PERSPECTIVAS

HISPANIC THEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE

TWENTY-FIRST ISSUE – 2024

SENIOR EDITOR:
Néstor Medina

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
Socorro Castañeda-Liles
Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III

TRANSLATORS:
Néstor Medina
Francisco Castillo

TECHNICAL SERVICES
Grace Vargas

BOOK REVIEW EDITORS
Theresa Yugar
Grace Vargas

ADVISORY BOARD:
Mayra Rivera
Felipe Hinojosa
Carmelo Santos
Ulrike Guthrie

PUBLISHER:
Joanne Rodríguez, Executive Director, Hispanic Theological Initiative

---

Perspectivas is a publication of the Hispanic Theological Initiative,
funded by Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

PERSPECTIVAS

TWENTY-FIRST ISSUE, 2024

CONTENTS

Editorial [ENGLISH VERSION] 4
Editorial [SPANISH VERSION] 6
Néstor Medina, Senior Editor

Reading with Canaanite Eyes: Joshua 5 and the Gaze of the Indigenous Mexican Revolutionary
[ENGLISH]
Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy *8*

Leer con ojos cananeos: Josué 5 y la mirada del revolucionario indígena mexicano
[SPANISH]
Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy *20*

Revolutionary Love: Ché's Complicated Legacy
[ENGLISH]
Michael Jimenez *33*

Lessons from Mestizaje for Catholic Theology from a 'Little Red Dot'
[ENGLISH]
Audrey Wong (Wong Siew Ming Audrey fcJ) *46*

Lecciones del Mestizaje para una teología católica desde un 'pequeño puntito rojo'
[SPANISH]
Audrey Wong (Wong Siew Ming Audrey fcJ) *61*

PERSPECTIVAS

SENIOR EDITOR:
Néstor Medina

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
Socorro Castañeda-Liles
Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III

TRANSLATORS:
Néstor Medina
Francisco Castillo

TECHNICAL SERVICES
Grace Vargas

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR
Theresa Yugar
Grace Vargas

Perspectivas: Occasional Papers is a publication of the
Hispanic Theological Initiative and is made possible by
Princeton Theological Seminary.

To celebrate our online debut, we are currently waiving
subscription fees for a limited time.
Happy reading and thank you for your support!

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to
The Hispanic Theological Initiative,
12 Library Place, Princeton, NJ 08540.

To Subscribe to the journal visit:
http://perspectivasonline.com/subscriptions/

Views expressed in this publication are those of the writers.
Publication does not necessarily signify endorsement by
the Hispanic Theological Initiative.

TWENTY-FIRST ISSUE | 2024

Editorial [ENGLISH VERSION]

Changes in academic seas often have a lot to do with geopolitical events. For some time now, the war between the Ukraine and Russia has occupied the imagination of many people. Not often do people realize that those most directly impacted by that war are the people on the ground in those cities, towns and villages that are attacked. Similarly, this past October marked the elevation of the Palestine-Israel military exchanges to new heights. In an uneven, bully-like, relentless attack, Israel's military might have already claimed the lives of over 30,000 Palestinians and has left over two million people in jeopardy with a lack of food, drinkable water, and shelter. The encounter between Ukraine and Russia demonstrates the extent to which the powerful nations are willing to use innocent people on the ground and their small cities and towns as the battlegrounds on which to fight their wars or to assert their military might.

With the involvement of the wealthier nations and their investment in the ever more destructive military arsenal, we can see how political interests and global decisions are often tainted by military confrontation. In the case of the Israelite onslaught of Palestine, it is becoming increasingly clear that though it remains powerful, the colonial project has lost any moral standing. Not that it ever had it, but that now the degree to which the richer and powerful nations will side with other wealthier and powerful nations to guarantee control of the poor peoples and nations of the world is ever more evident.

Latin Americans and Latinas/os/xs are not strange to foreign military invasions, political interests, and economic maneuverings. We have a long-standing history of economic and political interventionism orchestrated by foreign interests. Latinas/os/xs have become accustomed to navigating violent social spaces where many of us are still seen as foreigners, immigrants, or unwanted second-class citizens. And yet, we are also heirs to centuries-long struggles to define and think for ourselves and to undo the legacy of colonization that sometimes feels ubiquitous.

Along those lines, the first article of the 2024 issue of Perspectivas, by Michael Jiménez, revisits the historical figure of Che Guevara both for his capacity to rally people together and a complex history of violence and suppression of opposition. Drawing methodologically on biography as theology, Jiménez wrestles with Guevara's historical legacy while examining some of the contested threads of that history that turned him into a powerful symbol for many. Focusing on the Christian tradition of non-violence, the author invites readers to rethink this legacy of violence while at the same time daring them to claim other key figures in our history of struggle who may better fit our changing societies.

[Continued on next page]

Latinas/os/xs are no strangers to violence, especially historical texts and social policies and laws that have proven violent and exclusionary to our communities. Dealing with the issue of violent texts, Chauncey Handy discusses in our second article the complexities of reading potentially violent texts. Specifically focusing on the pericope of Judges 5, Handy complexifies the reading of this passage by drawing on Robert Warrior's proposal of reading with "Canaanite eyes" and by engaging the Zapatista leader, Subcomandante Marcos, as his primary interlocutor. The author problematizes uncritical readings of violent texts, including the Judges 5 passage, and exposes critical inconsistencies in hermeneutical claims that promote the "plain reading" of the biblical text.

Part of the work among Latinas/os/xs has been to dismantle the colonial legacy, to counter dominant narratives and theologies, to work toward building our own theologies from the heart of our communities, and from our affirmations offer to other ethnocultural traditions theological insights. In our third article, Audrey Wong draws on the theological and theoretical work of Latinas/os/xs particularly the notions of mestizaje and borderlands. Wong meticulously examines these two key categories and elaborates critical insights that are useful for developing of a theology from Singapore. This theology, she asserts, would have to account for the history of colonization and its legacy, the internal reality of ethnic and biological intermixture, and think carefully about what it would mean to write such a theology considering Singapore's present social climate and cultural reality of Singapore. Much like Latinas/os/xs started doing a few decades ago, Wong maps out ways in which a properly Christian and Singaporean theology can emerge in her context.

The editorial team of Perspectivas is pleased to publish these articles complemented by a few book reviews. These together display the growing Latina/o/x theological production. We offer this 2024 issue as an expression of the vitality of Latina/o/x academic work and research, and our contribution and sometimes disruption to multiple fields of research.

Néstor Medina, Senior Editor.

PERSPECTIVAS

NÚMERO VEINTICUATRO | 2024

Editorial [SPANISH VERSION]

Cambios en los espacios académicos a menudo tienen mucho que ver con eventos geopolíticos. Ya por algún tiempo, la guerra entre Ucrania y Rusia ha ocupado la imaginación de muchas personas. Pero no a menudo se dan cuenta de que quienes son más afectadas por esa Guerra son aquellas personas en las bases en las ciudades, pueblos y aldeas que están siendo atacadas. De igual manera, este pasado octubre marcó cómo los encuentros militares entre Israel y Palestina fueron elevados a nuevos niveles. En un ataque implacable y desigual, como "bully", el poder militar de Israel ya ha clamado la vida de más de 30,000 Palestinos y ha dejado en peligro a más de dos millones de personas con falta de comida, agua potable, y refugio. El encuentro entre Ucrania y Rusia demuestra el grado al que las naciones poderosas están dispuestas a usar personas inocentes en las bases y sus pequeñas ciudades y pueblos como el campo de batalla donde pelear sus guerras o afirmar su poder militar. Con el envolvimiento de las naciones ricas y su inversión en un arsenal militar cada vez más destructivo, ahora podemos ver como intereses políticos y decisiones de carácter global a menudo vienen manchadas por confrontamientos militares. En el caso de la invasión de Palestina por Israel, se hace crecientemente más claro, que, aunque permanece poderoso, el proyecto colonial ha perdido cualquier fundamento moral. No que lo haya tenido antes, pero ahora el grado al que las naciones ricas y poderosas apoyan a otras naciones ricas y poderosas para garantizar su control de los pueblos y naciones pobres del mundo se hace mucho más evidente.

Latinoamericanas/os/xs y latina/os/xs estamos familiarizados con invasiones militares foráneas, intereses políticos, y maniobras económicas. Tenemos una larga historia de intervencionismo económico y político orquestado por intereses foráneos. Latinas/os/xs ya se han acostumbrado a navegar espacios sociales violentos donde a muchos de nosotros se nos ve como extranjeros, inmigrantes, y ciudadanos de segunda clase no deseados. Sin embargo, también somos herederos de luchas, que han durado siglos, para definir y pensar por nuestra cuenta y deshacer el legado de la colonización que a veces parece ser ubicuo.

Siguiendo esas líneas, el primer artículo del tomo del 2024 de Perspectivas, por Michael Jiménez, retoma la figura histórica del Ché Guevara tanto en su capacidad de inspirar a la gente como su compleja historia de violencia y supresión de oposición. Tomando la metodología de biografía como teología, Jiménez reflexiona sobre el legado histórica de Guevara mientras examina algunos de los hilos conflictivos de esa historia que lo convirtió en un poderoso símbolo para muchos. Enfocándose en la tradición cristiana de la no violencia, el autor invita a los lectores a repensar ese legado de violencia mientras, a su vez, atreviéndose a clamar a otras figuras históricas claves en nuestra historial de lucha que pueden ser más apropiados para nuestras sociedades cambiantes.

[Continúa en la página siguiente]

Latinas/os/xs no somos extraños a la violencia, especialmente a textos históricos y políticas sociales y leyes que han probado ser violentas y excluyentes a nuestras comunidades. Abordando el tema de textos violentos, Chauncey Handy discute, en nuestro segundo artículo, las complejidades de leer textos potencialmente violentos. Enfocándose específicamente en el pasaje de Jueces 5, Handy complejiza la lectura de este pasaje tomando de la propuesta de Robert Warrior de leer con "ojos cananeos", y de tomar al líder Zapatista, Subcomandante Marcos, como su interlocutor principal. El autor problematiza las lecturas acríticas de textos violentos, incluyendo Jueces 5, y expone las inconsistencias críticas en las posturas interpretativas que promueven la "lectura literal" del texto bíblico.

Parte de la tarea entre latinas/os/xs ha sido desmantelar el legado colonial, contradecir las narrativas y teologías dominantes, y trabajar hacía la construcción de sus propias teologías desde el corazón de sus comunidades, y desde nuestras afirmaciones teológicas ofrecer ideas a otras tradiciones etnoculturales. En nuestro tercer artículo, Audrey Wong toma del trabajo teológico y teórico latino, particularmente las nociones de mestizaje y fronteras. Wong examina estas dos categorías meticulosamente y elabora ideas críticas útiles para el desarrollo de una teología desde Singapur. Esta teología, ella afirma, tendría que tomar en cuenta la historia de colonización y su legado, la realidad interna de entremezcla étnica y biológica, y tendría que pensar cuidadosamente acerca de lo que significaría escribir tal teología tomando en consideración el presente clima social y la realidad cultural de Singapur. Así como Latinas/os/xs comenzaron a hacer hace unas décadas, Wong mapea formas en que pueda surgir una teología que sea propiamente cristiana y singapurense.

El equipo editorial de Perspectivas se agrada en publicar estos artículos complementados con unas reseñas de libros. Estos juntos demuestran la creciente producción teológica latina. Les ofrecemos este tomo del 2024 como una expresión de la vitalidad del trabajo e investigación académica latina, y de nuestra contribución y a veces disrupción de múltiples campos de investigación.

Néstor Medina, Editor principal

PERSPECTIVAS • 2024

Reading with Canaanite Eyes: Joshua 5 and the Gaze of the Indigenous Mexican Revolutionary

Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy

Reed College

• VEA LA PÁGINA 20 PARA LEER ESTE ARTÍCULO EN ESPAÑOL •

Abstract

The historical realities of the reception history of violent texts place a particular burden on religious interpreters of violent biblical texts. In the past, religious interpreters of the book of Joshua justified mass murder of indigenous communities in the Americas. In this sense, the texts themselves are inherently dangerous in their canonical form—a problem that neither "plain-sense" readings nor historical critical approaches can address. I utilize Robert Warrior's concept of reading violent passages through "Canaanite eyes" as a paradigm that aims to highlight the dangers of the book of Joshua and potential means of resolution to issues posed by the text. The voice of Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) serves as an interlocutor who demonstrates the need for a vision of interpretive community that stretches beyond religious communities into what I call a "humanizing community."

More than 500 years have passed since Hernán Cortés' fateful voyage to colonize the "New World" in the name of Spain. In those five (now approaching six) centuries, millions of Indigenous lives have been taken and countless lands stolen by the conquistadores and their descendants. Comparatively, the arrival of the conquistador on the shores of Mexico and the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan put on display a disturbingly similar imagination. The land (Canaan or Mexico) is destined for the conqueror, whether commanded by Israel's deity or that of the Spanish, divine Providence is the justification for the genocidal dispossession of Indigenous communities.[1]

---

[1] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010), 92-93, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300163087ñ. Pablo Richard, "Interpretación Bíblica Desde Las Culturas Indígenas," *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana*, no. 26 (1997): 52; Alfred A. Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire," *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1988): 277-297,

Rather than being sidestepped by historical critical research which has consistently rejected the historicity of Joshua, reception history demonstrates how Israel's divinely authorized conquest of the Promised Land is a standard tool of Christian imperialism.[2] Here, Robert Warrior's point with respect to Christian interpretation of biblical texts is particularly pertinent: "The danger is that these [believing] communities will read the narratives and not the history behind them."[3] I argue, paralleling Warrior, that these historical realities ought to prompt responsible biblical interpreters to interrogate and subordinate "plain-sense" readings of the book of Joshua—whether literary, post-critical, or otherwise—to a hermeneutic that Warrior terms "reading with Canaanite eyes."[4] In other words, the imagination of the text itself—reflected in its appropriation by Christian empire—must be resisted in solidarity with indigenous communities, allowing their voices to speak against the biblical text as an act of interpretation explicitly advocating for life.[5]

In what follows, I demonstrate the practice of such a hermeneutic. Taking an "ideal" text from the book of Joshua that complexifies the imagination of conquest, I offer a close reading of Joshua 5 with special attention to vv. 13-15. These passages form a microcosm of the literary feature occurring throughout the book of Joshua in which the triumphant Israelite narrative of conquest is subverted. Then, turning to the voice of Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN (Ejército de Liberación Naciónal), I show that attention to the polyvocal nature of textuality in ancient Israel is not sufficient to blunt its rhetorical danger to readers. Rather, reading with indigenous realities and communities—reading with "Canaanite eyes"—necessarily subordinates the plain-sense reading to broader, more meaningful concerns. That is, such a hermeneutic reorients the reader (whether religious or not) towards the flourishing of all human communities.[6]

Close Reading of Joshua 5 (The Contemporary "plain-sense")

One of the most important elements of contemporary plain-sense readings is the delineation of how the meaning of biblical texts is in some sense generated by religious communities vis à vis the words on the page of canonical documents. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, reading in the plain-sense generally corresponds in practice to close

---

https://doi.org/10.2307/1184402; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o El Oro En Las Indias: Siglo XVI*, CEP ; 95 (Lima, Perú: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas--Rímac, 1989).

[2] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 114; M.C. Gaposchkin, "Louis IX, Crusade and the Promise of Joshua in the Holy Land," *Journal of Medieval History* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 245–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2007.10.007; Yvonne Sherwood, "Comparing the 'Telegraph Bible' of the Late British Empire to the Chaotic Bible of the Sixteenth Century Spanish Empire: Beyond the Canaan Mandate into Anxious Parables of the Land," in *In the Name of God*, ed. C.L. Crouch and Jonathan Stökl (Leiden, NL: BRILL, 2014), 4–62, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004259126_003.

[3] Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (1989): 6.

[4] Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 3. By the plain-sense here, I mean an approach to biblical texts that emphasize the importance of the "words on the page" as the primary locus of concern however that is ultimately framed—whether in models of literary theory or the function of texts in religious communities.

[5] My thanks to Kim Verudny and Max Wink for our conversations that led to this article's perspective.

[6] Enrique D. Dussel and Alejandro A. Vallega, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), xxii.

readings of textual traditions based on the Masoretic Text (MT). Carol Newsom summarizes this approach as, "reading with the grain of the text."[7] In this spirit, I will consider with the MT version of Joshua and extrapolate possible aspects of the narrative's rhetorical orientation. The results of this exploration will then be put through the paces of Warrior's hermeneutic of Canaanite eyes in the following section.

The structure of Joshua 5 is emblematic of broader narrative themes of chapters 1-12 and therein embodies a twist on Deuteronomistic theology. This theology presupposed by the first twelve chapters of Joshua was aptly summarized by Davis as "the only good Canaanite is a dead Canaanite."[8] The imperative in Deuteronomy 9:5 to enact the ban (*ḥērem*), or more clearly, to kill all the inhabitants of the land is the backdrop to the book of Joshua. This command is considered both a part of Israel's faithfulness to YHWH and a judgment on the wickedness of the indigenous peoples of the land (e.g., Deut 9:4).[9] However, the book of Joshua has a complex relationship with this theological assumption—undermining unequivocal commitment to the ban.[10] In order to effectively situate Joshua 5:13-15 in this movement of the narrative, it is necessary to comment briefly on preceding aspects of chapter 5.

The Israelites' experience in chapter 5 is the quintessential description of faithfulness to YHWH in the land. YHWH's command that the people should be circumcised "a second time" (Joshua 5:2) reads hyperbolically and prompts the biblical narrator to provide a lengthy explanation of why this would be necessary, though in so doing the wording of the divine command is not clarified. Nonetheless, the scrupulous observance of the divine command is evident. Daniel Hawk notes "…circumcision represents Israel's submission to Yahweh, its reception of the promises of God, and its acceptance of the identity and calling Yahweh has determined."[11] Hence, the act of circumcision (whether hyperbolic in this case or not) is a mutual affirmation of Israel's privileged relation to YHWH and its role in the land.

---

[7] Carol Newsom, "Reflections on Ideological Criticism and Postcritical Perspectives," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. David L. Petersen, Joel M. LeMon, and Kent Harold Richards, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study; no. 56 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 555-556.

[8] Ellen Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," in Ellen Davis and Richard Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 170; Douglas S. Earl, *The Joshua Delusion?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 48.

[9] Davis, "Critical Traditioning," 170. The Israel I describe here is a literary entity created by the biblical author.

[10] In his commentary, Daniel Hawk describes this in the following way: "A subtle voice, however, whispers as the domineering voice shouts. This voice subverts the strident voice of militarism, legalism, and superiority by drawing our attention to instances of disobedience to commands of Moses (as in making covenants with Rahab and the Gibeonites) and the reporting unsuccessful efforts to subdue the indigenous peoples (15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13; 20:47) and possess their lands (13:1-7). The voice speaks of a larger vision of Israelite identity, one that dismantles Israel's 'us/them' ethnic consciousness, portrays all peoples—invaders and indigenous alike—as recipients of God's mercy and establishes Israel's identity solely on devotion to a gracious and giving God (8:30-35; 24:1-24)." Daniel Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), xxiii.

[11] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 59.

Following the recovery period from circumcision, YHWH informs Joshua that the disgrace of Egypt is no longer upon the Israelites (Joshua 5:9). The new generation of Israelites is given a new status in the honor-shame dynamic of the Ancient Near East—they live in the Promised Land as the un-disgraced. Finally, the Israelites eat the last of the manna and celebrate Passover; symbolically reversing the movement of the Exodus. Where they once ate the Passover meal as they left their homes in Egypt to subsist on manna, the manna now stops (Joshua 5:12) at the very moment of their celebration of the Passover in their new homeland. The Israelites' faithfulness to YHWH is at a paradigmatic level by the time the reader arrives at verse 13.

It is as a result of these prior elements of the chapter that 5:13-15 is set up for a dramatic level of irony. The passage reads:

> When Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him, a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you ours, or our enemies'?" He said, "Neither; but as commander of the army of YHWH I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face earthwards and worshiped, and he said to him, "What does my Lord command his servant?" The commander of the army of YHWH said to Joshua, "[r]emove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.[12]

Laying aside various questions regarding the curious nature of how Joshua arrives in such a position alone facing an unidentified swordsman, the disjunctive irony delivered by this passage operates at implicit and explicit levels, all of which prompt significant doubts that destabilize the position of Israel vis-à-vis the ban, YHWH's relation to Israel, and Joshua's role.[13] At the explicit level, YHWH's relation to Israel is notably in question. Despite receiving the obedience of the chosen people via a second round of circumcision (5:2) coupled with the Passover celebration (5:12) and personally removing the disgrace of Egypt from Israel in the Promised Land (5:9), YHWH appears uncommitted.[14] YHWH's commander is shockingly neither for the Israelites nor for their enemies prior to the lauded battle at Jericho.

Deuteronomy is clear regarding the side YHWH takes, the side opposed to the wicked inhabitants of the land, "…but because of the wickedness of these nations YHWH, your God is dispossessing them before you" (Deuteronomy 9:5). However, here the narrative of Joshua displays its aforementioned ambivalence regarding the Deuteronomistic backdrop. The portrait of YHWH presented is hazardous for Israel at the worst possible moment. Hawk notes that this passage carries the rhetorical effect of encouraging the Israelites (and therein the reader) to evaluate their own commitment to YHWH.[15] However, this explanation does not resolve the biting subversion that comes with the declared neutrality of YHWH. Israel is at the pinnacle of its faithfulness in the Promised Land, in the context of a holy war instituted by YHWH, and on the eve of the first battle with wicked indigenous groups. In this fraught context, the significance of YHWH's neutrality is paramount.

---

[12] My translation.
[13] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D,* 62.
[14] Blazej Strba, *«Take off Your Sandals from Your Feet!»*, (Frankfurt, GER: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008), 304. An analysis of the BHS textual apparatus suggests that variant readings do not supply substantial differences to this interpretation.
[15] Earl, *The Joshua Delusion?*, 72.

This reality prompts doubts regarding Israel's status as executer of the ban. The explicit support of YHWH given in Chapter 1 is now notably missing. The entire project of Israel's entrance into Canaan is predicated upon YHWH's gracious action. If, however, YHWH is not on the side of Israel the outcome of Israel's call to claim the land by means of enacting the ban is dubious. Particularly considering how the previous generation of Israelites' failed incursion into the land is explicitly linked to YHWH's lack of support in Numbers 14.

Furthermore, the narrative raises uncertainty with regard to Joshua as Moses' successor. The parallels between Moses' call narrative in Exodus 3 are readily seen and yet in the form presented are an aspect of irony in chapter 5.[16] Chapter 1 presents an explicit affirmation of Joshua's installation with connections to Moses. YHWH states, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you…" (Joshua 1:5). However, unlike Moses, Joshua does not recognize the divine representative in the narrative set in parallel with Moses' call. Carolyn Sharp notes that this comparison presents ironies that "are sharp enough to draw blood."[17] Furthermore, in the moment that Joshua receives the parallel command to remove his sandals (Joshua 5:15) in a way identical to Moses' call at the burning bush, the narrator notably fails to reaffirm Joshua's leadership.

The narrative does not meet the expectation built by such an explicit reference to Israel's great leader. Moses' reception of the command to remove his sandals is met with YHWH's self-revelation and commitment to be with Moses and the Israelites (Exodus 3:6-12). One could easily expect that Moses' successor, having been officially installed in chapter 1 would be affirmed in a similar way in such a parallel narrative. Yet, following Joshua's reception of the command to remove his sandals, the narrative falls silent. There is no resolution to the problem caused by YHWH's neutrality in chapter 5. Moreover, Joshua's call to be Moses' successor is left unclear by a jolting stop to the scene where parallels would likely lead audiences to expect a call narrative. I suspect that familiarity with the Exodus narrative has led many commentators to positively describe this scene as an affirmation of Joshua's leadership.[18] However, this is precisely what the text *does not say*. The intertextual resonances here are sufficient to sow doubt into an audience's reception of Joshua.

In this sense, the function of Joshua 5:13-15 effectively undermines the Deuteronomistic theology that lies behind the book of Joshua. In light of chapter 5, the neutrality of YHWH and the lack of a reaffirmation of Joshua's call cast significant doubt on the Israelite invasion of the land at the worst possible moment. Thoughtful attention to the literary form of the present narrative destabilizes unequivocal support for the extermination of indigenous peoples in the land by means of an intensified awareness of Israel's ambiguous position vis à vis YHWH.

---

[16] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 63.

[17] Carolyn J. Sharp, *Joshua*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Vol. 5 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2019), 162.

