CANNIBALIZING THE COLONY

Cinematic Adaptations of Colonial Literature in Mexico and Brazil

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Chapter Three

Reimagining Guadalupe in *Nuevo mundo* (1976) and *La otra conquista* (1998)

> For Hidalgo and his ragtag army of Indians bent on revenge for centuries of oppression, as for Emiliano Zapata's *sureños* fighting for land and liberty, Guadalupe symbolized liberation and native rights. For others Guadalupe has had various meanings: indigenism, religious syncretism, respect for cultural autonomy, the struggle for human dignity, or, conversely, submission and subjugation, whether of Indians or women. Most frequently Guadalupe is associated with *mexicanidad*.
>
> Stafford Poole
> *Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Nicolás Echevarría's well-known *Cabeza de Vaca* is not alone among recent Mexican films in reformulating national identity through a return to the colonial period. Two other Mexican films that bracket the decade of the 1990s have carved out a corner of this cinematic zeitgeist. Juan Mora Catlett's *Retorno a Aztlán* (1990) and Salvador Carrasco's *La otra conquista* (1998) address the suppression of indigenous memory and recuperate pre-Columbian and early colonial indigenous history. If Echevarría's commentary capitalizes on "the other side of the conquest" in order to combat the residue of colonialism in Mexican society, *La otra conquista* confronts, consumes, and reconfigures a still-powerful icon of Mexican hybrid identity rooted in colonial culture, the Virgin of Guadalupe, who represents a symbolic fusion of the Virgin Mary with the Aztec goddess Tonantzin.[1] Like several other contemporary Mexican films that treat the colonial period, such as Eduardo Rossoff's *Ave María* (1999)—which enters into an intertextual

conversation with seventeenth-century poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—*La otra conquista* dialogues with literature written by people of European descent. In so doing, these films tackle and transform a part of the colonial period's discursive legacy in Latin America.

This chapter examines how *La otra conquista* and a much earlier film, Gabriel Retes's *Nuevo mundo* (1976)—which was released briefly in 1976 and then banned by the Mexican government until 1992[2]—transform the story of Guadalupe and intervene on deeply ingrained understandings of Mexicanness. When *Nuevo mundo* was re-released in 1992, one of the reviews was careful to point out that this film was not, like many, produced in conjunction with the *quintocentenario* (A.F.P. 3). The same can be said for *La otra conquista*, which arrived in theaters in 1998. As director Carrasco has said:

> Deseamos subrayar la actualidad de estos temas, la continuidad de los problemas abordados en la película, ya que el proceso de mestizaje y el sincretismo—y la violencia implícita en dichos procesos—no pertenecen sólo al pasado o a un momento ya superado de la historia de México. Espero que *La otra conquista* contribuya al diálogo sobre una realidad vigente de la que somos parte todos los mexicanos. ("Entrevista" n. pag.)[3] [44]

Such is the perennial preoccupation over Guadalupe, and what she represents in Mexican society.

By engaging Guadalupe the filmmakers are addressing one of the primary symbolic sources of mestizo identity not only in Mexico, but in many areas of Latin America.[4] Despite their disparate dates of release, these two films offer a particularly felicitous opportunity for comparison, and not merely because both films reconstruct Guadalupe. They also consciously reflect on the very process through which icons of identity are constructed. Through their versions of the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *Nuevo mundo* and *La otra conquista* envisage two distinct ways in which a figure may begin to reside in a nation's imaginary.

The literary intertext that I will take into consideration in my analysis of both of these films—one of the chief sources through which the tale of Guadalupe was promulgated—is the

document known as the *Nican mopohua* [*Here Is Recounted*], a Nahuatl text most likely written in the mid-seventeenth century by the vicar of Guadalupe, Luis Laso de la Vega.[5] The text recounts the apparition of the Virgin to the indigenous man, Juan Diego, in 1531, on Tepeyac Hill (in present-day Mexico City), the place in which some scholars believe there was a temple dedicated to Tonantzin. The impact that this version of Juan Diego's story has had on conceptions of Guadalupe in Mexico is evident in the films' allusions to it. In fact, I would argue that any return to the emergence of the figure of Guadalupe in Mexican society necessarily engages this Baroque text and the mark that Guadalupe has left through it in collective memory. In order to articulate a fresh and powerful conception of Mexican identity within the symbolic territory occupied by the Virgin, her existing incarnation within the national imaginary must first be devoured. And that is what these films do from distinct angles and to different degrees: they revise long-held beliefs and replace them with others.

Nuevo mundo and *La otra conquista*'s attempts to reconfigure Guadalupe's syncretic and political character coincide strategically, at times, with the *Nican mopohua*'s own inscription of the figure on the Mexican imaginary. The title of the book of which the *Nican mopohua* forms a part is Luis Laso de la Vega's 1649 poetic account called *Huey tlamahuiçoltica* ["By a great miracle," or "Very miraculously"]. The description of the Virgin's appearance has been dubbed with that section's opening words, *Nican mopohua*. Stafford Poole argues that, despite being written in Nahuatl, "the story itself is European in form and substance. It follows closely the standard genre of miraculous appearances" (28). This rhetorical hybridity lays the foundation for the text's multi-pronged persuasive efforts to promote a Christian figure that it overlays with indigenous cultural markers. Broadly speaking, the text promotes identification with the protagonist, Juan Diego, telling the story of the apparition and his attempts to convince the Archbishop, Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, of the truth of his account. The poem's omniscient narrator declares the truth of the apparition in the first lines of the text, and subsequently records the speech of Juan Diego as he, alone, encounters the Virgin on Tepeyac Hill. Yet the Archbishop is skeptical of the tale. Readers of the poem witness

the construction of Juan Diego's case: his return, re-encounter, and retrieval of irrefutable proof that he has interacted with the Virgin Mary. The exigent Archbishop's acceptance of Diego's story provides a model of reception for the audience of the text. The Archbishop character has endorsed the syncretic figure that the text constructs. Like the *Nican mopohua*, the films remold Guadalupe's syncretic nature and likewise arm their texts with a persuasive apparatus to promote their vision.

According to Poole, Guadalupe was a crucial catalyst for "criollo self-esteem" (156) vis-à-vis Spain.[6] He writes that "[b]y the 1680s the news of the apparitions had reached Spain, where there was at least one effort to demean their importance and to appropriate them for Spain itself. Perhaps even at that early stage there was concern about the political potential of the Dark Virgin" (156). Though Guadalupe was not the only "dark" Virgin, Poole's comment does highlight how indigenous/European cultural fusion lent itself to strategies of resistance. We should, however, recall that the Creoles, who embrace what they see as a cultural, political, and perhaps even racial difference, will in fact be the white perpetuators of a system that will continue to resemble colonialism in its treatment of indigenous peoples. So, on the one hand, Guadalupe has in fact long been used to confront the colonizer, but on the other hand, she was appropriated by the colonizer's progeny. In this respect, we can see a political dimension to Guadalupe's syncretic nature: she combines colonialism with resistance to colonialism. *Nuevo mundo* and *La otra conquista* exploit her long-standing, yet compromised, or whitened, symbolic potential for resistance, and turn it against that aspect of her that may still act as a proxy for colonialism.

Both *La otra conquista* and *Nuevo mundo* illustrate a revisionist approach to colonial writing and identity that might be termed anti-adaptation. In contrast with Humberto Mauro's *Descobrimento do Brasil*, Echevarría's *Cabeza de Vaca*, or even Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Como era gostoso o meu francês*, these films do not explicitly confront their colonial intertext. The fact that they choose not even to replay the well-known tale of Juan Diego that the *Nican mopohua* sings also underscores the malleable nature of national icons, their state of eternal flux, a dynamic that will be similarly germane in Rossoff's contemporaneous Mexican film *Ave María*, and in Brazilian filmmaker Guel Arraes's later *Caramuru: A Invenção do Brasil* (2001). Although I would not argue that these films represent the latest stage of a teleology within Latin American colonial cinema,[7] they do represent a significant cluster of films that manifest a rather free-form, but ultimately dominant engagement of well-known figures from the colonial period. Such films help to expose one general approach to cannibalizing the colony, one that involves skillful negotiation of both history and myth.

