

# **“The Virgin’s Slip Is Full of Fireflies”: The Multiform Struggle over the Virgin Mary’s *Legitimierende Macht* in Latin America and Its U.S. Diasporic Communities**

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## INTRODUCTION

In an earlier LatCrit commentary on religion, Elisabeth Iglesias and Francisco Valdes have appropriately insisted that:

religion, like any other social or political force or institutional arrangement, must be analyzed in terms of and engaged on behalf of the anti-subordination commitment that unifies the LatCrit movements’ multiple diversities — with critical attention focused on whether and how religion’s historical and contemporary agendas tend to promote and/or obstruct the liberation struggles and anti-subordination imperatives that have coalesced in and around the LatCrit movement.<sup>1</sup>

Given the awesome influence that Roman Catholicism has had on Latina/o communities throughout the Americas, and in light of the strong Mariocentrism<sup>2</sup> of Latin American Catholicism, such

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\* I revolt against any conception of Latin America that excludes Haiti, hence my use of the term “Latin America,” connotes — besides those nations usually understood as “Latin American” — the “francophone” Caribbean, especially Haiti, which, I would agree with Paul Farmer, “is in many respects the most representative of Latin American republics.” PAUL FARMER, *THE USES OF HAITI* 52 (1994). In light of this and of the possibility that no immigrant group in the United States has been subjected to greater injustice than Haitians, in my opinion LatCrit would be well counseled to create space for a broader consideration of Haiti and Haitians in the United States than has heretofore been the case, judging from LatCrit publications.

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth M. Iglesias & Francisco Valdes, *Afterword: Religion, Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in Coalitional Theory: A Critical and Self-Critical Analysis of LatCrit Social Justice Agendas*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 503, 509 (1998).

<sup>2</sup> The tendency to place Mary at the center of one’s or a community’s devotional life.

an analysis ineluctably entails careful exploration of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Latin American history and cultures. In addition, analysis must also explore Marianism's function in the creation and perpetuation of structures of domination as well as in the inspiration and development of antisubordination movements and ideologies. Critical of certain earlier LatCrit essays on Our Lady of Guadalupe for failing to critically examine the Virgin's symbolic power, Iglesias and Valdes call for "a more critical and contextualized analysis of this Virgin and the ideology that constructs and sustains her symbolic power and cultural effects."<sup>3</sup>

In part a response to this call, this Essay presents substantive examples of Marianism's function as a repressive and antisubordination force in Latin American history, cultures, and select diasporic Latina/o communities, and Marianism's role in constructing identity for and in these communities. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a "critical and comparative charting of diverse religious forces or experiences [that] can only enlighten LatCrit understanding of religion as a tool of oppression and/or liberation."<sup>4</sup> While these examples are discussed necessarily in broad fashion, the purpose is to stimulate further exploration of each and additional relevant cases, and establish that in the considered communities and nations, Marianism has consistently demonstrated the capacity to serve as a formidable antisubordination force.<sup>5</sup>

## I. HISPANIC COLONIZATION AS MARIAN COLONIZATION: TAPROOT OF A MULTIFORM DICHOTOMY

Goethe's Faust concludes with the resounding claim, "*das ewige Weibliche zieht uns heran*" ("The eternal feminine draws us ever anon"), which is of course a central reason why Catholicism in many parts of the world, and nowhere more so than in Latin America, is in reality the cult of the Virgin Mary with some lingering

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<sup>3</sup> Iglesias & Valdes, *supra* note 1, at 520.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 545.

<sup>5</sup> Because much of my demonstration of the liberatory dimension of Marianism in Latin America depends on an exploration of the empowerment gained through the Virgin's syncretism with indigenous or important African goddesses, I am concerned that an implied casual dismissal of orthodoxy might be perceived in my position. While the issue of just how far the Virgin can be assimilated before no longer being the Virgin is highly complex and beyond the scope of this essay, I will note that impetus for the Virgin Mary's inculturation can be found in Catholic doctrine. See, e.g., *Lumen gentium and Nostra aetate*, in VATICAN II DOCUMENTS. Thus, a reconstruction of the Virgin Mary as an antisubordination force does not necessarily require the rejection of orthodoxy.

christocentric sacramentality. There seems to be an irrepressible insight in the human religious consciousness that the sacred, the divine, or the Godhead is itself as much motherly as fatherly. Hence the Virgin's eclipse of God, the Father, and His Son in popular Catholic spirituality represents something of a timeless, universal act of resistance to the misogyny of orthodox Catholic theology and its limitation of sacramental power and Divinity to the male, the celibate male, at that. The Church hierarchy has been rightly accused by feminist theologians of employing the symbol of the Virgin as a "weapon of symbolic violence"<sup>6</sup> to beat women into submission to patriarchal domination and obedience to a Church that tells them they are unworthy of anything but a subservient role inside and out. Many feminists feel that the Virgin myth and symbol are so tainted by such patriarchal manipulation that they can make no meaningful contribution to "the struggle for ultimate womanhood."<sup>7</sup> However, a careful examination of the nature of popular Marian devotion in many parts of Latin America and its U.S. diasporic communities reveals clearly that, to quote a Haitian proverb, "the Virgin's slip is full of fireflies" (*jipon lavyej plen koukou*).<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Virgin is a hotly contested symbol that takes on a host of causes and responds to the needs of both the dominant to dominate and the subjugated to resist. Such struggles over the Virgin's symbolic power feature in the economic, the political, and the sexual fields, as will be reflected in the examples below.

