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Multicultural Origins of the Americas:
Education in the New Spain

by
Virginia Aspe Armella



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Multicultural Origins of the Americas: Education in the New Spain

Virginia Aspe Armella *

This article presents the first results of a study on multicultural origins in the Americas. I present the contributions of three intellectuals of New Spain, pointing out which of their approaches could aid in resolving today's immigrant problem. My research focuses its attention mainly on the Florentine Codex, a book written by Bernardino of Sahagún, who developed the first 'semiotic' treatise in the Americas. These contributions deserve to be studied in their peculiarities and, moreover, indicate possible solutions to the conflicts that arise also now from the clash of different cultures and their diverging world-views.

1. Introduction

My research deals with the multicultural origins of the Americas. As we know, the Americas were discovered at the end of the 15th century. It would take the Spanish Crown some years to fully understand the importance of such a discovery. Isabella of Castile and Fernando of Aragon realized the magnitude of their new possessions when Alexander VI's papal bull *Inter Caetera*¹ proclaimed Spain's ownership; immediately, the Crown began the validation of its conquest through the 'Principle of Evangelization'. The bull granted Spain

* Universidad Panamericana (vaspe@up.edu.mx).

¹ The last of three documents issued between May 3 and 4, 1493, that, together with the bull *Dudum siquidem*, settled the disputes on the rights of possession and trade between Spain and Portugal in favor of Spain (see Davenport 1917, 71-78; Ehler & Morral 1954, 153-59). See also on the subsequent evangelization Espinosa Spínola (1998).

80% of the territories in the Americas; the rest was given to Portugal, whose dominion extended over present-day Brazil.

After this bull, the Spanish Crown began a policy of conversion, sending twelve Franciscan friars to America, emulating the Twelve Apostles of Christendom. Prior to these twelve friars, others had come in small groups from Flanders and Aquitania, France. The twelve Spanish Franciscan friars came after those two earlier groups; among the Franciscans were Fr. Gerónimo de Mendieta, Fr. Andrés de Olmos and Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún.

As these friars arrived, they were sent to specific places following the designation of authorities through what was called the *distribution* of the souls as the workfield of evangelization. This meant the assignment of the friars to special territories so as to cover the cultural and pastoral needs of the Indians.¹ The Crown, similar in this to the church, had three non-negotiable principles: unity of faith, unity of language, and unity of government. Apart from this, the Crown was tolerant with differing forms of education; for instance, education could either be taught through the medieval *trivium* and *quadrivium*—emphasizing syllogistic demonstrations—or it could be taught in the ‘Renaissance way’ by emphasizing grammatical meaning and rhetorical arguments.

In this context, becoming conscious of the indigenous problems, Bernardino de Sahagún first settled at Tiripetío (Michoacán) where he founded what is now known as the first Library of the American continent. Then he was sent to Mexico City, where he founded the Old School of Tlatelolco, a high-level school for Indians where they learned rhetoric and grammar. Bernardino not only taught the European sciences, he sought to collaborate with the old wise Indian authorities and invited them to convey all their wisdom. He preserved their sayings under the famous writings of *Huehuetlatolli* (Sahagún 1986): a report on the meeting with the Náhua ‘Wise Men’ (León Portilla, 2002).

Alonso de la Veracruz, another important intellectual, was sent to New Spain to establish the University of Mexico. He took his second name from the port where he first arrived; there, in Veracruz, he also took the Augustine habit and settled in Tiripetío (Michoacán), where he learned the Tarasco language (Veracruz & Burrus, 1968). He also founded there the first higher school of studies

¹ Use of this denomination for the Natives of Latin America is made only in relation to our historical sources.

for Indians. In 1552 he was sent to Mexico City to open the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico, where he taught Philosophy and Theology.

Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican monk, and undoubtedly the best known of the three, was the son of an *encomendero* who owned many slaves in Cuba. After hearing a homily by the Dominican priest Antonio de Montesinos, he decided to take the Dominican habit and devote his life to the defense of the natural rights of the Indians.

These three men are the most representative intellectuals at the origins of Latin America, or Hispanic America. But it should be clear now that the correct way to name this part of the continent is ‘Latin America’, although the term is not widely accepted today as it tends to be interpreted in a pejorative sense—for racial reasons—whereas ‘Latin’ actually refers to the great culture that emerged from classical Rome. This Latin culture, together with the Greek, experienced a revival during the Renaissance, when Medieval Scholastic thought began its decline and classical authors were rediscovered. Since the term ‘Latin’ alludes to the Greek and Latin cultures, we can affirm that the culture that arrived in America during the 15th century should be named ‘Latin American culture’, even if the term ‘Latin’ is nowadays understood in a derogative sense (Elliot, 1997). Sahagún, de la Veracruz, and las Casas, followed this cultural tradition promoting what we might call, although anachronistically, ‘multiculturalism’, as a solution to the problems that emerged from America’s discovery. My objective in this article is to describe some contributions and proposals of theirs in the fields of education and justice.¹



¹ This represents a specific point of view on a complex historical and political development that can be appreciated in many different ways. Reference can be made *e.g.* to Gliozzi (2000), Padgen (1995), Headley (2008).

