (e.g. Brah and Coombes, 2000; Palmié, 2006, 2013). Regardless of theoretical perspective, hybridization seems to be a general term that most archaeologists apply to situations when one (1) encounters or has sustained interaction with another group or its material culture or some manifestation of difference, whether by force or by choice, and (2) adjusts to or incorporates new material, practical, genetic, and symbolic elements associated with the encountered group in experimental, creative, or seemingly imitative ways, again whether in coercive or equitable relations. The focus is usually on the materiality of these adjustments and incorporations, and in its original formulation in postcolonial literature, the power of hybridity—or the ability to be hybrid—rested with the indigenous, colonized, or subaltern as they negotiated larger power structures and discourses.

Historically speaking, the earliest and least refined model of hybridity for anthropological purposes is the biological one (see Jiménez, 2011; Young, 1995). That is, hybridity might be defined as organisms of two taxa coming together to produce offspring that represent a mixture of those two progenitors, ones that often lack viability or reproducibility. It was problematically applied to human “racial mixtures” in the 19th and early 20th centuries with negative connotations about miscegenation, weakness, and even races as different species (Young, 1995), and some of those ideas linger in “vernacular” definitions of hybridity (see Van Valkenburgh, 2013). It also continues to frame the biological outcomes of mating between anatomically modern humans and Neandertals. Still, as Prabhu (2007: xii) notes succinctly: “The hybrid is a colonial concept.” Or as Young (1995: 6) observed 20 years ago: “‘Hybrid’ is the nineteenth century’s word. But it has become our own again.”

Hybridity also found a wellspring in studies of linguistics and the process of creolization. Archaeologists have grappled with the ways that a linguistic model of admixture and meaning might illuminate cultural production through the venue of material culture (e.g. Burley, 2000; Deetz, 1977; Ferguson, 1992). These models gave archaeologists some insight into how objects and spaces—specifically introduced ones in colonial contexts—might be understood as speech acts (or *parole*) based on deeper cultural languages (or *langue*). In addition, some archaeologists looked to creolization for actual multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural mixtures in the offspring of these unions (Loren, 2000, 2001), giving hybridity a much clearer physical association. Dawdy (2000) also defined hybridization as a later stage of creolization when materials, peoples, and identities are more fluid and equally negotiable. For her, hybridity represents a more level historical playing field. Moussette (2003) defines a similar process of hybrid mixing as *métissage*, which has been fundamental to the *Métis* themselves, descendants of Native

American women and French male trappers who have been able to secure federal status as a recognized First Nations group in Canada. Finally, within the linguistic realm are Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about hybridity, which have influenced several archaeologists (Liebmann, 2013, 2015; Loren, 2013, 2015) and link nicely with postcolonial theory, especially the distinctions between organic hybridity and intentional hybridity. Bakhtin argued for a heteroglossia and the "hybrid utterance," in which one speaker can mix the speech styles or languages of another to incorporate as their own. Its metaphorical transformation to material practice, and not just discursive action, offers this kind of analytical potential.

Another version of hybridity is situated in posthumanist perspectives. The strongest example is drawn from Actor Network Theory, pulled together by Latour (2005) and others to account for the intersection of human and material agency. Its proponents in archaeology often practice what is called "symmetrical archaeology" (Webmoor, 2007; Witmore, 2007). Hybridity in this vein adheres to the tenet that things and people constitute agency between them in a network rather than with them individually. This requires thinking of everything as a hybrid in some way and then accounting for shifts in the assembling of those connections over time. In a different but related perspective not much used by archaeologists, the work of Haraway (1985, 1997) explores material-human-animal intersections and the resulting dissolution of binaries, such as those assumed to exist between human/animal or human/material, in the recognition of hybrids.