For the dominant of these fields, orthodox Mariology has performed a function of religion that Max Weber dubbed *legitimierende Macht*, or the "legitimizing authority" of their power and privilege.

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<sup>6</sup> See PIERRE BOURDIEU, *OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF PRACTICE* 22 (1977). Pierre Bourdieu's term "weapons of symbolic violence" connotes any custom, institution, expectation more, or belief system which is employed or manipulated in "that gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone" which permit, as explains Richard Jenkins "relations of domination to be established and maintained through strategies which are softened and disguised, and which conceal domination beneath a veil of enhanced relations." *Id.*; see also RICHARD JENKINS, PIERRE BOURDIEU 104 (1992).

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from the subtitle of MAURICE HAMMINGTON, *HAIL MARY? THE STRUGGLE FOR ULTIMATE WOMANHOOD IN CATHOLICISM* (1995). See *supra* notes 18-21 and accompanying text (surveying feminist thought on Mary).

<sup>8</sup> Carol Damian writes of Spanish missionaries discovering that the Virgin's slip was literally full of — if not fireflies — indigenous religious trinkets in Peru: "Spanish campaigns to destroy the idols of the Andean people revealed ritual objects hidden beneath the gown of statues of the Virgin Mary . . . ." CAROL DAMIAN, *THE VIRGIN OF THE ANDES: ART AND RITUAL IN COLONIAL CUZCO* 10 (1995).

The subjugated, oppositionally, often through syncretize the Virgin with the usually assertive, dark, and powerful goddesses of the indigenous and/or imported African religious traditions, transforming her into a force of resistance. This vision of the Virgin is especially evident in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> The phenomenon of underclass Marian syncretism, along with the longstanding tradition of elites milking Mary's *legitimierende Macht* has bred all sorts of fireflies in the Virgin's slip. We propose here to undress the Virgin to better glimpse these creatures and more broadly theorize Latin American Marianism and its foundational place in both structures of domination and antisubordination struggles by exploring the particular cases of the cults of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico (and, by papal sanction, all of the Americas), and of the leading Marian icons in Brazil, Cuba, Peru, and Haiti, including two of their diasporic communities in the United States. In doing so, with Brazilianist Paul Johnson, we illustrate how in Latin America, as throughout the Catholic world,

images of the saints have provided privileged, divinely sanctioned sites for negotiating the powers of ethnicity, nationalism, and . . . race. Moreover, if certain prominent images of the Virgin Mary have been effectively forwarded as a national face, Catholic yet distinct from the Roman version — Guadalupe in Mexico, Fátima in Portugal, Lourdes in France, Nossa Senhora Aparecida (Our Appeared Lady) in Brazil — precisely what, whom, and how these images represent has also been contested within national contexts. As the nationalist associations with saints grow, as might be suspected, the stakes as to what and for whom she signifies are magnified.<sup>10</sup>

Scholarly texts treating Marian devotion in South and Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and their diasporic communities in the United States are heavily influenced by liberation theology and emphasize the history of oppression to which poor Latin American Catholics have been subjected. Such an emphasis guides inquiry to a consideration of how the poor's Marian devotion takes the form of both an endeavor (through syncretism and symbolic

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<sup>9</sup> Such symbolic appropriation is a central feature of the revolutionary capacity inherent to popular religion, which Gramsci called "a worldview in active opposition" to that of the dominant.

<sup>10</sup> Paul C. Johnson, *Kicking, Stripping, and Re-Dressing a Saint in Black: Visions of Public Space in Brazil's Holy War*, 37 *HIST. RELIGIONS* 122, 123 (1997).

appropriation) in indigenous cultural maintenance and represents "the flag of all the great movements of independence, betterment and liberty."<sup>11</sup> Scholars like Leonardo Boff, Virgil Elizondo, and Ivone Gebara and María Clara Bingemer have shown that popular Marian devotion in Latin America can and, depending upon the historical moment and a variety of circumstances, sometimes does emerge as a potent ideologicoreligious critique of, and an effective challenge to, social, economic, political, cultural, and/or sexual oppression. According to Boff, throughout Latin America, "special appreciation of Mary's role of denunciation and proclamation (*denuncia y anuncia*) . . . stands out as a key aspect of the people's devotion to her."<sup>12</sup>

