

# Hegemony and the Talking Cross

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That useful and interesting publication, *African Arts*,<sup>1</sup> regularly sends out a questionnaire to its readers asking them for details of financial details, range of interests, and criticisms of editorial policy. The picture of the average reader which emerges, a prosperous art collector, or prospering would-be collector, seems to reflect the advertisements rather than the articles. Were *New Blackfriars* to launch such a questionnaire, one would be little surprised to find that the average reader is an under-wealthy book addict who through the articles enjoys her/his fantasies of endless and fascinating reading in well-stocked and up-to-date libraries. For such people a worthwhile, or, at least interesting, questionnaire could be constructed to test their control of semantic variations by seeing how they defined various “in” words. One problem, of course, is that “in” words must shift in meaning if they are to stay “in” indefinitely. One “in” word is “hegemony” which received from Gramsci a neat specification as the situation in which a group dominates society by means other than force, fraud, or consent. Unfortunately, the word has also become a resource for translating Chinese foreign policy statements in which “hegemony” refers to the domination of the super-powers over their allies. I want in this article to use “hegemony” in discussing Spanish colonial, and Ladino<sup>2</sup> post-colonial domination of the Maya Indians<sup>3</sup> of Yucatan Chiapas, and Guatemala,<sup>4</sup> and the way in which Maya resistance developed new forms of authority, based on the “assumption”<sup>5</sup> of some of the symbols used by their conquerors.

The very title of Victoria Reifler Bricker’s book, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*<sup>6</sup> indicates that she has recognized that the historical period and geographical area she has dealt with are characterized by this taking-over by the dominated of the symbols of holiness and authority used by the dominating society. The subtitle, *The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual*, points to a different set of problems. We have been discussing the difference between history and myth since Vico in the early eighteenth century, and the relation between ritual and myth since (at least) the late nineteenth century; the question of the relation between history and ritual has indeed been fleetingly commented on by anthropologists, but has been for centuries a major element of difference between Catholic and Protestant theologians.<sup>7</sup> The main strength of this book is the combination of clarity of expression with thoroughness of information, based on both archival and field research;

its main weakness is the relatively modest amount of theoretical analysis, and weakness which does not prevent it from being fascinating to read and to reflect upon. Perhaps if all anthropologists wrote as clearly as Professor Bricker, they would be more ready to leave readers to do their own theorizing.

In the Introduction, Victoria Bricker, after a courteous bow in the direction of Levi-Strauss, of whom little more is heard, explains that her interest in the historicity of myth developed through studying festivals which expressed ethnic conflict in dramatised form. She found that history (in the sense of factually accurate information about past events) was available in both oral and written sources; she found that myth, in the sense of the imposition of patterns on a narrative, characterized both Ladino and Maya perceptions of the past. The central myth of Spanish and Ladino historiography of the area has been what Victoria Bricker calls “the Myth of Pacification”, that is, by the action of Pope Alexander VI in the demarcation of Portuguese and Spanish spheres of influence, all the inhabitants of the lands assigned to Spain became immediately subjects of the Spanish Crown. Hence, all resistance by the Indians to the Spaniards was not “war” in the normal sense, but rebellion, and what the Spaniards were doing was not so much conquest as pacification. Thus, the Spanish-language historiography of the area, adopts a cyclical pattern of rebellion and pacification, and becomes incapable of noting differences in the ideology of Maya resistance, between movements intended to drive the Spaniards out, and movements to obtain equality with them.

On the other hand, the Maya, Victoria Bricker tells us, “believed that history was repetitive, that the events in one cycle would be repeated in all successive cycles as they had been repeating since time immemorial. Therefore, the calendar could be used to predict events in the future – and people had no control over their fate”.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps putting it a bit strongly, since it was the structure of events, rather than the experience of the individual that was determined. As the author herself notes, it is at least possible that some events to which the Maya chronicles refer did not actually take place, but were recorded as fitting the cyclical pattern. She also recognizes that “there is some evidence that the Maya intervened in history and made events conform”<sup>9</sup> and gives as an example the surrender of the last independent Maya group and their acceptance of Christianity in 1697, at, precisely, a point which had in previous cycles always marked defeat and destruction.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, Victoria Bricker sketches the Spanish conquest of Yucatan, Guatemala, and Chiapas. There is much fascinating detail as the story of the two Spaniards who were shipwrecked on the Yucatan coast in 1511, one subsequently becom-

ing an interpreter to the *conquistadores*, the other organizing Maya resistance through his knowledge of Spanish military tactics. The conflict between the brutal Alvarado and that prince of lobbyists, Las Casas, which resulted in a Dominican theocracy in the Verapaz area, is noted, as is the survival of the ancient Maya religion among the Lacandon down till the end of the colonial period, indeed till the present day. The author's major interest is, however, directed to the contrasting views of the Conquest offered by Spanish and by Maya sources. These latter were written down in the vernacular using, not the pre-colonial Maya script, but the adapted Latin alphabet introduced by the Franciscans after 1545.