Finally, the more common use of hybridity draws on postcolonial theory in archaeology, anthropology, and beyond (see Baltalı Tirpan, 2013; Ehrhardt, 2013; Liebmann, 2013; Loren, 2013; Prabhu, 2007; Roberts, 2013; Silliman, 2009b). Courtesy of Bhabha (1994, 1996), hybridity in a postcolonial sense offers a direct critique of previous versions of colonially situated theory that considered the effects of colonialism on indigenous people to be those of assimilation, acculturation, or even the more neutrally termed culture change. Hybridity offers a counterclaim of cultural creativity and agency, and it lends more subversion, nuance, and ambiguity than traditional assessments of the effects of colonialism. It emphasizes heterogeneity, especially those between the dichotomies of colonized and colonizer. That is, it positions cultural production in a "thirdspace," with complex mimicry and camouflage (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; see also Loren, 2013; Pezzarossi, 2014; Tronchetti and Van Dommelen, 2005). Hybridity in this formulation strives to make binary "original and pure" cultures an untenable concept and, therefore, to undermine notions of homogeneity, uniformity, essentialism, and boundedness of cultures that have plagued anthropological understandings of colonialism for some time (Thomas, 1994). Despite what others may have done lately to neutralize postcolonial hybridity as merely "fusion" or "intercultural encounter" (see critique in Pappa, 2013), it began as a subversive and intentional political act. For some, it can retain that core if carefully reformulated and applied (Prabhu, 2007).

At this juncture, some might argue that different theoretical orientations converging on an analytical idea—like hybridity—could be a good thing, such as

Hodder's (2012) attempted capture of the word "entanglement" to unify interpretive perspectives drawn from social agency, evolution, and network theory. However, unlike Hodder's attempt, the aggregation of various studies under the banner of hybridity shares little to no conceptual footing, comes from no concerted and cross-theory effort to properly define hybridity, and instead inadvertently strips down hybridity from an analytical perspective (often with political import) to an empirical outcome. In some ways, hybridity has started to become an unauthorized, almost "commonsensical" state of mixture for archaeologists to find. Rather than providing common ground or an intricate web across theoretical perspectives for those who have now discovered hybridity, this convergence is a discordant amalgamation, much like the Frankenstein monster, the quintessential hybrid of literary and cultural imaginaries.

Hybridity, in other words, has drifted from its theoretical anchors. This particular observation is not a critique of all individual users of the word or idea of hybridity, for many are quite clear about their theoretical anchors for hybridity, but rather a concern about the collective body of work on hybridity. For instance, quite a few chapters in Card's (2013b) volume hardly even theorize hybridity but seem more than willing to ride the current as part of the book's theme. That is, some archaeologists are comfortable simply using hybridity to mean a mixture drawn from two or more disparate sources with or without the colonial overlay. Some of this pattern can be additionally seen in the recent *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* (2013) issue on hybridity, although those authors tended toward a more explicit engagement with concepts and definitions (e.g. Pappa, 2013; Stockhammer, 2013).

We do not need to be left with hybridity as a word to *describe* various cultural situations of sharing, accommodation, exchange, modification, and experimentation (see similar admonition in Liebmann, 2013: 32). It should not just mean simply mixture, nor should it refer simply to cultural encounters across "zones of difference" (Stewart, 2011). We do not want it to be an "example of theoretical window dressing and ephemeral vogues in archaeology's long history of borrowing concepts and methods from other disciplines" (Van Pelt, 2013: 3), just as we should be, as Liebmann (2013: 31) opines, "leery to embrace yet another neologism in the already jargon-filled lexicon of archaeological theory." To remain useful, hybridity must help to *interpret* those events. But does it?

Without taking time here to critically examine all of the theoretical orientations to hybridity, I find that only the postcolonial engagement with hybridity has a hope of remaining useful. Yet, even in the more appealing postcolonial formulations, hybridity is not a panacea. Some applications have lost touch with the political origins of hybridity: "In archaeology, despite the extensive use of Bhabha's work as a legitimizing force for adopting hybridity as a theoretical stance, the concept is often deprived of its political semantic substance" (Pappa, 2013: 33). Even with proper but perhaps superficial citation to postcoloniality, this usage has effectively neutralized it, making it just a synonym for mixture, fusion, or intercultural encounter. Others question the postcolonial perspective itself: "[S]yncretism and

hybridity are academic conceptual tools providing an alibi for lack of attention to politics, in a project designed to manage the cultural consequences of colonization and globalization” (Hutnyk, 2005: 92). In addition, postcolonial ideas of hybridity may well reify the categories of colonized and colonizer even while trying to introduce ambiguity and to unpack them (Liebmann, 2013; Stockhammer, 2013). Young (1995: 23) also notes: “Hybridity here becomes a third term which can never in fact *be* third because, as a monstrous inversion, a miscreated perversion of its progenitors, it exhausts the differences between them.” Finally, hybridization can be—ironically—a marginalizing, rather than emancipatory, discourse when applied as it almost always is to the colonized, not the colonizers. This rings especially true when the hybrid outcomes undergo legislative evaluation in settler nations as to whether these communities are real, or authentic, enough. Liebmann (2008) provides a case with the respect to federal laws pertaining to Native American identity and heritage, although he makes an equally compelling argument for how hybridity might be used to contest these legalistic categories.

