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## **Cannibalism, the Eucharist, and *Criollo* Subjects**

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“¿y quién pensara,  
que al Fruto de la Vida le quitara  
lo hermoso la razón de apetecido?”  
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

### ***Cannibalia***

Beyond the archaeological and anthropological disputes over evidence indicating that people may have been eating each other since prehistoric times, cannibalism has been one of those primary images, desires, and fears on which both subjectivity and culture are based. Powerful narrations and images of man-eating men have been present for centuries, across many cultures and cultural traditions, myths, tales, and artistic works. As a frequently-used cultural metaphor, *cannibalism* constitutes a way to make sense of others and of ourselves as well; it is a trope that embodies the fear of the dissolution of identity and, conversely, it is a model of incorporation of difference. Cannibalism is not a neutral term denoting man-eaters. It is a discursive construction that emerges as a colonial metaphor for the *Other* during the invasion and conquest of the New World. At first it appeared as a non-European term (*caniba*) used to identify an indigenous group (the Caribs), who by some accounts devoured their adversaries. The word later found its way into Spanish and other

European vernaculars, replacing the Greek word *anthropophagous* and becoming a master trope for the New World. Indeed in the sixteenth century, America was constructed culturally, religiously, and geographically as a kind of *Cannibalia*. Letters, chronicles, ethnographic accounts, laws, engravings, and maps all turn cannibalism into a central trope with which to represent the New World: for example, the first *contact zone* was named *Caribana* or *Caribe* (lands of cannibals), Brazil was cartographically marked “Canibalar terra”, and “Aztec” society was for the most part portrayed through the imagery of sacrifice and ritual cannibalism.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, Cannibalism has historically been a cornerstone of colonialism and of the very idea of savagery and civilization. Nevertheless, from the European visions of a monstrous and savage New World to the (post)colonial and postmodern narratives and contemporary cultural production, the metaphor of cannibalism has been not just a paradigm of otherness but also a trope of self-recognition and a central concept in the very definition of Latin American identities forged within the conflicts of coloniality. The cannibal, one might say, is at once a sign of America’s anomaly (alterity) and a figurative devise for the continent’s “westernization” or peripheral inscription in the West.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the word “Aztec” (from Aztlán) was generalized during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to refer to those who identified themselves as *Colhua Mexica*; for the purpose of this article both words *Mexica* and *Aztec* will be used.

<sup>2</sup> William Arens’ influential and controversial work *The Man eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York, 1979) represented the Tower of Babel of “cannibal studies.” With an incisive hermeneutic of suspicion, his book questioned the scientific consistency of the narratives on cannibalism and accused anthropological discourse of being a space for ethnocentric, western, colonialist ideology. His book disrupted academic efforts of the 1970’s to explain the nature and meanings of cannibalism in so-called primitive societies. To mention some examples, there were attempts to understand cannibalism as a social form of institutional aggression (Eli Sagan, *Human Aggression: Cannibalism and Cultural Form*, New York, 1974), a system of demographic control arising from the need for protein (Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: the Origins of Cultures*, New York, 1977; Michael Harner, "The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice" *Natural History*, LXXXVI, 4, 1977, 47-51), a symbolic ritual by which certain qualities of the person consumed might be obtained (Marshall Sahlins "Culture as Protein and

This essay explores several variations on the theological conception of American anthropophagy as a marker of both similarity and difference between Europe and the New World, between Christianity and the aboriginal religions, and between the metropolis and its imperial periphery. The first three sections review the tensions between the Counter-Reformationist conceptions of the Eucharist and the syncretist readings of religious alterity and cannibalism, found in ethnographic and historiographic texts from sixteenth-century Mexico. The last part examines how in the New World Baroque—within the context of what has been

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Profit," New York Review of Books XXV, 8, [1978], 45-53). Since Arens' book, the veracity of the practice of cannibalism, the "historical" documents that report it, and the authority of these accounts have been strongly debated. The academic field could be described today as divided between those who are on what Maggie Kilgour calls the "did they or didn't they? debate" and those who set aside the question of historical veracity in favor of studying the different narratives about cannibalism. Within the first group some insist on assuming cannibalism as an ethnographically proven ritual system and try to explain it, or pursue 'hard evidence' to reveal different sorts of ritual cannibalism among remote indigenous peoples. Other scholars, however, examine the different roles that cannibalism plays in the construction of colonial authority. Among the latter, anthropologists such as Grannath Obeyesekere have studied the often-quoted testimonial evidence and classic colonial ethno-narratives about cannibals, suggesting their fictional and literary attributes (Obeyesekere, "Cannibal Feasts in Nineteenth-Century Fiji: Seamen's Yarns and the Ethnographic Imagination" in Cannibalism and the Colonial World, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, eds., [Cambridge, 1998], 63-86). Likewise, historians and literary critics have explored the use of the term "cannibal" as a justification for colonial aggression, and have examined the recurrence and representation of the cannibal in European imagery as well as in the colonial representations of the New World (i.e., Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797 [London, 1986]; Kilgour Kilgour, From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation [Princeton, 1990]; Philip Boucher, Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763 [Baltimore, 1992]; Frank Lestringant, Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne [Berkeley, 1997]; Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen eds., Cannibalism and the Colonial World [Cambridge, 1998]; Zinka Ziebell, Terra de canibais [Porto Alegre, 2002]). My book Canibalia analyzes the symbolic articulations of cannibalism in Latin American cultural history, and provides a critical account of the historical redefinition and ideological values of cannibalism, not just as a master trope of colonialism and otherness, but also as a shifting figurative device for the definition of Latin American identities.

called the emergence of *criollo* consciousness—the cannibal is recodified or “translated” symbolically as a *conceptual character* in two *loas* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.<sup>3</sup>

### **1. Anomalous Conversions, Mimetic Hybridity, and Sinister Commonality**

In the rhetorical process of the construction of alterity relationships of *continuity* imply a process of relative identification with alterity. The other (with a lower case *o*) constitutes one particularity within the continuous universal of humanity, Christianity, and Empire; the Old World (European Christianity) could thereby be continued in the New World. Schemes of *contiguity*, on the other hand, define the *Other* (with a capital *O*) as a limit; the *Other* cannot be subsumed by sameness. Alterity is, then, threatening and irreducible. As Hayden White affirms, these two types of schemes, *continuity* and *contiguity*, “engender different possibilities for praxis: missionary activity and conversion on the one side, war and extermination on the other.”<sup>4</sup>

The early years of the evangelization of America were full euphoria and optimism. The Franciscans envisioned the New World as a utopian opportunity for a new beginning of Christianity. Soon, however, a cloud of pessimism began to darken this Christian dawn in America. By the mid-1530s, clear indications began to emerge that idolatry was enduring, and that it was even hidden within Christian rites and celebrations. The Franciscans, and later the Dominicans and the Jesuits, compiled studies, such as Bernardino de Sahagún’s Historia general

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<sup>3</sup> “The *Loa* was a short theatrical piece that at times was shown by itself [...but]—more frequently—it preceded each *Auto* or Comedy and even alluded in the text to this role of prelude or introduction. There were sacred *loas* (those of the *Autos*) and profane ones (like those of the Comedies).” (Alfonso Méndez Plancarte, ed., Prologue and Notes, in Obras completas de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz [México, 1951-1957], III, 503).

<sup>4</sup> Hayden White, “The noble Savage: Theme as a Fetish” in First images of America: the impact of the New World on the Old, Fredi Chiappelli, ed., (Berkeley CA, 1976), 129. This brief explanation of relations of *continuity* and *contiguity* is merely descriptive, and is not intended to be in any sense a taxonomy of models for conceiving alterity.

de las cosas de la Nueva España (ca.1575-1580, pub. 1829), with the explicit intention of eradicating “superstitions [...] and idolatrous ceremonies,” consolidating the Church of Christ “where the Synagogue of Satan has been so prosperous,” and liberating the Mexicans from “the hands of the Devil.” The evangelical effort thus came to be seen as a cosmic battle between God and Satan. This particular vision had its roots in certain variations on theological conceptions of the Devil, idolatry, and sin during the late Middle Ages. The change in Medieval tradition from the seven capital sins to the conception of sins against the ten commandments established idolatry as the first sin against God and facilitated its identification with diabolism by supposing that the Devil was an entity opposite to God and that idolatrous practices were an anastrophe, or inversion, of the Christian rites. This vision was strengthened during the sixteenth century, especially as a result of the frustrations with the evangelization and the anxieties rising from within Counter-Reformationist readings of religious difference.<sup>5</sup>

As Francois Hartog states, the conversion or *translatio* of the Other fails, for alterity persists in various forms, both open and hidden, through mimesis and syncretism. The translated *Other* does not stop being alien, and his supplementarity thus becomes a threat. Within the *colonial context* this conundrum provided endless headaches for ethnographers such as Toribio

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<sup>5</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España. Madrid, 1988, 31, 34, 65. On the theological conceptions of *idolatry* as conceived in relation to the conquest and the processes of evangelization in Mexico in the sixteenth century, see Fernando Cervantes’ The Idea of the Devil and the Problem of the Indian: The Case of Mexico in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1991), 6, 13-19. The demonological vision of religious alterity can be found in most of the chronicles of the Conquest, as well as in the early historiography of the period. Francisco López de Gómara (1552), for example, sustains that “The Devil would frequently appear and speak to these Indians [...]. Deceived by his sweet words or the tasty foods of human flesh [...], they desired to please him” [“Aparecía y hablaba el diablo a estos indios muchas veces [...]. Ellos engañados con las dulces palabras o con las sabrosas comidas de carne humana [...] deseaban complacerle”] (López de Gómara, Historia general de las Indias [Caracas, 1979], 328). Several religious treaties also take up the demonological thesis; for example, the Tratado

de Motolinía (1495?-1569), Diego Durán (1537?-1588?), the aforementioned Sahagún (1499?-1590), and later for historians such as José de Acosta (1540-1600). Durán, like Motolinía before him, was justly worried about the impurity of faith on the part of the indigenous: “Many [Mexican rituals],” wrote Duran, “coincide so much with ours that they are hidden by them” [“muchos dellos [los ritos mexicas] frissan tanto con los nuestros, que estan encubiertos con ellos”]. However, his anxiety was not inspired by *hybridity* as such, which is an effect of colonial discourses and practices, nor by *mimicry*—strategy of colonial power / knowledge that is derived from the assimilation of the colonized in an “imperfect” way that thereby maintains his alterity—but rather by *mimesis*. The latter is seen as a strategy of resistance: *mimesis* perceived as *imitation* (in the Aristotelian sense), but also as dissimulation and *camouflage*. In the same sense that one of the meanings of *to mimic* is *to dissimulate* and that *mimetic* can be understood as *covered up*, Catholicism would be a façade behind which religious alterity would hide. Conversion thus becomes a masking; that is to say, it is a perfidious imitation that has as its object the defiant perpetuation of difference.<sup>6</sup>

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de hechicerías y sortilegios (1535) by Friar Andrés de Olmos (1491-1570), written in the “mexican language” (México, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> François Hartog, The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other in the Writing of History (Berkeley CA, 1988), 237. Diego Durán, Ritos y fiestas de los antiguos mexicanos (México, D.F., 1980), 71. On the term *colonial*, note the general observations of José Antonio Mazzotti: “the word ‘colony’ enjoyed little use and almost no diffusion in relation to the phenomenon of Spanish domination over the New World until at least the second half of the eighteenth century”. Despite the economic, political and social differences between this form of domination and those which have accompanied modern colonialism modeled after the Second British Empire, during the Imperial expansion and domination of America “there were many aspects of the treatment of the indigenous populations that today we would call colonial” (Mazzotti, “Introducción” in Agencias criollas: la ambigüedad "colonial" en las letras hispanoamericanas, Mazotti, ed., [Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000], 8-10). *Mimicry* as it is conceived by Homi K. Bhabha—in the context of the British colonization of India—results in a threat to colonial power and its discourses because in *mimicry* lies the Lacanian paradox of the production of traces of sameness in otherness. *Mimicry* produces a differential supplementarity (the other is “almost the same, but not quite”) and it embodies a decentering mockery of colonial power

Durán spoke of a masked other, maintaining its alterity hidden behind fakery and appearances: “our main purpose: warning them about the mixtures that may be going on between our rituals and theirs, because pretending to celebrate the ceremonies of our Lord [...] they could in fact be inserting, mixing and celebrating those of their idols” [“nuestro principal yntento advertirles la mezcla que puede haver á casso de nuestras fiestas con las suyas que fingiendo estos celebrar las fiestas de nuestro Dios [...] entremetan y mezclen y celebren las de sus ydolos”]. In other words, anxiety is not produced by the perception of sameness in alterity (the *Other* has my characteristics), but rather by the idea that Mexica traits are hidden below the false appearance of Christianity (the *Other* is hidden in the similarity, in the appearance of having been converted). There is no epistemological space more terrifying than resemblance. But when the otherness, thanks to which we recognize ourselves, masks itself by appropriating our image in order to resist, we at this point enter the realm of sheer horror.<sup>7</sup>

Not only was conversion failing thanks to this resistance and mimesis (pretending, hiding), but, furthermore, the Conquistadors and evangelists were finding that Mexica religion itself approximated Catholicism in many respects. The most problematic of the mirroring effects of religious difference stemmed from human sacrifices, since it was assumed that they functioned “under the same principle” of communion. Duran, like many other men of the cloth, was quick to clarify that these similarities existed only at the level of “form.” The problem was

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(Bhabha, The Location of Culture [London; New York, 1994], 86). Duran—as many of his contemporaries—is concerned about religious *mimesis* and false conversions: the camouflaged persistence of otherness. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several texts were published on the impurity of the conversions. Said impurity is the motive of colonial anxiety related to the supposed mimetic masking of the rites of American religions—identified with the Devil—under different forms of Christian devotion.

