

HAZAN, Haim, 2015, *Against Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity

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The premise of Hazan's book is that hybridity is highly valued in the contemporary, postmodern world, and that pure products are regarded with fear and suspicion. The "... social perception of non-hybrids results in aversion, distancing, and rejection..." (page 4). If in the modern era such social characters as the migrant, the nomad or the transgressor were seen as spreading anomie, "in a boundary-bound social order, these very figures have become the celebrated anti-heroes of our culture" (page 5).

This is a provocative argument, since it sets out to establish a critique of our contemporary social views, including hegemonic anthropological perspectives. These views are widely shared by progressive sectors of society, among which social scientists - and anthropologists in particular – are protagonists. One could suspect that Hazan's discussion would lead towards some kind of neo-conservative defense of the need to go "back" to clear boundaries of all kinds. One could also suspect that it would engage in discussions of ethnicity, nationalism, or religion, areas that immediately invoke discussions on purity and hybridity. But that is not the case. The author's purpose is not to engage in the highly politicized and ideological discussion about ethnic, cultural or political boundaries. Hazan's concern is much more with types of embodied human existence that are silenced and made invisible because of their intrinsic non-hybridity.

His concern and research focus is on the difficult to translate or even non-translatable experiences of the very old, the autistic, people experiencing extreme pain, or patients of Alzheimer's, among others. Echoing Agamben's *homo sacer*, Hazan states that "the literal, here-and-now utterances of bare life greatly hamper cultural translation" (page 43). Hazan's discussion is, therefore, a take on Latour's notion of the proliferation of the hybrids, and the perception of non-hybrids as those that stand outside the possibility of assimilation.

Extreme old age, for instance, is seen by the author as a condition that is perceived as “...neither quite living anymore nor dead yet”, one that “does not become a hybrid as a result of such ‘social death’ or ascribed liminality” (pages 46-7). Other biopolitical ramifications of non-hybridity are approached, namely autism or pain. Hazan says that “...pain is essentially incommunicable. Because bodily pain resists objectification in language, it is marked by a strong element of unshareability” (page 118).

The book’s argument is extremely focused and solid, and the choice of themes and examples is rich and varied, and yet it conveys a very realistic sense of who and what is placed on the margins of our commonly accepted definitions of what is or isn’t translatable, with the potential for assimilation. In sum, Hazan outlines – and also denounces, since at many points of the argument the reader cannot avoid a sense of guilty distancing from these old, autistic or sick “Others” – the contemporary equivalents of the “Savages” of yesterday.

Hazan states that “...the problem in applying to non-hybrids the grading and staging processes of medicalization and hybridization is actually the problem of translation: because this grading and staging is conducted in the strong language of western midlife culture, it further masks, distances, and silences its objects of translation. We have come back to the critical question of whether and how we can hear the silenced voices of these deadly “others”, and see the true colors of these essential barbarians” (page 133). As a general contribution to Anthropology, and trying to offer possible ways out of some problems posed by contemporary cultural perspectives, the author proposes a sort of collaborative ethnography and social inquiry, in which the respondents should become brokers, “doing more empirical research amidst people who are phenomenologically between worlds – people in early-stage dementia, people in the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum, and so on.” (page 140).

Hazan’s book is an excellent contribution to contemporary theoretical debates. Its focus on particular embodied forms of non-hybridity provides a solid empirical grounding for his analysis. One can only wish that similar critical work on hybridity as a “norm” - but regarding issues of ethnic, cultural, or national belongings – is on the

making by someone somewhere on the *high-functioning end* of the anthropological spectrum.