Punic Silence: Recovering Mestizo *Voices in Augustine's Africa*[1]

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Abstract: This article explores how educated men in late antique North Africa navigated the linguistic and cultural frontiers between the Latin and Punic languages. Using the surviving corpus of Augustine of Hippo, it provides case studies of provincials caught between their African origins and Roman education: Augustine's son Adeodatus, Augustine himself as a bishop, grammarian Maximus of Madauros, and controversial bishop Antoninus of Fussala. By applying a post-colonial framework of *mestizaje*, this study elucidates the ambivalent identities of North African elites while also exposing the marginalization of Punic-speaking populations in rural areas. Left without the same recourse to appeal to the pope or the Roman legal system, rural Punic speakers relied upon collective action to enforce their will.

Keywords: Roman Africa, Punic, *mestizaje*, Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine of Hippo spent his life between two cultural realities. Born in the Numidian town of Thagaste, his parents made sure he received a Latin rhetorical education. Their ambitions carried him to Madauros, Carthage, and then finally to Rome and Milan where he occupied the prestigious post of the city's teacher of rhetoric. Soon after his conversion to ascetic Christianity and baptism in 387 C.E., he returned to Africa, where he spent the remainder of his life as a priest and then bishop of Hippo Regius. *De magistro*, Augustine's philosophical dialogue between himself and his son Adeodatus, reveals the cultural tensions faced by the two African men who had just returned to their native land after a lengthy stay in Italy. Years later, as a bishop, Augustine had to find ways of preaching to the rural communities around the metropolitan center of Hippo who did not speak Latin.

This article is an exploration of the experiences of educated Africans when interacting with the Italians who sometimes scorned them and their Punic-speaking relatives and neighbors. Influenced by the work of fellow theologian, Virgilio Elizondo, Justo Gonzalez has previously analyzed the theology of Augustine as a product of *mestizaje*, that is, the blending of North African and Roman ideas, which were themselves influenced by multiple cultures for centuries beforehand.[2] Gonzalez aimed to uncover the different cultural strains present

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[2] Gonzalez 2016, 153.

in Augustine's theology, as well as to show the relevance of the ancient bishop's life to Latine[3] Christians today, particularly those in the Methodist tradition, of which Gonzalez is an elder.[4]

In contrast, this article employs the concept of *mestizaje* with a more historical orientation and a broader investigation of Augustine's cultural milieu. In addition to investigating Augustine's role as a bishop of Punic speakers, this article spotlights three other African men that appear in Augustine's writings: his son, Adeodatus; his former grammar teacher, Maximus of Madauros; and a bishop who had been educated in Augustine's own episcopal monastery, Antoninus of Fussala. By using the modern concept of *mestizaje*, this work sheds new light on the various experiences of educated African men in their colonized homeland, particularly through their different relationships with the Punic language and Punic speakers.

Mestizaje and Antiquity

As Mathura Umachandran has argued, any attempt to decolonize the discipline of Classics must "take seriously the kinds of knowledge that are produced from lived experience and from those who have suffered the harms arising from historical exclusions from the story of European universalism."[5] This warning is particularly poignant for the case of North Africa under the Roman Empire, the study of which has long been shaped by the modern European conquest and colonization of the Maghreb.[6] As David Wilhite has shown in his survey of postcolonial readings of the famous bishop, Augustine has long been considered a liminal cultural figure, caught between Africa and Rome.[7] The story of Augustine's travels and interactions with both Africans and Italians has often resonated with those in the modern world who exist between the culture(s) and language(s) of their family and those of their residence.

The author of this article is one of them. I am a Chicana/Latina from the Southwestern United States. Descended from both indigenous and European people, my ancestors' citizenship changed when the land under their feet changed hands in the Mexican-American War. While indigenous languages had long been suppressed in favor of Spanish, the internal hierarchy within European expansion soon displaced Spanish in favor of European languages with greater cultural hegemony. These languages continue to be considered the most acceptable for academic writing in the field of Classics: English, French, and German.[8]

As newly conquered citizens of the United States, my predecessors' use of English was the result of coercion. My grandmother suffered corporal violence in school whenever she spoke Spanish.[9] In order to help her children better fit into the U.S. education system, she taught them to speak in English, while they continued to hear and speak some Spanish with relatives and friends. The result was what Gloria Anzaldua has called a "forked tongue," the

[3] This article uses the gender-neutral "-e" ending because it sounds more harmonious with the Spanish language, rather than the "-x" commonly used by English-speakers in the United States.

[4] Gonzalez 2016, 11: "Thus, in studying Augustine we do not do so out of mere antiquarian curiosity or historical interest... but also in quest of a deeper and fuller understanding of the faith that sustains us."

[5] Umachandran 2025, 74.

[6] Mattingly 2023, 4.

[7] Wilhite 2014, 4—9.

[8] Mignolo 1996, 182, 193.