2. Multicultural proposals

2.1. Sahagún and the Florentine Codex

Let's begin with the most representative of these friars: Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590), a handsome man that came from a rich Spanish family. He studied at the University of Salamanca, one of the best European universities at that time. There, he learned about the conquest of New Spain and about the different cultures that had been discovered. After taking the Franciscan habit, he travelled to America, where he learned the Tarasco and Náhuatl languages of the indigenous people in Michoacán and what is today's Mexico City. As an intellectual, Bernardino was fascinated by the peculiar way of writing the Indians had, and also by their ancient wisdom and traditions. He found himself capable of distinguishing between what he called their *malas costumbres*, 'evil traditions'—such as anthropophagy, human sacrifices, idolatry and religious wars—and their magnificent civilization, as seen in their architecture, laws, and educative and family traditions (Frost, 2002; Duverger, 1996; Murillo Gallegos, 2009).

In 1578 he began writing a book to collect the contributions of the Indians to the arts and sciences. He was convinced that the Indians had valuable contributions, that their ideas and productions should be preserved. As a Franciscan monk, Bernardino thought the Indians should be evangelized and baptized in the Catholic religion; but he also was convinced that the first wave of evangelization in America had been a failure because the Spanish Crown and the first friars did not pay attention to the Indian culture, or to its language and traditions: this is an oversight that led to misunderstanding their rationality and form of life. In the *Prologo* or Introduction to the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, also known as the *Florentine Codex* due to its current location at the National Library in Florence, Sahagún writes:

The physician cannot advisedly administer medicines to the patient without first knowing of which humour or from which source the ailment derives. Wherefore it is desirable that the good physician be expert in the knowledge of medicines and ailments to adequately administer the cure for each ailment. The preachers and confessors are physicians of the souls for the curing of spiritual ailments. It is good that they have practical

knowledge of the medicines and the spiritual ailments. [...] In order that the ministers of the Gospel, who will follow those who have come first in the cultivation of this new vineyard of the Lord, may not have reason to complain of the first ones for having left the facts about these natives of this New Spain undivulged, I [...] wrote twelve Books of the divine, or rather idolatrous, human, and natural things of this New Spain.¹

The first preachers did not have the opportunity to see from what sort of ‘illness’ the Indian souls suffered, because they did not know anything about their culture and beliefs; thus, remaining in the dark, they did not pay enough attention to the Indians’ customs, rituals and idolatries. As a man educated during the Renaissance, who had a strong philosophical training, Bernardino understood that this kind of misconception was the reason why, while the Indians did publicly convert to Christianity, in their private lives they continued to practice their old traditions and idolatry. Sahagún thought that only an education emerging from one’s own conviction and taught in the native language could develop virtues, and thus solid decisions. In the dedication of his book, titled *To the Sincere Reader*, Sahagún explains his approach:

When this work began, it began to be said by those who knew of it, that a dictionary [*un Calepino*] was being made. And, even now, many keep on asking me: “How does the dictionary progress?” Certainly it would be very beneficial to produce so useful a work for those who desire to learn this Mexican language, just as Ambrosio Calepino prepared one for those who desire to learn the Latin language and the meaning of its words. But, assuredly, there has not been an opportunity, because Calepino drew the words, their meanings, their equivocals and metaphors from reading the poets, orators, and other authors of the Latin language, verifying everything said with the expressions of the authors; which source I have lacked, there being neither letters nor writing among

¹ “El médico no puede acertadamente aplicar las medicinas al enfermo sin que primero conozca de qué humor o de qué causa procede la enfermedad. De manera que el buen médico conviene sea docto en el conocimiento de las medicinas y en el de las enfermedades, para aplicar convenientemente a cada enfermedad la medicina contraria. Los predicadores y confesores médicos son de las almas para curar las enfermedades espirituales: conviene tengan experiencia de las medicinas y de las enfermedades espirituales. [...] Pues porque los ministros del Evangelio que sucederán a los que primero vinieron, en la cultura de esta nueva viña del Señor no tengan ocasión de quejarse de los primeros por haber dexado a escuras las cosas de estos naturales de esta Nueva España, yo [...] escribí doce libros de las cosas divinas, o por mejor decir idolátricas, y humanas y naturales de esta Nueva España” (Sahagún 1577, I, 1r; 1979; bilingual text in Sahagún, 1969, I, 45-46).