[18] Strba, *«Take off Your Sandals from Your Feet!»*, 334–335; Pekka Pitkänen, *Joshua*. (Nottingham, UK: Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 150-151.

At this point, it is important to note that what I have described is one of many such literary challenges posed by irony in the book of Joshua.[19] This is not to say that the book of Joshua is only formed by narratives that problematize a commitment to the ban. There is in fact a significant literary commitment to Deuteronomistic theology which runs throughout the book imperiling the indigenous peoples of the land. Yet, it is exactly this commitment which allows room for the function of various narratives within Joshua. A counterpoint which subverts Deuteronomistic expectations could only take place within a narrative including such a thematic backdrop—much as the interplay between Abbott and Costello required the "straight man" routine of Bud Abbott to make space for the disjunctive antics of Lou Costello.

Joshua 5 Through Canaanite Eyes

The subversion of conquest narratives in Joshua may challenge some privileged, culturally dominant readers through a plain-sense reading to resist incorporating biblical conquest narratives into their worldviews. However, the overwhelmingly troubling content of the narrative of Joshua cannot be helpfully rejected via a plain-sense reading alone. This is all the truer of Christian communities reading from the position of beneficiaries of anti-indigenous policies and actions (e.g., Manifest Destiny in the USA). This to say, the fact that many in these communities must be *convinced* of their responsibility to reject biblical narrative that justifies settler colonialist projects creates the need for perspectives from outside the text itself. In other words, plain-sense readings must turn to indigenous voices and communities and seek to hone their reading through "Canaanite eyes." I now turn to the writings of Subcomandante Marcos to aid in considering Joshua 5 from this perspective.[20] Marcos requires an introduction to place him helpfully at the center this discussion.

As the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico an uprising took place in Chiapas—the poorest and Southern-most Mexican state. Indigenous Mexicans long disenfranchised by the Mexican government's efforts to be included in NAFTA, took up arms calling themselves the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) and occupied various administrative buildings.[21] The voice of Subcomandante Marcos, the then spokesperson of the EZLN, narrated the indigenous communities' experience and critique of the status quo during the brutal armed conflict with the Mexican government. This leader and spokesperson of indigenous communities fighting for survival is an interlocutor who clearly embodies what Warrior suggests in terms of "Canaanite eyes."

---

[19] Some of the others being Rahab in Joshua 2, the Gibeonites in Joshua 9, and Joshua's farewell address in Joshua 24.

[20] Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *6-7*; Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, xxxvi.

[21] "Zapatista Army of National Liberation," Note: all translation of Spanish primary sources will be provided in the footnotes by reference to the official translation of the documents cited (Our word is our weapon).

The relation of the EZLN to reading with "Canaanite eyes" is made clear in some of Marcos' first public words following the revolution. Walking the reader through Mexican history until the present-day, Marcos voices the narratives of indigenous communities in Latin American having suffered five centuries of oppression:

> Somos producto de 500 años de luchas: primero contra la esclavitud, en la guerra de independencia contra España encabezada por los insurgentes, después por evitar ser absorbidos por el expansionismo norteamericano…los que se nos ha negado la preparación más elemental para así poder utilizarnos como carne de cañón y saquear las riquezas de nuestra patria sin importarles que estemos muriendo…Pero HOY DECIMOS ¡BASTA!…[22]

These words provide sufficient parallels to enliven the imagination with respect to Marcos as an interlocutor for biblical interpreters. The relevance of embodied cultural memory of centuries of genocidal colonialism in Latin America speaks for itself in the context of the conquest of Canaan described in Joshua 5.

From the position of indigenous readers given voice by Marcos, the Deuteronomistic theology of conquest undergirding the Joshua narrative is not substantively changed by its literary subversion in Joshua 5:13-15,[23] especially since the passage is immediately followed by the destruction of Jericho in chapter 6. Indeed, though the narrative of Joshua as a whole gestures to a dubious and self-defeating account of the conquest, it nonetheless remains an account of *conquest* with a functioning perspective that the indigenous population of the land is evil and worthy of divinely ordained extermination. Walter Brueggemann expresses the problem in a subtly different manner, "YHWH, with accompanying chosenness and violence, is to some extent a product and construct of Israel's testimony…"[24]

In other words, this Israelite tradition of violence toward indigenous peoples has become a prevailing backdrop to the text of Joshua with which interpreters will always struggle. In this way, the elements of the text itself lend strength to Marcos' expressed critique of capitalism, which doubles here as a critique of aspects of biblical imagination:

---

[22] Subcomandante Marcos and Juana Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra* (New York, NY: Siete Cuentos, 2001), 13.; "We are a product of five hundred years of struggle, first led by insurgents against slavery during the War of Independence with Spain; then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism…[those] who have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country without caring that we are dying…but today we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH." Subcomandante Marcos and Juana Ponce de Leon, *Our Word is our Weapon* (New York, NY: Seven Stories, 2002), 13.

[23] The subversion I describe here (as I mention above) is also demonstrated in the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6:22-25, the story of Achan in chapter 7, and lastly with the Gibeonites in chapter 9. In all of these narratives, despite some element of judgment on Israel—explicit in the case of Achan—and the survival of Rahab and her family and the Gibeonites, the result is the same. Israel's violent claim to the land of indigenous others is not negated and the life of the survivors—Rahab and her family outside the camp and the Gibeonites enslaved—is ultimately unwelcome despite the covenants made with Israel.

[24] Walter Brueggemann , "The God of Joshua: An Ambivalent Field of Negotiation." in Brenner and Yee, *Joshua and Judges*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 24.

"En el mundo de ellos, los que en el Poder viven y por el Poder matan, no cabe el ser humano…Esclavitud o muerte es la alternativa que el mundo de ellos ofrece a todos los mundos."[25] The possibility of separating out inherently xenophobic and violent aspects of the Bible is the flip side of the coin of genocide and oppression.

The details of the text beyond Deuteronomistic theology are also problematic from Marcos' seeming line of reasoning. In Joshua 5:1, the kings of the people of the land hear of YHWH's assistance in allowing the Israelites to cross the Jordan. At this news, their "hearts melted and there was no longer spirit (*rûaḥ*) in them because of the Israelites."[26] In this verse, the indigenous peoples' leaders have already lost their breath.[27] While this is certainly hyperbolic biblical language relating to the fear of these kings (and presumably their peoples), for all intents and purposes they are already marked for death and thus their loss of breath/spirit is foreshadowing for the very real death that is declared to have come upon them by the end of Joshua 12.

The indigenous peoples of the land are perceived by the Israelite gaze as the walking dead while divine initiative carries Israel into a land not their own. Cortés and Joshua—Israel's leader—operate with similar visions. It is this sort of imagination that drove the EZLN to an armed response, "[e]stamos dispuestos a morir otros 150 mil si es necesario esto para que despierte nuestro pueblo del sueño del engaño en que lo tienen."[28] Marcos' perspective is that any imagination which turns the lives of marginalized peoples into obstacles to profit (spiritual or financial) must be resisted to the point of death.

Ultimately, Joshua 5:13-15 is of little comfort to the indigenous interpreter. YHWH's neutrality in the conflict between invading Israelite and indigenous Canaanite populations does not offer hope to peoples who bear the brunt of the most xenophobic elements of Joshua. That the divine should not be allied with the invader is a given, but that the divine should abandon the invaded to chance renders the presence of the divine useless at best and more likely dangerous. By contrast, the Mayan religion to which Marcos ascribes articulates an aspect of the divine that is the heart of the community and present amidst their most despairing struggle—Votán Zapata. "Desde la hora primera en esta larga noche en que morimos, dicen nuestros más lejanos abuelos, hubo quien recogió nuestro dolor y nuestro olvido…Votán Zapata, guardián y corazón del pueblo."[29] In contrast to the representation of the God of Israel present in the narrative of Joshua 5, the divine in Marcos' community provides far more than simply a message of neutrality in the presence of the invader. In this light, the momentary neutrality of the God of Israel (a foreign god to Marcos) framed by a plain-sense methodology of reading fails to address the lived experiences of the Zapatista community.[30]

---

[25] Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 120; Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, 109. "In the world of those who live and kill for Power, there is no room for human beings…Slavery or death is the choice that their world offers all worlds."

[26] Spirit is also possible to translate as wind or breath.

[27] The parallels to Eric Garner's last words "I can't breathe," show how this passage speaks to marginalized peoples of many backgrounds. The struggle of many minoritized communities is grounded in the reality that their lives are seen as expendable.

[28] Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 18; Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, 17. "We are ready to die, 150,000 more if necessary, so that our people awaken from this dream of deceit that holds us hostage."

[29] Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 21; Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon,* 20. "From the first hour in this long night of our death, our most distant grandfathers say there was someone who gathered up our pain and our oblivion…Vote Zapata, guardian and heart of the people."

Reading with Canaanite Eyes in the Humanizing Community

As can be seen above, reading with Canaanite eyes renders plain-sense reading of the book of Joshua inescapably problematic. Even in the narrative moments most ripe for subversion, conquest is the divinely justified focal point. Decrying the inherently oppressive elements (no matter how aptly) of biblical texts is not a solution for religious communities that live with these texts. Many of these communities would not be willing to reject entire problematic narratives.[31] Moreover, attention to the intricacies of biblical narratives is not sufficient to guard against future harm of those implicitly marginalized by the Bible. In some sense, religious interpreters themselves must embrace the idea that a methodology of plain-sense reading alone is inherently harmful. Only interpreters committed to living alongside fully-considered biblical narratives (in terms of literary form and problematic elements) can hope to affect long-term lived change in response to the dilemmas of the Bible. In this respect, it is worth discussing the role community experience in Subcomandante Marcos' thought play, beyond challenging a "scripture alone" sense of interpretation. A hermeneutic of Canaanite eyes orients readers toward a differing concept of biblical interpretation that expands beyond the bounds of one's religious tradition, a concept I term "the humanizing community."

The writings of Marcos presuppose and frequently reference the sufferings and traditions of his indigenous communities. The very purpose for his critique is the living reality of those around him. For Marcos, the role of the community is essential. In his analysis, it is the experience of the community that prompts action and critique. Experience and meaning are unified in a community that includes the EZLN while also expanding in solidarity toward all those struggling against neo-colonialism.

This is of pressing importance for biblical interpreters. As exemplified by Warrior's point, the results of culturally dominant Christian biblical interpretation over the past several hundred years resulted in the deaths of countless indigenous lives, those considered other and in need of the salvific intervention of white settlers.[32] Whatever the motivations, the limitations placed on the nature of community to white Christians resulted in death. Texts require flesh and blood readers in order to generate meaning.[33] In this dynamic, the perception of the nature of the reading community is a pivotal aspect of interpretation. As noted by Carol Newsom, many religious communities have the presence of the marginalized, who are able to read with "Canaanite eyes," within them.[34] Regardless, indigenous voices must be heard as the community's experience comes to bear upon interpretation. This necessarily implies a concept of community that sees itself in solidarity with all those oppressed and de-humanized by neo-liberal capitalism, a humanizing community. Interpreting the Bible requires the acknowledgment of such an expansive community not limited to transcending the distinctions between Roman Catholic and Protestant interpreters. The interwoven histories of violence against indigenous communities in those traditions ought to move interpreters to incorporate the experience of those upon whose dispossessed land biblical texts are interpreted, especially those indigenous peoples who are not a part of Christian religious communities.

---

[30] It is worth noting that if one were to employ a redaction critical argument, the text of Joshua can be understood in a different light. That is, considering that the final editing of the texts of Joshua 1-12 were likely the product of a post-exilic imagination (at the very least that Joshua is the product of various levels of editing as Wazana has shown). See Nili Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land: The Promised Land in Biblical Thought in Light of the Ancient Near East* (University Park, Panama: Penn State University Press, 2013). One is left to consider the possibility that the book of Joshua was produced by an indigenous people, deported and living in the shadow of empire. In short, the sort of people who were unlikely to have had the military prowess as described in Joshua 1-12. Understood in this way, perhaps, there might be some of use to indigenous interpreters considering the text of Joshua. However, as I explain below, delivering this information effectively to most religious Christian interpreters is challenging.

[31] Indeed, the traditional approach to the creation of biblical texts displays a significant amount of conservation. Where modern readers would be much more likely to reject a whole narrative, Davis shows how biblical authors utilized a process of "critical traditioning" to keep and yet challenge previous traditional elements. See Davis in Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 163-180.

Throughout the religious communities that prominently feature interpreting the Bible as an aspect of their life, there is a variously confessed reality that YHWH continues to meet humanity in and through the biblical witnesses. While some interpretation has moved this meeting with the deity to an interior experience between the individual and YHWH, limiting this encounter to "the heart" nonetheless misses the communal dynamics of biblical narratives. The orality of biblical narratives in religious communities is a crucial aspect of their continued reception. Outside the anglophone world, a second person plural (*ustedes*) is effectively heard as direct speech to the congregation, creating an interplay between text and reading community that extends the narrative directly into the lives of its hearers. In English, where this distinction is obscured, the text is still grounds for the community to reflect as a whole about their relation to the narrative in consideration. As most Christian communities profess, the divine does not meet readers through a text to create pleasant emotional experiences, but to catalyze their communities into faithful action.

This action is of course mediated in part through biblical narratives and their reception in communities in space and time, subject to socio-political currents and bias. Over the course of the last 500 years, this mediation has frequently led to an inversion of the creation account in Genesis 1 whereby YHWH becomes shaped into the image of imperially defined humanity through biblical interpretation. This interpretive move results in explicit religious affirmations of xenophobia, militarism, and hatred in culturally dominant Christian communities. This reality is all the truer in the case of narratives like those in the book of Joshua that carry these themes within them. In this case, the conquest of the Promised Land is replayed through modern Christian imperial expansion.

---

[32] Reginald. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 200-201; Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 143.
[33] Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2000), 119.
[34] Newsom, "Reflections," 555.

For instance, the role of "evangelizing" and "civilizing" missions in Spanish colonial contexts was channeled—in various ways—through a theology of Providence.[35] For the Catholic conquistadores, the root of this colonial mission is traced back to the doctrine of discovery (expressed in Pope Alexander VI's Bull *Inter Caetera* in 1493) in which Christian forces were representatives of the divine economy. Papal authority over the globe, exercised on God's behalf, is in some sense redistributed to European rulers and their representatives.[36] The Promised Land is now parallel to the book of Joshua 1:3. Whereas in biblical contexts "every place in which the sole of your foot treads" meant the land of Canaan, in the context of global empires it has taken on the new meaning of any and every land and its peoples. The land and all that is within it was understood to belong to Christians in and through the theological expression of divine promise and action on behalf of the Church. Violent dispossession and slaughter of indigenous communities was part and parcel of this "Providence."[37]

It is in the context of this sort of interpretive agenda that one can fully appreciate the importance of reading through Canaanite eyes in light in a humanizing community. History shows the various and sundry ways that Christian interpreters ignore the voices of all the oppressed—particularly indigenous communities—at the peril of the world they profess the God of Israel to love. To avoid reinscribing imperial and/or capitalist violence into their core theologies and actions, biblical interpreters—especially Christians—must look beyond the plain-sense read, and therein beyond themselves.

Conclusion

The project of plain-sense reading is an ideological construction that leaves biblical interpretation at the mercy of prevailing winds of sociopolitical currents. The book of Joshua's parallel imagination with the Spanish conquest of the Americas highlights the danger of how a plain-sense reading of biblical texts by means of a Christian "us" easily results in a variously defined exterminated "them."[38] In reading Joshua 5 without indigenous voices such as Marcos, the meaning of the text runs substantial risk of being co-opted by imperialist and/or neo-liberal capitalist justifications of violence. The "Canaanite eyes" proposed by Warrior allows biblical interpretation in non-indigenous Christian communities to be attentive to the ways in which canonical texts speak violently against many marginalized listeners.[39] The humanizing community I have argued for as an implication of this hermeneutic allows the interpretation of biblical texts to avoid abstraction, and take place in the context of lived results for flesh and blood communities.

---

[35] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 106-112; Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land," 280-281. https://doi.org/10.2307/1184402.

[36] Néstor Medina, *On the Doctrine of Discovery* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Council of Churches, 2017), 11-12.

[37] For a detailed articulation of this reality see De las Casas' piece. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de La Destruición de Las Indias*, Segunda ed., Letras Hispánicas (Madrid, España: Catedra, 1984); Bartolomé de las Casas, Nigel Griffin, and Anthony Pagden, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1st ed., Penguin Classics (London, UK; Penguin Books, 1992).

[38] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 215–220.

[39] Childs' work emphasis on Canonical Criticism misses the potential role that the violent narratives of Joshua may have on the community of faith. See Brevard S. Childs *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2011), 241-253.

We are in desperate need of religious biblical interpreters invested in the hard work of reading with Canaanite eyes. Biblical texts take on lives of their own beyond religious communities, subject to the whims of various parties with goals of domination of our fellow human beings for material gain—no matter what harm occurs in the process. A hermeneutic of Canaanite eyes allows religious communities to stand in solidarity with the oppressed against the forces that seek to bend us to their will; a will which profits from violence. If Christian communities shirk their responsibility to do battle with these forces in biblical interpretation, by their silence they reinscribe colonial violence into their communal lives. Christian interpreters must instead risk a broad imagination amidst of a humanizing community that reflects what Pablo Richard describes as "Prioridad de la vida sobre la Bíblia."[40] The responsibility of religious communities is primarily to defend indigenous land, the culture, and communities. The Bible and its narratives are always of secondary importance to life.

---

[40] Richard, *Interpretación Bíblica desde las Culturas Indígenas*, 55.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2024

Leer con ojos cananeos: Josué 5 y la mirada del revolucionario indígena mexicano

Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy

Reed College

• SEE PAGE 8 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

Resumen

Las realidades históricas de la historia de la recepción de textos violentos ponen una carga particular a intérpretes religiosos de texto bíblicos violentos. En el pasado, intérpretes religiosos del libro de Josué justificaron la matanza en masa de las comunidades indígenas en las Américas. En este sentido, los textos mismo son inherentemente peligrosos en su forma canónica—un problema al que ni las lecturas del "sentido literal" ni las perspectivas histórico-críticas pueden responder. Utilizo el concepto de Robert Warrior de leer el texto con "ojos cananeos" como un paradigma que busca resaltar los peligros del libro de Josué y posibles formas de las que se puede encontrar resolución a preguntas hechas al texto. La voz del Subcomandante Marcos del EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) servirá como interlocutor que demuestra la necesidad de una visión de comunidad interpretativa que se extiende más allá de las comunidades religiosas a lo que yo llamo "comunidades humanizantes."

Han pasado más de quinientos años desde la fatídica travesía de Hernán Cortés para colonizar el "Nuevo Mundo" en nombre de España. En esos cinco (ahora llegando a seis) siglos, los conquistadores y sus descendientes han quitado millones de vidas indígenas y se han robado un sinnúmero de tierras. A comparación, la llegada del conquistador a costas mexicanas y la llegada de los israelitas a Canaán, manifiestan una imaginación perturbadoramente similar. La tierra (Canaán o México) está destinada para el conquistador, ya sea comandado por la deidad de Israel o la de los españoles, la Divina Providencia es la justificación para el despojo genocida de comunidades indígenas.[1]

---

[1] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010), 92-93, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300163087ñ. Pablo Richard,

En vez de ser aludida por la investigación histórico-crítica que consistentemente ha rechazado la historicidad de Josué, la historia de recepción demuestra cómo la conquista divinamente autorizada de la Tierra Prometida por parte de Israel es una herramienta estándar del imperialismo cristiano.[2] Aquí, el punto de Robert Warrior respecto a la interpretación cristiana de los textos bíblicos es particularmente pertinente: "El peligro es que estas comunidades [creyentes] lean las narrativas y no la historia detrás de ellas".[3] Sostengo, a la par de Warrior, que estas realidades históricas deberían impulsar a los intérpretes bíblicos responsables a interrogar y subordinar las lecturas de "sentido simple" del libro de Josué (ya sean literarias, post críticas o de otro tipo) a una hermenéutica que Warrior denomina "lectura" con ojos cananeos".[4] En otras palabras, se debe resistir la imaginación del texto mismo, reflejada en su apropiación por parte del imperio cristiano, en solidaridad con las comunidades indígenas, permitiendo que sus voces hablen en contra del texto bíblico como un acto de interpretación que aboga explícitamente por la vida.[5]

En lo que sigue a continuación, demuestro la práctica de esa hermenéutica, al tomar un texto "ideal" del libro de Josué que complica la imaginación de la conquista, ofrezco una lectura detallada de Josué 5 con especial atención a los vv. 13-15. Estos pasajes forman un microcosmos del rasgo literario que ocurre a lo largo del libro de Josué en el que se subvierte la narrativa triunfante de la conquista israelita. Luego, al recurrir a la voz del Subcomandante Marcos del EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), muestro que prestar atención a la naturaleza polivocal de la textualidad en el antiguo Israel no es suficiente para atenuar su peligro retórico para los lectores. Más bien, leer con las realidades y comunidades indígenas, leer con "ojos cananeos", necesariamente subordina la lectura en sentido simple a preocupaciones más amplias y significativas. Es decir, tal hermenéutica reorienta al lector (ya sea religioso o no) hacia el florecimiento de todas las comunidades humana.[6]

"Interpretación Bíblica Desde Las Culturas Indígenas," *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana*, no. 26 (1997): 52; Alfred A. Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire," *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1988): 277-297, https://doi.org/10.2307/1184402; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o El Oro En Las Indias: Siglo XVI*, CEP; 95 (Lima, Perú: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas--Rímac, 1989).

[2] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 114; M.C. Gaposchkin, "Louis IX, Crusade and the Promise of Joshua in the Holy Land," *Journal of Medieval History* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 245–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2007.10.007; Yvonne Sherwood, "Comparing the 'Telegraph Bible' of the Late British Empire to the Chaotic Bible of the Sixteenth Century Spanish Empire: Beyond the Canaan Mandate into Anxious Parables of the Land," en *In the Name of God*, ed. C.L. Crouch y Jonathan Stökl (Leiden, NL: BRILL, 2014), 4–62, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004259126_003.

[3] Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (1989): 6.

[4] Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 3. Por sentido simple me refiero a una aproximación a los textos bíblicos que enfatiza la importancia de las "palabras en la página" como lugar principal de enfoque, independientemente de cómo se enmarque en última instancia, ya sea en modelos de teoría literaria o en la función de los textos en comunidades religiosas.

[5] Mi agradecimiento a Kim Verudny y a Max Wink por nuestras conversaciones que llevaron a la perspectiva de este artículo.

[6] Enrique D. Dussel y Alejandro A. Vallega, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), xxii.

Lectura detallada de Josué 5 (El “sentido simple” contemporáneo)

Uno de los elementos más importantes de las lecturas en sentido simple contemporáneo es la delineación de cómo el significado de los textos bíblicos es en cierto sentido generado por las comunidades religiosas vis-à-vis las palabras en la página de documentos canónicos. En el caso de la biblia hebrea, la lectura en sentido simple generalmente corresponde en la práctica a la lectura detallada de tradiciones textuales basadas en los Textos Masoréticos (TM). Carol Newson resume este enfoque como “leer siguiendo la corriente del texto.”[7] Con este espíritu, consideraré la versión TM de Josué y extrapolaré los posibles aspectos de la orientación retórica de la narrativa. Los resultados de esta exploración serán sometidos a los pasos de la hermenéutica de ojos cananeos de Warrior en la siguiente sección.

La estructura de Josué 5 es emblemática de los temas narrativos más amplios de los capítulos 1-12 y en ella encarna un giro en la teología deuteronomística. Esta teología presupuesta por los primeros doce capítulos de Josué fue aptamente resumida por Davis como “el único cananeo bueno es un cananeo muerto”.[8] El imperativo en Deuteronomio 9, 5 de promulgar la prohibición (*ḥērem*), o más claramente, para matar a todos los habitantes de la tierra sirve de trasfondo del libro de Josué. Este mandato se considera ya sea como parte de la fidelidad a YHVH o como un juicio a la maldad de los pueblos indígenas de la tierra (p.ej., Deut. 9, 4)[9]. No obstante, el libro de Josué tiene una relación compleja con esta suposición teológica, lo que socava el compromiso inequívoco a la prohibición.[10] Para efectivamente situar Josué 5, 13-15 en esta conmoción de la narrativa, se necesita comentar brevemente los aspectos precedentes al capítulo 5.