Sociohistorical studies of Latin American Marianism also demonstrate the proclivity of society's dominant — be they politically, culturally, economically, sexually, religiously, or militarily dominant — to employ the symbol of the Virgin and Marian devotion to legitimize the status quo and, thereby, their privilege and power. Latin American elites, as has been the case since the Spanish conquistadors and missionaries first arrived in the New World, "institutionalize Christianity itself, with all its symbols and concepts, and reduce it to the service of their selfish cause."<sup>13</sup> In all of the symbolic violence perpetrated toward this cause, the symbol of Mary, along with the virtues that Catholic orthodoxy has promoted through her, including submission, obedience, and female subordination, has been a weapon of choice. This weapon is illustrated rather graphically in the image of Columbus chancing upon the shores of diverse Caribbean islands while standing on a ship christened *Santa María*.

The Virgin Mary had long been European Catholicism's ruler of the seas (*Stella Maris*; Our Lady of the Navigators; etc.), thus making her the logical choice as divine guiding force behind Spain's maritime exploration and subsequent colonization of the New World. As Marina Warner notes, "The Virgin's governance of the oceans was adapted to a practical purpose: she was prayed to by the missionaries who set out across the Atlantic and other oceans to

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<sup>11</sup> Virgil Elizondo, *Popular Religion as Support of Identity; a Pastoral-Psychological Case-Study Based on the Mexican American Experience in the United States*, in 186 *POPULAR RELIGION, CONCILIIUM* 36, 39 (Norbert Greinacher & Norbert Metz eds., 1986).

<sup>12</sup> LEONARDO BOFF, *THE MATERNAL FACE OF GOD: THE FEMININE AND ITS RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS* 188 (1987).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 191.

conquer new territories for Christ,"<sup>14</sup> and thus, as Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría conclude, "Hispanic colonization was Marian colonization."<sup>15</sup> Sixteenth century Spanish painter Alejandro Fernandez's *Virgin of the Navigators*, described here by Carol Damian, is a forceful "visual expression of the influence of Mary in Spain during the epoch of discovery" and a telling image of the Virgin's *legitimierende Macht* for the Euro-Catholic colonial enterprise:

The Virgin is represented standing on a cloud, the traditional image of the Virgin of Mercy, dressed in a splendid brocade tunic with a cape extended behind her. Two groups of navigators and other persons involved in the colonization of the New World are gathered within the protection of her cape. On the right side are King Ferdinand, Bishop Don Juan de Fonseca, Chief of the Casa de Contratación and Superintendent of the Indies, and Don Santo Matienzo, first Abbot of Jamaica. On the left appear Christopher Columbus, accompanied by the celebrated navigators Juan de la Cosa and Américo Vesputio. Beneath the figure, sailing vessels ply the calm blue sea. The implication was that the Queen of Mercy was responsible for the triumph of the Conquest of the New World and that the Conquest had her blessing.<sup>16</sup>

By the twentieth century, Fernandez's Virgin would take new form in the icons draped over the balconies of Latin American juntas' military headquarters. Her iconic alter ego, meanwhile, once the motherly patroness of slave rebellions in Saint-Dominique and Brazil, would herself learn karate and take up antisubordination causes like those of immigrant Mexican farm workers in California and Marielito rafters in their flight from oppression in Cuba to freedom in Miami.

## II. SOME MARIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO DIVERSE FORMS OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY

Considerations of socioeconomic class in Latin America thus go far in explaining the central juxtaposed poles in the contest over the Virgin Mary. Yet, the divergence between popular and elite perceptions of Mary represents but one level of the struggle that

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<sup>14</sup> MARINA WARNER, *ALONE OF ALL HER SEX: THE MYTH AND CULT OF THE VIRGIN MARY* 267 (1976).

<sup>15</sup> NICHOLAS PERRY & LORETO ECHEVERRÍA, *UNDER THE HEEL OF MARY* 31 (1988).

<sup>16</sup> DAMIAN, *supra* note 8, at 38.

has characterized the development and structure of Marianism throughout Latin American history and cultures. The contest over Catholicism's most important feminine symbol extends to a gender struggle, an ecclesial struggle, and a political struggle. In the gendered struggle, the Church hierarchy has employed the Mary symbol and myth to reinforce Catholicism's epic misogynist portrayal of human society and the consequent subjugation of women. This gender struggle is a principal theme of Warner's essential study of the history of the Marian cult, *Alone of All Her Sex*:

The Virgin Mary is not the innate archetype of female nature, the dream incarnate; she is the instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic Church about the structure of society, presented in a God-given code . . . an undiminished certainty that women are subordinate to men . . .<sup>17</sup>

For but one concrete illustration of this argument manifest in Latin America, we can turn to Marjorie Becker's study of nineteenth century Mexican Catholic sermons and pastoral letters:

In sermon after sermon priests recreated an image of purity and obedience. As the "immaculate daughter of God, the Virgin mother of God, the purest wife of God the Holy Spirit," she was chaste. As a woman who allowed a male God to have his way with her, she was portrayed as a model for women, who were to be "submissive to their husbands." Then too, she was generous beyond generosity. As she reputedly told the faithful, "I am a loving and tender mother for whomever asks my help in their pain and suffering."<sup>18</sup>

On the theological front of the gendered struggle, feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Daly, and Catharina Halkes have clearly exposed the sexism inherent to orthodox Catholic Mariology. While this has led "many feminist theologians [to argue] that Mary is not salvageable,"<sup>19</sup> others, meanwhile, keep

<sup>17</sup> WARNER, *supra* note 14, at 10.

