REVIEW ESSAY

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California Mission Gulags: Putting Junípero Serra's Canonization in Perspective

Elias Castillo. *A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions*. Fresno: Craven Street Books, 2015. 248 pages.

> [What] have the natives of California gained by their labors; what service have those Friars rendered to the Spanish nation, or to the world in general?… [W]e must entirely condemn their system and lament its results.
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> – William D. Phelps (Castillo 197)

On September 23, 2015 Pope Francis canonized Junípero Serra (1713–1784), a Spanish missionary and the first president of California Catholic missions. The Church hailed the friar as a visionary humanitarian who defended the dignity of the native community—in the words of the papal homily: "*protegiéndola de cuantos la habían abusado*."[1]

Just months prior to the canonization Elias Castillo's book appeared. Using first-hand witness accounts and scholarly works, as well as archival materials collected at the University of California's Bancroft Library, Santa Barbara Mission Historical Archive and Mexico's *Archivo General de la Nacion*, Castillo critically reexamines the foundations, developments and outcomes of the mission period (1769–1834) in California with the

1 "protecting it from those who were abusing it." My translation.

aim of pulling back "the veil of lies, deceit, and cover-ups that has been perpetuated for nearly 200 years" (x) about the California missions.

Before its release a copy of this historical study was enclosed with one of many letters sent to the Vatican by Valentin Lopez, a Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians. Lopez petitioned the Pope to abandon plans for Serra's sainthood and to "open a meaningful dialog with California Nations" (Carac, "Urge Pope"). He expressed "absolute disbelief" (Lopez, "Open Letter") that "Father Serra [who] was responsible for… enslavement and genocide of thousands of Indigenous Californians" (Carac, "Urge Pope") was about to be canonized. Serra's actions, petitioners argued, led to "the largest ethnic cleansing in North America" (Carac, "Urge Pope")—a claim supported by statistical data: from 1769 to 1890 the native population of California dwindled by ninety five percent, from 300,000 to 16,624 (Castillo 200). Altogether six letters were dispatched to which only one response was received—two weeks prior to the papal visit in the U.S. the Church declared that, having had the best historians review Serra's record the scholars were "recommending sainthood with clear conscience" (Lopez, "Native Groups").

The Church based the canonization upon a testimony of historians due to the fact that no proof of a second miracle required in standard canonization procedure could be found. The first Historical Commission for the Serra Cause was formed in 1934. Chaired by Herbert Eugene Bolton, the founder of the Borderlands Studies, the Commission failed to take into account a number of works which had already questioned the idealized version of the mission era[2] and testified in favor of sainthood in 1948. Acting upon this recommendation, Pope John Paul II beatified Serra at Mission San Carlos in California in 1988. Since then the case seemed to lay dormant while many analyzes critical of Serra and the missions continued to be published. Nevertheless, the mission myth, which Carey McWilliams called a "fantasy heritage" (35) and Leonard Pitt termed a "Schizoid Heritage," and which holds that "kindly mission *padres*" (McWilliams 35) happily coexisted with their Indian "wards" during the "Golden Age" of California has continued to grow.[3] It has been especially the case since the turn of the century and the prime vehicle of the myth became California public spaces. Here are two examples.

1. In 2004, federal "California Mission Preservation Act" (CMPA) allotted funds to help restore the missions, which today serve not only as churches but also as museums visited by tourists, as well as, fourth-graders in their courses on the states' history. The first version of the bill praised the missions as benevolent institutions. Castillo, wrote

2 Studies which had already problematized the mission legacy include works by Hubert Howe Bancroft, John P. Harrington, Sherburne F. Cook, and Carey McWilliams.

3 For a splendid, classic analysis of the idealization of the mission period see, for example, Carey McWilliams' *North from Mexico: The Spanish-speaking People of the United States* (35–47).

then an op-ed for *San Francisco Chronicle* voicing his concern that the bill would whitewash the "terrible truth" about the missions, "that they were little more than concentration camps where California's Indians were… virtually exterminated by the friars." Asserting that "the nation cannot continue to look the other way" he called to adopt a "moral responsibility that… the granting of those funds must be dependent on memorializing the suffering of California's native people in the missions." Castillo's text was eventually read into the U.S. Congressional Record and, in its wake, all language praising the missions was removed from the final version of the bill.

However, even a brief visit to mission museums today reveals that little has changed in the dominant narrative—information on the indigenous plight is scarce or nonexistent and Indian burial sites, which Castillo petitioned to be "declared hallowed ground," are inadequately indicated (i.e. Mission Santa Barbara) or not marked at all (i.e. Mission Soledad). Deana Dartt-Newton concludes her 2011 study for *Museum Anthropology*: "Current mission museum representations engender a form of social forgetting" (106).

2. The CMPA was accompanied by two federal Transportation Enhancement grants (2000, 2010) totaling $2M for the reconstruction and expansion of the Mission Bell Marker (MBM) system, a public space project of roadside mission bells placed along the entire length of the old Spanish Royal Highway or Camino Real. The grants resulted in the extension of the original 450-miles-long route to 700 miles and in the erection of almost 600 new markers. Every one to two miles tall Franciscan staffs with replicas of mission bells and a plate reading "The Historic El Camino Real," stand in a historio-graphic gesture declaring California "historic" mission land.

In the era of two parallel phenomena, that is, on the one hand, the engagement of the United States in two (now three) parallel wars and, on the other, of, what Jean Cohen has identified as, the third phase of human rights discourse in which "human rights violations have been selectively 'invoked as justification for the imposition of debilitating sanctions, military invasions and authoritarian occupation… by multilateral organizations… and/or states acting unilaterally'" (Huyssen 30), which, as Andreas Huyssen argues, expresses "the conflict between an emerging institutionalization of transnational human rights and a formerly sacrosanct idea of national sovereignty" (30) it was hard not to think of the MBM project as an insistent, executed with a precision of a Swiss watch (every minute a marker), appropriation of the visual field of California motorists to engender assimilation of territorial and epistemic imperialism, and entrench public cognitive investment in every form of Western interventionism as mission for salvation.