In different ways, *Nuevo mundo* and *La otra conquista* imply that their fictionalizations are grounded, at least partly, in history.[8] Such authorizing stratagems are not uncommon among makers of historical films that seek to persuade. Retes and Carrasco, in effect, recognize the fertile and fruitful interstices between history and myth.[9] They attempt to capture the confidence of viewers through, for example, allusions to verifiable events or figures. Subsequently, they exploit this acquired license once again to great effect in reshaping mythical or iconic figures. Such is the nature of their revision of Mexican history and identity. The films do redraft received renderings of history, yet neither of them pretends to offer a definitive version of events. Carrasco has said that one should approach the theme of the Conquest "de una manera absolutamente sincera y respetuosa, en el sentido de que esta película no pretende ser la versión definitiva o la 'nueva historia' de la post-conquista" ("Entrevista" n. pag.) [45]. These films would appear to suggest that more than one version of history is not only possible, but also valuable. Though the origins of identity markers such as the Virgin of Guadalupe are shrouded, their vague genesis does not make them less formidable. On the contrary, the uncertain emergence of icons, the impression of always having existed, imbues them with an unimpeachable air. If, on one side, an icon appears untouchable, its obscure outline also enables, and even facilitates its reimagining. Retes and Carrasco exercise this invitation to reinvent Guadalupe. In consuming her, they nourish their novel conceptions of Mexican identity and its relationship to the past.

These cinematic Guadalupes remain, as always, symbols of cultural fusion.[10] The filmmakers reshape her in order to inspire resistance or compromise. Broadly speaking, their reinventions

of the story of Guadalupe differ in this way: *Nuevo mundo* seeks to expose the figure as a subjugating influence over indigenous people consciously devised by Spaniards, while *La otra conquista* underscores, through the invention of an entirely different story, the continuing value of a Guadalupe-like character as a conciliatory symbol of mestizo identity in Mexico.[11]

Nuevo mundo describes a cruel and corrupt Church in early sixteenth-century New Spain that manufactures the myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This film postulates that the story has no basis in reality: ecclesiastical officials in the film manufacture the apparition of a Virgin so that the Spanish might more easily subdue an indigenous population poised for insurrection. *Nuevo Mundo* shows a priest compel an indigenous painter, Manuel, who knows the story of the apparition to be false, to paint the image, using an indigenous model, and propagate the myth of the figure.[12] In the end, despite attempted rebellion by indigenous groups, the influential icon is shown to take root among the people, and the Church murders both the priest and the indigenous painter in order to guarantee the endurance of their deception.

Through various means, the first part of *Nuevo mundo* promotes spectator identification with an indigenous population faced with sadistic colonizers. For the purposes of this analysis, I make a distinction between sympathy—immediately solicited through the display of sadistic Spaniards—and identification. It is one thing to recognize the plight of an other; it is something entirely different for an audience to accept an individual or group as their symbolic proxy. *Nuevo mundo* plays with language and camera work to align gradually the spectator's point of view with that of the indigenous population with which they presumably sympathize.

Nuevo mundo makes palpable Spanish cruelty from the opening moments of the film. Concomitantly, the action inspires sympathy for the oppressed indigenous population of Mesoamerica. Yet the cinematic establishment of Mexico's symbolic representative and the way that the film proposes that the viewer adopt the indigenous population's point of view is more complex than the film's heavy-handedness would appear to indicate. The film achieves these goals through the disruption of spectator expectations. Through linguistic and visual shifts,

Nuevo mundo creates a tension that destabilizes, to a degree, established perspectives and ultimately encourages viewers to adopt as their own an indigenous perspective.

The first words spoken in the film are in Nahuatl, and the opening sequence records a confrontation between members of an indigenous village and a party of Spanish clergy, escorted by rifle-armed soldiers, which is just arriving in the region. The film starts with an extreme long shot, from the perspective of a native village, of a large party led by Spaniards arriving; a carriage and many on foot move toward the camera as it, slowly, also advances until the carriage nearly fills the screen. The film then cuts to a long shot within the village, and again the visual perspective is of one who might be watching the Europeans arrive. Despite this partial alignment with the point of view of the indigenous, the untranslated Nahuatl precludes spectators who do not understand that language from fully sharing their perspective. Nonetheless, the Spaniards' behavior would still provoke the pre-identification state of sympathy.

A deep-focus extreme long shot shows an old indigenous leader, armed with a bow, emerging from a building, center-left, while two Spanish soldiers are seen from the back, closer by, on either side of the screen. After a few moments, the old man talks to a Malinche-like figure who is translating for the Spaniards. Notably, the shot/reverse shot medium close-ups that document their short conversation, and put the spectator visually into each of their places, are the most intimate exposure to characters that the audience has yet seen, which reinforces the proposal, first implied through visual point of view of the opening shots, to identify with the indigenous figures. She translates into Spanish, in indirect discourse, the man's inquiry: "Que ¿por qué los van a juzgar? Que los dejen en paz …" The priest responds: "¿Por qué están abandonando los pueblos?" [46] His preoccupation with indigenous flight recalls, and perhaps even winks at, the famous ending of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's account of his captivity and long voyage through North America that culminated in his re-encounter with Spaniards led by Nuño de Guzmán, the cruel governor of the northern frontier province of New Spain, Nueva Galicia. Cabeza de Vaca tells of the governor's efforts to enlist him, because of his influential position among the indigenous people, to secure the return of

the natives who have taken refuge in the hills. *Nuevo mundo* likewise shows a colonial power that has managed to scatter, through cruelty, their would-be work force. The indigenous man in the film responds by killing the Malinche figure, which sparks a short skirmish during which the old man is also killed. What initial identification the audience may have felt for these figures is quickly frustrated by their deaths.

The title sequence follows, and accompanies a series of shots that confirm the expectations that the opening scene proposes. Soldiers round up indigenous slaves and begin to torture them. The wickedness of the Spaniards is emphasized in a scene that epitomizes *Nuevo mundo*'s shocking implementation of graphic violence coupled with callousness. The titles close with a long take that displays, in an extreme long shot, Spaniards fording a river, and backs away as they come to shore, eventually exposing and centering on a small European house with a fenced area and surrounded by several horses and soldiers. Although this scene is similar to the movie's first shot in that it shows the arrival of Spaniards from afar, rather than from their point of view, this time the space from which we see is a European encampment. The perspective with which spectators are encouraged to identify remains ambivalent and varied. After the final title appears there is a fade out and fade in of the same view of the house. The camera, as if adopting the perspective of a curious onlooker—one would assume a Spanish onlooker, as the indigenous people in this place are prisoners—moves in closer to the house, ultimately framing a seated priest getting a haircut to the left. A soldier arrives from the right with two indigenous men in tow with blood stains tracing a line down their chins and covering their shirts. The soldier declares that they cut out their own tongues, and in this way manifests a damning collusion between soldiers and priests. The cruel behavior of the Spaniards is constantly reinforced during this first part of the film through vivid depiction of rape, and detailed portrayals of torture. Seen in this way, the film divorces modern Mexico from its Spanish side, and proposes exclusive identification with the indigenous population of Mesoamerica, though at this point still assuming, confirming, and yet challenging a European spectator perspective.