<sup>18</sup> MARJORIE BECKER, *SETTING THE VIRGIN ON FIRE: LÁZARO CÁRDENAS, MICHOCÁN PEASANTS, AND THE REDEMPTION OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION* 16 (1995).

<sup>19</sup> Hammington, *supra* note 7, at 162. "Many feminists want to forget Mary and concentrate on other issues, such as revisiting the language used for divinity or recovering women's spirituality. One could argue that this entire investigation has been a rationale for moving beyond Mary. However, deconstruction must occur before a reconstruction is possible. Mary is such a complex religious figure that to attempt any reworking of her image without fully addressing her history is to fail to appreciate her religious potency." *Id.*

the faith in the possibility of recasting Mary as a symbol propitious to the liberation of women. Halkes, to this end, links the political potency of Mary's Magnificat,<sup>20</sup> which has been reclaimed by Latin American liberation theology for political and ecclesiological argument, to prospects for a feminist Mariology. "Consequently, liberation by a female symbol can have a positive influence on the conscientization of women and the struggle against machismo, the dominant male vanity, which is still so present."<sup>21</sup> Daly, however, could not disagree more:

The immaculate conception . . . illustrates and legitimates the ineffable circularity of rapism. Mary's victimization is astonishing. . . . [A]s "Virgin" she is a reminder to women of their destiny to be raped, for in the patriarchal system, a virgin is a future rape victim. Since she is "forever virgin" (despite her maternity), she is forever future rape victim. The message is even more exacerbated by the extremity of her tantalizing purity. Moreover, as archetypal "Mother," she is past rape victim. Encompassing all time, her rape is the perpetual entombment of her life-time.<sup>22</sup>

The Virgin Mary's relevance for the struggle against patriarchy in Latin America (and thus for antisubordination theory) seems to

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My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
 my spirit finds joy in God my savior,  
 For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness;  
 all ages to come shall call me blessed.  
 God who is mighty has done great things for me,  
 holy is his name;  
 His mercy is from age to age  
 on those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm;  
 he has confused the proud in their inmost thoughts.  
 He has deposed the mighty from their thrones  
 and raised the lowly to high places.  
 The hungry he has given every good thing,  
 while the rich he has sent empty away.  
 He has upheld Israel his servant,  
 ever mindful of his mercy;  
 Even as he promised our fathers,  
 promised Abraham and his descendants forever.

*Luke* 1:46-55

<sup>21</sup> Catharina Halkes, *Mary in My Life*, in CATHARINA HALKES & EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX, *MARY: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW* 66 (1993).

<sup>22</sup> MARY DALY, *PURE LUST: ELEMENTAL FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY* 106 (1984).



depend on a transformation from archetypal rape victim to a black belt in karate striking back at the oppressor. This image is strikingly portrayed in Chicana artist Ester Hernández's aquatint etching *La Virgen de Guadalupe Defiendo los Derechos de los Xicanos*. Admittedly, one may question how meaningful a reflection a single feminist painting is of any grassroots liberation Mariology. Yet, a careful historical analysis of Latin American religious history reveals a consistent undercurrent of antisubordination Mariology that stands "in active opposition" to all forms of oppression. In each case detailed in this Essay, the transformation of the archetypal rape victim who patronized the Columbus expedition is rooted in a rich religious consciousness that, conditioned by oppression, assimilates the Virgin with the powerful goddesses of local or imported African traditions.

The subjugated have in fact assimilated these two powerful symbols toward the creation of an antisubordination ideology. For example, Mexico's Guadalupe was for them none other than a manifestation of Tonantzin, the ancient Mexican mother goddess, wife of the serpent. As a Virgin thus transformed from a pale, submissive "rape victim" into a dark, powerful serpentine woman for Mexico's dark skinned Masses, Guadalupe immediately became the symbol of resistance par excellence. This symbolic appropriation has remained very strong in Mexican popular Catholicism and is the wellspring of much of the liberatory force that Guadalupe represents for underclass Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