Whether or not hybridity has run its course may remain up for debate, but the spate of its use cannot continue unchecked. We have to disassemble the Frankenstein creation that lumbers through the discipline. The important message at this juncture is that hybridity must be theorized and analytically useful if we are to retain it as anything other than a casual metaphor. Its origins and ontologies must remain clear so that it can be properly evaluated or employed. We need to situate it explicitly if we choose to use it, and we need to be cognizant of its incompatibilities and problems.

What can be a hybrid, and for how long?

Regardless of theoretical program and differential viability within each, hybridity studies in archaeology and beyond face a distinct challenge in the ontological realm, expressed in the following question: what can be a hybrid, and for how long? An additional, perhaps more primary, question is: what is *not* a hybrid? Although this problem plagues all studies of hybridity, it has a particular salience for archaeologists who have become comfortable with “hybridity” as the go-to concept for resolving what actually may be problems in classificatory schemes.

What practice, material, or idea does not involve the influence or mixture of something or someone else? Can anything be truly invented anew that does not result, in some form or fashion, from other prior influences, materials, or inspirations (see Jiménez, 2011)? Are there really “pure” antecedents—that is, nonhybrids themselves—that can be mixed (see Stockhammer, 2013)? Liebmann (2015) offers one solution by making difference, not purity, that which defines a hybrid potential, but it begs the question of how much difference is required for hybridity to arise. However, if this question has no real answer and everything ends up being hybrid, then it is unlikely that the term or concept will have any use to archaeology or allied disciplines trying to explain culture and the past. As Pappa (2013: 35) stated, “Each and every culture can be conceived of as hybrid in the

sense of having been formed in interaction with its cultural environs, whether to a small or large extent.” Stewart (2011: 52) makes a similar statement: “Calling a religion ‘syncretic,’ or a culture ‘hybrid,’ is thus not much of a revelation for scholarship; there is little triumph in affixing a label of mixed on social forms.”

The issue can be considered on a more ontological and classificatory level, as Palmié (2013: 465) has argued: “‘Hybrids’ and ‘hybridity’ are always and everywhere the products of the operation of classificatory regimes (Douglas, 1972). As Latour (1993) points out, the more one strives for classificatory purity, the more ‘hybrids’ will begin to multiply.” Stockhammer (2013) observes similarly that the concept of a hybrid has often been deployed to identify those things that elude standard classifications, that fall outside of expected “pure” states. Stated more forcefully, perhaps hybrids do not exist in the past or present at all but instead only in the spaces between our categories of analysis. “We force the hybrid to speak and propose that it has always done so. We forget the genesis of this category and try to emphasize the particular character of the hybrid” (Stockhammer, 2013: 14). Perhaps the Frankenstein metaphor suits this creation as well. These observations could very well end the conversation about hybridity and serve as a true requiem.

Assuming the concept remains salvageable, at least for the sake of discussion here, these points raise the additional question of what can be hybrid. What cultural products or entities can be hybrid: objects, material conglomerations (e.g. architecture), classes of artifacts, practices, individuals, collectives, identities, languages, cultures? Archaeologists, with their materialist bent, tend to prefer hybridity as a framework for objects, hence a central focus by many on “hybrid material culture” (e.g. Card, 2013a; Cordell, 2013; Deagan, 2013; Harrison-Buck et al., 2013; Naum, 2012), although some venture into the realm of hybrid people (Klaus, 2013). Archaeologists also tend to focus on the production of material culture, rather than its use, presumably because these moments are believed to materialize the interaction of multiple sources inherent in their definitions of hybrid. For example, “I suspect that most archaeologists are more comfortable, as I am myself, with an operational definition of hybrid material culture that begins with the recognition of multicultural amalgamation in the *production* of the material in question” (Deagan, 2013: 262, emphasis added). This may be more palliative and likely easier to manage interpretively and may explain its popularity among archaeologists, but an overreliance on origins instead of practices (or similarly, production instead of consumption and use) sits at the core of many interpretive problems in archaeology, especially the archaeology of colonialism (Silliman, 2010).