La experiencia de los israelitas en el capítulo 5 es la descripción por excelencia de fidelidad a YHVH en la tierra. El mandato de YHVH de que las personas deben ser circuncidadas “una segunda vez” (Josué 5, 2) se lee hiperbólicamente e impulsa al narrador bíblico a proporcionar una extensa explicación de por qué esto sería necesario, aunque al hacerlo la redacción del mandato divino no se clarifique. Sin embargo, la observancia escrupulosa del mandato divino es evidente. David Hawk señala "… la circuncisión representa el sometimiento de Israel a YHVH, su recepción de las promesas de Dios, y su aceptación de la identidad y llamado que YHVH ha determinado.[11] Por lo tanto, el acto de la circuncisión (ya sea hiperbólico en este caso o no) es una doble afirmación de la relación privilegiada de Israel con YHVH y su papel en la tierra.

---

[7] Carol Newsom, “Reflections on Ideological Criticism and Postcritical Perspectives,” en *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. David L. Petersen, Joel M. LeMon, y Kent Harold Richards, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study; no. 56 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 555-556.

[8] Ellen Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," en Ellen Davis y Richard Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 170; Douglas S. Earl, *The Joshua Delusion?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 48.

[9] Davis,"Critical Traditioning," 170. El Israel que yo describo aquí es una entidad literaria creada por el autor bíblico.

[10] En su comentario, Daniel Hawk describe esto de la siguiente forma: “Una sutil voz, susurra mientras la voz dominante grita. Esta voz subvierte la voz estridente del militarismo, el legalismo y la superioridad al llamar nuestra atención sobre los casos de desobediencia a los mandatos de Moisés (como al hacer alianzas con Rahab y los gabaonitas) y los intentos fallidos de informar sobre los esfuerzos para someter a los pueblos indígenas (15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13; 20:47) y poseer sus tierras (13:1-7). La voz habla de una visión más amplia de la identidad israelita, una que desmantela la conciencia étnica de Israel de "nosotros/ellos", pinta a todos los pueblos (tanto invasores como indígenas) como destinatarios de la misericordia de Dios y establece la identidad de Israel únicamente sobre la devoción a un Dios misericordioso y generoso. (8:30-35; 24:1-24)”. Daniel Hawk, Joshua in 3-D (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), xxiii.

Después de que se recuperan de la circuncisión, YHVH le informa a Josué que la vergüenza de Egipto no está ya sobre los israelitas (Josué 5, 9). A la nueva generación de israelitas se les da un nuevo estatus en la dinámica de honor-vergüenza del antiguo Cercano Oriente, viven en la Tierra Prometida como los no deshonrados. Finalmente, los israelitas comen lo último del maná y celebran la Pascua; invirtiendo simbólicamente el movimiento del Éxodo. Donde una vez comieran la cena Pascual al dejar sus hogares en Egipto para subsistir con el maná, el maná ahora cesa (Josué 5, 12) en el mismo momento de la celebración de la Pascua en su nueva patria. La fidelidad de los israelitas a YHVH se encuentra a un nivel paradigmático cuando el lector llega al versículo 13.

Es como resultado de estos elementos anteriores del capítulo que 5, 13-15 presenta un nivel dramático de ironía. El pasaje reza:

> Cuando Josué estaba por Jericó, levantó la vista y vio a un hombre parado frente a él, con una espada desenvainada en la mano. Josué se acercó a él y le dijo: "¿Eres tú de los nuestros o nuestro enemigo?" Él dijo: "Ninguno de los dos; pero como comandante del ejército de YHVH ahora he venido". Y Josué cayó rostro en tierra y lo adoró, y le dijo: "¿Qué manda mi Señor a su siervo?" El comandante del ejército de YHVH dijo a Josué: "Quítate las sandalias de tus pies, porque el lugar donde estás es sagrado". Y Josué así lo hizo.[12]

Dejando de un lado preguntas concernientes a la naturaleza curiosa de cómo Josué llega a tal posición solo enfrentándose a un espadachín desconocido, la disyuntiva ironía que entrega este pasaje opera a niveles implícitos y explícitos todos los cuales crean significantes dudas que desestabilizan la posición de Israel vis- à -vis la prohibición, la relación de YHVH con Israel y el papel de Josué.[13] Al nivel explícito, la relación de YHVH hacia Israel queda notablemente en duda. A pesar de recibir la obediencia del pueblo elegido por medio de una segunda ronda de circuncisiones (5, 2) junto con la celebración de la Pascua (5, 12) y al remover de Israel personalmente la vergüenza de Egipto en la Tierra Prometida (5, 9), YHVH aparece no comprometido.[14] El comandante de YHVH sorprendentemente no está a favor ni de los israelitas ni de sus enemigos anteriormente de la meritoria batalla en Jericó.

---

[11] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D,* 59.
[12] Mi propia traducción.
[13] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D,* 62.

Deuteronomio es claro en cuanto el lado que YHVH toma, el lado opuesto a los malvados habitantes de la tierra, "… sino que solo por la perversidad de estas naciones las desaloja YHVH tu Dios delante de ti" (Deuteronomio 9, 5). Sin embargo, aquí la narrativa de Josué muestra su ambivalencia antes mencionada respecto al trasfondo deuteronomístico. De la manera en que se representa a YHVH es muy peligrosa para Israel en el peor momento posible. Hawk señala que este pasaje conlleva el efecto retórico de alentar a los israelitas (y por ende al lector) a evaluar su compromiso con YHVH.[15] Sin embargo, esta explicación no resuelve la punzante subversión que viene con la neutralidad declarada de YHVH. Israel está en el ápice de su fidelidad en la Tierra Prometida, en el contexto de una guerra santa instituida por YHVH, y en la víspera de la primera batalla con grupos indígenas malvados. En ese contexto tenso, el significado de la neutralidad de YHVH es primordial.

Esta realidad crea dudas en cuanto al estatus de Israel como ejecutor de la prohibición. El apoyo explícito de YHVH dado en el capítulo 1 está ahora visiblemente ausente. Todo el proyecto de la entrada de Israel a Canaán radica en la acción misericordiosa de YHVH. Empero, si YHVH no está del lado de Israel, el resultado del llamado de Israel a reclamar la tierra mediante la promulgación de la prohibición queda en duda. Al considerar particularmente cómo la fallida incursión de la previa generación de Israel a la tierra está explícitamente vinculada a la falta de apoyo de YHVH en Números 14.

Además, la narrativa crea incertidumbre respecto Josué como sucesor de Moisés. Los paralelos entre la narración de la llamada de Moisés en Éxodo 3 se ven fácilmente, pero en la forma en que se presentan son un aspecto de ironía en el capítulo 5.[16] El capítulo 1 presenta una afirmación explícita de la instalación de Josué con conexiones a Moisés. YHVH declara, "…así como estuve con Moisés estaré contigo…" (Josué 1, 5). Sin embargo, a diferencia de Moisés, Josué no reconoce al representante divino en la narrativa puesta paralelamente con el llamado de Moisés. Carolyn Sharp nota que esta comparación presenta ironías que "son tan agudas como para sacar sangre."[17] Además, al momento en que Josué recibe la orden paralela de quitarse las sandalias (Josué 5, 15) de manera idéntica al llamado de Moisés de la zarza ardiente, el narrador notablemente no reafirma el liderazgo de Josué.

---

[14] Blazej Strba, *«Take off Your Sandals from Your Feet!»*, (Frankfurt, GER: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008), 304. Un análisis del aparato textual de la BHS sugiere que las lecturas variantes no aportan diferencias sustanciales a esta interpretación.

[15] Earl, *The Joshua Delusion?*, 72.

[16] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 63.

[17] Carolyn J. Sharp, *Joshua*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Vol. 5 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2019), 162.

La narrativa no cumple con las expectativas creadas por una referencia tan explícita al gran líder de Israel. La recepción de Moisés de la orden de quitarse las sandalias se encuentra con la autorrevelación de YHVH y compromiso de estar con Moisés y con los israelitas (Éxodo 3, 6-12). Fácilmente se podría esperar que el sucesor de Moisés, habiendo sido instalado oficialmente en el capítulo 1, fuera confirmado de modo similar en una narrativa tan paralela. Pero, siguiendo la recepción de Josué de la orden de quitarse sus sandalias, la narrativa enmudece. No hay resolución al problema causado por la neutralidad de YHVH en el capítulo 5. Es más, el llamado a Josué de ser sucesor de Moisés no queda claro por una parada abrupta en la escena dónde los paralelos probablemente llevarían a los lectores a esperar una narrativa de llamado. Sospecho que la familiaridad con la narrativa del Éxodo ha llevado a muchos comentaristas a describir positivamente esta escena como una confirmación del liderazgo de Josué.[18] Sin embargo, esto es precisamente lo que el texto *no dice*. La resonancia intertextual aquí es suficiente para sembrar dudas en el lector de la recepción de Josué.

En este sentido, la función de Josué 5, 13-15 efectivamente socava la teología deuteronomística que está detrás del libro de Josué. A la luz del capítulo 5, la neutralidad de YHVH y la falta de reafirmación del llamado de Josué arrojan dudas significativas sobre la invasión de los israelitas de la tierra en el peor momento posible. Atención minuciosa a la forma literaria de la presente narrativa desestabiliza inequívocamente el apoyo para el exterminio de los pueblos indígenas en la tierra por medio de una conciencia intensificada por la posición ambigua vis- à-vis YHVH.

En este punto, es importante señalar que lo que he descrito es uno de los muchos retos literarios planteados por la ironía en el libro de Josué.[19] Esto no quiere decir que el libro de Josué esté solamente formado por narrativas que problematizan un compromiso con la prohibición. En efecto, hay un compromiso literario importante con la teología deuteronomística que atraviesa todo el libro poniendo en peligro a los pueblos indígenas de la tierra. Sin embargo, es exactamente este compromiso lo que deja espacio para la función de varias narrativas dentro de Josué. Un contrapunto que subvierte las expectativas deuteronomísticas solo podría suceder dentro de una narrativa que incluyera tal telón de fondo temático, del mismo modo que el intercambio entre Abbott y Costello requería que la rutina de "hombre serio" de Bud Abbott creara espacio para las payasadas disyuntiva de Lou Costello.

Josué 5 a través de ojos cananeos

La subversión de las narrativas de conquista en Josué puede desafiar a algunos lectores privilegiados y culturalmente dominantes por medio de una lectura de sentido simple a resistirse a incorporar narrativas bíblicas de conquista a su cosmovisión. Sin embargo, el contenido abrumadoramente preocupante de la narrativa de Josué no puede ser rechazado útilmente por medio de una lectura simple únicamente. Esto es más verídico en las comunidades cristianas que leen desde una posición de beneficiarios de acciones y políticas anti indígenas (p. ej., el Destino Manifiesto en los EEUU). Esto quiere decir que el hecho de que muchos en estas comunidades deban estar *convencidos* de su responsabilidad de rechazar la narrativa bíblica que justifica los proyectos colonialistas crea la necesidad de perspectivas que están por fuera del texto mismo. En otras palabras, las lecturas en sentido simple deben recurrir a las voces y comunidades indígenas y tratar de perfeccionar su lectura a través de "ojos cananeos". Ahora recurro a los escritos del Subcomandante Marcos para ayudar a reflexionar en Josué 5 desde esta perspectiva.[20] Marcos necesita una presentación para colocarlo útilmente al centro de esta discusión.

---

[18] Strba, *«Take off Your Sandals from Your Feet!»*, 334–335; Pekka Pitkänen, *Joshua*. (Nottingham, UK: Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 150-151.

[19] Algunos otros serían Rahab en Josué 2, los gabaonitas en Josué 9, y el discurso de despedida de Josué en Josué 24.

Mientras el Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN) de 1994 era firmado por los Estados Unidos, Canadá y México una insurrección tuvo lugar en Chiapas, el estado mexicano más pobre y más al sur. Indígenas mexicanos privados desde mucho tiempo de sus derechos debido a los esfuerzos del gobierno mexicano de ser incluidos en el TLCAN, se levantaron en armas autodenominándose el EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) y tomaron control de varios edificios administrativos.[21] La voz del subcomandante Marcos, el entonces portavoz del EZLN, narró las experiencias y las críticas de las comunidades indígenas del status quo durante el brutal conflicto armado con el gobierno mexicano. Este líder y vocero de las comunidades indígenas que peleaban por su sobrevivencia es un interlocutor que claramente encarna lo que Warrior sugiere en términos de "ojos cananeos".

La relación del EZLN a la lectura con "ojos cananeos" queda en claro en algunas de las primeras palabras públicas de Marcos después de la revolución. Al guiar al lector por la historia mexicana hasta el día de hoy, Marcos da voz a las narrativas de comunidades indígenas en América Latina que han sufrido opresión por cinco siglos:

> Somos producto de 500 años de luchas: primero contra la esclavitud, en la guerra de independencia contra España encabezada por los insurgentes, después por evitar ser absorbidos por el expansionismo norteamericano…lo que se nos ha negado la preparación más elemental para así poder utilizarnos como carne de cañón y saquear las riquezas de nuestra patria sin importarles que estemos muriendo…Pero HOY DECIMOS ¡BASTA!…[22]

Estas palabras aportan suficientes paralelos para avivar la imaginación respecto a Marcos como un interlocutor de intérpretes bíblicos. La relevancia de la memoria cultural encarnada de siglos de colonialismo genocida en América Latina habla por sí sola en el contexto de la conquista de Canaán descrita en Josué 5.

---

[20] Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *6-7*; Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, xxxvi.

[21] Nota: Referencia de las fuentes primarias son tomadas de documentos oficiales (Our word is our weapon).

[22] Subcomandante Marcos y Juana Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra* (New York, NY: Siete Cuentos, 2001), 13.

Desde la posición de lectores indígenas a los que Marcos da voz, la teología deuteronomística de la conquista que sustenta la narrativa de Josué no se transforma substancialmente por su subversión literaria en Josué 5, 13-15,[23] especialmente ya que el pasaje está inmediatamente seguido por la destrucción de Jericó en el capítulo 6. Por cierto, aunque la narrativa de Josué en su totalidad apunte a un relato dudoso y contraproducente de la conquista, no obstante, sigue siendo un relato de *conquista* con una perspectiva funcional que la población indígena de la tierra es malvada y digna de un exterminio divinamente ordenado. Walter Brueggemann expresa el problema de una manera distinta y sutil, "YHVH, junto con la elección y la violencia que lo acompañan, es hasta cierto punto un producto y construcción del testimonio de Israel…"[24]

En otras palabras, esta tradición israelita de violencia hacia los pueblos indígenas se ha convertido un trasfondo predominante al texto de Josué con el cual los intérpretes siempre tendrán dificultad. De este modo, los elementos del texto mismo dan fuerza a la crítica expresada por Marcos al capitalismo que aquí también sirve como una crítica de aspectos de la imaginación bíblica: "En el mundo de ellos, los que en el Poder viven y por el Poder matan, no cabe el ser humano…Esclavitud o muerte es la alternativa que el mundo de ellos ofrece a todos los mundos."[25] La posibilidad de separar aspectos violentos e inherentemente xenofóbicos de la biblia es la otra cara de la moneda del genocidio y la opresión.

Los detalles del texto más allá de la teología deuteronomística son también problemáticos desde la aparente línea de razonamiento de Marcos. En Josué 5, 1, los reyes de los pueblos de la tierra se enteran de la ayuda de YHVH en permitir a los israelitas que crucen el Jordán. Ante estas nuevas, sus "corazones se derritieron y ya no hubo más espíritu (*rûaḥ*) en ellos por causa de los israelitas".[26] En este versículo, los líderes de los pueblos indígenas ya han perdido su aliento.[27] Si bien este es ciertamente lenguaje bíblico hiperbólico relacionado con el miedo a estos reyes (y presuntamente a sus pueblos), para todo propósito, ya están señalados de muerte y por lo tanto la pérdida de su aliento/espíritu presagia la muerte real que se ha declarado sobre ellos al final de Josué 12.

Los pueblos indígenas son percibidos por la mirada israelita como muertos vivientes mientras que la iniciativa divina lleva a Israel a una tierra que no es suya.

---

[23] La subversión que aquí describo (como mencioné anteriormente) también se demuestra en la historia de Rahab en Josué 2 y 6:22-25, la historia de Acán en el capítulo 7 y, por último, con los gabaonitas en el capítulo 9. En todas estas narrativas, a pesar de algún elemento de juicio sobre Israel (explícito en el caso de Acán) y la supervivencia de Rahab y su familia y los gabaonitas, el resultado es el mismo. El violento reclamo de Israel sobre la tierra de otros indígenas no se niega y la vida de los sobrevivientes (Rahab y su familia fuera del campamento y los gabaonitas esclavizados) es, en última instancia, no bien recibida a pesar de las alianzas hechas con Israel.

[24] Walter Brueggemann , "The God of Joshua: An Ambivalent Field of Negotiation." en Brenner and Yee, *Joshua and Judges*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 24.

[25] Marcos y Ponce de Leon, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 120; Marcos and Ponce de Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, 109.

[26] Espíritu también se puede traducir como viento o aliento.

[27] Los paralelos con las últimas palabras de Eric Garner, "No puedo respirar", muestran cómo este pasaje se dirige a pueblos marginados de diversos orígenes. La lucha de muchas comunidades minorizadas se basa en la realidad de que sus vidas se consideran desechables.

Cortés y Josué, el líder de Israel, operan con visiones similares. Es este tipo de imaginación que llevó al EZLN a una respuesta armada, "[e]stamos dispuestos a morir otros 150 mil si es necesario esto para que despierte nuestro pueblo del sueño del engaño en que lo tienen."[28] La perspectiva de Marcos es que cualquier imaginación que vuelve la vida de los marginados en obstáculos para beneficio (espiritual o financiero) debe de resistirse hasta el punto de morir.

En última instancia, Josué 5, 13-15 es de poco consuelo para el intérprete indígena. La neutralidad de YHVH en el conflicto entre los pueblos invasores israelitas y los cananeos indígenas no da esperanza a los pueblos que soportan la peor parte de los elementos más xenofóbicos de Josué. Que la divinidad no deba aliarse con el invasor es un hecho, pero que la divinidad deba abandonar a los invadidos al azar hace que la presencia de la divinidad sea, en el mejor de los casos, inútil y, más probablemente, peligrosa. Por el contrario, la religión maya a la cual se adscribe Marcos articula un aspecto de la divinidad que es el corazón de la comunidad y está presente en su lucha más desesperada: Votán Zapata. "Desde la hora primera en esta larga noche en que morimos, dicen nuestros más lejanos abuelos, hubo quien recogió nuestro dolor y nuestro olvido…Votán Zapata, guardián y corazón del pueblo."[29] En contraste con la representación del Dios de Israel presente en la narrativa de Josué 5, la divinidad en la comunidad de Marcos proporciona mucho más que un simple mensaje de neutralidad ante la presencia del invasor. Desde este punto de vista, la neutralidad momentánea del Dios de Israel (un dios extraño para Marcos) enmarcada por una metodología de lectura de sentido simple no aborda las experiencias vividas por la comunidad zapatista.[30]

Leer con ojos cananeos en la comunidad humanizadora

Como se puede ver arriba, leer con ojos cananeos hace la lectura en sentido simple del libro de Josué ineludiblemente problemática. Aun en los momentos narrativos más propicios para la subversión, la conquista es el centro de enfoque divinamente justificado. Denunciar los elementos inherentemente opresivos (no importa cuán acertados sean) de los textos bíblicos no es una solución para las comunidades religiosas que viven con estos textos. Muchas de estas comunidades no estarían dispuestas a rechazar narrativas problemáticas enteras.[31] Además, atención a las complejidades de narraciones bíblicas no es suficiente para protegerse contra futuros daños de esos que están implícitamente marginados por la biblia. En cierto sentido, los propios intérpretes religiosos deben aceptar la idea de que una metodología de lectura de sentido simple solamente es inherentemente dañina. Solo los intérpretes comprometidos a vivir junto a narrativas bíblicas plenamente consideradas (en términos de formas literarias y elementos problemáticos) pueden esperar lograr cambios vividos a largo plazo en respuesta a dilemas de la biblia. Respeto a esto, cabe discutir el papel de la experiencia comunitaria en el juego de pensamiento del subcomandante Marcos, más allá de cuestionar un sistema de interpretación de "solo la escritura". Una hermenéutica de ojos cananeos orienta a los lectores hacia un concepto distinto de interpretación bíblica que se expande más allá de los confines de la tradición religiosa de cada uno, un concepto al que denomino la "comunidad humanizadora".

---

[28] Marcos y Ponce de León, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 18.

[29] Marcos y Ponce de León, *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra*, 21; "Desde la primera hora de esta larga noche de nuestra muerte, nuestros abuelos más lejanos dicen que hubo alguien que recogió nuestro dolor y nuestro olvido… Votán Zapata, guardián y corazón del pueblo".

[30] Vale la pena señalar que, si uno empleara un argumento crítico de redacción, el texto de Josué podría entenderse desde una perspectiva diferente. Es decir, considerando que la edición final de los textos de Josué 1-12 fue probablemente producto de una imaginación postexílica (al menos que Josué sea producto de varios niveles de edición, como ha demostrado Wazana). Ver Nili Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land: The Promised Land in Biblical Thought in Light of the Ancient Near East* (University Park, Panama: Penn State University Press, 2013). Nos queda considerar la posibilidad de que el libro de Josué fuera escrito por un pueblo indígena, deportado y que vivía a la sombra del imperio. En resumen, el tipo de pueblo que probablemente no hubieran tenido la destreza militar descrita en Josué 1-12. Entendido de esta manera, tal vez podría resultar útil para los intérpretes indígenas que consideren el texto de Josué. Sin embargo, como explico a continuación, entregar esta información de manera efectiva a la mayoría de los intérpretes cristianos religiosos es un desafío.

Los escritos de Marcos presuponen y frecuentemente hacen referencia al sufrimiento y las tradiciones de sus comunidades indígenas. El verdadero propósito de su crítica es la viva realidad de aquellos a su alrededor. Para Marcos, el papel de la comunidad es fundamental. En su análisis, es la experiencia de la comunidad la que impulsa la acción y la crítica. La experiencia y el significado están unidos en una comunidad que incluye el EZLN a la vez que se expande en solidaridad hacia todos los que luchan contra el neocolonialismo.

Esto es de importancia apremiante para los intérpretes bíblicos. Como lo ejemplifica el punto que hace Warrior, los resultados de la interpretación bíblica cristiana culturalmente dominante desde hace varios cientos de años que resultó en la muerte de un sinnúmero de vidas indígenas, aquellos que son considerados como otros y que necesitan la intervención salvífica de colonos blancos.[32] Cualesquiera que sean las motivaciones, las limitaciones impuestas a la naturaleza de la comunidad a los cristianos blancos resultaban en muerte. Los textos requieren lectores de carne y hueso para poder generar significado.[33] En esta dinámica, la percepción de la naturaleza de la comunidad lectora es un aspecto fundamental de interpretación. Como lo nota Carol Newsom, muchas comunidades religiosas tienen presente dentro de ellos marginados que pueden leer con "ojos cananeos".[34] De todos modos, voces indígenas deben ser escuchadas cuando la experiencia de la comunidad influye en la interpretación. Esto implica necesariamente un concepto de comunidad que se ve a sí misma en solidaridad con todos los que son oprimidos y des-humanizados por el capitalismo neoliberal, una comunidad humanizadora. Interpretar la biblia requiere el reconocimiento de una comunidad tan amplia que no se limita a trascender las distinciones entre intérpretes católicos romanos y protestantes. Las historias entrelazadas de violencia contra comunidades indígenas en esas tradiciones deben impulsar a los intérpretes a incorporar la experiencia de aquellos en cuyas tierras desposeídas se interpretan los textos bíblicos, especialmente esos pueblos indígenas que no son parte de comunidades religiosas cristianas.

---

[31] De hecho, el enfoque tradicional para la creación de textos bíblicos muestra un grado significativo de conservación. Mientras que los lectores modernos estarían mucho más propensos a rechazar una narrativa completa, Davis muestra cómo los autores bíblicos utilizaban un proceso de "tradición crítica" para mantener y, al mismo tiempo, desafiar elementos tradicionales anteriores. Ver Davis en Davis y Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 163-180.

[32] Reginald. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 200-201; Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 143.

[33] Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2000), 119.

[34] Newsom, "Reflections," 555.