The importance of syncretizing the Virgin with indigenous (or imported African) goddess to Mary's place in any antisubordination agenda is confirmed also by the irreplaceable role that such syncretized forms played in the Haitian Revolution. Being the only successful national slave revolt in world history and the New World's first nation in which political liberty was won for all of its residents, this revolution is perhaps the most significant, concrete, antisubordination achievement in Latin American history.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For discussions of the role of religion in the Haitian Revolution, see Odette Mennesson-Rigaud, *Le rôle du Vaudou dans l'indépendance d'Haïti*, PRÉSENCE AFRICAINE, Feb.-May 1958, at 17, 18 and MICAL NERÉSANT, RELIGIONS ET POLITIQUE EN HAÏTI (1994). In another essay I explored how Mary's assimilation with the various Ezili spirits in Vodou transforms the Virgin for Haitian women into a source of inspiration for resistance against domination. See Terry Rey, *Junta Rape and Religion in Haiti: 1993/94*, 15 J. FEMINIST STUD. RELIGION (1999).

To be sure, elites in Mexico and elsewhere would not allow the Virgin to be so subversively appropriated without a fight, and they sought to salvage her support for the status quo by lightening her skin anew:

This woman [Guadalupe] who had originally been dark, Semitic, and poor was recast. Painting her skin in tomes of ivory, icon makers whitened her, presenting a striking contrast to her real-life appearance, and to the dark-skinned Tarascans and mestizos of the area. In her new life she appeared as a delicate blond.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas the subjugated syncretize the Virgin to inspire resistance in Latin America, the dominant, European culture this manipulated the Virgin's symbolism to validate atrocities. The following historical account forcefully illustrates this manipulation, in which the builder of the New World's first church, Nicolás de Ovando, saw fit to make a virtual holocaust offering to Mary of dozens of native Xaraguans:

Ovando subjected three hundred Haitian chiefs, vassals to the queen, to torture. It was during their torment that they certified having conspired [against the Spanish]. They were then burned alive. After the extermination of the better part of the population of Xaragua, Ovando founded a town which he named Sainte-Marie-de-la-Paix [St. Mary of Peace!].<sup>25</sup>

Following such brutal, Catholic-based oppression of the indigenous populations of the lands it conquered in the Americas, Euro-Catholic imperialism next employed the Virgin Mary to sanction plantation slavery. Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique finds it duplicitous and ironic that "the establishment of the slave regime [in Saint-Domingue] should be patronized by such a figure" as Notre Dame de l'Assomption, for instance:

The symbol of the bodily ascension of the Virgin, the purity of this carnal representation, would seem fundamentally opposed to the physical violence committed against thousands of enslaved men and women. All the same, one makes what one wants of signs and symbols; they are manipulated, diluted, and adapted to needs. And, among the various representations in which she has

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<sup>24</sup> BECKER, *supra* note 18, at 15.

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS MADIOU, HISTOIRE D'HAÏTI, TOME I, 1492-1799, at 15 (1989).

been experienced from the very beginning of Christianity, the figure of Notre Dame most monopolized by the first [French] colonists would be that of the crowned Virgin, the immediate and logical development of the Assumption.<sup>26</sup>

As Beauvoir-Dominique insightfully noted above, how religious symbols are interpreted, manipulated, and used is chiefly dictated by the needs or agenda of a group or individual. These needs (political, religious, economic or sexual) represent one of the driving forces behind the diversity of interpretations of the symbol of the Virgin Mary in Haitian (as well as Latin American) religious history. In contrast to the conformist effect that the French (like the Spanish before them) intended for Marian devotion to have upon their subjugated flock in Saint-Dominique, forms of syncretism of the Virgin Mary with female African spirits soon became a defining feature of slave religion in the colony. "It seems logical to assume that when the missionaries evangelized the slaves during the colonial period," writes Leslie Desmangles, "they related the stories of the Virgin's life and made instructional use of the Catholic symbols connected with her, but that the slaves responded to such instruction by transfiguring these symbols in African terms."<sup>27</sup> Like the "orthodox" Mariology of the oppressors, then, the syncretic appropriations of the Virgin by enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue amounted to "strategic discourses promoting particular ends,"<sup>28</sup> to use Johnson's definition of the correspondent phenomenon in Brazil.

From the Euro-Catholic imperialist perspective, however, worse than syncretic Marian devotion among the oppressed was the slaves' ideological appropriation of the symbol of the Virgin Mary. In some cases, this appropriation transformed her into "the protectress of various liberation movements, including those of slaves."<sup>29</sup> In Brazil, for example, Nossa Senhora de Aparecida was "even at the very outset of her career, implicated in the dynamics of national resistance to the colony."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as evident in the celebrated Hidalgo Revolt of 1800 in Mexico, such ideological

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<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 28.

<sup>27</sup> LESLIE G. DESMANGLES, *THE FACES OF THE GODS: VODOU AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN HAITI* 143 (1992).

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 10, at 127.

<sup>29</sup> IVONE GEBARA & MARIA C. BINGEMER, *MARY: MOTHER OF GOD, MOTHER OF THE POOR* 134 (Phillip Berryman trans., 1989) (1987).