<sup>7</sup> Durán, Ritos y fiestas (México, D.F., 1980), 79.

that Catholicism defined itself against Protestantism precisely—among other things—in reference to the *substantiality of forms*.

In accordance with the dogma of *transubstantiation*, adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in the *Fourth Council of Letrán* (1215)—ratified in the *Council of Lyon* (1274) and the *Council of Trent* (1545-1563)—at the Last Supper, Jesus Christ was said to have given his disciples his own flesh and blood through bread and wine: “Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (*Matthew* 26: 26-28). The *Council of Trent* was categorical in its pronouncement: in this biblical passage there was no trope or figurative language. The Church argued for a total and real *convertio substantialis* of the Eucharistic forms: “If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue; let him be anathema.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to *Matthew* 26: 26-28, see also *Mark* 14: 22, 24: “And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. [...] And he said unto them, This is my blood.” This supper provides eternal life and communion with God: “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (*John* 6: 54, 56). According to *Luke* (22: 17-20) and *First letter to the Corinthians* (*1 Corinthians* 11: 23-25). Christ would have added on that occasion: “this do in remembrance of me”, biblical basis of the celebration of Mass. Historians and theologians have prolifically studied the history of the Eucharist in the Catholic and Protestant churches. For a comprehensive overview of the celebration of Mass and its origins, refer to the classic work of Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (*Missarum Sollemnia*) (Westminster, Md., 1986). Several specialized dictionaries are also particularly useful: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1907-1912), *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* by Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia (New York, 1991), *A Catholic Dictionary* (*The Catholic Encyclopædic Dictionary*, New York, 1958) by Gerald Donald Attwater, ed., and William J Collinge's *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism* (Lanham,



The topic would become the object of inflamed controversies, among which can be mentioned those carried out between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Even among reformed Christians there is not a single unified doctrine on this contentious matter.<sup>9</sup> Christopher Rasperger's treatise on the two hundred different interpretations of the biblical passage narrating the Last Supper, titled Ducentæ verborum, "Hoc est corpus meum" interpretationes (Ingolstadt, 1577), gives an idea of the magnitude of the controversy during the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Even today, religious historiographers debate the biblical and patristic foundations and the tradition of the dogma in the primitive and early Medieval Church. It is unclear if, as some affirm, for centuries the doctrine of transubstantiation had been more or less minor and believers in general would have stayed within the Hebrew tradition of symbolic interpretation, or if, on the contrary—as some Catholic historians affirm—the predominant position was that of acceptance

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Md 1997). Trent, Ses. XIII, chapter. iv, can 1, in Pageant of Europe: Sources and Selections from the Renaissance to the Present Day, Raymond Phineas Stearns, ed., (New York, 1947), 151, 152.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Swiss Protestant reformer Huldrych Zwinglio (1484-1531) conceived of the thesis of a *commemorative supper* and proposed that the bread and wine *meant*—and *were not*—the body and blood (*est = significat*). He thereby seconded John Oecolampadius (1482-1531), who elaborated the theory of the spiritual and not the physical presence of Christ (De genuina verborum Domini Hoc est corpus meum expositione [Basle, 1525]). Luther was the only one of the reformers to maintain the doctrine of the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist (1527), albeit under the heterodox theory that the body and blood of Christ were offered to the communicant *coexisting in, with and under* the forms of bread and wine, known as *consubstantiation*. Meanwhile in Geneva, Calvin was searching for a point of convergence between the literal interpretation of the substantial presence and the figurative or merely symbolic interpretation. He proposed that the Eucharist ought to be celebrated as the mystery by which Christ is truly present *in spirit*; communion is a real and spiritual (but not physical) supper of Christ (Christianae religionis institutio 1536-1559, Book IV chapters 17 and 18; for an account of Calvin's theories on this subject see John Calvin, the Church, and the Eucharist (Princeton, N.J., 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Christoph Rasperger, Ducentae paucorum istorum et quidem clarissimorum Christi verborum: Hoc est Corpus meum; interpretationes quibus continentur vocum novitates, deprevationes, errores, haereses, contra dictiones ... theologorum ... Ex propriis ... scriptis fideliter collectae (Ingolstadii, Excudebat A. Weissenhorn cum cohaeredibus suis, 1577). See also J. Pohle "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist" in The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 5.

of the real conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the Consecration (*Real presence*). The latter tradition would date back to the first century A.D. and apparently was subscribed to by fathers of the Church like Saint Ignacio de Antioquía (second century A.D.) and Saint Augustine, among others.<sup>11</sup>

It seems that rather than a fundamental difference between two distinct traditions, the conflict emerged from a notable change in the idea of symbolic representation: for the primitive and early Medieval Church, there was no scholastic schism between the symbol and the represented. The *repraesentio*—argues Adolph Harnack—had the sense of *to make present*, and “at that time ‘symbol’ denoted a thing which is in some kind of way really what it signifies.” If historians do not find great disputes or allegations that question the “literalness” of Communion during the first years of the Church, it is because only at the beginning of the thirteenth century did the discussion become relevant and, above all, epistemologically and politically possible. To many, however, the “realism” of transubstantiation was not convincing; the idea that within the Eucharist there was a symbolic representation and not an actual materialization of the *Last Supper* continued to be discussed by theologians, priests, and the faithful during the following centuries. But the dogma was imposed to such an extent that many came to venerate the sacred

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<sup>11</sup> Even though Saint Augustine never mentions the term *transubstantiation* (a word from the eleventh century), and although many allege that he favored a symbolic interpretation (making him a sort of “precursor” to the Reformation), it appears that he preferred the idea of the substantial conversion of the Eucharistic forms. In *Sermons* 227, Augustine instructs: “That Bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ” (*Sermons* [Brooklyn, NY, 1990]). See also *Sermons* 234: 2, 272, and *The City of God* 10:20 (Cambridge; New York, 1998). *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of The Salvific Function of the Sacrament According to the Theologians, c.1080 c.1220* (Oxford; New York, 1984) by Gary Macy presents early scholastic literature on the Holy sacrament and Miri Rubin’s *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist In Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge; New York, 1992) studies the historical and theological aspects of the communion during the late Middle Ages.

forms and to believe that the sacrilegious could literally torture the host and make it bleed. Such a scenario appears in six engravings from 1477 that present, in sequence, the theft of the Eucharistic forms, their being handed over in a synagogue and their bleeding in the presence of the Torah (the last three engravings illustrate the merciless punishment of the thieves)

[**Illustration 2.1**]. Indeed, until the first decades of the sixteenth century, this was the reason for numerous massacres of Jews. Thanks to the insistence upon a thorough exegesis—which had gained force with the interpretive criticism and the study of the Institutions of Roman law and the Bible—the ritual center of Catholicism was defined as a *theophagic act*, or better yet as an anthropo-theophagic sacrifice in which God, incarnated in a man (Christ), is both *host* and *guest* (that is, victim of a sacrifice and also a sign of alliance or incorporation).<sup>12</sup>

With the Discovery of America—especially after the conquest of Mexico, and later in the context of the Catholic-Calvinist colonization of Brazil<sup>13</sup>—this theological debate about the

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<sup>12</sup> Kilgour, From Communion to Cannibalism (Princeton, 1990), 80 (Harnack’s quote). By the beginning of the thirteenth century the Church had already begun affirming its universalist pretensions, had consolidated itself politically in Europe as an institution, and had defined its *Others* (Christianity, especially for Spain, is the story of the European, of the non-Oriental—neither Muslim nor Jewish). The problem of the Eucharist—to explain how one participates and exactly what *eating* means in the Communion—allowed Innocence III (1160-1216) to test the authority of the papacy against “heterogeneities” internal to Christianity; i.e., the Albigenses, the Catharists, the Waldenses, the Petrobrusians and other groups on the margins of institutional discipline who refused to recognize either the priestly power to consecrate or the *real presence*, and who defied the hierarchical authority of the Church. See Alberto Cardin, Dialéctica y canibalismo (Barcelona, 1994), 150. Cardin also recounts how rumors of Jewish desecrations of the host, human sacrifices and cannibalism were so prevalent that even the papacy intervened several times to discredit such stories (Dialéctica [Barcelona, 1994], 149-157). See also Reay Tannahill’s Flesh and Blood: A History of the Cannibal Complex (Boston, Mass., 1996), 82-84.

<sup>13</sup> In 1555 the French navigator Nicholas Durand de Villegagnon attempted, under the protection of Henri II, to establish a French colony (*France antarctique*) in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro. Amidst internal divisions, the Portuguese finally eradicated the colony in 1561. Villegagnon had promised Calvin he would protect his ministers in their mission to found, on the *terre du Brésil*, a society ruled in accordance with the reformed religion. However, *France antarctique* turned out to be a renewed scenario of the conflicts of the Counter-Reformation: Villegagnon defended the dogma of transubstantiation, which provoked the division of the



Illustration 2.1: “The Theft of the Eucharist.”

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colony; the protestant ministers abandoned the fort and went inland to live with the Indians. This failed colonial experience gave way to various ethnographies of Tupinambá cannibalism (i.e.: André Thevet 1557, 1575; Jean de Léry 1578) and to a religious and political debate between Protestants and Catholics. Furthermore, these ethnographies served as a motivation for diverse critiques of the religious wars in Europe and the European imperial enterprises in America. See Lestringant’s *Cannibals* (Berkeley, 1997), and my essay “*Brasil especular: alianzas estratégicas y viajes estacionarios por el tiempo salvaje de la Canibalia*” (in *Heterotropías: narrativas de*

Eucharist was articulated with the problem of universalist imperialism, and was thereby knotted up with the ethnic construction of American alterity. Paradoxically, while Catholic universalism defined itself in Europe by defending the realism of Eucharistic theophagy (eating of god), in America it nonetheless raged against what it perceived as a similar order of materiality in the communion of Amerindian religions.

## **2. The Envy of Satan: the Plagiarist *Simia Dei***

Since the first moment of the colonial encounter, blood sacrifices began to occupy a fundamental place in the imaginary of colonial Mexico. The map of the city of Tenochtitlán, which Hernán Cortés sent to Charles V, significantly underscores the place of sacrifice in the center of the defeated city [**Illustration 2. 2**]. Since Cortés, conquistadors often alleged human sacrifices and anthropophagy to justify the war against the Mexicas and the civilizing mission of Spain; but more importantly, the ritual aspects of Mexica cannibalism prompted all sorts of ethnographic and theological inquiries.<sup>14</sup>

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identidad y alteridad latinoamericana, Carlos Jáuregui and Juan Dabove, eds., [Pittsburgh, 2003].77-114.

<sup>14</sup> Some anthropologists, like Arens, maintain that although there were sacrifices, cannibalism was largely symbolic and sublimated in substitutive offerings; that tales of cannibalism were given by informants who had been neither witnesses to nor participants in said banquets; and that probably they expressed tensions between the lower oppressed classes and the elite political and military “Aztec” oppressors (Arens, The Man eating Myth [New York, 1979], 67-69). In reality, ever since Las Casas it has been noted that frequently the news of cannibals are hearsay reports (rumors and accusations) and that the areas where they habitually appear are those in which the colonial encounter is conflictive. In 1920 Julio Salas referred to American

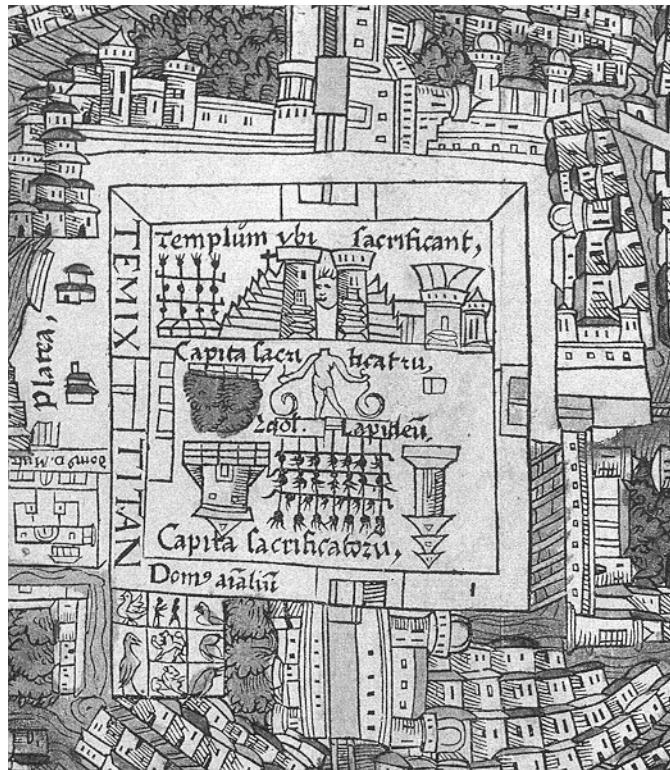


Illustration 2.2: Cortés' map of the City of Tenochtitlan

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cannibalism as a myth (Los indios caribes: estudio sobre el origen del mito de la antropofagia [Madrid, 1920]).