The large-scale public space promotion of the missions may have been timely in one other respect. In the recent decades the global "memory boom" (Neumann and Thompson 7) has intensified. Questions of remembrance and its obligations have been increasingly bound with the duty of reparative justice for collective victims of historical wrongs. These have been frequently addressed by attempts at combining "truth telling

and reparation to victims with reconciliation" (Neumann and Thompson 9). Often, truth telling itself is considered a form of reparation understood as victims' moral vindication and a starting point for fostering respectful relationships.

As "The Case for Reparations," a 2014 thesis by Ta-Nehisi Coates, and the response it generated have indicated the debate about restitution may be only beginning in the United States.[4] Thus the robust visibility of Catholic missions in American public discourse has served perhaps to preempt any serious reckoning of the nation with elements of its past, as well as, obviate any potential attempts at, be it consequential or non-consequential—i.e.: moral—redress. Seen in this light, both CMPA and MBM provided an epistemic build-up for the canonization. And the canonization itself was the crown variable in the ever-expanding myth and, after Roland Barthes, its larger "halo of interpretive possibilities" (Peña 4).

Castillo's works, his op-ed and *A Cross of Thorns*, stem from a counter effort: to keep remembrance alive and heed the moral obligation to set the record straight. Motivated by what I consider an imperative call to react to the recent canonization, in what follows, I revisit elements of Castillo's argument in order to reassess Serra's legacy. Drawing from and expanding upon a number of issues discussed by Castillo, as well as supporting and contrasting his findings with studies by other scholars (most notably, a 2004 study by James A. Sandos) I address questions concerning the foundations of the mission system, the mentality and motivations of the new saint, as well as the accusations of enslavement and genocide. In closing, I outline other areas of Castillo's concern, point out some of the book's shortcomings and strengths and, returning to Serra's canonization, extrapolate a number of implications for American anamnestic and ethical consciousness.

A Cross of Thorns opens with a passage from Serra's letter to military commander, Fernando Rivera y Moncada dated July 31, 1775:

> I am sending them to you so that a period of exile, and two or three whippings… may serve, for them and for all the rest, for a warning, may be of spiritual benefit to all.… If Your Lordship does not have shackles, with your permission they may be sent from here. I think that the punishment should last one month. (79)

Serra asks the commander to administer punishment to captured fugitive Indians offering shackles and suggesting the length of exile. Perplexed by the conflict be-

4 Coates' argument prefigured a January 2016 preliminary report issued by The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent which recommends that the US government should consider paying reparations to the African-American descendants of slaves, as well as establish "a national human rights commission and publicly acknowledge the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity" (Mortimer). The final UN report is due to appear in September 2016.

tween the putative benevolent purpose of the punishment ("spiritual benefit") and the prescribed violence Castillo sets out to investigate the intersection, the "darkness" as he calls it, between the goals of the missionaries and the means they chose to accomplish them. Thus he poses a vital question: under what authorization did the friars resort to inhumane cruelty? In this section, I review Castillo's answers to this question and add to them what I believe a necessary, yet often overlooked, aspect.

Castillo first puts the missionary efforts in California in a diachronic perspective that is, he investigates them in relation to original Spanish colonial policies initiated during the expulsion of Moors and Jews from the Iberian peninsula (i.e.: Spanish Inquisition founded in 1477) and expanded in the post-Columbus era. He points to papal bulls—*Real Patronato* (1486), *Inter caetera* (1493) and *Dudum siquidem* (1493)—as inaugural documents which authorized Spanish crown's colonization as Christianization of all the indigenous and "barbarous" nations arguing that the crown conspired with the Catholic Church for purposes of domination and it is in this context that he places all Spanish colonial ventures including the Alta California invasion.

With this premise in mind the opening chapters outline the sixteenth-century policies, colonial economy (*encomienda*, *repartimiento*, *hacienda*), legal pronouncements (*Requerimiento*), and the dominant worldview of "Catholic fatalism" (a belief in the ultimate will of God and anticipation of a reward in heaven) and argue that, collectively, these factors determined the general traits of Latin America which would plague the continent in centuries to follow, stifling reform movements and individual incentive, and buttressing strict division of society into different castes. Castillo reminds us that, in this symbiotic theo-secular cooperation it was Catholic missionaries who were assigned the task of instilling among frontier populations if not the essential European values then, more importantly, compliance with the unjust status quo.

The argument in these opening chapters is convincing albeit Castillo does not escape some simplifications, as well as omissions. From a historian's, as well as a legalist, position perhaps most glaring is his negligence to account for the *Laws of Burgos* (1512), *Orders for New Discoveries* (1573) and *Ordenanzas de Patronazgo* (1574), crown's decrees which formulated specific legal and procedural frameworks for pacification of newly "discovered" Indians by missionaries. It was under these laws that Indians became officially the "wards" of the Church. Although Castillo understands that the priests were positioned in "parental" relationship to the Indians—"They needed to treat them as children, no matter what their age and social status, by providing guidance and administering frequent corporal punishment" (65)—he does not bring into focus the laws regulating these relationships and this is a pity for when the Spanish Bourbon officials, by the mid-eighteenth-century generally opposed to missionization, decid-

ed to invade California in a hurried attempt to forestall Russian threats to hitherto unsecured territories it was these laws that they fell back on. From scholarly perspective, the omission of Bolton's "The Spanish Mission as the Frontier Institution" seems reductionist. Also, the analysis of the fundamental role of the papal bulls would have been augmented had Castillo referenced, for example, Steven T. Newcomb's excellent analysis of the "Doctrine of Christian Discovery" (2008).[5]

These omissions notwithstanding, Castillo makes a sound argument that it was the Church-empire cooperation that was at the foundation of Spanish colonialism and that missions were the key institutions in the scenario of domination. The thesis is well known at least since Bolton. The major difference is that Bolton encompasses the whole of New Spain and claims that the institution of the mission served to secure a territorial claim *as well as* to function as a "Christian seminary… [and] an industrial training school" (57) while Castillo, focusing on California alone, proposes to see these purposes in a hierarchy of importance: the missions' avowed purpose of conversion and civilization was at the service of the real goal which was to secure a territorial claim. This purpose, he claims, conveniently accommodated "the zealous faith of a particular friar—Junípero Serra" (33).