this people. And, so, it was impossible for me to prepare a dictionary. But I have laid the groundwork in order that whosoever may desire can prepare it with ease, for, through my efforts twelve Books have been written in an idiom characteristic and typical of this Mexican language, where, in addition to its being a very pleasing and profitable writing, also are found therein all the manners of speech and all the words this language uses, as well verified and certain as that which Virgil, Cicero, and other authors wrote in the Latin language.¹

Bernardino refers to Ambrogio Calepino, an Italian intellectual of the 15th century who had authored a dictionary of the Latin and Italian languages following the linguistic foundations laid down by the classical Roman authors that he read through the writings of humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Nicolò Perotti. Bernardino explains that his effort is far more difficult than Calepino's, since the Náhuatl language lacks writing, and was not preceded by any linguistic foundation. After giving the motive of his writing, Bernardino proceeds to expound the structure of his work, explaining the difficulties he has faced to succeed:

These twelve books are arranged in such a way that each page contains three columns, the first in the Spanish language, the second in the Mexican language; the third is the explanation of the Mexican words — with their numbers in both columns. A clear copy of that in the Mexican language has just been finished—all twelve books. That in the Spanish language and the glosses are not finished. It has not been possible to do more because of lack of aid and help. If the necessary aid were given me, in a year or a little

¹ “AL SINCERO LECTOR. Cuando esta obra se comenzó, comenzóse a decir de los que lo supieron que se hacía un Calepino, y aun hasta ahora no cesan muchos de me preguntar que en qué términos anda el Calepino. Ciertamente fuera harto provechoso hacer una obra tan útil para los que quieren aprender esta lengua mexicana, como Ambrosio Calepino la hizo para los que quieren aprender la lengua latina, y la significación de sus vocablos; pero ciertamente no ha habido oportunidad, por que Calepino sacó los vocablos y las significaciones de ellos, y sus equivocaciones y metáforas, de la lección de los poetas y oradores y de los otros autores de la lengua latina, autorizando todo lo que dice con los dichos de los autores, el cual fundamento me ha faltado a mí, por no haber letras ni escritura entre esta gente; y así me fue imposible hacer Calepino. Pero eché los fundamentos para quien quisiere con facilidad le pueda hacer, porque por mi industria se han escrito doce libros de lenguaje propio y natural de esta lengua mexicana, donde allende de ser muy gustosa y provechosa escritura, hallarse han también en ella todas maneras de hablar, y todos los vocablos que esta lengua usa, tan bien autorizados y ciertos como lo que escribió Virgilio y Cicerón, y los demás autores de la lengua latina” (Sahagún 1577, I, 3r; 1979; bilingual text in Sahagún, 1969, I, 50).

more, all could be finished. And, certainly, if it were finished, it would be a treasury for the knowledge of many things worthy of being known, and for the easy knowledge of this language with all its secrets. And it would be a thing of much value in New Spain and Old Spain.¹

The book was meant to promote the study of the native culture and language. Bernardino gave it the title *General History of the Things of New Spain*—‘history’ in the meaning both of a narrative and of a report of facts and things—wishing to encourage a second wave of missionary vocations (a second ‘navigation’, in the friar’s own terms) combined with a new methodology for Indian education. Being, as every European intellectual, familiar with the recent flourishing of the study of mottos and emblems (Panofski, 1962; Farago, 1995), he was fascinated by the Indians’ iconographic form of writing. They expressed their thoughts in pictures, with points and small markings: not a form of hieroglyphic writing, as many thought, but an aesthetic expression. Likewise, he was interested in their sayings, exhortations and rhetorical means of communication (Gómez Canedo, 1993; 1983). The sixth book of the *Florentine Codex* is titled: *On Rhetorics, moral philosophy and theology of the Mexican people: about many curious and beautiful things in their language and very delicate things related to their moral virtues.*² The book is devoted to their prayers, sayings and dialogues, as well as exhortations, moral reasoning and conversations between family members, priests and authorities. So, in the *General History*, Sahagún gave space to the Indians’ religion, their natural habitat, their rhetoric and ethical convictions, their policy and wars. What is even more interesting, however, is that he preserved their traditions.

