

JUNÍPERO SERRA'S CANONIZATION OR EUROCENTRIC  
HETERONOMY

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## ABSTRACT

The article assesses the recent canonization of Junípero Serra, Spanish Franciscan missionary and founder of the California mission system. I begin by introducing the priest and outlining the genesis of his assignment. I then discuss the model of missions' operation and problematize their results. The rise of Serra's legend is situated within the historical context of California's "fantasy heritage". I later outline the chief arguments and metaphors mobilized by the Church in support of the new saint. In the central part of the essay, I address and critically examine the ramifications of a document Serra authored and which the Church took as the priest's passport to sainthood. I argue that the document inaugurated the epistemic and social divides in California and, marking the Indian as *homo sacer* (Agamben), paved the way to the Indigenous genocide in the mission and American eras. Following this, I offer a semiological (after Barthes and Lakoff) interpretation of the canonization as a modern myth, argue that metaphors invoked in support of the priest inverted the historical role played by Serra and, finally, ponder the moral ramifications of this canonization.

Keywords: Junípero Serra; California missions; canonization; *homo sacer*; genocide; modern myth; colonization.

**Heteronomy:** "“subjection to the rule of another power,’ from *hetero-* Greek *nomos* ‘law’; the condition of being under the domination of an *outside* authority, either human or divine”.

(Heteronomy 2017)

On September 23, 2015, during a mass in Washington D.C. Pope Francis canonized Junípero Serra (1713–1784), the first President of the California

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missions. In the article, I first briefly outline the genesis of Serra's assignment and introduce the Spanish Franciscan. I then discuss arguments raised in support of Serra's sainthood indicating that the chief evidence cited in his favor inaugurated the epistemic and social divides in California. I argue that the end result of the priest's actions was to cast the mission Indian as *homo sacer* which paved the way to the Indigenous genocide. Then, I offer a semiological reading of the canonization as modern myth which, by way of "stolen speech", inverted history and reiterated in the present heteronomic relations inaugurated by Serra. Lastly, I ponder the moral ramifications of this canonization.

### 1. Serra's assignment and the priest's profile

In 1768, Serra, stationed at an outpost in Baja California, was commissioned to organize a chain of missions in the neighboring and hitherto unsecured Upper region. Although the Enlightened Bourbons had curtailed the Church's influence in other parts of the empire,<sup>1</sup> news of Russian explorations on the Pacific Northwest prompted suspension of hitherto secularist sentiments. Aware that the distant colony was "unattractive to investors" (Weber 2004: 45) and could not count on regular shipments of supplies from Mexico, and encouraged by Franciscans' proven dedication and proximity (in Baja California since Jesuits' expulsion in 1767) the crown fell back on a retrograde, missionary-based model of pacification.<sup>2</sup> As the Spanish crown "had become increasingly preoccupied with reducing the expense of its overseas empire and making all of its colonies productive within the framework of mercantilism" (Hackel 2005: 273), José de Gálvez, king's Inspector General to New Spain, hoped that the missions would become the new colony's agricultural factories ensuring its self-sustainability. To facilitate this, he granted Franciscans full authority over Indians and mission temporalities (Weber 2004: 45), and, in a move that casts doubt on his enlightened reputation, forbade Indian education in literacy for, as he wrote on June 19, 1769: "I have enough experience that such major instruction perverts and hastens their ruinations" (Gálvez in Castillo 2015: 129). Henceforth baptized Indians or "neophytes" would not be allowed to leave without permission (with exception of annual furloughs) – their life regulated by a regime of labor and prayer which one commentator compared to that of a European monastery (Margolin 1989:

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<sup>1</sup> The 1749 royal policy stipulated that missions should "become doctrinas, the beginning of Indian parishes, ten years after their founding" (Sandos 2004: 11). In the 1750s José de Escandon organized successful civilian expeditions to the province of Nuevo Santander. In 1767 Jesuits were expelled from the Americas.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Sandos calls this a "conservative restoration" (2004: 74). For a succinct, contextual explanation of the reasons for this anomalous measure see, for example, David J. Weber's *Spanish Bourbons and Wild Indians* (2004: 38–44).

15). Thus, although the official objective of the invasion was conversion/civilization, which the name “Sacred Expedition” was meant to describe, the real purpose was more pragmatic: to secure the region by making it self-sufficient with, as historian Steven W. Hackel says, “a minimum of royal support” (2005: 274) and, consequently, with maximum of Native labor overseen by the Franciscans as agents of the state.

Junípero Serra was charged with putting this plan to work. Gálvez found in the fifty-seven years old priest an ideal candidate for the task. Here was a man “with a medieval worldview, the antithesis and enemy of the Enlightenment thinking” (Sandos 2004: 3), known for zeal so fervent that throughout his life he would practice extreme forms of self-mortification (Castillo 2015: 36, Hackel 2013: 32), and respected for his administrative skills (Hackel 2013: 151). Experienced in previous missionary assignments (Fogel 1988: 44–45, Hackel 2013: 84–113) and a *comisario* of the Holy Inquisition (Castillo 2015: 61–62, Fogel 1988: 45–47, Hackel 2013: 114–136), Serra was elated to arrive in what he considered “the last corner of the earth” (Serra in Sandos 2004: 35), where his ambition of creating a Christian utopia in “these last centuries” (Serra in Sandos 2004: 41) would finally come true. Like Columbus, who embarked on his voyage propelled by his readings (Todorov 1987: 3–50), Serra was another type of “Don Quixote” whose motivation was fired by literature or, to be more exact, the colonial chronicles. Since early age, writes Hackel in his biography of the priest, Serra “immersed himself in the chronicles of the order and became enthralled with the lives of leading Franciscans. ... These narratives were anything but dry theological tracts; part of their intent was to inspire young men to devote themselves to Franciscanism, and they were filled with drama and miraculous occurrences” (Hackel 2013: 32). No wonder then that, as Fray Francisco Palóu wrote of his life-long friend, “the principal thing which came out of the reading was the *vehement desire to imitate* these holy and venerable men who had been employed in the conversion of souls, principally those pagan and barbarous peoples” (Palóu et al. 1913: 3; my emphasis).

Among his favorite role models were Saint Francis, as well as a number of New World missionaries including Fray Antonio Llinás and Saint Francisco Solano. Serra often invoked the example of the latter in order to justify violent punishments meted out to mission Indians; a practice which he referred to as an “immemorial custom” (Weber 1988: 38). His letter to Governor Felipe de Neve (January 7, 1780) may serve as a concise illustration of the priest’s staunch, readings-inspired conservatism.<sup>3</sup> He argues there that the fact that, “spiritual fathers punish their sons the Indians with lashes seems to be as old as the conquest

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth analysis of Serra’s conservatism see, for example, James A. Sandos’ chapter “Junípero Serra and Franciscan Evangelization” (Sandos 2004: 33–54).

of these kingdoms and so widespread that even the saints were no exception” (Serra in Sandos 2004: 74). He adds, that in Solano’s biography “[w]e read that ... in operating his mission in the province of Tucumán in Peru ... when they failed to carry out his order he had his Indians whipped by his *fiscales*” (Serra in Sandos 2004: 74). To Serra’s mind disciplinary violence was a didactic instrument and, if saints did it, it was utterly justified.