A lo largo de las comunidades religiosas que predominantemente destacan interpretar la biblia como un aspecto de su vida, hay una realidad confesada variadamente que YHVH continúa encontrándose con la humanidad en y a través de testigos bíblicos. Mientras alguna interpretación ha movido este encuentro con la deidad a una experiencia interior entre el individuo y YHVH, limitar este encuentro "al corazón" no obstante pasa por alto la dinámica comunitaria de las narrativas bíblicas. La oralidad de las narrativas bíblicas en comunidades religiosas es un aspecto crucial de su continua recepción. Fuera del mundo angloparlante, una segunda persona del plural (*ustedes*) se escucha efectivamente como discurso directo a la congregación, y crea una interacción entre el texto y la comunidad lectora que extiende la narrativa directamente a las vidas de sus oyentes. En inglés, donde esta distinción se oscurece, el texto continúa aun siendo motivo para que la comunidad reflexione plenamente sobre su relación con la narrativa en consideración. Como profesan la mayoría de las comunidades, la divinidad no tiene un encuentro con los lectores por medio de un texto para crear experiencias emotivas placenteras, sino para catalizar a sus comunidades a actuar con fidelidad.

Este actuar, claro, es mediado en parte por las narrativas bíblicas y su recepción en comunidades en el tiempo y en el espacio, sujeto a corrientes sociopolíticas y prejuicios. En el transcurso de los últimos quinientos años, esta mediación ha llevado frecuentemente a una inversión del relato de la creación en Génesis 1 por el cual YHVH es formado a la imagen de la humanidad imperialmente definida por la interpretación bíblica. Este movimiento interpretativo da como resultado afirmaciones religiosas explícitas de xenofobia, militarismo y odio en comunidades cristianas culturalmente dominantes. Esta realidad es más veraz en el caso de narrativas como las del libro de Josué que llevan estos temas dentro de sí. En este caso, la conquista de la Tierra Prometida se repite por medio de la expansión imperial cristiana moderna.

Por ejemplo, el papel de las misiones "evangelizadoras" y "civilizadoras" en los contextos coloniales españoles se canalizaban, de varias maneras, por medio de una teología de la Providencia.[35] Para los conquistadores católicos, la raíz de esta misión colonial se remonta a la doctrina del descubrimiento (expresada en la bula papal de Alejandro VI, *Inter Caetera* en 1493) en las que las fuerzas cristianas eran representantes de la economía divina. La autoridad papal sobre todo el orbe, ejecutado en nombre de Dios, en cierto sentido se redistribuye entre los monarcas europeos y sus representantes.[36] La Tierra Prometida es ahora paralela al libro de Josué 1, 3. Mientras que en contextos bíblicos "todo lugar donde pisa la planta de tu pie" significaba la tierra de Canaán, en el contexto de los imperios globales ha adquirido el nuevo significado de todas y cada una de las tierras y sus pueblos. Se entendía que la tierra y todo lo que en ella había pertenecía a los cristianos en y por medio de la expresión de la promesa y acción divina en nombre de la Iglesia. El despojo violento y la masacre de las comunidades indígenas fueron parte integral de esta "Providencia".[37]

---

[35] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 106-112; Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land," 280-281. https://doi.org/10.2307/1184402.

[36] Néstor Medina, *On the Doctrine of Discovery* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Council of Churches, 2017), 11-12.

Es en el contexto de este tipo de agenda interpretativa que se puede apreciar plenamente la importancia de leer con ojos cananeos iluminado por una comunidad humanizadora. La historia demuestra diversas y variadas formas en que los intérpretes cristianos ignoran las voces de todos los oprimidos, particularmente de las comunidades indígenas, a riesgo del mundo que ellos profesan ama el Dios de Israel. Para evitar reinscribir la violencia imperial y/o capitalista en sus acciones y teologías centrales, los intérpretes bíblicos, especialmente los cristianos, deben mirar más allá de la lectura de sentido simple, y, por tanto, más allá de ellos mismos.

Conclusión

El proyecto de lectura de sentido simple es una construcción ideológica que deja la interpretación bíblica a merced de los vientos predominantes de corrientes sociopolíticas. La imaginación paralela del libro de Josué con la conquista española de las Américas resalta el peligro de cómo una lectura de sentido simple de textos bíblicos por medio de un "nosotros" cristiano fácilmente resulta en un exterminio de "ellos" variadamente definido.[38] Al leer Josué 5 sin voces indígenas como la de Marcos, el significado del texto corre el riesgo sustancial de ser cooptado por las justificaciones de violencia imperialistas y/o capitalistas neoliberales. Los "ojos cananeos" propuestos por Warrior permiten que una interpretación bíblica en comunidades cristianas no indígenas esté atentas a los modos en que los textos canónicos hablan violentamente en contra de muchos oyentes marginados.[39] La comunidad humanizadora la cual yo propongo como implicación de esta hermenéutica permite que la interpretación de textos bíblicos evite abstracción y tenga lugar en el contexto de resultados vividos por comunidades de carne y hueso.

Necesitamos desesperadamente intérpretes bíblicos religiosos comprometidos con la ardua labor de leer con ojos cananeos. Los textos bíblicos cobran vida propia más allá de las comunidades religiosas, sujetos a los caprichos de distintos partidos con objetivos de dominar a nuestros semejantes para beneficio económico, sin importar cuánto daño ocurra en el proceso. Una hermenéutica de ojos cananeos permite a las comunidades religiosas hacerse solidarias con los oprimidos en contra de las fuerzas que buscan doblegarnos a su voluntad; una voluntad que se beneficia de la violencia. Si las comunidades cristianas eluden su responsabilidad de luchar contra estas fuerzas en la interpretación bíblica, con su silencio reinscriben la violencia colonial en sus vidas comunitarias. Los intérpretes cristianos deben en vez arriesgar una imaginación amplia en medio de la comunidad humanizadora que refleje lo que Pablo Richard describe como "Prioridad de la vida sobre la Biblia."[40] La responsabilidad de las comunidades religiosas es principalmente defender las tierras, la cultura y las comunidades indígenas. La biblia y sus narrativas son siempre de segunda importancia para la vida.

---

[37] Para una articulación detallada de esta realidad ver los escritos de De las Casas. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de La Destruición de Las Indias*, Segunda ed., Letras Hispánicas (Madrid, España: Catedra, 1984); Bartolomé de las Casas, Nigel Griffin, and Anthony Pagden, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1st ed., Penguin Classics (London, UK; Penguin Books, 1992).

[38] Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 215–220.

[39] El énfasis del trabajo de Childs en la crítica canónica pasa por alto el papel potencial que las narrativas violentas de Josué pueden tener en la comunidad de fe. Ver Brevard S. Childs *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2011), 241-253.

---

[40] Richard, *Interpretación Bíblica desde las Culturas Indígenas*, 55.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2024

Revolutionary Love: Ché's Complicated Legacy

Michael Jimenez

Associate Professor of History at Vanguard University

• THIS ARTICLE IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH •

Abstract

Using the framework of biography as theology, I will explore how revolutionary guerrilla fighter Ché Guevara became a type of religious symbol: fighting on behalf of the oppressed of the world, and modeling self-sacrifice through his death. Biography as theology has been used to look at Christian figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer over the last couple of decades. What about Ché? This reading will be accomplished by examining two writers, José Míguez Bonino and George Casalis, who analyze Ché's influence on liberation theology, and some strands of this type of thinking in Chicano/a activism. Finally, I will close the paper with a reflection about understanding Ché's role in history but remaining committed to the Christian model of nonviolence.

"I wish Che's face symbolized more than pimpled years of angst."

David Tomas Martínez[1]

"The history of Latin America foreshadowed—almost in the religious sense of the term—a figure like Che Guevara."

Enrique Krauze[2]

When kids suddenly appear in life, everything changes. The television, for example, ceases to be your own exclusive property. In our house, my wife sometimes indulges herself by watching her favorite telenovela while I put our two sons to bed. She loves the Brazilian shows on Telemundo, translated into Spanish from the original

---

[1] David Tomas Martínez, *Hustle* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande, 2014), 56. Thanks to Anastasia Fuentes for editing this article and the earlier reviewers.

[2] Enrique Krauze, *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America*, trans. Hank Heifetz and Natasha Wimmer (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2011), 293.

Portuguese. Depending on how exhausted the kids are that day, I usually catch most of the episode, attempting to follow along with my limited Spanglish. One of the main characters in the show *A Regra do Jogo* (*Reglas del Juego* in Spanish), played by Alexandre Nero, has a Ché Guevara poster featured in his living room. Nero portrays an edgy personality, who is putting up a front as a so-called man of the people. The Ché image catches my eye. What is the point of featuring Ché in the front room? How does *this* one image still hold so much symbolism for people?

The classic portrait of Ché still instills ideas of rebellion. However, Ché in a telenovela? The photo serves a point that, at first, I missed with my North American eyes. For example, in a USA sitcom, the image would most likely be identified with a young twenty-something college student who has not experienced the hard knocks of real life. The narrative would go something like this: "You know Ché fought with Castro, and Castro's a dictator, so Ché stands for tyranny." That is how the story usually goes in the US In fact, on an episode of the Netflix show *One Day at a Time*, a Cuban family living in Florida harangue their white friend for wearing the infamous Ché shirt. He thinks he is being an ally to Latino/a causes, but the family responds that Ché "burned books, personally banned music, personally oversaw executions - he's a mass murderer!" The diatribe is a little on the nose when they make the analogy that wearing a Ché shirt around a Cuban American is like wearing a Hitler shirt around the Jews! Whatever one's opinion about the show, it at least does not hide the point that the historical and heavily commercialized Ché should provoke some type of emotional response.[3]

There is no lost love for many Cuban Americans toward Ché. However, for many US Latino/as, his image remains iconic, sometimes handled with a holy reverence. Again, this might appear incomprehensible for some US Anglo's, but recall that even Fidel Castro's conversation about religion with priest Frei Betto became an international best seller.[4] Castro's musings about religion with Betto was not the first-time theologians took notice. For example, if the reader is a little suspicious, note that even Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff was impressed with Castro's theological comprehension.[5] On the one hand, Castro was a communist, a dictator who jailed writers; on the other hand, he was well read and articulate about Latin American liberation theology.

Writer Richard Rodríguez captures the way Latino/as were viewed by US families who circled around their television sets in the age of Kennedy's Camelot:

---

[3] María Elena Fernández, "*One Day at a Time* Calls Out the Che Guevara T-Shirt in One Perfect Scene," *Vulture*, accessed October 31, 2023, https://www.vulture.com/2017/01/che-guevara-t-shirt-one-day-at-a-time-scene.html.

[4] Fidel Castro and Frei Betto, *Fidel and Religion: Fidel Castro in Conversation with Frei Betto on Marxism and Liberation Theology*, trans. Mary Todd (New York, NY: Ocean, 2006). For a cautious and skeptical interpretation of Castro's public interest in theology see also Alma Guillermo Prieto, *Looking for History: Dispatches from Latin America* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2001), 87-152.

[5] See Boff's story of his meetings with Castro and then the subsequent theft of his notes once he left Cuba in Mario I. Aguilar, *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology, Vol 1.* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2008), 126-7.

> By the time *I Love Lucy* went to divorce court, Desi Arnaz had been replaced on our television screens by Fidel Castro. Castro was a perverted hotblooded—he was a cold warrior—as was his Byronic sidekick, Ché. Our fantasy toyed for a time with what lay beneath the beards. When we eventually got a translation, we took fright. *Bad wolf*! Rhetoric too red for our fantasy.[6]

These two continue to be too red in the US.[7] Whereas Castro's legacy is something that will be debated for decades as distance from the Cold War continues, there is something about Ché that remains inspiring for some. The history books already recognize his complicated significance.[8] The recent fifty-year anniversary of his murder conjures up memories of the popularity of the Ché's photo.

Guevara's image went through a makeover with the movie *The Motorcycle Diaries*, starring Mexican actor Gael García Bernal. Bernal's performance as the young, idealist Ché, who is a traveling doctor to the poor and outcast, before he met the Castro brothers, is hard not to root for. He sees the poverty of the people and wants to change things for the better, even as he battles his own health concerns. Even the most cynical viewer may relate positively to the rise of Ché's social-political consciousness in the film. Unlike many do-gooders, Ché's journey leads him to become a revolutionary. Ché's most conservative critics will never accept him because of his strident condemnation of capitalism and his part in guerrilla violence.[9] Still, violence cannot be the only reason for rejecting him, since armed resistance has never been a disqualifier for hero status in the US especially since the country was founded by a successful armed revolution. Of course, many leftists envision Ché as one of the most enduring examples of sociopolitical sacrifice. What fascinates me is how some Christian theologians were also touched by the theme of sacrifice in the words and works of Ché Guevara. Some theologians were bold enough to see Christ-like qualities. As an example of biography as theology, I will explore how this guerrilla fighter became transformed as a selfless martyr, fighting on behalf of the oppressed of the world, and modeling self-sacrifice through his death. This will be accomplished by examining two theologians, José Míguez Bonino and George Casalis, who analyze Ché's influence on liberation theology, and some strands of this type of thinking in Chicano/a activism. Finally, I will close the paper with a reflection about how we may move away from this phenomenon of the selfless martyr as seen in Ché and remain committed to the Christian model of nonviolence.

---

[6] Richard Rodriguez, *Darling: A Spiritual Biography* (New York, NY: Viking, 2013), 108.

[7] Some of the harshest critics of Castro are writers that were jailed under his regime. The most famous are Heberto Padilla and Reinaldo Arenas. See Rafael Ocasio, *Cuba's Political and Sexual Outlaw: Reinaldo Arenas* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2003). See 182-4 for comments about Arenas's views on spirituality. Also see the sequel to his book *A Gay Cuban Activist in Exile: Reinaldo Arenas* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2007).

[8] See Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove, 2010); Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*, trans. Marina Castañeda (New York, NY: Vintage, 1998).

[9] An example of this is Alvaro Vargas Llosa, "The Killing Machine: Che Guevara, Communist Firebrand to Capitalist Brand," *Independent Institute*, July 11, 2005, https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=1535.

Biography as Theology and Liberation

> "Nor should it be forgotten that the new revolutionary ethic that was Che Guevara's constant dream was based on this concept – a concept that makes use of the most specific channels for the efficacy of love in its transformation of history."
>
> Hugo Assmann[10]

> "The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."
>
> Ché Guevara[11]

In the 1970s a religious interpretation defined as biography as theology was born.[12] The book that popularized this theory was written by the Baptist theologian James McClendon, who taught ethical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary before his passing in 2000. McClendon presented on the lived practices of public figures to evaluate their religious beliefs. He focused on a variety of Christians, the most recognizable being Martin Luther King, Jr. The point of biography as theology was to say that Christian ethics should focus on the way imperfect men lived the Christian life, not simply following Christian abstract, universal principles jotted down on lined note paper. I note *men* on purpose since no women, or for that matter Latino/as, made the list. It is amazing that these books continue to be published, and I am left wondering why even Cesar Chavez, at the very least, does not make the list.[13] In *Remembering Lived Lives*, I try to update McClendon's method by stating that there needs to be a focus on what the empirical, historical community of faith actually looks like, resurrecting the biographies that have either been ignored or forgotten due to perceived ethnic gendered barriers.[14] We are luckily living in a moment where these types of books are beginning to be published, yet there is still much work to be done.

Another Christian figure often incorporated into this genre is the German Lutheran pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[15] Bonhoeffer is famous for being involved in an assassination plot to remove Hitler even though he was a committed pacifist. He was executed for taking part in this conspiracy. The martyrdom of King and

---

[10] Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 141.

[11] Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, *Socialism and Man in Cuba* (New York, NY: Pathfinder, 2009), 30.

[12] For a fuller discussion on biography as theology see Michael Jimenez, *Remembering Lived Lives: A Historiography from the Underside of Modernity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 86-117.

[13] One recent corrective to this is Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

[14] Jimenez, *Remembering Lived Lives*, 91-117.

[15] Bonhoeffer's story serves as a unique link from continental theology to African American theology because of his travels to the United States, specifically to Harlem. See Josiah Ulysses Young III, *No Difference in the Fare: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

Bonhoeffer serve as guidance for future generations and as good examples of biography as theology.[16] In fact, both King and Bonhoeffer were and remain important heroes and martyrs for liberation theology.[17]

The most typical example of a type of biography as theology by a liberation theologian can be viewed in the work of Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves, who highlights the non-violent witness of Gandhi, King, and Oscar Romero as representatives of the God of the Oppressed, a common theme among liberation theologians.[18] In fact, Archbishop Romero from El Salvador is probably the most cited Latino martyr among liberation theologians. For example, Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino consistently focuses on the witness of Romero.[19] The result is a liberationist biography as theology of Romero throughout his writings. In short, like King and Bonhoeffer, Romero's biography is a crucial element in examining his theology, particularly in choosing the path of peace during very violent social-political times.

Priest-turned-guerrilla-fighter Camilo Torres is also popular among liberation theologians. Torres eventually died a martyr in Columbia, which led to some to see him as a kind of Latin American Bonhoeffer, putting his life on the line for a revolutionary cause, even resorting to armed self-defense.[20] It was actually a French Protestant theologian well versed in Latin American theology, Georges Casalis, who made the positive comparison between Torres and Bonhoeffer. Casalis's essay "Resisting Conformity: Dietrich and Camilo" was a rarity outside of the Latin American sociopolitical context. Torres is a sort of test case in understanding the Ché phenomenon we are about to examine in the following pages. In fact, Salvadoran liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría points out that those who can theologically argue for war have a hard time being consistent when they condemn Torres's actions.[21]

Bonhoeffer is the go-to figure for examples of biography as theology. Since he was a pacifist who eventually got caught up into a plot to assassinate Hitler, his biography serves as a helpful source for ethicists to ponder the way we make choices based on our theological convictions. The publishing of Bonhoeffer's books and scholarship about him since the end of WWII increases as time goes on. But what about figures outside of the United States and Europe, who respond to colonial violence with revolutionary love? Are their hands too bloody? Or are our ethics too safe? Is the continued attention to Bonhoeffer just another way of how empire and colonization co-opt and distort the stories of martyrs and simply centers those historical narratives around Europe and Anglo North America? My guess is that because Bonhoeffer's target was Hitler, the gravity of theological violence is toned down. Perhaps because of the radical period of the late 1960s-1970s, while death of God theologians used Bonhoeffer to embrace bourgeois secular ethics, many writers, including activists and theologians, embraced Ché and even Fidel Castro. As we will see, many Latino/as and other ethnic minority groups living in the United States viewed Ché as a type of religious symbol of liberation even though Ché himself was irreligious.

---

[16] For example, see William Jenkins and Jennifer M. McBride, *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

[17] In true biography as theology fashion, James Cone presents Bonhoeffer as a positive example of a white theologian's empathy and interest in black theology in contrast to Reinhold Niebuhr. Cone would later juxtapose King with Niebuhr. See James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 41-2, 47 and 70-3.

[18] Rubem Alves, *What is Religion?* trans. Don Vinzant (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 70-79. This trend continues in recent Christian literature. For example, Romero is listed among other Christian martyrs like Bonhoeffer and King in Mae Elise Cannon, *Just Spirituality: How Faith Practices Fuels Social Action* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 150-74.

[19] For a discussion of the Salvadoran church situation during the last leg of the Cold War. See Jimenez, *Remembering Lived Lives*, 96-8.

[20] Georges Casalis, "Resisting Conformity: Dietrich and Camilo." *Catalysing Hope for Justice: Essays in Honour of C.I. Itty to Commemorate His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Wolfgang R. Schmidt (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 21-25.

[21] See Ignacio Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and his Church*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 217-226. Ellacuría juxtaposes Torres's position on violence with King and Charles de Foucauld.

Ché as a Liberating Ideal of Love

Using Camilo Torres and Ché as models for Christian living may seem strange because both espoused guerrilla violence specifically against US imperialism. I will deal with this point below. However, what might be more disconcerting is that the usual people we hold up as symbols of godly living and have a significant amount of scholarship like King, Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Bonhoeffer, and Thomas Merton, lately, have been exposed for having more disturbing aspects in their lives. For example, most of the figures I listed were pacifists, preaching an idea of self-lessness, yet many wrestled with megalomania. Moreover, the relations some of these men had with women are disturbing.[22] The glaring facts are that these famous figures were at the very least very *imperfect saints*. It is the job of each generation to ask ethical questions about what a famous person's legacy means for history, the present, and the future. The consensus may eventually lead to navigating away from the person's usefulness especially if thinking about the ethics of a biography as theology.

What may be surprising for an audience in the US is that Ché's success provided a paradigm for guerilla warfare, the *foco*, throughout Latin America. However, Ché's popularity was not shocking for movements navigating the violence of proxy wars in Latin America and across the Global South during the Cold War. The appeal to guerillas was used by both European and Latin American thinkers like Giulio Girardi and Helio Gallardo.[23] The Cuban Revolution, according to Michael Löwy, was a turning point in history, crucial for understanding the rise of Latin American liberation theology as much as the doctrinal changes associated with Vatican II.[24] Argentine liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino, a key interpreter especially in regards to Ché and Castro, points out that the Cuban Revolution sparked "a new time in Latin America" but one that ultimately proved unrepeatable, as seen in Ché's failed uprising in Bolivia.[25] In some ways, Cuba slipped by the notice of US foreign policy. The US's subsequent support of military coups and right-wing regimes would ensure that another Cuba did not happen. Ché's failure in Bolivia, along with other losses in socialist politics, brings the era of the first-generation of liberation theology to an end with the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. These social-political changes are not the only reason for the pressures placed upon many of the first-generation Latin American liberation theologians. In fact, after the reforms of Vatican II in the 1960s, the shift to a more conservative Vatican leadership is seen as a major cause. Perhaps because of liberation theology's genesis coinciding with the Cuban Revolution, and its utilization of Marxist analysis, this theology was seen as a threat by the United States during the Cold War.[26]

---

[22] A similar point could be made about Ché's relationship with women. In fact, many of the radical movements from the 1960s-70s feature complicated relationships between men and women. There is a growing scholarship that is highlighting this fact. For example, many Latina activists complained about being left out of the big decisions and being told their role was to make coffee. My fear is that when it comes to typically Christian saints, we will always get the sanitized version.

[23] Helio Gallardo, *Vigencia y mito de Ernesto Che Guevara* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 1997); Giulio Girardi, *Che Guevara visto da un cristiano. Il significato etico della sua scelta rivoluzionaria* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2005).

[24] See Michael Löwy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (New York, NY: Verso Books, 1996). See theologian Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and*

In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, Ché was transformed into a global symbol of revolution and martyrdom by those seeking radical social-political change rather than simply reforms. Löwy declares "Che is seen as the purest symbol of the fight for the liberation of the Third World."[27] Alma Guillermoprieto describes him as "the century's first Latin American" that was "born in Latin America's hour of the hero."[28] However, for this "harsh angel" he is willing to give up all comforts for the global revolution. But revolutions are messy. The timing was important because there had been other revolutions. Perhaps it is all thanks to the age of media that the world witnessed the dramatic rise and fall of Ché. With his capture and execution in Bolivia, he became a towering figure in Latino/a thought—something of a Christ-like martyr. Löwy and Guillermoprieto suggest that Ché became the first Pan-Latin American figure, an international hero. In the revolutionary 1960s-1970s, no other flesh and blood figure would inspire other activist minded Latino/as and Latin Americans from the United States all the way to Uruguay. These writers and artists would affirm his legacy as the Pan-Latin American giant. Ché's life and words became idealized, with Castro leading the way. Ché had such a meteoric rise globally during revolutionary times that it makes sense that a theology focused on the oppressed would find him inspirational.

Even a few throw away comments by Ché and Castro about love and Christianity would be applied by some theologians. For Castro, the earliest followers of Christ were the persecuted poor and outcasts. Christianity had betrayed its mission by becoming aligned with Roman power. In point of fact, the only Christian leaders that were exiled from Cuba during the transition to a socialist state were church leaders that were openly

---

Manifesto (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 1-2 for a more nuanced layout for the history of Latin American liberation theology.

[25] José Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1975), 33. This view is confirmed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm in *Viva la Revolución* (London: Abacus, 2016), 264-270.

[26] See Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[27] Löwy, *The Marxism of Che Guevara: Philosophy, Economics, Revolutionary Warfare* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 109.

[28] Guillermoprieto, *Looking for History*, 73 and 85.

anti-revolution and in support of US imperialism.[29] What Castro provided with his speeches and interviews about Christianity was the blueprint picked up by some of his admirers in the Christian theological tradition. In fact, the revolutionary leaders present a very public turning point for Marxist and Christian dialogue.[30]

What did this mean for some liberation theologians? These theologians were enabled to claim this revolution as their own, reinterpreting Marxism in a way that downplayed the critique of religion being the opium of the masses or at least not see opium as the essence of Christianity. They were great students of history, so they saw Cuba as a turning point. They envisioned more would be done with social-political instability across Latin America. Would democracy be embraced? They believed that the God of the oppressed would be on the side of anyone who sought a better standard of living for the masses since US imperialism and capitalist market economics were often seen as the biggest social-political danger in Latin American societies. It is in this sense that some liberation theologians publicly praise Ché (and Castro to a lesser extent). Most of this praise occurred within the timeframe of the 1960s while Ché was seen as a global revolutionary symbol. We will look specifically at two theologians, Georges Casalis and José Miguez Bonino, because they specifically write about Ché's legacy for theology.

