A Subversive Gathering

Material Culture, Lived Catholicism, and the Occult

by

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis utilizes a material culture approach of lived religion to analyze everyday practices resulting from past social interactions and discourses that alter the relation of things and actors within structured categories of thought and action. The case study for this analysis is a genealogical investigation of the icon of Death that attracts both lived Catholic and Occultist practitioners within the shared self-identification of folk magic. *La Santa Muerte* is an icon of Death that recently emerged as a Mexican folk saint over the last two decades, but appears to be a historical outcome of medieval Western European material depictions of a Good Death. My thesis addresses the question, what social and historical processes led to the Occultist adoption of the Mexican folk saint La Santa Muerte? I conclude that a Romantic counter-ideology denying both empirical rationality and Christian normativity gathers a diverse assemblage of people to the icon of Death. My methods include iconology, historiography, ethnography, and iconographic fieldwork. The result is a genealogy that traces a deep history of practices and materiality from the ancient Mediterranean through medieval Western Europe and the colonization of Mexico until the present moment on social media. My fieldwork examines what La Santa Muerte signifies or embodies in Nezahualcóyotl (Mexico City), Puebla, Puebla, Mexico, Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, and on social media. In my dissertation, I outline how lived Catholicism and Occultism converge within a gathering of religious practitioners who seek to subvert dominant social narratives that accuse them of deviancy.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Linda and Bruce Breault, thank you for teaching me curiosity and respect for the world we live in, I can only hope to live up to your examples.

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I would like to express my very great appreciation to my adviser and mentor Dr. Miguel Astor-Aguilera for his patience, wisdom, tireless effort, and constant availability throughout the entirety of this thesis and beyond. His genius, as well as his devotion to his students' work, is limitless and deserves to be recognized. As always, thank you Miguel.

I would also like to thank Dr. Alexander Aviña, Dr. Jason Bruner, and Dr. Eugene Clay for their patience, support, insights, and recommendations in the completion of this thesis. A special thank you needs to be directed toward Dr. Philip Arnold of Syracuse University whose advice and scholarship advanced and challenged me to improve my thesis.

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PREFACE

I became interested in religious studies because of experiences stemming from my childhood. My mother was Methodist and my father left his Roman Catholic practice after they married. Growing up, my family church shopped quite a bit. My religious studies education thus began with well-meaning Sunday school teachers with whom I never developed much of a personal relationship. A particular teacher mentioned in class one Sunday that Catholics participated in idolatry and were polytheistic. When I asked my father about it, he told me that this was a Protestant misconception based on a complicated history. While I could not fully understand his response at the time, I developed a curiosity regarding the purported miraculous efficacy of Catholic materiality.

I did not begin pursuing my intellectual interests until I was 32 years old. I grew up in a blue-collar family in Rockford, Illinois, a rust belt city with little opportunity outside of industrial labor. My father was an auto-mechanic and my mother was a receptionist; however, both changed their careers in their mid-thirties to provide a better life for their children. Following their example, I began my college career after 12 years of factory work and watching my now ex-wife earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in creative writing. After her graduation, we sold our house and we moved across the country where I enrolled as a full-time student at the local community college. At Mesa Community College, I took several classes from Dr. David Yount, a Platonic philosopher, who taught me how to read philosophical texts and think deeply about complex subjects. I did well at the community college, and thereafter, I transferred to Northern Arizona University.

In the undergraduate class HUM 381 Art and Culture of Mexico with Professor Judith Costello at Northern Arizona University, I read Eric Wolf's (1958) essay, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol." The article inspired my interest in semiotics. I became obsessed with how religious symbols might bind individuals into collectives. I gravitated toward the religious studies department at Arizona State University because I thought an anthropology of religion doctoral tract was ideal for this type of research. In the Fall of 2012, I matriculated into the master-in-passing Ph.D. program in the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies at Arizona State University.

I took Anthropology of Religion in my first semester of graduate school with Dr. Juliane Schober, who told the class to seek out another ontology that interested us and immerse ourselves in it. Looking back, I now understand that Dr. Schober was merely speaking about how ethnographic work opened one's mind to strange yet familiar ways of thinking and acting in the world. At the time, however, I could not cease thinking about the notion of "alternative ontologies" and what that possibly meant. The following semester, I had a class with my dissertation adviser Dr. Miguel Astor-Aguilera on Material Culture and Religion. This course reinvigorated my curiosity of Catholic saints and materiality. I became inspired by Alfred Gell's (1998) ideas regarding the human attribution of agency to objects, and Bruno Latour's (1993[1991]) insights on the relationship of modernity with the subject/object divide.