[9] Similar experiences mentioned by Anzaldua 1987, 53 and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 11—12.

ability to switch between language variants without full allegiance to any of them, a reflection of our residence at the border of two modern nations as well as between European and multiple indigenous heritages.[10]

My personal background informs my investigation of the experiences of Augustine and his fellow Latin-speaking Africans as they navigate the linguistic and cultural borders of their world. In doing so, I do not claim to have a true understanding of their lives or to "speak for" the inhabitants of North Africa under Rome, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautions in her landmark article.[11] Even less can I claim to represent the experiences of the Punic-speaking rural inhabitants of Roman Africa whose voices survive only in inscriptions. The parallel experience of living in the margins of cultures under settler colonialism merely provides a lens through which to read the texts produced in an ancient Roman province.

In an attempt to investigate ancient texts through theoretical understandings of race and ethnicity from other academic fields, this article engages with the term *mestizaje.* Spanish for "mixture," the term refers to the blending of cultures, particularly that of Spanish, indigenous, and (though often overlooked) African peoples that took place during the conquest and colonization of Latin America. This article will preface the term with a note of caution. Historically, the concept of *mestizaje* has been used to reinforce racist policies. While claiming to be inclusive, the mainstream discourse often attempts to erase African heritage, while also seeking to assimilate indigenous peoples into the larger population. The act of mixing races has long been appropriated as a tool for "improving" the perceived inferior groups by contact with European blood and culture.[12]

At the same time, the term has expanded to refer to the larger phenomenon of linguistic and cultural hybridity during the process of colonization, without necessarily including intermarriage.[13] As Gonzalez puts it, "to be a mestizo is to belong to two realities and at the same time not to belong to either of them."[14] In particular, Walter Mignolo has highlighted the linguistic aspects of cultural hybridity during the colonial process of prioritizing certain languages and certain writers of hegemonic languages over others. While acknowledging the historically harmful effects of the discourse of *mestizaje*, this article engages with this more general understanding of the term to describe the effect of being a colonized subject within an empire.

Although Gonzalez's theoretical framework is a useful tool in analyzing the culture of ancient North Africa, some of his arguments rely upon an anachronistic understanding of race and ethnicity in the Roman Empire. Gonzalez assumes that Patricius's name indicates his Italian descent and, similarly to other scholars, argues that Monnica's name shows that she was Berber.[15] "Berber" is a historically inaccurate term for the indigenous inhabitants of the Maghreb. It is a later creation made to support the myth that a united group had been conquered by Islamic forces. In reality, many different groups of people occupied ancient North Africa.[16] It is also misleading to characterize Augustine's parents as opposite poles with

[10] Anzaldua 1987, 55.

[11] Spivak 1994 [1988], 70.

[12] Flores 2021, 73; Johnson 2023, 820—22.

[13] Flores 2021, 70, Saldívar, Arenas, and Binmoeller, 2024, 2374—75.

[14] Gonzalez 2016, 12.

[15] Gonzalez 2016, 31; see also Wilhite 2014, 14—15.

[16] Rouighi 2019, 20—24.

monolithic identities due to their names. People in Roman Africa frequently had more than one name to deploy in specific cultural contexts, as can be seen in the epigraphic evidence from Tripotaliana. Patricius might have had a more traditional name for other situations, just as Monnica might have had a Roman name for official purposes, which Augustine might not have felt the need to disclose in his *Confessions*.[17]

Assuming an Italian father and indigenous mother, Gonzalez asserts that Augustine would have had darker skin than what he calls "pure Romans."[18] However, scholars of race in antiquity have demonstrated that this practice of tying race intrinsically to skin color, a product of the transatlantic slave trade, did not apply to the ancient Mediterranean. Skin color and other physical traits were one method of marking human differences, rather than the primary defining factor in the way that modern readers might expect.[19] Classicists such as Denise McCoskey and Sarah Derbew have argued for the continued use of the term 'race' to describe ethnic groups in antiquity.[20] Geraldine Heng, in her monograph *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, critiques the insistence on avoiding terms of racism for events in the premodern world due to accusations of anachronism. This forces scholars to "dance around words they dare not use; concepts, tools, and resources that are closed off; and meanings that only exist as lacunae."[21] Nevertheless, premodern race cannot be identified or understood in the same way as modern race.

This article makes no definitive claims about Augustine's own ancestry or skin color, given the complexity of trying to determine ethnicity or even distinguishing between ethnic groups in the ancient Mediterranean. Instead, I approach Augustine's cultural background through his own attestations of his experiences living between cultures and communicating with the inhabitants of Africa as both an insider and outsider. This analysis focuses on the linguistic markers that Latin-educated Africans relied upon to distinguish "Roman" from "African," and to live in the world existing between the two. By utilizing a modified version of the *mestizaje* framework, this article unearths the variety of possible experiences that a North African could have when engaging—by choice or by force—with the cultural hegemony of Rome.

Language in North Africa

As Gonzalez notes, North Africa was already the product of *mestizaje* long before the Romans arrived. Indigenous views and traditions mixed, co-existed, and clashed with those of the colonizing Carthaginians and Greeks, both of whom started establishing settlements around the seventh century B.C.E.[22] Unfortunately, little is known about the various autochthonous dialects of premodern North Africa (i.e. Libyan, Amazigh, or "Berber"), since they were not written in late antiquity.[23] Long before the arrival of the Carthaginians, the indigenous kingdoms now known by the names *Numidae* and *Mauri* show evidence of urbanization and

[17] Adams 2008, 215—16.