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 10, at 127.

Marian adaptation sometimes functioned to inspire armed rebellion:

Not long before the rebels moved out to intercept the royalists, a solemn celebration was held in the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Guadalajara to implore the protection of the Virgin of the Patria for the insurgent cause. Hidalgo, Allende, and the other commanders attended, with a large part of their army massed outside. Every method of employing the Virgin in [*sic*] behalf of the Revolt was continued and perfected . . . .<sup>31</sup>

In this remarkable case, the struggle over the legitimizing force of the Virgin Mary thus spilled over onto the battlefield, with images of the Virgin pitted in iconic combat above her opposing armies:

The priest Hidalgo used the flag and the colours of the Virgin of Guadeloupe for his army, as did Morelos, while the Spaniards grouped themselves under the banner of Perpetual Succour, which Cortes had saved from the Aztecs in the "sad night."<sup>32</sup>

However, in Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, the Catholic hierarchy (allied with the dominant)<sup>33</sup> has been quick to rebound from such sociopolitical outbursts of subversive Marianism and reestablish Mary's role as the "guardian of the status quo.

The specter of revolution triggered a longstanding clerical anxiety. With the arrival of liberal soldiers in the 1858-61 War of the Reform, priest hastened to the ideological battlefield. In their determination to defend an inequitable status quo against the liberal challenge, they plucked up the Virgin Mary and outfitted her for battle. Stressing her alleged purity, they remade her into a guardian of the status quo. The campaign climaxed with her 1851 coronation as the patron saint of Zamora.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, the Haitian Catholic hierarchy effected an ideological retrieval of the Virgin's *legitimierende Macht* upon its return to Haiti

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<sup>31</sup> HUGH M. HAMILL, JR., *THE HIDALGO REVOLT: PRELUDE TO MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE* 201 (1966).

<sup>32</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Popular Religion as Oppression and Liberation: Hypothesis on its Past and Present in Latin America*, in *POPULAR RELIGION*, *supra* note 11, at 88.

<sup>33</sup> BECKER, *supra* note 18, at 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 14.

in 1860.<sup>35</sup> As was the case for the Mexican Catholic hierarchy, Haitian ecclesial authorities had to reckon with the legacy of a Virgin-inspired resistance movement, in this case one far more radical and heterodox than that of Hidalgo. Led by Romaine-la-Prophétesse, who claimed to be "the godson of the Virgin Mary," this movement of escaped slaves spread revolt from plantation to plantation between Leogâne and Jacmel, torturing and murdering whites, slaughtering livestock, and burning plantations.<sup>36</sup> Romaine said Mass before an inverted cross, a saber in his hand, and retrieved his godmother's written messages from within his church's tabernacle, wherein normally rests the Eucharist alone. This forceful example demonstrates how religious symbols, once appropriated, can be transformed from legitimizing buttresses of sociopolitical domination into inspirational forces for insurgence. Invariably, the Virgin, through Romaine's highly syncretic rituals and mediumship, instructed his band of rebel slaves and maroons to terrorize the French colonists for a period of seven months until the underground army of several thousand insurgents was finally disbanded.

This Essay has alluded to but a few examples to demonstrate the symbolic importance and central place of the Virgin Mary in the domination/resistance dichotomy that characterizes Latin American history and societies. Moving from the highly politicized and militarized examples of this arena of contest over the Virgin in Haiti and Mexico, we next consider examples from Brazil, Cuban Miami, and Peru of how the struggle for Mary's *legitimierende Macht* is waged just as forcefully by oppositional forces in the arenas of nationalism and identity.

### III. THE VIRGIN MARY, NATIONALISM, AND IDENTITY IN BRAZIL, PERU, AND CUBAN MIAMI

In Peru, the Virgin Mary is not the national patron saint, rather that status is held by St. Rose de Lima. Perhaps the Virgin Mary's

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<sup>35</sup> Catholic priests were mostly slaughtered or fled the colony during the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804. Upon gaining independence, Haiti struggled to gain recognition by the Vatican and would be bereft of Vatican-sanctioned priests until the signing of a concordat in 1860 brought an end to what Haitian historians refer to as the "Great Schism."

<sup>36</sup> For an extensive discussion of the history and scope of this rebel/prophet, see Terry Rey, *The Virgin Mary and Revolution in Saint-Domingue: The Charisma of Romaine-la-Prophétesse*, 11 J. HIST. SOC. 341, 341-369 (1998).

resultant dissociation from “official” Peruvian nationalism renders her more readily seizeable by the underclasses. With St. Rose of Lima being just that, a Saint of Lima and not of the entire nation, the Virgin herself is left free to mingle among the provincial goddesses of indigenous culture (primarily Incan). The popular syncretization of the Virgin and Incan traditions are thus not surprising.