After ensuing conversations with Dr. Aguilera, I reconfigured my childhood curiosity of Catholic sainthood into a doctoral project. When he suggested that I read R. Andrew Chesnut's book *Devotion to Death: The Skeleton Saint*, I then decided to utilize the cult of La Santa Muerte as the case study for my dissertation project. I then enrolled in Dr. Aguilera's ethnography seminar. He told the class that when we write the preface to our dissertations, we need to explain what gave us the right to study what it is we study. I am studying what I do simply out of intellectual curiosity. I follow Orsi's (2005, 178) understanding that in religious studies "we want to understand these persons in their worlds in order to discover something about human life and culture, about religion and about ourselves." In short, I have no right to study La Santa Muerte devotees, nor can I claim any expertise beyond the information adherents have shared with me. The best I can hope to achieve within this study is to represent La Santa Muerte devotees in the most honest and accurate way I possibly can.

Claiming an honest academic representation of devotion requires fieldwork, which has admittedly not come natural to me. It is easily the most humbling experience that I have ever gone through in my life. Since entering the doctoral program at Arizona State University after earning my Master of Arts degree in 2014, I spent at least two weeks in Mexico every summer from 2015 to 2019, doing either language study, or reconnaissance and iconographic fieldwork. Over the past six years I have developed relationships with the Montes Rodríguez family in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, and a family of Muertistas in Nezahualcóyotl, a suburb of Mexico City. In the summer of 2017,

I drove from my home in Tempe, Arizona to Central Mexico where I was able to stay with friends in Cuernavaca and Nezahualcóyotl that I consider family.

My dissertation research, nevertheless, relies heavily on an analysis of secondary sources. I am indebted to every single scholar that has studied this phenomenon before me. This present work is a synthesis of academic literature and information taken from questions generated during my fieldwork. As I got to know several La Santa Muerte devotees through conversations and as an occasional participant observer in their magical and devotional activities, I gained a sense of the "lived" aspect to my research, which guided my discernment of secondary and primary sources.

An example of how fieldwork altered my research along the way is when my friend and interlocuter in Nezahualcóyotl, Camila, grieved over the loss of her mother. As she told me about her mother's death, she exclaimed repeatedly through tears that she did not know where her mother was. Her mother's remains became the possession of her estranged sister who also became the sole inheritor of her mother's estate. Camila claimed that her sister hired a *hechicero* (bewitcher, hex maker) to gain power over her mother's remains and her estate. In my naïve attempt to console Camila, I told her that her mother was in heaven and thus her sister's claim to power had no bearing. I quickly became frustrated that my repeated attempts to console my friend did not work. I was incapable at the time to comprehend our ontological dissonance. Growing up with a United Statesian Protestant worldview of death and the afterlife, I conceptualized the idea of the soul's departure after physical death as normative. Within Camila's lived Mexican

Catholic framework, however, she understood her beloved deceased mother's material remains as a continued presence in the world.

Our graduate training as researchers of religion does not protect us from our own cultural orientations in the world. We simply cannot just bracket out our subconscious biases of the world like we may assume. In researching a different ontological viewpoint, we attempt to learn about mysteries of the world we live in, however, we learn more about ourselves and our incapacity to fully comprehend cultural worldviews other than our own. Such misunderstandings created questions that bear the richest fruit of my research. Martin Heidegger (1967, 51-52) addresses the importance of questions within the humanities when he states,

> Why, for example, has the treatment and interpretation of the poets for years been so dreary in our higher schools? Answer: Because the teachers do not know the difference between a thing and a poem; because they treat poems as things, which they do because they have never gone through the question of what a thing is…However, the teachers are not to blame for this situation, nor the teachers of these teachers, but an entire period, i.e., we ourselves—if we do not finally open our eyes.

To "finally open our eyes" is a continual process, a labor of love that requires humility, patience, dedication, and passion for the subject matter.