The Aztec sacrifices took various forms, at times with rituals that provided the gods with a gift of the victim's blood.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes the victim, seen as the living image of the god, was killed and skinned, and his or her hide was worn<sup>16</sup>. In other instances, a figure or a prisoner of war was consecrated as a god and then eaten: the flesh of the god was provided by human victims<sup>17</sup>, or else by mushrooms<sup>18</sup>, tamales, or anthropomorphic figures made of corn or *bledos*, sometimes drizzled with blood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Durán associates various scenes of cannibalism with the Mexica religion: the prisoners were “the tasty and warm food of the gods whose flesh was very sweet and delicate to them” [“comida sabrosa y caliente de los dioses cuya carne les era dulcísima y delicada”]; they were sacrificed and offered “as food for the idol and for those wicked butchers hungry to eat human flesh” [“de comer al ydolo y a aquellos malditos carniceros hambrientos por comer carne humana”] (Durán, Ritos y fiestas [México, D.F., 1980], 94). Fray Toribio de Benavente, Motolinía adds that the hearts of the sacrificed sometimes were eaten by “the old ministers; other times they were buried” [“los comían los ministros viejos; otras los enterraban”] and that the bodies were thrown down the staircase, where they were picked up and, if the victim had been a prisoner of war, “they would take him and prepare that meat with other foods, and [...] they would eat it” [“llevábanlo y aparejaban aquella carne con otras comidas, y [...] le comían”] (Motolinía, Historia de los indios de la Nueva España, Giuseppe Bellini, ed., [Madrid, 1988], 82).

<sup>16</sup> During the second month (*Tlacaxipehualiztli*) “they would kill and skin many slaves and captives” [“se mataban y desollaban muchos esclavos y captivos”] that they offered to Xipe Tótec, god of fertility, and to Huitzilopochtli, sun god of war. The principal figures would eat their flesh and they would dress in “the hides of the flayed” [“los pellejos de los desollados”] (Sahagún, Historia general [Madrid, 1988], 82, 107-111). Likewise, in honor of the goddess Toci, mother of the gods, they would skin a woman (Historia general [Madrid, 1988], 91, 147-152).

<sup>17</sup> In accordance with the informants of Sahagún, the offering of the human victims was done in different months: for example, in the first month (*Atlcahualo*), in honor of Tlaloc, they would kill children and “once they were dead, they would cook them and eat them” [“después de muertos, los cocían y comían”]; in the thirteenth month (*tepeilhuitl*) women and men—to whom they gave the names of the deities of the mountains—were sacrificed and eaten (Sahagún, Historia general [Madrid, 1988], 81, 104-107, 155, 157).

<sup>18</sup> They called those mushrooms “*Teunanacatlth*, which means the flesh of god, or of the demon that they adored [...] with that bitter delicacy their god gave them communion” [“que

Motolinía, along with Sahagún, observes that in Mexico they made corn tamales and “sang and said that those *bollos* became the flesh of Tezcatlipoca, who was their highest god or demon,” and that “they ate those *bollos* in place of communion” [“cantaban y decían que aquellos bollos se tornaban carne de Tezcatlipoca, que era el dios o demonio que tenían por mayor” / “comían aquellos bollos, en lugar de comunión”].<sup>20</sup>

In the fifteenth month (*Panquetzaliztli*), dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the body of the god, sculpted out of seeds, was eaten. The breaded idol was sprinkled with human blood and later the priests broke it into “little pieces [...that] were administered as a communion to children and adults, men and women, the elderly and the young [...] with [...] such reverence, fear and joy [...] that it was remarkable to hear them saying that they were eating the flesh and bones of the god” [pedaçitos [...que] comulgauan [...] chicos y grandes, onbres y mugeres, biejos y niños [...] con tanta reuerencia, temor y alegria [...] que era cossa de admiracion diçiendo que comian la carne y los guessos del dios].<sup>21</sup>

Even more perturbing to the Spaniards was the ritual proximity between Mexica and Christian theophagy, “close to the Easter of Resurrection,” during the fifth month, or *Toxcatl*, in honor of Tezcatlipoca (smoking mirror). Like the Roman soldiers in Durostorum (Low Moesia)—who, to celebrate the Saturnalia, chose among themselves a handsome man and

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quiere decir carne de dios, o del demonio que ellos adoraban [...] con aquel amargo manjar su dios los comulgaba”] (Motolinía, Historia de los indios [Madrid, 1988], 64).

<sup>19</sup> Cortés is the first to refer to these sacrifices of a figure made of seed, mixed and kneaded with “blood from human hearts and bodies” [“con sangre de corazones y de cuerpos humanos”] (Hernán Cortés, Cartas de relación [México 1993], 65).

<sup>20</sup> Motolinía, Historia de los indios (Madrid, 1988), 64. Sahagún refers to the communion in honor of Huitzilopochtli with similar kinds of bread (*tzoalli*) (Sahagún, Historia general [Madrid, 1988], 118).

<sup>21</sup> Durán. Ritos y fiestas (México, D.F., 1980), 95, 96. For an ethnographic of the *Panquetzaliztli* see Sahagún (Sahagún, Historia general [Madrid, 1988], 37, 94, 161) and Durán (Ritos y fiestas... [México, D.F., 1980], 85, 86).



dressed him in such a way that he looked like Saturn, then gave him license to do all sorts of things, and then sacrificed him (as James Frazer recounts)—during the Mexica festivals the god was made to die in the person of its human representative. He was then resuscitated in the figure of another victim, who for one year would enjoy the fatal honor of divinity and all sorts of privileges and honors, and then would die as his predecessors. The altar of sacrifice—according to Durán—“was in the same form that our sacred Christian religion and Catholic Church uses” [“era á la mesma forma que nuestra sagrada religion xiptiana y la yglesia católica usa”]. The chosen one was transformed into a deity by virtue of physical similarity, careful education, and adoration: “they honored him like a god” [“honrábanle como a dios”]) before the sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas the conversions were viewed suspiciously as a form of *mimetic deception*, Mexica religion itself was perceived as a *mimicry* of Catholicism. Peggy Sanday remarks that, like in the case of the Catholic Eucharist, the Aztec rite entails a bloody transubstantiation. While this of course is a generalization that misses the complexity and variety of the Mexica rites, it nonetheless accurately expresses the understanding of cannibalism exhibited by the evangelizing priests. The colonial reading of difference reduces all complexity to similarity; and, as we have stated, similarity is the antechamber to horror.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sahagún describes the *Toxcatl* in his *Historia general* (Madrid, 1988, 85, 115-118). James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, New York, 677-679, 681. Durán. *Ritos y fiestas...* (México, D.F., 1980), 99. See the description of said ceremony in Acosta (*Historia natural y moral* [Madrid, 1987], 378-383). The mask and the costume contained the power and the identity of the (re)presented. To (re)dress in this mask or appearance meant to embody this force (*ixtli*), to become it (Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* [Bloomington, Indiana, 1998], 147).

<sup>23</sup> Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge, 1986), 18, 172. Several anthropological studies point out that the Mexica sacrifices—associated with hunting, war and agricultural cycles—dramatized the flows of the cosmos with the continuous rhythms by which one consumes and is consumed, a movement that can be understood as the incessant flow or *continuum* of existence and the discontinuity of its forms. Food, ritual sacrifice and periodic bloodletting were equivalent to the movement of the cosmos

In order to explain the supposed similarities between the religious practices of the Mexicas and the sacraments of the Church, and to make this recognition intelligible, two hypotheses were proposed in the sixteenth century. According to the first, God had in some way revealed himself to the Indians, thus preparing for the arrival of his word; the Eucharist thereby would replace ritual anthropophagy. The other possibility was that the similarities were the work of Satan (from the Hebrew *אֲדֵרְבָדִּי* —*adversary o contrary*).

The first hermeneutic tradition was syncretist and it lent itself to important developments, such as: the conjectures about a pre-Columbian revelation of the word of God to the Indians and the presence of Saint Thomas in America;<sup>24</sup> the theses of Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, for whom the pre-evangelic anthro-phagic sacrifice had a theological dimension; and the universalist interpretations of some Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, who saw prefigurations of Christianity in the pagan rites.

The second thesis converted religious difference into idolatry and a cult of evil and it turned Mexica theophagic cannibalism into a satanic version of the Eucharistic sacrament (in the Hebrew sense of contrary to God, relative to the Devil). Cannibalism, which has never been defined by Catholicism as a sin in and of itself, was made one by constituting the “ultimate expression of idolatry.”<sup>25</sup>

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and prevented the *tlahtlacolli*, or the apocalypse of the Mexica-Tenocha universe (Sagan, Human Aggression [New York, 1974], 109; "Culture as Protein and Profit," New York Review of Books XXV, 8, [1978], 45-53; Yolot González-Torres, El sacrificio humano entre los mexicas [México, 1985], 304; Sanday, Divine Hunger [Cambridge, 1986], 47-48; Read, Time and Sacrifice [Bloomington, Indiana, 1998], 124, 127-136, 144).

<sup>24</sup> Thesis present in the writings of José de Acosta, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and Servando Teresa de Mier.

<sup>25</sup> Fernando Cervantes, The Idea of the Devil (London: 1991), 23.

Although Durán recognized the possibility of a previous revelation or prefiguration, the demonological discourse and the idea that the ritual was a perverse (American) copy of the Eucharist prevails:

The reader should note how truly deformed is this demon-possessed ceremony, [which is a deformation of] the ceremony of our sacred church, that obliges us to receive the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ true god and true man on Easter [...] from which we can conclude two things: either there was news (as I have stated) of our sacred Christian religion on this land or our accursed adversary the devil made them do wrong in his service and cult making himself adored and served, deforming the Catholic ceremonies of the Christian religion.

[Note el lector quan propiamente esta contrahecha esta cerimonia endemoniada la de nuestra yglesia sagrada que nos manda recibir el verdadero cuerpo y sangre de nro. Señor Jsuxto verdadero dios y verdadero hombre por pascua florida [...] de lo qual se coligen dos cosas ó que huvo notiçia (como dexo dicho) de nuestra sagrada religion christiana en esta tierra o que el maldito de nro. aduersario el demonio las haçia contra haçer en su seruicio y culto haciendose adorar y seruir contra haciendo las católicas ceremonias de la christiana religion].<sup>26</sup>

Despite the range of intellectual attitudes, many colonial writers typically arrived at this conclusion. For them, the similarities could not have been of divine origin, firstly because that commonality would undermine the conversions, and secondly because it made no sense that God would copy Himself, much less that he would do so imperfectly. Mimicry is a thing of the Devil or *Simia Dei*, as the fallen angel was called, alluding to his supposed “apelike” fondness for

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<sup>26</sup> Durán, Ritos y fiestas (México, D.F., 1980), 96.

imitation. According to Sebastián de Covarrubias' well-known Tesoro de la lengua castellana o Española (1611) “we call simian he who mimics another and wants to imitate him” [“llamamos simia al que remeda a otro y quiere imitarle”]. Lucifer is defined precisely by his envy, by his desire to copy, to imitate and be like God: “How art thou fallen from heaven, Oh Lucifer, son of the morning! [...] For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (*Isaiah* 14: 12-14). However, as stated by Thomas Aquinas, this simian desire fails as the Devil can only muster up a grotesque imitation of God<sup>27</sup>.

It was even understood that abstinence, confession and chastity among the indigenous peoples were inspired by the jealousy that the Devil had of the true virtues and penitence offered to God. In the specific case of the Eucharist, the Devil carried out his copy of transubstantiation to an extreme by making it a bloody sacrifice, as if he wished to outdo the most sacred mystery. Thus the New World became host to the plagiarizing hand of Satan; the unspeakable rites of the Americans were actually perverse copies perpetrated by the *Simia dei*.<sup>28</sup>

Even the rational Jesuit José de Acosta—often inclined to syncretic explanations—would thus use the rhetoric of *sacrilegious* alterity to posit similarity as sinister, an aping “deformity” that can only simulate the truth: “the devil”—he wrote in his Historia natural y moral de las

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<sup>27</sup> “Simia” in, Tesoro de la lengua castellana o Española (Barcelona, 1943), 939. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (Denver, CO, 1995), [www.knight.org/advent/summa/summa.htm](http://www.knight.org/advent/summa/summa.htm), Prima pars: 63: 3.

<sup>28</sup> As many historians point out, diabolism does not reach its peak during the Middle Ages, as it is often assumed, but rather between the fourteenth century and the end of the seventeenth, concomitant with the Conquest and colonization of the New World. See Georges Minois' Historia de los infiernos (Barcelona, 1994) as well as the work of Fernando Cervantes mentioned above, on the relationship between the idea of the Devil and indigenous culture and religion in Mexico during the sixteenth century.