¹ “Van estos doce libros de tal manera trazados que cada plana lleva tres columnas: la primera, de lengua española: la segunda, de la lengua mexicana: la tercera, la declaracion, de los vocablos mexicanos: señalados con sus cifras, en ambas partes: lo de la lengua mexicana se a acabado, de sacar en blanco, todos doze libros: lo de la lengua española y las escolias no está hecho, por no haver podido más por falta de ayuda y de favor. Si se me diese la ayuda necessaria, en un año, o poco mas, se acabaria todo: y cierto si se acabase, seria un tesoro, para saber muchas cosas: dignas de ser sabidas. Y para con facilidad, saber esta lengua, con todos sus secretos, y seria cosa de mucha estima, en la Nueva, y Vieja España” (Sahagún 1577, I, 3r; 1979; bilingual text in Sahagún, 1969, I, 51).

² “Libro sexto, de la Rethorica, y philosophia moral, y theologia: de la gente mexicana: donde ay cosas muy curiosas tocantes a los primores de su lengua: y cosas muy delicadas tocantes a las virtudes morales” (Sahagún 1577, II, 1r).

Bernardino had the idea of bequeathing this text to his Franciscan brothers, promoting a new wave of learning. The new method would take the best of each culture by expressing it in the column written in Spanish, where he described their environment alluding to European elements (Anchondo Pavón, 2008). The codex is thus filled with comparisons between Mexican terms and their explanation through a similar Spanish term. For example, when he describes the *ocelote*, he relates that it is similar to a tiger, although it is smaller and has a lighter color. Based on this strategy, Sahagún began writing down the foundations of the Hispanic-American culture in a monumental book, passing on the indigenous culture to future generations, including their virtues, the blessings of their land, their moral principles and their political actions.

In its general structure, his work follows the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas: it starts with the study of God, continues with the angels, and then descends to analyze human creatures and animals, and finally returns to God. Written in twelve books, the *Florentine Codex* is a monumental work of around one thousand pages, each layed out, as Bernardino explained in the passage quoted above, in three columns: one in Náhuatl, one in Spanish, and the third one in pictures (Anchondo Pavón, 2014). Each book begins with a prologue and ends with an appendix, both written only in Spanish. Sahagún wrote in Náhuatl also in order to circumvent censure, as the Spanish Inquisition forbade the preservation of ‘pagan’ religions and customs. Prudently Sahagún related all such matters in Náhuatl, while in the Spanish prologues and appendixes he usually wrote what he expected censors to prefer. For instance, in the Prologue to Book Four, Sahagún introduces in typical Renaissance fashion the theme of judicial astrology:¹

It is well known that the astrologers called genethliacs are careful to know the hour and instant of birth of each person. Such being known, they foretell and prognosticate the natural inclinations of men through a consideration of the sign in which they are born and the position and aspect that the planets then have one with another and with respect to the sign.²

¹ See f.i. Garin (1983), Dooley (2014).

² “Cosa muy sabida, es: que los astrologos, llamados Genethliaci: tienen solitud, en saber la hora, y punto del nacimiento de cada persona: lo qual sabido, adivinan, y pronostican, las inclinaciones naturales de las hombres; por la consideracion del signo, en que nacen, y del estado, y aspecto: que

But immediately after that, Sahagún makes it clear to the reader that nobody should make the mistake of thinking that these influences are not limited to tangible aspects but also affect free will; this Catholic authorities would not accept. Conversely, he wrote more freely and hold to the truth of his information in the pictures and in the Náhuatl column.

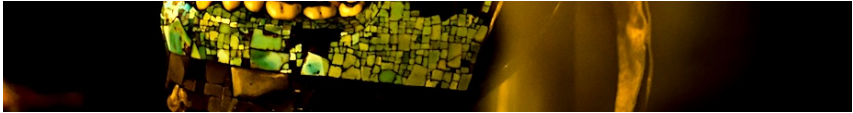
The relevance of the *Codex* for the preservation of the Indians' native language is self-evident.¹ Also relevant, as we shall see, is its semiotic re-organization of the language with added meanings, so that the original metaphorical sayings are converted into conceptual Western discourses. As I have stated before, the structure of the *Florentine Codex* leads to a meeting of cultural points of view. Although it starts with the description of God and religious matters in the same fashion as Thomas Aquinas composed his *Summa theologiae*, or the Franciscan writer Bonaventura his *Comment to the Sentences*, the *Historia* is composed with the aim of producing a cultural encounter: as the description descends to nature, climates, animals, plants and minerals, Bernardino, as a Renaissance encyclopedist, provides detailed descriptions. Then he further deepens his insight into the historical and linguistic features of human beings. He describes Náhuatl anthropology, their sayings and their understanding of liberty, their rhetorical and moral contributions, as well as their politics. He ends his work, in book 12, with a historical account of the arrival of the Spaniards (Aspe Armella, 2011; Sahagun, 1982).