[18] Gonzalez 2016, 31.

[19] Nguyen 2025, 161—62.

[20] For an overview, see McCoskey 2012, 68—76 and Derbew 2022, 16—21.

[21] Heng 2018, 4, and Heng 2022, 163.

[22] Dossey 2010, 12—13; Gonzalez 2016, 14; Mederos Martín in Doak and López-Ruiz 2019, 638—39.

[23] Adams 2008, 245—47; Conant 2023, 38.

large-scale sedentary agriculture. Further south, the *Gaetuli* and *Garamantes* established desert oasis settlements.[24]

Roman Africa, which overlapped with parts of modern-day Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, spoke a variety of languages due to the region's history of conquest.[25] Punic had a prolonged vitality in both urban and rural areas of the province, although it was typically stereotyped as a rustic, lower-class language.[26] While it is difficult to determine ethnicity of individuals, Martyna Świerk's work on the nomenclature on inscriptions in Roman Carthage highlights the mixture of linguistic traditions in Africa. Her research suggests that African port cities likely had a prevalence of Roman cultural traditions while still containing a local Punic substrate. In addition, there was cultural influence from migration from the African interior as well as the Eastern Mediterranean.[27]

By the fourth century C.E., many native-born inhabitants were able to speak Punic (sometimes called "neo-Punic"), a language that developed out of the Phoenician language of the Carthaginians. In certain regions outside the Latin-dominated sphere in northern and central Tunisia, Punic was the majority language. However, by the fourth century C.E. it was no longer a language of written knowledge production as it had been previously.[28] In addition to thousands of dedicatory and funeral inscriptions bearing the Punic language, Augustine's own writings indicate the widespread importance of the language in the fourth and fifth centuries. In particular, Punic was more common in the rural hinterlands in Augustine's day, perhaps explaining why earlier African Christian writers from urban areas, such as Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage, never mention the language in their extant works.[29]

Even for those Africans of some social standing who spoke Latin, their linguistic abilities were scrutinized on the basis of their origins. I will mention only a couple of examples here.[30] The second-century African writer Apuleius, in his court speech defending himself against his influential in-laws in Sabratha, criticizes them for failing to properly continue the education of his stepson, Pudens. Apuleius claims that Pudens speaks Punic, and a little Greek, but is neither willing nor able to speak Latin. Pudens did know enough Latin to give testimony during the trial, but Apuleius asks the presiding proconsul to remember how the boy "barely stuttered single syllables."[31] In the *Historia Augusta*, the African emperor Septimius Severus is said to have been embarrassed by his sister's rudimentary knowledge of Latin when she visited Rome from their native Leptis Magna.[32] The emperor himself is said never to have lost his accent, even as an old man.[33] Although the *Historia Augusta* is generally unreliable for historical testimony about Septimius Severus, we can take this source

[24] Mattingly 2023, 166-67, 214—16.

[25] Hobson in Doak and López-Ruiz 2019, 188—90; Daniel-Hughes and Kotrosits 2020, 4.

[26] Adams 2008, 213, 242—43.

[27] Świerk 2022, 163, 175—76.

[28] Múrcia Sànchez 2011, maps 3 and 4; Conant 2023, 40, 48.

[29] Millar 1968, 133—34. For a summary of all the references to Punic in Augustine's corpus, see Lepelley 2010.

[30] See Adams 2008, 237 for overview.

[31] *Vix singulas syllabas fringultientem, cum ab eo quaereres, dona[s]setne illis mater quae ego dicebam me adnitente donata.* Apul. Apol. 98 (Teubner 1963, 109). All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[32] *Vix Latine loquens.* SHA Sev. 15.7 (Teubner vol. 1, 1965: 148).

[33] *Afrum quiddam usque ad senectutem sonans.* SHA Sev. 19.9. (Teubner vol. 1, 1965: 152).

alongside others to conclude that an elite African in Rome might be assumed to be ashamed of less fluent relatives, and that there was an identifiable "African" accent.

Augustine offers brief illustrations of some of his relatives that did not have the advantage of an elite Latin education. In his early dialogue *On the Blessed Life*, Augustine provides illustrations of the friends and relatives who joined him for his brief monastic retreat at Cassiciacum. Alongside the educated participants, there were his cousins Lartidianus and Rusticus, whose common sense he respected, "even though they had endured no grammar teacher."[34] His mother Monnica, depicted as a woman filled with divinely inspired wisdom, demonstrates her ignorance and/or indifference to proper Latin by making use of a colloquial term that amuses the group. Augustine glosses the ableist insult, *caducarius* ("spaz"),[35] as "a name commonly used among us to describe those who are affected by epilepsy."[36] Monnica's other son, Navigius, clarifies that this word is "bad Latin, but still very fitting."[37]

In this brief summary, it is evident that in late antique North Africa, the abilities and choices of language contributed to the perception of one's racial/ethnic identity, both by outsiders and by oneself. Latin was the language of power through which imperial administration, the law, the military, and taxation operated. As a result, a person's ability to speak Latin determined the degree to which they could access important parts of civic life. On a higher level, one's ability to speak Latin like someone who has had a traditional elite education determined the degree to which someone could socially advance. At the same time, Punic also played a vital role in African society in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. In the following case studies, it will be clear that one's knowledge of Punic strongly influenced cultural self-identity, perception of social status, and community cohesion.

