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Theatres of Combat: humiliation, vindication and the expression of difference in Mexican dance dramas

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Abstract This paper compares pre-Hispanic and post-Hispanic dance dramas to emphasise their epistemological, ontological and semantic differences. It then critically discusses bi-cultural approaches to dance dramas which essentialise and distinguish between pre-Columbian and Hispanic expressions, as well as the approach which sees dance dramas as reproducing the defeat and humiliation of Amerindian cultures in the wake of Spanish colonisation. Instead, it is argued, combat plays, and dance dramas generally, should be seen as unique and innovative hybrid responses to conquest situations. The paper concludes by examining indigenous strategies to reassert moral and ethical superiority and vindicate the struggle against oppression and colonisation.

Key words Dance-dramas; masquerades; Moors and Christians; México.

Resumo Este artigo compara dramas dançados pré-hispânicos e pós-hispânicos de forma a enfatizar as suas diferenças epistemológicas, ontológicas e semânticas. A seguir, discute criticamente aproximações biculturais a dramas dançados que essencializam e distinguem expressões pré-Colombianas e hispânicas, assim como a aproximação que entende os dramas dançados como reproduzindo a derrota e a humilhação das culturas ameríndias no dealbar da colonização espanhola. Argumenta-se, ao invés, que os jogos de combate e os dramas dançados em geral, devem ser vistos como respostas híbridas inovadoras e únicas a situações de conquista. O artigo conclui com um exame das estratégias indígenas na reafirmação da superioridade ética e moral e na justificação da luta contra a opressão e a colonização.

Palavras-chave Dramas dançados; mascaradas; Mouros e Cristãos; México.

> "Tenían estas gentes una buena y gentil manera de memorar las cosaspasadas y antiquas, y esto era en sus cantares y bailes, que ellos llaman areyto, que es lo mismo que nosotros llamamos bailar cantando."
>
> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo.
> *Historia general y natural de las Indias.*

Dance dramas formed an important though fragmented and reconfigured part of the pre-Columbian cultural heritage of colonial and independent México and continue to be performed throughout the Republic today. Dance had been an important element of pre-Hispanic religious cultures, but although it has often been argued that such dramas were appropriated by the Spaniards for apostolic ends, there remains far more that divides pre- and post-Hispanic dance dramas than actually unites them. These differences, and more important European misconceptions of such differences, have resulted in misrepresentation of contemporary dance dramas as bearing distinctive pre-Columbian or Spanish cultural traits and an occultation of their more important nature as sites of political and ethnic contestation. This paper argues that while in the pre-Columbian and early Spanish colonial periods, dance dramas were utilised as part of first elaborate and then rudimentary theatre states[1]; with changes in the church and colonial government in the 17th century, their political importance diminished thus permitting greater freedom for indigenous self expressions. Although over the past 300 years dance dramas have gone through periods of decline and fluorescence, many still stage, encode and reproduce the roles, practices and habits that their performers lived, live or desire to live and, as González (1980) and Fabian (1990) argue, are important and perhaps unique sources of social knowledges which are not articulated or made visible elsewhere in society. This paper will explore the implications of these views mainly for a category of dance dramas that are usually described as combat plays. These include

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[1] By theatre states I mean those polities that employ elaborate religious and / or secular ritualisation and dramatisation to legitimate and reproduce institutionalised authority structures. The subject and content of such ritualisation of aspects or roles of a society, and the dramatisation of its 'core truths' is usually extremely simple and economical, but reproduced to the extent that it is made heavily redundant.

the much reported versions of the dances of the Moors and Christians, the dances of the Santiagos, and the dances of the conquest, the plume, and the *Tastoanes*.

Pre-Columbian and early colonial dance dramas

Sten writes that Nahuatl theatre was "a theatre in which the roots of human conduct are reflected; a mirror-theatre of man and his world; a religious spectacle, which at the same time is an inestimable source for anthropological study, in which the philosophy of the society, its myths, the Olympus of its gods, its cosmology, astrology, magic and rites can all be discovered" (1974: 31). Francisco Hernandez, the special envoy of Phillip II reported: "The Aztecs had many ways and manners of dancing and called them *nitoteliztli* ... They practised not only singing and dancing but also represented comedies and tragedies based on some event of their valiant deeds... Sometimes they sang the praise of the ruler and sometimes those of some great hero or Principal or perhaps of the deity which they were honouring, and in some other songs victories were commemorated" (1945: 94). War, royal accession and aristocratic weddings were all celebrated using a poetic genre, *melahuacuicatl*, which enshrined and recounted important events of state. In more religious events, according to Motolinía:

> "... they not only called on and honoured and praised their gods with songs but also with the heart and the movements of the body. In order to do this properly they had and used many patterns, not only in the movements of the head, of the arms, and of the feet but with all their body ... and this they called *maceualiztli*, penance and good deal" (Kuruth and Martí, 1964: 25).

Pre-Hispanic dance and stylised recitation were employed in religious and also less religious (in our terms more secular) contexts.[2] Martí

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[2] Warman (1985: 69) identifies three types of pre-Columbian combat rituals which would have probably made dances of Moors and Christians more familiar to the indigenous population: combats performed between young warriors and priests performed du-

described Aztec dance and music as having 'a hieratic, intense, and stylised character' (1964: 15). Together with his co-writer, Kuruth, the authors of the first English account of pre-Columbian dance, distinguished seven dramatic patterns; deity impersonators made by captives and priests; priestly, aristocratic, and commoner processionals and offerings; combats engaged in by warriors and victims as well as more symbolic engagements enacted by priests; zoomorphic impersonations; frenzied dances engaged in by sacrificial victims; processional files; closed circuits centred around a deity impersonator or altar; and aristocratic and commoner performances of open round and serpentine dances (1964: 84-87). Other classifications, like that of León-Portilla (1959), divided pre-Columbian dance into the oldest forms of representation as enacted in religious ceremonies; comic acting; the staging of important myths or legends; and performances related to social and familial problems. Even the most cursory reading of Sahagún's Florentine Codex or the work of Durán attest to the wide distribution and frequent performance of dances as part of the eighteen month ceremonial round.[3] Sten went so far as to describe Nahuatl theatre as the "highest expression of religious fanaticism" (1974: 36). Action was more important than words; the drama of the gods and the universe eclipsed the representation of human passions; and the staging of the drama consisted of a whole town in which different events were enacted simultaneously (Sten, 1974: 37).

Religious uses of drama, particularly during the first fifty years of the conquest, were intended to provoke a deep and cathartic impression on the conquered population.[4] According to the historian García Icazbalceta, Christian dramatic representations were introduced to substitute new vehicles for popular religious expression after the prohibition and suppression of indigenous religion (Sten, 1974: 72). The Franciscans institu-

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ring the celebration of *Atemoztli*; combat between young men and women during *tititl* and combat between women curanderos and curtisans that took place during *ochpaniztli*.

[3] Both Kuruth and Martí (1964) and Sten (1974) include good summaries of early testaments on the prevalence of dance dramas in the pre-Hispanic world.

[4] Although Burkhart (1996: 43) dates the first recorded drama to 1531 or 1533 when, in *Tlatelolco*, a performance was staged on the Last Judgement and Christ's treatment of sinners, the Dance of the Moors and Christians had been enacted as early as 1524 or 1525. No record of a dance which specifically describes the conquest of México has been found prior to 1566 (Jáuregui, 1996: 34).

ted religious dramas both as a means of religious instruction and to commemorate the most important festivals of the religious calendar (Pazos, 1951: 133).[5] More recently, from a consideration of surviving scripts and secondary descriptions of now extinct manuscripts, Horcasitas (1974: 171) has suggested four rather more precise motives for missionary theatre: first it admonished the indigenous population to live a moral, austere and penitent mortal life; second it inculcated a belief in the coherent comprehensively ordered, structure of a cosmos that had been born with the Creation, had continued through the Redemption and would be destroyed by a cataclysmic but fair judgement; third, it underlined the purpose and duty of the mendicant orders in the campaign for salvation; and lastly, it emphasised the final judgement, the torment of the evil in Hell and the second coming of Christ as judge at the head of the celestial armies led by the Archangel Michael.[6]

From the 16th century, narrative dances often provided the central episode of a mass commemorating a settlement's patron saint (Horcasitas, 1974: 84). A 1537 papal bull decreed native people had to observe twelve annual church festivals, including six related to the life of Christ (Christmas, the Circumcision, Epiphany, Easter, the Ascension, and Corpus Christi), four devoted to the Virgin (the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation, the Purification and the Assumption), Pentecost and the festival of Peter and Paul, as well as the saint's day of the community to which they belonged (Burkhart, 1996: 80-1). The Holy See had also decreed as early as 1317 that as part of the Corpus Christi celebrations the consecrated host should be publicly paraded. These processions became increasingly elaborate and included musicians, equestrians, dancers and even dragon and eagle impersonators as well as allegorical carts which carried tableaux representing biblical themes, and later theatrical per-

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[5] The first Franciscan missionaries arrived in Nueva Espana (México) in 1523. These three were supplemented by a further twelve the following year, and the next decade found Nahua performances in Nahuatl on christian themes being performed publicly. Horcasitas agrees with Ricard's original observation that with the exception of a Dominican organised representation of Corpus in Etla in 1575, the Franciscans were singularly responsible for introducing religious dramas into the new world (Horcasitas, 1974: 76).