Georges Casalis takes his admiration of Ché and Fidel to new heights. In his book on theological method, he quotes Guevara more than any theologian other than Bonhoeffer! The militant revolutionary surpasses other modes of Christian doctrine of human existence. Casalis provides large quotes of both Ché and Fidel on "partisan love" to lecture his readers on cheap and idealistic reconciliatory love often seems within the confines of middle-class church environment.[31] The most frequent critique by liberation theologians is reserved for any theology that snoozes while dreaming about maintaining the status quo. Ché realized that Latin America had a special connection to Christianity, declaring that if Christians lived to their revolutionary potential, it could change the world.[32] In an interview with Teófilo Cabestrero, Casalis interprets Ché as a Christ-like figure based on the kenosis passage in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians. According to Casalis, Ché is "the revolutionary who truly left everything to live, struggle, and die for the freedom of others."[33] Kenosis theology articulates the way Christ empties himself of his glory, descending to earth as the incarnated baby in the manger. Divine status was not something Christ jealously held onto, because out of love he was willing to sacrifice himself for others. Casalis links Christ's incarnation to Ché as he was the son of the bourgeois, leaving behind the privileges of his social class to live among the freedom fighters. The fact that both die prematurely because of their commitments leads to their intimate connection for interpreters like Casalis. This is an amazing disclosure especially regarding a globally recognized revolutionary only a few years after his death.

---

[29] See Castro's speeches collected in Sergio Arce, *The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context* (New York, NY: New York Circus Pub, 1986), 182-196.

[30] Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 15, 23, 27.

[31] Casalis, *Correct Ideas Don't Fall from the Skies: Elements for an Inductive Theology*, trans. Jeanne Marie Lyons and Michael John (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 157-8.

[32] Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 27 and 104.

[33] Teófilo Cabestrero, "A Conversation with Georges Casalis" in *Faith: Conversations with Contemporary Theologians*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980), 30.

Ché's statement that "a true revolutionary is led by great feelings of love" appears as the most analyzed and quoted by intellectuals like Casalis and Bonino.[34] Casalis believes that Ché embodies the Christian idea of selfless love. The commandment is to live for others, even to give one's life for one's friends. True happiness comes from living for something bigger than selfish material desires.

The view of the Christ-like Ché is not limited to liberation theologians. Similar to the kenosis reading of Ché, Chicano intellectual George Mariscal presents numerous samples of inspirational art about Ché among Chicano/a writers, poets, and artists. He dedicates a whole chapter to Ché in his book about the Chicano/a Movement in the 1960s-1970s.[35] From being painted as the Christ figure in a Latino/a version of the Last Supper by artist José Antonio Burciaga to inhabiting the center figure of the model of Latino/a mestizo identity, it seems there is no limit to what Latino/a figures across the Americas can envision about Ché as an icon. Burciaga's painting is telling since he created this mural in the 1980s, only a few years after Ché's death. The fact that Ché, out of all the Latin American and Latino/a figures, is featured prominently as Jesus Christ illustrates the power and influence of the Ché ideology.

Probably the work of art in Mariscal's book most similar to Casalis's vision of Ché as Christ is Tejano poet David García's "A Tribute to Che." The poem states that Ché is the "Christo image" who like Jesus Christ was "brown," adding that "Christ was the Che of a religious revolution." Here the models have flipped. Ché is not simply a modern-day messianic figure, but Christ becomes the Ché. Mariscal's study illustrates that, in a matter of a decade, it was not only Latin American liberation theologians and admirers that saw Ché as a Christ-like figure but that even some US Latino/a artists viewed Ché this way.

The examples of Ché as Christ so soon after his death illustrate perhaps the starvation for models in the 1960s for US Latinos/as in general. Mariscal asserts that the dedications to Ché and other activist and revolutionary figures are not appropriations of "frozen icons" but instead "living signifiers for the utopian desire of many young people around the world."[36] The Ché phenomenon was a global symbolization, but its major impact was felt in Latin America since Ché was from Latin America and major revolutionary situations arose across its landscape. Liberation philosopher and historian Enrique Dussel agreed with Mariscal's line of reasoning. He writes that in all the major historical revolutions there are leaders who become the "symbolic reference" of the revolutionary event in the present-future.[37] The symbolic use of revolutionary figures among Latin Americans and US Latino/as was commonplace. However, what was different was the way Christian leaders openly embraced non-Christian figures who clearly had blood on their hands. The conservatives in the Vatican were uncomfortable with the use of communist sociology in liberation theology, so they must have been beside themselves with righteous indignation to see Castro and Guevara quoted as theological authorities.[38] Why did some Latin American clergy accept this paradigm?

---

[34] See Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 77 and 100.

[35] George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 97-139. See also Krauze, *Redeemers*, 316-7 and 324-7; Krauze points out that Ché's poetic imagination was evident through the themes of redemption and martyrdom in one of Ché's favorite poems by León Felipe's "To Christ." Moreover, Krauze lists other Latin American poets (Roque Dalton and Mario Benedetti) writing about an idealized Christological Ché.

[36] Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 101.

Bonino theorized on this link between Christ and Ché by discussing his encounter with a group he calls "Guevara Christians."[39] He wrote about a play put on by the youth at a Protestant church in Uruguay. In response to the question about who Christ is today, one student shouted out that it was Ché. This encounter led Bonino to make the following declaration about Latin Americans equating Christ with who they viewed presently as a hero for humanity:

> This or that missionary or priest, or the suffering Indian or mixed blood, was cast as a model for the Christ. What is new, and startling is that a group of Christians would name for that role a guerilla fighter and, moreover, a man who was—quite consciously and lucidly—not a Christian but a Marxist revolutionary.[40]

Bonino followed this statement with Ché's own suggestion about the potential of Christians being revolutionary and not reactionary, which might possibly lead to Latin America becoming truly liberated. How then does Bonino interpret the Guevara Christians? He posits three ideas.

First, Bonino claims that there no longer exists a "pre-Guevara time" for Christianity in Latin America because the revolutionary times have changed the coordinates of how to talk about Christian faith. This seems to be the most consistent idea throughout most of the writers who idealized Ché. Second, since at the heart of Christianity is the gospel mission to spread the message across the globe, according to Bonino, this evangelization must take place within the concrete, social-political concerns of the people of the land. Here, Bonino appears close to the doctrinal and religious concerns of Vatican II and the main tenets of liberation theology. This view is nuanced since, in fact, Bonino is not Catholic but a Protestant Methodist. However, his viewpoint illustrates the ecumenical and global appeal of liberation theology at the time. Finally, the shout “Christ is Ché” means “liberation and revolution are a legitimate transcription of the gospel.”[41]

---

[37] Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History*, trans. Thia Cooper (London: SCM Press, 2011), 548.

[38] One of the most famous examples of the Vatican censuring a Latin American liberation theologian for flirting with Marxist interpretation is the silencing of Leonardo Boff. For more on this event see Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone, 1988); John Luis Segundo, *Theology and the Church: A Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (Minneapolis, MN: Seabury, 1985); Boff and Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Robert R. Barr (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986).

[39] Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 13, 2-3. See Samuel Escobar, *In Search of Christ in Latin America: From Colonial Image to Liberating Savior* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 166-8 for his summary of the influence of Camilo Torres and Che Guevara on Latin American Christians.

[40] Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 2.

The way historical actors appeal to figures and ideals of history are not always Predictable. Ché inspired many across the world who were hungry for radical change. His short life served as a type of Christological model for those seeking radical social-political change. However, whereas Camilo Torres was examined in a type of liberationist biography as theology in juxtaposition with other Christian figures like King and Bonhoeffer, Ché’s importance among Latin Americans and US Latinos/as, especially in liberation theology, still needs to be highlighted. The utilization of Christological themes attributed to Ché because of his life and words makes the format of biography as theology a potentially useful format to write this narrative and understand his historical and theological legacy.

Conclusion: Revolutionary, Nonviolent Christian Love

“Though I am more Che than Chavez, I am still a dove. And I do not apologize.”

David Tomas Martínez[42]

What does the Ché image mean for us today? There is never just one answer. I do get a sense that Latino/as in the United States of America, many going through the process of assimilation, have very little knowledge of the man behind the beret. His introduction might come in a college general education history class, but that is often wishful thinking since Latino/a history is still marginalized. My guess is that the primary way Latino/as in the US learn about Ché is from seeing the famous photo that was discussed in the telenovela. It still pops up everywhere. However, across Latin America, Ché continues to be identified with resistance to the Yankees from the North or to the various powers that abuse the people. Thus, Jorge G. Castañeda points: “Half a century since his death, Guevara’s legacy and relevance is practically nil, in terms of his aspirations and achievements.”[43] Castañeda claims it is as a symbol that Ché is remembered.

What does it mean decades later that we still live in post-Guevara time since he is dead, but his legacy remains? Perhaps we are at a point in our history where we have given up seeking messianic figures wielding machine guns. What if post-Guevara time in this sense is over?[44] The bigger question is, what if Guevara time, symbolized through the image of the messianic guerilla fighter during the Cold War and around the same time as the birth of liberation theology, was a mistake? Can a Christian theology with the central message of option for the poor mix with liberation executioner style? Is there enough in liberation theology historically in Latin America with its commitment to the poor and the oppressed that critiques the corrupt social-economic system across much of Latin America that we may still find inspiration? However, did some—hypnotized by the romantic symbolization of the revolutionary 60s—get carried away in Ché's idealization? Some might still read Ché's "the new man" as a revolutionary hope, and as we have seen, Christianize it, yet to those who do not fit the requirements of "the new man" the symbol is monstrous because of the many killed in the name of armed revolution.

---

[41] Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 3.

[42] David Tomas Martínez, *Post Traumatic Hood Disorder* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande, 2018), 7.

[43] See Jorge G. Castañeda, “What Is Che Guevara’s Legacy 50 Years After His Death?” *New York Times*, accessed October 25, 2017, https://jorgecastaneda.org/notas/2017/10/25/what-is-che-guevaras-legacy-50-years-after-his-death/. Castañeda’s article is helpful in noting the shift in Ché’s legacy over the last 50 years.

[44] Petrella discusses how liberation theologians, after the end of the Cold War, tried to rethink the core ideas of their theology, distancing themselves from big state, concrete historical, socialist programs. However, appealing specifically to Bonino’s *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, he views this

The appeal to Ché as a religious symbol by liberation theologians remains an important phenomenon kept alive in texts from a revolutionary moment in history. It is an event that is symbolized by murals of Ché throughout the Latino/a world. As a floating symbol detached from the historical person, the Ché phenomenon is completed by one's own fantasy about revolutionary change. Castañeda poignantly addresses what this legacy means for today:

> So which Guevara should we recall? The autocrat who executed hundreds of Batista collaborators outside Havana in 1959? The disheveled guerrillero captured under humiliating circumstances in Bolivia? The warrior whose irreverence is a symbol all over the world? Or the unwilling icon of the cultural revolution of 1968, to which we owe the lives we live today? He would have preferred being remembered as the martyred revolutionary, but those who survive him today can only thank him, despite himself, for becoming the cultural icon he did. That is his legacy, relevance and glory.[45]

Castañeda's list illustrates the complexity of dealing with Ché's legacy.[46] In some ways, what we might do is nuance the diatribe from *One Day at a Time* mentioned at the start of this essay. As discussed earlier, biography as theology chooses figures that are imperfect saints—even though the tendency of hagiography looms large for any religious and specifically Christian biography. The hagiography about Ché serviced no one. It is one thing to point out that murals of Ché are just lingering shadows of a revolutionary romanticism of past decades. It is another thing to continue to idolize a figure with so much blood on his hands. The execution of many Cubans is linked directly to Ché, which is why the actors in *One Day at a Time* were outraged to see him celebrated.[47] There are many anti-imperial figures that do not deserve adulation. Moreover, for all the criticism we might hand out to Christian historical accounts that

---

as a wrong turn and instead thinks liberation theology needs to reconnect to historical projects. See Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, 3-5, 11-16.

[45] Castañeda, "What Is Che Guevara's Legacy."

[46] See Krauze, *Redeemers*, 308 for similar comments.

[47] For example, see Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 384-90, in a chapter titled "The Supreme Prosecutor."

downplay our heroes' failures, there is a tendency to do the same thing with accounts of revolutionary figures.

Perhaps without losing sight of what Ché meant to the past generation, the current one may learn much from other Latino/a icons. The religious iconography that has surrounded Ché might be understood as an aspect of the Spanish Catholic obsession with Christian images of death and martyrdom. For example, the other famous Latin American communist, Frida Kahlo, whose popularity was on the rise at the same time as Ché's stardom, painted herself with similar themes. Like Ché, we find her influence everywhere. Frida continues to inspire, even as we mourn with her over her tragedies.[48] Furthermore, the nonviolent labor leader Cesar Chavez was also treated with Christological images.[49] Chavez (and Delores Huerta) are prime candidates for a new Latino/a based biography as theology especially because of their commitment to nonviolence based on Catholic social teachings.[50] The point is not to forget Ché's place in history or to Christianize Frida, but to look at the impact these historical figures had on religious movements and their theology. In short, future thinkers should evaluate Ché's influence over the last few decades and how elements of his story can both inspire to become more socially conscious and warn about using extreme means to deliver social justice. In so many cases, the example of biography as theology illustrates a powerful witness of individual will that is shaped and formed by community. Community in some form is not absent so perhaps the new *Ché* are human rights activists like Marielle Franco, who was recently murdered in Rio. I had never heard of this remarkable woman until those same Brazilian telenovela stars I watch on TV every night during the week took to their social media accounts, speaking about her in words mixed with sorrow, frustration, and admiration. Now, murals of her can be found across Brazil. Perhaps, if liberation theology has a place in this world, it will follow Franco and not Ché. The age of the glamorized martyrs with the gun is gone. They have become a parody like Pola Oloixarao's Latin American studies professor in her wonderful novel *Mona*.[51] Whatever Ché's legacy means for our future, it is paradoxically fascinating that a photo of Ché hung in Franco's office.

---

[48] Like Ché, Frida's legacy has also become commercialized.

[49] See Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 151-2; Mariscal illustrates how the nonviolent leader of the farm worker's movement was often juxtaposed with Ché. This comparison and contrast help show the various tensions in Chicano and Latino/a consciousness.

[50] All three figures also make Burciaga's Last Supper table on the left of Ché. An example of Frida in this context is Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007). As an example of a type of biography as theology, Chavez, and Huerta to some extent, get a whole chapter in Romero, *Brown Church*, 120-41, which was based off his earlier essay on Romero, "The Spiritual Praxis of César Chávez," *Perspectivas* (2017), https://perspectivasonline.com/downloads/the-spiritual-praxis-of-cesar-chavez/, accessed April 15, 2024. Furthermore, this point on Chavez's legacy was brought home by his direct impact on Father Luis Olivares, who was the leader of the sanctuary movement in Los Angeles; see Mario T. García, *Father Luis Olivares: A Biography: Faith Politics and the Origins of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 160-7; also see Michael Jimenez, "A Beacon of Militant Nonviolence: Cesar Chavez, Faith-Based Activism, and Alliances," *The Other Journal* 35 (2023).

[51] Pola Oloixarao, *Mona*, trans. Adam Morris (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 101. This example reminds me of the reference to Ché in Carolyn Forché's memoir of her time in El Salvador; see Carolyn Forché, *What You Have Heard is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2019), 170 and 211.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2024

Lessons from Mestizaje for Catholic Theology from a 'Little Red Dot'

Audrey Wong (Wong Siew Ming Audrey fcJ)

M.A. student at Regis College of the University of Toronto

• VEA LA PÁGINA 61 PARA LEER ESTE ARTÍCULO EN ESPAÑOL •

Abstract

This paper explores how U.S. Latina/o theological discourses on mestizaje offer insights for a theology from Singapore, a small Southeast Asian nation. Development of such a theology would involve reclaiming history – including the experience of colonization – with its successes and its dark side, as well as the reality of biological and cultural intermixtures, as part of ongoing divine creation. Ethical practices arising from this reclaiming might involve interreligious and intercultural dialogue both within the church and without, and particularly with the indigenous Malay-Muslim community, as well as creative and constructive engagement in the public sphere for a more inclusive society.

Introduction

Singapore – a small island nation in Southeast Asia – is affectionately known to its residents as the "little red dot." The term was first used in a derogatory manner by an Indonesian politician who, feeling slighted by Singapore's political leaders, denigrated the country's influence by referring to it as only a "red dot" on the map. Singaporeans later made the term a badge of pride at what the nation could achieve despite its small size.

On the other side of the world, the term *mestizaje* – deriving from *mestizo/a* – also started out as a derogatory one, referring to biological mixtures between the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers and the indigenous peoples of Latin America. The term has since been imbued with multiple meanings and been claimed by some in Latin America and Latinas/os in the United States as a source of pride and unity. U.S. Latina/o Catholic theologians have also explored *mestizaje* as a theological category.

This paper explores how U.S. Latina/o theological discourses on *mestizaje* may contribute to a theology from the "little red dot" of Singapore, which is also a site of biological and cultural intermixtures. The paper will (i) explore the multiracial and multireligious context of Singapore; (ii) delve into how *mestizaje* has been used as a theological category; and (iii) draw out some lessons from theological discussions on *mestizaje* that can guide the development of Catholic theology and ethics in Singapore.

The Context: Race, Religion & Multiculturalism in Postcolonial Singapore

Singapore, despite its small size, is an ethnically and religiously diverse country. In fact, the Pew Research Center's Religious Diversity Index ranks Singapore as the most religiously diverse country in the world.[1] Singapore's postcolonial nation-building efforts, therefore, have required a careful balancing of the needs of diverse ethnic and religious groups. This has been achieved by the adoption of a multicultural national narrative and policies, which seek to allow various groups to contribute and benefit equally from national development, while retaining their own cultural and religious practices.

Multiculturalism in a Multiracial Society

The emergence and development of multiculturalism in Singapore must be seen against its historical background. Before the era of British colonization, there is evidence of some intermixing between the small indigenous Malay population and Chinese and Indian traders.[2] The British East India Company through its representative Stamford Raffles founded a settlement in 1819 and opened the doors to immigration of laborers from the surrounding region, mostly Chinese and Indian. The British administration applied a "divide and rule" policy to manage relations between the various ethnic communities. By 1871, influenced by Social Darwinism and associated racial theories in Europe and the United States (U.S.), it introduced a system of "racializing" communities, segregating them into categories separated by origin, language, and other characteristics.[3] Ironically, this practice was continued in postcolonial Malaysia and Singapore.[4] The present paper follows the use of the term "race" where it reflects such usage in the national narrative.

In the 1950s and 1960s, as the British prepared to leave the territories of Malaya and Singapore, local political parties worked towards a merger of the two territories, whose destinies were seen as closely linked. The difficulty was in the difference in racial composition: while Malays were the largest racial group in Malaya, at 49.8% of the population in 1957,[5] in Singapore the Chinese population was dominant, at about 70%.[6] After much work, the Federation of Malaysia merging the two territories was established in 1963, but this proved to be disastrous because of the racial tensions that ensued. While the politicians from Singapore insisted on multicultural policies, the Malayan politicians demanded special rights, including political leadership, for Malays as *bumiputera* ("sons of the soil").[7] Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, though racial hostility and politics continued to play out in inflammatory rhetoric and suspicions for several years afterwards. Independent Singapore's policies for managing racial and religious diversity cannot be considered apart from this crucible of historical experience, in which racial identities and tensions played a dominant role. Multiculturalism became a focus of nation-building and an integral part of the national narrative.[8] While it is largely accepted by the population as necessary and effective, national policies have had some homogenizing tendencies that have obscured the distinctiveness and diversity of ethnocultural traditions.

---

[1] "Global Religious Diversity: Half of the Most Religiously Diverse Countries are in Asia-Pacific Region," Pew Research Center (April 2, 2014), 15.

[2] Marc Rerceretnam, "Intermarriage in Colonial Malaya and Singapore: A Case Study of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Roman Catholic and Methodist Asian Communities," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 43, no. 2 (June 2012): 302-323.

[3] Lian Kwen Fee, "Race and Racialization in Malaysia and Singapore," in *Race, Ethnicity and the State in Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Lian Kwen Fee (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2006), 219-235, at 221.

[4] History scholars have claimed that this preoccupation with "race" had not existed prior to the nineteenth century, where the different migrant communities intermingled without preconceived notions of superiority or inferiority: see Rerceretnam, "Intermarriage," 309.

Firstly, the state's multicultural policies[9] are based on a framework that classifies ethnic communities as "Chinese," "Malay," "Indian," and "Others" ("CMIO").[10] This framework has affected Singaporeans' understanding of their cultural identities.[11] However, this negatively impacted cultural diversity as the CMIO categories conflated ethnocultural groups that previously considered themselves distinct, hailing as they did from different regions and with different languages and traditions. When a bilingual education policy was introduced, all students were required to learn English and their "mother tongue." For the "Chinese" this meant Mandarin and for the "Malays," the Malay language, which meant that many families did not pass down to their children their other ancestral languages and dialects.[12] The state, however, considered the adoption of common languages a unifying force that would bind the diverse population together.[13]

The state's developmental choices also had homogenizing tendencies. In what one writer describes as a "peculiar post-colonial affliction."[14] Unlike other postcolonial states, the Singapore state did not turn to its people's ancient cultural traditions, nor was there a transformation of ethno-religious traditions into nationalist discourses. Instead, it "grounded the imagination of the nation in the calling of modernity to achieve progress and prosperity through rapid industrialization and participation in the capitalist world economy," cultivating an "ethos of economic asceticism, pragmatism, and diligence."[15] This required, among other things, the sacrifice of certain cultural aspirations. The English language became the main language used in schools, government, and businesses, which drove a wedge between those within ethnic groups who were proficient in English and those who were not. Vernacular schools, which had been the medium for passing on of language, culture, and the political aspirations of one's ethnic group, were phased out, and in recent years a greater percentage of families across all ethnic groups have spoken English in their households.[16]

---

[5] Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), 12.

[6] Constance Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore 1819–2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 237.

[7] See Lian, "Race and Racialization," 222 onwards for a discussion of racialization in post-colonial Malaysia.

[8] Chan Heng Chee, Sharon Siddique, Nurlina Irna Masron, Dominic Cooray, *Singapore's Multiculturalism: Evolving Diversity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 1.

[9] See Lian, "Race and Racialization," 230 for examples of specific multicultural policies.

[10] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 2.

[11] Lian, "Race and Racialization," 229.

[12] See Lian, "Race and Racialization," 230 on the homogenizing tendencies of the state's bilingual education policy.

[13] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 47.

[14] Daniel P.S. Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-colonial Singapore," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 25 no. 1 (2010): 55 at 57.

The issue of Malay indigeneity and sovereignty claims has – after separation from Malaysia – given way to an ethic of multiculturalism, though Malays have been given certain constitutional rights arising from their indigenous status.[17] While the Malay community has, like other Singaporeans, benefited from national development, it has been seen as lagging behind other ethnic groups, including the Indian minority, in areas such as educational and socio-economic achievements. This has been a cause of concern for government leaders and the Malay community, and commentators have postulated various reasons for this, ranging from cultural values to systemic inadequacies.[18]

Religious Diversity, Liberal Catholicism, and the "Maintenance of Religious Harmony"

Race is very much tied to religion in Singapore as the vast majority of the Malay population is Muslim,[19] while the Indian community is linked with Hinduism and Sikhism, and the Chinese community with Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism.[20] In 2020, 18.9% of the Singapore resident population were Christian, the majority of these being Chinese, though there is also a significant Indian minority. [21] Research has shown that among Chinese converts to Christianity, Christianity is associated with modernity, and Chinese traditional religions with backwardness.[22]

---

[15] Goh, "Social Christianity," 57. See Joseph Stimpfl, "Growing Up Malay in Singapore," in *Race, Ethnicity and the State in Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Lian Kwen Fee (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2006), 61-94, at 67, which discusses the Singapore government's strategy to create a "national culture" or collective identity for citizens based on an "ideology of pragmatism" that would avoid sectarianism.

[16] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 48.

[17] Article 152 of the Singapore Constitution recognises "the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore" and makes it the responsibility of the Government "to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language." See Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 94.