The *Mestizo* Adeodatus

Adeodatus was born in North Africa, probably Carthage, in 372 C.E. His mother's name does not survive. She gave birth to him out of wedlock, but while in an exclusive relationship (known in Roman law as "concubinage") with Augustine, at the time a young student with high ambitions.[38] When Adeodatus was around eleven years old, he and his mother followed Augustine to Rome, and later to Milan for his teaching career. There, Adeodatus would have been able to hear the sermons of the city's famous and influential bishop, Ambrose, and witness the doctrinal conflicts of the day between Nicene and Arian factions. The following year, Adeodatus's grandmother Monnica came to Milan and helped arrange his father's engagement to a ten-year-old girl from a Christian aristocratic family. Adeodatus's mother soon left Adeodatus with his father and returned to Africa, vowing never to be with another man.[39] Adeodatus's father, on the other hand, took another concubine while he waited for his child fiancée to reach the minimum marital age of twelve years. When Augustine experienced his famous conversion, broke off the engagement, and vowed celibacy,

[34] *Nec Lartidianum et Rusticum consobrinos meos, quamuis nullum uel grammaticum passi sint, deesse uolui ipsum que eorum sensum communem ad rem, quam moliebar, necessarium putaui*. Aug. *De beata vita* 1.6 (CCSL 29: 68).

[35] Translation from Foley 2019, 33 and 144n90.

[36] *Quo nomine uulgo apud nos uocantur, quos comitialis morbus subuertit*. *De beata vita* 2.16 (CCSL 29: 74).

[37] *Male latino, sed aptissimo sane. De beata vita* 3.20 (CCSL 29: 76).

[38] Aug. *Conf*. 4.2.2. On concubinage, see Arjava 1996, 205—10.

[39] *Conf*. 6.15.25.

Adeodatus joined him in the private monastic retreat. After they were baptized, father and son returned to Africa, where Adeodatus died shortly before reaching his twentieth birthday.

Most of this information comes from Augustine's autobiographical *Confessions*, written after he had been a bishop for years. Augustine's goal was to describe his conversion to the Christian ascetic life, not to provide details about his relationships that would interest a modern social historian. However, Augustine also wrote a dialogue between himself and his son shortly after Adeodatus's death, between 388 and 391 C.E. *De magistro* is the longest mention of Adeodatus in Augustine's entire, massive surviving corpus. As with the other briefer mentions of his son, Augustine takes pains to show that Adeodatus was a bright pupil and carried no personal defects despite his conception from Augustine's sin, a blessing for which Augustine credits God rather than himself as Adeodatus's father.[40] Augustine declares before God that all the words he ascribes to his son were Adeodatus's true opinions when he was fifteen years old.[41]

Their discussion in *De magistro* deals with the limitations of learning from a human teacher and from language, rather than from divine illumination. [42] During their conversations about words, signs, and meanings, the topic of the Punic language arises:

> "Recently, when I had said that a certain Punic word meant 'mercy,' you said that you had heard that it means 'piety' from those who know the language better. But I resisted, insisting that you had completely forgotten what you had heard. For it seemed to me that you had not said 'piety' but 'faith,' although you were sitting really close to me, and these two words in no way sound similar enough to deceive my ear. Still, I thought for a long time that you did not know what had been said to you, when I was the one who did not know what you had said."[43]

Fitting the dialogue's theme, this anecdote shows the limitations of words as a means for gaining understanding.[44] As Donald Capps notes, it reveals a father-son relationship where Augustine is firmly in control, or at least where Adeodatus demonstrates idealized submissiveness to his father. Capps suggests that this passage is also Augustine's exploration of his own shortcomings, shaped by a lingering shame over how he sent away his son's mother when his son would die so soon afterwards.[45]

For the purposes of this article, this short exchange also sheds light on the experiences of two African men who received an excellent Latin education, lived in Italy, interacted with the senatorial aristocracy, and returned to their native land almost as strangers. Their experience is similar to modern *mestizaje* as a state of belonging and not belonging, belonging to both places, and belonging to neither place.[46] Like modern immigrants who have lost some

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[40] *Conf.* 9.6.14, *De beata vita* 1.6.

[41] *Conf.* 9.6.14: 'sixteenth year' by Roman inclusive counting.

[42] Aug. *Retract.* 1.12; Fladerer 2010, 316.