The academic study of religion utilizes the social theories of scholars like Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Geertz, Foucault, Bourdieu, de Certeau, Sahlins, etc. not for answers, but to generate an analytical framework to ask novel questions regarding the "religious." These social theorists examined ideas related to power, meaning, social formation, and

representation that give rise to the central questions of my research. Why is it that people treat a medieval Western European icon like a saint in Mexico? Furthermore, why are Occultists attracted to this same icon only after it emerged as a Mexican folk saint? I have gleaned several responses to these questions from several vantage points, but it is a study that will never be fully complete. The manifold number of private altars and public shrines devoted to La Santa Muerte in diverse settings—like Nogales, Nezahualcóyotl, Puebla, Ciudad Juárez, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Houston, Phoenix, and new forms of devotions springing up regularly on the Internet—makes giving a voice to the totality of adherents a severe impossibility.

My inquiry rather involves a critical view of the categorizing of human thought and action through the lens of religion with La Santa Muerte devotion as its case study. I agree with Lease (1995, 322-323) that religious studies is at its most exciting when religion is the lens by which we question cultural categories that privilege some experiences, relationships, and discourses over others. I only hope to have begun a genealogy of why individuals utilize material objects to gain the favor of non-human entities to subvert social structures that regard them as deviant. A synthesis of how materiality, lived Catholicism, and Occultic practice interrelate is at the heart of what follows.

This doctoral dissertation is not solely the outcome of my own efforts. My intellectual development would not have been possible in the first place without the standard of hard work and acceptance for new challenges that my parents, Bruce and

Linda Breault, instilled in me. My ex-wife, Darcy Breault, was my original inspiration to return to college as a thirty-year old factory worker. I am thankful for the loving support of Stephanie Morton, John Holmes, Kyla Pasha, Blayne Harcey, and Rebekah Dawn who helped me to traverse some difficult times during the completion of this dissertation.

Without my advisor Dr. Miguel Astor-Aguilera, I would never have survived graduate school or managed what I needed to complete this dissertation. Each member of my dissertation committee: Dr. Philip Arnold, Dr. Alexander Aviña, Dr. Jason Bruner, and Dr. Eugene Clay have also been central to the completion of this project and I can only hope that this work is worthy of having their names attached to it.

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Due to the stigma of practices associated with La Santa Muerte, I have chosen to use pseudonyms when necessary to protect the identities of practitioners that were integral to my research. With that in mind, my deepest thanks go to those who made my research in Mexico possible. During my Spanish language study, the Montes Rodríguez family in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, provided me with a second home. I also learned how to navigate the streets of Puebla and Nezahualcóyotl under the watchful eye of mi hermana Camila and mi hermano Jorge. My experiences traveling and living in Mexico have been and will continue to be one of the most important aspects of my professional and personal life. I am forever grateful to John, Ángel, and Rebekah Dawn whose contributions, hospitality, and insights made my research in Tijuana possible. Lastly, the amazing contributions of my Facebook family at The Santa Muerte Tradition; Priya, I am forever indebted to your openness and thoughtfulness; and to the administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition, thank you for having patience with a gringo that asked a lot of annoying questions.

1 INTRODUCTION

The material culture approach to lived religion within this dissertation analyzes the reproduction of devotional everyday practices relationally pertaining to things and people (see Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 4; Long 1986, 9; Orsi 1997, 9; Sahlins 1981, 67-68; Vásquez 2011, 6). Reproduction here refers to everyday practices that perpetuate and transform past social interactions within structured categories of thought and action (following Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 79; de Certeau 1984, xiii; Sahlins 1981, 67). Everyday practice references tactics used by individuals to subvert dominant social structures (de Certeau 1984, xvii). Orsi's (1997, 9) understanding of lived Catholicism provides the overarching framework for analyzing the historical and contemporary reproductions of materiality and practices discussed herein (Knauft 1996, 106-107; Ortner 1984, 148). The case study for this analysis utilizes a genealogical investigation of the icon of Death that attracts both lived Catholic and Occultist practitioners whose practices converge within the subversive identification of folk magic (see Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 329-330, 366, 408-409, 516; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6, Kristensen 2014, 13; Sebald 1980,185; Styers 2004, 220, 223-226; Torres Ramos 2017, 38-51; Whitehead 2008, 18).