By focusing on the formation, mentality, beliefs and theological motivations of the friar Castillo provides a second answer to the question of the authorization of violence. In a meticulously specific chapter—including dates, itineraries, menus, etc.—he sketches Serra's detailed portrait. He finds out that early in life Serra decided to focus on two goals: "the propagation of Roman Catholicism and the baptism into religion of as many souls as he could find in his lifetime" (58). This was a friar immersed in the medieval world-view, with penchant for self-loathing and self-mortification, whose fervent zeal, one Father Superior considered "necessary to moderate" (36). His theological beliefs "banned from consideration" (64) scientific discoveries (two hundred years after Copernicus he held a stubborn belief in geocentrism), and Enlightenment humanitarian ideals. His conservatism landed him an appointment for the officer of the Inquisition for New Spain, a genocidal institution.[6] Maria Pascuala de Nava, the accused in the witch trial Serra conducted, was, Castillo alleges, executed or tortured to death (62). We learn further that, motivated by apocalyptic anticipation of imminent Second Coming, Serra, when he arrived in California—what he considered "the last corner of the earth"—saw his chance to create a Christian utopia and dedicated

5 In the petition to the Vatican, Toypurina Carac expressed anxiety that canonization would "re-awaken the Inquisition Doctrine of Discovery" ("Urge Pope") and called on the Pope to "rescind the Doctrine of Discovery" ("Urge Pope"). For more on the Doctrine of Discovery, see Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*.

6 Totten and Bartrop include Inquisition in their *Dictionary of Genocide*.

all efforts to proselytism. Congregation of Indians in missions was conditioned on their baptism but linguistic differences hindered instruction and hence missionization was initially slow. Serra overcame this problem by administering baptisms on basis of mouthed, rote repetition of prayers (117) and enticing Indians by gifts and promises of easier life. Inflamed by the passion of saving souls Serra imposed strict, coerced regimentation. Once at mission compound Indians could not leave freely but were expected to participate in multiple daily prayers and perform roughly seven hours of labor a day—both obligations considered by friars necessary for successful conversion/civilization but which, for Indians, meant loss of personal liberty, traditional values, and cultural ties. If Indians refused to work, escaped, or lagged behind in prayers these were interpreted as apostasy, insufficient moral strength and backsliding and, as such, necessitated correction. The methods of correcting, Castillo finds out in his research, had nothing to do with an idealized parental love of today or the enlightened ideals of the Rights of Men (both arguments raised by the Church in favor of sainthood) but were based on cruel, medieval models which Serra referred to as "ancient customs." These customs, examples of which he found in readings of the sixteenth-century missionary accounts (Francisco Solano), justified the use of violent punishments.

When mass deaths struck the missions (due to epidemics, punishments, hunger) rather than stir the conscience of the friars they further reaffirmed the belief that violence was justified for God himself was punishing the infidels. In fact, the deaths inspired exaltation or, what Castillo calls, "dark joy" (82) for in the light of Christian fatalism and eschatology "[d]eath was the important step toward reaching the heaven, an event meant for rejoicing" (Castillo 74), especially, if the dead had been previously baptized. Robert Archibald once described the friars as fundamentalists who, "preferred dead Christians to live pagans." Castillo's research confirms this. In Serra's letter dated July 24, 1775 we read: "In the midst of all our troubles, the spiritual side of the missions is developing most happily. In [Mission] San Antonio there are simultaneously two harvests, at one time, one for wheat, and of a plague among the children, who are dying" (Castillo 82). Although Castillo does not explore theodicy as a possible explanation for the "dark joy" it seems justified to propose that this theological hermeneutics (first expressed by Leibnitz three years before Serra's birth) provided another rationalization/authorization for "necessary" violence.

Aside from the macabre content Serra's letter above exposes another reason for the authorization of violence. Serra exalts about the harvest of wheat revealing that the missions were agricultural farms of vital importance for the region which, as a distant colony, could not depend on regular shipments from Mexico. The missions, founded on the best arable lands, provided sustenance for the whole colonial population and not only the mission Indians. Because the demand for mission products grew proportionately to the growth of the colony Castillo's thesis is that,

> the situation soon developed into one where the Indians were little more than forced labor. This permitted the missions to thrive economically, and allowed the friars to profit personally from the sale of tallow, hides, horns, wine, and brandy to the foreign merchant ships that anchored annually off the California coast. For the Indians, it signified the beginning of brutal suffering and cultural genocide. (98)

This is the crux of Castillo's argument about the accommodation not only of one friar but of the whole mission system into the pattern of an expanding colony. Conversion in this context was another name for coerced labor—hence the subtitle of the book, *The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions*.