[6] See also Ricard's discussion of the specific contents of some plays and their didactic functions (1966: 202-4).

formances (Burkhart, 1996: 17). This busy liturgical calendar, must by itself have allowed great scope for elaborate displays of enforced piety and devotion, but it was further supplemented by elaborate private, civic and ecclesiastical masquerades. Masquerades might be performed at baptisms, on saints' days, at the dedication of churches, to greet the arrival of new viceroys, or reliquaries, and to commemorate new conquests or foreign treaties. The baptism of Martín Cortés, the son of Hernán Cortés, was accompanied by a representation of a forest with real animals and Indian huntsmen with bows and arrows. In another masquerade, organised by Alonso de Ávila in 1566, twenty four friends dressed as Indian caciques, including Moctezuma, and Cortés to commemorate the entrance of the Spanish into México-Tenochtitlán (Sten, 1974: 78-9). Descriptions of the elaborate preparations made for visiting ecclesiastical or civic dignitaries recorded by Antonio de Ciudad Real included the fabrication of triumphal arches, interspersed with stands or *ramadas* which contained clowns, theatrical *autos,* a 'living statue of St Francis, Chichimecs ready for mock onslaught, and a child painted like Death, together with offerings of fruit or vegetables arranged on an altar' (Trexler, 1984: 195-6). In all these ceremonies, private, ecclesiastical and civil, the dance of the Moors and Christians was ubiquitous at least until the beginning of the 18th century (Warman, 1985: 91).

Ecclesiastical sources from Zumárraga, the first bishop of México, writing to Carlos V in 1540, to Fray Pedro de Gante's 1558 report to Phillip II repeat the enthusiasm of the indigenous population for the festivals and music of the church (Sten, 1974: 72-3). The dedication, subjection and importance, given these dances is borne out in Thomas Gage's account of their organisation made between 1625-1637, a good time after such dramas had supposedly reached their apogee:

> "The Indians of the town have their meetings at night for two or three months beforehand, and prepare for such dances as are most commonly used among them .... For every kind of dance they have several houses appointed, and masters of that dance, who teach the rest that they may be perfected in it against the saint's day. For the better part of these two or three months the silence of the night is unquieted with their singing, their hollowing, their beating upon (drums and using as trumpets) the shells of fishes, their waits, and with their piping. And when the feast cometh, they

act publicly for the space of eight days what privately they had practised before. They are that day well apparelled with silks, fine linen, ribbons, and feathers according to the dance. They begin this in the church before the saint, or in the churchyard, and thence all the octave, or eight days, they go dancing from house to house, where they have chocolate or some heady drink or chicha given them" (Gage, 1958: 243 *in* Thompson, 1958).

Missionaries were divided between those that wished to erase any evidence of the prior existence of an indigenous society and those that were tolerant of indigenous modes of expression, if not their content. The Franciscans, and later the Jesuits in particular encouraged the adoption of imported European dance dramas to aid the difficult process of proselytisation.[7] Texts including sermons, scripture, and miracle literature and the biography of saints, were translated into Nahuatl, Mixtec, Purépecha and other indigenous languages and were used as part of the liturgical calendar. In addition, Nahuatl translations of Spanish devotional literature included plays, or *autos*,[8] such as the *Lucero de Nuestra Salvación*, originally written by Ausías Izquierdo, translated around 1591, and others made under Jesuit supervision in 1641 (Burkhart, 1996: 2-4). Ricard (1966: 195, 198) and Horcasitas (1974: 90-92), have identified some of the authors or translators of religious dramas, most of whom appear to have been European priests versed in Nahuatl. Much Spanish devotional literature was, however usually translated, edited or co-edited in collaboration with Nahua scholars. This close collaboration allowed for the adoption of native literary styles and expressions which permitted the incorporation of pre-Hispanic nuances which could blur the frontiers of the two genres and their significance. Burkhart, for example, has demonstrated how the translator of Izquierdo's drama made changes to adopt it to a

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[7] It is the Franciscans that are usually credited with the introduction of the religious theatre into Mexico. Although the Dominicans arrived seven years earlier, there is no evidence that they staged any popular representations. Neither are there any accounts of the Augustinians, who arrived in 1533, favouring this type of pedagogic action. The Jesuits arrived much later in 1572, and left evidence of only one or two experiments in religious theatre (Horcasitas, 1974: 76).

[8] A one act play, written in rhymed verse, usually on a religious subject. Once called 'sermons in verse'.

Nahua audience while adding four additional speeches at the end. Although the changes to the text were subtle, they were sufficient to create enough ambiguity to allow European Christians to take the indigenous zeal for such representations as evidence of the progress of proselytisation, while indigenous communities were able to use them to create new identities which contributed to their cultural survival. Furthermore, some of the content of the plays, the events of the Last Judgement, or Christ's sacrifice, descent into Hell and his ensuing resurrection, must have provoked strong resonances with former Nahuatl apostolic, millenarian and redemptive obsessions.

By the end of the Middle Ages in Spain, religious theatre had started to employ mechanical devices as well as masked actors to perfect miraculous illusions. Less sophisticated versions which nevertheless effectively represented the flames of Hell; the infernal throne and the agonies of the damned; or suspended clouds among which Christ, the Virgin, and a host of angels and demons could be raised and lowered, were also used in popular New World theatre. Neither was this theatre innocent of the use of small bags of red liquids which could be used in the depiction of crucifixions or the combat plays which pitted Moors against Christians to imitate the blood and gore of battle and torture (Horcasitas, 1974: 126-7).[9] Large numbers of Indians were involved in these plays. López de Gómara claimed that in Tlaxcala, theatrical battles were fought as part of the pageantry performed to welcome a viceroy or celebrate a religious festivals which might employ between 60-70,000 performers (Trexler, 1984: 203). Las Casas reported that 800 Indians took part in *El Juicio Final* (Ricard, 1966: 195), and it was not unusual for audiences to include the complete population of towns. Five thousand Indians attended a performance of the *Comedia de los Reyes* in Tlajomulco in 1587 (Ricard, 1966: 199), and in some instances, audiences could number as many as 80,000 (Horcasitas, 1974: 163).[10]

Mass baptisms were also arranged to coincide, and even be incorporated into dramatic representations. In Tlaxcala, according to Motolinía,

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[9] For a secondary description of the elaborate scenography employed in the 1539 version of the Fall of Adam and Eve (see Ricard, 1966: 196).

[10] The number, again given by Las Casas, who attended a performance of La Asunción in Tlaxcala.

the 1539 enactment of the victory over the Turks in the taking of Jerusalem involved large numbers of the indigenous population with the roles of Christians reserved for indigenous converts, while those of Turks were restricted to unbaptised Indians. After the defeat of the Turks, the unbaptised protagonists participated in a ceremony that converted them into christians (Horcasitas, 1974: 84; Trexler, 1984: 209). Rudolfo Usigli (1932: 56) and Maria Sten (1974: 11) have drawn attention to the fundamental uniqueness of the Spanish conquest of the New World, compared to other European colonial projects, in its use of theatre as an arm to reform indigenous values, beliefs and political affiliations.[11] Drama was flawlessly connected with Spanish apostolic colonialism, and it is doubtful whether in these zones of hybridisation, in the encounter of these two fundamentally opposed civilisations, clear distinctions between social, political and military action and mimetic representation were ever maintained.

The Spanish devotion to liturgical drama and the pre-Columbian use of dramatic forms - each ontologically, epistemologically and existentially, irreducible to the other - encountered each other in interstitial pockets of a tattered geography to generate new forms which not only borrowed and combined elements from both civilising discourses, but created sufficient ambiguity for different ethnic audiences to interpret them in radically different ways. The text of *La Comedia de los Reyes* (1607), for example employed literary devices such as *difrasismos*, metaphors and parallels that were strongly reminiscent of pre-Hispanic literary styles, while the Hebraic God was referred to as *Tloque Nahuaque* (The Lord of the Far and Near) and *Ipalnemohuani* (He that gives us life) (Ricard, 1966: 198, Horcasitas, 1974: 169). These were pre-Hispanic modes of address reserved for the god *Ometeotl*. Thus post-Columbian Nahua dramas although sometimes stylistically comparable to the pre-Hispanic *huehuehtlahtolli*, were classified differently as *neixcuitilli* 'something that sets an example', a Nahuatl translation of the Spanish '*ejemplo*', an exemplary story (Burkhart, 1996: 45-6).