## 2. The means and cost of the system

In California, Serra established nine missions. His successors would add another twelve before the secularization in 1834. Despite the argument of benevolence raised by proponents of canonization, the missions relied almost exclusively on coercion and their model of operation has often been compared to slavery.<sup>4</sup> Serra’s earlier assignment at missions in Sierra Gorda had already drawn serious accusations of cruel despotism. In January 1762, the Fernandinos were accused of “‘exorbitant harshness, unbearable work, the cruelest punishments, and the treatment that was at odds with the gentleness, moderation, and affection’ required by Spanish law” (Hackel 2013: 109). Alta California missions did not stray from this pattern. Whippings of up to one hundred lashes (Cook 1976: 125) were executed by friars, soldiers, and Indian overseers or *alcaldes*. Shackles and stocks were in common use. Serra left ample testimonies illustrating his preferred methods of instruction. In a letter to Commander Fernando Rivera y Moncada, dated July 31, 1775, the priest explains why and how captured deserters or those whom he calls *his* “lost sheep” (Serra in Castillo 2015: 79) should be disciplined:

I am sending four of these ... . They are Cristóbal, Carlos, Geronimo, and Ildefonso, all married men. Their wives are staying here ... . The first three have deserted a number of times, and although they have been punished at various times, there is no sign of amendment. This is the first desertion of the fourth, who is now Christian: but he stayed away a long time. However, his character is that he could become the ringleader. ... I am sending them to you so that a period of exile, and two or three whippings ... applied to them on different days may serve, for them and for all the rest, for a warning, may be of spiritual benefit to all; and this last is the prime motive of our work. If Your Lordship does not have shackles ... they may be sent from here. ... the punishment should last one month.

(Serra in Castillo 2015: 79)

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Robert Archibald’s *Indian Labor at the California Missions: Slavery or Salvation?* (1978); Daniel Fogel’s *Junipero Serra, the Vatican, and the Enslavement Theology* (1988); Elias Castillo’s *A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California’s Indians by the Spanish Missions* (2015).

The rationale for violence is this: the fugitives are to be taught a lesson because, despite previous instruction and punishments, they have not yet shown improvement. The instinct of the Inquisitor shows in Serra here – in Ildefonso he smells a potential trouble-maker and thus the Indian's character must be broken in advance. Apart from physical punishment a psychological impact must be sought; hence emphasis on extended exile and separation from families; their wives, as Hackel says, “under lock and key” (Hackel 2013: 201). All of this is explained as being of “spiritual benefit.” In other words, violence and privation are means to a greater end. The immediate goal is a public spectacle which will serve as “a warning.” But the more fundamental or “prime motive” is Indian salvation. It is therefore a higher motivation and, crucially, a subjective motivation of the perpetrator that explains violence. As Hackel reminds us, “corporal punishment was essential to Fernandinos' effectiveness and [Serra] averred that ‘everyone knows that the padres love the Indians’” (Hackel 2013: 201). Thus the moral code underpinning this logic can be described as theodicy which justifies the existence of Evil as, to adopt Jean Paul Sartre's definition, “a condition of a greater Good” (2012 [1963]: 227).

Alternatively, in the above excerpt we could identify an impulse not unlike, what Michel Foucault defines as, the modern “theoretical disavowal: do not imagine that the sentences that we judges pass are activated by a desire to punish; they are intended to correct, reclaim, ‘cure’” (Foucault 1991: 10). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault argues that between “the years 1760–1840” (Foucault 1991: 15), that is, around the time of Serra's arrival in California and almost concurrently with the California mission era a great transformation occurred in European penal systems which introduced “a whole new morality concerning the act of punishment” (Foucault 1991: 12).<sup>5</sup> In that period public spectacles of torture which had taken “the body as the major target of penal repression disappeared” and the objective of the penalty shifted: “one touched the body” only in order “to reach something other than the body itself” (Foucault 1991: 11). The punishment moved “[f]rom being an art of unbearable sensations ... [to] an economy of suspended rights” (Foucault 1991: 11), because the central questions now asked did not concern the crime but, rather, “the ‘soul’ of the criminal” (Foucault 1991: 19). If Foucault talks of *diachronic* transformations of European secular institutions at the service of bio-politics or modern state's techniques of population control our focus on the missions reveals the latter as important predecessors to the processes described by the French scholar. As the case of Cristóbal, Carlos, Geronimo, and Ildefonso, as well as

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault says: “‘Modern’ codes were planned or drawn up: Russia, 1769; Prussia, 1780; Pennsylvania and Tuscany, 1786; Austria, 1788; France, 1791, Year IV, 1808 and 1810. It was a new age for penal justice” (Foucault 1991: 7).

other examples, illustrate at the missions two disciplinary models operated *simultaneously* – medieval, which involved public torture, floggings, shackles, stocks, and rituals of public humiliation,<sup>6</sup> and “modern”, which prioritized suspension of the subject’s rights (period of exile, separation from wives, withdrawal from sight).<sup>7</sup> The peripheral mission thus resides beyond and before the linearity of the modern European history of disciplining described by Foucault. It is indeed a “peculiar institution”, because it is situated at a threshold of at least three types of economies – theological, capitalist, and paternal – and therefore its disciplinary practices and motivations are liminal: heterogeneous and contradictory. It could be argued that the modern penalty’s concern (since the Enlightenment) with the individual’s “soul” and its “cure” removed from the public eye comes into existence as an extension of the bio-political processes already tested at the missions. The birth of the prison would be in this sense consequent and contingent on the birth of the mission.

Both theodicy and this more “modern” concern with the soul may explain why, when California missions started to reap a catastrophic human toll – rape and venereal diseases introduced by Spanish soldiers, concentration of populations in filthy conditions, and chronic malnutrition quickly led to epidemics and mass deaths (Sandos 2004: 111–127) – Serra expressed, what historian Elias Castillo terms summarily as “dark joy” (Castillo 2015: 82).<sup>8</sup> On July 24, 1775 the priest wrote: “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” (Serra in Castillo 2015: 82; my emphasis). But

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<sup>6</sup> In 1815 a Russian, Vassili Petrovitch Tarakanoff, was taken prisoner at Mission San Fernando. In his “Statement of My Captivity among the Californians”, we find this account of the punishments executed to runaway Indians: “Some of the runaway men were tied on sticks and beaten with straps. One chief was taken out to the open field, and a young calf which had just died was skinned, and the chief was sawn into the skin while it was yet warm. He was kept tied to a stake all day, but he died soon, and they kept his corpse tied up. The Spaniards must have put some poison on the calfskin that killed the man” (Tarakanoff in Castillo 2015: 177). Sandos describes how Indian women suspected of abortions were treated: “The suspected abortionist’s head was shaved, she was flogged for up to fifteen consecutive days, a shackle was placed upon her legs for up to three months, she was forced to wear sackcloth, to rub her face with ashes, and to carry with her at all times a wooden effigy of a child, painted red. On Sundays she had to stand with the doll at the entrance to the church and receive the jeers and verbal abuse of her fellow congregants. Franciscans visited these punishments upon women, most of them administered in the medieval tradition of the public humiliation of sinners, throughout the mission system” (Sandos 2004: 102).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Sandos reminds us, “Indian women were flogged in the *monjerio* so that Indian men would not hear their cries and be enflamed against the missionaries” (Sandos 2004: 102).

<sup>8</sup> Sherburne F. Cook found out that “the calories per person per day would not exceed 1,000” (Cook 1976: 43). This means that the daily rations were lower than in Auschwitz.

whose spirit does Serra have exactly in mind? Interpreted from an eschatological point of view Serra did not mourn the children, because they were going straight to heaven in droves. Or, perhaps, like the Biblical plagues of Egypt he interpreted these deaths as divine chastisement? This would be a theodicean approach. But, if we think of the children's deaths as the ultimate forms of privation which their parents were to endure then it was perhaps the surviving parents' "spiritual side", their souls that Serra was elated to touch just as he was touching their bodies by coercive work and public floggings.