Historians have debated the adequacy of the term "slavery" in relation to the mission system. Sandos refutes such comparisons drawing attention to what he believes were different goals of the missionaries and the plantation owners: "[t]he *purpose of the mission* was to organize a religious community in isolation that could nourish itself physically and spiritually.… Profit was *never a consideration*, unlike plantations, where profit was the purpose and reason for their creation" (107; my emphasis). Ha also adds that "[i]n Catholic theology one of the consequences of sin is the temporal punishment that must be served in Purgatory that accompanies the forgiveness of each sinful act" (108). Building on this he proposes to refer to Indians' status at the missions not as slavery but as "spiritual debt peonage" (108) arguing that "the neophyte had *voluntarily* forsaken part of his freedom in return for the spiritual salvation" (108; my emphasis). In other words, for Sandos, the missions were religious institutions akin to earthly purgatories to which Indians volunteered to work humbly towards their reward in heaven with the help of charitable padres.

Castillo's findings directly contradict Sandos' claims. First, unlike Sandos, in relation to the question of slavery Castillo takes into account the *double purpose* of the system, not only religious but also production goals of which the latter ultimately prevailed. And if production was so important then necessarily deaths and flight hindered it by diminishing necessary labor-force—the remedy was kidnapping of free Indians, return of fugitives and harsh punishments. It was in this context that Indians' actual if not nominal status deteriorated from converts, or "spiritual debt peons," to slaves, and friars' initial intentions from religious to far more mundane.

Further, Castillo justifies comparisons with slavery by mounting evidence for the brutality of the system, crown-Church collusion in refusal to provide education to neophytes, and by providing ample evidence that missionaries were indeed profit-driven.

Friars' cruelty standards are illustrated by first-hand testimonies. One such account was written by Jean Francois de Laperouse, a French captain, who stepping on shore in Monterey on September 14, 1786 discovered several Indians locked into wooden stocks but still required to work "suffering punishment meted out by the friars" (109). We can only presume that the practice of "exile" Serra wrote about in 1775 became a standard

procedure and continued after his death. Further, Laperouse describes whippings, irons and shackles noting with perplexity the similarity between the missions and slave plantations in the Caribbean. He says that men were whipped in public while women at a safe distance so "that their cries may not excite a too lively compassion, which might cause the men to revolt" (113). Punishments were administered by *alcaldes*, neophytes appointed by friars as overseers who roamed the mission lands whip-in-hand, pursued runaways, brought new Indians. Friars themselves were guilty of cruelty: the sadistic padre Andres Quintana who was murdered by Indians when he put to use his newly customized whip "tipped with iron barbs" (114), fray José Maria Zalvidea known for his penchant for whipping both Indians and himself, friar Ramon Olbés known for perverted punishments (124–125), or another priest who burned crosses on the faces of captured fugitives. A whipping of a young neophyte on February 21, 1824, triggered the Great Chumash Uprising which, considering the cause of the rebellion, can be termed the first mass race riot in California. Because birth rate was always lower than death rate women at the missions were subject to severe, long-term punishments and humiliations if they could not bear children or aborted their pregnancies.

Castillo should be applauded for contributing to our understanding of the actual dedication of the fathers to the avowed purpose of educating Indians in preparation for their life in society. We learn that even at the end of the mission era Indians had only a rudimentary knowledge of the Spanish language, many did not speak it at all, and only selected few had a chance to learn how to read and write. This was not an aberration but a result of a deliberate policy. Castillo reminds us that it was José de Gálvez, crown's Visitor General responsible for staging the *entrada* and Serra's appointment, who in 1769 issued an order not to teach Indians to write, "for I have enough experience that such major instruction perverts and hastens their ruinations" (129). Gálvez is usually portrayed as an Enlightened reformer. However, as Castillo's research shows, his attitude towards Indians casts doubt on his reputation; the order can only be compared with precepts of American slavery jurisprudence which forbade teaching blacks to read and write. Castillo also reminds us that in 1793 the crown issued orders to instruct Indians in reading and writing at which the padres "shrugged their shoulder… filed it away, and simply ignored" (130). It was easier and more profitable to let the Indians remain as they were: children, "species of monkeys" (52) as one friar expressed it, or "lower animals" (93) as said another.

Castillo says that Indians, "for all practical purposes, [were] slaves. The only difference was that the Indians were never sold, although they were occasionally loaned to nearby pueblos on condition that the friars... be paid for their labor" (123). The study proves beyond doubt that friars reaped profits and many led lavish lifestyles as the missions grew into "phenomenal" (11) agricultural empires. For example, at San Luis Rey de Francia at one point more than 1 000 Indians tended 57 330 animals, including "27,500 head of cattle, and 26,100 head of sheep" (121) and producing "2,500 barrels

of wine annually" (121). As "self-sustaining" (131) missions imported only selected items while trading their products for silver and gold. Although Sandos claims that for fathers profit was never a consideration and, as we know, strict Franciscan regulations stipulated that friars be never paid in cash but had to preorder items from Mexico City Castillo finds evidence to the contrary. He cites Russian hunter Kirill Timofeevich Khlebnikov who testified that some friars, had their gold and money counted and put in sacks by the mission foreman before, "they accurately count the sacks with the piastres and prudently place them in their bedroom" (123). This may have been true of, for example, José Viador, an eccentric and grotesque friar of Mission Santa Clara who had young Indian boys or "pages" (120) as assistants, was so fat he could not move and had a special carriage built according to his specifications. Pablo Tac, a Luiseño Indian who wrote a short account of the life at Mission San Luis described the friar there as a "king" (135). "He has his pages, *alcaldes*, majordomos, musicians, soldiers, gardens, ranchos, livestock, horses by the thousands, cows, bulls by the thousand, oxen, mules, asses, twelve thousand lambs, two hundred goats, etc." (135). When in 1827 Mexican Congress ordered all Spaniards to leave the country many priests simply "stole away" (193) carrying their fortunes with them. Among them were two friars, Antonio Ripoll and José Altimira, who fled with gold which they claimed they had accumulated from annual stipends (193). As Castillo rightly observes, these portraits contradict the vows of poverty taken by Franciscans: "While the Franciscans claimed all of the profit made by the missions was spent on the Indians, the facts do not bear that out" (131). The accumulation of details concerning the wealth of friars is one of Castillo's greatest accomplishments and belies the claim of missionary altruism.