Bernardino decided to structure his book as many classic European encyclopedists had done. He emulated Pliny, the great founder of Latin encyclopedism, and his *Historia naturalis*. In each book, whether he is describing minerals, jobs, functions or virtues, he first gives the Náhuatl term. The species of all things mentioned are likewise named in Náhuatl. In a similar way as Isidore of Seville, the founder of Iberian culture, did in his monumental book *Etymologiae* (Isidoro de Sevilla, 2004), Sahagún tried to document every achievement of the ancient civilization. He also followed prominent compilers of knowledge like the his-

entonce tenjan los planetas entre si, y en respecto del signo" (Sahagún 1577, I, 243v; bilingual text in Sahagún, 1969, I, 61).

¹ Recently, in Mexico, there have been some important contributions dealing with the influences of the *Codex*. Authors such as Ascención Hernández de León-Portilla (1998; 2007), Pilar Máynez (2002; 2009), and, especially, Sandra Anchondo (2008; 2014), have analyzed the relationship between these prior authors and the *Codex*, together with the semiotic relevance of the *Florentine Codex*.

torian Bartolomé Anglico, founder of the Saxon language and culture, as well as Juan Gil de Zamora, a medieval Spanish polymath who wrote an encyclopedic work titled *Historia naturalis, canonica et civilis*, in the intent of describing objects by explaining their functions and not just giving their definition.



As we follow Sahagún writing through the *Codex*, we become aware of his intention: achieving what we would call a cross-cultural, comprehensive encyclopedia. We may observe how the Indians conquered by Spain had themselves conquered the monk by the beauty of their wisdom. This was the first cultural fusion of the Americas; Bernardino merged old and new traditions. He expressed this, for instance, with his exposition on the Virgin of Goadalupe—a fusion of the Tonantzin goddess of the Aztecs and the Goadalupe Spanish Virgin of the converted Muslims. In the case of the eagle symbol, he presented both the Aztec eagle that guided the Mexicans to Aztlán—their promised land—and the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire.

A clear example of this cultural hybridization is book 11 of the *Florentine Codex*. The book deals with animals in New Spain. It includes drawings and pictographs that relate to these natural beings; it also has vignettes around the pages where he is describing these animals. The similarity of these frames is intended to prove Bernardino's hypothesis: that abstract images are related to natural things because they are the starting point of ideas, even if they refer to deeper symbols. European intellectuals would not come into agreement with this view until Giambattista Vico, a 17th century Italian philosopher, wrote his *Scienza nova*. Similarly, Bernardino proves in his book that things can be classified by their form and function, or by the virtue emanating from them. Sahagún always follows his descriptions with these three types of elucidation. It almost seems as though he was intending to prove that Mexican terms are more capable of capturing nature's dynamism than Spanish words were.

Sahagún found that phonetic similarities were useful for endowing old Indian beliefs with a Christian significance, thus helping the conversion of pa-

gans into Christianity by employing their own terms and beliefs. He intended in this way to attain different cultural understandings through a subtle variance in the sound of some words. Thus, he took advantage of similarities between the sounds of words, giving the Spanish meaning but using the Náhuatl sound of the term.

On the one hand, Sahagún suggests to turn a Mexican term into a Spanish term, substituting the meaning of the latter to that of the former, if it benefits cultural purposes and if both terms are similar in phonetics; for example, he recommends switching the word *tonatzin* (a diabolical goddess that the ancient Mexicans had in their pantheon) with the words *Santa Maria* (the Christian virgin, mother of God in the Catholic faith) so that, by means of language itself, evil cults would be converted into good ones. Sahagún also shows that the Mexican language ascribes good or evil powers to all things in nature. By this transference of meanings, he thought that the true culture would prevail. On the other hand, he thought Indians had valuable things to offer Europe, so that when he represented in paintings, for example, an important indigenous political figure—not drawing by himself, but with the aid of a Tlacuilo, an Aztec painter—he would dress him with Roman attire, thus achieving the inclusion of Indians into the world through this classical Latin attire. I believe all these techniques were meant, through such semiotic efforts, to help achieve the cultural integration *of both sides*. This was the goal achieved in fact by Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* precisely thanks to its semiotic complexity: his connection between concepts and situations, verbal descriptions and images—a profoundly iconic program—allowed the readers of the *Codex* to learn more about Mexican culture, traditions, thought, and natural world.