The missions destroyed many Indigenous communities and cultures, and laid the groundwork for contempt for Native humanity leading to, what one commentator considers, "the largest ethnic cleansing in North America" (Carac 2015). California's pre-1769 population has been variously estimated. In the 1940s Sherburne F. Cook cited the number of 133 500 (Cook 1976: 4). Recent studies give larger estimates: James A. Sandos – 310 000 (Sandos 2004: 14), Castillo – 350 000 (Castillo 2015: 44). Native American writer, Deborah A. Miranda, speaks of "California's Indigenous peoples, numbering over one million at the time [of contact]" (Miranda 2013: xvii). Statistical information on the population decline illustrates the scale of destruction. According to Sandos, approximately twenty percent (65 000) of California's total population had lived in the coastal region which fell under immediate Spanish mission influence (Sandos 2004: 14). By 1820 this number had dropped by seventy four percent to 22 000 (Sandos 2004: 1). By the end of the 1850s, with the rapid influx of Anglo settlers and gold seekers, the total California Native population dropped to about 30 000 – "an 80 percent decline in just twelve years" (Sandos 2004: 183) and more than a ninety percent drop compared to the original total population of the province in 1769. By 1890 this dwindled further to 16 624 (Castillo 2015: 200) and by 1900 to 15 377 (Jackson & Castillo 1995: 109). Thus, within 130 years, in the region where previously more than one hundred languages had been in use (Starr 2005: 13), the Indigenous total population was slashed by ninety five percent.

The dramatic population drop in the post-1850 American era has long overshadowed the grim statistics of the mission period. However, it should be noted, already by 1820 one Franciscan President, Fray Mariano Payeras (1815–1819), pondered the scale of devastation the institution he ran was, he realized, responsible for. As he observed the rapidity of Indian deaths he asked why "we find ourselves with missions or rather a people miserable and sick ... which with profound horror fills the cemeteries" (Payeras in Castillo 2015: 154). For him, the priests' proselytizing tasks essentially came down to the following: "[t]he missionary priest baptized them [Indians], administered the Sacraments to them, and buried them" (Payeras in Sandos 2004: 105).

Such calls to conscience however fell on deaf ears. Due to a number of factors – scarcity of settlers, the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1821), the emergence of the Mexican state, and the expansion of foreign trade relations – California’s economy depended almost exclusively on mission products. Thus neophytes’ deaths, as well as their “absenteeism and feigned illness” (Hackel 2005: 286) hindered production and were reason for economic rather than ethical anxiety. To amend this, already in 1803 a vice royal edict ordered “‘active recruitment’ by whatever means necessary” (Dartt-Newton 2011: 101), “[b]y 1810 extensive expeditions in search of fugitives were established” (Cook 1976: 76) and, as Cook asserts, “toward the end of the mission period all pretense of voluntary conversion was discarded and expeditions to the interior were frankly for the purpose of military subjugation and forced conversion” (Cook 1976: 76). Missions turned into insatiable labor gulags; economic factors coupled with contempt for Indian humanity – in 1792 a visitor called California Natives “the most stupid as well as the ugliest and the filthiest of the natives of America” (Navarete in Miranda 2013: 63) – effectively screened from view the darker side of the institution.

Another reason why the mission system’s moral legitimation remained largely unquestioned was that when after secularization Indians dispersed and missions fell into decay, arriving commentators saw in their ruins and abandoned fields picturesque spectacles suggestive of the region’s putative Arcadian beginnings, California’s “Golden Age” (Engelhardt 1915: 599) when life was “easy and indolent” (McWilliams 1968 [1949]: 35). Clearly, as Carey McWilliams sarcastically put it, “[t]he climate was so mild, the soil so fertile, that Indians merely cast seeds on the ground . . . and relaxed in the shade of the nearest tree . . . . Occasionally one of the field-hands would interrupt his siesta long enough to open one eye and lazily watch the corn stalks shooting up in the golden light” (McWilliams 1968 [1949]: 35).

### 3. The myth and its discontents

McWilliams famously referred to this version of California’s inaugural scene as “fantasy heritage” (McWilliams 1968 [1949]: 35–47). Mike Davis calls it the state’s “ersatz history” (Davis 1992: 30). For Anglo settlers the missions became, as Charles Fletcher Lummis put it, “the best capital Southern California has” (Lummis, as quoted in Davis 1992: 24). Turned into metonymies of the new state’s benevolent past they became postcard attractions contributing to further repression of the system’s horrific legacy. Everything-mission, i.e., the region’s signature Mission Revival architecture,<sup>9</sup> was turned into ubiquitous signs

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<sup>9</sup> The style of Mission Revival made its debut when the California Building was unveiled at



generative of assuaging nostalgia which, after anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, we can term as an “imperialist” (Rosaldo 1989: 71) form of mystification which “uses compelling tenderness to draw attention away from ... inequality” (Rosaldo 1989: 87). Miranda renders this in the following definition: “Mission Mythology of Happy Indians Working at Productive and Useful Chores Instead of Lolling about the Undeveloped and Wasted Paradise of California” (Miranda 2013: 63).

It is in this context that we should see the rise of Serra's legend. It was Lummis, California's greatest promoter, who in 1909 (Weber 1988: 101) first began to campaign for his sainthood. He was building on a well-established tradition dating back to 1787 when Palóu's hagiography of Serra appeared. Helen Hunt Jackson's sentimental novel *Ramona* (1884) brought millions of tourists to California. Moved by the lot of California Indians the author of *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) wrote it as a call to her readers' conscience. However, the novel's sentimental romance story of Ramona, the beautiful mestiza, effectively disarmed its political edge. Replete with reverence for Serra the novel created what cultural geographer Dydia DeLyser calls “a new social memory for the region” (DeLyser 2004: 886). In 1912, John Steven McGroarty's *The Mission Play*, eventually seen by more than 2,5 million people, substantially contributed to the myth's growth (Bokovoy 2002).<sup>10</sup> In 1931 Serra became officially California's Founding Father when his statue was placed in the National Statuary Hall on the Capitol. In 1934 the Vatican appointed a Historical Commission for Serra's sainthood. Although, as Sandos (1988: 1255–1259) points out, many scholars (Cook, McWilliams, J.P. Harrington, Hubert H. Bancroft) had already questioned the system's benevolence the Commission – chaired by Hebert Eugene Bolton, the dean of the Spanish Borderlands studies – testified in favor of sainthood in 1948. Pope John Paul II beatified Serra in 1988 and Francis sealed the case with the canonization of 2015.

Both the beatification and canonization were steeped in controversy. Critics saw them as monumental acts of moral injury to collective memory of Indigenous victims and their descendants. Chicano writer José Antonio Burciaga wrote in 1988: “A beatification and canonization of Junipero Serra would be another insensitive denial of past oppression and maltreatment of California Indians and Indo-Hispanics” (Burciaga 1988: 192). When in 2015 plans for canonization were announced demonstrations, marches, and vigils in memory of victims of the system followed. Multiple letters of protest (Carac 2015), books (Castillo 2015), dramas (*IYA the Esselen Remember* 2015, at CSU Monterey Bay, dir. Luis Xago

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the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. On the wave of its popularity Californians began to build the architectural version of the fantasy heritage. The prime example of this phenomenon of material simulacra is the Mission Inn in Riverside.

<sup>10</sup> In what can be termed as another build-up for the canonization, The Mission Play was restaged at McGroarty's San Gabriel Mission Playhouse in 2013.

Juarez), and an appeal before the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Chairman Valentin Lopez [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band] on April 23, 2015) mobilized public opinion. The Vatican remained unmoved. Just days before the papal mass the Holy See issued a statement explaining that, it "had the best historians take a look at Serra's life ... and they all conclude that Serra is worthy of sainthood ... and they are recommending ... [it] with a clear conscience" (Lopez 2015).