An issue related with slavery is the question of genocide. Let me briefly consider this contentious problem. Many historians have raised the accusation. McWilliams says that: "[w]ith the best theological intentions in the world, the Franciscan padres eliminated Indians with the effectiveness of Nazis operating concentration camps" (29). Castillo himself mentions "cultural genocide" (98) as a result of the enslavement of the neophytes. Sandos however refutes such accusations by concentrating on the purposes of the missionaries: "From the standpoint of intention alone, there can be no valid comparison between Franciscans and Nazis" (179). Limiting his analysis to the consideration of intentions (or their lack) Sandos absolves the missions' results as "unintentional diminishment of the California Indian population" (180).

Sandos' argument is an echo of a longstanding debate about how to "assess the intent of alleged perpetrators of genocide" (Totten and Bartrop 214)—a question originating from the 1948 *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (CPPCG) which defines "genocide" as: "acts committed with *intent* to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (United Nations 1948; my emphasis). Concentrating on intentions Sandos opts for a very literal, narrow and, today highly problematic, interpretation for, as Totten and Bartrop caution, "[o]ver

the years, international law specialists… have argued that, in reality, 'intent' can be inferred from the various criminal acts themselves" (214). Bearing in mind the tragic toll of the missions and their long-term operation in an unaltered, violence-based form we are prompted to ask whether neglect to act upon the fact of alarming death toll cannot be a sufficient signal of a genocidal intent? Similarly, considering the reciprocity of salvation-coercion model operative at the missions would it be illogical to propose that theological intentions were only the obverse of genocidal calculations? Further, I believe that to polarize intentions against outcomes, instead of seeing them in relation, is to miss the point not only about the issue of genocide but also to miss the fundamental answer to Castillo's initial question about the authorization of violence. To problematize these let us return to the beginnings of the system and Serra's activity. I provide here only an outline of an argument I am developing in a separate study.

Early governors of California, Pedro Fages, Moncada, and Felipe de Neve disliked Serra's methods. They considered Indians' interminable reductions detrimental to the development of the natives into self-reliant citizens. They fought with him constant battles over the expansion of the system, the number and behavior of soldiers at each mission and, most importantly, the autonomy of authority Serra claimed he had over the Indians and whose fate Neve considered "worse than that of slaves" (Castillo 80).

In 1772, in order to resolve his dispute with Fages, Serra travelled to Mexico City where he presented to the viceroy a document known as "*Representación,*" in which he pleaded that "the missions be given full responsibility for the training, governance, discipline, and education of their baptized Indians" (Castillo 78). In response, on July 23, 1773, the viceroy issued decrees of which the most important stated that, "The management, control, punishment, and education of baptized Indians pertain exclusively to the missionary Fathers" (Sandos 53). Although the friction with the governors continued into the 1780s it was the regulations Serra secured that ultimately prevailed as a legal framework for the continuation and expansion of the system, and remained effective until 1825.

It is surprising that the joint significance of the "*Representación,*" and the viceroyal decrees or, what I call, the "theo-secular collusion of 1773," is not adequately highlighted by Castillo; the more so that the book's major focus is the investigation of the Church-state conspiracy. The omission is also troubling because "*Representación*" constitutes the foundation upon which the Church's thesis about Serra's humanitarianism—his passport to sainthood—is based.[7] Apologists maintain that by obtaining *loco parentis* Serra defended Indians against corrupt influences of the society, as well as

7 José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, calls it "a landmark of Catholic social teaching and a primary document in the history of human rights." Ruben Mendoza, references the same document to claim that Serra was "not only a man of his time, [but]… a man ahead of his time in his advocacy for native people on the frontier" (Theobald).

made "their lands… secure from the land-grabber" (Bolton 47); he supposedly saved the native community "*de cuantos la habían abusado*," from those who would like to take advantage of it. I agree that this was a founding document for California but I beg to differ in its interpretation. The fact that the friars acquired exclusive authority over their "children" was not beneficial to the natives but guaranteed their downfall. Let me explain.

When the viceroy acquiesced to Serra's pleas the Indians were removed from the jurisdiction of the state and cast *en mass* as exceptions to the laws pertaining to all other, including second- and third-class (i.e. mestizo and afro-mestizo), citizens. Even though the Indians lived on their own lands, of which the missionary was supposed to be only a temporary guardian,[8] they overnight lost all rights as members of the larger polity, becoming stateless in their own homeland. Thus the missions became places akin to refugee or internment camps in which natives from various villages and nations like denationalized aliens were congregated. This was purportedly a temporary condition which required from them a constant physical and spiritual exertion on their way to salvation in some indeterminable future. Here "*arbeit macht frei*" work theology was the supreme principle and the friars, as the guardians of the divine law, had the exclusive right to assess from without the Indians' status in relation to the sacred order and, as "parents" to their "children," their advances in civility—a predicament which was extendable *ad infinitum*. The Indians remained on their way to sacred and cultured life but were continually not yet there, bad, natural and, by extension, expendable and "ungrievable" (Butler 22). As Serra's successor and the second president Fermin Lasuén argued only violence could bring them to "realize that they are men" (Sandos 92). This was an arduous task for as Diego de Borica, governor and Lasuén's great ally, said: "at the rate they are progressing, [they] will not become so in ten centuries" (Weber, *Spanish Frontier* 262). Their status was then a double threshold: they were part of both spheres (*ius humanum* and *ius divinum*) only as exceptions, residing between the cursed and the sacred, the savage and the civilized. Like African slaves they were, to use Orlando Patterson's term, "socially dead."