[43] *Tu nuper uerbo quodam punico, cum ego misericordiam dixissem, pietatem significari te audisse dicebas ab eis, quibus haec lingua magis nota esset. ego autem resistens quid acceperis tibi omnino excidisse asserebam. uisus enim mihi eras non pietatem dixisse, sed fidem, cum et coniunctissimus mihi assideres et nullo modo haec duo nomina similitudine soni aurem decipiant. diu te tamen arbitratus sum nescire, quid tibi dictum sit, cum ego nescirem, quid dixeris.* Aug. *De magistro* 13.44 (CCSL 29: 201).

[44] See Bordreuil 2012 for further discussion of the linguistic implications of this passage.

[45] Capps in Capps and Dittes 1990, 88—90.

[46] Gonzalez 2016, 12.

of their language or cultural ties in order to pursue upward mobility in their new country, Augustine and Adeodatus find themselves ignorant of a language that surrounds them once again, both familiar and alien to them.

By his own account, Augustine seems to have dismissed his son's correction immediately. He omits any excuses that someone could offer for not listening to his son. Was the brilliant Augustine uncomfortable studying something from the very beginning alongside his own teenaged son? Did it bring back memories of trying and failing to learn Greek well enough to avoid corporal punishment at school, and his parents' mocking laughter at his punishments?[47] Whatever the reason, it effectively illustrates the defects of human instructors.

Although Augustine does not focus on it, this anecdote also reveals that Adeodatus was learning Punic separately from his father. He had gotten his answer from fluent speakers, possibly some of their own relatives, since they were back in Augustine's native city of Thagaste.[48] Why was Adeodatus asking about the Punic language? Perhaps he was striving to reintegrate himself into his homeland after being absent for so long. For most of his life, learning Latin was prioritized for the sake of ensuring his social mobility. Punic, on the other hand, would have allowed him to connect with the people of his homeland and his other relatives. He had been separated from his mother, and his grandmother Monnica had recently died. When he tried to grieve Monnica's death, his father and uncle silenced him, considering displays of grief to be inappropriate for Christians who believed in eternal life.[49] Adeodatus perhaps sought connection from the new people around him.

Modern Kenyan author Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o similarly realized that in order to effectively work against the neocolonial structures in his homeland, he would need to write in Gikuyu, the language spoken by the working and peasant classes of his homeland, rather than in the English that an international, elite audience could read.[50] In Adeodatus's case, he may have decided to learn more Punic because he wanted to build social networks locally and live there as he grew older.

The *Mestizo* Bishop Augustine

The anecdote shows that Augustine was also learning some Punic soon after his return to Africa. Whatever his initial reasons for doing so, Augustine utilized his knowledge later in his role of priest and later bishop of Hippo. Unlike his secluded days in the Italian monastic retreat at Cassiciacum, Augustine was in charge of preaching Christianity to Africans of varying linguistic backgrounds. Although he could be reasonably sure that his urban audience in Hippo Regius understood Latin, many of them spoke Punic as well. Augustine never became fluent in Punic, but he incorporated it into his preaching in order to connect with different parts of his audience.

[47] Aug. *Conf.* 1.9.14; Capps in Capps and Dittes 1990, 71—72.

[48] Wilhite 2014, 18, suggests that Punic was spoken primarily by the women of the family, while the fathers wanted their sons to be more Romanized. However, there is no concrete evidence that the cultural ties fell along gender lines.

[49] *Conf.* 9.12.29.

[50] Brinkman 2024, 354—55.

Augustine cited Punic several times in his sermons, particularly due to its similarities to Hebrew.[51] Punic appears on lists of languages that Augustine would name to highlight the universality of Christianity and the Church.[52] Other times, Augustine used his audience's familiarity with Punic to explain the nuances of translating Greek Scripture. In a sermon delivered in 406 C.E., he translates the Greek particle *ara* with the Latin *forsitan.* Then, he mentions the Punic word *iar*, because, as he puts it, "it does not pertain to Latin but is suitable for your understanding."[53] Augustine often took advantage of the similarity between Hebrew and Punic to instruct his audience on Hebrew terms in Scripture, such as "mammon" and "Messiah." He was particularly fascinated when he learned that the Punic word for three is strikingly similar to the Latin word for salvation, *salus*, thus symbolizing the saving power of the Trinity.[54]

In other instances, Augustine cited Punic not for any exegetic goal, but to relate better to his audience. In one sermon, he elaborated on Jesus's instructions to avoid arguing over property in the courts by quoting a Punic proverb about giving in to a contentious person in order to get rid of them: "Disease is begging for a coin; give it two, and let it go away."[55] He quotes the proverb in Latin, because, as he says, "not all of you know Punic."[56] Edmund Hill suggests that this phrase indicates Augustine is probably in his own diocese, rather than a more rural area.[57] In this location, Augustine used Punic as a marker of African cultural identity rather than out of necessity for the audience's comprehension. It shows the importance that he, and likely other Africans, placed on the unique cultural makeup of their native land, even while still communicating primarily in Latin.