#### 4. The rationale behind the canonization

In what follows, I address the key argument, raised by the Church in the run-up to the canonization and reiterated by the pope during the Washington mass, that Serra was an enlightened defender of Indigenous rights. Francis said: "Junípero sought to *defend the dignity* of the native community, to *protect* it from those who had mistreated and abused it" (my emphasis). At the end of the sermon the friar acquired a status of a progressive, empathetic individual: "Father Serra had a motto ... which shaped the way he lived: *siempre adelante!* Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way ... *to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized*. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. ... because his brothers and sisters were waiting" (Francis 2015; my emphasis). During the canonization campaign Father Thomas Reese said: "Junípero Serra was a *good man* in the sense that he *loved* the Native Americans. He *tried to do ... what was good for them*" (Reese in Poggioli 2015; my emphasis). Similarly, José H. Gómez, the Archbishop of Los Angeles, characterized Serra's relations with the Native community as marked by "tender mercy" and "compassion" (Gómez 2015). Serra, Gómez added, was motivated by "deepest ... religious, spiritual and *humanitarian*" calling, by "a *burning love* for the land and its people" (Gómez 2015; my emphasis). Gómez argued further that Serra, whose "writings reflect *genuine respect* for the indigenous people and their ways", "*loved his people* [Indians] with a *father's love*" always acting as their "*protector and defender*" (Gómez 2015; my emphasis).

As key evidence purportedly attesting to the priest's immaculate reputation *Representación*, a document authored by Serra and presented to the viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa in 1773, was cited. It was argued that this memorandum of "more than eight thousand words" (Hackel 2013: 190) and containing thirty two suggestions as to the administration of Alta California expressed what Gómez characterized as Serra's "radical call for justice for the Indigenous peoples living in the missions" (Gómez 2015). For Ruben Mendoza, member of the papal panel of historians, *Representación* stood as evidence 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" (Mendoza in Theobald 2015; my

emphasis). Gómez called the memorandum “a landmark of Catholic social teaching and a primary document in the history of human rights,” “probably the first ‘bill of rights’ published in North America” (Gómez in Grabowski 2015). Similarly, Monsignor Francis J. Weber referred to Serra’s points as the “‘Bill of Rights’ for Indians” in which, “Serra showed himself to be a defender of the Indians’ human rights” (Weber 2015). Thus Serra became “one of the *great pioneers of human rights* in the Americas” (Gómez 2015; my emphasis).

To summarize, Serra was represented with metaphors evoking purely positive affect. In the tradition of cognitive linguistics I explain them in capital letters: LOVING FATHER, PROTECTOR, etc.<sup>11</sup> In the Church’s words he was a MAN OF JOY, COMPASSION, LOVE. Despite his documented disciplinary authoritarianism and staunch conservatism (contempt for Enlightenment, geocentric beliefs, millenarian theological convictions, public corporal punishments, etc.) he was cast as a PROGRESSIVE HUMANITARIAN distinguished by RESPECT FOR THE OTHER. California Indians were metaphorized as BROTHERS AND SISTERS, PEOPLE, COMMUNITY, that is, in terms evoking egalitarianism. If Indians were abused, it was done by “those” others while Serra was their DEFENDER. In short, an image of TENDER NURTURING FATHER and PIONEER OF HUMAN RIGHTS was evoked.

### 5. Representación

Does historical evidence confirm this image? Was *Representación* indeed a “Bill of Rights for Indians”? The priest wrote it frustrated with a prolonged conflict with military commander Pedro Fages. Hackel says: “They disagreed over the size of the military escort needed for the planned Mission San Buenaventura, the distribution and storage of provisions for soldiers at the missions, the allocation of mules between missions and the presidios, and *the division of power between soldiers and missionaries ... especially in matters concerning Indians*” (Hackel 2013: 185–186; my emphasis). Fundamentally, Fages challenged the Franciscans’ claim to exclusive authority over the mission Indians believing that, “if left to his own devices, [Serra] would punish Indians arbitrarily and put soldiers in harm’s way” (Hackel 2013: 186). As was said before, Gálvez had granted such authority to Serra prior to the invasion but faced with Fages’

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<sup>11</sup> The typographic capitalization of concepts and conceptual (cognitive) metaphors used in this section and elsewhere (NURTURANT PARENT, PROTECTOR, etc.) is derived from a widely-accepted typographic convention used in cognitive linguistics. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) popularized that practice. In *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics* (2006), Friedrich Ungerer and Hans-Jörg Schmid use a slightly different convention of “+ signs and small capitals” (Ungerer & Schmid 2006: ix). I decided on the early model by Lakoff and Johnson.

opposition the priest was forced to seek the mandate's renewal. Anthropologist Christine Grabowski provides a detailed analysis of the *Representación* and proves that, contrary to assertions made by the proponents of the canonization, none of its points "discussed Indian complaints or desires": "There is no mention of Indian rights or privileges in the title and none included in any of the 32 'suggestions'" (Grabowski 2015). Rather, the *Representación* defended Serra's "position vis-à-vis the commanding officer" (Grabowski 2015). Hackel explains: "Serra wanted the viceroy to clarify the extent of the padres' authority over Indians. Thus, Serra – in the most important point of his memorandum – asked Bucareli not for new powers but for *formal acknowledgement of the powers that Serra presumed the Franciscans already had*" (Hackel 2013: 192; my emphasis). Simply put, Serra sought confirmation that, in the words of the *Representación*, "the training, governance, punishment, and upbringing of the baptized Indians, and those who will be baptized, pertain exclusively to the missionary fathers" (Serra in Hackel 2013: 192). Serra's argument was that, "such policy had been the custom in New Spain since its 'conquest,' and it was '*in uniformity with the law of nature concerning the upbringing of children*, and an essential condition for the proper education of the poor neophytes'" (Serra in Hackel 2013: 192; my emphasis). Thus, requesting "*exclusive control over the baptized Indians except with respect to capital offenses*" (Grabowski 2015; my emphasis) Serra reduced Indians to children and invoked the paternalistic model sanctioned by nature and custom. Only such an arrangement would give him a "near-complete control over the Indians" and a check on the military (Hackel 2013: 192).

In May 1773, having deliberated with his counsel, the viceroy "granted nearly everything [Serra] had asked for" (Hackel 2013: 193): "[t]he management, control, punishment, and education of baptized Indians" (Serra in Sandos 2004: 53) would henceforth belong to the Franciscans. This was what Hackel calls Serra's "important bureaucratic and administrative victory" (2013: 193) but, it must be underscored, it did not result in any rights or privileges for Indians. Grabowski calls the Church's "claim that Serra's increased authority ... gave Natives 'rights'" a "gross distortion" (Grabowski 2015).

#### 6. *Representación* reassessed

Neither Hackel nor Grabowski explore the larger ramifications of the law instituted as a result of Serra's intervention in the capital. Yet I believe it is exactly here that the most problematic part of the priest's legacy begins. For the decision to grant missionaries exclusive, parental control or *loco parentis* "to manage the mission Indians as a father would manage his family" (Engelhardt 1915: 117) had, as I aim to argue, disastrous consequences.

The vicerojal decision lifted the state oversight over the mission Indians. From now on they would remain under the missionary's authority. Exempt not only from obligations but also from protections available to all other citizens they remained part of the polity only as exceptions. Missions were routinely established in areas of large Native concentration, usually at or near original settlements. In other words, the Indians were the host populations with anterior titles to their homelands. If the colonial intrusion was rationalized by marking the Indians as pagans to be converted (hence the "Sacred Expedition") now, as a result of Serra's plea, the Native populations were turned into political and epistemic exiles – under the paternalistic type of relationship, reduced collectively to children with a Franciscan as a father of this extended family they were stripped of any anterior privileges and exiled from maturity, they lost their title to the land as well as to full humanity. To such *diminished* people friars descended promising, in return for spiritual and physical work, guidance in Natives' indefinitely extendable process of ascent to maturity, civility, salvation. At California missions we find a locus in which the work theology based on the precept of salvation through work finds its apotheosis, meeting the politics of colonialism and epistemic coloniality. Serra and his cadre served as spiritual and civil leaders, and ultimate judges; they assessed the Indian progress toward the ever elusive divine, civil, or individual (rational) norm.