Shortly after the arrival of the ecclesiastical party at a Spanish village, one scene features a close-up traveling shot moving to

the right across a line of indigenous people passing rocks from hand to hand. The shot then pans out to show dozens of natives occupied in this way, tracing a path up a hill in the distance that is topped with a cross. The coordinated labor of the indigenous people, here obviously forced, recalls a scene from Brazilian director Mauro's 1937 recounting of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, in which an enthusiastic population helps to unload Pedro Álvares Cabral's ship, passing barrels from man to man. In Retes's film, the stones that the men pass along clearly indicate that they are building a church, the location and emblem of the spiritual indoctrination of indigenous Americans. Once again, a compelling intertext is found in Mauro's film, which depicts the first mass held in Brazil in 1500, which itself revisits the mise-en-scène of Victor Meirelles's 1861 romantic rendering of the scene in his painting *The First Mass*. In *Descobrimento do Brasil*, the filmmaker's goals are accomplished by postulating an indigenous people who happily haul a massive wooden cross to the top of the hill. Rather than following the implications of Mauro's film, *Nuevo mundo* anticipates Echevarría's 1991 *Cabeza de Vaca*. Retes overlays indigenous participation in the construction of a church with an exposé of their state of slavery exposing once again in this way the collusion of Church and State.[13]

The construction sequence in *Nuevo mundo* culminates inside the building that safeguards not only the apparatus of religious indoctrination, but also that of ruthless subjugation. The mise-en-scène of the interior of the church correlates with the torture taking place within and starkly contrasts with the brightly lit exterior. The camera frames shadowy space, dimly lit by several torches placed around the perimeter of the small room. Clergy are clustered around a table and at the several torture stations packing the room where men and women are being interrogated with the help of an interpreter. Several priests and others are occupied with torturing indigenous men and women in order to discover how many indigenous people are part of the insurrection. One of the priests tells another that the natives that they are torturing die before they are able to reveal how many rebels there are. When they splay a naked woman on a two-meter-tall wooden wheel and begin to stretch her to death, the film cements the core of its commentary to this point and the sympathy that it encourages spectators to

feel toward the indigenous people. The intense and disturbing image of the naked indigenous woman extended on the rack and killed by priests crystallizes spectator condemnation of Spaniards. At this point the film begins to propose a possible release of the tension that it establishes by inspiring sympathy for, but not identification with the indigenous, and visual and linguistic alignment with, but condemnation of the Spaniards. The woman's husband, a Creole man, dies from shock when he sees his wife on the rack. Before she dies and he follows, however, the camera adopts his point of view. A medium close-up of him is followed by an eyeline match to a medium close-up of her on the rack, and then showing him from her perspective as he falls backward, dead. This rare sympathetic non-indigenous character—really, a repentant former abuser of indigenous people—and the alignment of spectator perspective with his and with that of his indigenous wife initiates more plainly what we might see as a gesture toward encouraging a broad, Mexican spectator identification—across the spectrum from European, mestizo, indigenous identity categories—generally with the oppressed indigenous people of the film, but allowing for identification with good non-indigenous people. So, this partial release of perspectival tension does not consist of a simple switch or inversion of alignment, but rather with the disruption and complication of established patterns of identifying.

As we have seen, *Nuevo mundo* clearly encourages viewers to sympathize with indigenous victims by way of the behavior of the Spanish characters. Other techniques seek to take full advantage of the inclination that the film attempts to inspire by solidifying spectator identification with them. One of the ways in which *Nuevo mundo* tries to shape the point of view and political disposition of spectators is through its play with language. Throughout the film, viewers are immersed in Nahuatl,[14] and in the opening scene, the language is not translated. Non-Nahuatl-speaking spectators are necessarily led to share the perspective of the colonizer, if not their ideology. In effect, spectators witness atrocities from the point of view of the perpetrators. Like a dissenting Spaniard, viewers are thus encouraged to take the acts personally, to couple shame with outrage. From another angle, the lack of subtitles de-familiarizes Mexico for spectators. Viewers who do not understand the native language are

made to feel out of place. What is more, because Nahuatl shares the stage in this Mexican film, Spanish is partially de-centered and the linguistic hybridity of the region is emphasized.

Nuevo mundo later attempts to realign the troubled, destabilized point of view that it has up to this point sought to provoke in spectators. The film gives viewers access, at intervals, to the perspective of the indigenous people through, ironically, the language of the colonizers. Spanish-language subtitles of Nahuatl dialogue represent an invitation to join the conspiracy. The film thus confirms, reifies, and emphasizes an inferred shift in the point of view of spectators. It gradually entertains the viewers' inclination to see the Spaniard as the other. At the settlement that was the destination of the military and ecclesiastical party, one of the soldiers rapes an indigenous woman, which provokes an insurrectionist exchange in Nahuatl. The indigenous language is now translated for viewers. Indigenous men are speaking with what we might read as the viewer's transitional proxy, the sympathetically portrayed Creole man, whose indigenous wife was the one who was raped, and who later was tortured. In a subsequent scene, the alignment with an indigenous point of view culminates when spectators are made privy to the space and content in Nahuatl, of an insurrectionist conspiracy among only indigenous people.

The film generally exploits cinematic polyperspectivality.[15] As I have pointed out, the camera work contributes to the destabilization and realignment of spectators' point of view. At times we share the perspective of Spaniards, and at other times that of the indigenous characters. Viewers are taken into the midst of scenes solely populated by, or visually guided by, either one group or the other. At one point in the film, a group of indigenous people are burned at the stake.[16] As soldiers light the pyres, the camera displays the act from the perspective of the Spaniards. In a series of traveling medium long shots moving across the backs of the Europeans and showing the pyres in focus in the distance beyond them, cross cut with similar medium long shot displays of the faces of various groups of Europeans viewing the executions, spectators see the stakes and the people burning. The film's tactic here recalls the opening scene, which would provoke discomfort through the forced adoption of a despicable perspective.

Another scene follows, and intersects with, the pattern of the film's alternating use of subtitles for the Nahuatl dialogue. A man, whom the church suspects of sculpting indigenous idols, is being tortured, stretched on the same round rack that killed the woman earlier. The camera encourages alignment with his point of view by showing him from above and behind, and framing his torturers below to either side. His arms are tied above his head and to the sides in a position and condition reminiscent of crucifixion. The priest is to the left, while an indigenous or mestizo interpreter, a male Malinche, a collaborator, is to the right. The translated words: "Tú lo hiciste. Tú le ayudaste al maestro don Manuel a lo menos. O tu compañero que se escapó" [47]. The man is then pulled tighter, closer to the camera, his agonized expression filling the screen, in intimate proximity to the spectators, who see the Spaniards beyond and from the same perspective as the tortured man. The shot reminds viewers of a comment that Manuel had made earlier; he suggested that the indigenous people of Mexico suffer like Christ—a comment in this context that distances Christ from Christianity/Spaniards—which is why he is able to capture the agony of Christ in his depictions of the figure. Under Spanish rule, Manuel had insisted, his companions provide a constant model for his art. In the shot of the man on the wheel, the tortured man responds to the Spaniards in Nahuatl. The interpreter begins to translate, and the priest says "¡Habla español!" ["Speak Spanish!"] as the man dies or passes out. This time the Nahuatl is not translated for the spectator, despite the camera's proposal that we sympathize, and even identify, with the native man, a dynamic that contributes to the tension of perspectives in the film. His dying words are lost on spectators, as they are lost on the Spaniards, which once again obliges viewers to hear through the ears of the Spaniards at the same time as they have been seeing through the eyes of the tortured indigenous man.

The camera work of the crucifixion scene models for viewers the appropriation of imagery—Christ on the cross—and its redeployment as a tool of discursive resistance—the condemnation of Christians on their own iconic terms. The film taps the symbolic power of Christ's martyrdom to infuse its own martyr with sway or to better dissect what it sees as the Church's hypocrisy. Within the context, then, of a sympathetic disposition

toward reasonable indigenous characters who are mistreated, the film begins to display a nascent organized resistance among the indigenous population, and the quick response on the part of Spaniards to squelch that resistance. Up to this point, the film has envisioned an awestruck indigenous population basically powerless to challenge its oppression. Finally, the accumulation of martyrs, and the catalytic vengeance of the woman being raped (when she stabs and kills her attacker), lead to insurrection.