This dissertation shows how practitioners merged the categories of lived Catholicism and Occultism to subvert dominant social narratives that accuse them of deviancy. I utilize a genealogy to demonstrate a continual process of reproduction that resulted from historical occurrences that were neither inevitable, nor intended. Genealogy in this sense arises from Foucault's (1984, 81) understanding that,

> [G]enealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.

The genealogy of the icon of Death, as *La Santa Muerte* (Saint Death or Holy Death), in this dissertation traces a deep history of practices and materiality from the ancient Mediterranean through medieval Western Europe and the colonization of Mexico until the present moment on social media.

This genealogy of the icon of Death is novel in its approach to studies on La Santa Muerte in three ways. First, while previous scholarship on La Santa Muerte acknowledges the iconographic history of Death as rooted in medieval Europe, a full historical investigation of the icon of Death is still missing from existent literature. Next, the material culture study of lived religion highlights how ideology and materiality within the cult of La Santa Muerte intersect through Orsi's (2010 [1985], xvi) notion of a "logic of presence," and a Romantic counter-ideology that defies empirical rationalism as a dominant social narrative (Hanegraaff 2003, 375, 376n.36). Finally, this dissertation contributes with an examination of the intertwining practices of Occultism and lived Catholicism within the category of folk magic (Sebald 1980, 185).

La Santa Muerte—sometimes referred to as *La Santísima Muerte* (Most Holy Death)—is an icon of Death that functions as a folk saint in Mexico and the Southwestern United States (Chesnut 2012, 4). The icon referred to as La Santa Muerte evolved from

complex social processes involving conflictive and harmonious interactions over long periods of change within medieval European Christianity and the colonization of New Spain (Chesnut 2012, 27-33; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Gruzinski 1990, 219). The icon of La Santa Muerte is a skeletal embodiment of death depicted as a female Grim Reaper (Chesnut 2012, 27).

Icon, here, is a semiotic term Peirce (1998 [1895], 13) distinguishes as a signifier with physical resemblance to that which it signifies. La Santa Muerte is a historical reconstruction of metonymic blending and intertwining death imagery that resulted in the Grim Reaper and thereafter took on a saint-like devotional form. My use of iconology herein follows Astor-Aguilera (2010, 19) as a historical study of iconic imagery, including an icon's origin, continuity, alteration, and entanglement with other images. The Grim Reaper developed from an aggregation of the metonyms scythe, cowl, and skeleton that together form a single composite (Turner 1996, 77). In analyzing the Grim Reaper, metonymy refers to a cognitive blending of two distinct conceptual elements through an aggregated composite (Radden and Kövecses 1999, 21). The Grim Reaper, for example, is a composite whose scythe is a metonym for the eschatological harvest in the book of Revelation.

What La Santa Muerte represents is central to how adherents relate to the icon (Chesnut 2012, 191-193) and, despite this, the iconology of La Santa Muerte remains underemphasized within scholarship. *Muertistas* (Mexican Catholic adherents of La Santa Muerte) justify their faith in an iconic representation of Death with narratives of the icon's acts of intervention (Bigliardi 2016, 304; Chesnut 2012, 34-37; Martín 2017, 2).

Various scholars describe La Santa Muerte as a Mexican "folk saint" (see Bastante and Dickieson 2013, 438; Bigliardi 2016, 319; Bromley 2016, 2; Chesnut 2012, 20; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 2; Kristensen 2015, 564; Martín 2017, 1; Michalik 2011, 165; Roush 2014, 129). Dundes (1965, 2) defines "folk" as a popular collective identity among a group of individuals derived from a tradition or shared custom. Muertistas relate to a feminine embodiment of Death in a popular-folk manner that parallels an independent collective identity close to what Brown (1981, 4) terms the "cult of the saints."

Chesnut (2012, 6-8) and Graziano (2007, ix) separately emphasize that the folk status of autonomous cults devoted to non-canonical saints—specifically La Santa Muerte—contributes to a common group identity. The term cult here refers to the manner Durkheim (2001 [1912], 40) proposed that religions consist of a series of smaller cults that may, or may not be, allied, autonomous, or hierarchically ranked, but are associated with a larger religion in some systemic fashion. Durkheim's (ibid., 46) use of cult expounded upon his definition of religion as a systematic set of beliefs and practices relationally pertaining to things that unite people into an ethically bound community. Muertistas engage in practices resembling official Catholic liturgy, prayers, and iconography, while maintaining somewhat autonomous identities (Chesnut 2012, 59).