For Augustine, Punic functioned as a way to bridge the linguistic and social gaps within his diocese and the territories around Hippo. Perhaps it was his way of emphasizing his local status to his audience as well. The well-educated bishop, former teacher in Rome and Milan, may have impressed some people, but it is possible that he was perceived by others as an outsider. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldua gives voice to the potential accusations against a Latina who speaks English: "*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language."[58] If so, Augustine's efforts to speak about Punic in his sermons may have served to remind his audience that he was one of them.

The *Mestizo* Maximus

Although Augustine gladly made use of Punic to relate to his audience, he regularly encountered slights to himself and his native land by men who prided themselves on their

[51] Burton 2012, 118.

[52] Aug. *Serm.* 360A.2; *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 14.7.

[53] *Possumus illud uerbo dicere minus quidem latine coniuncto, sed apto ad intellegentias uestras.* Aug. Ps. 123.8 (CCSL 40: 138).

[54] Mammon: *Serm.* 113.2, *Serm.* 359A.11, *De sermone Domini in monte* 14.47; Messiah: *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.239, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 15.27; Salus: *De pecc. meritis et remissione et de bapt. parvul.* 34, *Ep. ad Romanos inchoata expositio* 13.

[55] *Punicum enim proverbium est antiquum: 'Nummum quaerit pestilentia; duo illi da et ducat se'.* Aug. *Serm.* 167.4 (SL 41Bb: 358).

[56] *Prouerbium notum est Punicum, quod quidem Latine uobis dicam, quia Punice non omnes nostis.* Aug. *Serm.* 167.4 (SL 41Bb: 358).

[57] Hill 1992, note 1 on Sermon 167.

[58] Anzaldua 1987, 55.

Romanitas. The Italian writer Jerome, annoyed by Augustine's questions about his Vulgate translation of the Bible, compared the younger man to the legendary Carthaginian and enemy to Rome, Hannibal.[59] The Pelagian writer Julian attacked Augustine's ideas based on his land of origin, mocking Augustine as the "Aristotle of the Punics."[60]

Despite Augustine's extensive experience speaking, writing, and teaching Latin, even in Italy itself, his doctrinal opponents fell back on attacking his views via his African roots, evidently confident that this could undermine his argument. As Mignolo notes in his analysis of Caribbean poet, Michelle Cliff:

> "Colonial literature will always be viewed as inferior when confronted with the practice defined and exemplified by the metropolitan literary canon. The same language, the same syntactic rules; but the game played under different conditions results in diverse verbal practices."[61]

The fact that Augustine did not even know a lot of Punic was irrelevant: Augustine's race was perceived by outsiders through the lens of language and, in Jerome's case, the image of the famous foreign general who challenged Rome.

The letter of one man in the African city of Madauros demonstrates that some educated Africans internalized this scorn of their native land. Early in Augustine's career in the clergy, a certain Maximus, a grammarian possibly known to Augustine from when he was a student in Madauros, wrote him a letter defending the traditional gods of Rome. Perceiving the Christian cult of the martyrs as a strange, foreign religion in which humans are worshiped instead of the traditional Roman gods, Maximus scorns the Punic names of African martyrs, which are "offensive to gods and men."[62] He compares them side by side:

> "Who could bear for Mygdo to be preferred to Jupiter brandishing his thunderbolts? For Sanaes and the archmartyr Namphamo to be preferred to Juno, to Minerva, to Venus, to Vesta and all the immortal gods? The horror!"[63]

Proud of his Latin education, Maximus states that the new religion of Christianity is a second "war on Actium… in which Egyptian monsters dare to shake their spears at the gods of Rome, but not for long."[64] He coopts the elite Roman scorn of 'barbaric' languages such as Punic to highlight the Otherness of Christianity as a whole.

Maximus treats this debate as a friendly disagreement between peers.[65] He claims that he must respond to Augustine's last onslaught lest "you mistake my silence for offense."[66] To Maximus, they are two Latin-educated African men engaging in a debate within the

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[59] Jerome *Ep*. 72.2.3.

[60] *Aristoteles poenorum*. Aug. *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 3.199 (CSEL 85.1: 498). See also Aug. *Contra Secundinum* 25; Aug. *contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 1.16, 1.72.

[61] Mignolo 1996, 188.

[62] *Diis hominibusque odiosa nomina*. Ep. 16.2 (CSEL 34.1: 38).

[63] *Quis enim ferat Ioui fulmina uibranti praeferri Migginem, Iunoni, Mineruae, Veneri Vestaeque Sanamem et cunctis, pro nefas! diis immortalibus archimartyrem Namphamonem*? Ep. 16.2 (CSEL 34.1: 38).

[64] *Sed mihi hac tempestate propemodum uidetur bellum Actiacum rursus exortum, quo Aegyptia monstra in Romanorum deos audeant tela uibrare minime duratura*. Ep. 16.2 (CSEL 34.1: 38).

[65] Ep. 17.1, 5.

[66] *Auens crebro tuis affatibus laetificari et instinctu tui sermonis, quod me paulo ante iucundissime salua caritate pulsasti, paria redhibere non destiti, ne silentium meum paenitudinem appellasses*. Ep. 16.1 (CSEL 34.1: 37).

framework of their shared cultural background, and the elite Roman disdain for 'barbarian' languages is one of Maximus's methods of defense against his humorless opponent.