From early on in Retes's film, it is apparent that power struggles between natives and colonizers take place through icons. The film gradually and concurrently proposes that spectators locate social leverage in iconic domination. Shortly after the ecclesiastical party arrives at the hacienda, the sympathetic Creole man places religious imagery at the core of the intercultural conflict. He proposes that Spaniards accept the idols of the indigenous people, claiming that the faith, after all, is the same. This suggestion of religious universality recalls a theological assertion of Cabeza de Vaca, who seeks to convince his sixteenth-century readers that the native people with whom he has developed a relationship possess the same beliefs as Christians; they need only change the name they use to refer to their tripartite deity. This assertion was replayed again as one of the central tenets of *La otra conquista*. Despite its ubiquitousness, such an outlook on religious syncretism in colonial New Spain is inherently problematic, as it conveniently erases the form and specificity of indigenous beliefs and attempts to justify their forced conversion.

The scene in which the indigenous men gather to plan their insurrection culminates with a rally cry around religious imagery. The film shows here a united, proud, resistant indigenous population that insists on agency. Their plan, spoken in subtitled Nahuatl, articulates the battle for liberty in terms of a religious struggle, as the camera weaves its way behind carved idols to frame the group:

> —Debemos enviar emisarios al sur y al norte; tenemos que unir a todas las tribus. Sólo unidos podemos vencer.
> —Nuestra dulce señora no nos perdonaría si dejamos vivo al dios de los españoles.

> —Con sus propias armas debemos acabarlos. Mis hombres están en espera de la señal.
> —Los míos también, pero necesitamos de todos los pueblos.
> —Los españoles destruirán nuestros dioses.
> —Primero muertos que vencidos.
> —El poder de los españoles está en sus armas pero nosotros tenemos la fe.
> —Venceremos si confiamos en la dulce señora. Que cada quien elija. [48]

Their brief exchange assembles various persuasive strategies that reinforce the symbolic role that the film assigns to this group of indigenous men: they are emblems of unity and resistance for all Mexicans. They model for viewers unified action. The film fortifies rhetorically the first speaker's call to arms with an allusion to the ubiquitous revolutionary exclamation: "¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!" ["The people united will never be defeated!"]. In 1976 this likely intertext seeks to inspire solidarity, among spectators who support projects such as the Cuban Revolution, with this indigenous group and the ideals that they stand for. The willingness of this native group to die for a cause enhances its inspirational revolutionary spirit. At the end of the conversation, all of the men grab both weapons and idols, two kinds of resistance. Their rebellion is expressed, in fact, in religious terms: they must attack not the colonizers, the followers of a god, but the god itself. If the Spaniards focus their aggression and domination through religion, this indigenous resistance responds in like fashion.

Nuevo mundo contrasts through parallel editing the explicit insurrection of this group with other, more subtle, strategies of resistance. The scene that follows the insurrection conspiracy takes place in the church, where a large party of indigenous people are shown worshipping at the Christian altar. One Spanish observer remarks on what appears to be a miraculous mass conversion, but another dissents. Viewers would likely suspect the hidden explanation for their behavior. Later, when the church is empty, the skeptic reveals what lies behind their devotion, as it were. He removes an idol that had been tucked away on the other side of the altar—a sign of subversive resistance, and also a possible allusion to the notion that Mexican

religion can only be syncretic. The Catholic clergy reaches a conclusion similar to that of both the overt and covert resistance factions among the indigenous people: they must dominate and transform iconography (much as the film itself is attempting to do). Soon one of the priests will recruit the indigenous artist, Manuel, to create a new, and more palatable icon for the native population.

One of the priests, Fray Pedro, conceives his plan to convert the indigenous population by transforming their manifest religiosity. The priest compels Manuel, through an implication that he might accuse the artist of heresy, to invent and produce a new image of a Virgin that would help to influence the native population. With no choice in the matter, Manuel acquiesces. Fray Pedro begins by proposing a white nun as a model, but Manuel rejects the suggestion. In one sense, we might read Manuel's insistence as reserving a degree of agency and resistance even within his obliged collaboration with the enemy. Yet his rejection of the priest's idea ultimately results in strengthening the scheme. When the pair pass by an indigenous woman, the priest modifies his plan.[17] Fray Pedro corrals several women and displays them to Manuel behind bars. The priest and the painter pass along the lined up potential models and arrive at one who spits on Fray Pedro. She and Manuel converse in untranslated Nahuatl. Even at this late stage in the game, the film continues its pattern of translating Nahuatl only when all of those present understand the language. When one of the non-Nahuatl-speaking priests is present, spectators are periodically confronted with the point of view of the Spaniards. In this scene, the lack of subtitles perhaps highlights the secrecy of their conspiracy. The painter indicates the rebellious woman—someone who embodies physical and linguistic resistance—as his choice.

Spectators are given access to a later conversation that takes place between Manuel and the young woman. He explains to her that the image that they are creating will help them to survive. At this point Fray Pedro and Manuel bring into sharp focus the two main ways in which Guadalupe has been simultaneously and consistently used: as a vehicle of oppression and opposition. "Pronto llegará el día," Manuel tells her, "en que a los dioses lleguen las lágrimas de nuestros ojos. Que baje su justicia de un golpe sobre el mundo. Este cuadro será útil.

Aunque nosotros vayamos a morir" [49]. He believes that the icon that he is creating for the Spaniards possesses a lasting and dormant seed of resistance. Indeed, the uniform conversion sought through the painting has the potential to backfire and instead rouse a disgruntled people into rebellion.

After Manuel produces the potentially persuasive image, Fray Pedro attempts to ensure its acceptance among the indigenous population. This time threatening to accuse the young model of heresy, Fray Pedro forces the painter to claim that it was to him that the Virgin portrayed in the painting appeared. Manuel travels among indigenous groups with the image held high and telling his story, with some success. It is only toward the end of the film, when his tale intersects most clearly with the story of Juan Diego as told in the *Nican mopohua*, that his discourse appears to take hold among the population. Up to this point the film has continued to alternate and in this way associate progressively more violent scenes of insurrection with the story of the fabrication of Guadalupe, at one point through a slow dissolve that begins with a close-up of Manuel's face and transitions to a traveling medium long shot of an armed indigenous man running through the woods. Manuel enters a packed Church and tells the story of the apparition, but exploits its cachet among indigenous and Spaniards to achieve various results of his design. His explains:

> Esta imagen apareció en mi celda, bañada por una luz más intensa que la del amanecer. Oí una voz más suave que la de la diosa de la muerte que me decía, "Sal de aquí y lleva este lienzo a mi pueblo." Y yo respondí, "Señora, la puerta está cerrada y yo no tengo palabras para describir tu hermosura." Y ella me dijo, "si quieres todas las puertas se abrirán." Caí de rodillas y recé. Al abrir los ojos la encontré a ella en mis pies. Fui a la puerta y la puerta estaba abierta. Volví a oír la voz y esta vez me dijo: "Manuel, tú, que eres conocido y respetado por todos, di a mi pueblo que Dios, conmovido de tanto sufrimiento, me manda para darles consuelo. Diles a mis queridos hijos que confíen en mí, porque soy carne de su carne, y sé como nadie de su desamparo infinito. Quiero oír sus problemas en oración para llorar con ellos. No hagan la guerra, porque morirán todos, indios y españoles, y así la gran misión de formar una nueva raza no será cumplida.