Such methods were very popular at the time. We should remember that the Council of Trent dedicated its last session to the problem of images. The representation of the divine was a recommendation made after the Reformation, which excluded the use of mediations such as images of the Virgin, saints and others. In the Catholic *Counter-Reformation* program, if Luther was against images, Catholicism would promote them energetically. Against Luther's minimalism, the Catholic response was a sort of maximalist or Baroque manner that is itself a form of communication through images, metaphors, symbols and all forms of representations. The Baroque *Novo Hispanic* style emerged from this policy.

Aristotle's *Poetics* became particularly important in America because of these cultural and educational perspectives. The prominence of phonetics grew, along with the use of mnemonic discourses in education. Theatrical representations were also used by the Franciscans in order to achieve evangelization, for instance through the picaresque genre of the *Posadas* and street celebrations. Sahagún's proposal was in this precise sense 'multicultural': he used *the other* names, beliefs, and traditions, and passed them to the new land of Christendom.

As we read Sahagún's book, we may find interesting parallels to present-day cultural problems relating to immigration in the Americas. The Codex offers practical modes to combine the old with the new, external uses with internal ones. Christianity serves as a paradigm of those times, just as 'democracy' is the paradigm of nowadays. Sahagún's proposal is a reasonable way of inclusion that brings light on today's cultural problems.



2.2. Alonso de La Veracruz and Justice in the New World

Similar ideas appear in *De dominio infidelium et iusto bello* of Fray Alonso de la Veracruz. In this case, the main topic is justice. From the point of view of Francisco De Vitoria's natural law doctrine,¹ Alonso analyzed whether there was any 'just' cause in the case of the conquest of the American territories. He put forth eleven doubts concerning this issue and concluded that there were no legitimate causes for war in New Spain against the native inhabitants. Although he believed that all Indians should be converted to Christianity, he defended the

¹ On the relation of Veracruz's ideas to Vitoria's see Aspe Armella (2010), Vera Cruz & Heredia (2007). Schmitt (2006), who gives great importance to Vitoria's *De Indis et de Jure belli relectiones* (Vitoria, 1975), ignores Veracruz.

independence of native peoples against interventionism and intimated either to end the Spanish administration in New Spain because he thought it was not founded in natural law, and that natural rights were unfairly violated; or to limit it severely and proceed to restitutions of lands and autonomy (Veracruz & Heredia, 2007). To demonstrate this, Alonso de la Veracruz wrote *De dominio infidelium*.¹

In *De dominio infidelium*, juridical arguments are founded upon an idea of justice emerging from the customs of the community. To the questions: what is justice? is it a divine imposition, or is it a natural law written in the heart of men?, de la Veracruz responds that justice rests upon these foundations, but only inasmuch as they include a sense of equality, based on a duty that all humans have towards the others, especially the poor. He believes that even if the Indians did not live according to European natural law—since they practiced anthropophagy, human sacrifices and idolatry—an invasion was still illegitimate. Spain could not claim Indian territories arguing that their atrocious vices made war legitimate (Veracruz & Heredia, 2007). De la Veracruz thinks that each nation or people has the right to live according to the will of the community. Consequently, if Spain was to continue its stay in American territories, it should acknowledge Indian rights and self-government, while respecting the Indians' tributary laws. Similarly, if Spaniards should rule Indians, they had to take into account their language, conditions, customs and traditions. Alonso, in the end, sought the achievement of a distributive concept of justice that would combine both cultures—the new and the old—so that peace could prevail (De la Torre Rangel, 2007).



¹ At this time we must make clear that no friar proposed as a practical program that Spain should withdraw from America; however, the three intellectuals we are considering maintained that if Spain intended, or pretended, to educate the Indians, attention and respect should be paid to their traditions and customs.

Alonso wrote another book, a treatise on Indian marriages in which he vindicated Indian traditions (Veracruz, 2007). He proclaimed that the subordinate principles of natural law, that derive from the first principles, could vary according to the situation,¹ and depending on history, education and rational achievements (Armella, 2009, 2010; Aspe Armella 2013).