From the third quarter of the 16th century indigenous theatre along with the mass participation of the indigenous population in popular Christianity began to decline. This decline has been attributed to a number of

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[11] A uniqueness that may have been shared with Portuguese colonialism and the related strategies employed by the Jesuits in Brazil.

circumstances including the catastrophic collapse in the native po-pulation; the erosion of missionary authority by the establishment and consolidation of a civic state; the replacement of the mendicant orders by a secular and institutionalised clergy brought from Spain and having clo-ser affiliations with the metropolitan powers than with the heroic history of the conquest and redemption of the New World. Taken together these factors would certainly have been sufficient to undermine any Franciscan millenarian project, of which the Spanish Crown was already suspicious, which sought to build a utopian society composed of missionaries and 'natives'. From 1555 restrictions were imposed on the manner of religious celebrations and with the arrival of the Inquisition in 1574, devotional literature was prohibited from being translated into Nahuatl and subjected to censorship. In 1585 it was decreed that theatrical representations could no longer be staged within ecclesiastical properties, but by then missionary theatre was supposed already to have fallen into decadence. However, this decline did not affect all dramas and the themes represen-ted by the *pastorelas*, the passion and the combat plays appear to have remained popular. Dances of Moors and Christians instead of being less popular, were disseminated more widely by the opening of the trails lin-king central México with the new mining areas in the north (Warman, 1985: 77). In other places dance dramas had become divorced from the church leading to the decline and abandonment of complex theatrical productions such as those on the scale of *La caída de nuestros primeros padres*, *La anunciación de Nuestra Señora*, *La predicación a las aves* or *El juicio final*, which had previously brought together whole communities. Nevertheless, the process towards radical hybridisation of cultural expressions continued, albeit at different paces, under dissimilar conditions, and with ingenious effects as will be seen in the cases of some versions of the conquest dances in Jalisco and Oaxaca. Warman (1985: 86-91) suggests that after a period of exceptional splendour between 1600-50, the Dance of the Moors and Christians fell out of popularity until, by 1700, it was seldom performed as part of the large urban festivities. After the lapse of a further fifty years, the church largely relinquished its control over local performances in favour of the *cofradías* and other locally controlled organisations (*Ibid.* 100). Detached from strict missionary supervision plays lost their popularity or underwent simplification and, in the opinion of some religious commentators became so 'misinterpreted' that the theatre should be

abandoned altogether and any surviving scripts in indigenous hands confiscated and burnt (Horcasitas, 1974: 164-5).

Indigenous elements and any mention of pre-Hispanic deities were, with two known exceptions, carefully excluded right up until the Baroque period, a time, when the proliferation of ostentatious forms and decoration could provide a camouflage for the re-entry of pre-Columbian themes. The *Nueva conversíon y bautismo de los cuatro últimos reyes de Tlaxcala en la Nueva España*, an early drama attributed to Motolinía, incorporated an imaginary native god, Hongol 'idol, god and demon', and in some *autos*, the anti-Christ was identified with Quetzalcoatl (Trexler, 1984: 200), but it was left to Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz to incorporate an actual pre-Hispanic deity, Centeotl, into Spanish dramatic language. Another play, *La invención de la Santa Cruz* (1714), included the appearance of Mictlantecuhtli, the Aztec underworld deity. Both these latter pieces however, were meant for educated audiences and destined for elite rather than popular consumption.

Although pre-Hispanic forms of cultural expressions were used after the Spanish aggression as ideological devices that could be made sympathetic to Christian values and European projects, their structure, content and timing, at least in the early period, were tightly controlled by European missionaries. Through them a new habitus was fabricated which attempted to change the habits, practices and ways of thought of the indigenous populations nurturing them to view themselves as culturally homogenous and defeated vassals of the Spanish colonial state. No longer, was it intended, that they identify themselves with the political and cultural histories of their former civilisations or city states, but according to a class based division of labour under which most became part of a lumpenproleteriat of Indian workers. This habitus was not only based on the inculcation of a didactic theology, with its simplified but well integrated cosmology and ethics, but was aimed at the interiorisation of a new psycho-logy of the defeated and humiliated, where the victims of the Spanish aggression supposedly acquiesced in their subjection and acknowledged their inferior role in New Spain. As Guzmán-Böckler, Warman and many others have emphasised the Spanish had not only murdered the intellectual elite of the civilisations they encountered, but destroyed the repositories in which their knowledge, as well as historical records had been preserved; monuments and buildings were levelled and burnt, in an attack that was total

(Guzmán-Böckler, 1975: 88-9; Warman, 1985: 66). Guzmán-Böckler describes the effects of conquest in terms of the preponderant influence of *thanatos* over *eros* which generated socio-psychopathological disequilibriums which created a universe of abhorations, as well as a 'defensive aesthetic' which manifested itself principally through dance drama (1975: 90-91). In the apt words of an American commentator: "Because of the power of Spanish soldiers and administrators, the missionaries were able to choreograph the 'Indian' culture they ima-gined and force the natives to perform that imagination" (Trexler, 1984: 190). This overwhelming hegemony that the conquerors were able to pro-ject, changed in the 17th century with the greater freedoms the indigenous population could create through their own religious brotherhoods and a relaxation of church censorship. Nevertheless, the resulting development of indigenous cultures was not indebted to a recovery of the pre-Columbian pasts they had lost, but more often than not was born from the universe of forms derived from the early period of Spanish apostolic colonialism.

Continuity *versus* rupture in the interpretation of colonial and post-colonial dance dramas

While important differences between former indigenous representations and their post-Hispanic forms have been well documented in the historical literature, other authors, particularly those that have approached dance dramas through a consideration of masquerades, have emphasised and imagined continuities between different historical periods rather than the ruptures that separate them. One of the most unfortunate consequences of this approach is its effect in supporting the folklorisation of contemporary indigenous civilisation. This tendency is long standing and robust and has been reinforced by popular writers and critics alike, who while agreeing that indigenous populations were converted into Christians, insist that once having undergone conversion, they quickly began to transform their new religion's saints and angels back into pre-Hispanic gods.[12] If in some

[12] See O. Paz (1959) but also his introduction to J. Lafaye, 1977. Quetzalcóatl y Guadalupe: la formación de la conciencia nacional en Mexico. Mexico, D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica.

cases this did happen, it was neither consistent, institutionalised or faithful to older religious forms, and one must view the resulting religious mixes including their beliefs and rituals as new hybrid cultural expressions which emerged from the early European apostolic colonial milieu. It should not be forgotten that this hybridity was not only a linguistic or textual hybridity, but a visual hybridity too, which should be understood not only from the position of the dominant group, but the interpretation too of the subject group who were the 'beneficiaries' of such representations. The elementary structure and basic didactic functions of many of the scripts described by Ricard, Horcasitas, Burkhart, Beutler and others, suggests the emphasis was much more on the visual spectacle rather than the spoken word, and was designed to divert and hold the attention of indigenous peoples who were considered too child-like, innocent or, for some, corrupted to understand much of the creed (Ricard, 1966: 200-1). As Trexler (1984: 192) insists the purpose of missionary theatre for the Spaniards was "to win less the hearts and minds than the knees of the demons and Indians" (figures 1, 2 and 3).

Figure 1. Cristianos. Dance of the Moors and Christians, Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe, México D.F., 1979.

Figure 2 A and 2 B. Combat between Moors and Christians. Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe, México D.F., 1979.

Figure 3. Procession carrying the dead body of the leader of the Moors. Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe, México D.F., 1979.

This is not to deny that remnants of pre-conquest culture did not survive. Ironically, it might have been the similarities between some Aztec and Spanish institutions and beliefs that encouraged the superficial preservation of part of the native intangible cultural patrimony. Although the content of pre and post Hispanic dramatic representations was tied to two very different colonising ideologies, there were also similarities. Both Aztec and European colonialisms legitimated their expansionism and usurpation of foreign territories and peoples according to their respective apostolic callings. Moreover, the Aztec state can be described, in the Geertzian sense as a theatre state which shared a common intoxication with visual spectacle as was to be found in the conjunction of Spanish medieval and Baroque cultures. Furthermore, both Aztec and early Spanish colonialism depended on a system of indirect rule both of which employed local native authorities backed up by using spectacle and the threat of force to uphold their respective hegemonies. Theatrical and military spectacles were not opposed ludic and historical actions but used as complementary political strategies sharing the same end of pacifying and subjecting native peoples. Organisationally, both Aztec and Christian dramatic expressions were centred on the temple or place of worship. Although pre-Hispanic representations could take place throughout a town or settlement, and during the early part of Hispanic rule Christian dances were performed in public squares and domestic patios, laws were soon introduced to restrict their private performance.

Ideologically, apart from the obviously very different and incompatible concepts and relations pre-Hispanic peoples nurtured with their deities - the Christ of Christianity had sacrificed himself for the salvation of his people, while in the Aztec world, it was the people who had constantly to be sacrificed to maintain their gods - American and European civilisations were divided on fundamental epistemological and ontological issues. Most importantly, although Spain and the Nahuatl-speaking states could be described as theocracies,[13] both had singularly exclusive and incompatible, perhaps even incomprehensible, concepts of representation. In Europe the notion of mimicry and impersonation was well esta-

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[13] In the conquest and subjection of the New World Charles V was often identified with St. Michael in his war with Lucifer.

blished and considered to be within the orbit of the human persona conceived as a physically bounded, well defined and mortal body; the seat of an immortal soul distinct from the divine or other agents which it might be used to mimic. There was no similarly well defined human personhood among Nahuatl speaking peoples. The person was transformative, composed of interdependent and sometimes independent body and souls; capable of assuming animal qualities, and, under certain conditions, even able to stage some of the abilities and conditions of the divinities themselves. In place of Christian free will, the destiny of the Nahuatl person was predetermined by the day sign at his birth. The Nahuatl did not have actors but intermediaries, which did not mimic conditions and events, but intervened and transformed them. The Dominican Thomas Gage who resided in México and Guatemala between 1625-1637, a century after the conquest, observed that many of the indigenous people who took part in religious dramas:

> "... seem almost to believe that they have actually done what they only performed for the dance. When I lived among them, it was an ordinary thing for the one who in the dance was to act St. Peter or John the Baptist to come first to confession, saying they must be holy and pure like that saint, whom they represent, and must prepare themselves to die. So likewise he that acted Herod or Herodias, and some of the soldiers that in the dance were to speak and to accuse the saints, would afterwards come to confess of that sin, and desire absolution as from blood-guiltiness" (Gage, 1958: 247).