The result of Serra's intervention was thus an institutionalization of heteronomic relations in California – social, moral, and epistemic norms were now being imposed by an outside force, the mission padres, while Indians' collective or individual autonomy was subject to purgation although, it must be noted, this was never a smooth nor one-directional process. Throughout the mission period the Indians both adapted and resisted, strategically negotiating their subjectivity within the heteronomic model. These negotiations could range from what psychologist Edward Jones terms "protective ingratiation" – a technique "by which a subordinate assumes the behavior the superior wants in order to minimize or avoid further interference in the subordinate's life" (Jones 1964, quoted in Sandos 2004: 6) – to open military rebellions and everything in between, including poisoning of priests, fleeing, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas in other parts of the Empire the Spanish crown reformed the mission system, for example, by introducing and enforcing a ten-year limit on missions' operation,<sup>13</sup> the case of California missions is peculiar, for the colony's distance

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the Indigenous resistance see, for example, James A. Sandos' *Converting California* (2004: 154–173), Elias Castillo's *A Cross of Thorns* (2015: 161–190), or Sherburne F. Cook's *The Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization* (1976: 226–233).

<sup>13</sup> For a concise overview of Bourbon reforms with regard to colonized Indians see, for example, David J. Weber's *Spanish Bourbons and Wild Indians* (2004).

from the capital and its dependence on products of Indian labor discouraged change for decades and demanded a perpetual renewal of the premise of Indian inferiority. Thus, Franciscans argued, Indians were ever not yet there, including not yet human. In other words, Franciscans were the guardians of the ontological difference between *gente de razón* and *gente sin razón* – those with and without reason. Well into the nineteenth century the friars described their converts as “lower animals” (in Castillo 2015: 93), belonging to the “species of monkeys” (in Castillo 2015: 52). When in 1803, Fermin Lasuén, the second *Padre Presidente*, responded to accusations of brutality at the missions, he did not recognize even a glimmer of the sovereign Indigenous subjectivity in Indians’ refusal to abandon their traditional way of life.<sup>14</sup> Instead, he complained that they were still “murmuring after” their “free and ... lazy” (Lasuén in Sandos 2004: 93) lifestyle. For him, this was a sign of “addiction”, a certain Indian feeble-mindedness, to use a nineteenth-century jargon, which had to be rooted out with the force of the mission guards, the inevitability of their pursuits, and certainty of punishment. Only such a strict enforcement of their “denaturalizing”, Lasuén argued, would make “a savage race such as these” “realize that they are *men*” and eventually become “*human*, Christian, civil and accomplished” (Lasuén in Sandos 2004: 92; my emphasis). How long would it take? California Governor (1794–1800), Diego de Borica, Lasuén’s friend and a fellow Basque, perhaps shed light on the missionary-gubernatorial consensus when he said that, “at the rate they [the Mission Indians] are progressing, [they] will not become so [i.e., human, Christian, civil, accomplished] in ten centuries” (Borica in Weber 1992: 262). It is well-documented however that it was the priests, not the Indians, who held the keys to Indian “progress” and deliberately opted for programmed “backwardness”. Gálvez’s ban on Indian instruction in the alphabet was the original disincentive, masses were held entirely in Latin, friars resisted mechanical and labor efficiency innovations “to keep Indians busy” (Sandos 2004: 101), when in 1793 the crown finally lifted Gálvez’s ban ordering instruction in reading and writing the padres “shrugged their shoulders ... and simply ignored” (Castillo 2015: 130) it. Thus the status Serra secured for the mission Indians can perhaps be best rendered as an existence at a complex threshold: outside the social, divine, ontological norms, in a temporal limbo, excepted from moral deliberations.

According to Giorgio Agamben the state of exception can be genealogically traced back in the Western world to the Roman legal category of *homo sacer*.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1798, friar Concepción Horra wrote an extended letter of complaint to the viceroy where he alleged that, “[t]he manner in which the Indians are treated is by far more cruel than anything I have ever read about. For any reason, however insignificant it may be, they are severely and cruelly whipped, placed in shackles, or put in the stocks for days on end without receiving even a drop of water” (Horra, as quoted in Sandos 2004: 87).

*Homo sacer* defined a person subject to “the sovereign ban” (Agamben 1998: 83), removed from any form of state or religious protection, without any rights, who could “be killed by anyone” (Agamben 1998: 86) and such an act “did not constitute sacrilege” (Agamben 1998: 82), because *homo sacer* stands for “life devoid of value” (Agamben 1998: 139), “bare life” (Agamben 1998: 4), life reduced to biology. What transgressions pushed one out onto that abyss “outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law” (Agamben 1998: 81)? Agamben reminds that in the Roman law these were, for example, “*terminum exarare*” or illegal crossing of borders, and “*verberatio parentis*” or “the violence of the son against the parent” (Agamben 1998: 85).

Consider now that *Las siete partidas*, a Castilian legal code based on Roman sources and drafted in 1265, was enormously influential in the Spanish colonies and remained until the nineteenth century the principal template upon which all other laws were based. Its Section Four describes the absolute power of the father to, for example, sell his children to slavery or “eat his own son with *no damage to his reputation*” (in Nichols 1932: 277; my emphasis). In other words, the Section describes the paternal relations as facilitating the production of *homo sacer* in a more recent era and absolves its results by the injunction to paternal obedience. Francisco Vitoria’s *Natural Laws* (1550), the first of colonial laws which designated Indians as wards of the Church (Menchaca 2001: 53) and instituted missionaries’ *loco parentis*, were based on *Las siete partidas*. The colonial mission, operating under the paternalistic arrangement, must be therefore seen within this line of filiation. Note that if in the Roman code illegal crossing of borders and defiance of the father resulted in being doomed, at California missions a similar lot awaited Indian fugitives (illegal crossers) and the recalcitrant (like Ildefonso) – they were routinely subject to exile, torture, punished “sometimes to the point of death” (Archibald 1978). Considering the fact that, as M. C. Mirow says, “[l]aw and legal institutions served the crown’s needs of conquest and colonization” (Mirow 2004: 11) it may be posited that the 1773 ban created the necessary legal instruments which, rooted in pronouncements of the *Natural Laws* and the *Partidas*, extended the original category of *homo sacer* onto the host-turned-alien Indigenous Californians. The legal framework thus established, while exposing Indians to unconditional precariousness, not only shielded the friars’ conscience but also, and more immediately, *their reputation*.

If the common explanations of the missionary violence cite overzealousness, theodicy, “immemorial customs,” expediency of Indian labor, or the modern motivation of touching the soul, it seems to me that by accounting for the legal genealogy of the mission-arrangement we may begin to tap into a more fundamental “custom”, the Law, which as “a mechanism of political and cultural hegemony” (Mirow 2004: 11) sanctioned at the missions a model of panoptic

oversight based as a principle on its exemption from the due process of law. It was this state of being outside the law, of being, to adopt Agamben's definition of *homo sacer*, "included in the juridical order ... solely in the form of ... exclusion" (Agamben 1998: 8), that Serra fought for and secured. Authorizing unconditionality and imminence of paternal sanctions, it underwrote the relations of domination and exploitation at the missions. This is, it seems, a more accurate account of the legacy of *Representación*. It should be kept in mind as an antidote to the fiction of tender stewardship or, what George Lakoff defines as the "Nurturant Parent Model" (Lakoff 2009: 81), which metaphors like FATHER'S LOVE generate when used out of or despite historical context.

