

Inventing New Worlds: A Franciscan Reflection

This thesis uses the alternative historical tradition of the Franciscans to challenge the mythology of the narrative of the discovery of the 'New World' in 1492 and to investigate the process of the construction of the New World in the late Middle Ages. 1492 represents a spatial and temporal rupture generating the meta-narrative of European dominance; it is seen as the origin of the Modernity, the Middle Ages, and Coloniality. The Franciscans, and their philosophy of poverty, provide a way to critically reflect on the mechanics of this narrative. The Franciscan philosophy of poverty cause the Franciscans to have a particular relationship with space and time that is both "translocal" and "exilic". It explores the significance of movement to Franciscan identity. This thesis explores the implications of Franciscan poverty for the identity of New World by tracing their presence and colonial ambiguity in the Atlantic world 1300-1550. The Franciscan role in Atlantic colonialism is ambiguous as the discourse of their poverty makes them at once colonised and colonisers. The ambiguity of Franciscan poverty creates a space to reflect on colonialism and its narratives in the late medieval Atlantic world and to interrogate the medieval identity of the 'New World'.

The notion that the 'New World' was invented in the late Middle Ages posited by Edmund O'Gorman in the 1940s; he described the New World as 'A world forever in the making, always a new world'.¹ More recently, Carlos Alonso argued that concepts of futurity and novelty lead to the 'permanent exoticization of the New World'; which constitutes an 'ideological façade sustaining old world power'.² At a recent lecture of the *Society of Latin American Studies* the political philosopher Enrique Dussel appealed for new global histories that would oppose the continued marginalisation of Latin America by shaking off the shackles of Eurocentric periodisation and by considering the origins and legacy of the discourse of the New World. This thesis is responding to this agenda, but it is not simply looking for the medieval 'origins' of the 'New World' but exploring the process of the construction of the coloniality that came to dominate the identity of the New World and to consider the role of the Franciscans and their identification with poverty as a point of ambiguity which challenges existing meta-narratives of discovery and conquest.

The first chapter surveys the different ways in which narratives of the Franciscan role in the discovery of the New World have been formulated, and includes an investigation of the legend of the relationship between Columbus and the Franciscans at La Rábida (Palos). In some narratives it is argued that the Franciscans knew of the New World and gave Columbus the support to go, in others they simply encouraged his own plans and used their political influence to help him obtain royal backing. Franciscan political importance in late medieval Castile was pronounced, as Cardinal Cisneros, Queen Isabella's Franciscan confessor from 1492, had extensive power and eventually became the regent of Castile. La Rábida is a powerful symbol of the Franciscan connection to the 'New World'. However, the way that the Franciscans influence the discourse of the New World is more complex than this link which appears close to the surface of the hegemonic narrative.

Knowledge, representation, and control of space and ideas of space are important to the paradigm of colonialism. The history of the Franciscans is particularly relevant to the discourse of space, because their identity is based on poverty, or the rejection of property, which is a certain model of space. The Franciscans were involved in the Eurocentered

¹ E. O'Gorman, *The Invention of America, an inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history* (Westport Connecticut, 1972), p. 69.

² C. Alonso, *The Burden of Modernity* (New York, 1998), p. 8 and p. 10.

process by which property became the dominant model of space, in this thesis I will argue that the Franciscan poverty dispute of the fourteenth century constituted a critical moment in the construction of the hegemonic notion of property and this had a significant legacy in the construction of the paradigm of coloniality. Chapter Two explores the economic and legal structures of property engineered in the late medieval Atlantic world and their continuation in the Americas. During the Franciscan poverty dispute property became synonymous with rights, and this became a legally codified relationship. This too had implication for the colonial matrix of power. Consequently Franciscan history encompassed the medieval construction of the paradigm of coloniality. Their struggle with poverty contributed to it conceptually, and their translocal networks, driven by their commitment to both poverty and mission, paralleled (and even pre-empted) the spatial map of the proliferation of European colonialism in the Atlantic world.

Chapter Three surveys the long and problematic history of the Franciscan philosophy of poverty and indicates that the identity of Franciscan poverty was colonised in the fourteenth century phase of the Franciscan Poverty Dispute. This occurred as Pope John XXII issued *Ad conditorem canonum* in 1322 which revoked the arrangement established in 1279 by Pope Nicholas III in *Exiit qui seminat*.³ In 1323 John XXII issued *Quum inter nonnullos* which decreed that it was heretical to claim that Christ and his Apostles owned nothing or in common, which denied both the legitimacy and the religious memory of the Franciscan position.⁴ Yet, despite this legislation the Franciscans maintained their identity of poverty, as a ritual and a performance. The Franciscans were both colonised and entangled in colonial systems as colonial agents. In this way they transcended the colonised/coloniser binary, and reflect a dimension of colonial ambiguity, which is the subject of Chapter Five. This ambiguity cannot be understood without thinking about identity. Identity has many levels, but dress is one way in which identity is performed. Poverty of dress was part of the grammar of Franciscan identity.⁵ The scarcity of Franciscan dress (compared to an armoured conquistador) made their identity closer to the naked or scarcely clad people of the Atlantic world. They transcended identity distance. The Franciscan historian Antoinine Tibesar claimed that ‘of all the orders, none was closer to the popular classes than the Franciscans’.⁶ Franciscans’ philosophy of poverty made them better able to relate to and interact with the indigenous populations in the Americas. Yet, according to the first Franciscan chronicle entry about the New World (written by Nicholas Glassberger c.1500), one of the first acts of the Franciscans in the New World was to spin cotton so that they don’t become naked as their clothes rotted.⁷ This anxiety regarding clothing perhaps reflects some Franciscan awareness of the ambiguity of their identity.