[18] See Hussin Mutalib, *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City-state* (London, UK; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

[19] See Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,"* Ch. 5 for a discussion on the influence of Islam on Malay identity.

[20] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 102-103.

[21] Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion (Statistical Release 1)*, available at: https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx (accessed 1 June 2023), 32.

[22] Tong Chee Kiong, "The Rationalization of Religion in Singapore," in *Understanding Singapore Society*, eds. Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong and Tan Ern Ser (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997), 199 and 205.

The Singapore state itself is secular, but there is a great deal of state intervention to promote religious harmony and ensure that religion stays out of the political domain. The Catholic Church in Singapore has had its own experience of running afoul of the state. From the 1950s, Catholic university students became active in examining social issues in accordance with the social teaching of the Church, and began organizing groups of students to pray, act, and reach out to workers. Various social initiatives were taken by the Catholic community to minister to local and foreign workers. Catholic students became involved in campaigning for workers' rights and other social causes.[23]

Catholic social activism, however, came to a head in May 1987, when the Singapore government arrested sixteen church workers and social activists, calling them "new, hybrid pro-communist types [augmenting] traditional Communist Party of Malaya tactics with new techniques and method." Besides those arrested, the Young Christian Workers, the University of Singapore and Singapore Polytechnic Catholic Students' Societies, the Geylang Catholic Centre (for workers), the Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission, and four liberal priests were also implicated in what became known as the "Marxist Conspiracy." To the dismay of some Catholics, the then-Archbishop, after a meeting with the Prime Minister, took action to avoid further conflict with the government by stopping the sale of an implicated newsletter, suspending the four liberal priests from preaching, closing the Geylang Catholic Centre, and tightening controls over church administration.[24]

Daniel Goh has argued that the state's real concern over this incident was that "the socio-political capacity of liberal Christianity threatened the state's monopoly on setting the public agenda for the day-to-day running of the country."[25] The detained activists' theological views also connected local worker experiences to the larger issues of working-class experiences in developing Asia. This contradicted the state's pragmatic discourse on the need for obedience, diligence, and frugality to survive in a hostile economic world.[26] Not long after the arrests, the government passed the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.[27] The need for this law was purportedly because when a religion "crosses the line and goes into what they call social action," this opens up "a Pandora's box in Singapore," leading other religions to enter the political fray and disturb the harmony of multi-religious Singapore.[28] In other words, according to the State, religion should remain in the private sphere.

Mestizaje as Theological Paradigm

Having considered the multiracial and multireligious context of postcolonial Singapore, we will now explore critical aspects of the theological discourse of *mestizaje* that may contribute to the development of a Singaporean theology.

---

[23] Goh, "Social Christianity," 66-69.
[24] Goh, "Social Christianity," 69-71.
[25] Goh, "Social Christianity," 71.
[26] Goh, "Social Christianity," 71-72.
[27] *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act* (Cap. 167A, 2020 Rev. Ed. Sing.).
[28] Goh, "Social Christianity," 74.

During the 1970s, Mexican American theologians first used the notion of *mestizaje* to articulate the faith of the Mexican American people.[29] Over the years this has been taken up by other communities of U.S. Latina/o theologians who found *mestizaje* a useful category for constructing collective identity against the backdrop of the dominant political, cultural, and religious U.S. context.[30]

Mestizaje has been associated with multiple meanings, four of which are described by Néstor Medina in his article "(De)ciphering Mestizaje."[31] Firstly, it refers to the biological intermixture that took place between indigenous peoples and the Spanish and Portuguese during the latter's invasion and colonization of the Americas. Secondly, it points to the historical condition of cultural intermixtures, wherein indigenous, African, and European cultural sources gave rise to rich and diverse Latina/o cultures, and which has been on the one hand valued and on the other given rise to socio-political and economic discrimination. Thirdly, *mestizaje* conveys how identities are fluid, dynamic, contested, and irreducible to facile or clearly defined notions. Fourthly, *mestizaje* also refers to processes of code-switching, in which several cultures and traditions are "seamlessly" used together, such as in certain linguistic practices (e.g. speaking in Spanglish).

Theological Reinterpretation of History

Adopting *mestizaje* as a theological category, launched U.S. Latina/o theologians into "a slow and painful process of (re)claiming their historical past as the province of God's creative work."[32] Reclaiming history unmasks the violence of conquest and rape from which the historical *mestizos/as* first emerged, the experience of slavery of the African peoples, and the later U.S. history of expansionism and interventionism. On the other hand, this critical re-reading also reveals how historical violence and destruction had unexpected results in the creation of the *mestizo/a* people. This, as the U.S. Latina/o theologians came to see, was a divine act of creation.[33]

The theologians' discovery of divine providence in their people's bloody experience of *mestizaje* suggested to them that the biblical text cannot be read apart from questions of power.[34] The objective of reading the biblical text to elucidate questions of power is to acknowledge divine activity amid the messiness of human actions and history, without romanticizing it. Justo González, for example, suggests that all biblical interpretations are tainted by unacknowledged social, economic, and political interests, which have often obscured the good news. The biblical text is in fact profoundly political, dealing directly with matters of power and powerlessness, and there is no universal, ahistorical reading of the text. He therefore suggests that the biblical text must be read in light of the history and experiences of the members of the faith community, for it is their history and experiences that shape the questions they bring to it.[35]

---

[29] Virgilio Elizondo is widely recognized by Latino/a scholars as a pioneer in theological reflection on *mestizaje*. For his main arguments, see his influential works: Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); *The Future is Mestizo*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2000). For another influential perspective, see Arturo J. Bañuelas, ed., *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers), 2004.

[30] Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 1-2.

[31] Néstor Medina, "(De)Ciphering Mestizaje: Encrypting Lived Faith," in *The Word Became Culture*, ed. Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 47-48.

[32] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 13.

[33] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 13-14. In addition, from the point of view of culture, while mestizo/as experience marginalization and tension from not belonging to either parent group, their closeness to and distance from both parent cultures gives rise to the potential of transcending established worldviews to bring forth a new one: Elizondo, *Galilean Journey,* 18.

[34] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 14.

Culture as Critical Site of Theology

As theological discourse, *mestizaje* challenges dominant theological approaches by insisting on the centrality of culture in people's faith experiences, where the cultural is understood broadly as "the inescapable fabric of how people view the world, understand reality, confront misery, and experience and process both pain and happiness," and as "that open-ended, fluid, and linked series of codes and segments of codes by which people make sense of life, interact with each other and the world, and approach the divine."[36] U.S. Latina/o theologians affirm that neither the gospel nor expressions of faith can be understood or articulated outside of culture. Accordingly, culture is the very place where people encounter the divine at work – and thus also the locus of theology. This rejects dominant notions of theology as a meta-discourse above culture.[37] It also necessitates a new understanding of divine revelation: for if God's self-disclosure is mediated through culture, then the cultural material of a group limits such revelation. As such, no cultural group has a complete view of God, and all theological notions therefore are incomplete, although one can have a fuller understanding by engaging in dialogue with other cultural groups as equals.[38]

For the U.S. Latina/o people, cultural *mestizaje* took place specifically in the historical clash of indigenous, African, and Spanish peoples and the subsequent mixture of their cultural elements. Adoption of *mestizaje* as theological category allows celebration of traditions and sources of knowledge from these cultures and cultural intermixtures – including dreams, stories or even gossip, and their own non-Christian religious traditions[39] – that might yet be absent from dominant approaches to theology associated with enlightenment rationality and exclusivist theological claims.

In the Borderlands: Identities in Tension

One scholar who draws out the impact of *mestizaje* on formulating and articulating questions of identity is Gloria Anzaldúa. She plays with the metaphor of *borderlands / la frontera*, which firstly refers to the geographical Mexico-United States border which remains an "open wound" and symbol of the historic exploitation of and discrimination against Chicano/a communities. Secondly, the borderlands describe the spaces erected by dominant groups to exclude the other: a "series of psychological, sexual, and spiritual sites, present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[40] In her own experience of borderlands as a Chicana Catholic with indigenous ancestry, she rejects notions that make indigenous women traitors of the people, the Catholic heterosexual script imposed on her, notions of women as sexual objects closer to evil, and the U.S. dominant Anglo-European culture that disallows her Chicana experience and identity.[41] Chicanas in this way resist "cultural tyranny" in the form of inflexible hegemonic frames of interpreting reality that exclude those whose identities do not fit the socially-constructed frames. She calls for a paradigm shift to resist the dominant culture's reduction of reality to dualistic frames that do not permit the recognition of multiple identities in people. Here she reclaims a second metaphor from the legendary Aztec symbol of Coatlicue, the ancient serpent creator goddess who holds opposite elements in fine tension without excluding any. The goddess represents a mental space in which "ambiguity and contradiction reign, and where reality and identity are irreducible to fixed categories, conceptual frames, or rigid terms. Any attempt at defining her reality and true identity means going outside prescribed norms and frames; it is to 'kick a hole' out of old boundaries."[42] Like Coatlicue, living in the borderlands, the *new mestiza* "learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing is rejected, nothing abandoned."[43]

---

[35] Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, T.N.: Abingdon Press, 1990), Ch. 5.
[36] Medina, "(De)Ciphering Mestizaje," 51.
[37] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 11.
[38] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 12.
[39] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 140.

Anzaldúa's proposal has been criticized as tending towards intellectual abstraction and without historical grounding. In particular, her synthesis of different facets of identity occurs at the level of consciousness while saying nothing of its historical expressions in everyday activities, practices, customs, etc., which would relate it to the larger cultural whole.[44] Her disconnection from the historical use of the category *mestizaje* also runs the risk that historical baggage – such as how the rhetoric of inclusion has led to exclusion of certain voices in Latin American or Latina/o communities – is not engaged with.[45]

Problems with the use of *Mestizaje*

This latter criticism has also been levelled against other theological articulations of *mestizaje* by U.S. Latina/o theologians. Medina explains that they have tended to draw from idealized constructions of *mestizaje* from Latin America without engaging the socio-political context of the region, assuming that *mestizaje* would lead to the inclusion of other cultural groups when that does not reflect historical reality.[46] As *mestizaje* became characteristic of U.S. Latina/o communities, the "unmixed" or "differently mixed" indigenous and African voices became obscured. Scholars such as Ada María Isasi-Díaz have realized this, using the term *mestizaje-mulatez* to include the intermixture of European and African people in the Caribbean.[47] Hanna Kang has also pointed out how Asian Latino voices need to be included in *mestizaje* discourse.[48] Regarding gender, scholars have also not yet satisfactorily responded to women's challenges to hegemony, homogenization, racism, and sexism in the way *mestizaje* has been conceived and articulated.[49] Therefore, Medina argues that there is a need for Latina/os to interrogate how oppression and discrimination take place within their own communities as they have applied inherited racialized and patriarchal hierarchies. He emphasises the importance of dialogue or mutual conversation with the religious and ethnocultural universes of indigenous peoples, African Latinas/os and other voices that have been obscured by *mestizaje* and, following this, once again engaging in painstaking historical revising.[50]

---

[40] Margaret E. Montoya, "Border Crossings," in *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 641.

[41] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 72.

[42] Medina, *Mestizaje,* 74.

[43] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1987), 79.

[44] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 76-77.

[45] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 78-79.

[46] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 82.

Medina also proposes that *mestizaje* be understood in the plural sense (as plural *mestizajes*) – a "multiplication of syntheses and fusions and the creation of multiple new identities that spill out of rigid, airtight categories" – as opposed to one global *mestizaje*, and that they be qualified in light of the historical contexts from which they emerge.[51] This, he says, challenges theologians to a wider understanding of divine revelation, which takes place in multiple ways among different cultural and (even non-Christian) religious groups.[52] In a similar challenge to a hegemonic image of *mestizaje* determined by biological ancestry and visual conception – which leaves out marginalized social groups like Asian Latinos – Kang argues for a conceptual category of *mestizaje* that is "intentionally messy, ever-changing, and open-ended."[53]

Contributions of *Mestizaje* to a Singaporean Theology & Ethics

As we have seen, the discourse of *mestizaje* arose from a particular set of historical contexts and cannot be considered uncritically apart from it. Despite this, I propose that both the category of *mestizaje* – and criticisms of it – offer fruitful ways of thinking about a Singaporean theology.

The preliminary question on which it has something to say is on whether there should, in fact, be a theology from Singapore.[54] I would hazard a guess that most present-day Singaporean Catholics, in line with dominant theological assumptions that the gospel is distinct from culture and seeing the adoption of imported Western Christianity as part of their progress towards "modernity," have never entertained the thought that their "little red dot" might have something to offer to broader theological discourse. If, though, as the U.S. Latina/o theologians postulate, the people themselves in their everyday living and the ways they make sense of the world are the site in which the divine works and thus the source of theology, then the residents of the "little red dot" indeed have a distinct cultural window into divine revelation. How are they then to make sense of this revelation in their midst? I suggest that theological discourses on *mestizaje* point to two fruitful avenues for exploration: firstly, reclaiming Singapore's history as the site of ongoing divine creation; and secondly, reclaiming culture – and in particular cultural intermixtures – as a locus of theology. Both explorations will lead to new theological understandings and deeper expressions of faith, which, in Singapore's multi-ethnic and multi-religious context, I propose would take the form of creative, constructive, and collective engagement towards a more inclusive society.

---

[47] Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 70. See also Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 64.
[48] Hanna Kang, "Mestizos/as with an Asian Face," *Perspectivas*, 18 (2021): 43-60.
[49] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 82.
[50] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 138-139.
[51] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 137.
[52] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 141.
[53] Kang, "Asian Face," 44.
[54] On this question, one might find it helpful to explore other emerging theologies from Asia and Southeast Asia. See for example Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport, eds., *Emerging Theologies from the Global South* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023).

(Re)claiming History as Site of God's Ongoing Creation

Reclaiming Singapore's history as the site of ongoing divine creation requires first questioning inherited uncritical attitudes about colonization and official versions of history that narrate the founding of the Singaporean state, *ex nihilo* as it were, by the British. Samantha Fong argues that the fact that we know and think so little about Temasek (Singapore's pre-colonial civilization) as its residents knew it "testifies to a colonial erasure that was perhaps less bloody, but no less decisive than that which notoriously took place in the Americas."[55] She asks:

> What stories of creation did the Orang Laut have? How did the Johor Sultanate imagine the body politic? Questions like these are problematic because they use the disciplinary language of modern scholarship, and set Western models up as normative paradigms for comparison. Nonetheless, they are a useful first step toward rethinking Singapore's successes not as ex nihilo creations of modernity, but the result of a costly series of political and cosmological conquests—first by the British… and then by the "native" elites of Singapore, who rejected Western rule, but continued the modern mission of salvation through the pursuit of secular gods like Progress, Security, and National Development. These new gods have demanded no fewer sacrifices… [and those] of us who have benefited from the success of modern Singapore must thus reckon with ourselves as beneficiaries of an imperfect and imperializing form of *creatio ex nihilo*.[56]

The first group sacrificed to the new colonial regime of course was the indigenous peoples of the land (*bumiputera*), who through their leaders first conceded *de facto* and later *de jure* sovereignty over the land through treaties providing pecuniary benefits. Some have raised questions, though, about the pressures placed upon them by British agents.[57] The historical record shows that the British were keen to push the indigenous population to the fringes of the new settlements – which were being populated by immigrants in numbers that far outstripped that of the original inhabitants – both for more effective land use and because of violent disputes occurring between them and the immigrant settlers.[58] The rights of Malays as *bumiputera* was a key issue in dispute between Singapore and Malaysia in the foundational years. Arguably, many Malays have now – perhaps realizing the fruitlessness of this endeavour – turned their focus away from asserting their historical rights to the country in favour of calling for equitable treatment and more opportunities in the country's multicultural and meritocratic environment.[59] It remains a reality though that they have not done as well as other ethnic communities, according to social and economic indicators.[60] What does this mean to those of us who are Catholics today, settlers in a land once sacred to the Malay peoples? What responsibilities might we have, of cultural exchange or in promoting their communal aspirations? Perhaps we are now far enough away in time from the trauma of inter-racial violence associated with the nation's birth that these issues can be re-explored by a new generation of Singaporeans in dialogue with each other.

---

[55] Samantha Fong, "Ex nihilo: The Christian Creation Story and the Founding of Modern Singapore," *Cultural Dynamics,* vol. 27, no. 2 (2015): 295-299, at 297.

[56] Fong, "Ex nihilo," 297.

Furthermore, how are we to come to terms with other voices and aspirations that have been silenced in the name of progress, among which were the left-wing parties and trade unions shut down in Operation Coldstore, the Chinese cultural aspirations embodied in Nanyang University, or the Catholic social consciousness embodied in our own silenced activists?

The U.S. Latina/o theologians reclaimed their history of violent colonial conquest by seeing what emerged – *mestizaje* – as part of ongoing divine creation. The Singapore story, on the other hand, has been too quick to see divine intervention in creating the modern nation state, uncritically accepting – and even celebrating – the colonizing event and subsequent drive for progress without acknowledging the historical erasures and marginalization of social groups that facilitated both. The use of *mestizaje* as a tool for reinterpreting history, then, might suggest ways in which we might more critically reclaim our history in a fuller and deeper way: firstly, by identifying the biological intermixtures and cultural clashes and amalgamations that took place as various ethnic and religious groups came together during the period of colonization, and then in efforts to forge a shared nation; and secondly by examining the power dynamics that undergirded these historical movements, paying attention to how some voices were privileged while others were suppressed or lost. In so doing, we might come to a new understanding of how the divine has been present in both the glory *and* messiness of our human actions, and how it might be calling us towards a more inclusive society while making reparations for historical injustices and imbalances.

(Re)claiming Culture as Site of Theology

---

[57] See Gareth Knapman, "Settler Colonialism and Usurping Malay Sovereignty in Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 52, no. 3 (September 2021): 418-440 at 439.
[58] Knapman, "Settler Colonialism," 437.
[59] Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,"* 139.
[60] See Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,"* Ch. 4.

Mestizaje as theological discourse also points us towards reclaiming the centrality of culture – and in particular, cultural intermixing – in our faith and theology. The CMIO framework that has guided national policy and come to shape our self-understandings has obscured our biological and cultural intermixtures. For example, intermarriages between ethnic groups have been taken place since before the colonizing event – though the British policy of "divide and rule" had a constraining effect on these during the colonial period – and picked up pace afterwards. The CMIO framework rendered this invisible, first by subsuming the category of "Eurasian" – in use since colonial times to describe biological intermixture between Europeans and Asians – under the "Others" category in CMIO,[61] and then by requiring children from mixed marriages to follow one parent's race. In more recent times, hyphenated identities have been recognized, such that children of mixed marriages might be registered as Chinese-Indian, for example, or Indian-Chinese, with the first marker being the group with which they are identified for the purpose of national policies (e.g. an Indian-Chinese would be considered Indian and not Chinese under public housing quotas).[62] Even the revised framework, however, still remains a blunt tool in describing an increasingly complex reality, especially in light of immigration trends in recent years which have seen an influx of new residents from different parts of the world.

Apart from the biological, cultural intermixtures have also been a shared Singaporean experience. This is evident in how long-time Singaporean Indians or Chinese, for example, consider themselves culturally distinct from more recent immigrants from India or China, given their socialization over generations by cultural processes in Singapore. The discourse of *mestizaje* gives us a greater appreciation of how our cultural boundaries are porous, fluid, and always in flux.

Anzaldúa's work in recognizing multi-sectional identities is particularly of interest as we seek new language that recognizes our cultural intermixtures. Public discourse has not allowed space for exploration of the multiple influences there have been on our cultural identities, and her interpretation of *mestizaje* in particular might open our imaginations to the way in which we might conceive of our plural ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and other identities that exist together in mutual tension. Medina's advice to the Latina/o community to "drink from their own wells" in recovering lost traditions and epistemologies (or cultural universes) might also be helpful for Singaporeans if we are to value the totality of our cultural inheritances. A constant spectre in our cultural imaginary – as sometimes caricatured in local media productions and narratives – is the English-educated Singaporean native who, having attended the best universities in the West, is nonetheless rootless and tragically comedic for having lost touch with her ancestral languages and cultures.[63] Medina's challenge, however, goes further than simply recovering language and cultural traditions, to include non-Christian religious traditions as well. This is particularly relevant in the Singaporean context where, in the worldviews of many of our ancestors, religion and culture were not considered distinct. However, this would certainly be a stretch for Singaporean Catholics who have inherited exclusivist understandings of the Christian tradition and require Coatlicue-like powers for those who do take up the challenge of inter- and intra-religious dialogue.

---

[61] Historically, "Eurasians" had privileged positions during the colonial regime and considered themselves among the founding racial groups in Singapore. There was a level of unhappiness at their being subsumed under the "Others" category, which in recent times has also come to include immigrants from other countries such as the Philippines, the Middle East, Japan, and Thailand, etc. See Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 74.

[62] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 40-41.

[63] See for example Terence Chong, "Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 877-897.

Another important cultural influence for Singaporean Catholics to acknowledge and interrogate is that of socio-economic class – an issue that has been amplified in public discourse since 2017 with the publication of a book titled *This is What Inequality Looks Like* by a local sociologist.[64] It could well be that nowadays the issue of class has come to be more divisive in Singaporean society than race, and it behoves Catholic Singaporeans who hail from the upper- and middle-classes of society to consider how this aspect of their cultural conditioning and identities has affected their theological understandings.

Resistance as Creative and Constructive (Rather than Oppositional) Engagement

How might what emerges from efforts in reclaiming our histories and cultures be expressed in our concrete theological and faith practices? Anzaldúa's work, as has been pointed out, suggests a synthesis that remains at the level of consciousness and does not necessarily guide us here. Other theologians writing on *mestizaje* have emphasized the importance of popular religion as the cultural expression of a people's faith.

On the level of theology, our re-reading of history, appreciation of our cultural intermixtures, and awareness of the power plays that have determined our current course should suggest to us new questions to ask of scripture and new appropriations of our faith tradition that facilitate our quest for a more inclusive society. More attention, for example, might be paid to Catholic social teaching, gone out of vogue since the incident of the "Marxist conspiracy". More efforts might also be paid to the areas of comparative theology, the theology of religions, and interreligious dialogue. I suggest that interreligious dialogue needs to happen with respect to the cultural and religious traditions of those ethnic groups represented *within* the church, in an effort to develop a theology that resonates more with our own cultural instincts; but furthermore also with those *outside of* the church, particularly Islam, the traditional religion of the Malay indigenous population in Singapore, with whom, given our history, we have a special responsibility to dialogue, and by whom we have also been influenced over the years in the fluid and dynamic processes of cultural intermixture.

I suggest that in the Singapore context, the Catholic Church itself provides a fruitful space for intercultural encounters. Among the ethnic groups represented in the church in significant numbers are Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos, each of which is associated with a certain social status, class, and cultural stereotypes. Coming together as members of the same worshipping community, though, is an opportunity to encounter each other in a different way. Practices of inculturation (understood as *inter*-culturation, as Asian theologian Peter Phan suggests) serve not only as culturally relevant expressions of a people's faith, but can also aid the different ethnic groups to appreciate one another's cultures at a deeper level. [65] For example, the popular religious practice of "Simbang Gabi" – a Christmas novena that is an integral part of Filipino Catholic practice – has in recent years been celebrated in some Singaporean churches, and Chinese New Year, a significant cultural celebration in the Chinese community, is also commemorated by a special mass. Our appropriation of cultural intermixtures, as described in the previous sub-section, might contribute to deeper inculturation of faith expressions, and these could also be more intentionally used as spaces for intercultural encounter between ethnic groups in the Catholic community. At the same time, power differentials between cultural groups in the church should be acknowledged. Personal intercultural encounters within the church context, entered with the spirit of mutual curiosity, might help facilitate re-interpretations of these relationships of power.

---

[64] Teo Youyenn and Kian Woon Kwok, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like,* rev. ed. (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2019).