For example, Marian festivals in Cuzco, as in other provincial centers, features *chicha* (potato whiskey) offerings to Pachamama, the leading goddess of the Incas. These *chicha* cups are a common sight before the door of the Cuzco cathedral, which is built upon an ancient Incan temple site. *Retalbos*, small, originally Incan altar boxes made of potatoes and used to hold sacrificial offerings, represent another site of Peruvian Marian assimilation with devotions to the indigenous goddesses. Once adorned with the imagery and symbolism of Incan nature spirits, today *retalbos* usually depict nativity scenes, St. Rose de Lima, or some image of the Virgin Mary, especially Our Lady of Mount Carmel of Sorrows, the Immaculate Conception, and the Candle Stick (*Candelaria*).<sup>37</sup> In part out of discouragement with St. Rose’s irreversible association with the Spanish and their elite Peruvian offspring, Peru’s foremost *retalbero*, Nicario Jimenez Quispe, offers no space in his artwork for his nation’s patron saint, decorating his *retalbos* most often with *Nuestra Senora de Candelaria*, patron saint of his native rural village. This is perhaps reflective of what the artist perceives of as her irrelevance to any but the urban Peruvian elite.<sup>38</sup>

National identity is very much at stake in portrayals of those Virgins who are the patron saints of nations and in the orchestration of their devotions, especially on their feast days. To attend the feast day of *Nuestra Senora de Caridad del Cobre* (September 8), patron saint of Cuba, at the Hialeah Race Track in Miami is to witness exilic Cuban nationalism in all of its passionate politicized pomp. In 1998, fifteen thousand attended as Caridad’s icon, herself an immigrant smuggled out of Cuba in 1961, entered the stadium along the racetrack across which normally gallop quarter-horses. The Virgin sat nobly encased in glass, surrounded by a couple of priests and a few men in Guayaberas and sunglasses perched above

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<sup>37</sup> *Candelaria* have been functionally associated with the portable altars originally employed by traveling Spanish friars

<sup>38</sup> This discussion is based upon insights shared with me by Carol Damian.

the backseat of a sparkling new (appropriately white) Mercedes Benz convertible. The greatest surge of emotion rose at the singing of the Cuban National anthem, which inspired passionate chants of "Viva Cuba Libre" throughout the event, while limpid Catholic hymns barely raised a collective devotional eyebrow. In studying this annual event, Thomas Tweed, in fact, "sensed in conversations with some of the clergy that it might be a bit too 'secular' for their tastes . . . . In any case, all of the singing, reciting, applauding, and weeping — yes, there is weeping here too — negotiates diasporic identity."<sup>39</sup>

As elsewhere in Latin American, popular devotion to the Virgin in Cuba and among Cuban Americans in Miami cannot be fully understood without awareness of the "pagan" goddesses with whom she is most often assimilated and the cosmology in which these goddesses love, dance with, and "mount" their devotees.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, just as legitimacy is at stake in the political field in the struggle over the Blessed Virgin Mary, so it is in the sexual field, and not only patriarchal domination but heteropatriarchal domination as well. In the African-based religion of Santería, homosexual men find acceptance by certain *orishas* (spirits) (namely Ochun, Yemaya, and Ogun) and rejection by others, especially Shango,<sup>41</sup> the most powerful *orisha* in the Santería pantheon. The Virgin Mary's assimilation in Cuban Santería with Ochun (as Caridad del Cobre) and Yemaya (as Our Lady of the Regla) opens a discursive locus of legitimacy for homosexual men in popular Cuban Mariology. However, Ogun, who is syncretized with St. Peter, pays a significant price for his acceptance of gay children in that none are admitted to the highest ranks of the religion, be they gay or straight.<sup>42</sup> It would seem, in any event, that those fireflies in the Virgin's slip that are gay, Cuban, and male are "children" of Ochun and Yemaya, with a few of Ogun's children counted among them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> THOMAS TWEED, OUR LADY OF THE EXILE: DIASPORIC RELIGION AT A CUBAN CATHOLIC SHRINE IN MIAMI 127 (1997).

<sup>40</sup> In the metaphoric language of numerous religious cultures wherein spirit possession is esteemed, a person who is possessed is referred to as a "horse" whom the spirit "mounts" as her/his rider.

<sup>41</sup> The spirit of lightning and thunder.

<sup>42</sup> The highest ranking religious specialists in the religion are known as the brotherhood in *babalawos*.

<sup>43</sup> It is interesting, if not suggestive, to note in this regard that men are the majority of devotees at the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Caridad del Cobre in Miami. Tweed explains this phenomenon with reference to Cuban nationalism. See TWEED, *supra* note 39, at 61.