La Santa Muerte devotion is like that of other Catholic saints in terms of being a social relationship of patronage derived from the Roman patron-client system (Chesnut 2012, 7 and see Brown 1981, 35, 89, 90; Head 1990, 200). Devotees propitiate Death for matters related to healing, redemption, protection, and binding (Chesnut 2012, 165, 189-

193). Individuals tend to relate to saints that most embody their needs, fears, and anxieties (Orsi 2011, 15-16). According to Chesnut (2012, 4), the cult of La Santa Muerte attracts Roman Catholics in Mexican communities whose lifestyles the orthodoxy deems as unacceptable. Previous scholarship suggests that Muertistas select La Santa Muerte over official Catholic saints because of social conditions such as poverty, hazardous or lack of employment, illegal immigration, sexual issues, criminal affiliations, and imprisonment (see Bastante and Dickieson 2013, 436; Bromley 2016, 4; Chesnut 2012, 12; Kristensen 2015, 546; Martín 2014, 190; Roush 2014, 129-130).

Roman Catholic officials consider La Santa Muerte an inversion of Christian tenets due to the theological assertion of Christ's victory over death as revealed in the resurrection (Bigliardi 2016, 309; Bromley 2016, 5-6). Contending views from Catholic administrators and Santa Muerte adherents raise the question of why Muertistas interact with the icon of Death similarly to official Catholic images despite social and theological repudiation. Analyzing the social and historical trajectories that transformed the Grim Reaper into La Santa Muerte is crucial to understanding why Muertistas associate themselves with an icon of Death.

Lomnitz (2005, 490-496) states that Death is frequently represented in Mexican cultures as God's messenger and the daughter of sin. Muertistas, however, relate to Death as a redeemer and social leveler. Muertistas' relation to La Santa Muerte is an everyday practice in which the adherent's use of the icon of Death need not align with the production or interpretation of the image (following de Certeau 1984, xiii). Interactions with Death as a divine presence make La Santa Muerte a material focal point for a

gathering of devotional practice deemed deviant (following Dreyfus 1996, 2-3, 12-13; Orsi 2010 [1985], xviii-xix and see Bromley 2016, 6; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Lomnitz 2005, 490-496; Martín 2014, 204-206).

What La Santa Muerte signifies or embodies depends on the various perceptions that diverse practitioners develop through their everyday practices. Understanding how everyday life shapes individual perceptions requires ethnography and participant observation (Knauft 1996, 35-36). Analyzing the construction and transformation of the icon of Death into an entity perceived as a saint requires an iconology. Ethnography and iconology are methodologies grounded in social constructionism examining how individuals are born into social structures with pre-established categories of knowledge (Vásquez 2011, 3, 123). Social constructionism arises from cultural relativism in revealing the collective production of knowledge within the confines of language, ideology, and representation (Long 1986, 80-83; Mitchell 1986, 38).

Inquiries into material culture investigate how practices affect the way humans interact with cultural artifacts to construct lasting yet shifting and contested social relationships (see Armstrong 1971, 4, 10; Long 1986, 9; Vásquez 2011, 6). The material culture study of La Santa Muerte within this dissertation examines how Muertistas perceive an icon of Death in what Orsi (2016, 7) terms "webs of relationships" as contrasted with Geertz's (1973, 5) semiotic notion of culture as "webs of significance." Orsi (2005, 170; 2011, 14; 2016, 7, 38), following Asad (1993, 33-37, 43), critiques Geertz's semiotic position for ignoring how social discourses express authority and power in ways that determine the meaningfulness of cultural representations. Orsi (2010

[1985], xviii-xix; 2011, 15-16; 2016, 7-11, 38, 249-252) advocates a rethinking of the Catholic notion of "presence" as an option to the Protestant theologies and idealist interpretations that remain implicit (if not explicit) within the modern study of religion.

Since Muertistas relate to Death as a saint, La Santa Muerte adherents are—according to the Catholic Church—in violation of official ecclesiastical doctrine (Castells Ballarin 2008, 14, 22-23; Kristensen 2014, 2-3). Muertista interactions with Death as an embodied being that is present in their lives, rather than merely a symbolic representation, is a further violation of Catholic Counter-Reformation doctrine (see *Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235; Orsi 2016, 4-7). That an icon of Death could be an embodied presence, however, resonates with Western Christian discourses on devotional objects (per Bynum 2011, 31-32; Cervantes 1994, 20-21; Eire 1986, 4-5; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 4; Orsi 2005, 193; Orsi 2016, 2-5).