Augustine, on the other hand, takes this debate very seriously. Throughout his career, he promoted the ideal of a Church that was both culturally diverse as well as a united whole.[67] It was therefore important to him to grapple with the scorn of Roman elite culture for the often lower-class provincial martyrs whose names and stories were so important to Christian communities. Augustine defends the African martyrs and Christianity by exercising his proficiency in their shared Latin literary education. He quotes Vergil to demonstrate that these Punic names are similar in meaning to important Latin mythological names.[68] The most important point for Augustine, however, is that African Roman intellectuals should not so easily dismiss the language of their countrymen:

> "For you could not forget yourself so much that, as an African writing to Africans—since we are both located in Africa—that you thought that Punic names ought to be criticized."[69]

Augustine reminds Maximus that "many words of wisdom have been committed to memory in Punic books."[70] If Maximus denies this fact, Augustine has a sarcastic response: "you should, of course, regret that you were born where the cradle of this language is [still] warm."[71]

In the words of screenwriter Priscila García-Jacquier, "I must reconcile that the very white of my skin is a product of an internalized self-hatred so deep, so ancestral, I will never be done unlearning."[72] Maximus mocks the Punic names of the martyrs, preferring to identify himself as an heir of the Latin language. He criticizes the language of his native land to declare his allegiance to traditional Roman religious practices and distance himself from the African martyrs with their foreign-sounding names. To him, the Punic language functions as a symbol of Christianity's inherent inferiority to the religious traditions of Rome.

The *Mestizo* Antoninus

Among African Christians, communication in Punic was especially important due to the competition between two churches: Augustine's faction, sometimes called the Catholics or the Caecilianists, and the so-called Donatists or dissidents.[73] As a result of the third and final imperial persecution of Christians at the beginning of the fourth century, the African church split into two factions over the question of whether or not sacraments performed by 'sinful' bishops were valid, particularly the bishops who had handed over copies of the Scriptures to

[67] Sarr 2017, 118-19.

[68] Aug. Ep. 17.2.

[69] *Neque enim usque adeo te ipsum obliuisci potuisses, ut homo Afer scribens Afris, cum simus utrique in Africa constituti, Punica nomina exagitanda existimares*. Ep. 17.2 (CCSL 31: 41).

[70] *Quae lingua si improbatur abs te, nega Punicis libris, ut a uiris doctissimis proditur, multa sapienter esse mandata memoriae!* Ep. 17.2 (CCSL 31: 41).

[71] *Paeniteat te certe ibi natum, ubi huius linguae cunabula recalent*. Ep. 17.2 (CCSL 31: 41).

[72] Cited in Flores 2021, 68.

[73] Shaw 2011, 5; Ando 2013, 198—99; Burns and Jensen 2014, 47—51.

imperial agents as a symbolic repudiation of Christianity.[74] Augustine's faction, which eventually won the competition for influence, believed that sacraments were ultimately from God and therefore could not be defiled by the flawed human agents who performed them.[75]

The Punic language was a necessary part of vying for converts. In one letter, Augustine suggests a debate between himself and Crispinus, the Donatist Bishop of Calama, who had just bought an estate and rebaptized the tenant farmers into his faction. Augustine claims to suspect that they have not gone to the Donatist side of their own free will but rather were pressured by their new landlord. According to Augustine, this debate would need to be written down and translated into Punic in order for the tenant farmers to understand it, highlighting the significant language barrier between these bishops and their audiences in rural communities.[76]

The infamous case of Antoninus of Fussala highlights Augustine's efforts to find qualified clergy who knew Punic well enough to preach to those who did not understand Latin. Details about the controversy survive in two letters: one to Pope Celestine and the other to Fabiola, a laywoman in Rome who hosted Antoninus while he visited Rome to appeal to Celestine.[77] Around 422 C.E., Augustine needed to find a bishop for the small town of Fussala. When his desired candidate deserted him, Augustine hastily offered a young man from his own monastic community whom he later claimed he had not thoroughly vetted. The new bishop, Antoninus, had come from humble beginnings. When he was younger, his mother and stepfather came to Augustine begging for food. The bishop of Hippo only agreed to aid them if the couple separated, because the woman's first husband was still alive and her current marriage was invalid in the eyes of the Church. Antoninus joined the monastic community with his stepfather, who apparently died soon after.[78]

Once he became bishop, Antoninus apparently began stealing from his parishioners and coercing them to sell their properties to him.[79] Perhaps Augustine was correct when he said that the young man, who was in his twenties, simply got carried away by his sudden elevation in status.[80] Alternatively, Antoninus may have resented his separation from his mother, or the confines of monastic life that he was forced to enter in order to survive. In any case, upon being discovered, Antoninus refused to give up his control of the Fussala bishopric, even in exchange for other territories, and took his case to Pope Celestine. Evidently, he placed great importance on remaining bishop of Fussala, even though he was strongly disliked there. He may have had more supporters than Augustine admitted, but the evidence is not clear.[81]

Unlike the other '*mestizos*' of this study, Antoninus was actually fluent in Punic. This skill gained him an episcopal seat and perhaps some supporters in his bishopric. However, the price of this eventual success was his separation from his mother and childhood community in order to be considered worthy of receiving the church's assistance. His knowledge of Punic

[74] Adamiak 2019, 46—47.