A particularly neat illustration of this contrast is given in two accounts of the same battle between Alvarado and the Quiché. Alvarado is laconic;

“While dismounted and drinking, we saw many warriors approaching and we allowed them to approach as they came over very wide plains; and we defeated them.”

The Quiché account reads like poetic fantasy with its story of noble Indian warriors turning into eagles and lightning but failing to kill Alvarado, who was defended by a very beautiful maiden, footless birds, and a white dove. Yet the Quiché document is ultimately more realistic than Alvarado's, because it recognises that what was happening was a war of religions. As Victoria Bricker interprets it,

“the Indians lost the battle because their magical arsenal was no match against the spiritual arsenal of the Spaniards: the magical eagle and lightning sent by the Indian chiefs against Alvarado were grounded, blinded, and immobilized by the “fair maiden” (the Virgin Mary), the footless birds (the Holy Spirit), and the white dove of peace, and Tecum Umam in his guise as the sacred quetzal bird was downed by Alvarado's spear.”<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, most Maya had some elements of Christian identity. Pacification could be seen as a success; but it was precisely this success that was to bring about a new kind of resistance in which the Indians tried to tap the sources of spiritual power which had been so valuable for the Spaniards. In 1687 Bishop Nunez de la Vega of Chiapas was alarmed by the continued worship of traditional “idols”; little more than twenty years later, his successor was to be worried by reports that the Indians of Chamula and Zinacantan were listening to a Ladino hermit who was telling them that the Virgin had descended from Heaven to help the Indians. A chapel was built, and the Indians brought offerings of incense and food. The Dominicans had the

chapel destroyed and handed the hermit over to the Jesuits, who decided that he was possessed by the devil, and recommended deportation to his native province. Devil or no devil, the hermit knew better than the Dominicans or the Jesuits what people wanted from Catholicism.

In autumn 1711, an Indian woman claimed to have seen a vision of the Virgin, and a similar popular cult sprang up, to be suppressed in the same way. At another town, Chenalho, around the same time, miracles were reported in connection with images of St Peter and St Sebastian. In May, 1712, yet another apparition was reported from Cancuc; the Indians wanted to build a chapel and sent a delegation to the bishop, who had it arrested. At this point, a young man from Chenalho, Sebastian Gomez de la Gloria appeared, who managed to turn religious discontent into a political movement. But it is surely significant that he claimed to have been to Heaven, where he had received authority to appoint literate Indians as priests and was informed that "there was no longer King, tributes, *alcalde mayor*,<sup>11</sup> nor officials of Ciudad Real". By August, letters were being sent out in the name of the Virgin to all the neighbouring Indian towns, calling on them to join in the establishing of the new religious and social order. Each town that joined the rising was asked to send its *fiscal* (parish clerk) to Cancuc for ordination by Sebastian Gomez de la Gloria. Bricker quotes Herbert Klein on the blend of continuity and inversion which the new church presented:

"The sacerdotal robes of the expelled Spanish priests were worn by the natives and the holy chalices and crosses from the churches were carried forth in great processions. In short, continuity in symbols and form was heavily stressed, with the church now headed by the Virgin Mary instead of God, and with a heaven and a priesthood opened only to the Indians".<sup>12</sup>

Apart from this, Spanish administrative and legal institutions were imitated, and an Indian army of four to six thousands marched on the provincial capital. Despite the superior weapons of the Spanish forces, Indian resistance continued after the fall of Cancuc on 21 November. By March 1713, pacification was completed.

The contemporary Dominican historian, Fr Francisco Ximenez, ascribed the uprising to economic grievances, particularly those occasioned by the greed of the bishop, Alvarez de Toledo.<sup>13</sup> Victoria Bricker sees it as essentially a religious movement, triggered off by the refusal of the church authorities to recognise cults which, while remaining within the paradigm of Catholic doctrine,

were specifically oriented towards Indian interests. Conceivably, the Indians saw no great divide between economic and ritual concerns. Spanish control of Catholic institutions and ritual accounted for Spanish power and wealth; establishing Indian control would transfer power and wealth to the Indians.