In *The origins of totalitarianism* Hanna Arendt proposes that the "loss of national rights [is] identical with loss of human rights" (Arendt 1973: 292), that is, "[t]he Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, [prove] to be unenforceable ... whenever people ... [are] no longer citizens" (Arendt 1973: 293). Building on this, Agamben proposes that the refugee is Modernity's *homo sacer* – deprived of human rights precisely because he/she is stateless, an alien to the polity: "When their rights are no longer the rights of the citizen, that is when human beings are truly *sacred* ... doomed to death" (Agamben 2008: 93). In other words, the production of the bio-political bare life is contingent on citizenship and statelessness. If so, argues Agamben, the early twentieth-century European refugee camp stands as a predecessor to the concentration camp. It is this genealogy that is responsible for what became a standard preliminary legal procedure of Nazi extermination policies – stripping victims of citizenship, their denationalization "either," wrote Hauptsturmführer Dannecker, "prior to, or, at the latest, on the day of deportation" (Dannecker in Arendt 1973: 280). Agamben thus proposes a triad of succession: "internment camps-concentration camps-extermination camps" (Agamben 2008: 93) and consequently considers the refugee the "central figure of our political history" (Agamben 2008: 93).

However, bearing in mind the example of the post-1773 status of the California mission Indian as the polity's internal alien I propose to amend Agamben's tripartite genealogy by an occluded colonial precursor – the result of what Walter D. Mignolo calls Modernity's "Atlantic detour" (Mignolo 2011: 57) – the denationalized/denaturalized neophyte/inmate of the mission. In other words, I want to argue that modern bio-politics does not first emerge in Europe of the early twentieth century as Agamben postulates. Nor does it begin in Western Europe at the height of the Enlightenment when, as Foucault argues, "the entire economy of punishment was redistributed" (Foucault 1991: 7). Rather, it comes into existence in the colonial periphery from the late fifteenth century onwards.<sup>15</sup> For clarity, we can add that it is not the institution of colonial slavery

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<sup>15</sup> Michele de Cuneo, member of Columbus' second expedition, left a report which describes



that stands at the origins of the modern camp for, as Arendt says, “slaves were not, like concentration-camp inmates, withdrawn from the sight and hence the protection of their fellow-men; as instruments of labor they had a definite price and as property a definite value. The concentration-camp inmate has no price, because he can always be replaced” (Arendt 1973: 444). It is the condition of the mission neophyte at such sites as Solano’s or Serra’s missions that parallels the condition of the camp inmate: subject to the sovereign ban, removed from view by a policy of “reduction,”<sup>16</sup> and, as we saw, exposed to unconditional precariousness and entirely substitutable. Therefore it is the missions’ Indigenous Other who must be considered the original protagonist of *our* political formation and the repressed resident of *our* political unconscious. A revised diachronic succession of the modern bio-politics thus conceived would read: missions-internment camps-concentration camps-extermination camps. This proposition is consistent with Mignolo’s argument that “bio-political techniques enacted on colonial populations returned as a boomerang to Europe in the Holocaust. ... Hitler re-activated technologies of control and racist ideology that European actors and institutions had applied to the non-European population” (Mignolo 2011: 139–140). My analysis illustrates Mignolo’s assertion that, “colonies were not a secondary and marginal event in the history of Europe, but ... on the contrary, the colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe” (Mignolo 2011: 140). It is in this context that McWilliams’ oft-contested (see Sandos 2004: 179) comparison – “With the best theological intentions in the world, the Franciscan padres eliminated Indians with the effectiveness of Nazis operating concentration camps” (McWilliams 1994 [1946]: 29) – begins to sound less outrageous and reveals the social historian’s profound intuition expressed merely months after WWII and at the apex of the “fantasy heritage”.

The 1948 *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (CPPCG), Article II, letter c) defines genocide as “*Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part*” (CPPCG 1948: 280; my emphasis). I believe that it is this definition of genocide as deliberate conditions that is of particular

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what can be termed as an early concentration camp organized by Columbus on a Caribbean island: “When our caravels ... were to leave for Spain, we gathered in our settlement one thousand six hundred male and female persons of these Indians, and of these we embarked in our caravels on February 17, 1495, five hundred fifty souls among the healthiest males and females” (Cuneo in Todorov 1987: 47). When the ships “reached the waters off Spain, around two hundred of these Indians died.” Cuneo concludes: “We cast them into the sea” (Cuneo in Todorov 1987: 48).

<sup>16</sup> As early as 1503 Spaniards introduced a policy of relocating Indians to “*reducciones*” or reductions, places where Native populations were concentrated and which facilitated access to their labor, promoted Christianization, and detribalization or destruction of kinship ties.

importance, for it names the body of processes which facilitate, make possible, enable the phenomena described in two earlier letters of the same Article: “a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious mental and bodily harm to members of the group” (CPPCG 1948: 280). Serra’s appeal to the capital and the resultant vice royal decrees created exactly such conditions under which violence or murder were if not directly prescribed then at least deliberately condoned and this, consequently, led to genocidal practices and outcomes. If this seems stretched consider that it was the state of exception in the Mexican law that provided the legal justification for Indian extermination in California’s American period. Historian of the Southwest, Martha Menchaca, reminds that the California Supreme Court’s 1850 ruling in *Suñol v. Hepburn* recognized that although under the Mexican Constitution of 1824 Indians acquired citizenship they had not been granted “any constitutional rights ... because emancipated Indians had been given the same constitutional status as lunatics, children, women, and other people dependent upon the state (*Suñol v. Hepburn*, 1850: 279)” (Menchaca 2001: 220). Citing this precedent the court ruled that Christian Indians in California “had never had, and should not be given any U.S. constitutional rights” (Menchaca 2001: 220). Although the decision references Plan de Iguala (1821) and the Mexican Constitution, it seems that it was the missions which provided a more direct, on-the-ground support for the verdict’s certainty. Invoking a link to an anterior framework the Supreme Court offered a legal and moral mandate for the U.S. Congress to commission “the War Department to clear hundreds of thousands of acres ... for the arrival of Anglo-American settlers” (Menchaca 2001: 223). As a result, by 1855 the Indian population plummeted to 50 000. To put it simply, the genocide of the American era – that “spectacular” event many historians agree upon (Lutz 1985: 90–101, Hurtado 1988, Heizer 1993, Trafzer & Hyer 1999, Lindsey 2015, Madley 2016) – was not aberrant nor incidental but, rather, a logical step in the unfolding colonial history of California in which the events of 1773 – the *Representación* and its vice royal approval – are, after Jean Baudrillard, the “determinant instance” (Baudrillard 1981: 146). Such a phylogenetic analysis reveals Serra not as an agent of humanitarianism but the architect of Indigenous gehenna.

## 7. The Barthesian myth

In the light of the above, the decision of the Church to cast the colonial nadir which the *Representación* stands for as the high point of humanitarianism and to make it synonymous with Serra’s passport to sainthood must be assessed as based on subreption. Perhaps the best way to understand its mechanism is to apply a semiological analysis after Roland Barthes’ theory of modern myth. Barthes defines “myth” as a “speech stolen and restored. Only, speech which is restored

is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place. It is this brief act of larceny, this moment taken for surreptitious faking, which gives mythical speech its benumbed look” (Barthes 1984: 9). According to Barthes, myth appropriates or “steals” that which is well-defined and univocal and fills it with new, hollowed out content. Myth, as Manuel Peña explains, destroys pre-existing historical complexities, and offers its “own superimposed messages” (Peña 2012: 17), a drained out, unproblematic summary. Or, as Barthes says, “the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains” (1984: 5). Barthes uses the metaphor of a “constantly moving turnstile” (1984: 7) to explain the way the myth ingrains itself in perception. Briefly, he argues that myth relies on two semiological systems, denotative and connotative, which enter into a “staggered” (Barthes 1984: 3) relationship with each other: the second-order myth imbricates itself “onto the first-order system of language” (Peña 2012: 15). The myth’s recipient’s attention operates like a turnstile alternating between the two orders. “Thus, on the one hand,” says Peña, “the consumer can more or less consciously see that the original sign is present, although in a ‘half-amputated’ state. Alternatively, ... the original sign, now a signifier in myth’s signification, looms large as the new *interpretant* (the myth’s validation)” (Peña 2012: 15). Thus, Peña adds, “myth is accomplished by ‘staggering’ ... in which *cultural materials with previous historical meaning must surrender their signifying load to myth’s imperatives* at the very moment they are transformed into signifiers for its own motivating concept” (Peña 2012: 16; my emphasis).<sup>17</sup>