As a result, the scale and directionality of application needs some resolution. As an example of this conundrum, we can consider this framework as it might be applied to Native American strategic accommodations to European colonialism. Would those individuals—such as the Eastern Pequot on a reservation in southern New England—who blended different cultural items or practices be considered hybrids, or could they be seen as performing hybrid practices or using hybrid things? Would we consider only certain artifacts, such as flaked glass, as hybrids

due to their blended technologies of production and materials, or would we also consider hybrid those unmodified objects, like European ceramics, if used in novel ways or even “traditional” technologies, like stone tools, used for new tasks?

Most archaeologists prefer hybridity as a reference for the modified objects (but see Ehrhardt, 2013: 372). Such a preference leads frequently to a search for those particular kinds of objects in collections (Loren, 2015). This search reifies those mixed hybrid forms as a true signifier of culture, creativity, and colonialism; as a mark of being uniquely indigenous in a colonial context. Most of us who work on colonial-period indigenous sites could likely admit to wanting to find that projectile point or scraper made of bottle or window glass. Yet what does the prioritization of those typically quite small percentages of overall assemblages say about the rest of the collection? It sidelines the bulk of everyday life in place of a few iconic objects, and it ensures that the so-called nonhybrid objects continue to stand as emblems of the categories to be hybridized: Native and European.

And what does it say about ongoing cultural practice? In the case of objects like worked glass, the designation draws our gaze to those hybrid practices or objects that emerge from particular antecedents during encounters between cultural difference but that do *not* typically found new traditions. They become fleeting phantoms of creative adjustment rather than obvious links in a persistent chain. Admittedly, this is not the case with all “hybrid material culture,” duly noted by Deagan (2013: 274) when she claims that “hybridity in material culture. . . eventually evolves into normativeness.” Yet, perhaps hybridity has different interpretive implications depending on whether its emblems became a recognizable part of long-term cultural currents or only flashed briefly but powerfully to garner our attention and perhaps the attention of those engaging with the objects at the time.

In the Eastern Pequot archaeological collections, these so-called hybrid objects such as worked glass are few, situated among manifold more objects from European sources, such as nails, glass bottles, ceramic vessels, iron kettles, buttons, buckles, and pipes—plus an interesting small array of locally made and curated items of stone and metal. If these rare objects are called hybrids, I run the risk of restoring the vast majority of their material assemblages into the category of “European” objects, which is necessary to buttress the duality behind the hybrid. This move would undermine all arguments that I have made to date about these Eastern Pequot households (e.g. Silliman, 2009a)—that is, that all of the materials are “Eastern Pequot artifacts” because they occur in their households, on their lands, as a result of their practices. In effect, making the hybrid object represent solely, rather than partially, their indigeneity reduces the complex materiality and negotiations of their cultural existence and community life on the reservation and renders them *less* indigenous by definition given the bulk of other material objects and the relatively short-lived existence of these hybrid objects in their cultural history.

Herein lies a cautionary tale: The hybrid object might seem to be a revealing category in those assemblages when presumed “Native” material culture still dominates, as it shows unique engagements with new materials and technologies, but it

might become a damning object in collections overrun by “nonhybrid” materials deriving from the production and consumption contexts of the modern world. The latter swamping has the effect of extinguishing those momentary bright flashes. This does not mean we should ignore those practices of intersecting cultural traditions represented by these objects, particularly since my experience in a collaborative context suggests that indigenous community partners may relish those particular items as connections to an earlier time, as markers of certain strands of their indigeneity, as something not quite “globalized.” What we should do, however, is avoid making them badges of hybridity as a universal process and examine thoughtfully if the excitement they generate today is as much of a historical phenomenon as it is a contemporary one. The latter cuts right to the chase of whether hybridity is something actually negotiated and performed by people in the past or engendered by certain kinds of politically charged classifications.