Prior to the 16th century, Byzantine and Western theologians struggled with everyday Christian beliefs that divinity could be present in materiality (Bynum 2011, 19-20; Maniura 2011, 52; Orsi 2016, 2; Whitehead 2010, 97). Beliefs in miracles associated with objects and images in Western Europe proliferated between the 13th and 16th centuries (Bynum 2011, 19-21; Kieckhefer 1989, 54-55; Kleinberg 1992, 69). Since the 16th century, Catholic officials sought to delineate the acceptable use of devotional objects, yet, often with inconsistent political and moral claims (Orsi 2016, 35-36; *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1918, 10-11).

Images depicting Death as an embodied figure—derived from source material found in ancient Greece and 1st-century Jewish writings—were forms of materiality

utilized in Europe during the Black Death (1347-1353) (Aberth 2010, xii; Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 205; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52). From ancient Greece, medieval Western Europe inherited psychopomps (guides that deliver souls to afterlife destinations), and female chthonic beings propitiated for *defixiones* or "binding" (any formulaic act that transforms an individual, as an object of the ritual, into a servant bound to the practitioner) (Cooper 1997, 1217-1223; Faraone 1991, 3-9; Graf 1991, 191-197; Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 211; Littleton 2002, 194-195; McLerran and McKee 1991, 66-67). From Judaism, Christianity inherited an Angel of Death that acted on God's behest (see Exodus 12:23-29; 2 Kings 19:35; Revelation 6:4; Revelation 20:14). Liturgical dramas in 14th-century Iberia and didactic plays in 16th-century New Spain featured Death as an eschatological actor alongside the archangel Michael and the Virgin Mary (Burkhart 2004, 51; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44).

La Santa Muerte more specifically developed from Grim Reaper like images signifying a Good Death (known as "*la buena muerte*") in the context of *cofradías* (lay brotherhoods) in colonial Mexico (Chesnut 2012, 27-33; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1995], 164; Gruzinski 1990, 219; Malvido 2005, 20). Inquisitorial records from 1797 reveal practices related to *santa muerte* or "holy death" (Gruzinski 1990, 219-220). Chesnut (2012, 189) sees no connection that La Santa Muerte is related to the Mexican *Mictecacihautl* (the so-called Aztec goddess of the Underworld) and, instead, likens it to the Iberian Catholic *La Parca* (the Latinized name for the Greek Fates although now referring to a single female Grim Reaper).

Graziano (2007, 78) argues that La Santa Muerte—and her male Argentinian counterpart *San La Muerte*—emanate from a medieval European culture that features the Grim Reaper, the Dance of Death, Catholic Holy Week practices, Penitent death imagery, and medieval notions of witchcraft. Practitioners invoked La Santa Muerte as a form of love magic beginning in the early 20th century (Toor 1947, 141-145). According to Kelly (1965, 108, 161), the icon was one of three love charms associated with healing practices. La Santa Muerte is a historical outcome of the medieval Christian notion of a Good Death reproduced in colonial Mexico as the devotional object of Holy Death that resembled the intercessory power of saints (see Graziano 2007, 78, Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 201).

Devotees petitioned La Santa Muerte along the Mexico-United States frontier since at least 1997 (Thompson 1998, 405). However, as Chesnut (2012, 8) notes, the popularity of Santa Muerte devotion has grown exponentially since 2001. For example, spell-books written for English speakers and networks established on social media made La Santa Muerte popular among Occult practitioners (Bigliardi 2016, 312; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165; Michalik 2016, 93; Torres Ramos 2017,42). Since 2015, Occultists have utilized La Santa Muerte to gain a sense of hope and self-direction amidst institutionalized marginalization (see Martín 2014, 31, Hanegraaff 1998, 408-410; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 4-6, 9-10). My doctoral dissertation utilizes a historical to ethnological trajectory and contributes with an ethnographic account of this Occultic adoption of the icon of Death paradoxically utilized as a Mexican folk saint.