> Diles a los españoles que no quiero más violencia. Los hago responsables ante nuestro señor de toda su crueldad contra los míos. Demando que los vean como iguales porque todos somos hijos de Dios. Es mi voluntad que desde hoy todos, indios y españoles, sean un pueblo, un sólo pueblo, unidos por el amor hacia mí y hacia Jesús, nuestro señor." [50]

Manuel's discourse follows some of the *Nican mopohua*'s persuasive strategies. Just as the portrait of Guadalupe appeared miraculously on the gown of Juan Diego, Manuel attributes a divine genesis to the painting that he offers as proof of his experience. And to confirm the miraculous capabilities of his Virgin, he, like the *Nican mopohua*, recounts a simple miracle: the desire for doors to be opened produces that result. If this promise of the Virgin is realized, he hopes to convince his audience, all of her words should be trusted. With her authority established, he begins to make use of it. His discourse clearly aligns the Virgin with the indigenous people—whose suffering she feels and who claims them as the people of God—and not with the Spaniards. His first goal in his exploitation of the icon is to quell the rebellion, which he believes to be doomed. He also turns the Spanish religious icon against them, condemning their mistreatment of the indigenous people and demanding equal treatment. The Virgin wishes for the end of the violence because, if not, "la gran misión de formar una nueva raza no será cumplida." Manuel attempts, here, a conciliatory message—much like that presented much later in *La otra conquista*—a celebration of a cultural mestizaje whose center is Catholicism. He seems to recognize that the figure that he has helped to create is destined to hold an influential position in Mexican society. Given that, he tries, like these two Guadalupe films, at least to determine the direction of her discursive sway.

Yet *Nuevo mundo* is, in the end, rather pessimistic. Manuel appears to realize the futility of his subversive strategy, his attempt to invert the Spaniards' iconic weapon. At the end of his speech, he pauses, gets up and grabs the image in an evident move of open rebellion. Later indigenous people are seen burning statues of Virgins. But the resistance is indeed doomed; subsequent scenes show a subdued native population. Now many indigenous painters are shown copying the image that Manuel

created. Mass production helps to anchor Guadalupe in the imagination of the population, yet the Spanish recognize that it would have more sway in the population if reinforced through other means. One of the priests makes a possible allusion to the *Nican mopohua* when he says that a text should accompany the image. And to help to ensure durability of the icon, all players in the charade are murdered. What remains, the film might imply, is the unanswered question of whether Manuel's prediction to the young model will be realized. Will the gods rise up aided by the image of the Virgin to smite the Spaniards? Is *Nuevo mundo* the fulfillment of that promise?

Retes's film focuses its energy on dismantling colonialist ideology. He deconstructs Guadalupe, and thus encourages a departure from her as a source of Mexicanness. After its unrelenting vilification of the Catholic Church and Spanish colonial government, *Nuevo mundo* leaves neither hero nor martyr among the indigenous cast, only the collective image of a populace coerced into complicity and on the road to domination and assimilation. The catalyst for their defeat was an indigenous turncoat, but one who himself was also deceived and manipulated. Still, Retes unequivocally privileges the resistant, liberationist indigenous characters and treats them as the only true Mexicans (though he leaves some room in this privileged space for sympathetic Creoles), a tack that unavoidably proffers them as a collective icon of an oppressed people. Even a Mexican audience that may conceive of itself primarily in mestizo terms is encouraged to see itself reflected in this indigenous group. Despite the destruction of Guadalupe, the mestizo icon par excellence, the film leaves viewers a broad iconic identity option.

Even as it undoes her, *Nuevo mundo* depends on Guadalupe's currency to evoke conceptions of Mexicanness, and the source for Retes's rendering of present-day Mexico remains the colonial past. A clear example of the anthropophagous pattern in Latin American film that I am describing, the film consumes Guadalupe entirely and attempts to absorb her representational promise. Yet in exchanging Guadalupe and forging his own, alternate (collective) indigenous/mestizo icon from the period of the conquest, the director perhaps plants the seed of the film's own disruption. His attack on Guadalupe depends on destabi-

lizing the Church's efforts to forge and deploy icons through art and persuasion, strategies that are mirrored in his own film. *Nuevo mundo* both typifies and critiques efforts to embody the nation.

* * *

La otra conquista, in its turn, tells the story of an illegitimate child of Moctezuma, Topiltzin (later dubbed Tomás), and how he is taken captive by Spaniards and sent to a monastery for religious, cultural, and linguistic indoctrination.[18] The protagonist ultimately perishes when a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary, whom he has from the beginning associated with the Aztec deity Tonantzin, falls and crushes him. The film proposes through this syncretic association—which it had earlier suggested through a conversation in which Topiltzin and a priest attempt to reconcile religious beliefs—an alternate birth of the figure of Guadalupe in Mexican society. The director of *La otra conquista*, Carrasco, has said in an interview that the title of the film refers to the spiritual conquest that was woven into the political conquest in Mexico in the sixteenth century (Interview 66).[19] His intention, he maintains, was to speculate about the period between Cortés's conquest of Tenochtitlán in 1521, and the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531, equivalently foundational moments for Mexico (Interview 66). In naming the film, Carrasco also sought to evoke the fact that the story focuses on an indigenous protagonist and tells a version of the conquest not traditionally included in the "official story." When asked about the originality of his approach to reimagining the colony, the director insists that the indigenous community that he portrays is creative, critical, and resistant, and seeks agency in the shaping of its destiny.[20] Carrasco says the following of his protagonist: "Topiltzin [es] un hijo natural del emperador, cuya 'otra conquista' tiene que ver con la identificación y apropiación que lleva a cabo de un icono de la Virgen María, para recuperar a su propia diosa madre, Tonantzin [. . .] que en cierto modo es lo que sucedió en nuestro país con la Virgen de Guadalupe" ("Entrevista" n. pag.) [51]. In fact, such is the commonly held understanding of the syncretic origin of Guadalupe. Edmundo O'Gorman has famously articulated the view that in the middle

of the sixteenth century the second archbishop of Mexico—who held his post from 1551 to 1572—founded the chapel dedicated to Guadalupe at Tepeyac, a place of worship for the indigenous goddess Tonantzin, in an attempt to inspire the devotion of the indigenous population and control them.[21] The maternal aspect of the deity helps to highlight the generative role of the syncretic figure, how from her may emerge an idea of Mexicanness. The film, then, directly and openly engages the genesis of Guadalupe. However, the explanation for her emergence—which *La otra conquista* offers in place of that told by the *Nican mopohua*—differs substantially from that of *Nuevo mundo*.

Unlike *Nuevo mundo*, which eases into foregrounding iconographic battles, *La otra conquista* immerses viewers in the negotiation of Amerindian and European icons from the beginning of the film. The appearance of the film's title sets the stage: an indigenous-looking icon—a stylized face with the tongue stuck out—is fused with a cross, likely emblematizing syncretism. The words "La otra conquista" overlay the images before they subside, leaving only the words. The cultural and religious struggles that gave rise to Mexico, this graphic design seems to imply, underlie modern arbitration of their aftermath in society. The film intends to give viewers access to those cultural palimpsests, and to ensure the success of its revelatory efforts. An introductory intertitle appears that summarizes the background of the action, a typical device of historical films. The nature of this image, however, seeks to authorize the film's message, by rooting it in (a simulacrum of) a textual source. The following words are written on a mock-up of an aged manuscript that combines words in Spanish with indigenous iconography: "En 1519 el conquistador español Hernán Cortés y su reducido ejército penetraron en Tenochtitlan [...] Al cabo de dos años, la civilización azteca [...] trataba de adaptarse a un nuevo mundo" [52]. With this technique, *La otra conquista*—like two contemporaneous Brazilian films, Lúcia Murat's *Brava Gente Brasileira* (2000) and Guel Arraes's *Caramuru: A invenção do Brasil* (2001)—attempts to ground persuasively its story in an invented intertext. The action of the film begins with a complementary foundation in history. The words "Templo Mayor Mayo de 1520" ["Templo Mayor, May 1520"]—a specific time and place—appear on the screen and imply a verifiable basis for the film.