3. Las Casas and the Method of analogy

Due to his radical thought, the best known among these three writers was the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas. We shall consider his works under a very specific angle, that is, his use of analogy. For Plato, the term ‘analogy’ meant a proportion between two *ratios* and what he had in mind were arithmetic proportions (e.g.: 1 is to 2 as 3 is to 6). It was Aristotle who understood the method in philosophical terms. In different passages Aristotle used ‘analogy’ to mean the fact that, in comparisons on which complex metaphors are based, the second term is to the first one as the fourth is to the third.² Las Casas studied the philosophy of Aquinas, and was also inspired by Cardinal Thomas de Vio.³ Both influences helped Las Casas to articulate what we shall call *the method of analogy*. Authors who follow this method argue that it is possible to talk about different things in a different manner, keeping the proportion between terms and without falling into contradiction (Beuchot, 2000; Hernández de León-Portilla, 2009). In his book *Apologética historia sumaria* Las Casas proposed a methodology based on this approach, in order to harmonize different cultural ‘levels’. With the help of the method of analogy, both Alonso de la Veracruz and Bartolomé de las Casas sought to solve the problems arising when indigenous cultures were faced with European traditions and beliefs.

¹ “Nam sicut illa naturalia non semper fiunt eodem modo, sed frequenter, ob quod possunt variari per aliquam causam naturalem, sic et ista naturalia, quae non sunt prima pincipia, non sunt per se nota, et non semper fiunt eodem modo, sed frequenter” (Veracruz, 1562, 306).

² See Plato, *Rep.* VI 507d, 508d; Aristotle, *Poet.* 21, 1457 b18, and 22, 1459a5-10; *Rhet.* 3.10, 1411 a1-5, 3.2, 1405a10-15; *Nich.* 1.6, 1096b; *Met.* 5.6 1016b30-1017a5.

³ Also a Dominican, and a follower of Aquinas’, better known as Cajetan. Writing on justice in the early 16th century, he holds that law is first understood in relation to others, and not to oneself. A natural right, then, is what naturally belongs to others, that is, a *proportion* on human justice. He develops his argument while commenting on Aquinas’ *S. Th.* I-II, q. 92, 2 and 3. See Brett (1997, 112-116).

I would now analyze some of Alonso's arguments and solutions to the problems of the Indians, highlighting the method of analogy. To do so, I shall reproduce or paraphrase three passages, here dubbed 'A', 'B', and 'C':¹

De Dominio (A). In his 'First Doubt', Alonso questions "whether those Spaniards who own villages in New Spain but have no documents to prove their ownership should receive taxes from the Indians or whether they should return those payments to the Indians, being compelled to restore all damages to them." He answers that "the dominion or ownership of a village belongs to the community itself so that neither by natural law nor by divine law can there be a master over the community itself that could own or ask for any tribute from the Indians, since they were the absolute owners of those lands."

De Dominio (B). In the 'Fourth Doubt' de la Veracruz questions "whether it is fair to demand payment of taxes of the Indians if the encomendero [agent] is a legitimate owner." The answer of Alonso is that "although the encomendero [agent] might be a legitimate owner he should nonetheless seek to care for the benefit of the republic, that is that the encomendero [agent] could not subdue the Indians to an condition inferior to the one they had before the discovery of the Americas, nor could he demand more taxes than they are able to pay." Alonso makes his stand for equality in these paragraphs, and recommends balanced remedies and fees, since all men—free of slavery—have basic needs to attend to.

De Dominio (C). In the 'Fourth Doubt' Alonso also questions "whether the encomendero [agent] may tax the Indians demanding products that are not grown or made in their lands and community." He argues "tributes or taxes should proceed from their environment and surroundings, since encomenderos [agents] used to demand products that were not manufactured by the Indians and for which not even their raw materials came from such lands". Alonso's criterion is that the principles of justice regarding different cultures should be adapted to the traditions and possessions of the aboriginal culture and not ruled by the whim or will of the new proprietor. The reason for this is that the laws and rules of a community should emerge from the traditions and practices of each community, since the only way they have to respond to authorities is from their own knowledge and customs.

¹ See Veracruz & Heredia (2007, 117 f., 167, 177-181).

I consider this argument remarkable, as it again provides us—just as Sahagún’s cultural principles did before—with a technique, a method to deal with ‘the others’ (other cultures, other languages, other customs, other beliefs) moving from their own comprehension and understanding of reality. This is the fundamental feature of a justice of equality.

Analogy provided a valuable methodology for achieving equality of ratios over different entities. Las Casas extended it to cultures: for instance, since they do not understand Spanish, just as Spaniards do not understand their language, “as barbarous as they appear to us, so much we appear such to them”.¹ The *Apologética*, a book written by him in 1550, was his effort to acknowledge the differences between cultures (Greek, Roman, Medieval) in a balanced way. Analogy provided, in the Aristotelian tradition of the followers of Aquinas, a strategy that related four different things in a proportional relation, while both preserving differences, and giving them, at the same time, a logical frame of reference.