This status was akin to what in the Roman law, as Giorgio Agamben reminds us, was referred to as "*homo sacer*"—a category defining a person who could not be deprived of life in the face of the civil or divine law but who nonetheless could be killed with impunity. "It indicates… a life that may be killed by anyone" (Agamben 86), violence done to which "did not constitute sacrilege" (Agamben 82). Subject to "the sovereign ban" (Agamben 83) and residing at the threshold, that is, "set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law" (Agamben 81), *homo sacer* was stripped of civil rights and not yet included under the protection

8 According to a 1749 law, a new royal policy required missions "to become *doctrinas*, the beginning of Indian parishes, ten years after their founding" (Sandos 11).

of the divine order. As such, *homo sacer* was "life devoid of value" (Agamben 139). The Roman law regulated which crimes merited "*sacratio.*" Among them were "*terminum exarare*" and "*verberatio parentis*," which stand for, respectively, the "cancellation of borders" and "the violence of the son against the parent" (Agamben 85). To punish for such transgressions no court order was necessary, one could kill and be absolved.

It may be productive to think of the excessive punishments applied to the Indians as the extension of the original Roman laws regarding *homo sacer*. For if, under the Roman law, those who illegally crossed borders or those who defied *pater familias* could be killed with impunity, Indian fugitives, those who cancelled the borders of the missions or overstayed their furloughs, as well as all those who were disobedient "children" could be violently punished, "sometimes to the point of death" (Archibald) and such transgressions would not be regarded neither as sacrilege nor a breach of law. *Las Siete Partidas* (1265), Spanish statutory code which remained effective until the nineteenth century, had been largely based on the Roman codes. Its section four defined the absolute power of the father to, for example, sell his children to slavery or, if "he had nothing to eat,… [to] eat his own son with *no damage to his reputation*" (Nichols 277; my emphasis). It was the authority of these and other laws (also laws prescribing specific violent punishments) that assured that the priests' conscience, as well as their record or reputation would remain clean in spite of the hideous crimes they committed.

I believe this diachronic legalist perspective to be an important, if often overlooked, addition to the usual explanations of priests' violence. In other words, it was not only a legacy of the Church-empire collusion of the early colonial era that legitimized priests' cruelty and utter disdain for Indian life; it was not only religious fervor to penalize apostasy or an eschatological "dark joy" and theodicy that drove them; neither are evocations of sixteenth-century missionaries nor even the expediency of enslavement for the benefit of the colony satisfactory explanations. It was the legal framework, a more fundamental "ancient custom," which rationalized and provided authorization for violence. As M.C. Mirow reminds us: "Law and legal institutions served the crown's needs of conquest and colonization" (11) and in considering the functioning of the California missions this legal aspect—"law as a mechanism of political and cultural hegemony" (Mirow 11)—should not be lost of sight. Considering Castillo's initial question it is a pity that he does not explore the legal implications in more detail.

The collusion of 1773, like the denaturalization laws in Nazi Germany applied to Jews before they were sent to camps, sealed natives' fate as "bare life" (Agamben 139), turning them into "the actualization of a mere 'capacity to be killed'" (Agamben 14) or saved; making salvation indistinguishable from violence. That such a claim is correct is supported by the fact that it was upon the legal designations secured by Serra that subsequent genocidal settler policies in U.S. California were based. In 1850, in *Suñol v. Hepburn*, the California Supreme Court ruled that because Christian Indians in Mexico

"had been given the same constitutional status as lunatics, children, women, and other people dependent upon the state" (Menchaca 220) they "had never had, and should not be given any U.S. constitutional rights" (Menchaca 220). Martha Menchaca reminds us that this pronouncement allowed the U.S. Congress to commission "the War Department to clear hundreds of thousands of acres… for the arrival of Anglo-American settlers" (223) which "resulted in the massive reduction of the Indian population… to 50,000 in 1855" (223). The genocidal results of these policies cast ghastly shadows on the 1773 ban. Thus, contrary to formulaic interpretations we need to conclude that Serra's articles, which in the run-up to the canonization some even "shamelessly" (Grabowski) called California's first "Bill of Rights" (Weber 2015) were, as Christine Grabowski rightly observes, "not 'rights' *for* Indians."

The laws of 1773 are the central proof of the theo-secular complicity to create legal authorization for both physical and cultural destruction of the native population. Article II, point c) of the CPPCG defines "genocide" as: "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (280). To think about California missions in the light of this definition factoring in both, the legal and practical consequences of the 1773 decrees is to critically refocus the debate about genocide from intentions and/or results to calculated conditions designed to effect ultimate domination. It is only by viewing these conditions in relation to the missions' methods of operation and their results that we can conjecture the weight of intentions and arrive at the conclusion that California missions functioned as a deliberate genocidal system.

It was in the years following Serra's death that the decrees of 1773 acquired gruesome proportions. Castillo says that "nearly half of the missions' populations died each year" (139) and yet friars did nothing to change the situation. They blamed the deaths and the need for brutal punishments on the deficient nature of their Indian "wards." For example, in 1800 Lasuén described Indians as "people of vicious and ferocious customs, who know no other law than force, nor any authority other than their own free will nor reason other than mere caprice.… It is a duty imposed on us to correct and punish men of this kind" (Castillo 138). Defending the system by condemning the people he served Lasuén, in fact, implicitly indicts himself suggesting that the missions were a form of a theo-civilizing gulag. In 1830, friar Rafael de Jesus Moreno declared what clearly reads as genocidal intent that the Indians "must and will die off and disappear before the more morally educated white man" (Castillo 143). It does not take much historical expertise to read this declaration as prefiguring the racial discourse of Manifest Destiny and *lebensraum*.