Victoria Bricker then considers two episodes, one in 1761, the other in 1820, both of which were perceived by Ladino opinion as being attempts to establish Indian kingdoms. This tells us more about the way the Ladinos thought politically – like whites in colonial Africa, they paradoxically combined a fear of educated people from the subject race with confidence that the natives were eager to return to the pre-colonial state of things – rather than how the Indians acted. While the supposed Quisteil rebellion of 1761 may simply have been Indian reaction to official panic, the Totonicapan rising among the highland Indians of Guatemala in 1820 is significant as representing an Indian response to Spanish liberalism. The Spanish constitution of 1812, suspended in 1814 and restored in 1820, abolished all discriminatory legislation against Indians. Specifically, this abolished the tax on Indians called the Royal Tributes. In 1812 the articles which had special significance for the Indians were translated into several Indian languages. Understandably, many Indians refused to accept the reimposition of the Royal Tributes in 1814 as legal, and early in 1820, before the news of the restoration of the constitution had reached Guatemala, a movement against paying them had developed among the highland Indians.

With the Totonicapan rising, we get a new option for the Maya, that of political action to obtain equality of civic rights for the Indians. The Caste War<sup>14</sup> of Yucatan began with the involvement of Maya in Ladino liberal politics. Between 1839 and 1846, three Yucatan liberals, Iman, Barbachane, and Barret, led secessionist revolts in which they appealed for Indian support with promises of reductions in church dues, and civil taxation, and a measure of land reform. All three provided their Indian followers with military training and experience, none of them kept their promises. Not surprisingly, the Indians took to the armed struggle in 1847, but even then, they emphasised equality with the Ladinos rather than independence from them. A letter of April 1850, signed by several Indian leaders, and addressed to a Ladino priest who was trying to bring about a negotiated peace reads:

“we are fighting so that there will never be a contribution whether they are Whites, Negroes, or Indians and that baptism (will cost) three *reales* whether they are Whites, Negroes, or Indians, that marriage (will cost) ten *reales* whether they are Whites, or Negroes, or Indians, and whatever debts they are,

the old debts are not going to be paid, whether they are Whites, Negroes, or Indians and the forest will not be purchasable: Whites are going to farm wherever they please, Negroes are going to farm wherever they please, Indians are going to farm wherever they please".<sup>15</sup>

Here, the grievances seem to be largely economic, both as regards church dues and the changes resulting from increasing plantation agriculture. Other letters, however, condemn not only acts of cruelty carried out by Ladinos but also sacrileges.

"They burned (the statue of) the blessed St Rose inside the Church. Didn't they know that they (the images) are loved by our Lord God, when he left them here in the world to be worshipped within our Holy Mother Church, by us the poor Indians and by the angels?"<sup>16</sup>

By 1850, the first two main leaders, Jacinto Pat and Cecilio Chi, were dead. They both came from the most prosperous class of Indians. Jacinto Pat, particularly, had been on good terms with leading Ladinos and could write "elegant and eloquent letters" in both Spanish and Maya. By the time of their deaths, the Indians had been driven into the forests. The new leaders thought in terms of independent theocracy with a home-made priesthood. By the end of 1850 the cult of the Talking Cross had come into existence. Before describing its importance, I have to discuss the Maya understanding of person in Christianity.

Catholicism had taken root among the Maya through the acceptance of the yearly cycle of festivals, rather than through instruction based on the Bible. Hence for many, perhaps most, Maya who sincerely believed themselves to be Catholics, the Christ who was born at Bethlehem was not the same person as the Christ who died on the cross.<sup>17</sup> Again, sacred time for the Maya Catholics was still predominantly cyclical, rather than linear, so that there was no particularly sharp eschatological hope among them; but there was equally no conceptual difficulty in the presence of one of the aspects of Christ among them. Hence the Talking Cross was perceived as a material object, as an abiding manifestation of the crucified Christ, and an oracle which gave policy directives and conducted negotiations for the Cruzob (people of the Cross), as the insurgents were now called. The Talking Cross both spoke in a squeaky voice and dictated letters in Maya, which sometimes reach a level of quasi-Biblical eloquence. The following passage, forbidding the killing of prisoners, shows how the movement's egalitarian aims had survived the increasing violence of the war:



“My beloved, Ye Christian villagers, how can ye just brutally kill Your fellow creatures – Because it is a most grievous sin For a Christian to be killed While kneeling (and) mentioning my Father’s name. . . Whether they are Whites, Whether they are Negroes, Whether they are Indians, Whether they are Mulattoes. Whatever happen, They are our fellow creatures.”<sup>18</sup>