If the myth’s “purpose is to distort and displace the original signage and make it serve its own motivation” (Peña 2012: 16), this is exactly what we see in Serra’s canonization. The original *denotation* of *Representación* is the signified of the ABSOLUTE FATHER. Lakoff would say, that, the family model Serra secured and which he mapped onto his relations with the mission Indians was the “Strict Father Model” (Lakoff 2009: 77). In this model, “the strict father is the moral leader of the family, and is to be obeyed. The family needs a strict father because there is evil in the world from which he has to protect them ...” (Lakoff 2009: 77). Painful punishment is justified here: “You need a strict father because kids are born bad, in the sense that they ... don’t know right from wrong” (Lakoff 2009: 78). The children, like Ildefonso and others, “need to be punished strictly and painfully when they do wrong, so they will have an incentive to do right in order to avoid punishment. That is how they build internal discipline, which is needed to do right and not wrong” (Lakoff 2009: 78). In short, we can say that, in its

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed and accessible semiological breakdown of Barthes’ modern myth see Manuel Peña’s “Introduction” to his *American mythologies* (2012: 1–23).

original signification, *Representación*, securing fathers' authority in the areas of "management, control, punishment, and education" denoted a CONSERVATIVE family model organized around "[a]uthority, obedience, discipline, and punishment" (Lakoff 2009: 78).

The canonization however turned this founding signified into a signifier in the second-order signification, endowing it with an ahistorical *connotation* of BENEVOLENT PARENT. The term FATHER was divested of its meaning of ABSOLUTE POWER and restored under new guise of STEWARD or a progressive, NURTURANT PARENT. Lakoff says: "Nurturance is empathy, responsibility for oneself and others, and the strength to carry out those responsibilities" (2009: 81). The Nurturant model rests on "mutual respect - a parent's respect for children, and respect for parents by children [which] must be earned by how the parents behave" (Lakoff 2009: 81). The preferred form of punishment is restitution - "if you do something wrong, do something right to make up for it" (Lakoff 2009: 81). In this model, "[t]he job of parents is protection and empowerment of their children, and a dedication to community life, where people care about and take care of each other" (Lakoff 2009: 81). Thus, Lakoff adds, this model is based on "the politics of empathy" which, when "mapped onto the nation", results in "the progressive politics of protection, empowerment, and community" (2009: 81).

Exploiting the ambiguity that surrounds today the term FATHER (strict or nurturant?), combining it with our culture's prioritization of futural orientation (Serra as a man ahead of his time with motto "*siempre adelante!*"), and recruiting the discourse of human rights ("humanitarian Bill of Rights", "protection", "dignity", etc.), the canonization conjured Serra's image consistent with the nurturant model. Contrary to historical evidence, the priest emerged as PROGRESSIVE and, when Francis added that Serra guarded his heart against growing numb, he emerged as EMPATHETIC. However, let me emphasize again, while pursuing the expansion of his influence Serra upheld his power not upon the ideals of "the politics of empathy", but upon retrograde legal codes of antecedent centuries which worked precisely to anesthetize his heart and guard his reputation. Peña says that, "myth colonizes and re-writes the harsh historical text ... thus concealing its exploitative practices while creating a faux version based on the mythical vision of a *benevolent ... order*" (Peña 2012: 19; my emphasis). The canonization discursively mystified and neutralized Serra's original *politics of heteronomy* and substituted it with the myth of benevolence. Thus, in the light of Barthesian semiology, the canonization's theological objective shrinks to ideological mythification. Barthes would not be surprised for, as he says, "myth is on the right" (Barthes 1984: 150), that is, the "right-leaning bourgeois ideology [is] the proper incubator of modern myth" (Peña 2012: 17). Myth is the domain of those *classes dirigeantes*, including the Church, most

interested in perpetuating the norms of the status quo: “the oppressor conserves [the world], his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth” (Barthes 1984: 150).

That myth, as opposed to theology, was indeed the chief concern of the Church was revealed by Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour, secretary of the Papal Commission for Latin America. Lecour envisioned Serra among America's hallowed Founding Fathers: “The story of the Pilgrims as founding fathers ... ignores ... a Catholic Hispanic missionary presence throughout almost the entire American territory ... The Saint Junípero Serra will help overcome the contrast between what is Hispanic and what is Anglo-Saxon in the United States, what is Catholic and what is Protestant” (Lecour in Poggioli 2015). In other words, what was pursued was an ideological purpose of expansion of the national pantheon, that normative nation-state narrative which grounds American history in Christo-European individual male agency. The discursive strategies leading up to the canonization (appeals to authority of history, Christian mission, progressive humanitarianism), as well as the embodied symbolism of the papal mass itself – the East Coast, Francis saying mass facing Europe, his back literally turned at the American West – all buttressed the aim of strengthening the Euro-American myth.

However, in the unilateral pursuit of this goal the Vatican ignored appeals of a broad coalition of concerned groups and individuals. No responsibility for Serra's problematic legacy was taken. Instead, he was granted eternal absolution. Barthes says that myth purifies things, “it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification ...” (Barthes 1984: 143). However, no matter how innocently the Church would represent its case the “inversion, displacement, and effacement of history” (Butler 2009: 121) belittled the historical justice claims of victims and their descendants, marking both as what Judith Butler calls “[a]n ungrievable life” (Butler 2009: 38), that is, mere *homines sacri* of Eurocentrism. In doing so, the Church reinstated Serra's heteronomic epistemology in the present.

As such, the canonization, a public event of global reach and lasting consequences, constituted a serious breach of moral and legal norms. The legal aspect concerns human rights standards but its analysis is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that the Holy See, as a Permanent Observer state at the United Nations, is obligated to abide by at least those UN principles and conventions it is signatory of.<sup>18</sup> As for moral ramifications consider two aspects. First, Serra's sainthood exposed as disingenuous the papal apology to the Indigenous Peoples expressed in Bolivia in July 2015. If the apology had inspired

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* signed by the Holy See in 1966 and ratified on May 1, 1969. Other documents pertinent here include the recent UN human rights guidelines (“right to know” and “right to truth”), and the *United Nations' International Decade for Rapprochement of Cultures* (2013–2022) which calls member states to enhance work toward interepistemic equity.

hopes for transatlantic, equal-footing interepistemic dialog, Serra's sainthood foreclosed them by offering the perpetrators instant purgation and effecting deontological closure. Both events, orchestrated within two months of each other, may be seen as mutually-supportive acts of "surreptitious faking". Following Barthes, we can say that the apology represented the figure of "*inoculation ... which consists in admitting the accidental evil ... the better to conceal [the] principal evil*" (Barthes 1984: 151). Inoculation is akin to a safety valve: "One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion" (Barthes 1984: 151–152). Anesthetizing public opinion by way of apology the canonization could then: 1. reassert the heteronomic relations by the symbolic monumentalization achieved through what Barthes calls the "privation of history" (Barthes 1984: 152), and 2. obviate any potential, consequential or non-consequential, forms of redress.