One way to answer those questions is to attend to another ontological dilemma: Is hybridity a quality (something that can be expressed or possessed) or a state (something that is or is not), or as Hayes (2013: 427) frames it, process or product? If we retain the word, I recommend that hybridity be considered as a social practice and a quality so that it can be used to accentuate moments of transformation, change, and creativity at the hands of social agents—much like Van Dommelen (2005) emphasized with hybridization rather than just hybridity—instead of placing entities such as people and things into less-than-precise and much-too-durable categories that have political effect. Otherwise, if hybridity applies to peoples and things as a state, we would need to know when something or someone is no longer hybrid and how long it or they should be compared to a preexisting state. If hybridity is applied to moments of transition, as assumed by many who use it, we would need to know the duration of such transitions. These remain understudied if not outright neglected. Archaeologists tend to have a good sense of when such transitions that they might deem hybridity begin but not much clarity about when they end. This gap results, in part, from archaeologists’ tendency to end their studies at a convenient period, often well before the present or the “end of the transition.” Although Stewart (2011: 53) claims that the question of when hybridity ends is an unpersuasive “straw man” argument against hybridity, I contend that it forces the hand of an ambiguous concept.

Consider the case of Native American and colonial interactions again. If one were to consider Native American societies, like the Eastern Pequot, that adjusted to colonialism as hybrids (or in the process of hybridization), when did they stop being so? When did they reestablish themselves again, or when was a new culture in place? Or have they been adrift since then? Are they still hybrids? These questions should make archaeologists rightly uncomfortable, for we need to give people in the past, especially indigenous and colonized people, a way out of the binds we impose upon them with our ontological vice-grip of hybridity. Otherwise, we trap them in analytical frameworks that make them, as Bhabha (1994: 142) would say, “always less than one and double,” or forever less than they started and not quite whole again.

Can hybridity offer a way out, as an avenue for creating new cultural forms? Perhaps this is what Naum (2012: 67–68) attempted to do by suggesting that hybridity meant “the creation of new material forms and social attitudes,” or what Deagan (2013: 271–272) highlighted as the transition from “hybrid” to “traditional” with *cerámica criolla* in Latin America where once blended ceramic production styles became normalized in household life. Or perhaps this is what Stewart (2011: 53) sought when he stated that

[h]ybridity must be understood against the flow of time as a particular moment when exogenous traditions appear new and different to each other. After a while, when hybrids are formed, they become their own new entities perceived as zones of difference to other hybrid entities.

They are, in effect, “crystallized” (Stewart, 2011: 54). Yet, what indices can we use to identify that transition, and would people in the past have recognized those thresholds? For me, the notion of hybridity is not capable of doing this on its own—it requires some engagement with postcolonialism, practice, performance, ethnogenesis, or other concepts.

More problematic at this juncture, however, is the dilemma of distinguishing hybridity from culture change as commonly understood (Deagan, 2013: 261). Is it only the presence of different people and materials that distinguishes hybridity from general culture change? If so, how do we distinguish enough difference (as noted earlier), and how do we not fall into the trap of assuming the mechanisms or at least impetus for change come from the outside? So, for example again in southern New England in periods leading to the Eastern Pequot colonial context, did shifts in Native mobility patterns in the much deeper New England past (see Dincauze, 1990; McBride, 1994) represent just cultural change instead of hybridity? Did the introduction of corn and beginning of the “Late Woodland” about a millennium ago constitute culture change or also hybridity since corn was from somewhere else, namely neighbors to the southwest? Or did hybridity begin only when colonists appeared? Most archaeologists would have a hard time answering these questions with a hybridity lens and that may be because we are asking the wrong questions.

Another more radical question rises at this juncture. Can we even be sure that hybridity relates more fundamentally to cultural change than to cultural continuity? I have suggested elsewhere that the dichotomous poles of change and continuity may mask the general process of community or cultural persistence (Silliman, 2009b), and this applies equally to the issue of hybridity. Archaeological ways of talking about hybridity tend to link it to cultural change and often disruption, but this is a moot linkage. Could hybridity be a way of staying the same, culturally speaking? Some archaeologists have done an excellent job in drawing out this possibility of changing to stay the same (Hodge, 2005; Liebmann, 2002; Pezzarossi, 2014; Prince, 2002; Baltalı Tirpan, 2013). But who judges this—archaeologists looking backward or past social actors looking both forward and backward?