This historically rooted juxtaposition of European and indigenous iconography is paralleled from the beginning of the film with polyperspectivality: spectators are alternately exposed to indigenous Mexican and European points of view. Following the opening scene, which depicts the indigenous protagonist as a lone survivor of a battle emerging in the rain from under a cadaver at the Templo Mayor in 1520, the film cuts to a bright, dry, intimate interior sequence showing an old priest, Fray Diego (1548, La Coruña), in a series of medium close-ups and close-ups, with two other men, in the moments before his death. At one point Fray Diego looks up, the camera following his eyeline to frame in a medium shot the two other men, and then cutting in a graphic match to the representation of what apparently is a memory of Fray Diego's: shadows on a wall depicting him and Topiltzin as the priest makes the sign of the cross over the indigenous man and finalizes his conversion to Christianity. These first sequences foreground an indigenous and then a European point of view, and then display in a visually abstract way, from a neutral or ambiguous standpoint, the convergence of the two constituencies through memory/shadow. In this way, the film initiates a complex relationship to perspective and identification, which it will parley to propose a plural as well as hybrid, and always inclusive, symbolic representation of Mexicanness.

The scene in which Fray Diego dies also emphasizes the centrality of iconography. It recruits a scrap from an indigenous painted manuscript as the catalyst for a flashback. One of the priest's companions finds a corner of an indigenous Mexican pictorial manuscript between the pages of one of Fray Diego's books. A close-up of the scrap transports viewers back to 1526 (a date flashed on the screen later indicates this), through a graphic match cut to an extreme close-up of that detail in the codex from which the scrap came. The camera pulls back and tilts up to show the back of a young indigenous man, Topiltzin, whom we learn later is one of Moctezuma's sons, and his view of the scene that he contemplates beyond and below. The man sits alone and paints atop a temple and looks out upon the aftermath of a battle, where apparently his compatriots were crushed by their enemy. His painting recounts the battle through pictographs. He narrates in Nahuatl voiceover that Spanish subtitles translate. Viewers are thus encouraged to identify with

Topiltzin, as they are made privy to his private moment and are given access to his language. The voiceover, in a first-person plural that may act as an inclusive gesture toward spectators, locates agency in the iconographic preservation of indigenous memory: "[T]odo esto pasó con nosotros. Nosotros lo vimos. A nosotros nos tocó. Este fue nuestro destino. Pero al darle voz al papel, nuestra esencia vivirá" [53]. But the film implies that this cultural essence did not fare so well, as the scrap of paper that Fray Diego would hold years later was all that remained of this codex, which viewers see burned in a subsequent scene. If the manuscript itself represents resistance for the writer/painter, Topiltzin also models another kind of resistance by featuring in his images an indigenous man strangling a Spaniard. The voiceover continues to decode the pictographs: "Gran sol, ¿por qué nos has abandonado?" ["Great sun, why have you abandoned us?"]. A possible referent for Topiltzin's desperation, of course, is Jesus. The faith of the indigenous people of Mesoamerica is being put to the test. Topiltzin will indeed persevere in the face of terrible adversity. His determination establishes him as a spiritual paragon, an example, like Jesus, to be followed. His faith never wavers, yet it does take on a syncretic, universalist character. His advocacy for the convergence of beliefs soon begins to play itself out through the juxtaposition of indigenous and European icons.

Inside the temple, as Topiltzin continues to paint, his grandmother confirms the young man's characterization of the codex as preserver of a cultural essence, and takes the commentary into religious territory: "Tu códice es la palabra de nuestra gente. Es digno de nuestra Diosa Madre Tonantzin" [54]. Topiltzin expresses his desire to offer the codex to the goddess, and his frustration, along with that of his brother and grandmother, that there remains no suitable place to do so because of Spanish restrictions on their religious practice. In a subsequent scene, at the conclusion of a ceremony that entreats Tonantzin to guard the manuscript, the man conducting the ceremony hides it inside a statue of the goddess. Religious identity and cultural memory are intertwined here, mutually dependent. At this moment, the film represents a waning state in which this indigenous population is in control of their history and culture.

The scenes depicting the process leading up to this hiding of the codex have been intercut with the progress on foot of a

Spanish party that includes soldiers and a priest, Fray Diego, who lugs a large cross. After displaying again this procession, the film cuts back to the indigenous context, where they are preparing to sacrifice a young woman—an act that they realize and which confirms their beliefs. The two spaces converge—when Spanish soldiers and Fray Diego break into the temple shortly afterwards. The soldiers, despite protests by Fray Diego, kill several of the indigenous people there, which display of gratuitous cruelty, as in *Nuevo mundo*, likely inspires spectator sympathy for the victims, with whom, in *La otra conquista*, the audience has been generally encouraged to identify, even if the seeds have been planted for a somewhat broader spectrum of identification through a relatively positive exposure to Fray Diego. Topiltzin's brother betrays the location of the codex, and the Spaniards destroy both the statue and the codex, and with them what we might see as Topiltzin's dual strategy of survival through icons. The rest of the film, through Topiltzin, tries to imagine another strategic path that takes into account the Spanish cultural and iconographic hegemony that awaits the indigenous population.

Topiltzin is the first to collapse the iconography and related beliefs of his people and the Spaniards. The party of colonizers that enters the temple has been hauling not only a large cross, but also a life-sized sculpture of the Virgin Mary. After the Spaniards shatter the statue of Tonantzin, a series of shots cements the association of icons. A close-up of the face of the statue of Tonantzin is followed by a close-up of Topiltzin's face as he, face up on the ground, looks at her depiction and begs her forgiveness. At this point he looks up at Fray Diego, the camera sharing his point of view, and what is beyond the priest: the covered statue of Mary. A soldier uncovers what will emerge in the film as Tonantzin's blond analog. Topiltzin looks intently at the European rendering: from a close-up of his face, the camera cuts to a dolly-in of the statue that ends in a close-up and then alternates to a dolly-in of Topiltzin that frames once again his face in a close-up. The priest detects this charged moment of introspection and fusion, and what he perceives as his associated opportunity to proselytize. A shot of the priest's face implies his well-intentioned conviction, as his seductive catechism begins: "Mirad la Virgin. Esta hermosa mujer es María la madre de Dios. La vuestra no es más que un puñado de

piedras" [55]. Rather than seeing one or the other as an empty simulacrum, Topiltzin conceives the correspondence in divine characteristics of the two figures (motherhood), which represents the core of the film's message of spiritual universality (or perhaps its leveling of cultural distinctiveness). The filming of this scene, which shifts from shots of Tonantzin to the Virgin, conveys Topiltzin's intuition. When, later, the statue of the Virgin sits upon a hill and Topiltzin, now captive, looks upon her, he makes a decision and takes the first steps in his strategy of iconic revision. He runs up the hill and kneels before the statue, which convinces Fray Diego that Topiltzin has experienced a spontaneous change of heart. Actually, the film is rather ambiguous about the implications of the young man's actions. Perhaps it suggests either that Topiltzin considers Tonantzin to have simply adopted a new face, or that he postulates a shared referent for Tonantzin and the Virgin. In any event, Topiltzin's ostensible epiphany has no effect on his disposition toward the Spaniards, as he turns to Fray Diego, throws a rock at him, and makes his escape.

When finally the Spaniards recapture Topiltzin (due to another betrayal of his brother), he is brought before Hernán Cortés, where he meets Tecuichpo. Also a child of Moctezuma, she translates for the Spanish *conquistador*.[22] In a demonstration of oblique solidarity Tecuichpo speaks to him in Nahuatl that is translated for spectators but not for Cortés: "No digas nada, no hagas nada. No me juzgues por estar aquí" [56]. She collaborates, much like Malinche, with the enemy, yet she holds a position of influence within the colonial power structure. She thus models for Topiltzin an alternate, less overt, vehicle of resistance. In this instance, her small rebellion takes the form of covert communication. She wins one battle through her domination of signs, her control of the linguistic channel. Spectators are encouraged to identify with the pair because they are made part of the inside joke. Cortés responds to her resistance also, at first, in the territory of signs: when she tells the Spaniard Topiltzin's name, he calls her Doña Isabel and sentences her brother to a lashing, to the new name of Tomás, and to a Catholic education with priests. Later, Cortés takes his response to her resistance into a more palpable realm when he rapes Tecuichpo.