Indias (1590)—“has endeavored to resemble God in the forms of sacrifice, religion, and sacraments” [“el demonio ha procurado asemejarse a Dios en el modo de sacrificios, y religión y sacramentos”].<sup>29</sup>

In Mexico as much as in Peru<sup>30</sup>, Acosta suggested, the Devil “has managed to mimic the sacraments of the Holy Church” [“ha procurado remedar los sacramentos de la santa Iglesia”] with ceremonies, offerings, services, “convents of virgins [...] invented for his service,” imitations of penitence, an institution similar to the confession, lavatories, processions and flagellants, etc. Of course the most horrible of these simulations was the Mexican mockery of the Eucharist. Acosta gives a detailed account of the *guerras floridas* (*Flower Wars*), the capture of prisoners, the extraction of hearts to be offered up to the sun, and the practice of anthropophagy. The Jesuit angrily notes that the word *host* (*hostia*; victim) is closely related to *huestes* (enemies)

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<sup>29</sup> José de Acosta, Historia natural y moral de las Indias (Madrid: 1987), 334-335. Acosta stands out for his adroit intuition with respect to matters such as the Asian origin of the aboriginal Americans and his proto-evolutionary theory of animal species. Without a doubt, Enlightenment thought was influenced by the classificatory and universalist concepts of savagery, barbarism, and civilization that Acosta developed to explain the differences between societies in relation to their “cultural evolution”, the sort of temporal classification of the present in which Eurocentrism and ethnography are based. In 1571 Acosta was sent by his own petition to the missions of Peru, where he became provincial of the Company and had an evangelizing experience. Due to conflicts with the viceroy, he returned to Spain by way of the viceroyalty of “New Spain” where he stayed from the beginning of June 1586 through the middle of March 1587. While there he documented Mexica religion using such sources as the works of Alonso Sánchez and Jesuit priest Juan de Tovar. The influence and sometimes even paraphrasing of Diego Durán is undeniable as well.

<sup>30</sup> In Peru they would make “little rolls of corn flour colored and kneaded with blood [...] of sheep [...] and they would give everyone a bite of those rolls, telling them that they gave them those bites so that they would be confederated and united with the Inca” [“unos pequeños bollos de harina de maíz teñida y amasada con sangre [...] de carneros [...] y daban a cada uno un bocado de aquellos bollos, diciéndoles que aquellos bocados les daban para que estuviesen confederados y unidos con el Inga”] (Acosta, Historia natural y moral [Madrid: 1987], 360). Acosta suspects that this and other similar ceremonies—that do not use human blood—are structured under the principle of transubstantiation.

and then goes on to dedicate several embittered anthological pages to a rant against the plagiarism of the Eucharist:

What is most admirable about the envy and competency of Satan is that not only with idolatries and sacrifices, but also in some way with ceremonies, he has mimicked our sacraments that Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted and that his sacred Church uses, especially the communion, the highest and most divine [which] he tried in a certain way to imitate.

[Lo que más admira de la envidia y competencia de Satanás, es que no sólo en idolatrías y sacrificios, sino también en cierto modo de ceremonias, haya remedado nuestros sacramentos, que Jesucristo Nuestro Señor instituyó y usa su santa Iglesia, especialmente el sacramento de la comunión, que es el más alto y divino [y que] pretendió en cierta forma imitar].<sup>31</sup>

Acosta describes the festivals in honor of Huitzilopochtli, which involved the creation of the corn idol, its consecration and supper. The “pieces of dough [that] they called the bones and flesh of Vitzilipuztli” [“trozos de masa [que] llamaban los huesos y carne de Vitzilipuztli”] were then given

as a communion to all the people [... and] they received it with such reverence, fear and tears that it inspired admiration, as they said that they were eating the flesh and bones of god [...]. Who could not but admire that the devil takes such care to make himself adored and received in the same way that Jesus Christ our God ordered and taught [...]? [...]

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<sup>31</sup> Acosta, Historia natural y moral (Madrid: 1987), 341-346 (1<sup>st</sup> quote), 360 (2<sup>nd</sup> quote). As mentioned, Acosta details several examples of indigenous mimicry of different sacraments (i.e., 247, 364, 372, 381, etc); his account of the *guerras floridas*, treatment of prisoners, ritual killings and cannibalism is accompanied by a ardent allegation against the diabolic mimicry of the Eucharist (Historia natural y moral [Madrid: 1987], 352-359).

Satan [...] always mixes his cruelties and filth because he is a homicidal spirit and the father of lies.

[a modo de comunión a todo el pueblo [...] y] recibíanlo con tanta reverencia, temor y lágrimas, que ponía admiración, diciendo que comían la carne y los huesos de dios [...] ¿A quién no pondrá admiración que tuviese el demonio tanto cuidado de hacerse adorar y recibir al modo que Jesucristo nuestro Dios ordenó y enseñó [...]? [...] Satanás [...] siempre mezcla sus crueldades y suciedades porque es espíritu homicida, y padre de la mentira].<sup>32</sup>

The seriousness and vehemence of Acosta's writings against the Devil and his "mixtures" permit one to suppose that he was not simply placating the Inquisition, but rather responding to the threat of the specular traps of difference. "How one suffers" says Acosta, "when using this word (communion) to describe such a diabolic act." Religious alterity appeared as a sinister mirror. Religious ethnographies, such as Acosta's aimed to differentiate what the evil *Simia Dei* had intermingled. Here, colonial discourse is not fraught with the fear of being devoured, but rather with horror at this promiscuous confusion, at the diminishing of difference. The thesis of diabolic plagiarism converted religious difference into a satanic cult, constructing the Mexica theophagic cannibalism as a sinister mimicry of the Eucharistic sacrament. This demonological discourse recognizes similarity, but insists upon difference, and concludes with accusations of plagiarism.<sup>33</sup>

In his Historia eclesiástica Indiana (1596-1604), the Franciscan Friar Geronimo de Mendieta—a "friend" of the Indians—also hotly denounced these "execrations that [the Devil] ordained in his diabolical church, in competition with Christ's holy sacraments" ["los

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<sup>32</sup> Acosta, Historia natural y moral, (Madrid: 1987), 363, 364.

excrementos que ordenó [el demonio] en su iglesia diabólica, en competencia con los santos Sacramentos [de] Cristo”]. Similitude (of the sacraments) becomes sinister in the rhetoric of execrable alterity, a sinister deformity that simulates truth. *Cannibalism*, as a trope of identity / alterity, is a perturbing image and is essentially ambivalent: it is a mockery of the culture of the European conquistador and an American (that is to say, *different*) version of sameness; in other words, cannibalism is *diabolic plagiarism*. American difference is the discursive result of the theological dissimulation of similitude within the realm of evil and moral monstrosity.<sup>34</sup>

### **3. *Divine Permission and the Prefiguration***

Coincident with the emergent idea of an empire—above and beyond the rhetoric of conquest, the mission of which was to civilize, evangelize and protect the Indians—another tradition of conceiving religious alterity recognized a commonality with the Mexica religion and saw its rites as prefigurations of Christianity. Las Casas’s position (and later that of various Jesuits) was based on a scheme of continuity with the *Other*: Christ could be reached from the indigenous religion for it already possessed the seeds of revelation. There was just a “minor” detail to be resolved: *cannibalism*. Las Casas accounted for this uneasy matter from four angles: cultural comparisons and relativism; the thesis that gave a biblical sense to the bellicosity of the Caribs; the recognition that some cannibal rites in Central America had a theological dimension; and the construction of a cannibal-conquistador / *encomendero*.

Las Casas’s first strategy is to construct a textual journey to Antiquity, a journey that seeks to dismiss the notion that cannibalism is original or unique to the New World, refuting “many [who] think that the practice of eating human flesh was originated in this land.”

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<sup>33</sup> Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, (Madrid: 1987), 361.



According to the different types of barbarism defined in the epilogue to the Apologética historia sumaria, the Indians of the New World can only be defined as barbarian in relation to their paganism—which is not negative (because it only indicates a lack of revelation)—and with respect to linguistic difference. Regarding the latter, Las Casas warns that “as barbarous as they are to us, we are to them” [“tan bárbaros como ellos nos son, somos nosotros a ellos”]. Las Casas’ discussion of barbarity takes place in continuous and casuistic comparison to ancient civilizations. He establishes a long tradition of paganism and human sacrifice among the Greeks, Romans, Jews, Babylonians, etc., and he reminds the reader that cannibalism was not unknown to the Old World; for example, there was anthropophagy among the early settlers of France, Spain and England, and among Asian peoples such as the Scythians.<sup>35</sup>

Las Casas also claims that Caribs are not cannibals by “corrupt nature” or by “perverse constitution” [“perversa complixión”]. In other words, they are not monsters. His hypothesis is that there must have been a famine, or some calamity “like many times there has been in the world, and our Spaniards have done it [eaten human flesh] in these Indies and in Spain” [“como muchas veces ha en el mundo acaecido, y nuestros españoles lo han hecho [comer carne humana] en estas Indias y en España”]. To illustrate his point he mentions the “horrible and abominable” case of the Spaniards on Pánfilo de Narváez’s expedition, told by Cabeza de Vaca in Nafragios. He also notes other reports of cannibalism, including incidences in France and Spain recorded by the ancient geographer Strabón, as well as Saint Jerome’s account of cannibalism in Scotland.

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<sup>34</sup> Gerónimo de Mendieta, Historia eclesiástica Indiana vol I, (Madrid, 1973), 66.

<sup>35</sup> The Apologética historia sumaria was written between 1555 and 1559 and published in 1909 (Edmundo O’Gorman, “Estudio” in Apologética [México, 1967], XXI-XXXVI). Apologética (México, 1967), II, 221 (1st quote). Las Casas’ typology of barbarism outlines the grounds for his sympathetic anthropology of otherness (Apologética II, 637-654); II, 654 (2<sup>nd</sup> quote). Las Casas’ “comparative approach” defines his vision of cannibalism, as he examine

Las Casas goes on to list events narrated by Herodotus, Pomponio Mela, and Munster, all of which seem to him much more cruel than Carib cannibalism: “I do not know if the Caribs of these lands who are tainted by it [eating human flesh] could go further, nor even as far” [“No sé si los caribes destas tierras que della [la carne humana] están inficionados puedan llegar a más, ni a tanto”].<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, in his Historia de las indias Las Casas maintains that the Caribs are God’s instruments for punishing the sins of the Spaniards:

Once the natural neighbors [of the Island of San Juan] were killed, God reserved for the exercise and punishment of the Spaniards those fierce peoples of the Caribbean islands of Guadalupe and Dominica and others around there, who infested many times that island, assaulting it; they killed some Spaniards and robbed and destroyed some of the estates and haciendas [...] That is how God left some nations for the sins of the sons of Israel, so that they might bother, perturb, infest, rob and punish them [...]. And God willing, with that damage and punishment we could pay for the havoc and calamity and destruction that we have caused on that island.

[Después de muertos los naturales vecinos della [la Isla de San Juan], dejó Dios para ejercicio y castigo de los españoles, reservadas las gentes de los caribes de las islas de Guadalupe y de la Dominica y otras de por allí, que infestaron muchas veces aquella isla, haciendo saltos; mataron algunos españoles y robaron y destruyeron algunas estancias y haciendas [...] Así dejó Dios ciertas naciones por los pecados de los hijos de Israel, para que los inquietasen, turbasen, infestasen, robasen, castigasen [...]. Y pluguiese a Dios que

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cases of anthropophagy among ancient classical civilizations, early inhabitants of Europe and Asian civilizations (Apologética II, 140-172; I, 467-470, 543-545, II, 354, 355, 356)

<sup>36</sup> Las Casas, Apologética (México, 1967), II, 352-356.

con aquellos daños y castigos pagásemos solos los estragos y calamidades y destrucciones que habemos causado en aquella isla].<sup>37</sup>

The recurring formula (from Columbus to Cieza de León) according to which the conquistador was a sort of instrument of God to punish the cannibals is here inverted. Las Casas locates the cannibals within an order of calamities. The fierceness of the cannibal is not his own; it is a divine instrument. The Caribs thus become the corrective punishment for the excesses of the colonizer.

Regarding what was perceived as the more “civilized” Meso-American cannibalism, Las Casas—while not justifying it—points out that in Guatemala and New Spain cannibal feasts were religious rites, and that more “horrible and abominable” was the cannibalism of the Old World. He points out that in Guatemala “they cooked, prepared, and ate the flesh [...] of the sacrificed as a holy thing, consecrated to their gods [...] they did it for religion and for no other reason” [“La carne [...] de los sacrificados la cocían y aderezaban y la comían como cosa sanctísima y a los dioses consagrada, [...] que por religión y no por otra razón hacían”]. If certainly he did not justify Mexica cannibalism, he offers a theological context to explain it: in “New Spain they did not eat [human flesh] just for the sake of it, as I understand it, but rather they ate the flesh of those they sacrificed, as a sacred thing, more for religion than for any other reason” [“[en] la Nueva España no la comían tan de propósito, según tengo entendido, sino la de los que sacrificaban, como cosa sagrada, más por religión que por otras causas”].<sup>38</sup>

Las Casas’s universalism regarding the perception of Amerindian religions can be juxtaposed to the thesis of diabolic intervention: idolatry is seen in the *Apologética* as “a natural and universal corruption present among all human beings [...] before the knowledge of God’s

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<sup>37</sup> Las Casas, *Historia de las indias* (Caracas, 1986), II, 204.

revelation.” Idolatry, therefore, is not instigated by the Devil, but rather by an innate religious sense. Moreover, Las Casas insinuates that religious cannibalism occurred “by divine permission, before the Gospel’s word gave the world light.” The idea of *divine permission* suggests that eating the flesh and blood of Christ substitutes anthropophagy as natural idolatry gives way to true knowledge of God. In his polemic with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Las Casas dares, with intellectual audacity, to say that the sacrifices, although censurable, were proof of the high religiosity of the infidels because by “giving their life to God, they make the greatest act of subjection and respect they can” [“dando la vida a Dios, la hacen mayor subiección y acatamiento que pueden”].<sup>39</sup>

Again Las Casas draws on examples from Antiquity to propose that, due to the lack of divine revelation that would otherwise prohibit it, it was understandable that idolaters would offer God the greatest and best offering, which is human life itself:

[T]he nations that offered men in sacrifice to their gods [...] had a noble and honorable estimation of the excellence and deity and deservedness (mistaken because they were idolaters) of their gods [...] because they offered, to those they understood to be gods, the most splendid and most precious and most valuable [...] of creatures [...] and,] as has been said, by natural illumination [reason] judges that one should offer to God the best and the most worthy, being within the limits of natural law, in the absence of positive law, human or divine, which would prohibit or hinder the offering of men.