Las Casas aimed to prove that all human beings are equal in dignity and rationality even if, at the same time, their cultures, laws and traditions are different. He organized his book in the same way in which Aristotle structured his treatise *On Politics*. In the latter, Aristotle presented the main reasons for holding that a community is civilized, maintaining that it should have laws, politics, art, commerce, economic self-sufficiency and at least some cult to the gods. In the *Apologética* Bartolomé de las Casas described all those requirements as being found among the Aztecs.² His intention was to prove that even if the Indians practiced cannibalism and human sacrifices, they did so to worship their gods, and that happened by divine permission, before the Gospels were known to the world, as a form high religiosity: Las Casas suggested that, in this case, they were absolutely human, since the first principle of divine law was to put God above any other value, and superior to Europeans who occasionally committed cannibalism for base reasons. Furthermore, Las Casas suggested that cannibalism was a sort of prelude to the Eucharistic sacrament, in which Catholics ate

¹ “Tan bárbaros como ellos nos son, somos nosotros a ellos” (Las Casas, 1992, 654).

² An appreciation of these elements was already proposed by Gutiérrez (1993, f.i. 166 ff.). See Pagden (1982), Clayton (2011; 2012). A negative appreciation of Las Casas’ commitment to evangelization is offered by Castro (2007).

the body and and drank blood of Jesus. This apology for the Indian culture was made possible by a strategy based on his method of analogy (Beuchot, 2000).

Las Casas was a champion of every culture's achievement. *Apologetica* is a description of the Indians' architecture, their religion and education. Thus it offers a solution to the issue of cultures and races by promoting the idea that cultures educated at the same time in equality and differentially, have better relations. Las Casas appreciated the Indians' social organization, because he thought that all men were equal, due to their rationality and free will. *Apologetica* is an effort to compare and discover a proportional similitude between the Greek and Roman cultures, and the culture of the Aztecs discovered in America. In another work, called *De unico vocatione modo* or *On the only way to attract Indians to the only true religion*, he affirms that persuasion—that is, rhetorical arguments—are the only means by which one can seek to convert others from a different religion. It meant that dialogue must be the only accepted path for evangelization. For Las Casas, human dignity was universal: he would even equate 'men' and 'Indians', that is to say, not only Indians were rational, but rather humanity itself was expressed as a whole in their condition. Las Casas promoted what we would call human rights in the light of his universal approach, which he applied to different cultures thanks to a method of analogy.

4. By way of conclusion

To bring to a close my analysis of these three proposals, I will argue that these thinkers can offer interesting solutions to the Americas of today. Just as the thinkers I have discussed remarked in their time, the heterogeneity implicit in the Mexican-American experience could be of advantage to the U.S. in its present moment. But how can this cultural hybridization be handled without compromising cultural identities? America is a country founded by immigrants. Undoubtedly, cultural amalgamation is at its core. Could perhaps the synthesis of so many experiences, all of these panhuman, multicultural and multi-social cultures and peoples, actually be too difficult? How can we prevent their collision?

The other American experience—the Spanish American experience of the 16th century—has produced a remarkable body of thinking with regards to the

significance, challenges and value of wide spread ‘racial’ and cultural mixture, to which modern-day Americans should pay attention. If the birth of New Spain was a *mestizaje* (intermixing), the experience of the North, full of immigrants, tends to cultural heterogeneity (Rodriguez, 2007). Looking back to the texts we have analyzed, we may put forth that they had, to some extent, the same end: they intended to preserve new achievements and convictions, just as much as they aimed at building a bridge to the future; their authors were trying to reshape their own attitudes towards ‘race’ and ‘mixed-race’ persons. They did not want to abandon their own traditions for the sake of those of others. Just as present-day Americans believe that the democratic principle is non-negotiable, the American Hispanic thinkers thought that Christendom was not negotiable. And yet both cultures develop as immigrants, or with immigrants; in both cases, with *the other* (Lewis, 1994; Gruzinski, 1999; Olivé, 1999; Dascal, 1992).

I wish to remark that three elements were crucial for the understanding of other cultures in the Spanish conquest of the Americas: first, the hermeneutic importance those intellectuals gave to the various languages. Language was considered the expression of rationality; we must pay attention to it, and see the world through the other’s way of expressing, in order to understand their way of thinking. Secondly, that paying attention to representations, images and iconic language is the best way to knock down walls that stand between different cultures. Expressions such as paintings, graffiti, as well as their open use of native terms and cultural descriptions, document and reveal other forms of rationality. Colonial intellectuals left us important methodologies and techniques, that surpassed many European contributions regarding forms of symbolic art and the relevance of images. Finally, the analogy method—a proportionate sense of equality—contributed, and can still contribute, to bring down cultural barriers.



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