

Satan and his World of Darkness (TRRS6020)

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2. Colonial Encounters between Christianity and indigenous religions

- A 'spiritual conquest'?



Baptism

- Aim was the evangelization of everyone in the Spanish territories



Spanish Inquisition



- However, the discovery of a vast amount of non-Christian objects and other forms of 'idolatry' led to the demonisation of native cultures (see Cervantes)

- At the time of the invasion of the Americas the missionaries were convinced that the devil was everywhere
 - > people assumed that in the absence of the Gospels, ‘Satan had ruled unchallenged for millennia’ (Reff, p. 355)



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- According to Behar the early Christian missionaries struggled to 'extirpate' idolatrous survivals, in particular among newly converted Indians
- -> the early times were dominated by several ways of "**disciplining the Indians**"



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- Cervantes argues that the harsh punishment was linked to developments in Europe at this time, 'where the impact of the Reformation and the hardening of doctrinal positions on both sides of the confessional front was leading to the reaffirmation of some significant developments in late medieval demonology' (2002, p. 154).

Demonisation of indigenous religions

- By focusing on sin, especially the sin of idolatry ...
'the devil came to be perceived increasingly as a subservient being used by God for the spiritual improvement of the pious' (Cervantes, 2002, p. 157)
- -> The devil was blamed for the persistence of idolatry
- -> but diabolism was seen mainly as threat for individual
- -> **Inquisition**

Focus of Inquisition

- sexual crimes such as polygamy and solicitations of women by priests
- and so-called witchcraft, superstition, and pacts with the devil
 - often seen as linked evils (e.g. various forms of witchcraft were regarded as linked to sexual and amatory themes)



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- An example of linking witchcraft with sexual crimes....
- Photo by Ruth Behar (1985, p. 41), showing a contemporary Mexican sorceress used this doll to "tie" her client's husband to the house



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- Inquisition records show an increase focus on 'pacts with the Devil' from the 16th century onwards.
- According to Behar (p. 43) they were integral part of the 'magical domain of male/female relations' by the 18th century
 - women's pacts were linked with witchcraft while men's pacts were treated as heresy

- However, it is important to note that the Devil was viewed by colonial Mexicans not as a horrible and frightening creature but as a figure who in times of crisis offered ‘solace, conversation, and the illusion of hope’ (Behar, p. 43)



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The People of the Sun



- Dualistic worldview
- Not only in gender relation (male/female as one) but also in cosmological terms such as moon/sun duality
- -> god/devil duality
- -> the devil are capable of good as well as evil

- The devil responded to their problems more directly and quickly than God
 - -> ‘the Devil's magic was more efficacious than the magic of the Church’ (Behar, p. 45)
- According to Behar Christian evangelization produced ‘an infatuation with the Devil and an elaboration of devil-beliefs’ (p. 45)

- Jose Miguel del Sacramento, an acrobat and baker, was brought before the Inquisition of Guadalajara in 1790 for having in his possession this "ridiculous drawing" of the Devil. (from the Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico City)
- Illustration take from Behar's article (p. 44)



Ruth Behar writes ...

- devil pacts implied a (temporary or permanent) 'rejection of the religiosity of sin, guilt, confession, and penance, a sense of being beyond salvation' (Behar, p. 47)
- However, one should not overlook the distinct feature of the devil in Latin America as trickster, dualistic and ambivalent

Michael Taussig writes

- “The Spanish conquest brought a spirit of evil to the Indians of the New World, initiating a process of destruction which that spirit could symbolize” (p. 182)
- -> the devil became local, indigenized



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