These difficulties underscore why hybridity should not be applied as a label or category and should not be applied to people or things, but rather be understood, if used at all, to refer to practices anchored in social memory and multiscalar explorations of culture change and continuity (see Tronchetti and Van Dommelen, 2005; Van Dommelen, 2005). These practices can emphasize experimentation, innovation, creativity, and fusion, but our understandings of them must pay close attention to the cultural trajectories leading to and from those moments of entanglement. Hybridity tends to draw perhaps too much attention to the short-term mixing of cultural elements and thereby emphasizes transformation and alteration—what I have called the short *purée* (Silliman, 2012). However, these processes or moments may, and likely do, connect to the long *durée* trajectories of culture before those moments or, more neglected by archaeologists, after those moments. The “after” matters if we are concerned—as we should be—about the links between past and present and about the contemporary communities that descend and persist from these so-called hybrid, or short *purée*, moments.

Who gets to practice hybridity, and do they know they are doing so?

Some of the problems with hybridity lie in the definition and formulation, but other problems inhabit its imbalanced application. That is, who gets to practice hybridity, and do they know they are doing it? With perhaps the rarest of exception, archaeologists and other researchers do not apply ideas of hybridity to the colonizer, choosing instead to apply it to the colonized. Some have talked about ethno-genesis (Voss, 2008) and transculturation (Deagan, 1998) in those contexts, but not many have opted for hybridity. Admittedly, the theoretical source of the more viable versions of hybridity—postcolonialism—developed the concept to be about those who struggled, maneuvered, endured, and worked through colonialism, empire, and attempted domination. Hybridity was therefore a political project about the power of discourse and practice, past and present. However, if hybridity continues to be severed (inappropriately, I might add) from its postcolonial origins by many archaeologists, should it remain one-sided? Not considering the implications of doing so problematically repoliticizes a subtly depoliticized concept.

Retaining an idea of hybridity *as practice* might permit a continued focus on how the colonized, the subaltern, and the indigenous contested and negotiated categories of difference. That is, hybridity could be a reference to an active social and cultural strategy, and not just an observation about objects combining different technological or cultural traditions, since the latter may well be just a creative update to notions of acculturation. Yet, we would have to confront tough questions posed by Pappa (2013: 35):

Is the person partaking in practices that we define as “hybrid”, conscious of their actions or were these actions already so deeply embedded in an (already) hybrid cultural context that no such consciousness could have been at play? Is the hybridity

of practices or material culture hybrid through the archaeologist's eyes or did it appear in such a way to their agents too?

As noted earlier, this requires distinguishing between 'our' notions of hybridity and past people's actions that may have admitted pursuing what we now term hybridity. Confronting the ontological dilemma of categories discussed earlier comes back into play. It also requires asking whether hybridity as practiced is intentional or subconscious, strategic or quotidian, momentary or durable. The former takes the discussion back to Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about conscious and unconscious hybridity, as also utilized by Liebmann (2015). For archaeologists and other scholars who use the associated concepts of mimicry and mockery as part of their version of postcolonial hybridity (e.g. Loren, 2013; Pezzarossi, 2014), how they relate to intentional action in the past have been much clearer.

Yet, if—a big “if”—we can feel comfortable defining hybridity as social action in the past (and not only our name for it now), why is it that only those we call colonized, subaltern, or indigenous have the chance to be hybrid or practice hybridity? And, is this truly “a chance” in the past, or is it a present political burden hoisted on them? Are we acknowledging power and resistance by calling these hybridity as postcolonial theorists have encouraged, or are we marginalizing their experiences, setting them apart from others undergoing cultural change with different origins, tempos, and materials that receive a different name for the process? Stated differently, why do Native Americans who adopt some versions of European technology or material culture have to be seen through a hybridity lens, but those European colonists who did the same in reverse either fall into a different category altogether or simply remain who they are with the additions unworthy of comment? The latter is insidious, as it sets up a kind of default against which the hybrids—those worthy of remark—are compared.