Concepts of personhood were not so defined in popular drama. Horcasitas notes the protagonists of the plays fulfilled fairly general conventional roles, with little concern for the individual psychology of characters and scripts were straightforward with predictable outcomes (1974: 167).[14] Sufficient evidence exists that this radically different concept of personhood long outlasted the initial Spanish conquest, and should be carefully considered when interpreting the hybridisation of colonial and post-His-

[14] Despite their conventional and predictable qualities, Horcasitas places great value on the elegant Nahuatl form of expression, as well as the elaborate scenography and accompanying music. That is to say the indigenous elements of the drama are valued over their Hispanic structure and narrative (1974: 167).

panic dramatic representations.[15] However, despite these observations on concepts of selfhood and transformation, it is surprising how little mention there is of the use of masks in either the religious *autos* or popular masquerades. In Trexler's interpretation, missionary theatre was not about hiding or transforming actors, but a political theatre aimed at making the relation between the different contingents and actors, each representing particular ethnic groups and classes, transparent (1984: 197). Masks were therefore used selectively and unambiguously to identify wild Chichimecas for example, or by Europeans playing the role of the three kings in nativity plays (*Ibid.*: 222).

Much contemporary scholarship has followed the 16th century Spanish clerical concern to distinguish indigenous from Spanish elements within dramas. Though this scholarship has been concerned with celebrating pre-Columbian survivals, rather than extirpating them, it has effected an 'othering' or exoticisation and consequent marginalisation of those cultures as they exist today. Kuruth, Martí (1964) and Horcasitas (1974), in their different ways, saw colonial and contemporary dramas as made from pre-Columbian and Spanish Christian elements and attempted to separate them for analytical and subjective evaluation. Kuruth and Martí equate hybridity with incoherence (1964: 160) and advocate: "The discovery of the native core requires 'peeling off' European elements, and necessitates study of Spanish as well as Indian forms" (*Ibid.*). In a later paper Kuruth divides contemporary Mexican dance dramas into religious and secular forms, equating them with the country and town respectively and distinguishing between survivals in 'pure forms'; 'blends of native and European elements'; and 'foreign adoptions' (mystery plays, liturgical dramas and popular crazes). The second category of blends is subdivided between those where 'European imports are superimposed on ancient forms' (whose core is native with a European veneer) and those in which the 'native qualities (are) submerged' such as in the Moors and Christians (1968: 236-7). Kuruth then reiterates the importance of studying both pre-Columbian and European ceremonies and choreographic

[15] It would be a mistake to assume that dance dramas are only performed by indigenous peoples. They are commonly performed in *mestizo* townships and villages and actors may be indigenous or *mestizo*.

styles to 'help disentangle elements in ceremonial blends' (1968: 238). Horcasitas distinguishes between the Spanish elements which included the cosmology, content, themes, structure, liturgy and roles on the one hand and indigenous elements such as language, choreography, scenography, costume and music on the other to depreciate the first while extolling the latter (1974: 169). This method has the opposite effect of what is intended. It reduces contemporary indigenous culture to a compound of two archaic structures, leaving it as an abhorration of historical cultural patterns lacking creative impulse, direction and innovation. It denies culture as a dynamic, historically produced corpus whose social life is dependent on reproduction or the potentiality of reproduction by retrieval from archives or stores. It further dispossesses people as meaningful actors who create their own beliefs, practices and heuristic frameworks. In these views, Mexican indigenous culture has been stagnant, lacking creative direction and incapable of recognising the historical oppressions that have assailed it for four and a half centuries. Popular culture becomes a survival for the use and entertainment of the dominant or majority culture that defines it.

Bi-cultural approaches to indigenous culture almost inevitably lead to taxonomic descriptions. Several classifications of dance dramas have been suggested. Toor used function, ethnic group and geography to divide the various dance dramas she discussed in her 1947 compendium, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways*. Mompradé and Gutiérrez (1976) distinguished eight categories of dances; dances related to the solar and cosmological cults; dances related to acts of petition such as those for agricultural success; dances related to the old cult of Huehueteotl; totemic dances; dances of Moors and Christians; other types of Christian religious dances; other types of colonial influenced dances, and dances that represent everyday activities. More recently Ruth Lechuga has suggested a division according to origin and content (1991: 29): cosmological and acrobatic dances; dances of the old men; animal dances; Moors and Christians; dances whose origin was in missionary theatre; dances of negros; dances related to Carnival and Easter; dances related to the agricultural cycle; miscellaneous dances. These three attempts to discriminate between different types of dance drama should be sufficient to indicate that most classifications based on a fundamental division between pre and post Hispanic dance dramas, further subdivided by cult, historical period

or geography, reinforce the same bi-cultural view of indigenous societies and contribute to their cultural disposition as previously discussed. Despite such unintended ideological effects, some form of classification is necessary for the exercise of scholarly method. Consequently, and given the arbitrariness of all classifications, I have adopted here a much simpler four part taxonomy intended only to order this and similar related work that I am engaged in. More crucially, this classification does not use bi-cultural classificatory categories and is not intended to define or discriminate 'purified' cultural forms.

I. Morality dance dramas. From the few colonial period texts that have survived reductive and predictable moral exhortations can easily be identified. *La educación de los hijos* condemned belief in dreams, and lack of piety and compassion; *El juicio final*, criticised fornication; *El sacrificio de Isaac*, repeated the missionary disgust over human sacrifice *El mercader el robo*, decried theft, greed, lies, and usury; *La predicación a las aves*, taught against the destruction of another's property, theft, drunkenness, abortion and witchcraft; while *Las ánimas y los albaceas* condemned one by one all the sins indicated in the Ten Commandments and the five of the church (Horcasitas, 1974: 170). Although none of the complex morality plays that were an important hallmark of early Franciscan evangelisation are still performed, simpler didactic exhortations on the proper life continue to be represented in such dance dramas as *Los Siete Vicios*; *Los Ocho Locos*, *Las Tres Potencias, La Danza de los Mudos* and the various Devil dances in Tixtla, Petlacala and neighbouring villages of Tlapa. In didactic purpose *Las ánimas* appears to share close parallels with the *Danza de los Siete Vicios* found today in Ayutla, Atlixtac, San Luis Acatlán, Tlapa de Comonfort, Chilapa de Álvarez, and Cuanacastitlán, all in the state of Guerrero. Also included in this category are the *pastorelas* performed at Christmas time which pit the shepherds who have decided to visit the Christ child against devils who attempt to impede their journey. All these performances orchestrate the opposition between good and evil. Interestingly, the majority of such plays are performed today in Guerrero, a state that was evangelised not by the Franciscans but the Augustinians whose methods appear to have precluded religious theatre. Furthermore, the Augustinian convents were poor in comparison with those of other orders and their campaigns may have been less effective.

Given such circumstances, there is a strong possibility that the level of religious hybridity may have been far richer than elsewhere where indigenous communities had greater freedom to fabricate their own syntheses of post-Columbian religious beliefs and practices (cf. Shelton, 1994: 99; 1999/2000: 45). Ricard reported that the passion and obsessive need of the indigenous population to participate in religious spectacle was so great that when a priest was not available they were not adverse to impersonating one (1966: 187), thereby incorporating and extending their performance to the Christian church itself.

II. Cosmological dance dramas. A second genre may be classed as cosmological dances, many with ritual implications. Within this category we might include the tiger dances (*Los Tlocololeros*, *Los Tecuanes*, *Los Maizos* (a version of *Los Tlocololeros* found in Mochitlán), and *Los Tejorones*), that at a structural level usually involve the detection, hunt and sacrifice of the animal (Shelton, 1999/2000). *Los voladores* of the Sierra de Puebla region, and *los viejos*, well known in Michóacan and in parts of Guerrero would also fall into this category.

III. Comic dance dramas. These include Carnival performances and the various dances of the Blacks found in Oaxaca and elsewhere. They frequently use satire, opposition and inversion as basic strategies in depicting or alluding to the 'world turned upside down'. Clowning although found on the margins of many dances should be considered comparatively within this category.

IV. Combat plays. The forth type of drama, today the most common found throughout central México, Guatemala and the American Southwest, and the one that the remainder of this paper will focus on, are combat plays. These can be divided into those that enact battles between Moors and Christians and those that treat the conquest and religious conversion of México. Jáuregui and Bonfiglioli define conquest plays as those genres incorporating two antagonistic groups which stage a combat to conquer, recoup or defend a territory. In addition to distinguishing them from other plays centred around dualistic struggles, they add that the battle must involve ethnic or religious grounds, and must be of an epic military encounter (1996: 12-14). Warman (1985: 115) has sub-divided the

performances belonging to this genre into six categories: Moors and Christians; dances of the Santiagos; dances of the conquest; mass spectacles such as the spectacular battles that are performed in Huejotzingo, Puebla for Carnival; the dance of the *Concheros*; and other choreographed derivations including the dance of the *paloteo* and dance of the *rayados* found in the Bajío region and the widely distributed Dance of the *Matachines*. Keen to emphasise that despite the common tendency to regard the dances of the conquest as historically derivative from the Moors and Christians, Jáuregui and Bonfiglioli, rightly argue structural similarities should not be confused with historical evolution (1996: 12).