The leadership of the Talking Cross, military skill, and the purchase of arms through British Honduras (now Belize) kept the Cruzob state independent till 1901. Before this date, however, a number of Maya groups had rejected the authority of the Talking Cross, and come to terms with the Yucatan state government. Their political and religious organization was similar to that of the Cruzob, with political power in the hands of the military commanders and Catholic-type services conducted by the choir-masters. The Yucatan government classified them as “peaceful rebel Indians”.<sup>19</sup>

For Victoria Bricker, the Cruzob and the “peaceful revolted Indian” societies had undergone revolutionary change, not so much in religion, where their beliefs were similar to those of Maya in parts of Yucatan where Ladino priests continued in charge of parishes, as in the adoption of a military organization. A visitor from British Honduras in 1867 noted that the Cruzob could put 11,000 men armed with rifles into the field and that military service was obligatory for a fortnight each month.

Chapter Nine deals with “the War of St Rose” of 1867-70 in Chiapas, an uprising very similar to the Cancuc rising of one hundred and fifty years before. Late in 1867, Agustina Gomes Cheheb an Indian girl, claimed to have seen stones falling from the sky. She found support from the *fiscal*, Pedro Diaz Cuscat, who soon, to the annoyance of the parish priest, elaborated a cult around Agustina, who was spoken of as “St Rose”. Cuscat, having added a living Indian to the calendar of Catholic saints, then apparently went a step further and, on Good Friday 1868, had an Indian boy of ten or eleven crucified so that the Indians would have their own Christ. Victoria Bricker admits that the documentary sources are not entirely clear on this, but states that –

“some kind of a mock or real crucifixion took place in Chamula because Chamula is the only Indian community in highland Chiapas today where an Indian Christ impersonator is worshipped during the Easter season”.<sup>20</sup>

She does not develop the point that in Maya thought the persons who order the sacrifice are those who benefit by it, and that Ladino power was seen as resulting from the sacrifice of Christ, seen as organized by the Ladinos, who were identified with the Biblical Jews.

At the end of 1868, the ringleaders of the "St Rose" cult were arrested and held in prison. In May 1869, however, a new leader appeared, Ignacio Fernandez de Galindo, a liberal schoolmaster from Mexico City, who had clashed with Chiapas conservatives. Galindo wore Indian dress, told the Indians that he was St Matthew, taught them military tactics, and appealed to the Indians in the neighbouring towns to help in rescuing Cuscat. On 12 June, the parish priest made a clumsy attempt to suppress the cult, and was murdered. A few days later, Galindo and four to five thousand armed Indians appeared outside the Ladino city of San Cristobal Las Casas. Galindo then offered to surrender himself and his Ladino associates in return for Cuscat and Agustina. The offer was accepted. Three days later, Cuscat tried to liberate Galindo, but reinforcements had arrived, and the Indians were driven off. This was followed by a savage guerilla war, in which the Indians slaughtered the inhabitants of several small Ladino settlements. The rising failed to establish anything like the Cruzob state; however, the priesthood established by Cuscat has continued to the present day.

In Chapter Ten, Victoria Bricker examines the ritual dramas associated with Carnival time (immediately before Lent), Good Friday, and Easter. Detailed analysis is provided to show that these dramas, copied originally from Spanish plays, reflect now the prolonged ethnic conflicts of the area. They are not historical dramas which recall a single sequence of events with a single set of characters.

"There is nothing incongruous about the fact that Passions, who are impersonators of Christ, are harassed by men dressed in French grenadier costumes. For the French belong to the same structural category as Jews, Moors, Ladinos, and Guatemalans. They are all villains".<sup>21</sup>

Yet this mythicisation of the past is perfectly consistent with the way that particular past experiences have shaped the content of the local form of the dramas.

Victoria Bricker shows in this book that she is capable of using both the historian's grasp of *la longue durée* and the anthropologist's talent for the microscopic glance. Yet this excellent and satisfying book deserves a fuller theoretical framework than that of "revitalization movements" which she has adopted. Indeed, she would seem to be aware of the possibility of a "Gramscian" analysis, in which a struggle for control of symbols of power is seen as an essential part of the struggle against the powerful, from an interesting quotation she gives from Munro S Edmonson, suggesting that Maya ethnocentrism is not a survival from pre-conquest times but rather a reaction to Spanish rule – both an act of conformity to, and of resistance against, the alien ruler. One interest-



ing line of argument which she does develop, though not as fully as she might, is the way in which a cyclical concept of time imposes constraints on people's capacity for acting to change their condition. It is sometimes argued that both the idea of progress and the concept of revolution in European culture are the result of the predominance of linear time in the Biblical view of sacred history; but while the Maya, even after they came to think of themselves as Christians, thought in terms of cyclical rather than linear time, this did not render them wholly passive before events.