Fray Diego refuses to be present at the torture—rather, he looks on, concerned, from a window—which further imbues him with a sympathetic air that the film will exploit in conjunction with that of Topiltzin when the two later reconfigure their beliefs through the icon of the Virgin. The priest inverts the civilization/barbarism paradigm and voices the hypocrisy of a Church in collusion with the colonial power: "No soy responsable del barbarie que se comete en nombre del Dios nuestro" [57], he tells Tecuichpo as the torture is carried out. Earlier, in preparation for Topiltzin's punishment, the statue of the Virgin is placed in front of him, thus forcing him to contemplate the symbol of the religion that he is being compelled to adopt while he is whipped. The camera cuts in an eyeline match from the gaze of Topiltzin, who is framed in a medium close-up, to another medium close-up of the Virgin. The following image is of Topiltzin: a medium shot from the point of view of the Virgin whose hair and shoulder we see to the right of the screen, which suggests that she is looking at him, and guiding as well the spectators' perspective. At the close of the torture scene, Fray Diego arrives and embraces the broken, unconscious young man. The priest looks up and behind himself at the Virgin, and an eyeline match cut shows a close-up of her face as she sheds a tear for Topiltzin in an apparent reaction shot, which, in collusion with the suggestion that she is gazing at him, defies her inanimate state and suggests a miracle. The film thus suggests an alliance between the icon and whatever she represents (the Virgin Mary? Tonantzin?), and Topiltzin and what he represents (indigenous Mexico in the sixteenth century? All of Mexico in 1998?). At this point, *La otra conquista* contrasts sharply with *Nuevo mundo*. Retes's film does anticipate *La otra conquista* in that it proposes that the Virgin was the champion of the natives, yet it puts the proposal in the mouth of Manuel, who was obviously shaping his discourse strategically. *La otra conquista* depicts such a sympathy as real. In *La otra conquista*, as in other recent Mexican films about the colonial period, such as Nicolás Echevarría's 1991 *Cabeza de Vaca*, the supernatural reigns. The eyeline match cuts and the statue's tear in *La otra conquista* help to reify Topiltzin's beliefs.

During a break in the torture of Topiltzin, the camera travels in close-up past the somber faces of indigenous men and

women, who look on, a shot that corresponds with one at the end of Rossoff's *Ave María* (1999), when the title character, who herself is associated with Tonantzin and the Virgin Mary, is burned at the stake for heresy. Topiltzin's treatment provokes in more than one member of the crowd a manifestation of resistance. His brother abandons finally his collaboration and comes forward to attempt to save Topiltzin, but he is beheaded. His only contribution, in the end, is martyrdom. Another says to the torturer in Nahuatl the following phrase that is translated for viewers of the film, "¡Tu sangre no vale nada!" [58]. The interpreter's translation recalls Tecuichpo's manipulation of signs: "Dice que vuestras palabras en nada responden a la imagen que tienen de la gran señora de piel blanca" [59]. He suggests here a core aspect of Topiltzin's beliefs: the problem lies not with Christianity, but with the Christians. This exchange seems to want to preserve the viability of the Virgin (even a white-skinned one) as a symbol for Mexico. In the final moments of Topiltzin's punishment, the image that the film has painted of the young man as a representative of a proud indigenous Mexico is reinforced through an allusion to Cuauhtémoc's torture. The camera cuts successively in close-ups to the torch on Topiltzin's feet, to Topiltzin's face, to the Virgin, and then back to his face, and again to his feet being burned. This Christian—and by now in the film, syncretic—icon has now born sympathetic witness to the mistreatment of indigenous Mexico.

Shortly after Topiltzin is taken to the monastery for his indoctrination, he and Tecuichpo essay another domination of signs. This time, however, they attempt to control official discourse in Spanish. She has pilfered a stamp of Cortés's signature and with it they sign a letter that they have written to the king. "Dulce venganza" ["Sweet vengeance"], translates the Spanish subtitle of what Tecuichpo says. Yet their efforts are in vain, as Fray Diego observes their machinations. When the priest arrives, he takes over the manipulation of signs, insisting that they stop speaking what he calls Mexican. In private, the pair fight back in two ways. First, Topiltzin sets aside the name with which the Spanish had clothed her (Isabel), referring to her as Tecuichpo. Additionally, the couple is shown in a slow long shot having sex. He comments that the survival of their blood depends on their intimate union. The film in this way suggests the continuity of the Mexican people and reinforces the symbolic privileging of the Aztecs. *La otra conquista* thus may advance a proposal of ethnic and/or racial preservation, rather than an acceptance, reconfiguration, or celebration of cultural or racial mestizaje, which punctuated the closing discourse of Manuel in *Nuevo mundo*. When Tecuichpo, imprisoned for forging the letter, reveals to Cortés that she carries a child that is not his, she repeats that this is her body, and this is her blood. Their act of procreation was an act of resistance that ensured for her a degree of agency and attempted to provoke the symbolic birth of a Mexico with indigenous identity at its center.

While the film suggests through the union of the siblings that Mexico of 1998 should conceive of itself as the imaginary descendents of this originary indigenous pair, it allows the survival of the syncretic Guadalupe, but revises her, through Topiltzin, as a proud synonym of Tonantzin. Topiltzin, toward the end of the film, is delirious with fever. He flashes back to the moment when the Spaniards entered the temple just after the sacrifice of the young woman. At one point in the dream-like sequence, the image of the white Virgin, in a medium shot, dissolves into that of Tonantzin. Topiltzin, in his delirium, collapses the two maternal divine symbols into one. He confirms his position, at a point in which he is not hallucinating, in a conversation with Fray Diego: "Ahí [en el templo] quedó hecho humo nuestra verdad de las cosas [. . .] En el fondo, compartimos la misma creencia, Fray Diego, aunque [venimos] de mundos tan distintos" [60]. Topiltzin reluctantly accepts that indigenous discourse and the power of their icons has begun to subside. His reaction is to harmonize the new symbols with his own beliefs. By proposing religious universalism, he preserves his pride and a path to long-term survival. He also reconfigures Guadalupe: rather than a European figure grafted with indigenous elements, he proposes that she can be considered, at her core, either indigenous or European; for him they are the same. He tries in this way to make her more malleable and palatable. He attempts, from another perspective, to de-colonize her. Later, Fray Diego coincides with Topiltzin's message, and thus fortifies it for those spectators who might also identify with this sympathetic Catholic figure. He says that "Esta hermosa mujer no es ni más ni menos verdadera que la vuestra. Lo que ahora

importa es que ésta es la nueva palabra" [61]. Fray Diego's position is actually more radical. He emphasizes that whatever one's beliefs may be, they will have to accept this new symbol. But rather than suggesting that Tonantzin and the Virgin share the same referent, he implies that both of them are real.

The final segment of the film, which chronicles Topiltzin's bizarre death, combines his and Fray Diego's new conception of Guadalupe with the not entirely straightforward insinuation of Topiltzin (and by extension, native Mexico) as an indigenous Christ, who sacrifices himself for his people. When Topiltzin is caught trying to access the chapel where the statue of the Virgin is kept, guards carry him off toward the receding camera: each one has an arm and his legs are dragging behind him, suggesting with this composition the crucifixion of Jesus. In the climactic sequence of the film, Topiltzin replaces his Spanish frock with a loincloth. He sheds the signs of his transculturation and makes a final gesture of pride in native culture. Topiltzin sneaks into the chapel and removes the Virgin's crown. The camera frames in close-up the faces of the young man and the statue, who are facing each other and apparently gazing into each others' eyes. It then moves 180° around the back of her head to rest again on an image of their faces from the other side. The film in this way revises its vision of an originary pair: now it begins to imply a mestizo birth for Mexico. Topiltzin then pulls the statue through the window. In his final act, which the film once again accompanies with flashes of the Virgin and Tonantzin, he tries to dominate the icon, to take her with him and reconfigure her. But rather than represent the realization of this optimistic symbolic revision, the film instead reflects the tragic truncation of his symbolic scheme.