Combat plays had been popular in Europe from classical times, though the first recorded performance of the Dance of the Moors and Christians dates only to 1150 (Beutler, 1984: xiii). Their general form was influenced by the *Chansons de Geste* that had been widely disseminated throughout Europe by story-tellers and acrobats from the 11th century onwards. In Spain the *chansons* gave rise to derivative cycles such as the *carolingio*, *el novelesco* and *el fronterizo*, as well as the themes found in the *Roldán* and *El Cid*. The *Crónica General de España*, the *Romancero* and the Hispano-Moorish romances, also coupled with the cult surrounding Santiago or Saint James (Ricard, 1966: 186; Warman, 1985: 19; 27). The designation 'Moors', '*moros*', is derived from the ancient inhabitants of Roman 'mauretania' and is a geographical assignation; 'Christians' define the adherents of a faith (Beutler, 1984: xiii). As will be discussed in the final part of this work, the dance of the Moors and Christians was a fundamental element of Spanish conquest culture and was first performed in the New World in 1524-5, just a few years after the fall of Tenochtitlán, in Coatzacoalcos (Beutler, 1984: xiv).

It has been suggested that these combat plays may have originated in a performance of the taking of Rhodes performed in México City in 1538 and another on the capture of Jerusalem performed the following year in Tlaxcala (Ricard, 1966: 186; Warman, 1985: 62-3; Baumann, 1987: 141-2; Beutler, 1984: 13-14). However, others have emphasised the uniqueness of different texts and performances of conquest dances and warn against seeing them as versions of an undiscovered master text (Englekirk, 1959: 466). At the outset it is important to emphasise that the battles to capture Jerusalem were far more elaborate than anything staged in the 20th century and it would be surprising if the semantics of such per-

formances had been preserved untouched by political, economic and social contingencies for more than four and a half centuries. In the 1539 production, the Spanish Army included contingents from all parts of Europe and México. The rear-guard comprising of Germans and Italians: the Mexican Army led by Tlaxcalans and Tenochca led by their viceroy, included contingents from the Huasteca, Cempoala, the Mixteca, Acolhuacáns and even peoples from Peru and the Antilles. Its rear guard was composed of Purépechas and Guatemalans. In the first sally the Moors were defeated and took refuge in the city. After another battle and a second defeat, Galilee, Judea, Samaria, Damascus and Syria sent reinforcements which encouraged them to begin another and more successful battle. So successful were they that the Emperor sent out a third army which he accompanied in person with the kings of France and Hungary. The Moors, at first fearful and timid of the great armies raged against them, became more confident and inflicted further losses on the Christians. The Emperor implored the Pope to pray for the victory of his army. Both the Pope and his cardinals and the emperor and his army prayed; God answered by sending an angel who reassured them and foretold the arrival of Santiago on his white charger. The Moors became terrified and retreated into the city, but an attempt by the Mexicans to take it failed. They also prayed for God's help and were answered by another angel who announced the imminent arrival of Saint Hippolytus mounted on a black horse. The Spanish are led by Santiago while the Mexicans advance behind Saint Hippolytus. The two factions entered into battle against the Moors, which is interrupted by the appearance of the Archangel Michael who tells the Moors that God has forgiven them, because they did not desecrate the holy places, but that they must be converted and do penance. The sultan and Turks surrendered and the baptism of all the unbaptised Indians who played their roles commenced (Ricard, 1966: 196-8) (figures 4, 5 and 6).

Figure 4. Santiago and the Devil entering the dance patio. Dance of the Santiagos, Acatlan, State of Guerrero, México, 1982.

Figure 5. Masked Moors. Dance of the Santiagos, Acatlan, State of Guerrero, México, 1982.

Figure 6. Christians. Dance of the Santiagos, Acatlan, State of Guerrero, México. 1982

It seems paradoxical that despite this apparent strong Spanish influence, Horcasitas speculates that the geographical distribution of the dramatisation of the Moors and Christians in México today, suggests that it has a particular popularity within Nahuatl or Nahuatl dominated areas. Furthermore, these areas may be isolated and strongly indigenous, and while undoubtedly introduced by the Franciscans, the popularity of such combats might be historically related to those regions and city states that possessed strongly theocratic military traditions (Horcasitas, 1976: 227).

Forms of indigenous subversion in dances of the conquest

Even such a cursory review of the historical literature on 16th and 17th century popular religious theatre suggests the occurrence of a complex process of syncretisation between indigenous and European sources which cannot simply be reduced to the view of Christianity merely pro-

viding a new bottle in which to contain the wines of old sacramental religions. Formal bi-cultural analyses of the type discussed above neglect or ignore the essential dialogical nature of religious theatre and contemporary dance dramas. In an opposite view, Trexler (1984: 192-3) encourages us to widen our purview of missionary theatre to look as well at what he calls military theatre. Military theatre, the original events staged almost as prototypes for missionary theatre include the elaborate code of greetings enacted by Cortés and his entourage of prostrating themselves before the first twelve missionary apostles to arrive in the New World; the narrative with which the twelve apostles responded describing the battle between good and evil angels which they compared to the conquest of the New World (identifying Carlos V with the triumphant archangel Michael); and the military battles which provided the prototypes for more popular dramatisations. These events, according to Trexler (1984) provided a lexicon of modes of submission through which the native population were made to endlessly re-enact their own defeat and humiliation at the hands of superior alien forces, thereby providing a visual dramatisation or charter which revealed and legitimated the new Spanish order.

Trexler accepts the simplification, purification and selection of cultural elements that Christendom and the Spanish monarchy bequeathed New Spain and describes well their political uses, but he ignores the counter process of filtration performed by the subservient society which Foster (1960) so perceptively described in *Culture and Conquest.* This second process, although undertaken by indigenous societies which in the early period of the conquest lacked their own institutions and were prisoner to those imposed on them, may have been less effective but evidently worked to favour the dramatic and ritual vestiges of Christianity to formal devotion and creed. Through these processes what Foster famously referred to as a 'conquest culture' was born; a complex, dynamic, changing hybrid which was neither European or American. Furthermore, if this view of the conquest as a dialectical process envisaged by Foster is accepted, one would not expect the indigenous enactment of Christian plays particularly combat plays that either directly or metaphorically represented their own subjection, to be nothing more than a one-way slavish reproduction of a theatre of self humiliation, acquiescence, and bondage.

If Trexler called attention to the Spanish ritualisation and incorporation of formal formulas of submission and humiliation of the Indian po-

pulation through the mass spectacles of missionary and military theatre, one should perhaps expect corresponding non-choreographed indigenous response to be also represented through the same media. These are difficult to detect in historical sources when we are dealing only with texts and not performances, or equally as bad, descriptions of performances without texts, but as Wachtel (1977: 33-58) has clearly demonstrated dance dramas could and were used to propagate a specifically Indian version of conquest events. However, without recourse to the meta-narrative modes of communication - gestures, grimace, innuendo, the quality of acting, the interpersonal network of actors, producers, sponsors, censors, etc., as well as the cumulative fixing of the final form of a performance that results from rehearsals and discussions - one is severely impoverished in our attempts to detect what could only have been the subtle use of social criticism or defiance that indigenous actors could level at their tormentors (Fabian, 1990: 12). After all, just because scripts existed, does not mean they were simply repeated verbatim in speech. If colonial theatre had a similar structure to contemporary indigenous productions, the informal level of performance would have been important and could be expected to have involved a good deal of improvisation and in parts extemporisation. Although, this has not been captured and handed down to us, it can be assumed that such a free style could have been a powerful vehicle for social criticism. Moreover, from our knowledge of contemporary indigenous theatre, formal drama, song and dance are not well differentiated, suggesting that the script or a description of a work might represent only one genre of many that were staged as part of the same performance. Lastly, actors and audience do not appear to have been very clearly delineated anymore in historical representations than they are in contemporary dance dramas. The informality of indigenous theatre therefore leaves extensive grounds in which social criticism could be developed, though unfortunately, little information about these aspects of indigenous theatre appear to have been preserved. As a result of these limitations, we are able to detect only the brute and overt subversions that missionary and even contemporary theatre was and is capable of expressing.