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<sup>38</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética* (México, 1967), II, 221, 354 (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quote respectively).

<sup>39</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética* (México, 1967), I, 381 (1<sup>st</sup> quote); see also I, 375, 386. According to Las Casas, even though idolatry is a product of the natural religiosity of the human kind, the Devil might take advantage of it (*Apologética* [México, 1967], II, 263; I, 384-387). *Apologética* [México, 1967], I, 466 (2<sup>nd</sup> quote). Las Casas, *Obra indigenista* (Madrid, 1985), 193 (3<sup>rd</sup> quote).

[las naciones que a sus dioses ofrecían en sacrificio hombres [...] noble y digna estimación tuvieron de la excelencia y deidad y merecimiento (puesto que idólatras engañados) de sus dioses [...] porque ofrecían, a los que estimaban ser dioses la más excelente y más preciosa y más costosa [...] de las criaturas [...]y] como queda dicho, por la lumbré natural juzga [la razón] que a Dios se le debe ofrecer lo mas digno y lo mejor, estando dentro de los límites de la ley natural, faltando ley positiva, humana o divina, que ofrecer hombres prohíba o estorbe].<sup>40</sup>

Before the preaching of the Gospel, religious cannibalism appears as an anthropophagic sacrament and as a prefiguration of the Eucharistic Supper, in the same way that indigenous penitence, mortifications, confessions, ablutions and other religious rites are also referred to as forms of religiosity that anticipate Christianity. Las Casas—who takes care to not harm the sacrament—barely insinuates that the body and blood of Christ replace anthropophagy in a relay-like exchange of natural idolatry for true spiritual and physical knowledge of God. A fragment of a painting by Paolo Farnati (1595) in Villa de la Torre, Mezzane di Sotto (Verona), **[Illustration 2.3]** adeptly expresses this idea of *correspondence and substitution* between communion and cannibalism that Las Casas suggests: an indigenous man (functioning as an allegory of America) is shown leaving the cannibalistic banquet that appears on his left—where a human arm and torso are being roasted in a fire pit. As he turns his back on the feast, he grabs the crucifix to his right: America substitutes anthropophagy with the Eucharist.

Finally, in his evangelizing role, Las Casas finds himself face to face with the native and he discovers, as Mario Cesareo has observed of other friars, that in the “step from the Satanic mask to the indigenous face, what is at stake is the inevitability of supposing the monstrous as a

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<sup>40</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética* (México, 1967), II, 244, 245.



Illustration 2.3: Painting Fragment by Paolo Farnati (1595) in Villa de la Torre, Mezzane di Sotto (Verona)

possibility of the self.” Las Casas—addressing the moral monstrosity within what Enrique Dussel has called the *ego conquiro*—produces one of the most radical re-figurations of the cannibal trope. In Las Casas’ writings the Indian is not a devouring *Other*, but a suffering and consumed victim. Anticipating Las Casas’s idea that the colonizer could be more “savage” than the colonized, a letter the Dominicans wrote to Charles V on December 4, 1519 had called the *encomenderos* “butchers” and had identified colonial commodities with the exploited bodies who produced European wealth: “we think that if the silk were well wrung, Indian blood would flow from it” [“la [...] seda pensamos que si fuese bien esprymida, sangre de los yndios manaría”]. American goods and wealth were soaked with blood, and attained at the expense of uncountable human lives, consumed by the *encomenderos*. Las Casas gets the most out of this trope throughout his Historia de las Indias: “the peoples of San Juan seeing that they were on their way to be *consumed* [...] decided to fight back” [“viendo las gentes de la isla de San Juan que llevaban el camino para ser consumidos [...] acordaron de se defender”] [...]; “By that time, the year of 1516, the Spaniards did not forget that they were guilty of the *consumption* of docile peoples” [“Por ese tiempo y año de 1516, no olvidaban los españoles que tenían cargo de consumir la gente mansísima”]. Elsewhere, in the famous Brevísima relación de la destruicion de las Indias, he denounces: “They [Spaniards] were [involved] in these inhuman butcheries for about seven years [...] Judge how many people they managed to *consume*” [“Estuvieron [los españoles] en estas *carnicerías* tan inhumanas cerca de siete años, [...] Júzguese cuánto sería el número de la gente que *consumirían*”].<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mario Cesareo, Cruzados, mártires y beatos: emplazamientos del cuerpo colonial (Indiana, 1995), 18. Enrique Dussel, 1492: el encubrimiento del otro: hacia el origen del “mito de la modernidad” (La Paz, Bolivia, 1994), 59. Colección de documentos inéditos, relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de América y Oceanía, Joaquín Francisco Pacheco y otros, eds. (Madrid, 1875), XXXV, 199-240. Karl Marx,

Note here that for Las Casas the verb *to consume* (*consumir*) has the double meaning of annihilation and communion. In fact, *to consume* is defined by Covarrubias (1611) as the “act of taking the priest, the body of our Lord Christ, on the bread and the wine, during the holy sacrifice of Mass” [“En el Sacrosanto Sacrificio de la missa el tomar el sacerdote el cuerpo de Christo nuestro Señor, debaxo de las especies del pan y el vino”]. When Las Casas says that the *encomenderos consume* the Indians, his trope was depicting the colonial consumption of labor as a diabolic distortion of the Eucharist. In Lascasian discourse, the verb *to consume* is not metaphorically associated with a voracious “savage,” but rather with the conquistador. His selection of the verb *to consume* (*consumir*) in relation to the subject *conquistador*, allows the latter to occupy the place previously assigned to the rapacious “savage.” The perverse copy of the communion is thus that of the encomenderos and the conquistadors. According to Las Casas, the conquistadors perverted Christ’s mandate to his disciples to preach like sheep among wolves (*Matthew* 10:16). Instead—said the priest—they behave “like wolves and tigers and cruel lions famished during many days” [“como lobos e tigres y leones crudelísimos de muchos días hambrientos”]. The Spaniard represented in the Brevísima is a devourer of the innocent, and a true cannibal. In this manner, Las Casas distances himself from the conquistador-cannibal and authorizes his church to speak for the Indian, to be the “prosthetic tongue” of the subjugated *Other*.<sup>42</sup>

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using a similar metaphor than the Dominicans, but in relation to capital, will say that if one thinks that money is stained with blood, capital “comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt“ (*Capital* I, [New York, 1976], 926). Bartolomé de las Casas, Historia de las Indias (Caracas, 1986), vol II, 202, and vol III, 333. Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias (Madrid, 1992), 68.

<sup>42</sup> “Consumir” in Covarrubias, Tesoro (Barcelona, 1943), 351. I owe this reference to Luis Fernando Restrepo. Las Casas, Brevísima (Madrid, 1992), 16. Cesareo uses the expression “prosthetic body” to refer to the function of “tongue” and voice that some friars assigned to



#### 4. Cannibalism and *Criollo* Consciousness

In the culture of the *Barroco de Indias*, in the context of *imperial decadence* and what has been called “the emergence of a *criollo* consciousness,” colonial tropes, especially *cannibalism*, are reexamined without the religious and militaristic paranoia of the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, an abstract and heroic version of the Indian emerged as the symbolic patrimony of the American elite, a concept unimaginable to earlier writers, judging from such examples as Bernardo de Balbuena’s Grandeza mexicana (1604).<sup>43</sup>

An interesting example of a syncretic representation of alterity is found in Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s Teatro de virtudes políticas, que constituyen a un príncipe (1680), apparently produced in collaboration with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700) wrote the text to accompany an *arco triunfal* in honor of the arrival of Viceroy Tomás Antonio de la Cerda, Marqués de la Laguna (1680). According to Sigüenza’s description, represented on the arch was a succession—extending into the pre-Hispanic past—of rulers of New Spain, with Viceroy de la Cerda at the apex. Sigüenza positions the “Aztec State” in the Mexican viceregal genealogy. Even Huitzilopochtli, the bloodthirsty cannibal god—who for Durán and Mendieta had been the quintessential demonic image, the instigator of the abominable plagiarism of the Eucharist—here allegorizes the virtues of the prince. Sigüenza mentions José de Acosta and

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themselves in order to represent the indigenous, who were considered minors without legal standing of their own (Cesareo, Cruzados, mártires y beatos, [Indiana, 1995], 106).

<sup>43</sup> See Guillermo Céspedes’ “La defensa de las Indias” (in América hispánica (1492-1898), [Barcelona, 1983]), Trevor Davies’ La decadencia española, 1621-1700 (Barcelona, 1969), and John Lynch’s The Hispanic World in Crisis and Change, 1598-1700 (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, 1992).

Bernal Díaz del Castillo as two of his sources. Both of these authors represent Huitzilopochtli as the Devil of the Mexica religion, and yet this deity becomes a positive sign in *criollo* writing.<sup>44</sup>

In Teatro de virtudes políticas the evil and monstrous Huitzilopochtli becomes a political allegory of leadership. This is not to say—as Georgina Sabat de Rivers maintains—that Sigüenza was making an “apology for the Aztec world,” nor that the *cannibal* is adopted as a sign of *identity* in the Baroque. What I am proposing here is that, for some *letrados*, there is an incipient symbolic appropriation of the indigenous (even of the cannibal) and, simultaneously, a partial overcoming of the colonial stereotype. This did not happen in works of classical Spanish theater, such as Lope de Vega’s El Nuevo Mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón (1614), Fernando de Zárata’s La conquista de México (1668) or in the representations of America in the theater of Calderón.<sup>45</sup>

This phenomenon of appropriation corresponds to what has been called the *emergence of criollo consciousness*, or simply *criollo agencies*, which can be defined as a set of symbolic strategies and discourses for disputing and negotiating power; based on assertions of American particularisms, they sought on the one hand cultural and political authority *vis-à-vis* the

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<sup>44</sup> Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, Teatro de virtudes políticas, que constituyen á un príncipe advertidas en los monarcas antiguos del Mexicano imperio (México, 1986), 47-69. Note the contrast between Sigüenza’s representation of Huitzilopochtli and that of his sources (Acosta and Díaz del Castillo [n. 67]); for example, Bernal Díaz del Castillo—who calls the Mexica god “Huichilobos”—portrays the god as a Demon and describes the abject spectacle of its cult (Díaz del Castillo, Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España [México, 1995], 174-178). Although Sigüenza’s sources cannot be considered the same as Sor Juana’s, we should keep in mind that they shared references and ideas; on this matter, see Georgina Sabat de Rivers (En busca de Sor Juana [México D.F., 1998], 289, 290).

<sup>45</sup> Sabat de Rivers, En busca de Sor Juana (México, D.F., 1998), 267. Lope de Vega, “El Nuevo Mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón” in América en el teatro clásico español: estudio y textos. Francisco Ruiz Ramón (ed.). (Pamplona, 1993), 269-330. Fernando de Zárata, “La conquista de México” in América en el teatro clásico español, Francisco Ruiz Ramón (ed.), 1993, 207-258. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Obras completas (Madrid, 1960).

theocratic and cultural universal order of the Empire and, on the other, inscription or participation within that same order.<sup>46</sup>

The emergence of a *criollo* consciousness can be described by its gestures better than by its goals; for instance one of those gestures is the step from horror at alterity to its symbolic appropriation and recodification by a sector of the *lettered city*. However, one does not find an identitarian recognition in the *Other*. These approximations are symbolic, retrospective and extremely ambivalent; they are always quivering on the edge of paranoia.<sup>47</sup>

While Sigüenza installed Huitzilopochtli in the genealogy of viceregal power, some flesh-and-blood New World Indians provided the viceroy with a different kind of welcome—in the form of an insurrection that he would never succeed in containing during his entire tenure. But as we know—and Sigüenza makes this very clear in his own writings—the distance is vast

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<sup>46</sup> For this reason I do not speak of a Spanish American proto-national consciousness. The latter, I believe, is more related to the change of paradigm (from a non capitalist modernity to a capitalist one) prompted by a broadening of the commercial circuits of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the consequent modification of the cultural horizon beyond the Hispanic. For a discussion on this historical emergence of “criollismo” and the conflicts of interest between the American Spaniards and the Peninsular Spaniards, see Anthony Pagden’s “Identity Formation in Spanish America” (in Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800, A. Paguen and Nicholas Canny, eds., [1987], 51), the chapter on “El criollismo” by Guillermo Céspedes (América hispánica (1492-1898) [Barcelona, 1983], 283-309), and John H. Elliott’s “Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World” (in Colonial Identity, Paguen and Canny, eds., [1987], 3-13). On the formation of this “*criollo* consciousness” in the American *lettered city*, consult Relecturas del Barroco de Indias (Hanover, NH., 1994) and Viaje al silencio: exploraciones del discurso barroco (México, 1998) by Mabel Moraña and also the volume edited by Mazzotti (Agencias criollas [Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000]). The expression “*criollo* agency” was recently proposed by Mazzotti as a conceptual and more flexible alternative to the terms “subject” and “consciousness” (“Introducción” in Agencias criollas ([Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000], 5-33).