Archaeologists are quick to talk about hybridity when Native Americans adopted cattle into their lifestyles, or worked a piece of window glass, or built a traditional wooden structure with glass window panes and nails. Yet, what about those European colonists who adopted corn from the indigenous people of the Americas, or the Italians who added New World tomatoes to their cuisine, or the various colonists across the Americas who used Chinese porcelain in their everyday lives? Were they also hybrids? In many versions of hybridity that have come to ignore power, it seems that they would have to be. Are they still? No one asks that question because these historical contexts have not undergone the same kind of culture change/continuity scrutiny as those for indigenous and other colonized peoples. To many with European cultural heritages, Italians became more Italian with the addition of tomatoes, Irish became more Irish with potatoes, and Americans became more (or finally?) American with the new materialities they encountered and even with the old British aspects that they retained. As for the indigenous people in the same overarching contexts, to this same audience they became *less* Native American as they adopted new things, especially when the “hybrid objects” that generate excitement are those not seen as adding

to long-term cultural practices (unlike the foods mentioned earlier). Admittedly, archaeologists have done much to alter that narrative course, but only recently and certainly not enough.

Therefore, as much as we need perspectives that help to identify the practices and struggles of those with silenced voices, we need to be ready to defend why these same perspectives are not also applicable to those with dominant voices and social power. I cannot justify that convincingly for hybridity, unless situated firmly—rather than just nominally—in a postcolonial framework. Otherwise, we may commit symbolic violence on those we otherwise believe to be elevating and celebrating. Archaeologists may lock them into an inescapable state by no longer talking about their histories beyond the “hybrid moment,” the one we emphasize for our own research but cannot often even bracket with an endpoint or cannot properly connect to community persistence. As a result, we may leave them with the responsibility for explaining to others in a contemporary setting why they have legitimacy as a community today when we have bound them academically and historically to an untenable and permanently mixed state of existence. Even worse, we may have metaphorically transformed certain groups of people into “cultural mules,” the classic icon of biological hybridity that descends from two parentages (male donkey and female horse) and cannot produce viable offspring. Mules stand as interesting challenges to taxonomic categories and valued creatures in their own right, much like our interpretive engagement with hybridity in archaeology and anthropology, but mules are forever confined to their own lifespan and incapable of continuing their line. We must be cautious not to unintentionally condemn indigenous cultures and communities to a similar fate.

Conclusion

At this juncture, hybridity is poised to ultimately fail as anything truly useful for archaeologists. As Thomas (1996: 9) stated almost 20 years ago: “Hybridity is almost a good idea, but not quite.” In sum, the imbalance of its application, even within postcolonial contexts, is problematic, especially in the aftermath of its political neutralization. Hybridity creates durable hybrids in what should be only a moment in ongoing cultural trajectories, largely in the prioritization of production over consumption. Hybridity’s assumed link to cultural change more than continuity has inconsistencies and can generate political and interpretive fallout. As articulated by Prabhu (2007: xiv), “it is questionable to have recourse to a disembodied notion of hybridity in an attempt to resolve conflicting situations where the inequalities of the colonial period continue to play out, even if modified or radically transformed through newer forces.” In addition, the inability to identify when hybridity actually ends leaves us in an interpretive bind that we cannot simply ignore by stopping archaeological and historical studies at a moment in time convenient to researchers. Moreover, I have to agree with Palmié (2013) and Stockhammer (2013) that a “hybrid” may well be a function of our own overwrought classification schemes rather than something fundamentally felt, meant, or

practiced in the past. As Loren (2015) identifies, museum cataloging and displays further reify hybridity as a third category that does not fall into either “indigenous/Native” or “colonial/European.” Instead of simply debating hybridity and its semantics, we need better alignment of our notion of past realities with those who lived them rather than the reification of the spaces between our typologies as a simulacrum of that lived experience.

These problems seem insurmountable. If archaeologists abandon hybridity, what is its replacement? Some have argued for versions of entanglement (Dietler, 2010; Hitchcock and Maeir, 2013; Langin-Hooper, 2013; Martindale, 2009; Stockhammer, 2012, 2013). Unlike hybridity, entanglement provides a view of how things, peoples, and practices intertwine in certain circumstances to produce new forms without requiring them to remain that way indefinitely. It also applies a term to the product that does not bind it to an entangled state; talking about hybridity tends to lead to discussions of people, cultures, and objects as hybrids, but applying entanglement does not lead to “entangles.” This is a good lexical prohibition. Entanglement permits different starting and ending points, depending on the question asked, but hybridity usually requires clear starting points and explicit antecedents. Moreover, entanglement may better draw out the analytical metaphor of “roots and routes” introduced first by Clifford (1994, 1997), critically examined by Friedman (2002), and picked up by some archaeologists (Hauser, 2011; Liebmann, 2008). That said, entanglement offers even less theoretical footing than hybridity does, despite Hodder’s (2012) attempts to make it a theory of things. Instead, entanglement remains a heuristic and a metaphor, but perhaps a better one than hybridity (Stockhammer, 2012, 2013).