Baumann, in a study of missionary theatre in Tlaxcala, draws attention to certain unexplained paradoxes in some theatrical representations. In the 1539 Tlaxcalan representation of the Conquest of Jerusalem already discussed, Cortés and Alvarado, the latter perhaps one of the most brutal

of the conquerors, were inexplicably cast not as leading the Spanish army or the Mexican contingent within it, but as the Sultan of Babylon and his lieutenant at the head of the Moorish armies (Warman, 1985: 74; Baumann 1987: 142). Such role reversal re-fashioning Cortés and Alvarado as pagans and the losers rather than the victors in a military conflict which was clearly a homology of the conquest of Tenochtitlán is difficult to explain and would have required Spanish as well as indigenous connivance.[16]

Tlaxcala believed itself to be an unusually privileged city and constantly reminded and petitioned the Crown of the liberties and favours Cortés had promised to bestow on it in exchange for its alliance and military support against Tenochtitlán. Unlike in most other parts of New Spain, the Tlaxcalans, despite having themselves fought an ill fated battle against the Spanish considered them friends and allies. In their version of combat plays, it was not their enmity to their conquerors that was displayed but their close and amicable alliance. This friendship was articulated through various theatrical devices such as the special mention that an angel gave to the Tlaxcalans as the allies of the Spanish in the 1539 representation of the Conquest of Jerusalem. It was more forcefully reiterated in a mock battle between Tlaxcalans and Spaniards against the Chichimeca which had been planned to honour the visit of a new viceroy in 1585, and it was even the subject of a play, the *Coloquio de la nueva conversión y bautismo de los cuatro últimas reyes de Tlaxcala en la Nueva España* (Baumann, 1987: 143-5). The *Coloquio* describes the visitation of an angel to the last four kings of Tlaxcala who in a dream, warns them of the deceits of the Devil in the guise of Hongol, an imaginary pagan deity, belonging to their own religion, and exhorts them to accept baptism and become Christians. When they awake they decide to accept the new religion and send ambassadors with presents to Cortés. The messengers are received by the Spanish and Cortés tells them he is not interested in their wealth but wants to help them, on condition they become Christians, in their struggle against Tenochtitlán. The kings become Christians, receive the Spanish armies, and the script ends with

[16] Cortés and Alvarado were in conflict with the Spanish crown and disagreements between them and the viceroy may have weakened their political position and standing to the point that the authorities allowed the theatre of humiliation to be used to ridicule them (Baumann, 1987: 143).

the two forces marching on Tenochtitlán (Baumann, 1987: 144-5). In this version of the conquest, the Tlaxcalans depict themselves as the natural allies of the Spanish and the grateful beneficiaries of Christianity while flatly denying their historical military conflicts with them. However, bearing in mind the 1539 *auto* when Cortés was identified with the Moors, the Tlaxcalans not only denied their conquest, but also its perpetrators. The preserved memory of the Tlaxcalans, legitimated the town's prosperity under New Spain - they became prosperous and innovative farmers and were licensed to wear Spanish clothing, bear arms and the more important among them to have their own heraldic devices - by closely identifying and assuming a good part of the material culture of their enemies turned allies (Baumann, 1987: 147). This strategy of forgetting is a clear indication of the selective rearticulation of memory in conformity to the new political contingencies forced upon the city.

A second strategy of representing a specifically Indian view of the conquest is evidenced in the Santiago dramas enacted in five of the towns of the municipality of Zapopan, near Guadalajara. Despite early attempts to identify Santiago exclusively with the Spanish and St. Híppolytus with the christianised indigenous population, native peoples showed a sharp preference for the former, as is attested by the countless combat plays that document his intervention in mock battles. In the *Relación of Salatitán Santiago* is described as: "Apostle, King of Spain and King of Nueva Galicia, Conqueror in battle, who has done us much harm" (Gillmore, 1983: 106), and in the first part of the drama of the *Tastoanes* performed here he is identified with the Spanish invaders. However, after he is defeated by the helpers of the three indigenous kings, and is sternly admonished by God for his evil deeds, he is resurrected with quite a different personality and the power to cure sicknesses. In this dance drama the military saint of Spain seems to undergo a dramatic transformation which re-aligns him with his former indigenous victims. He has been appropriated by the indigenous population as a miraculous supernatural being capable of curing sickness (Gillmore, 1983: 108, Nájera-Ramírez, 1998: 27) and perhaps, even as a guardian against injustice.[17] The fault

[17] In fact, the appearance of miraculous Christian saints, virgins and Christ figures can be seen as part of an Indian attempt at redeeming an expropriated and alienated geography. If terrestrial space had been sacralised and had been conceptualised through reli-

with much of the ethnographic literature on acculturation is that indigenous struggle and self representation is assumed to only be expressed in 'indigenous' drama, and is not thought to be something that one would expect to be articulated through the conquerors own ideological apparatus. When pure 'indigenous' elements, usually thought to be connected to pre-Columbian representations, are not found, it is assumed too readily that the culture has submitted and become submerged within a homogenous ideology of the conquerors.

Where Santiago was not appropriated as the supernatural helper of the indigenous communities, he could be defeated and history inverted to represent an Indian triumph over their tormentors. Graziano (1999: 104) summarises two events in which such history was reversed. In a village in the vicinity of San Pedro Tlaquepaque, in 1815, a mounted Santiago was recorded brandishing his sword and striking Indians. In this combat however, it was not the Indians who were again portrayed as the defeated underdogs, but Santiago himself, who was pulled from his horse, verbally abused and theatrically flayed. In another account, this time of a performance of the *Tastoanes* dated to the 25 July 1899, from San Andrés Huentitlán and Tonalá, the *Tastoanes* are identified with satanic roles and rampage through the towns taking whatever they like from shops. Santiago gallops through the town but although each time he encounters the *Tastoanes* a battle ensues, it always ends with their escape. In the next scene three kings who rule over the *Tastoanes* appear and begin to measure the land. Santiago again appears: he is pulled from his mare and taken to the kings. The kings find Santiago guilty and is executed by the *Tastoanes* (Warman, 1985: 108-9). A similar event is enacted in the dance of the *Tastoanes* as it is performed on the 8th September in Jocotán, a small dormitory town of Zapopan. Santiago rides into the square where he is surrounded and killed by the *Tastoanes*.[18] God then resurrects him after

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gious metaphors as a cosmological model, then the wholesale destruction of key sites and their expropriation could only lead to a feeling of anomie. The Spanish destruction and desecration of religious sites created a mutilated geography, which could only be healed by working within the tenets of the new cosmological order to regain a sense of time and space and their position within it.

[18] Mata Torres traces *tastuan* to the Nahuatl, *tlatoa* meaning, he that has the word, master, and was the name given to the native kings or *cacique*s (1987: 15). See also Gillmore (1983: 106).

admonishing him that he has been sent not to kill the people and take their land, but to convert them to Christianity. Santiago then mends his ways and resurrects the *Tastoanes* who convert to Christianity (Nájera-Ramírez, 1998: 92-3). Mata Torres (1987: 16) believes that the murder of Santiago was incorporated at a later date after the Franciscans had relaxed control over the five communities in Zapopan that still preserve the dance drama. The murder of Santiago by an actor representing an Indian ally is subversive in itself, but the intervention of God to rebuke the saint's actions, which paralleled those of the Spaniard, effectively creates a disjunction between Spanish military and political power and evangelisation, and affirms the proximity of the five communities directly to a God who himself intervened and ordered their conversion. The Spanish were simply not required to teach or baptise indigenous peoples into the new faith and are articulated as superfluous to the region's history.

A similar representation which apparently reverses the fate of the indigenous populations of the Americas, the Dance of the Feathers or Plume, whose script was published in 1902, is discussed by Wachtel (1977: 49-50). I quote Wachtel's summary in full.

> "At the start of the play, Moctezuma looks troubled. Malintzin proposes using the oracle and the shadow of Cortés appears. Moctezuma and the spectral Cortés challenge one another. After this scene, the real Cortés, followed by his officers, bursts into Moctezuma's palace and receives their oaths of allegiance.. The band of intruders then withdraws. Moctezuma now speaks of his anxiety concerning the strange voices he has just heard. His vassals warn him that earth, water, sky and stars, all proclaim the end of his empire. But Moctezuma does not loose hope. 'I hold the world in my power.' Nevertheless, with Malintzin to keep him company, he decides to sleep on his throne, to learn in dreams what the future holds.
>
> Moctezuma's vassals describe his dreams. The omens are sinister: waters flood and rise to the sky; a strange star lights up the dawn; an eagle tries to find its way into the palace. But perhaps these are merely signs to warn Moctezuma to defend himself. Meanwhile Cortés, followed by his band, forces his way into the palace a second time. His officers renews their oaths. Before withdrawing, Cortés gazes at the sleeping Moctezuma: the King speaks in his sleep, wondering who these gods are who stand before him.

Suddenly he wakes, in a furious rage: what man, 'holding thunder bolts in his hand' has dared to threaten him? Malintzin tries to calm him and Moctezuma decides to go to the temple to offer sacrifices to the gods. The Spanish soldiers then break into the palace a third time. Cortés decides to send Alvarado as an ambassador to exhort Moctezuma to baptism.

The first real encounter between the Spanish and the Indians occurs when Alvarado's page meets Teuhtlilli: after a few defiant words, the Indian returns to inform his sovereign, who eagerly agrees to receive the ambassador. Alvarado kisses Moctezuma's feet, the King bids him be seated at his right hand. The ambassador delivers his message, whereupon Moctezuma's mood changes abruptly: he dismisses Alvarado from his presence.