<sup>47</sup> Although the concept of the *lettered city* developed by Angel Rama is extremely useful (La ciudad letrada [Hanover, N.H., U.S.A., 1984]), one ought to note that it does not correspond to a monolithic but to a heterogeneous sector of society and that, as Rolena Adorno points out, “the concept of the *lettered city* refers to a set of practices and mentalities that did not form one single ideological discourse, but rather were polyvocal” (Adorno, “La ciudad letrada y los discursos coloniales” in Hispanamérica: revista de literatura XVI, 48, [1987], 4).

between allegorical Indians and those armed, ready to revolt and burn Sigüenza's sacred Baroque library.<sup>48</sup>

Rolena Adorno has indicated that the *lettered city* itself “was a labyrinth of ideological rivalries [...but] confronted with other groups [...] it acted as if it had only one program of action.” The rebellion of the indigenous reminds us that the colonial *letrado* is located in a “besieged enclave” and that the integration of the Indian into the chorus of the Baroque fiesta, or into the allegorical monument, acts as a sort of symbolic compensation for this *state of siege*.<sup>49</sup>

In the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz symbolic appropriations—or, better yet, recodifications—of the indigenous are abundant. A notable sampling might be gathered from her *villancicos*, in which a *criolla* virgin is the leader of disparate voices (of blacks and Indians) from New Spain in a sort of poetic procession of integration. The Virgin is the point of confluence for New World heterogeneity. Similarly, the lettered *criollo* constructs his or her organic place as interpreter, translator and privileged epistemological subject; he or she

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<sup>48</sup> The religious pressures resulting from intolerant evangelization and the high tributary duties imposed on the *Pueblo* Indians gave rise to an extended indigenous insurrection that from 1680 to 1692 successfully challenged Spanish control of New Mexico. In 1680 there was a general revolt, led by an indigenous man from San Juan named Pope. Several churches were demolished, four hundred Spaniards were massacred and the rest expelled from the area. For more than a decade, the viceregal establishment was incapable of controlling the insurrection and subjugating the *Pueblo*. Finally, in 1692, reconquest was made possible thanks to a combination of successful negotiations and a military campaign headed by Don Diego de Vargas. By that time, Sigüenza y Góngora had his own taste of Indian insurgency. I am referring to the revolt that Sigüenza y Góngora relates in *Alboroto y motín de los indios de México* (1692), and to the burning and destruction of papers and documents from the viceregal palace, some of which the author saved, burning his own fingers in the process.

<sup>49</sup> Adorno, “La ciudad letrada” in *Hispanérica: revista de literatura* XVI, 48, (1987), 4, 5. Mabel Moraña, *Viaje al silencio: exploraciones del discurso barroco* (México, 1998), 58. The *state of siege* describes a general condition of the Hispanic lettered city faced with insurgent heterogeneities. However, mutiny and insurrection are irruptions of violence within very dynamic and complex processes of negotiation and resistance.

apprehends and then unites the ethnic-cultural and linguistic hubbub of New Spain, and renders the heterogeneous intelligible.<sup>50</sup>

In what will be an inevitably partial analysis, I will refer to the intersection between the translation / allegorical construction of indigenous alterity and the manifestation of a *criollo* agency in Sor Juana's *loas* that precede the *autos* El Cetro de José ([1692] 1951-1957) and El divino Narciso ([1690] 1951-1957).<sup>51</sup>

Here Sor Juana takes on the problem of the “similarity” between the anthropo-theophagic rites of the Aztecs and the Eucharist. Both *loas* are about the religious conversion of an American feminine character (*America* and *Idolatría*) through the benign means of persuasion by a religious feminine *dramatis personae* (*Fe* and *Religión*); they are also about the substitution of

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<sup>50</sup> Certainly—as Sabat de Rivers argues—in these *villancicos* there are carnivalesque and transgressive aspects. What is being emphasized here is that this *transgression* is articulated functionally in the *culture of the Baroque* (Sabat de Rivers, Estudios de literatura hispanoamericana [Barcelona, 1992], 193-198). Marie-Cécile Bénassy Berling gives an overview of Sor Juana's representation of the indigenous in Humanismo y religión en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (México, 1983), 307-324.

<sup>51</sup> El divino Narciso was first published in 1690 (Imprenta de la viuda de Bernardo Calderón); El cetro de José in 1692 in the second volume of Obras de soror Juana Ines de la Cruz (Sevilla, Por t. Lopez de Haro). Méndez Plancarte judges that El divino Narciso was composed “in 1688, if not earlier”. Regarding El cetro de José he notes that “there is no chronological or local information” (Méndez Plancarte in Sor Juana's Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, lxxi). Sabat de Rivers affirms that the *autos* and their *loas* were written between 1680 and 1691, and she supposes that El cetro is posterior to El divino Narciso (En busca de Sor Juana [México, D.F., 1998], 265). However, there are some textual indications that would permit one to rethink this chronology. In the *loa* to El divino Narciso, *Celo* speaks to the character *America* calling her *Idolatría*: “How, barbarous Occident; / how blind Idolatría, / do you despise Religion [...]?” [“¿Cómo, bárbaro Occidente; / cómo, ciega Idolatría, / a la Religión desprecias [...] ?”] (III, 8). A similar thing happens with Religion when she says “Occident, listen; / listen, blind Idolatría [...]!” [“¡Occidente, escucha; / oye, ciega Idolatría [...] !”] (III, 14). In both cases, it appears that *Celo* as much as *Religion* speak to this nonexistent character (*Idolatría*), in a sort of interference with El Cetro—in which the American character is named, in effect, *Idolatría*. These lapses would indicate that El Cetro (or at least its *loa*) could be a previous work. Lacking further information, this point must remain open to discussion and future investigation.

Mexican cannibal rites with the Catholic communion. Moreover, both exalt the mystery of transubstantiation.<sup>52</sup>

Méndez Plancarte affirms that Sor Juana had access to and indeed utilized Monarquía indiana (1615) by Friar Juan de Torquemada (1557-1664), a work that formed part of the library of the *Golden Age* in Spain and America, and which reproduced the rhetoric of the sixteenth-century “war against the demon”. With that text, Sor Juana would have had indirect access to Mendieta, Motolinía, and Durán, as suggested by Margo Glantz.<sup>53</sup>

Sor Juana was heiress to more than a century and a half of demonological rhetoric on religious alterity, but also to a counter tradition that in the sixteenth century had its most resolute defender in Las Casas and in the seventeenth century in the many missionaries and Jesuit educators who maintained a syncretist evangelical position toward the indigenous religions. It is therefore not an arduous hermeneutic task to see that Sor Juana takes up the latter tradition. But

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<sup>52</sup> Both *loas* maintain a structural and thematic relation to the *autos sacramentales* that they introduce. Other cases relevant to a comprehensive study of the perceptions of religious alterity would be texts by the evangelists of seventeenth-century Mexican missions and the work of intellectuals like Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1578-1650), who—with a tense and problematic sense of belonging to New Spain’s elite—represents a *criollo agency* that negotiates and translates alternative imaginaries and a heterogeneous historical “memory” for New Spain.

<sup>53</sup> Juan de Torquemada, Monarquía indiana (México 1975). See coment by Méndez Plancarte in Obras completas, [México, 1951-1957], III, lxxiii. Margo Glantz, Borrones y borradores: reflexiones sobre el ejercicio de la escritura (ensayos de literatura colonial, de Bernal Díaz del Castillo a Sor Juana (México, D.F., 1992), 178. We should also consider Sigüenza’s sources (which certainly included Torquemada, but also Acosta and Bernal), for it is not preposterous to suppose that Sor Juana shared some of them. Neither is it impossible that Sor Juana would have been familiar with some of the texts of the sixteenth century chroniclers, prohibited by Felipe II in 1577; the appearance of some of these in the form of manuscripts, copies and fragments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicates that there were camouflaged shelves in the libraries of the Mexican *Lettered city*. Additionally, one cannot undervalue the knowledge that was the common patrimony of Sor Juana’s learned friends, nor the fact that in the oral tradition there were vestiges of the history of “ancient” Mexico and human sacrifices. Some verses of the *loa* to El Cetro de José even permit one to venture the hypothesis that perhaps she knew of other sources and manuscripts: “It should not be news to anyone, / for the traditions / of the Indians so

this syncretist humanism does not legitimate *per se* the thesis of a proto-national Mexicanism in the work of Sor Juana that has been put forth since the nineteen fifties (i.e., Agustín Cué Cánovas 1951; Francisco López Cámara 1957). The *loas*, although they present American themes and express to different degrees an incipient “Americanism”, do not declare an “Americanist act of faith”, nor do they manifest a “‘nationalist’ aspect” of Sor Juana, as Sabat de Rivers has somewhat hyperbolically alleged. This opinion reads the Baroque of New Spain teleologically as on a path toward the national. Moreover, it exaggerates the function of the characteristic Baroque trait of incorporating difference and the exotic; it confuses the *translation of difference* with the celebration or vindication of alterity.<sup>54</sup>

In Sor Juana’s *loa* to El Cetro de José (1692), the problem of sacramental “similarity” is debated in a dialogue between the *conceptual characters* *Fe* [Faith], *Ley de gracia* [Law of Grace]—Christian morality—, *Ley natural* [Natural Law], *Naturaleza* [Nature], and *Idolatría* [Idolatry].<sup>55</sup>

Contrary to numerous readings, the *loa* allows for very little heterodoxy. Instead it puts forth a dogmatic defense of the integrity of transubstantiation and exhibits a stereotypical critique of Mexica sacrifice, described by *Fe* as “blind idolatry” and as “barbarous” and “sacrilegious” rites:

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reveal it” [“A nadie novedad haga, / pues así las tradiciones / de los indios lo relatan”] (*Loa* to El cetro de José in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 196).

<sup>54</sup> Agustín Cué Cánovas, “Juana de Asbaje y su tiempo” El Nacional (29 de noviembre de 1951), 3; 6. Francisco López Cámara, “La conciencia criolla en Sor Juana y Sigüenza,” Historia mexicana 23, 1957, 350-373. Sabat de Rivers, En busca de Sor Juana (México, D.F., 1998), 269-271; see also by Sabat de Rivers “Apología de América y del mundo azteca en tres *loas* de Sor Juana,” Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 9, (1992), 267-291.

<sup>55</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that *conceptual characters* are true agents of enunciation that make philosophy (as well as political and moral ideas) tangible; for example *Socrates* in Plato or *Zarathustra* in Nietzsche (Qu'est-ce que la philosophie? [Paris, 1991], 60-81).

[...] blind Idolatry:  
 whose sacrilegious Altars,  
 despite your precepts [those of *Ley de gracia*]  
 stained with human blood,  
 showed that they are men  
 of the most barbarous entrails  
 more so than the most cruel beasts  
 (for among these there is none  
 who against its own kind  
 turns its ferocious claws [...])

[...] ciega Idolatría:  
 cuyas sacrílegas Aras,  
 a pesar de tus preceptos  
 manchadas de sangre humana,  
 mostraban que son los hombres  
 de más bárbaras entrañas  
 que los brutos más crueles  
 (pues entre éstos no se halla  
 quien contra su especie propia  
 vuelva las feroces garras [...])<sup>56</sup>

The American character in indigenous costume, *Idolatría*, is declared “Plenipotentiary / of all the Indians” [“Plenipotenciaria / de todos los indios”]. “Plenipotentiary”—emissary or representative—yes, but in the allegorical sense of a *dramatis personae* that exists only to be converted, reduced to sameness. For example, when the character *Ley de gracia* proposes to remove the Mexican sacrilegious idols and false gods and replace them with “the sacred image of Christ”, *Fe* categorically responds to the advocates of simile and metaphor:

[...] more appropriate  
 action—I think—  
 is placing a Consecrated Form,  
 which is not placing the Image

[...] más acertada  
 acción tengo el colocar  
 una Forma Consagrada,  
 que no es colocar la Imagen

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<sup>56</sup> *Loa* to “El cetro de José” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 186. Translations are mine.



but the real Substance

sino la propia Substancia<sup>57</sup>

Images find no haven. Instead, the Sacred Form, which is the substance; that is, the flesh, the “real thing.” To the *loa*—inasmuch as it is a Counter-Reformationist work—the revelation of truth is insufficient. As Maravall points out, referring to the culture of the Baroque in general, it was necessary to present such a truth performatively, “as an action.”<sup>58</sup>

Let’s take a look at another example of the Counter-Reformationist character of the *loa* to El Cetro de José. At one point *Idolatría* proposes to continue with human sacrifices, since they are not in contradiction with the new religion (Catholicism):

[I]t does not contradict the precept	no contradice al precepto,
that to this same Deity [the Christian	que a esa misma Deidad hagan
one]	los mejores Sacrificios,
they offer the best Sacrifices,	que son los de sangre humana. <sup>59</sup>
which are those of human blood.	