Practices of reclaiming history and culture also impact a community's interactions in the public sphere. Since the "Marxist conspiracy", the Catholic church has been wary of encroaching into spaces that the state considers "out of bounds" for religious groups, such that Catholic faith practice in Singapore has largely been seen as a private matter. Surprisingly, Pentecostalism, which has been on the rise in recent years, has increasingly engaged in the social arena in Singapore; for example, "prayer walking" around the city and praying over government offices.[66] The difference, it seems, is that its efforts cultivate among its adherents a sense of responsibility for and loyalty to Singapore that is in line with the state's own ideology of progress and shared responsibility, without openly opposing state policy. Catholics might take a leaf out of their fellow Christians' playbook in finding creative and constructive ways to contribute to public discourse while respecting the nation's multi-ethnic and multi-religious context and the prerogative of the state. To risk a broad generalization, the Asian traditions to which we in Singapore are heirs privilege the values of harmony and consensus over that of opposition and resistance in political and social life. This is not to say that resisting abuses of power and injustice is not important, but that there is also an appreciation of the role of moral leadership on the part of the state, and so how resistance is carried out must reflect that to be effective. As the East Asia Christian Conference declared in 1964:

> Much Christian thinking, particularly in the West, has emphasized the necessity to limit state power. But in Asian countries we must stress the positive functions of government in the re-ordering of economic life and the duty of Christians and other citizens to accept the authority of the state and a great measure of state-imposed discipline as a means to social progress.[67]

---

[65] Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

[66] Daniel P.S. Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-colonial Singapore," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 25 no. 1 (2010): 54-89 at 57.

[67] Ron O'Grady, *Banished: The Expulsion of the Christian Conference of Asia from Singapore and its Implications* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia International Affairs Committee, 1990).

The kinds of oppositional practices associated with liberation theology from the Americas are unlikely to be effective or culturally resonant in the Singaporean context. Furthermore, there is also a deep appreciation among Singaporeans for harmony between diverse ethnic and religious groups, such that limits on public expression and discourse are understood as necessary. Therefore, Catholics in Singapore seeking to work towards a more inclusive society as an expression of their reclaiming of history and cultural intermixtures must resist unjust or oppressive practices in ways that are creative and constructive, through mutual dialogue and collective solutions that respect Singapore's multi-ethnic and multi-religious context.

Conclusion

In summary, *mestizaje* as a theological category offers fruitful pointers for a development of a Singaporean Catholic theology and faith practice. This would involve reclaiming history with both its successes and its dark side, as well as the phenomenon of biological and cultural intermixtures, as part of ongoing divine creation. Ethical practices arising from this reclaiming might involve interreligious and intercultural dialogue, both within the church and without, and particularly with the indigenous Malay-Muslim community. Finally, the faith community's aspirations for a more inclusive society may be effectively expressed in creative and constructive engagement in the public sphere.

PERSPECTIVAS • 2024

Lecciones del Mestizaje para una teología católica desde un 'pequeño puntito rojo'

Audrey Wong (Wong Siew Ming Audrey fcJ)

M.A. student at Regis College of the University of Toronto

• SEE PAGE 46 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

Abstract

Este ensayo explora cómo los discursos teológicos del mestizaje por las/os/xs teólogas/os/xs estadounidenses ofrecen claves para una teología desde Singapur, una pequeña nación sudasiática. El desarrollo de tal teología requeriría un recobro histórico—incluyendo nuestra experiencia de colonización—con sus éxitos y momentos oscuros, como también de la realidad de entremezcla biológica y cultural, como parte de la continua creación divina. Prácticas éticas surgiendo de este reclamo histórico incluirían un diálogo interreligioso e intercultural tanto dentro de la iglesia como afuera de ella, y particularmente con las comunidades indígenas malay-musulmanas, como también un abordaje creativo y constructivo de la esfera pública para construir una sociedad más inclusiva.

Introducción

A la pequeña isla-nación de Singapur en el sudeste de Asia los residentes la llaman cariñosamente "el puntito rojo". Primero el término se usó de manera despectiva por un político indonesio quien, sintiéndose ofendido/despreciado por los líderes políticos de Singapur, denigró la influencia del país al referirse a él como solo un "punto rojo" en el mapa. Más tarde los singapurenses lo convirtieron en insignia de orgullo de lo que la nación podría conseguir pese a su pequeño tamaño.

Al otro lado del mundo, el término mestizaje, derivado de mestizo/a también empezó como uno despectivo, y se refiere a la mezcla biológica entre los colonizadores españoles y portugueses y los pueblos indígenas de América Latina. Desde ese entonces el término a recibido muchos significados y se ha convertido en punto de orgullo y unidad para algunas personas en América Latina y latinas/os/xs en los Estados Unidos de América. Los teólogos latinos católicos de los E.E. U.U también han explorado el mestizaje como categoría teológica.

Este artículo explora cómo los discursos latinos-estadounidenses de mestizaje pueden contribuir a una teología desde el "puntito rojo" de Singapur, que es también un sitio de entremezcla biológica y cultural. El artículo (i) explorará el contexto multirracial y multirreligioso de Singapur; (ii) indagará en cómo el mestizaje ha sido usado como categoría teológica; y (iii) sacará algunas enseñanzas de los debates teológicos sobre mestizaje que pueden guiar el desarrollo de la teología católica y la ética en Singapur.

El contexto: raza, religión & multiculturalismo en el Singapur poscolonial

Pese a su pequeño tamaño, Singapur es un país diverso en su étnica y su religión. De hecho, el Índice de la Diversidad Religiosa del Centro Pew de Investigación (Pew Research Center's Religious Diversity Index) categoriza a Singapur como el país más diverso religiosamente del mundo.[1] Por lo tanto, los esfuerzos poscoloniales de Singapur en construir la nación han requerido un balance cuidadoso de las necesidades de diversos grupos étnicos y religiosos. Esto se ha logrado adoptando una narrativa nacional multicultural, y políticas que intentan permitir a los grupos étnicos igualmente contribuir a y beneficiarse del desarrollo nacional, mientras retienen sus tradiciones culturales y religiosas.

El multiculturalismo en una sociedad multirracial

La emergencia y desarrollo del multiculturalismo en Singapur debe ser visto en contraste a su trasfondo histórico. Antes de la época de la colonización británica, hay pruebas de una entremezcla entre la población indígena malaya y los comerciantes chinos e indios.[2] En 1819, la Compañía Británica de las Indias Orientales por medio de su representante Stamford Raffles, fundó un asentamiento que abrió las puertas a la inmigración de trabajadores de la región circundante, mayormente a chinos e indios. La administración británica aplicó una política de "dividir y vencer" para manejar las relaciones entre las varias comunidades étnicas. Para 1871, por la influencia del darwinismo social y otras teorías asociadas en Europa y los Estados Unidos (EE. UU.), se introdujo un sistema de "racialización" de las comunidades, segregándolas por categorías separadas por origen, idioma, y otras características.[3] Irónicamente, esta práctica se mantuvo en la Malasia y en Singapur poscoloniales.[4] Este artículo sigue el uso del término "raza" donde refleja tal uso en la narrativa nacional.

En los años 50 y 60, mientras la población británica se preparaba a salir de los territorios de Malaya y Singapur, los partidos políticos locales trabajaban hacia la unión de los dos territorios, cuyos destinos se consideraban estrechamente relacionados. La dificultad estaba en la diferencia de composición racial: mientras los malayos eran el grupo racial mayoritario en Malaya, con 49.8% de la población en 1957,[5] en Singapur la población china dominaba, con cerca de 70%.[6] Después de mucho trabajo, en 1963 la Federación de Malasia incorporó los dos territorios, pero esto resultó ser un desastre por las tensiones raciales que ocurrieron. Mientras los políticos de Singapur insistieron en políticas multiculturales, los políticos malayos demandaban derechos especiales, incluyendo liderazgo político, para malayos, como *bumiputera* ("hijos de la tierra").[7] Singapur se separa de Malasia en 1965, aunque las hostilidades y las políticas raciales continuaron en la retórica inflamatoria y de desconfianza por varios años después. Las políticas del Singapur independiente para manejar la diversidad religiosa y racial no pueden ser consideradas separadas de este crisol de experiencia histórica, en el que las tensiones e identidades raciales desempeñaron un papel importante. El multiculturalismo se convirtió en un foco de la construcción de la nación y una parte integral de la narrativa nacional.[8] Mientras en gran medida la población lo acepta como necesario y efectivo, las políticas nacionales han tenido algunas tendencias homogeneizadoras que han oscurecido lo distinto y diverso de las tradiciones etnoculturales.

---

[1] "Global Religious Diversity: Half of the Most Religiously Diverse Countries are in Asia-Pacific Region," Pew Research Center (April 2, 2014), 15.

[2] Marc Rerceretnam, "Intermarriage in Colonial Malaya and Singapore: A Case Study of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Roman Catholic and Methodist Asian Communities," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 43, no. 2 (June 2012): 302-323.

[3] Lian Kwen Fee, "Race and Racialization in Malaysia and Singapore," in *Race, Ethnicity and the State in Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Lian Kwen Fee (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2006), 219-235, at 221.

[4] Académicos de la historia sostenido que esta preocupación con "la raza" no existía antes del siglo diecinueve, cuando las diferentes comunidades migrantes se entremezclaban sin ideas preconcebidas de superioridad o inferioridad. Véase Rerceretnam, "Intermarriage," 309.

Primero, las políticas multiculturales del Estado[9] se basan en un marco que clasifica a las comunidades étnicas como "chinos", "malayos", "indios", y "otros" ("CMIO").[10] Este marco afecta como las/os/xs singapurenses entienden sus identidades culturales.[11] Sin embargo, esto tuvo un impacto negativo sobre la diversidad cultural porque las categorías CMIO combinaban grupos etnoculturales que anteriormente se auto consideraban distintos, porque procedían de regiones distintas con lenguas y tradiciones también diferentes. Cuando se introdujo una política de educación bilingüe, se requirió que todo estudiante aprendiera el inglés y su "lengua materna". Para los "chinos" esto significó mandarín, y para los "malayos," la lengua malaya, lo cual significó que muchas familias no transmitieron as sus hijos/as sus lenguas y dialectos ancestrales.[12] Sin embargo, el Estado consideraba la adopción de un idioma común como una fuerza unificadora que uniría la población diversa.[13]

Las decisiones de desarrollo tomadas por el Estado también tuvieron consecuencias homogeneizadoras. En lo que describe un autor como una "aflicción peculiar poscolonial".[14] A diferencia de otros Estados poscoloniales, el Estado singapurense no tomó en cuenta las tradiciones culturales antiguas de sus pueblos, ni hubo una transformación de tradiciones étnico-religiosas en discursos nacionales. Por el contrario, "basó la imaginación de la nación en la llamada de la modernidad para lograr el progreso y la prosperidad a través de la industrialización rápida y la participación en la economía capitalista mundial", cultivando un "ethos de ascetismo económico, pragmatismo y diligencia".[15] Entre otras cosas, esto requirió el sacrificio de ciertas aspiraciones culturales. El idioma inglés llegó a ser el idioma principalmente usado en las escuelas, el gobierno, y los negocios, lo cual sembró discordia entre los grupos étnicos que tenían facilidad con inglés y los que no. Se eliminaron progresivamente las escuelas de lengua vernácula, que habían sido el medio para transmitir la lengua, cultura, y aspiraciones políticas del grupo étnico propio. En años más recientes un gran porcentaje de familias de todos los grupos étnicos hablan inglés en sus hogares.[16]

---

[5] Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976),
12.

[6] Constance Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore 1819–2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 237.

[7] Véase Lian, "Race and Racialization," a partir de 222 para un debate sobre la racialización en la Malasia poscolonial.

[8] Chan Heng Chee, Sharon Siddique, Nurlina Irna Masron, Dominic Cooray, *Singapore's Multiculturalism: Evolving Diversity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 1.

[9] Véase Lian, "Race and Racialization," 230 para ejemplos de políticas multiculturales.

[10] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 2.

[11] Lian, "Race and Racialization," 229.

[12] Véase Lian, "Race and Racialization," 230 acerca de las tendencias homogeneizadoras de la política estatal de educación bilingüe.

[13] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 47.

La cuestión de los reclamos de indigeneidad y soberanía por los malaya—después de la separación—ha dado espacio para el surgimiento de un multiculturalismo étnico, aunque a los malayos se les han concedido ciertos derechos constitucionales que surgieron de su estatus indígena.[17] Aunque la comunidad malaya, como otros singapurenses, se ha beneficiado del desarrollo nacional, se le ha visto como quedándose atrás con respecto a otros grupos étnicos, incluyendo la minoría india, en áreas como la educacional y en los logros socioeconómicos. Esto ha sido causa de preocupación para los líderes gubernamentales y la comunidad malaya, y los comentaristas han postulado varias razones para ello, que van desde valores culturales hasta deficiencias sistémicas.[18]

La diversidad religiosa, el catolicismo liberal, y el "mantenimiento de armonía religiosa"

En Singapur la raza está muy ligada con religión dado que la gran mayoría de la población es musulmana,[19] mientras la comunidad india está vinculada con el hinduismo y el sikhismo, y la comunidad china con el confucianismo, budismo, o taoísmo.[20] En el 2020, un 18.9% de la población residente singapurense era cristiana, de la cual la mayoría es de trasfondo chino, aunque hay también una minoría india significativa. [21] La investigación demuestra que, entre los chinos convertidos al cristianismo, el cristianismo es asociado con la modernidad, mientras las religiones tradicionales chinas son asociadas con el atraso.[22]

---

[14] Daniel P.S. Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-colonial Singapore," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 25 no. 1 (2010): 55 at 57.

[15] Goh, "Social Christianity", 57. Véase Joseph Stimpfl, "Growing Up Malay in Singapore", en *Race, Ethnicity and the State in Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Lian Kwen Fe. Lian Kwen Fee (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2006), 61-94, en 67, que analiza la estrategia del gobierno de Singapur para crear una "cultura nacional" o identidad colectiva para los ciudadanos basada en una "ideología del pragmatismo" que evitaría el sectarismo.

[16] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 48.

[17] El artículo 152 de la Constitución de Singapur reconoce "la posición especial de los malayos, que son el pueblo indígena de Singapur" y responsabiliza al Gobierno de "proteger, salvaguardar, apoyar, fomentar y promover sus intereses políticos, educacionales, religiosos, económicos, sociales y culturales y la lengua malaya". Véase Chan y Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 94.

[18] See Hussin Mutalib, *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City-state* (London, UK; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

[19] Véase Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,"* Cap. 5 para un debate sobre la influencia del islam en la identidad malaya.

[20] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 102-103.

El Estado de Singapur mismo es secular, pero hay mucha intervención estatal para promover armonía religiosa y asegurarse de que la religión se quede fuera del campo de la política. La iglesia católica en Singapur también tiene su propia experiencia de conflicto con el Estado. Desde los 1950, las/os/xs estudiantes católicas/os/xs universitarios han sido muy activos examinando problemáticas sociales de acuerdo con las enseñanzas sociales de la iglesia, y comenzaron a organizar grupos estudiantiles para orar, actuar, y alcanzar a los trabajadores. La comunidad católica ha tomado varias iniciativas sociales para ministrar a los trabajadores locales e internacionales. Los estudiantes católicos se han involucrado haciendo campaña por los derechos de los trabajadores y otras causas sociales.[23]

Sin embargo, el activismo social católico llegó a un punto crítico en mayo de 1987, cuando el gobierno singapurense arrestó a dieciséis trabajadores de la iglesia y activistas sociales, llamándolos una "nueva clase híbrida procomunista [aumentando] las tácticas tradicionales del Partido Comunista de Malaya con nuevas técnicas y métodos". Además de los arrestados, los Trabajadores Jóvenes Cristianos, la Universidad de Singapur y las Sociedades de Estudiantes Católicos Politécnicos de Singapur, el Centro Geylang Católico (para los trabajadores), la Comisión Arquidiocesana para la Justicia y la Paz, y cuatro sacerdotes liberales fueron también implicados en lo que se ha llegado a conocer como la "Conspiración Marxista". Para la consternación de algunas/os/xs católicas/os/xs, después de una reunión con el Primer Ministro, el arzobispo de ese entonces tomó la acción de evitar más conflicto con el gobierno, deteniendo la venta de un boletín informativo implicado, suspendiendo los cuatro sacerdotes de continuar predicando, cerrando el Centro Geylang Católico, y apretando el control sobre la administración de la iglesia.[24]

Daniel Goh ha argumentado que la preocupación real que tenía el Estado sobre este acontecimiento era que "la capacidad sociopolítica del cristianismo liberal amenazaba el monopolio del Estado en fijar la agenda pública para el manejo cotidiano del país".[25] Las perspectivas teológicas de los activistas detenidos también conectaron las experiencias de los trabajadores locales a los problemas mayores de las experiencias de la clase obrera en la Asia en desarrollo. Esto contradecía el discurso pragmático del Estado de la necesidad de la obediencia, la diligencia, y la frugalidad para sobrevivir en un mundo económico hostil.[26] Poco después de las detenciones, el gobierno aprobó la Ley de Mantenimiento de la Armonía Religiosa.[27] Supuestamente se necesitaba esta ley porque cuando una religión "cruza la línea y pasa a lo que ellos llaman la acción social", esto abriría "una caja de Pandora en Singapur", provocando a que otros grupos religiosos entren los espacios políticos y molesten la armonía del Singapur multirreligioso.[28] Según el estado, en otras palabras, la religión debe quedarse en la esfera privada.

---

[21] Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion (Statistical Release 1)*, available at: https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx (accessed 1 June 2023), 32.
[22] Tong Chee Kiong, “The Rationalization of Religion in Singapore,” in *Understanding Singapore Society*, eds. Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong and Tan Ern Ser (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997), 199 and 205.
[23] Goh, “Social Christianity,” 66-69.
[24] Goh, “Social Christianity,” 69-71.
[25] Goh, “Social Christianity,” 71.

El mestizaje como paradigma teológico

Habiendo considerado el contexto multirracial y multirreligioso del Singapur poscolonial, ahora consideraremos unos aspectos cruciales del discurso teológico de mestizaje que pueden contribuir al desarrollo de una teología singapurense.

Durante los años setenta, los teólogos mexicanos americanos primero usaron el concepto de mestizaje para articular la fe de los pueblos Mexicoestadounidense.[29] A lo largo de los años este ha sido tomado por otras comunidades teológicas latinos estadounidenses que encontraron en el mestizaje una categoría útil para construir una identidad colectiva opuesta al trasfondo del contexto dominante político, cultural y religioso en Estados Unidos.[30]

El mestizaje ha sido asociado con múltiples significados, cuatro de los cuales los describe Néstor Medina en su artículo "(Des)cifrando el mestizaje".[31] Primero él hace referencia a la entremezcla biológica entre los pueblos indígenas y los españoles y portugueses cuando estos invadieron y colonizaron las Américas. Segundo, él señala la condición histórica de las mezclas culturales donde fuentes indígenas, africanas, y europeas dieron origen a culturas latinas ricas y diversas, y la cuales han sido valoradas, por un lado, y por el otro han sido causa de discriminación económica, social y política. Tercero, el mestizaje comunica como las identidades son fluidas, dinámicas, disputadas e irreducibles a ideas simples o nociones claramente definidas. Cuarto, el mestizaje también se refiere al proceso de "cambio de código", en el cual varias tradiciones y culturas se usan juntas "perfectamente integradas", como ocurre en ciertas prácticas lingüísticas (por ej., hablar en el espanglish).

La reinterpretación teológica de la historia

---

[26] Goh, "Social Christianity," 71-72.

[27] *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act* (Cap. 167A, 2020 Rev. Ed. Sing.).

[28] Goh, "Social Christianity," 74.

[29] Virgilio Elizondo es generalmente reconocido por los académicos latinos como pionero de la reflexión teológica sobre el mestizaje. Para conocer sus principales argumentos, véanse sus influyentes obras: Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); *The Future is Mestizo*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2000). Para otra perspectiva influyente, véase Arturo J. Bañuelas, ed., *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers), 2004.

[30] Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 1-2.

[31] Néstor Medina, "(De)Ciphering Mestizaje: Encrypting Lived Faith," in *The Word Became Culture*, ed. Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 47-48.

Adoptar el mestizaje como categoría teológica lanzó los/as teólogos/as latino estadounidenses a un proceso "largo y doloroso de (re)cobro de su pasado histórico como espacio de la obra creativa de Dios".[32] Recuperar la historia desenmascara la violencia de conquista y violación histórica de la que surgieron las/os/xs primeras/os/xs mestizas/os/xs, la experiencia de esclavitud de pueblos africanos, y más tarde, la historia estadounidense de expansionismo e intervencionismo. Esta nueva lectura crítica, por el otro lado, también revela cómo la violencia y destrucción histórica tuvieron resultados inesperados en la creación del pueblo mestizo. Esto como lo vieron los teólogos estadounidenses, era un acto divino de creación.[33]

El descubrimiento por parte de los teólogos de la providencia divina en la sangrienta experiencia de mestizaje de los pueblos les indicó que el texto bíblico no se puede leer sin tener en cuenta las cuestiones de poder.[34] El objetivo de leer el texto bíblico para aclarar cuestiones de poder es para reconocer la actividad divina en medio de la complejidad de las acciones e historias humanas, sin idealizarla. Por ejemplo, Justo González sugiere que todas las interpretaciones bíblicas están contaminadas por intereses sociales, económicos y políticos no reconocidos, que a menudo han oscurecido las buenas noticias. De hecho, el texto bíblico es profundamente político, ya que trata directamente con cuestiones de poder e impotencia, y no existe una lectura universal y ahistórica del texto. Por lo tanto, él sugiere que el texto bíblico debe leerse a la luz de la historia y las experiencias de los miembros de la comunidad de fe, ya que es su historia y sus experiencias las que dan forma a las preguntas que plantean.[35]

La cultura como sitio crítico de teología

Como discurso teológico, el mestizaje desafía los caminos teológicos dominantes al insistir en la centralidad de la cultura en las experiencias de fe de las personas, dónde lo cultural se entiende a grandes rasgos como "el tejido ineludible de la forma en que las personas ven el mundo, entienden la realidad, se enfrentan a la miseria, y experimentan y procesan tanto el dolor como la felicidad", y cómo "esa serie abierta, fluida y conectada de códigos y segmentos de códigos con los que las personas dan sentido a la vida, interactúan entre sí y con el mundo, y se acercan a lo divino".[36] Teólogos latino estadounidenses afirman que ni el evangelio ni expresiones de fe se pueden entender o expresar desde afuera de la cultura. Por lo mismo, la cultura es el sitio mismo donde las personas encuentran la acción divina y, por tanto, también el lugar propio de la teología. Esto rechaza las nociones dominantes de la teología como un metadiscurso por encima de la cultura.[37] También requiere una nueva comprensión de la revelación divina:

---

[32] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 13.

[33] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 13-14. Además, desde el punto de vista de la cultura, mientras que los mestizos/as/xs viven la marginación y la tensión de no pertenecer a ninguno de los dos grupos parentales, su cercanía y distancia de ambas culturas parentales da lugar al potencial de trascender las cosmovisiones establecidas para dar lugar a una nueva: Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 18.

[34] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 14.

[35] Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, T.N.: Abingdon Press, 1990), Ch. 5.

[36] Medina, "(De)Ciphering Mestizaje," 51.

[37] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 11.

porque si el develar de Dios es mediado a través de la cultura, entonces el material cultural de un grupo limita dicha revelación. Como tal, ningún grupo cultural tiene una visión completa de Dios y, por lo mismo, todas las nociones teológicas son incompletas, aunque uno puede tener una comprensión más completa al entrar en diálogo con otros grupos culturales como iguales.[38]

Para la gente latina de los Estados Unidos, el mestizaje cultural se produjo concretamente en el choque histórico de pueblos indígenas, africanos y españoles y la posterior mezcla de sus elementos culturales. La adopción del mestizaje como categoría teológica permite la celebración de tradiciones y fuentes de conocimiento de estas culturas y mezclas culturales—incluyendo sueños, historias, o incluso chismes, y sus propias tradiciones religiosas no cristianas[39]—que aún pueden estar ausentes de los enfoques dominantes de la teología asociados a la racionalidad de la ilustración y los reclamos teológicos exclusivistas.