One potential way out of this predicament may be the concept of ethnogenesis (Cipolla, 2013; Clifford, 2004; Hill, 1996; Voss, 2008), but it has only very limited applicability to those contexts where new cultural forms are consciously articulated and typically renamed by those undergoing the process. Example includes the appearance of *Californios* in 18th- and 19th-century Spanish and then Mexican California (Voss, 2008) and the transformation of amalgamated New England Native American groups in the late 18th and early 19th century into the community of Brothertown Indians in Wisconsin (Cipolla, 2013). If hybridity is seen as part of what initiates or contextualizes these change, the notion of ethnogenesis may turn a dead-end hybrid state celebrated for its creativity into a process that leads to new cultural forms, but only with attention to political effect of emphasizing newness and change.

Other options might be the concept of persistence (Panich, 2013; Silliman, 2009b) or survivance (Silliman, 2014) or even the “tinkering” part of Martindale’s (2009) version of entanglement, as these situate communities in their ongoing trajectories and acknowledge that if we can attribute a valence of change or continuity, then the cultural entity continues to exist. Such perspectives seek temporal and analytical scales that balance both the decimation and celebration of mixture (the short *purée*) and the deeper histories (the long *durée*) that

inform people's actions and extend past those periods of mixing (Silliman, 2012). In so doing, they unpack the change/continuity dichotomy, as well as similar ones embedded in colonizer/colonized and European/Indigenous, thereby obviating hybridity as a necessary interpretive intervention to bridge what are not dualisms, but multiply intersecting vectors. Yet, caution is required as these frameworks could fall back on a notion of problematic cultural essentialisms, which can cause more interpretive, political, and ontological problems than hybridity.

Finally, some versions of "assemblage theory" (DeLanda, 2006) may offer yet another correction to the tendencies latent in hybridity (e.g. Harrison, 2011, 2013). Law Pezzarossi (2014) offers a tantalizing glimpse of its possibilities, as she uses it to frame the practice of wood-splint basket-making among Native Nipmuc peoples in 19th-century Massachusetts. Rather than falling into the traps of innovation and tradition as problematic dichotomies or using hybridity to try to escape it, Law Pezzarossi (2014) looks at the emergent qualities and affordances of objects potentially related to basket-making in ongoing but simultaneously reformulated practices of indigeneity. As she states

The assemblage exhibits elements of both change and continuity, but rather than cast the practice of Native basketry as essentially traditional, or essentially innovative, I suggest that the assemblage can help reveal fundamental flaws in the perceived dichotomy of tradition and innovation and its problematic employment in indigenous historical archaeology. (Law Pezzarossi, 2014: 357)

This dissolves dichotomies and better characterizes lived experience through different assembling practices—hers as archaeologist and the user of those materials in the past—rather than tries to ameliorate them with hybridity's lackluster framework.

I choose not to conclude this critical examination of hybridity with a remedy for all problems left in its wake or even in its impending absence. This does not represent interpretive laziness or a preference for diatribes, but rather a commitment to exposing interpretive and semantic problems that prevent more nuanced approaches to less categorical social realities. It will take a variety of approaches to fill that gap, and concepts like ethnogenesis, persistence, and assemblage may well take up the slack in important ways, depending on the circumstance. To accomplish this, we may well have to abandon some of our most treasured classification systems. If nothing else, archaeologists must avoid the fabrication and valorization of Frankenstein-like creations that derive from incommensurate theoretical approaches or overdetermining classification systems, must endeavor to not overemphasize the short purées of colonial contexts and intercultural contacts at the expense of mid- and long-range durées of cultural production, and must not spawn and then celebrate cultural "mules" rather than historically situated social agents engaged in acts of persistence, both looking backwards and moving forwards. However we proceed, we need to stay focused on practices and performances—the ways that people engaged time, space, and materiality with bodies and

things, and the ways they performed, sometimes fleetingly, the complex negotiations that our terms try to handle.

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