*Idolatría*—who appears to be an Indian woman educated in Scholasticism and the logical argumentation of Jesuit disputes, or at least a reader of Las Casas—adds that because the human offerings are so high, the error of the ancient cult “was not in the Sacrifice / but rather in the purpose, for / it was offered to false Deities” [“no en el Sacrificio estaba, / sino en el objeto, pues / se ofreció a Deidades falsas”], and that now simply “exchanging the purpose is good enough” [“mudar el objeto basta”]. *Naturaleza*, seconded by *Ley natural*, responds by saying that the problem is not only the object, but also the “inhuman offering” [“la ofrenda inhumana”].

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<sup>57</sup> *Loa to “El cetro de José”* in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 193, 188, 189.

<sup>58</sup> José Antonio Maravall, La cultura del Barroco (Barcelona, 1983), 153, 154

According to *Ley natural*, life is a universal right: “all / are men” [“todos / son Hombres”], including the Tlaxcalans (enemies of Tenochtitlán), since—adds *Naturaleza*—”they all / came from my entrails” [“todos / salieron de mis entrañas”].<sup>60</sup>

*Idolatría*, however, insists on the practice of cannibalism by employing a theological appeal that assimilates cannibalism with the Eucharist:

[...A]mong the foods,	[...] en las viandas,
sacrificed meat	es el plato más sabroso
is the tastiest dish	la carne sacrificada,
[...]	[...]
for making life long	para hacer la vida larga
for all those who eat it	de todos los que la comen. <sup>61</sup>

Then *Fe* offers *Idolatría* a real sacrifice, more complete than anything that *Idolatría* has tasted before:

So I will place on the Altars	Pues yo pondré en las Aras
a Holocaust so pure	un Holocausto tan puro
a Victim so exquisite	una Víctima tan rara,
an Offering so supreme	una Ofrenda tan suprema,
not one that would be just human	que no solamente Humana,
but also Divine;	mas también Divina sea;
and one that would not only serve	y no solamente valga

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<sup>59</sup> *Loa* to “El cetro de José” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 193

<sup>60</sup> *Loa* to “El cetro de José” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 194, 195.

<sup>61</sup> *Loa* to “El cetro de José” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 196.

to calm,	para aplacar la Deidad,
but also to satisfy the Deity	sino que La satisfaga
completely; and one that would not only	enteramente; y no sólo
provide the delights of a flavor,	delicias de un sabor traiga,
but infinite delights;	sino infinitas delicias;
and would give not only long	y no solamente larga
life, but Eternal Life.	vida dé, mas Vida Eterna. <sup>62</sup>

*Fe*, is talking, obviously, about the Holy Eucharist. *Idolatría* doubts but finally concedes: if it is that good, and if the meal is real and anthropophagic, she will accept the Eucharist:

Well, as long as I see	¡Vamos, que como yo vea
that it is a human victim;	que es una Víctima Humana;
that it pleases God;	que Dios se aplaca con Ella;
that I eat it, and it gives me	que La como, y que me causa
Eternal life (as you say),	Vida Eterna (como dices),
the dispute is over	la cuestión está acabada
and I will be satisfied!	y yo quedo satisfecha!. <sup>63</sup>

*Fe* has no problem keeping her promise because as we know, in the Eucharist “Christ is present” thanks to the mystery of transubstantiation (Trento, Ses. XIII, cap. Iv, can ii).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Loa to “El cetro de José”* in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 197, 198.

<sup>63</sup> *Loa to “El cetro de José”* in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 199.

<sup>64</sup> In the sonnet “A San Juan de Sahagún en consumir la Hostia Consagrada, por aparecérsese en ella Cristo visiblemente” [“To St. John of Sahagún upon consuming the Sacred Host, for Christ visibly appearing in it”] Sor Juana states “¡Oh Juan! Eat, and do not look, for you make one sense / jealous of the other; and who would think / that the Fruit of Life / could

The work, then, does not—to repeat—”center around the theological recuperation of aspects of indigenous culture”, as Carmela Zanelli argues, nor around the affirmation of difference. On the contrary, it constitutes a symbolic appropriation of that difference for an orthodox defense of the dogma of transubstantiation, which, indeed, is the function of Eucharistic theater.<sup>65</sup>

In the culture of the Baroque, the presence of ethnic or religious alterity, like that of monstrosity, revolt, and transgression, is often used to reinforce the absolutist pretension of incorporating and symbolically subduing all particularisms and subversions. The oft-mentioned “Americanism” of Sor Juana should be approached with the same caution, even with the evident poetic sympathy exhibited by Sor Juana toward the general rowdiness of *Idolatría* and her critique of the violence of the Conquest:

No! While my anger be alive	¡No, mientras viva mi rabia,
you, <i>Fe</i> , will never achieve your purpose,	Fe, conseguirás tu intento,
even though (against my will)	que aunque (a pesar de mis ansias)
you took from me the Crown	privándome la Corona,

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lose its beauty / because it is craved? / The sacrament is children’s delight; / and God provokes us to blindly / deserve his nourishment, by eating” [“¡Oh, Juan! Come, y no mires, que a un sentido / le das celos con otro; y ¿quién pensara, / que al Fruto de la Vida le quitara / lo hermoso la razón de apetecido? / Manjar de niños es el sacramento; / y Dios, a ojos cerrados nos provoca / a merecer, comiendo su alimento”] (Fama, y obras póstumas del fénix de México, y dezima musa, poetisa de la América, sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, religiosa professa en el Convento de San Geronimo, de la Imperial Ciudad de México [Madrid, 1700], 164).

<sup>65</sup> Carmela Zanelli, “La loa de ‘El divino Narciso’ de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y la doble recuperación de la cultura indígena mexicana” in La literatura novohispana: Revisión crítica y propuestas metodológicas, José Pascual Buxó and Arnulfo Herrera, eds., (México, 1994), 187. It is noteworthy to observe that neither *loa* fits easily within the parameters of the Eucharistic theater of New Spain, at the service of religious celebrations and the catechesis. The public for whom these works were written was, apparently, the Madrid court in the case of the *auto* El divino Narciso, and the *criollo* lettered city and the viceregal court in the case of El cetro de José.

that for so long	que por edades tan largas
I peacefully held	pacífica poseía,
[and] you tyrant imposed	introdujiste tirana
your sovereignty in my Domains	tu dominio en mis Imperios,
preaching the Christian Law,	predicando la Cristiana
a Law for which weapons	Ley, a cuyo fin te abrieron
opened for you a violent path.	violenta senda las armas. <sup>66</sup>

Even though *Idolatría* recognizes that force opened the “path,” she prefers a peaceful conquest: “do not try with violence / to alter the ancient customs” [“no intentes con la violencia / inmutar la antigua usanza”]. This humanist nuance does not in itself constitute rupture, but rather continuity with an intellectual tradition conscious of the questions of legitimacy that faced the conquest. A genealogy of this position would run through, for example, Francisco Vitoria, Las Casas, Bartolomé de Carranza, and Diego de Covarrubias, all, in one way or another, ideologues of the “new” imperial reason.<sup>67</sup>

The other *loa* introduces the *auto* El divino Narciso, a play that underscores a cultural symmetry between the Greco-Roman Antiquity absorbed by Christianity and the Mexican Antiquity conquered by imperial Spain. El divino Narciso—as Martínez-San Miguel states—”explains the institutions of the Eucharist by establishing a parallel [...] between Narciso and

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<sup>66</sup> *Loa to “El cetro de José”* in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 192.

<sup>67</sup> *Loa to “El cetro de José”* in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 193.

Christ.” The *loa* constitutes an American prelude that anticipates the religious dramatic allegory.<sup>68</sup>

There are two Indian characters in the *loa* to El divino Narciso: *Occidente* (“A handsome Indian, with a crown” [“Indio galán, con corona”]), according to Sabat de Rivers “a Mexica King”; and *América*, a defiant Indian woman (described in Spanish as “India bizarra: con mantas y cupiles”). Both characters are dancing and offering sacrifices to their gods when they are accosted by *Religión* and *Celo*. Here, the Empire is represented militarily by *Celo* and spiritually by *Religión*. *Celo*, “Captain General” and conqueror, is pure force. Glantz notes that *Celo* evokes the image of Hernán Cortés. *Religión* (a “Spanish lady” [“de dama española”]), on the other hand, is the conceptualization of the Lascasian, evangelizing project, inclined to persuade the Indians, to—as she says—”invite them, in peace / to accept my faith” [“convidarlos, de paz, / a que mi culto reciban”].<sup>69</sup>

*América* resists conversion and invites *Occidente* to ignore *Religión*: “Obviously she [Religion] is crazy; forget about her / and let’s continue with our rituals” [“Sin duda es loca; ¡dejadla / y nuestros cultos prosigan!”]. Later she reproaches *Celo*: “You barbarous, crazy, blind man who / with reasons not understood, / wants to disturb the peace [...] we enjoy” [“Bárbaro, loco, que ciego, / con razones no entendidas, / quieres turbar el sosiego / [...que] gozamos”].<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “El divino Narciso” Obras completas, vol III, Alfonso Méndez Plancarte, ed., (México, 1951-1957). Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “Articulando las múltiples subalternidades en el Divino Narciso” in Colonial Latin American Review, IV, 1, [1995], 92.

<sup>69</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 3, 6. Sabat de Rivers, En busca de Sor Juana (México, D.F., 1998), 187. Margo Glantz, Borriones y borradores (México, D.F. 1992), 180. Note the positive representation of *Religión* as a feminine and peaceful character, counter to the masculine, military subjectivity of *Celo* (see Martínez-San Miguel, “Articulando” Colonial Latin American Review, IV, 1, [1995], 91).

<sup>70</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 8, 9.

Faced with the disastrous failure of his method of forced conversion, *Celo* prepares to execute *America*; but before he can carry out the deed—and in historic correspondence with a second moment in the Conquest—*Religión* intervenes:

Wait, don't kill her	¡Espera, no le des muerte,
for I need her alive!	que la necesito viva!
[...] because defeating her by force	[...] porque vencerla por fuerza
was your role, but subduing her	te tocó; mas el rendirla
through reason	con razón, me toca a mí,
and persuasive kindness	con suavidad persuasiva. <sup>71</sup>
is mine	

The pagan couple is then vanquished by *Celo*, but both make what we could call a *conscientious objection*: *América* declares:

[...] though captive I am crying	[...] aunque lloro cautiva
for my freedom,	mi libertad, ¡mi albedrío
my free will	con libertad más crecida
with rising liberty	adorará mis Deidades! <sup>72</sup>
will adore my Gods!	

*Occidente*, likewise, states:

I already said that your violence	Yo ya dije que me obliga
forces me to surrender,	a rendirme a ti la fuerza;

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<sup>71</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 11.

<sup>72</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 12.

.....	.....
but although I grieve in captivity,	y así, aunque cautivo gima,
you can not prevent	¡no me podrás impedir
me from saying, here in my heart,	que acá, en mi corazón, diga
that I worship the great God of seeds!.	que venero al gran Dios de las
	Semillas! <sup>73</sup>

The proximity with Lascasian tradition is evident: *Religión* is the “persuasive” good colonizer, in contrast with *Celo*. Mabel Moraña has said of this *loa* that it “relativizes the legitimacy of the implementation of the conquest” through a certain questioning of the violence of its campaigns. Glantz alleges that the *loa* is hence a universal defense of reasoned conversion and free will. The legal and theological defense of free will, however, is clearly not an original thesis of Sor Juana’s. Las Casas’s had sustained it more than one hundred fifty years before as the only mode for the religious conversion of alterity in his De unico vocationis modo omnium gentium ad veram religionem (written c.1537; pub. 1975), and this was indeed, an accepted theological thesis among many seventeenth-century Jesuits. Furthermore, the critique of the conquistadors (for their greed or their cruelty) is a common topic in Peninsular Baroque literature.<sup>74</sup>

The *loa*, although syncretist, to a certain extent takes up the tradition of the *Simia Dei*. *Religión*, faced with the rites of America, manifests the thesis of *diabolic plagiarism* inherited

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Mabel Moraña, Viaje al silencio: exploraciones del discurso barroco (México, 1998), 212, 213. Glantz, Borrones y borradores (México, D.F. 1992), 185, 186, 189. Bartolomé de las Casas, Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión (México, 1975).



from the archives of the sixteenth century: “leave the profane cult / that the Devil incites” [“dejad el culto profano / a que el Demonio os incita”];<sup>75</sup> and further on:

My God! What kind of replicas,	¡Válgame Dios! ¿Qué dibujos,
what kind of simulations or ciphers	qué remedos o qué cifras
of our sacred Truths	de nuestras sacras Verdades
do those lies want to be?	quieren ser estas mentiras?
.....	.....
Until what point does your malice [of the	¿Hasta dónde tu malicia
Devil]	quiere remedar de Dios
want to imitate from God	las sagradas Maravillas? <sup>76</sup>
the sacred Marvels?	