En tierras fronterizas: identidades en tensión

Gloria Anzaldúa es una estudiosa que destaca el impacto del mestizaje en la formulación y articulación de las cuestiones de identidad. Ella juega con la metáfora de *borderlands* / la frontera, que se refiere en primer lugar a la frontera geográfica entre México y Estados Unidos, la cual sigue siendo una "herida abierta" y un símbolo de la explotación histórica y discriminación contra las comunidades chicanas. En segundo lugar, las fronteras/zonas fronterizas describen los espacios erigidos por los grupos dominantes para excluir al otro: una "serie de lugares psicológicos, sexuales y espirituales, presentes allí donde dos o más culturas se bordean, donde personas de diferentes razas ocupan el mismo territorio, donde se tocan las clases bajas, medias y altas, donde el espacio entre dos individuos se encoge con la intimidad".[40] En su propia experiencia de tierras fronterizas como chicana católica de linaje indígena, ella rechaza las nociones que convierten a las mujeres indígenas en traidoras del pueblo, el guion heterosexual católico que se le impone, las nociones de la mujer como objeto sexual más cercano al mal, y la cultura anglo-europea dominante en EE.UU. que desautoriza su experiencia e identidad chicana.[41] De este modo, las chicanas se resisten a la "tiranía cultural" en la forma de marcos hegemónicos inflexibles de interpretar la realidad que excluyen a aquellas/os/xs cuyas identidades no encajan en los marcos socialmente construidos. Ella pide un cambio de paradigma para resistir la reducción de la realidad por parte de la cultura dominante a marcos dualistas que no permiten el reconocimiento de las múltiples identidades de las personas. Aquí ella recupera una segunda metáfora del legendario símbolo azteca de Coatlicue, la antigua diosa serpiente creadora que mantiene elementos opuestos en fina tensión sin excluir a ninguno. La diosa representa un espacio mental en el que "reinan la ambigüedad y la contradicción, y donde la realidad y la identidad son irreducibles a categorías fijas, marcos conceptuales o términos rígidos. Cualquier intento de definir su realidad y su verdadera identidad significa salirse de las normas y los marcos prescritos; es "abrir un hueco" en las viejas fronteras".[42] Como Coatlicue, al vivir en la frontera, la nueva mestiza "aprende a hacer malabarismos con las culturas. Tiene una personalidad plural, funciona de un modo pluralista: nada se expulsa, ni lo bueno, ni lo malo, ni lo feo, nada se rechaza, nada se abandona".[43]

---

[38] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 12.

[39] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 140.

[40] Margaret E. Montoya, “Border Crossings,” in *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 641.

[41] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 72.

La propuesta de Anzaldúa ha sido criticada por tender a la abstracción intelectual y carecer de base histórica. En particular, su síntesis de las diferentes facetas de la identidad se produce a nivel de la conciencia, sin decir nada de sus expresiones históricas en las actividades, prácticas, y costumbres cotidianas, que la relacionarían con el conjunto cultural más amplio.[44] Su desconexión del uso histórico de la categoría del mestizaje también conlleva el riesgo de que no se tenga en cuenta el bagaje histórico, por ejemplo, de cómo la retórica de la inclusión ha llevado a la exclusión de ciertas voces en las comunidades latino estadounidenses o latinoamericanas.[45]

Problemas con el uso de *mestizaje*

Esta última crítica también ha sido formulada contra otras articulaciones teológicas del mestizaje por teólogos latinos de EE.UU. Medina explica que tendieron a basarse en construcciones idealizadas del mestizaje de América Latina sin examinar el contexto sociopolítico de la región, asumiendo que el mestizaje llevaría a la inclusión de otros grupos culturales cuando eso no refleja la realidad histórica.[46] A medida que el mestizaje se convirtió en una característica de las comunidades latinas de EE.UU., las voces indígenas y africanas "no mezcladas" o "mezcladas de forma diferente" se quedaron ocultas. Académicos como Ada María Isasi-Díaz se dieron cuenta de ello, utilizando el término mestizaje-mulatez para incluir la mezcla de europeos y africanos en el Caribe.[47] Hanna Kang también ha señalado la necesidad de incluir en el discurso del mestizaje las voces asiático-latinas.[48] En cuanto al género, los estudiosos tampoco han respondido satisfactoriamente a los desafíos por las mujeres en contra de la hegemonía, la homogeneización, el racismo y el sexismo en la manera de la que el mestizaje ha sido concebido y articulado.[49] Por lo tanto, Medina sostiene que es necesario que las/os/xs latinas/os/xs cuestionen cómo se producen la opresión y la discriminación dentro de sus propias comunidades, ya que conllevan jerarquías raciales y patriarcales heredadas. Él subraya la importancia del diálogo o conversación mutua con los universos religiosos y etnoculturales de los pueblos indígenas, los afrolatinos y otras voces que han sido ocultadas por el mestizaje y, tras ello, emprender de nuevo una revisión histórica minuciosa.[50]

---

[42] Medina, *Mestizaje,* 74.

[43] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1987), 79.

[44] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 76-77.

[45] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 78-79.

[46] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 82.

[47] Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 70. También ver Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 64.

[48] Hanna Kang, "Mestizos/as with an Asian Face," *Perspectivas*, 18 (2021): 43-60.

[49] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 82.

[50] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 138-139.

También propone que el mestizaje se vea en sentido plural (como mestizajes plurales) –una "multiplicación de síntesis y fusiones y la creación de múltiples identidades nuevas que se desbordan de categorías rígidas y herméticas"—y no como un mestizaje global, y que se califiquen a la luz de los contextos históricos de donde surgen.[51] En su opinión, esto desafía a los teólogos a una comprensión más amplia de la revelación divina, que ocurre de múltiples maneras entre diversos grupos culturales y religiosos (incluso los no cristianos).[52] En un desafío similar a una imagen hegemónica del mestizaje determinada por ascendencia biológica y una concepción visual –que deja afuera a grupos sociales marginados como las/os/xs latinas/os/xs asiáticas/os/xs—Kang defiende una categoría conceptual del mestizaje " intencionadamente desordenada, siempre cambiante, y abierta".[53]

Las contribuciones del mestizaje a una ética y teología singapurense

Como hemos visto, el discurso del mestizaje surgió de un conjunto particular de contextos históricos y no puede considerarse acríticamente afuera de él. A pesar de ello, propongo que tanto la categoría de mestizaje, como sus críticas, ofrecen formas fructíferas de pensar en una teología singapurense.

La cuestión preliminar sobre la que tiene algo que decir es sobre si, de hecho, debería haber una teología de Singapur.[54] Me atrevería a decir que la mayoría de los católicos singapurenses actuales, en línea con los supuestos teológicos dominantes de que el evangelio es distinto de la cultura y viendo la adopción del cristianismo occidental importado como parte de su progreso hacia la "modernidad", nunca han considerado el pensamiento de que su "puntito rojo" pueda tener algo que ofrecer a un discurso teológico más amplio. Sin embargo, si, como postulan los teólogos latinos de EE. UU., la gente misma, en su vida cotidiana y en su manera de entender el mundo son el sitio donde actúa lo divino y, por tanto, la fuente de la teología, entonces los residentes del "puntito rojo" tienen, en efecto, una perspectiva cultural distinta a la revelación divina. ¿Pues, cómo van a entender esta revelación entre ellos? Sugiero que los discursos teológicos sobre el mestizaje señalan dos vías útiles para explorar: en primer lugar, la reapropiación de la historia de Singapur como lugar de la creación divina; y, en segundo lugar, la reapropiación de su cultura –y en particular de las mezclas culturales—como lugar de la teología. Como propongo, ambas exploraciones conducirán a nuevas comprensiones teológicas y a expresiones más profundas de la fe, que, en el contexto multiétnico y multirreligioso de Singapur, tomarían la forma de un compromiso creativo, constructivo y colectivo hacia una sociedad más inclusiva.

(Re)apropiarse de la historia como lugar en curso de la creación de Dios

---

[51] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 137.
[52] Medina, *Mestizaje*, 141.
[53] Kang, "Asian Face," 44.
[54] Sobre esta cuestión, resulta útil explorar otras teologías emergentes de Asia y el Sudeste Asiático. Véase, por ejemplo, Mitri Raheb y Mark A. Lamport, eds., *Emerging Theologies from the Global South* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023).

Reapropiar la historia de Singapur como el lugar de una continua creación divina requiere, en primer lugar, cuestionar las actitudes acríticas heredadas sobre la colonización y las versiones oficiales de la historia que narran la fundación del Estado singapurense, *ex nihilo*, por así decirlo, por los británicos. Samantha Fong sostiene que el hecho de que sepamos y pensemos tan poco sobre Temasek (la civilización precolonial de Singapur) tal y como la conocían sus habitantes "da testimonio de una supresión colonial que quizás fue menos sangrienta, pero no menos decisiva que la que tuvo lugar notoriamente en las Américas."[55] Ella pregunta:

> ¿Qué historias de la creación tenían los orang laut? ¿Cómo imaginaba el sultanato de Johor el cuerpo político? Preguntas como estas son problemáticas porque utilizan el lenguaje disciplinario del estudio moderno y establecen modelos occidentales como paradigmas normativos para la comparación. No obstante, estos son un primer paso útil para repensar los éxitos de Singapur no como creaciones ex nihilo de la modernidad, sino como el resultado de una serie costosa de conquistas políticas y cosmológicas – primero por los británicos... y luego por las élites "nativas" de Singapur, que rechazaron el dominio occidental, pero continuaron la misión moderna de salvación a través de la búsqueda de dioses seculares como el Progreso, la Seguridad y el Desarrollo Nacional. Estos nuevos dioses no exigieron menos sacrificios... [y aquellos] de nosotros que nos hemos beneficiado del éxito del Singapur moderno debemos reconocernos como beneficiarios de una forma imperfecta e imperializadora de *creatio ex nihilo*. [56]

El primer grupo sacrificado al nuevo régimen colonial fue, por supuesto, el de los pueblos indígenas de la tierra (*bumiputera*), que por medio de sus líderes concedieron primero *de facto* y más tarde *de jure* la soberanía sobre la tierra mediante tratados que proporcionaban beneficios pecuniarios. Sin embargo, algunos se han preguntado acerca de las presiones ejercidas en este proceso por los agentes británicos.[57] La historia demuestra que los británicos estaban interesados en expulsar a la población autóctona a las afueras de los nuevos asentamientos, que establan siendo poblados por inmigrantes en un número muy superior al de los habitantes originales, tanto para un uso más eficaz de la tierra como por los violentos conflictos que ocurrían entre ellos y los colonos inmigrantes.[58] Los derechos de los pueblos malayos como *bumiputera* fue una cuestión clave en la disputa entre Singapur y Malasia en los años fundacionales. Podría decirse que muchos malayos han abandonado el enfoque de afirmar sus derechos históricos al país, quizás al darse cuenta de cuán inútil era esta lucha, para reclamar un trato equitativo y crear más oportunidades en el entorno multicultural y meritocrático del país.[59] No obstante, sigue siendo una realidad que no les ha ido tan bien como a otras comunidades étnicas, según los indicadores sociales y económicos.[60] ¿Qué significa esto para los que hoy somos católicos, colonos en una tierra antigua sagrada para los pueblos malayos? ¿Qué responsabilidades tendríamos de intercambio cultural o en la promoción de sus aspiraciones comunitarias? Quizá estemos ya lo suficientemente lejos en tiempo del trauma de la violencia interracial asociada al nacimiento de la nación, como para que estos asuntos puedan ser exploradas nuevamente por una nueva generación de singapurenses en diálogo mutuo con los demás.

---

[55] Samantha Fong, "Ex nihilo: The Christian Creation Story and the Founding of Modern Singapore," *Cultural Dynamics,* vol. 27, no. 2 (2015): 295-299, at 297.
[56] Fong, "Ex nihilo," 297.
[57] See Gareth Knapman, "Settler Colonialism and Usurping Malay Sovereignty in Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 52, no. 3 (September 2021): 418-440 at 439.
[58] Knapman, "Settler Colonialism," 437.

Además, ¿cómo vamos a reconciliarnos con otras voces y aspiraciones que han sido silenciadas en nombre del progreso, entre las que se encontraban los partidos de izquierda y los sindicatos clausurados en la Operación Coldstore, las aspiraciones culturales chinas encarnadas en la Universidad de Nanyang, o la conciencia social católica encarnada en nuestros propios activistas silenciados?

Los teólogos latinos de EE. UU. reivindicaron su historia de violenta conquista colonial viendo el mestizaje que surgió como parte de la continua creación divina. Por otra parte, la historia de Singapur se ha enfocado demasiado en ver la intervención divina en la creación del Estado-nación moderno, aceptando incuestionablemente—e incluso celebrando—el acontecimiento colonizador y el posterior impulso hacia el progreso sin reconocer las supresiones históricas y la marginación de los grupos sociales que facilitaron ambas cosas. Por tanto, el uso del mestizaje como herramienta para reinterpretar la historia, podría sugerir, entonces, formas en las que podríamos reivindicar más críticamente nuestra historia de forma más completa y profunda: en primer lugar, en identificar las mezclas biológicas y los choques y amalgamas culturales que ocurrieron cuando varios grupos étnicos y religiosos se unieron durante el periodo de colonización, y después en los esfuerzos por forjar una nación compartida; y en segundo lugar, en examinar las dinámicas de poder que afianzaban a estos movimientos históricos, resaltando cómo algunas voces fueron privilegiadas mientras que otras se suprimieron o se perdieron. Al hacerlo, podríamos llegar a una nueva comprensión de cómo lo divino ha estado presente tanto en la gloria como en el desorden de nuestras acciones humanas, y cómo podría estar llamándonos hacia una sociedad más inclusiva que a la vez repara injusticias y desequilibrios históricos.

(Re)apropiando la cultura como sitio de teología

El mestizaje como discurso teológico también nos lleva a reivindicar la centralidad de la cultura –y, en particular, el mestizaje cultural—en nuestra fe y nuestra teología. El marco del CMIO que guio la política nacional y conformó nuestra autocomprensión también oscureció nuestras mezclas biológicas y culturales. Por ejemplo, los matrimonios mixtos entre grupos étnicos han tenido lugar desde antes de los eventos de colonización—aunque la política británica de "dividir y gobernar" tuvo un efecto restrictivo sobre ellas durante el periodo colonial—aunque se aceleraron después. El marco del CMIO hizo estas mezclas invisibles, primero al subsumir la categoría de

---

[59] Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,*" 139.
[60] See Mutalib, "*Singapore Malays,*" Ch. 4.

"euroasiático" –utilizada desde la época colonial para describir mezclas biológicas entre europeos y asiáticos—bajo la categoría de "otros" en el CMIO,[61] y después al exigir que los hijos de matrimonios mixtos siguieran la raza de uno de sus progenitores. En épocas más recientes, se han reconocido las identidades de mezcla, de modo que los hijos de matrimonios mixtos pueden registrarse como chino-indio, por ejemplo, o indio-chino, siendo el primer marcador el grupo con el que se identifican a efectos de las políticas nacionales (por ejemplo, un indio-chino sería considerado indio y no chino en las cuotas de vivienda pública).[62] Sin embargo, aún el marco revisado sigue siendo una herramienta inadecuada para describir una realidad cada vez más compleja, especialmente considerando los patrones de la inmigración en los últimos años, que han visto una afluencia de nuevos residentes de diferentes partes del mundo.

Aparte de lo biológico, las mezclas culturales son también una experiencia compartida por las/os/xs singapurenses. Esto es evidente, por ejemplo, en el hecho de que los indios o chinos singapurenses por todas sus vidas se consideran culturalmente distintos de los inmigrantes más recientes de la India o China, dada su socialización durante generaciones por los procesos culturales de Singapur. El discurso del mestizaje nos permite apreciar mejor que nuestras fronteras culturales son porosas, fluidas y siempre cambiantes.

El trabajo de Anzaldúa en el reconocimiento de las identidades multi-seccionales es de interés especial, ya que buscamos un nuevo lenguaje que reconozca nuestras mezclas culturales. El discurso público no ha dejado espacio para explorar las múltiples influencias que ha habido en nuestras identidades culturales, y su interpretación del mestizaje en particular podría abrir nuestra imaginación a una manera de la que podríamos concebir nuestras identidades étnicas, culturales, religiosas, de género plurales, y otras identidades que coexisten en tensión mutua. El consejo de Medina a la comunidad latina de "beber de sus propios pozos" para recuperar las tradiciones y epistemologías (o universos culturales) perdidas también podría ser útil para los singapurenses si queremos valorar la totalidad de nuestras herencias culturales. Un espectro constante en nuestro imaginario cultural—a veces caricaturizado en las producciones y narrativas de los medios de comunicación locales—son los singapurenses nativos educados en inglés que, habiendo asistido a las mejores universidades de Occidente, se encuentran sin embargo desarraigados y trágicamente cómicos por haber perdido el contacto con sus lenguas y culturas ancestrales.[63] El reto de Medina, sin embargo, va más allá de la simple recuperación de la lengua y las tradiciones culturales, buscando incluir también las tradiciones religiosas no cristianas. Esto es especialmente relevante en el contexto de Singapur, donde, en la cosmovisión de muchos de nuestros antepasados, la religión y la cultura no se consideraban dos cosas distintas. Sin embargo, esto podría estirar la imaginación de los católicos singapurenses, que heredaron concepciones exclusivistas de la tradición cristiana y requeriría poderes como los de Coatlicue de aquellos/as/xs que aceptan el reto del diálogo inter-e intra-religioso.

---

[61] Históricamente, los "euroasiáticos" ocuparon posiciones privilegiadas durante el régimen colonial y se consideraban así mismos uno de los grupos raciales fundadores de Singapur. Existía cierto disgusto por quedar subsumidos en la categoría de "otros", que en los últimos tiempos también ha llegado a incluir a inmigrantes de otros países como las Filipinas, el Oriente Medio, Japón, Tailandia, etc. Véase Chan y Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 74.

[62] Chan and Siddique, *Multiculturalism*, 40-41.

[63] See for example Terence Chong, "Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 877-897.

Otra influencia cultural importante que los católicos singapurenses deben reconocer e interrogar es la clase socioeconómica, una cuestión que se ha amplificado en el discurso público desde 2017 con la publicación por un sociólogo local del libro titulado *This is What Inequality Looks Like.*[64] Es muy posible que hoy en día la cuestión de la clase social haya llegado a dividir más a la sociedad singapurense que la raza, y corresponde a los singapurenses católicos que proceden de las clases alta y media de la sociedad considerar cómo este aspecto de su condicionamiento cultural e identidades afectan a su comprensión teológica.

La resistencia como compromiso creativo y constructivo (y no de oposición)

¿Cómo podría expresarse lo que surge de los esfuerzos para recuperar nuestras historias y culturas en nuestras costumbres concretas teológicas y de fe? Como se ha señalado, la obra de Anzaldúa sugiere una síntesis que se queda en el nivel de la conciencia y no puede guiarnos en esto. Otros teólogos que han escrito sobre el mestizaje han destacado la importancia de la religión popular como expresión cultural de la fe de un pueblo.

En el plano teológico, nuestra relectura de la historia, la apreciación de nuestras mezclas culturales, y la conciencia de las dinámicas de poder que han determinado nuestro curso actual deberían sugerirnos nuevas preguntas para plantear a las escrituras y nuevas apropiaciones de nuestra tradición de fe que faciliten nuestra búsqueda por una sociedad más inclusiva. Podría prestarse más atención, por ejemplo, a la doctrina social católica, pasada de moda desde el incidente de la "conspiración marxista". También podría prestarse mayor atención a la teología comparativa, la teología de las religiones, y al diálogo interreligioso. Sugiero que el diálogo interreligioso debe ocurrir con respecto para las tradiciones culturales y religiosas de los grupos étnicos representados *dentro* de la iglesia, como parte de un esfuerzo de desarrollar una teología que resuene más con nuestros propios instintos culturales; pero además también con los que están *fuera* de la iglesia, en particular el Islam, la religión tradicional de la población indígena malaya de Singapur, con la que, dada nuestra historia, tenemos una responsabilidad especial de dialogar, y por la que también hemos sido influenciados a lo largo de los años en los fluidos y dinámicos procesos de entremezcla cultural.

En el contexto de Singapur, quiero sugerir que la propia Iglesia católica ofrece un espacio provechoso para los encuentros interculturales. Entre los grupos étnicos representados en la iglesia hay un número significativo de chinos, indios y filipinos, cada uno de los cuales está asociado a cierto estatus social, clase y estereotipos culturales. Sin embargo, reunirse como miembros de una misma comunidad de culto es una oportunidad para encontrarnos de una manera diferente. Las prácticas de inculturación (entendidas como *inter*-culturación, como sugiere el teólogo asiático Peter Phan) no sólo sirven como expresiones culturalmente relevantes de la fe de un pueblo, sino que también pueden ayudar a los distintos grupos étnicos a apreciar las culturas de unos y otros a un nivel más profundo.[65] Por ejemplo, la práctica religiosa popular de "Simbang Gabi" –una novena de Navidad que forma parte integrante de la práctica católica filipina—se ha celebrado en los últimos años en algunas iglesias de Singapur, y el Año Nuevo chino, una celebración cultural importante en la comunidad china, también se conmemora con una misa especial. Nuestra apropiación de las mezclas culturales, tal como se describe en la subsección anterior, podría contribuir a una inculturación más profunda de las expresiones de fe, y estas también podrían utilizarse con más intención como espacios para el encuentro intercultural entre los grupos étnicos de la comunidad católica. Al mismo tiempo, las diferencias de poder entre los grupos culturales en la iglesia deben reconocerse. Los encuentros interculturales personales dentro del contexto eclesiástico, llenos con espíritu de curiosidad mutua, podrían ayudar a facilitar la re-interpretación de estas relaciones de poder.

---

[64] Teo Youyenn and Kian Woon Kwok, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like,* rev. ed. (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2019).

Las prácticas de recuperar la historia y la cultura también repercuten en las interacciones de la comunidad en la esfera pública. Desde la "conspiración marxista", la Iglesia católica ha sido cautelosa al no ocupar espacios que el Estado considera "prohibidos" para los grupos religiosos, de modo que la práctica de la fe católica en Singapur se ha considerado mayormente un asunto privado. Sorprendentemente, el pentecostalismo, que ha aumentado en los últimos años, se ha extendido cada vez más hacia el ámbito social en Singapur; por ejemplo, "caminatas de oración" alrededor de la ciudad y orar sobre las oficinas gubernamentales.[66] Al parecer, la diferencia es que sus esfuerzos cultivan entre sus adeptos un sentido de responsabilidad por y lealtad hacia Singapur que está en consonancia con la propia ideología estatal de progreso y responsabilidad compartida, sin oponerse explícitamente a la política estatal. Los católicos podrían tomar una página y aprender de sus compañeros cristianos y encontrar formas creativas y constructivas de contribuir al discurso público, respetando al mismo tiempo el contexto multiétnico y multi-religioso de la nación y la prerrogativa del Estado. Arriesgándonos a una amplia generalización, las tradiciones asiáticas que heredamos en Singapur privilegian los valores de armonía y consenso en vez de los de oposición y resistencia en la vida política y social. Esto no quiere decir que resistirse a los abusos de poder y a la injusticia no sea importante, sino que también hay una apreciación del papel del liderazgo moral por parte del Estado, de manera que la forma en que se lleva a cabo la resistencia deberá reflejarlo para ser efectiva. Como declaró la Conferencia Cristiana de Asia Oriental en 1964:

> Gran parte del pensamiento cristiano, sobre todo en el Occidente, ha hecho hincapié en la necesidad de limitar el poder del Estado. Pero en los países asiáticos debemos subrayar las funciones

---

[65] Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

[66] Daniel P.S. Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-colonial Singapore," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 25 no. 1 (2010): 54-89 at 57.

> positivas del gobierno en la reordenación de la vida económica y el deber de los cristianos y otros ciudadanos de aceptar la autoridad del Estado y una gran medida de disciplina impuesta por el Estado como medio hacia el progreso social.[67]

Es difícil pensar que el tipo de prácticas de oposición asociadas a la teología de la liberación de las Américas sean eficaces o tengan resonancia cultural en el contexto de Singapur. Además, los singapurenses aprecian profundamente la armonía entre los diversos grupos étnicos y religiosos, por lo que los límites a la expresión y el discurso público se consideran necesarios. Por lo tanto, los católicos de Singapur que quieran trabajar hacia una sociedad más inclusiva como expresión de reivindicar su historia y las mezclas culturales deberán resistir las prácticas injustas u opresivas de forma creativa y constructiva, mediante el diálogo mutuo y soluciones colectivas que respeten el contexto multiétnico y multi-religioso de Singapur.

Conclusión

En resumen, el mestizaje como categoría teológica ofrece pistas útiles para el desarrollo de una teología y una práctica de fe católica en Singapur. Esta incluiría un recobro de la historia, con ambos sus éxitos y su lado oscuro, así como el fenómeno de las mezclas biológicas y culturales, como parte de la continua creación divina. Las prácticas éticas derivadas de esta reivindicación podrían incluir el diálogo interreligioso e intercultural, tanto dentro de la Iglesia como fuera de ella, y en particular con la comunidad autóctona malayo-musulmana. Finalmente, las aspiraciones de la comunidad de fe a una sociedad más inclusiva podrán expresarse por medio de un compromiso creativo y constructivo en la esfera pública.

---

[67] Ron O'Grady, *Banished: The Expulsion of the Christian Conference of Asia from Singapore and its Implications* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia International Affairs Committee, 1990).