Considering comparisons between Nazis and friars it is important to note one other aspect. Despite the fact that the missions prospered Indians were chronically underfed. Fugitives from Mission San Francisco testified that one of the primary reasons for flight was hunger (Castillo 152–153). Sherburne F. Cook found out that

"the calories per person per day would not exceed 1,000" (43). This means that the daily rations were about twenty five percent lower than in Auschwitz.[9] The fact that measurements of skeletal remains from mission burial sites found them "considerably stunted and far smaller" (Castillo 155) than those of pre-contact graves also confirms the legitimacy of the comparison. Sandos' claim that the sole purpose of the padres was "to organize a religious community… that could nourish itself physically and spiritually" (107) should thus be disqualified. In 1820 mission president, Mariano Payeras, pondered a devastating conundrum: why, he asked, instead of "a flourishing church and some beautiful towns… we find ourselves with missions or rather a people miserable and sick... which with profound horror fills the cemeteries" (Castillo 154). Payeras feared that the responsibility for the disappearance of "Indians within a century of... discovery" (Castillo 154) would fall on the padres. This soul-searching document is of paramount importance however it came too late. In the previous decade, as the war of Mexican Independence (1810–1821) was waged, the region depended exclusively on supplies from the missions and Indian labor-force and its continuous replenishment became expedient. After the war little changed as the new government feared that the closure of the missions would result in Alta California's collapse. Despite the fact that, as Payeras said, "[t]he missionary priest baptized them [Indians], administered the Sacraments to them, and buried them" (Sandos 105) an analysis of statistical data for these two decades reveals a robust expansion of the system (Jackson and Castillo 113–136).

Bearing in mind the accumulated evidence (theo-secular collusion, theological motivations, tradition of violence, legal framework, coercion and enslavement, death rate, hunger, etc.) we have to conclude that California missions were insatiable genocidal machines which diachronically prefigured the internment/concentration/extermination camp of the twentieth century. Those who operated them—the friars under the auspices of the imperial regime—incurred a moral obligation for receiving privileges at the expense of Indian life and land, an obligation which as a binding force has been passed through time into the present. Bearing this in mind, the placement of "*Representación*" at the heart of Serra's sainthood campaign is exposed as a Machiavelian move. Naming a milestone of humanitarianism what in fact was a nadir, a crime against humanity, the Church attempted to remove from view the real denotation of the sign and replace it with a fabricated connotation. This was a calculated ruse, an act of purgation meant to effect a deontological closure. Betraying lack of moral and political will to amend

9 The Auschwitz Alphabet website states: "The official daily value of food for prisoners employed in light work stood at 1,700 calories and for prisoners doing strenuous work, 2,150 calories. An analysis done after the war of the actual food content ranged from 1,300 calories for light-work prisoners to 1,700 calories for prisoners performing hard labor" (Wallace).

past wrongs this maneuver can only be interpreted as a smoking gun evidence of *mens rea*, and a doubling-up in the present on Serra's original criminal intent. As such, it constituted a resurrection of teleologic theodicy, smoke and mirrors which Castillo's book, as well as this article aim to expose.

Composed of eleven chapters with Epilogue and Appendix the book discusses more than we have been able to cover. Other themes are, for example: a comprehensive overview of pre-contact California with "as many as 50,000 sites" (45); the psychological effects of missionization and Indians' apathy which bewildered observers and which no amount of Christian ceremonialism or "theaters of conversion" (Edgerton 156) could ameliorate; the fascinating history of Indian resistance and rebellions from 1769 through 1830; the demise of the system which, leaving Indians illiterate and without citizen status, resulted in further loss of lands and status, "vermin that needed to be exterminated" (193); the full-scale genocidal and enslavement policies of the American era during which, for example, while Civil War was being waged against slavery, Indian children "as young as three and four years were being bought $50 a piece" (198). In the Epilogue Castillo links the policies of the past with the current situation of many tribes pointing to the scurrilous termination of more than a hundred California tribes by Indian Field Service Superintendent L.A. Dorrington in 1927. Due to this unconstitutional decision many tribes continue to fight for recognition. One such tribe is Amah Mutsun and a letter authored by its chairman Lopez and addressed to the U.S. Department of the Interior is included in the Appendix. Lopez convincingly explains the history of California Indians' status tribulations and proposes a revision of federal recognition standards.

The scope of the book is enormous and minor flaws were unavoidable. For example, although the book has a nearly exhaustive bibliography a few omissions stand out: Bolton's frontier mission thesis; Zephiryn Engelhardt's monumental *Missions and Missionaries of California*; friar Juan Crespi's journal and Miguel Costanso's account from the first land expedition to the region; Sebastian Vizaino's description of the original inhabitants of the Monterey Bay. Attention to protagonists of the era is selective and failure to mention José Joaquin Arrillaga—of all California governors the greatest ally of the missionaries and, probably, Indians' worst foe—is regrettable. Sometimes Castillo falls into the traps of romanticization (the description of pealing bells) or fails to adhere to his professed diachronic logic (when he says that friars were "ignorant of how disease spread" (118)). At times, information is not coherently presented (i.e.: plans for colonization or punishments). The editing, in general, leaves a lot to be desired: there are a few typos (23, 34, 71, 180), misspellings (two versions of the same name: Moncada and Moncado) and inconsistencies (Solanus or Solano?); the inlay with color illustrations is commendable but pictures lack references in the text; the index is somewhat imprecise (the same persons are listed under two different names) and incomplete (some names are missing). The editors appear to have neglected Lopez's

letter which is a shame because formal shortcomings diminish the impact of a vital argument.