[75] *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus*, 5.15.

[76] Ep. 66.2.

[77] Aug. Ep. 209 and 20*. For a general analysis of the following events, see Dossey 2010, 136—39.

[78] Ep. 20*.2.

[79] Ep. 209.4, Ep. 20*.6.

[80] *Adolescentem non multo amplius quam viginti aetatis annos agentem*. Ep. 20*.3 (CSEL 88: 96).

[81] *Ep*. 209.7, Dossey 2010, 139.

worked to his advantage, but he had been uprooted from his community and placed into a Latin-speaking environment. He later took full advantage of this ability to operate within Roman educated culture by taking his complaint all the way to the pope.

While Antoninus was able to make use of the Latin that he learned in Augustine's monastery, his unhappy parishioners did not have the same cultural capital. Instead, their resistance took the form of collective action. For example, when Antoninus tried to gain clerical oversight of an estate near Fussala, the tenant farmers threatened in a letter to their landowner and Augustine that they would leave the estate if she permitted Antoninus to preside over them. Their protests caused her and Augustine to contact the primate of Numidia on their behalf.[82] At a meeting between the clergy and laity, the primate, Aurelius of Macomades, asked the people of Fussala, in Punic, what Antoninus had done wrong.[83] They gave him separate accounts of their injuries at his hands, but refused to put their accusations in their own names, for fear that their former bishop would "hunt them down individually and destroy them."[84] The clergy insisted that they do so, but the townspeople walked out in anger and, according to Augustine, "not even one of the consecrated women remained."[85]

Augustine and his peers understood this problem from an elite Roman perspective: as in the case of imperial law, complaints must be documented, they must be specific, and they need to have the names of the accusers attached.[86] On the other side, Antoninus's opponents were comfortable enough voicing their accusations in Punic and as a group, but they evidently did not trust the Church leaders to protect them once the accusation became official written record. Withdrawal, whether from the land they farmed or from the non-Donatist Church, was their last, best resort against an opponent who knew how to operate among the Latin-educated elite. In this case, their Punic language, rather than a less powerful alternative to Latin, was their means of maintaining community cohesion and collective resistance against the wealthier and more powerful Church leaders.

Conclusion

This article does not claim that premodern Africa directly correlates to Latin American *mestizaje*. It instead presents a lens through which to consider the experiences of subjects about whom we have very little direct evidence. As Gonzalez notes, *mestizaje* enables one to "claim resources from one culture or the other, according to various needs and circumstances."[87] Postcolonial readings of the Roman Empire, and specifically North Africa, have shown that subjects under Rome were very adept at what we now call code-switching.[88] By analyzing the writings of late antique North Africa through *mestizaje*, we can see how educated African men grappled with issues of identity in ways that are familiar to those in

[82] *Coloni, quia eum de uicinitate iam senserant et cum aliis mala illa pertulerant, scripserunt ad dominam possessionis, si hoc fieri permisisset, se continuo migraturos et ad me similiter, ut pro eis interuenirem ne fieret; propter quos et illa et ego ad senem scripsimus*. Ep. 20*.10 (CSEL 88: 100).

[83] Dossey 2010, 154, 164.

[84] *Responderunt se timere ne innotescerent ei quos singillatim persequeretur et perderet*. Ep. 20*.21 (CSEL 88: 105).

[85] *Nec feminarum saltem sanctimonialium aliqua remaneret*. Ep. 20*.21 (CSEL 88: 106).

[86] Uhalde 2007, 36—38.

[87] Gonzalez, 2016, 133.

[88] Adams 2008, 233-34; Mattingly 2011, 241; Mattingly 2023, 562—63.

the Latine community as well as others caught in the cultural clashes inherent under colonization.

Adeodatus, Augustine, Maximus, and Antoninus each sought to define themselves through the space between Latin and Punic in their colonized homeland. The Punic language could be used to relate better to the local community, mocked in favor of Latin to identify with the Roman elite, or even used to gain an episcopal seat. For all of these men, the language was a rhetorical tool through which they positioned themselves within the cultural mixture of their homeland.

The Africans who lived in the rural hinterlands did not have the same ability to move between the two cultures. When Augustine sent them a bishop who terrorized and exploited them—evidently because there were a limited number of candidates fluent enough in both Punic and Latin—their written and spoken words to those in power did not produce the results they desired. They fit among those who face what Spivak calls the "epistemic violence of imperialist law and education."[89] When they tried to speak, the bishops wanted them to conform their speech to the framework of Roman law. They had to resort to the threat of silent, empty churches and empty, untilled fields to demand change from the *mestizo* elites who headed the African Church.

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[89] Spivak 1994 [1988], 78.

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