On his way back to camp, Alvarado meets the Indian girl Cihuapilli, also called Marina: she begs him to take her to Cortés. Alvarado speaks kindly to her and proceeds on his way. On his return to camp, he gives an account of his mission to Cortés who prepares for battle. Then on his master's orders, Alvarado goes back to look for Marina who becomes Cortés' consort. Moctezuma, in turn also decides to send an ambassador: he offers the Spaniards gold and silver as an inducement for them to withdraw Teuhtlilli, who is received with honour, delivers his message: Cortés sends him away.

Finally Moctezuma and Cortés meet face to face. The Indian asks the Spanish leader what his purpose is. Cortés replies that he has come to offer him baptism. Moctezuma threatens him and looses his temper: 'Do you claim that my gods are false?' Battle commences. Cortés is conquered and surrenders. Moctezuma throws him into prison but orders him to be treated with respect. Cortés admits his folly and begs for death. But Moctezuma spares him and sets him free. Cortés thanks Moctezuma and pleads for forgiveness" (1977: 49-50).

Gillmore has raised reservations over this document which he compares with others he himself collected from Cuilápan and Teotitlán del Valle. In the Teotitlán version, the dance drama includes the events of above, but ends with an additional battle in which the Spanish are victorious, thus leading him to believe that the above version had its final few pages missing (Gillmore, 1983: 105). In fact further research by Brisset (1996: 82), shows that of seven performances of the Dance of the Plume recorded in the Valley of Oaxaca from the 17th century to the present, four gave victory to the indigenous combatants. This reversal of the fortunes

of the vanquished is not achieved by inversion, or any other structural mechanism, but by simply terminating the dance at the events of the Noché Tristé, when the Aztecs won their greatest and nearly complete victory over Cortés (Brisset, 1996: 83).

The last examples of a combat play that I intend to discuss here is a script of the Dance of the Conquest from the Quetzaltenango region of Guatemala. In this version, King Quiché receives notification from Moctezuma that his empire is about to be destroyed by foreigners with magical weapons. His sons recommend resistance and go to Quetzaltenango to warn Tecum. King Quiché tells Tecum and the other chiefs that he has dreamt that Moctezuma has been killed and that the same fate awaits him. Tecum promises to defeat the enemy. There is an exchange of ambassadors, with the Spanish insisting on the baptism of the Indians and Tecum refusing. The Spaniards prepare for battle while a terrified King Quiché hands over the command of the armies to Tecum. Next, Tecum narrates a foreboding dream: in battle he became an eagle and three times soared high to attack the Spanish, until he fell and his heart was split into two bloody parts. He then tells how he saw a dove leading the triumphant Spanish army. The real battle begins. Tecum twice soars up high in attack. The third time Tecum tries to descend on Alvarado but kills only his horse, as Alvarado quickly delivers him a deathblow. Tecum's successor, Zunum, stops the battle. Tecum's body is buried in the mountain and King Quiché declares he has received a dream in which the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, has convinced him to be baptised.

Performing and exploring social knowledge and identity

Despite repeated attempts at repression, dance dramas continued to be performed throughout the colonial period. An indication of their vitality is given in documents which record that more than three hundred and twenty five years after the conquest, in 1853, the archbishop of México still found it necessary to try to prohibit the enactment of indigenous representations. Again, the order had little effect and merely shifted their performance to the patios outside churches (Ricard, 1966: 187). Other attempts to eliminate them during the early Independence period, in Oaxaca in 1844 for example, and during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz

similarly failed. Their stubborn preservation can be taken as a measure of their importance to the indigenous communities that practice them. This importance, it is suggested, lies in the ability of dance dramas to orchestrate social knowledge and periodically re-assert an indigenous view of ethnic and class relations in what are often mixed ethnic communities. They are examples of what Victor Turner (1982: 86) referred to as 'redressive rituals', though in these cases the "peaceful tenor of regular, norm-governed social life" is not broken by any recent or novel transgression that can lead to sudden and unexpected crisis, but by the events of conquest and the consequent rearticulation of a subordinated Indo-American society that exists in permanent crisis as a result of its structural marginalisation from mainstream Mexican society. The terms of domination can be played out many times; Spaniards against Moors; Spaniards against indigenous Americans; Santiago against indigenous Americans; the French, Americans or Texans against indigenous Americans, or over the southern border where Guatemala fought for independence against Mexico, it can be orchestrated as Mexicans against Guatemalans. In all these instances engagements that were crucial in structuring contemporary indigenous life are expressed through a kind of drama of redemption.

In the dances of conquest described above missionary theatre has been effectively appropriated, using diverse strategies, to represent indigenous views of the conquest and to reassemble and assert new identities which contested the early Spanish view of a conquered, mute and incorporated people, or more contemporaneously, the integrationist policies of the state that threaten to effectively disinherit a people's culture and incorporate them into the lowest rung of a class-based society. The Tlaxcala drama interpreted by Baumann shows how social criticism can be directed at one's oppressors through reversing their roles within a drama. The dances of the *Tastoanes* performed in the states of Jalisco and Zacatecas also use moral inversion to ridicule and finally defeat the pugnacious and murderous Santiago. Afterwards he is reborn as an Indian supernatural with healing powers. In a second strategy, also evidenced in the Dance of the *Tastoanes*, as well as many other dramas, the indigenous people bypass political submission to the Spaniards by communicating directly with the Christian god, usually through an intermediary, and accepting baptism and the new faith as their own. The performance of such events reaffirms the cardinal relations between a community and

God and the patron saints that look over them. This gives the indigenous population equal or even privileged access to God over that which is claimed by Spaniards, *mestizos* and others. A third strategy illustrates how events can be deliberately forgotten or edited out of historical narratives. In the Tlaxcalan epic discussed above, the relationship between Tlaxcalans and Spaniards are consistently amicable. The historical battle between Tlaxcalans and Spaniards is said never to have occurred and the contest is shifted to one of the Spaniards and their Tlaxcalan allies against the Aztec. The Tlaxcalans then portray themselves as the victors of the conquest rather than its victims. The same strategy is also often employed in the Dance of the Plume, where the performance is ended at a victorious battle, rather than at the end of the Spanish-Tenochca War. In this case the indigenous protagonists express their superiority over the Spanish, while the Tlaxcalan text only asserts their equality. In a forth strategy found in the Tecum Uman stories, the vanquished Indian leaders are not really killed in the battle, but continue to exist as spirits. What is notable about the Guatemalan dance drama is that each year before the play was performed, the dancers with their *ajiz,* or shaman, would visit the mountains and on three occasions ask permission or thank the spirit of Tecum before they re-enacted the event (Wachtel, 1977: 42-3). These rituals which are as much public knowledge as the dramatic representations themselves, each year reiterate a millenarian belief that despite the events of the conquest, Tecum and King Quiché still live on mountain tops near the indigenous population and affirm the possibility of their someday triumphal return and a reversal of conquest events.

The role of dreams in all these plays is remarkable, for by electing dream as the medium of communication between the indigenous leaders and the spirits, and gods, the producers and actors of dance dramas subscribe to an indigenous view which emphasises a special relationship between the conquered and the deities which, as in the case of Tecum, Santiago and the Dance of the Plume, can cancel out the role of the conquerors in evangelisation in totality. These dances also reiterate the importance of Christianity as part of a community's identity, and are careful to claim access and subjugation to the Christian God and his family of saints while repudiating other aspects of the conquest. In one sense therefore, one part of the Spanish inheritance is used to annul another. Wachtel (1980: 48-9) argues that dance dramas communicate ethnic reconciliation whereby at

different times and places either the Spanish or Indian population are ascribed the dominant position, but they are also expressions of a longing for redemption and vindication of either the Indian or *mestizo* world over and above the European and the US world that have imposed their burden on them. González' description of the dance dramas of Xalatlaco, a Nahua community between Mexico and Toluca, confirms the ability of the genre to encode and express an expansive range of social and historical knowledge. Dances such *as Los Tlaxinques*, *Los Arrieros* and *Los Yunteros* not only perform knowledge about different conditions and relations of work in the early colonial and Independent periods, but in the case of *Los Yunteros*, enact a peasant rebellion against the rich *hacienda* owners and overseers which ends with the burning of their estates (González, 1980: 64-66). The three dance dramas described and analysed by González are unusual in that they are not mentioned in mainstream literature and may be part of a potentially large unrecorded corpus of more experimental and perhaps, short lived examples of the genre which are more topical and contemporary. As protest plays with their politically charged subject they seem at first to reaffirm the subversive potential of indigenous theatre and point towards still unexplored avenues in our appreciation of the genre. However, in *Los Yunteros* it is drunken peasants that set light to the *hacienda* and push and chide their rich overlords. After the buildings have been destroyed and the protagonists become sober, they cry and regret their actions, and the play ends with the owners and peasants dancing together (González, 1980: 66). This represents a kind of ethnic reconciliation in Wachtel's terms, but as González notes the play also gives voice and form to the smouldering everyday, irreconcilable tensions between classes that one reads about daily in newspapers, in all parts of the Republic. *Los Yunteros* is incapable of resolving these tensions through purposive or revolutionary action that might decisively give the upper hand in the struggle to the oppressed, and through its floundering the ruthless circle of oppression between the rich and poor reasserts itself. González concludes that while these dance dramas encode their opposition to the dominant society, they are not able to critically reject it. Rather their opposition is formulated through a passive, sentimental, mechanical, almost instinctive rejection in which subordinate and dominant classes are reduced to ahistorical taxonomies between the rich and poor; powerful and weak, villains and victims. Without an alternative social project, the

subordinate protagonists of these dramas fall back on the world they distrust and reject, but the only world they know that will at least give them subsistence (González, 1980: 120). Without a firm vision of a future outside the exploitative conditions under which its protagonists live, drama stops short of its revolutionary potential and is easily reappropriated as an agent of social control when it leaves its audience with a situation in which the poor are without work and consequently even worse off than they were previously. *Los Yunteros* clearly shows the limitations of indigenous dance dramas as expressions of political and social critique; limitations which can be detected also in the subversive examples we previously examined. Indigenous dance dramas can be subversive, but they are not usually revolutionary.