Nevertheless the real strength of the book is that the author never resigns his ethical imperative which is to speak in the name of the voiceless and invisible and whenever he can he humanizes his protagonists. For example, he describes Toypurina, the female ring-leader of the failed plot at Mission San Gabriel in 1785 as an "attractive, green-eyed young woman of 24" (162). Thanks to such storytelling techniques Castillo's narrative is engaging and, at times, reads like two in one: a scholarly text and an action novel. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze says about the colonial history of Africa: "The truths about these facts read like fiction, like horror films" (196). The same holds for the California history. The personas described are often extraordinary and events utterly horrific that, from today's perspective, they would make a perfect subject for a film and one wonders why the missions' *real* history has been neglected by Hollywood producers who would rather shoot a film about Holocaust or, at best, the "Peculiar Institution" rather than focus on their own backyard (Mission San Fernando is just one Metrolink stop away from Burbank). Eze suggests that by reframing facts of history we give "even the most unbelievable of them… a second chance at credibility" (196) and this is perhaps why the topic of missions is elided by the film industry.

Like the lack of instruments of torture in mission museums the absence of mission themes in Hollywood may be indicative of a deep repression of guilt at the heart of American unconscious. As mission bells have become the number one symbol of California the experience of Castillo's book turns them into a metonymy of violence similar to the Confederate flag. After we put the book away California wine will never taste the same and rolling hills will turn palimpsest, repopulated by specters of the original owners of what is, we now realize, all stolen land. The experience of Castillo's book and the realization of the hegemonic refusal to act upon the knowledge of history reveals the real nature of public historical imagination in the state. Paraphrasing Tony Barta's argument about the relationship of all Australians to the Aborigines we can say that all Californians live in objective "relations of genocide" (Moses 25) with its indigenous populations. Because genocide in California was the result of both state pre-mediation (first by Serra and the Spanish crown and, later, by the U.S. courts and Congress) and pressure of individual settlers we can also venture a statement that California has been a genocidal society and state.

Serra's canonization mass was held at the east portico of the Basilica of Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. The Pope prayed facing the Atlantic and Europe, his back turned at the American West. The gesture was ineluctably symbolic. It signified turning away from the California Indians' historical trauma and their pleas for dialog, and perhaps more importantly, from the terrible truth about the Church itself. Indian activist Toypurina Carac called the canonization "the final salvo of dehumanization and genocide… towards our people" ("How") but it was also equally a metonymy of

Church's denialism and deontological abdication. Serra's sainthood invalidated papal calls for reconciliation expressed in the apology to the indigenous peoples in Bolivia in July 2015 and exposed the differential treatment of indigenous peoples in South and North America. As an act of public dissemination of untruth it was also a violation of human rights, which the United Nations defines now as the "right to know" and "right to truth" (United Nations 2007).

Pressure cooker bombs are improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and potentially lethal weapons because they allow the energy to accumulate before detonation causing damage by fragmentation. Castillo's book is an important example of engaged, decolonial scholarship which takes up an ethical responsibility to oblige the duty to speak across, what Bruno Latour identified as, Modernity's "External Great Divide" (133). As such, it vitally contributes to, what I call, a body of mnemonic explosive devices (MEDs), joint commitments designed to keep remembrance and calls for justice alive. Refusing to respectfully respond to such MEDs like victims' pleas, letters, and this book the Church claimed the authority of the Highest Sovereign and put an airtight lid of sainthood on the pressure cooker of memory.

However, because it did not care to put out the fire—neither questions of appropriate remembrance of past wrongs nor these wrongs' ongoing consequences have been addressed, but only suppressed—it would be naïve to think that the simmering pot of memory and epistemic indignation does not explode in some near future. This makes the calls for genuine dialog, including dialog of reparations understood as "the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences" (Coates), all the more urgent. Truthful remembrance would be for the benefit of all for, if we are to draw any lesson from the memory boom, unless wrongs of the past are publically acknowledged America will remain a nation burdened with a lie in its collective unconscious and on course to lethal fragmentation as opposed to rapprochement.

Considering Serra's sainthood this fragmentation can take unpredictable forms. On the one hand, by illusorily assuaging the anxiety of living on what was not-long-ago indigenous land it may re-inflame hostility towards now belittled claims of the victims. It may also reawaken the dormant demons of racist self-righteousness which energized the mission myth in the booster era (1885–1925) when Charles Fletcher Lummis and his Arroyo Set's professed credo held that "the power of sunshine [would work] to reinvigorate the racial energies of the Anglo-Saxons" (Davis 27). The demons may play out in such arenas as ruthless gentrification of traditional communities (i.e. the Mission District in San Francisco) or acts of terror (i.e. Charleston shooting). On the other hand, the failure of the Church to heed the moral injunction may be interpreted as an act of hubris and result in negative evaluation of the canonization not only by descendants of victims but also by members of the Church itself. The canonization may thus be viewed both, as a moral injury to the indigenous community and a violation of ethical standards against which Catholics would like to measure themselves and

their spiritual institution, in the process undermining its moral authority, provoking resentment and mobilizing shame against the Church. It may also lead to symbolic and/or literal acts of civil, militant, scholarly, theological, etc. disobedience.

One such civil disobedience took place just days after the canonization. At Mission San Carlos in Carmel Serra's statue was toppled over and sprayed with paint. An inscription "Saint of genocide" was added. A public outcry followed. But one cannot help pondering if, like the anarchists of Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent* who decide to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in a destructive act directed at the modern fetish of science, the "terrorists of Carmel" had a similar intent—to spectacularly destroy what the statue represents: the fetish of individual-centered Western historiography buttressing the theo-secular nexus of coloniality and repressing colonized communities' ancestral memory, cultural rights, implaced epistemology. Perhaps this irrational act of vandalism was then the only rational, however futile, measure available to those whom the Pope rendered invisible by turning his back on them? Perhaps it was a call to action before it is too late? Before the MEDs turn to IEDs.

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