Ambivalent toward the Mexica religious otherness, the *loa* also proposes the idea that cannibalism anticipates or is a prefiguration of the Eucharist, which corresponds to a conception of religious alterity in a relation of continuity with Catholicism. This circumstance has been the base for countless hyperboles. Sabat de Rivers proposes that both *loas* constitute an “apology for America” and “for the pre-Cortés world”. Zanelli concurs, noting that in the *loa* to El divino Narciso Sor Juana “recuperates” both the “historical and the theological dimensions of the indigenous cultures.” Susana Hernández Araico sees in both *loas* the “de/re/construction” of the festive European code of the allegorical representation of América, as well as a critical consciousness of the Spanish conquest and an attempt to give historical and cultural specificity to

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<sup>75</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 7.

<sup>76</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 13 .

the representation of America. Martínez-San Miguel insinuates that it might have been a “dramatization of the process of the Conquest from the perspective of the colonized Indian.”<sup>77</sup>

The implications here, which would frame Sor Juana as something of an indigenist, Latinamericanist antecedent to Martí, or an intellectual from the *tradition of the oppressed*, find little textual support in the *loa* itself. Like in the case of the theological jurists of the sixteenth century, the discourse of the *rights of the Other* is not a loose wheel of colonialism, but rather one of its most well-oiled gears. The dramatic division between *Religión* and *Celo* corresponds to the old *division of imperial labor*. What has been seen as a political and religious heterodoxy is actually a quote from the Spanish Christian humanism of the sixteenth century that proposes a new imperial model (an evangelical one) in terms similar to those set out by Las Casas. Let us not forget that at the end of the *loa* America is converted, and that the last scene concludes with *America, Occidente* and *Celo* dancing in naked celebration of the integration of difference:

(America, Occidente and Celo singing:)	(Cantan la América, y el Occidente y el
the Indies	Celo:)
now know	[...] ya
the one who is True	conocen las Indias
God of Seeds!	al que es Verdadero

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<sup>77</sup> Sabat de Rivers, *En busca de Sor Juana* (México D.F., 1998), 265, 282. Carmela Zanelli. “La loa de ‘El divino Narciso’ de Sor Juana...” in *La literatura novohispana*, Buxó and Herrera (Eds.), (México, 1994), 183. Susana Hernández Araico, “El código festivo renacentista barroco y las loas sacramentales de Sor Juana: Des/re/construcción del mundo europeo” in *El escritor y la escena II: Actas del II Cong. de la Asociación Internacional de Teatro Español y Novohispano de los Siglos de Oro*. Ysla Campbell (ed.). (Ciudad Juárez, 1994), 79. Hernández Araico “La alegorización de América en Calderón y Sor Juana: Plus Ultra” in *Revista de Filología Hispánica* XII, 2, 1996, 294, 295. Martínez-San Miguel, “Articulando” in *Colonial Latin American Review*, IV,1, 1995, 88. Martínez-San Miguel recognizes however, that in the *loa* the “American Indian” is an “abstract category” (90).

Dios de las Semillas!<sup>78</sup>

If the *loa* to El divino Narciso displays a kind of Americanism or a sign of the “emergence of a *criollo* consciousness”, it is not because it “recuperates” any aspect of indigenous culture, but rather because it translates radical alterity (cannibalism) into the Catholic and imperial universalist continuity.

Nonetheless, there is a notably indeterminate space in the Baroque games and parallelisms of the *loa*. Throughout the work, there is a repeated invitation to celebrate “the great god of seeds” [“el gran Dios de las semillas”], whose name Sor Juana never clarifies. Among the logical referential candidates would be *Huitzilopochtli*, whose effigy was made of seeds (“semillas”) and eaten in the *Teoqualo*; *Tlaloc*, the god of water and fertility; *Quetzalcóatl*, the benevolent god of agriculture; Saturn, god of agriculture in European Antiquity; or Christ, the sower (“sembrador”), who plants his body in man through the Eucharistic feast. Only the *loa*’s instructions, which indicate who is speaking, can differentiate between Christianity, European paganism and Mexica religion. What is said about one god is not distinguished from what is said about another. *Religión*, like Durán or Acosta, sees in all of this a demonic imitation of Catholic rites, but ends up defining the Eucharist like *América* and *Occidente*—and using the same symbols and materials (bread, blood, seed, and redemption). What’s more, *Religión* describes the Christian God as an *agrarian* deity:

If the fields become fertile	si los campos se fecundan,
If the fruit multiplies	si el fruto se multiplica,
If the crops grow	si las sementeras crecen,

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<sup>78</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 21.



The *loa* could be described as a *cultural missive* with which the peripheral sender inscribes herself in the metropolis by way of cultural correspondence and participation in a conservative genre (Eucharistic theater)—at the same time that she produces the symbolic appropriation and construction of the “indigenous.” Sender and receiver are thus in a participatory relationship of periphery and center.<sup>83</sup> The *loa* makes this tension explicit: *Celo* questions *Religión*: “Don’t you see any impropriety in the fact that the play is written in Mexico, but it would be performed in Madrid?” [“¿Pues no ves la impropiedad / de que en Méjico se escriba / y en Madrid se represente?”]. *Religión*, with a SorJuanesque innocence, responds with another question: “So it is such an odd event / that something is produced in a certain / place, but used in another?” [“¿Pues es cosa nunca vista / que se haga una cosa en una / parte, porque en otra sirva?”]. Moreover, the character *Religion* insists that the play is not a “creation of audacity” [“parto de la osadía”], since it complies with an order from her Excellency the Countess de Paredes.<sup>84</sup>

*Celo* then replies: “How do you respond to the objection that you introduce the Indies and you want to take them to Madrid?” [“¿cómo salvas la objeción / de que introduces las Indias, / y

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divino narciso by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” in *Romanistisches* 19, (1968), 257-274), as well as the aforementioned erudite works of Hernández Araico.

<sup>83</sup> *Criollo* agency functions as a sort of negotiation of *criollos* “with the overseas power, trying to accommodate themselves within the bureaucratic system and the ecclesiastic organization” (Mazzotti, “Introducción” in *Agencias criollas*, Mazotti, ed., [Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000], 11); in this case, through the symbolic translation of American difference.

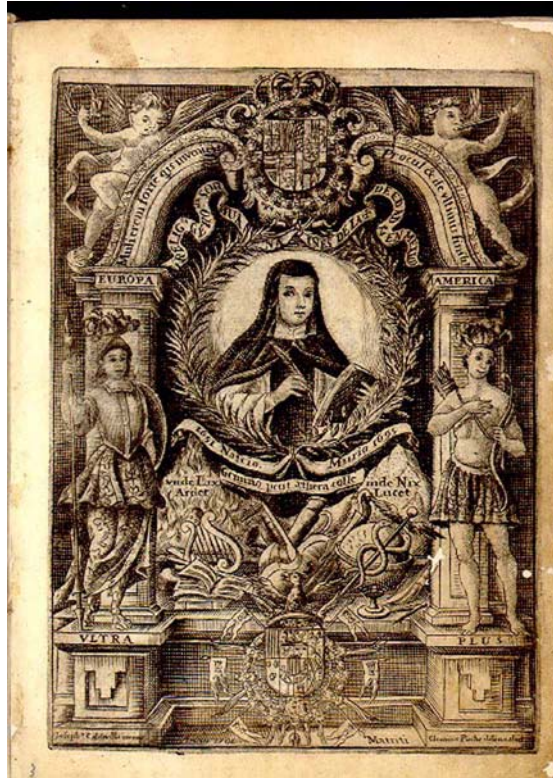
<sup>84</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 19. As is well known, a *trick of the weak* common in Sor Juana is her insistence that she is obeying an order (Josefina Ludmer, “Tretas del débil” in *La sartén por el mango: Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas* Patricia Elena González, ed. Introd, Eliana Ortega, ed., [Río Piedras, PR, 1984] 47-54).

a Madrid quieres llevarlas?"]], thereby alluding to the condition of the *criollo* intellectual, peripheral translator of a cultural difference that yet forms part of the Empire.<sup>85</sup>

The publication of the *loa* to El cetro and the republication of the *loa* to El divino Narciso in 1692—according to Hernández Araico, prepared for the second “centenary of Colón’s navigation to the New World”—signals the works’ celebratory character or, at least, their commemoration of America’s belonging to the Empire. *Religión* defends the *criollo* boldness: “in matters of intelligence there are neither distances nor oceans that hinder” [“que a especies intelectivas / ni habrá distancias que estorben / ni mares que les impidan”]. The insinuation is clear: just as the Christian faith has its use and place in the New World, discourse made in America can also serve Europe. At issue, then, is the intellectual authority of the *criollo* intellectual. Sor Juana reclaims her epistemological competence *vis-à-vis* the peninsular *Ingenios*, to whom *América*—with false modesty—begs pardon for “pretending with unrefined lines / to describe such a Mystery” [“querer con toscas líneas / describir tanto Misterio”]. In the illustration that follows the cover of Fama y obras póstumas (1700)—published after Sor Juana’s death—she appears writing (with a plume and paper in hand), under an imperial arch whose pillars are adorned with a conquistador on the right (below the inscription “Europe”) and an indigenous figure at the left (below the legend “America”) [**Illustration 2.4**]. The place of identity for the *criollo* intellectual (an imaginary construction, like the arch) appears in a location

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<sup>85</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s Obras completas [México, 1951-1957], III, 19, 20. Octavio Paz signals early on that “[i]t would be an error of historical perspective to confuse Baroque aesthetics—which opened the door to the exoticism of the New World—with a nationalist preoccupation [...]. Rather the opposite can be said. But if [Sor Juana] has no consciousness of nationality, she is conscious, and very much so, of the universality of the Empire. Indians, *criollos*, mestizos, whites and mulattos form a whole. Her preoccupation with pre-Cortés religions—visible in the *loa* that precedes El divino Narciso—has the same meaning. The function of the Church is not diverse to that of the Empire: to reconcile antagonisms,



2.4. Portrait of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, title page of Fama y obras póstumas (1700)

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embrace differences in a superior truth” (Octavio Paz, “Homenaje a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz en

written between the commemoration of the Conquest and the legacy of “the indigenous” (subordinated to the Empire).<sup>86</sup>

The *parto de la osadía*—to use an expression of Sor Juana—consists in writing from the margin, of bringing her American “conceptual character” to Europe, translating *America* from cannibal to Christian, and symbolically placing alterity into the *continuity of the universal*, in other words, the continuity of Christianity and Empire. The American anomaly is conjured up as an allegory (as a simulacrum of otherness) below the imperial arch. In what could be described as a kind of eccentric *occidentalism*, Sor Juana’s cultural trope of cannibalism and heterogeneous Americanism reclaims a cultural space of commonality within the Empire through the affirmation of an abstract difference, represented by allegorical Indians. Of course, the cannibal (or more generally the Indian) is “a metaphorical *idea dressed up in rhetorical colors*”, as Sor Juana said.<sup>87</sup> *America* and *Idolatría* are *conceptual characters*, as abstract as the “Americanism” of the plays:

and these persons introduced	y aquestas introducidas
are not people but	personas no son más que
abstract figures, that illustrate	unos abstractos, que pintan
what it is sought to be said.	lo que se intenta decir. <sup>88</sup>

The *letrado criollo* constructs an ahistorical version of colonized alterity that reclaims as part of its genealogy. Any empathy therein is, of course, symbolic, and retrospective; and

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su Tercer Centenario 1651-1695” in *Sur* 206 [Diciembre, 1951], 29-40).

<sup>86</sup> Hernández Araico “La alegorización de América...” in *Revista de Filología Hispánica* XII, 2, 1996, 290, 294. *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 20, 21. De la Cruz, *Fama y obras póstumas* (Madrid, 1700).

<sup>87</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 17.

<sup>88</sup> *Loa* to “El divino Narciso” in Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* [México, 1951-1957], III, 20.



identitarian affiliation, allied not with historical subjects of the present, but with a construction of the indigenous. The Baroque constitutes its unconscious by way of a series of exclusions, one of which are the historic Indians, and the material conditions that make that self-celebratory imperial culture possible. The indigenous do not offer themselves up like the rest of the Baroque cornucopia. They cannot enter into *the sublime* of the allegory, because *non-allegorical* Indians are the labour that makes the *ciudad letrada* possible, from its *arcos triunfales* to its poetic games; and hence they dwell in the Baroque's fields of horror, abjection, and unrepresentability. They inhabit the nightmares of the *ciudad letrada* as the insurrectionist Indians that spoiled Sigüenza y Góngora's appetite for the autochthonous.

The emergence of *criollo* consciousness can here be defined as the exorcism of the horror of the *other* by way of the compensatory appropriation / translation of colonial tropes. Sor Juana, "anticipating" one of the most recurrent discursive practices of nationalism, inserts into the family album—she renders familiar—distant and touched up portraits of strange ancestors, dressed in "retóricos colores." But she does so in order to be part of the Empire. Later, this stereotype would be converted into a cultural fetish; a fetish upon which would be displaced the *obscure object of desire* of Latin American nationalisms. Then again, by the last decade of the seventeenth century this was only an ambivalent sign of the *criollo* desire to belong to the imperial cultural community.