This case, in effect, suggests that Marian syncretism with indigenous or imported African goddess figures is an issue that should be central to LatCrit's theoretical exploration of anticolonial religious forces, because it serves as resistance against all forms of domination, including heteropatriarchal hegemony.<sup>44</sup>

By virtue of its sheer size and extraordinary cultural diversity, there are perhaps more fireflies in the Virgin's slip in Brazil than anywhere else. Since the discovery of her icon in a river in the early eighteenth century, *Nossa Senhora Aparecida* has gradually been transformed from a regional patroness of fisherman into Brazil's national patron saint. Pedro I in his 1822 declaration of Brazilian independence from Portugal, officially proclaimed her as Brazil's patron saint, which the Vatican formally sanctioned in 1930. As was the case in Haiti and elsewhere, the Catholic hierarchy in Brazil employed the Virgin as patroness of its campaign to suppress African-based religious traditions such as Candomblé and Umbanda. Already in 1804, the example of the Haitian Revolution, along with local maroon dissidence, was enough for Brazilian elites to realize the enormous threat that religious syncretism represented, and within a few years police were legally empowered to raid *batuques*, African-based drumming ceremonies, and arrest participants.<sup>45</sup> As Johnson explains, "Nossa Senhora Aparecida had now become the marker of public space, one that was transformed into the folkloric shadow of the mulatto, albeit 'whitened' for the public good."<sup>46</sup> She has since even been named the highest-ranking general in the Brazilian army.<sup>47</sup>

Given these multilocal powers invested in Aparecida, what occurred on October 12, 1995, her feast day, was an affront to all sectors of Brazilian society except Protestant Pentecostals of the fundamentalist extreme. On a nationally televised broadcast, Protes-

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<sup>44</sup> The pinnacle religious experience of African and African-based religions, that of spirit possession, is another area that should be investigated by anti-subordination theory. In possession experiences/performances, not only are gender lines often erased, the possessed devotee (more often female than male) is understood to experience a displacement of her/his personality, and with it, all responsibility for anything uttered. It is the possessing spirit who speaks, creating an unparalleled discursive arena for popular resistance ideology. For a discussion of this function of spirit possession see I.M. LEWIS, *ECSTATIC RELIGION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPIRIT POSSESSION AND SHAMANISM* (1971).

<sup>45</sup> See Johnson, *supra* note 10, at 137.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 128.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of contested representations of the Virgin in the direction of liberation theology in Brazil, see ROBIN NAGLE, *CLAIMING THE VIRGIN: THE BROKEN PROMISE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN BRAZIL* (1997).



tant preacher Sérgio Von Helder of the *Igreja Universal*, kicked and trampled a statue of Aparecida, declaring to the nation:

It's a piece of plaster made by human hands. . . . Oh, oh, this here doesn't work. This here isn't a saint of anything. . . . Can God be compared to a doll like this, so ugly, so horrible, so wretched? . . . The Catholic Church lives on a lie . . . this image can't do anything for you.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson interprets Von Helder's shocking gesture as an "attempt to gain control of public space, and thereby public consciousness and national identity" through television broadcasting. Von Helder's insulting attempt at control failed, however. One hundred and fifty thousand pilgrims showed up at a Mass the following week at the basilica of Aparecida to "redeem" the national patroness. A second gathering of seventy thousand followed at a soccer stadium in Salvador to render homage to the Virgin. A veritable *guerra santa* had broken out over "issues of nationalism and national identity — public space and the importance of patrolling its boundaries — which provided much of the hidden text of the debate."<sup>49</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The various levels of the struggle over the Virgin in Latin America and its diasporic U.S. communities are, in the end, significant facets of the culture of domination and subjugation that has characterized Latin American history and societies. These struggles demand forthright address in LatCrit antisubordination theory and should be central to any LatCrit theory of religion. Orthodoxy's interests in maintaining doctrinal unity in the name of ecclesial supremacy and the domination of the laity have usually been pursued in the form of an alliance with the politically and economically dominant. The dominant comprises largely of elite men, who have much interest in promoting obedient resignation in the masses. This pursuit often involves an assault against sometimes politically or otherwise subversive indigenous or syncretic popular forms of religious expression, wherein are found loci of empowerment on the political, ideological, and sexual levels.

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 10, at 131.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 134.

The overarch of this multilevel contest over the Virgin Mary and the wealth of *legitimierende Macht* invested in her is the quest for power and domination in relationships including: men over women, the rich over the poor, whites (or mulattos) over blacks and native Americans, and the Catholic hierarchy over the laity and indigenous religions or heresy. Theoretical explorations of Latin American Marianism that seek to deconstruct in order to create space for reconstruction must, therefore, focus careful attention on the relationship between power and the uses of the symbol of the Virgin Mary and Marian devotion. Furthermore, these explorations must keep sight of the fact that struggle implies, of course, the presence of two or more conflicting forces. In the sociomariological context, this means that those who are to be subjugated through the dominant's manipulation of Mary themselves can respond with their own forms of Mariology that sometimes emerge as politically, socially, sexually, or theologically subversive. This being the case, it should be expected that in Latin America, the fireflies in the Virgin's slip will continue to be fruitful and multiply.