³John XXII, *Ad conditorem canonum*, trans. John Kilcullen and John Scott [Latin text from *Corpus iuris canonici* (Lyons, 1671), compared with Friedberg's edition (Leipzig, 1879). Section numbers in square brackets from the gloss in the Lyons edition.], <http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/Ockham/wadc.html>, (15.04.2011); Nicholas III, *Exiit qui seminat*, para 2, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/N3SEMIN.HTM>, (14.04.2011).

⁴ John XXII, *Quum inter nonnullos*, (translation has been made from the latin text found in "EXTRAVAG. IOANN. XXII. TIT. XIV. DE VERBORUM SIGNIFICATIONE CAP V [1]", DECRETALIUUM CCOLLECTIONES, AKADEMISCHE DRUCK - U. VERLAGSANSTALT GRAZ, 1959, which was published as a second volume of a reprint of the work "*Codex Iuris Canonici*", ed. B. Tauchnitz, Leipzig, 1879), <http://www.franciscan-archiv.org/index2.html> (15.04.2011).

⁵ *Regula non bullata*, in *Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Con., William J. Short, O.F.M., eds, Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 1., The Saint* (New York, 1999), pp. 63-86.

⁶ A. Tibesar, *Franciscan Beginnings in Colonial Peru* (Washington, 1953), p. ix.

⁷ Nicholas Glassberger, O.F.M., *Chronica, ad. a. 1500, MS. In the Archives of the Franciscan Province of Bavaria, Munich, folio 270v-270r*, in Rev. Livarius Oligier, O.F.M., ‘The Earliest Record on the Franciscans in America’, *Catholic Historical Review*, 6 (1920/1921), pp.59-65.

Chapter Four explores other outcomes of the fourteenth century Franciscan Poverty Dispute which had an immediate relevance in the context of Atlantic world colonialism: the colonisation of the meaning of rights, the denial that any rational man could exist outside of the legally regulated regime of rights, and the projection of a history of property into the Garden of Eden. This outcome indicates another way in which the Franciscans contributed (if unintentionally) to the paradigm of coloniality which became part of the identity of the New World. This chapter surveys the implications of the Franciscan and anti-Franciscan poverty discourse, considering the legacy of both the Franciscan William of Ockham and the Dominican and advisor to Pope John XXII, Hervaeus Natalis. It explores this notion by considering the imperial dimension of the discourse of rights that emerged in the New World with Las Casas and the School of Salamanca. It also traces continuities between narrative tropes of the Franciscan Poverty Dispute (such as references to the Garden of Eden as the testing ground for theories of property and rights) and descriptions of Atlantic world rights. Continuities within the discourse of property and rights and the discourse of discovery and colonisation are suggestive of ideological and justificatory links. It posits that a teleological historical approach has plagued the history of rights and has failed to adequately understand the imperial function of rights. It contributes to Castro's re-evaluation of the historical legacy of Las Casas,⁸ but expands upon this premise to argue against the historical emphasis on Thomism and the 'School of Salamanca' in the history of rights. It suggests ways in which the Franciscan Poverty Dispute contributed to the Western paradigm of rights in ways that have been overlooked.

The final chapter explores the Hispanic Franciscan contribution to the identity of the New World by exploring the Franciscan relationship with mysticism and millenarianism. This chapter seeks to penetrate the culture of prophetic Franciscan mysticism, and explore the potential significance of the Franciscan idea that at the end of the world is a New World; a theological belief which becomes a spatial truth. It argues that the meta-historical framework shaped by the Franciscans played a role in the construction of the New World. Mysticism and prophecy play an important role in the invention of the New World.

This thesis concludes with a reflection upon whether this fragmented picture of the history of Franciscan poverty and Franciscan identity can contribute to our understanding of colonialism, the meaning and identity of the New World, the colonial dimension of rights, and the colonial dimension of historical meta-narratives. It also investigates how this could contribute to our understanding of dimensions of coloniality, a multifaceted paradigm with many ambiguities, and its role in the identity of modernity and the New World.

⁸ Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (London, 2007).