Reflection on the links between the experience of time and the activity of revolt suggests also the question; where, with the Maya is the boundary between rebellion and revolution? Rebellion is usually defined as the violent overthrow of a social order. But after 1700 Indian insurrections by and large accepted Spanish ideas about power, military, political, and ecclesiastical, but aimed at getting a larger share of it for the Indians. They were, then, rebellions? Or, seeing that, for instance, agreeing to the demands made by the Indians in the early part of the War of the Castes, reasonable though they were, would have meant very significant shifts in social relations, can they not be called revolutions, even though, with the partial exception of the Cruzob, unsuccessful? It may be that drastic changes in power relations can occur in societies where the accompanying imagery and symbolism of power is simultaneously being readapted and reallocated, rather than being destroyed and replaced. This may be particularly the case in Latin American societies where so much of the popular view of the world is communicated and expressed through festivals.

Enthusiasm for liberation theology might find benefit in reading this book which indicates that any theology concerned with the relations of grace and power has to relate to a given historical and cultural context; or perhaps this is known already?

- 1 Published quarterly at the African Studies Centre, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2 "Ladine" refers to people who are culturally Hispanic, but who may be in descent, pure Spanish, pure Indian, or of mixed race. It is even possible in this part of the world for an individual to begin life as an Indian, to become a Ladine, and then, late in life, recover his Indian identity. The absence of a strict colour-bar does not prevent the formation of unfavourable ethnic stereotypes.
- 3 "Maya" refers to a common cultural and linguistic heritage, as does "Scandinavian" in Europe. There are several Maya languages which are related. At the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, the Maya formed several different political units.
- 4 Chiapas and Yucatan are states in southern Mexico; not all Guatemala Indians are Maya. The particular Maya language spoken in Yucatan, whose proper name is Yucatec, is often referred to as Maya.

- 5 In the sense of the taking-over of an alien cultural element by a people, so that it becomes part of the core of their own identity.
- 6 *The Indian Christ, the Indian King; the Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* by Victoria Reifler Bricker, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981 pp xiv + 368. \$ 45.
- 7 If we are to use (as the ARCIC proposed) the concept of *anamnesis* to bridge differing positions on the Eucharist, then a purely linear time is not the only "sacred" time available to the Christian.
- 8 Bricker, op cit p 7.
- 9 Bricker, *ibid*.
- 10 Bricker, op cit pp 40-41.
- 11 An *alcalde mayor* was a provincial governor.
- 12 Herbert S Klein, quoted in Bricker, pp 61-62.
- 13 Bricker quotes Ximenez as saying that Alvarez de Toledo "introduced new church levies and increased old ones. His first tour, shortly after taking office, was very costly for the Indians". p 66.
- 14 Ladinos and Indians were regarded as separate *castas*.
- 15 Bricker, op cit p 93. "Contribution" referred to the church tax paid only by Indians. The liberals had reduced it in 1840; this did not satisfy the Indians, particularly as parish priests had raised fees for the sacraments in order to make up for the reduction in tax.
- 16 Bricker, op cit p 98.
- 17 Catholicism had been imposed on top of, rather than replacing, the old Maya polytheism. Hence, the different aspects of Christ were perceived as *santos*, which in this context means "spiritual powers" rather than "saints" in the normal Catholic sense.
- 18 Bricker, op cit p 194.
- 19 *Indios sublevados pacíficos*.
- 20 Other scholars who have worked in the area seem to accept the crucifixion as fact.
- 21 Bricker, op cit p 150.

## Ignatian Spirituality Today

### Margaret Hebblethwaite

In September of this year the Dominicans are holding their General Chapter in Rome at the same time as the Jesuits are holding their General Congregation. The occasion marks the opportunity for renewed dialogue and friendliness between these two great orders. As someone who has drawn from both spiritual traditions with great profit, I offer this article on Jesuit spirituality for those of a Dominican background, in the hope of contributing to mutual understanding and respect.

The last twenty years have seen a major upsurge in Ignatian spirituality and in the practice of the Spiritual Exercises – the form of retreat devised by St Ignatius and now given by Jesuits and many others all over the world. Inspired by the movement towards *le ressourcement* (or getting back to the sources) and by the Conciliar drive to rediscover the true spirit of each religious order, Jesuits began to research the early history of the Exercises.