He and the statue fall backward from the window as he cries out the name of Tonantzin, and the statue—which now embodies both Tonantzin and the Virgin—crushes Topiltzin. Rather than killing the icon and replacing Guadalupe with a new mestizo emblem as in the case of *Nuevo mundo*, *La otra conquista* here represents a partial and mutual disintegration and absorption, but one that retains a white exterior. Topiltzin and the indigenous beliefs that he stands for are all but annihilated, but he attempts to take the European Virgin down with him. The Virgin, of course, who rises as the phoenix from the ashes,

remains relatively intact. In her subsequent incarnation, the film would imply, she has adopted some of the qualities with which Topiltzin has earnestly attempted to infuse her through his association of the Virgin with Tonantzin.

Carrasco's film attributes the conception of the syncretic Guadalupe to indigenous rather than European authorship. Topiltzin's efforts to verbally and visually, through reason and symbolism, reconcile indigenous and European beliefs, imagines a degree of indigenous agency in mestizo conceptions of identity. The postulation of an alternate, indigenous invention of a Guadalupe-like figure promotes an appropriation and reconfiguration of this ingrained icon of Mexicanness. In endeavoring to achieve social harmony, in the end, the film maintains the essentially European character of Guadalupe (a Catholic icon, after all, and one represented by a European statue in the film). Her transformation lies in what *La otra conquista* does with Mexico's symbolic surrogate, Topiltzin: in addition to shifting the iconic authorship, his character posits religious universality. He is neither praying to Tonantzin through the Virgin Mary, nor has he replaced wholesale his god with another. He imagines a fusion, a perfect overlap. Mexico can be proud, in other words, of its indigenous heritage even while maintaining the status quo of European-dominated social and religious practices. The film, in this sense, attempts to come to terms with a social reality rather than proposing a substantive change.

After Topiltzin's death, the priest realizes a reciprocal syncretism. He demonstrates his own heart-felt linguistic, cultural, and religious acculturation by blessing Topiltzin in Nahuatl. Whereas *Nuevo mundo* offers no model of kind Spaniards, and only and almost grudgingly acknowledges the mestizo reality of Mexico, *La otra conquista* leaves viewers the option to imagine an egalitarian syncretism. This optimistic outlook on transculturation or cultural mestizaje de-centers Europe's role in the formula. On the one hand, in doing this, the film may be seen to sweep under the carpet the dominant and oppressive role that the (Catholic) Church and (Spanish) State did take in Mexico. However, on the other hand, the film's unequivocal depiction of the overall behavior of the colonizers brings this priest's gesture into clear relief. Thus, the priest's own alignment with Topiltzin's point of view may be understood as a proposal for

spectators to follow his lead and rethink the nature and proportions of Mexican mestizo culture.

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Both of the films, through iconography, alternate proposals for pride in indigenous culture with reconsiderations of mestizaje. For its part, however, *La otra conquista* does not offer a very consistent view of Guadalupe, and much less of Mexican identity.[23] But perhaps the film's ultimately unwieldy symbolic intricacy, whether intended or not, is what best reflects the complex, layered, irreducible Mexican imaginary. It does contribute nonetheless to a re-evaluation of the emergence of the powerful icon of identity that is the Virgin of Guadalupe. Carrasco's film recognizes the vitality of viewing Mexico through this cultural icon. If nothing else, *La otra conquista* centers the indigenous population of colonial Mexico within negotiations of the figure's cultural value and uncovers a strategy for all to embrace this ubiquitous icon. Carrasco characterizes his film as conciliatory, "una invitación al diálogo, a reflexionar sobre nuestros orígenes y a respetar nuestras diferencias" (Interview 66) [62]. *Nuevo mundo*, on the other hand, while perhaps not an invitation to dialogue, certainly is a catalyst for reflection. Its relatively more stable indictment of the conquest and its cultural, religious, political, and social aftermath disrupts inherited conceptions, and loosens the rooted icon within her place in the Mexican imaginary. The films coincide nonetheless in seeing their reformed Guadalupes as double-edged swords. In both films the indigenous protagonists manage to manipulate the meaning of Guadalupe—privately, in *La otra conquista* and publicly, in *Nuevo mundo*. Yet in both cases, the protagonists' deaths were a direct result of their involvement with her. Guadalupe thus possesses extraordinary promise to reform conceptions of identity, yet her consumption and digestion, these films would seem to imply, is sometimes a risky endeavor.

Chapter Four

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Retooling of a National Icon in *Ave María* (1999)

Eduardo Rossoff's film *Ave María* was released in May of 2000, just two months before the PRI,[1] after seventy years of uninterrupted rule, lost the presidential election to the Alianza por el Cambio (PAN-PVEM)[2] candidate, Vicente Fox. The film, which was partly financed by the former imperial power that *Ave María* condemns,[3] proposes a hybrid hero who clearly occupies iconic territory within the sphere of Mexicanness. Perhaps ironically, the creator of the script was a woman from the United States, Camille Thomasson.[4] Like so many other Mexican and Brazilian films of the twentieth century, Rossoff's film plainly and persuasively amplifies the contrapuntal resonance of the present and the colonial past, but in this case, the varied and international factors contributing to the production of the film exemplify a new, complex model of Latin American historical film, in which several and varied parties share their colonial sustenance. However, *Ave María*'s relationship with colonial literature is best characterized as grazing rather than eating. Rossoff's exemplifies an ever-more-prevalent sector of colonial films—a term I use to denote films treating the colonial period—films that establish loose or tenuous connections with written intertexts.

Curiously, *Ave María* invokes a seventeenth-century Creole icon in an attempt to inspire solidarity with the indigenous population of Mexico, and to shift mestizo conceptions of Mexican identity toward the indigenous side. The protagonist of Rossoff's film, María Inez, owes an obvious debt to the seventeenth-century poet who was awarded in her lifetime both international renown and the jealous, oppressive contempt of the Church for her lyrical and intellectual prowess: a prominent

PSRL
Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures
volume 45

The 1992 and 2000 quincentenaries of the arrival of the Spanish and the Portuguese in America prompted an explosion of rewritings and cinematic renditions of texts and figures from colonial Latin America. However, such negotiations with the colonial past are not simply a recent phenomenon in Latin America. *Cannibalizing the Colony* analyzes a crucial way that Latin American historical films, since the beginning of sound cinema, have grappled with the legacy of colonialism. It studies how and why filmmakers in Brazil and Mexico—the countries that have produced most films about the colonial period in Latin America—appropriate and transform colonial narratives of European and indigenous contact into commentaries on national identity. The book focuses on the dynamics of cinematic adaptation and examines the processes through which filmmakers "devour" and "digest" artifacts from the colonial period. In other words, it looks at how they attempt to reconfigure history and culture and incorporate it into present-day understandings of the nation. The book additionally considers the motivations and implications for these filmic dialogues with the past and how the directors attempt to control the way that spectators understand the complex and contentious roots of identity in Mexico and Brazil.

"In *Cannibalizing the Colony*, Richard Gordon probes Latin American cinema as the perfect vehicle for illuminating its history—through colonial discourse, postcolonial hybridism, modernist anthropophagy, national allegory, and adaptation theory. This first-rate study should appeal to scholars and students of film, and to all who are interested in how history is represented on film."

—Patricia Hart, Director of Film/Video Studies, Purdue University

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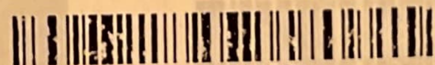

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