Second, with the benefit of hindsight, we can say that because both events "by a perceptual sleight-of-hand" (Peña 2012: 16) brushed aside the question of Indigenous genocide they reasserted the claim to grandstanding, Christo-European moral high ground or, which is the same thing, repressed deeper the central protagonist of our collective unconscious. As such, they constituted important variables in the recent rise of the post-truth politics – when facts no longer matter – contributing to the resurgence of reactionary, nationalist, and neo-facist movements, i.e., alt-right.<sup>19</sup> On some base level the canonization encouraged shedding the prickly burden of white guilt and a repudiation of that doctrine of minimal social compassion and simple interpersonal/inter-communal respect known as "political correctness". All in all, the message that the Vatican sent was loud and clear: it pursues not rapprochement of cultures but a self-interested, global agenda which is bound to spur not assuage conflicts.

## 8. Strict Fathers' education

I have tried to demonstrate here that neither Serra's legacy nor his canonization were unproblematic. First, I outlined the priest's role as the theo-secular agent who introduced retrograde relations of exploitation in California. Second, I placed the campaign for Serra's sainthood within the context of the growth of

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<sup>19</sup> Bear in mind that the term "alt-right" is highly imprecise. Rather than naming something it veils and mythifies the purely Eurocentric and white nationalist, xenophobic agenda. On November 28, 2016 Associated Press issued New Guidelines for using the term: "Avoid using the term generically and without definition ... because it is not well known and the term may exist primarily as a public-relations device to make its supporters' actual beliefs less clear and more acceptable to a broader audience" (Daniszewski 2016). The name, coined by Steve Bannon, masks and normalizes, critics argue, what once would be called a fascist or racist program.

California's "fantasy heritage". Third, I summarized the arguments of the Church expressed in the lead-up to the canonization. I argued that the metaphorical apparatus mobilized in Serra's favor conjured him as a PIONEER OF HUMAN RIGHTS. Fourth, addressing the claim that Serra's *Representación* constitutes the key evidence for his humanitarianism and drawing from Agamben's proposition that the refugee is Modernity's *homo sacer*, I argued that the legal category created for mission Indians as result of Serra's actions cast them as exceptions and exposed to unconditional precariousness, that is, created "calculated conditions" under which Indigenous genocide could unfold in California. Building on this, I argued further that the mission/plantation prefigures camps of the twentieth-century Europe and, in this sense, the mission neophyte/inmate is central to *our* political unconscious. Fifth, I offered a semiological reading of the canonization, arguing that the papal inversion of *Representación*'s original denotation constituted an example of Barthesian myth. Lastly, I assessed the canonization (and its partner-in-crime, Bolivian apology) from the moral standpoint and suggested its disingenuous and spurious character.

In place of conclusion, let me evoke a section of Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* entitled "The Genealogy of Violence, Part II", in which she recalls a childhood incident. When Al, her four-year-old little brother, accidentally loses his tooth and breaks into tears, her father, of Chumash and Esselen mission Indian ancestry (Miranda 2013: xi), first chides him for being a crybaby and then "there is a horrifying sound of a belt buckle being flipped open ... belt being pulled angrily through the hard denim loops of my father's Levis" (Miranda 2013: 33). Embarrassed and furious with his son's tears the "father has seized my little brother by his plump arm, swung him around across the lap that should be comfort, should be home, should be refuge, and is swinging the doubled belt with such force that the air protests" (Miranda 2013: 34). Miranda sees her father's belt as an extension of the mission whip:

... the arc of my father's arm is following a trajectory I know too well, the arc of leather ... instrument of punishment coming two hundred years out of the past in a movement so ancient, so much a part of our family history that it has touched every single one of us in an unbroken chain from the first padre or the first *soldado* at the mission to the bared back of the first Indian neophyte, heathen, pagan, savage, who displeased or offended the Spanish crown's representatives.

(Miranda 2013: 34)

The Indigenous author tells us that the Strict Father Model her father now epitomizes is a foreign import and begins with first conversions: "Flogging. Whipping. Belt. Whatever you call it, this beating, this punishment, is as much a part of our inheritance ... we carry the violence we were given with baptism" (Miranda 2013: 34), "my father's arm rises and falls in an old, savage rhythm

learned from strangers who came with whips and attack dogs, taught us how to raise our children” (Miranda 2013: 35). She indicts the mission system for having instituted the “savage”, as opposed to civilized, school of the whip as a moral order. Her father is not only a perpetrator but also the victim of disciplinary heteronomy – he and his immediate ancestors were trained to survive in this new world by means of chastisement and blows and he is now passing it to “his cowardly son” (Miranda 2013: 34).

Within Miranda’s story excerpts from original mission records are interwoven. They describe Indigenous Californians’ model of parent-child relationship. A note from Mission San Antonio reads: “They ... love their children; in fact, it can be said that this *love is so excessive that it is a vice*, for the majority *lack the courage* to punish their wrongdoings and knavery” (in Miranda 2013: 34; my emphasis). Using Lakoff’s terminology, one could say that in the Indigenous cultures of California it was the Nurturant Parental Model that was the norm. Hackel says that physical punishment was unknown “among the Natives of California” (Hackel 2013: 200) nor was it among the Pames in Sierra Gorda where Serra worked in the 1750s (Hackel 2013: 100). A record from Mission San Miguel states: “Toward their children they [Indians] show an extravagant love whom *they do not chastise. Nor have they ever chastised them*” (in Miranda 2013: 34).

Compare this with what Franciscans called the “paternalistic rigor” (Hackel 2013: 100) of corporal punishments, which was “the norm in Spain in the early modern period” (Hackel 2013: 200). Serra – whose own father, Hackel speculates, was “a strict disciplinarian who liberally doled out corporal punishment” (Hackel 2013: 18) – believed that “good fathers punished their children with blows” (Hackel 2013: 200). The priest held that an ideal father “because he loves him with fatherly love, he teaches him [the child] to obey; when he fails in anything, he scolds him and punishes him, so that the son corrects his deviations” (in Hackel 2013: 19). For the recent saint such punishments were “acts of pure love” (Hackel 2013: 19). From this perspective, the Indigenous parental model was interpreted as yet another sign of Native’s weakness; their love for children was seen as “excessive”, a “vice” deserving scorn and condemnation.

As Miranda’s research indicates, the school of disciplinary cruelty Spanish missionaries introduced would soon change the Indian ways. A missionary from San Miguel noted of his Indians: “some are beginning to chastise and educate them [Native children] due to the [missionary] instructions they are receiving” (in Miranda 2013: 34). In other words, the Strict Father Model, hitherto culturally alien, was being progressively internalized by the Indigenous neophytes: “Some parents who are a little better instructed punish their children as they deserve while others denounce them to the missionary fathers or to the alcaldes” (in Miranda 2013: 35) reads a journal entry from San Antonio.



Serra's *Representación*, by freeing the fathers to punish their “wards” or “children” at will, provided an opportunity to educate in this parental code by ample example. Miranda's memoir indicts that the costs of the mission era's violence were far greater than merely territorial dispossession and cultural reformatting. The missions, she tells us, stand as foundational to cycles of domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism, suicide rates, post-traumatic stress disorders, clinical depression, maternal mortality, poverty, homelessness and many other afflictions still plaguing Indigenous communities today (Miranda 2013: 2). Her father is a case in point.

Serra's halo works as a counter-mnemonic device which blinds us to the gravity of this legacy. And yet, despite its numbing trance, shaken to renewed awareness by writers like Miranda, we have an ethical obligation to continue asking the same questions American captain William D. Phelps posed in the 1840s. Upon his visit to California he pondered: “[What] have the natives of California gained by their [missionaries'] labors; what service have those Friars rendered to the Spanish nation, or to the world in general?” (in Castillo 2015: 197). Phelps concluded: “we must entirely condemn their system and lament its results” (in Castillo 2015: 197). This somber, concise assessment of the outcomes of Serra's work should be remembered for it offers a salutary contagion to the Eurocentric epistemic heteronomy of the past and the present. Let it echo in our conscience so that we may return the stolen speech to truth, myth to reality, civilization to savagery, NURTURANT SAVIOR to STRICT OVERSEER.

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