Although the content of combat plays may be irreducible to simple thematic summary, despite Englekirk's (1959: 463) contrary view, their structure, composition, and communicative competence are relatively simple and consistent. One of their most fundamental and repetitive characteristics is that battle scenes are always long, complex and full of reverses. If the inculcation of lessons in self-humiliation was the sole reason for their repetitive enactment, as Englekirk and Trexler have suggested, combats would be simpler, less strategic and more stereotypical. Disregarding even this, it is difficult to understand why, in the absence of any coercive authority that demanded their annual performance, self-deprecating forms of cultural expression should be reproduced over such a long period of time.[19] Combat plays commonly allow both protagonists to assert their prowess, heroism, patriotism and compliance with the rules of military engagement in battle. Even if in the final scenes, because of things out of their control, magical weapons, supernatural interventions, or force of arms, the Moors or indigenous Americans are doomed to loose, they are ennobled by battle and permitted to submit with dignity. Combat plays show the founding ancestors as valiant and strong, even if both sides were not able to claim the triumph of battle. This is important for ethnic self-esteem and is reiterated and asserted to dominant ethnic groups to in an attempt to promote respect for cultural identities and conviviality

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[19] Though to be fair Englekirk (1959: 473) argues that these dance dramas were largely abandoned during the 17th and 18th century and were only reinvented in the 19th as a result of the influence of a nationalist romantic theatre.

between members of different ethnicities. However, perhaps an even more important purpose in performing combat plays and an unsuspected strategy of subversion, may be the promotion of laughter. Bakhtin (1981: 13) has contrasted epics to the modern novel. Epics are concerned with an absolute past based on national traditions which derive their authority from the absolute distance they establish with their audience. Performances, like the novel which Bakhtin discusses, are part of the 'lived' world and may draw their subject from experience and antecedent genres of literature. However, also as with the novel, performance collapses the previously unbridgeable distance between the absolute time of ancestral or heroic deeds, the foundation of the nation state, and necessity of a given division of labour and resulting inequality, staging them in the present and thereby making them susceptible to interrogation, critique and even rebuttal and humour. Through performance epic deeds loose their previous remoteness and become things which can be examined, relativised and re-articulated. Within this process of interrogation that performance allows, the individuality of men and women is asserted over and above the mere categories to which epic inevitably reduces them (Bakhtin, 1981: 35), allowing the very possibility of post-colonial identity formation.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the organisation, sponsorship and staging of dance dramas contributes to a community's identity. It is not only the content of the communication which after all lasts only a few days each year, but the *cofradias*, or religious brotherhoods, who are responsible for sponsoring it; the company which may be permanently institutionalised in a *cofradia,* followers of a *maestro,* or the amateur actors who perform a dance drama in compliance to a promise or *manda* made to a saint or holy figure. The long periods of practice, often between two to six months, the expense, and the relations between past and present performers, all contribute to the enhancement and reproduction of the identity of a village or community over that of outsiders. If a dance troupe becomes famous either for the quality of their performance or through the sudden popularity of a dance drama they themselves originated, they can be asked to perform elsewhere and thereby enhance the status of their own community. Where this community is indigenous, such activity creates a bulwark against *mestizo*, European or other indigenous communities. Where the town or region is mixed, they provide what Jáuregui and Bonfiglioli (1985: 58) call a 'myth of origin' which is redo-

lent with politicised imagery of national identity. Last of all, it should be borne in mind that the apparent effect or message of dance dramas may be quite different from the intentions of those that first produced and performed them. This has already been made apparent, from the indigenous point of view, in the *Tastoanes*, but for a Spanish example it is necessary to return to Warman's historical account of the Moors and Christians. Warman has argued that the conquerors of Mexico were essentially medieval men who saw and thought the conquest of the New World as a continuation of the heroic and patriotic reconquest of the Iberian Peninsular from the Moors. The Dance of Moors and Christians was a popular element of this culture and rather than intended as a forecast or triumphant enactment of the fall of the indigenous American polities, may have been enjoyed as a performance which reproduced the manners and values of chivalry; ideals of manhood, and core beliefs about merit, honour and reward which were more important for maintaining the habitus of the small contingent of Spaniards themselves entrapped, surrounded and outnumbered by a very different majority culture (Warman, 1985: 64). In short, it is difficult to accept, at least from the 17th century that the missionary theatre was nothing more than a theatre of humiliation.

As a final observation, it is interesting that the importance of dance dramas in the assertion of a community's identity is not limited to combat plays. Social knowledge has also been incorporated into animal dances such as the Dance of the *Tlocololeros*, which by including the roles of *hacienda* owners and peasants also stages colonial and early Independent ethnic relations in rural Guerrero (Shelton, 1999/2000: 54-5). Gillmore records instances where in one episode of the *Tastoanes*, Santiago is himself associated with a wild, devouring and menacing tiger that is killing the cattle.[20] He is hunted down by the dog, Perro or else the Aztecs (Gillmore, 1983: 106). Although this author does not mention the fate of the tiger, he clearly describes the end of Santiago who is 'killed, skinned and disembowelled'; ... 'the saint is castrated and cut up' and his entrails eaten by the *Tastoanes* (Gillmore, 1983: 106-7). If Santiago and the tiger, are thought as identical, then the episode can be taken to be nearly the

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[20] Jáuregui and Bonfiglioli (1996: 16) note that Santiago is identified with Ehécatl, the god of the four winds, in contemporary *Conchero* Dances, while the Cora identify him with the 19th century agrarian leader, Manuel Lozada.

same as the script which orchestrates *Los Tecuanes* (Shelton, 1999/2000: 51-2). At the end of his paper, Gillmore quotes an explanation given by one of his informants which gives quite a different explanation of the Tastoanes from that which regards it as a combat play. In this version the three kings of *Los Tastoanes* - the dark, less dark and the lightest - were considered to represent an Indian, a Ranchero and a Wealthy man (a miner or Spaniard), while the episodes of the measuring of the land and the granting of important letters, is equated with the redistribution of land and the granting of legal title in the 1910 agrarian revolution (Gillmore, 1983: 109). Perhaps, this is the best warning against the classification and typologising of dance dramas, for here, at a semantic rather than structural level, we have a cosmological dance that incorporates a combat drama, and a combat dance that discloses possible cosmological contents. Given that one interpretation of the *Tlocololeros*, associates the drama with life on the *hacienda* (Shelton, 1999/2000: 54-5), the multivalent codings that dance dramas can stimulate - in this case between various tiger dances that have usually been associated with pre-Columbian survivals, and Spanish conquest dances - are quite exceptional and are suggestive of the extraordinary fecundity of basic structural relationships common to different genres - to generate multiple, overlapping and innovative semantic mea-nings.[21] Such a process however, is based on an accumulation, reduction and collusion of past or known characters, forces and conditions, and still lacks the forward imaginative prowess that can inform a critical rejection of a society and articulate a new alternative to break out of González' '*ideologema trágico*'.

This peculiar ability to distort persons, found in many contemporary dance dramas, rallies together characters from diverse places and times - for example Santiago, Lucifer, Pilate, Charlemagne, El Cid, Nero and various Spanish and Islamic rulers in dances of the Moors and Christians or collapses the identity of Cortés with that of Columbus, or their Spanish followers with the invading armies of the United States[22] - creates what to us is a bizarre chronotope which is defined neither by historical or geographical, but by ethical criteria. In the Amerindian vision what is important is represented by a polar concept of good and evil - the one measure that Europe imposed that allowed all events and personages including

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[21] See also Jáuregui and Bonfiglioli (1996: 13).

[22] In: Jáuregui, 1996: 38.

González' poor and wealthy; powerless and powerful; victim and villain, to be reduced to it. The deep and disturbing anomie that the conquest brought, perhaps occasioned a psychological disruption of the concept of time, so the past could be remembered, the present denied and the future, when indigenous Americans again gains control over their destiny, eagerly anticipated. This view, expressed by Ángel Flores Osorio and Guzmán Böckler in which dance dramas become the expression of a millenarian yearning, represents the antithesis of Trexler's theatre of humiliation, but taken together, the two approaches reveal dance dramas as no static survivals from a dimly remembered past or wooden forms of Spanish imposed propaganda, but as dynamic heterodoxies in which identity was and is formed, imposed, affirmed, rejected and reconfigured and in which the politics either of state and church, or between the different factions within a civil population, or different classes and ethnicities, can be arbitrated and disseminated as spectacular forms of knowledge. Spectacle as the apotheosis of textual cultures is in its nature best suited to reproducing a present or a new present based on an alternative past, rather than a revolutionary new beginning.

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