2 REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH

Thanatopsis (contemplating death) refers to Christian material culture devised to prepare medieval laity for dying well (Seaton 1996, 235-237). *Ars Moriendi* (art of dying) illustrated manuscripts and *memento mori* (remembrance of death) sculptures, engravings, and *tavolettas* (double sided tablets featuring Christian imagery) were forms of thanatopsis used to instruct a Good Death in correlation with the Good Life (Ariès 1981 [1977], 301-306, Seaton 1996, 235-237). Contemplating the ever-presence of death through materiality and rituals was important to medieval Christians who believed their dying involved temptations toward "unbelief, despair, impatience, pride, and avarice" (Binski 1996, 41). Christian material culture used for contemplating death developed from a mixture of Greek, Roman, and Judaic sources (Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 180; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Whyte 1977 [1931], 54). In this chapter I examine how popular or folk Christian practices transformed ancient Greek, Roman, and Judaic imagery into an embodied figure of Death on the medieval Iberian Peninsula and in the colonial context of New Spain.

Ancient Greek and Roman Death Imagery

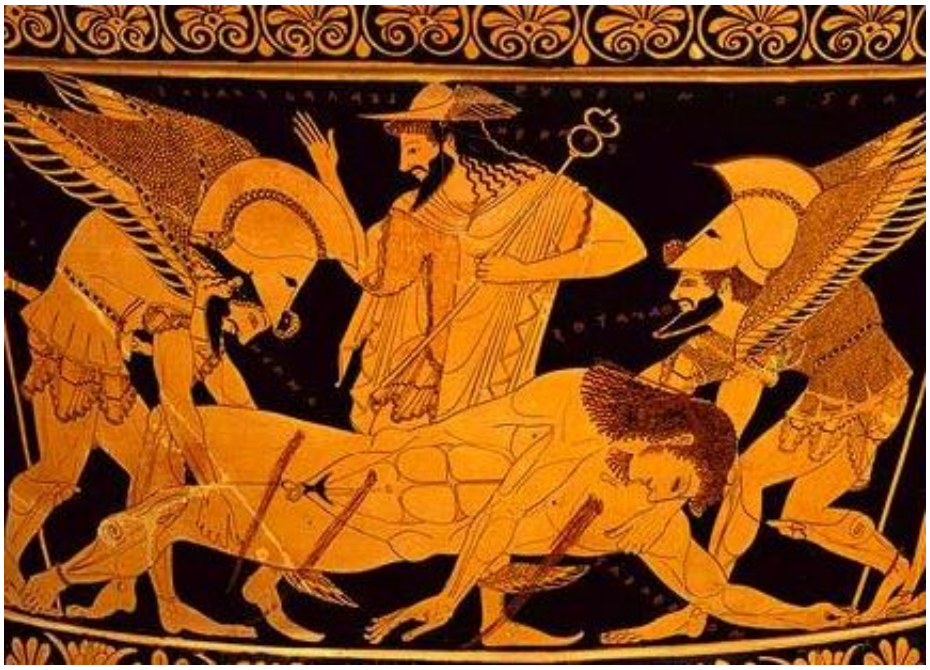
Thanatopsis is a term derived from the ancient Greeks who depicted death in the embodied figure of *Thanatos* (Seaton 1996, 234). Greek artists portrayed Thanatos (or *Mors* in Latin) with wings, a sword, the face of a corpse, and an hourglass (Littleton 2002, 195). Hesiod's *Theogony* (in Caldwell 1987, 70) describes Thanatos as pitiless, unyielding, and detested for his obdurateness. Fagles' (1996, 258) edited translation of

Homer's *The Odyssey* refers to Thanatos as the guardian at the gates of the Underworld. In Homer's *The Iliad* (in Fagles 1990, 434) Thanatos is a psychopomp (an entity who guides souls to afterlife destinations) that delivers *Zeus'* mortally wounded warrior son, *Sarpedon*, to the Underworld. Another psychopomp depicted in Greek material culture includes *Hermes* (the messenger, the border crosser, and the deliverer of souls), as well as the *Keres* and the Fates (Fagles 1990, 103, 660; Forty 2004, 274; Littleton 2002, 191-192, 194; Vermeule 1979, 39-40).

Thanatos and Hermes were representations of death reserved for epic poetry, while the Greeks understood the Keres as present in the everyday world of the living (see figure 1) (Vermeule 1979, 39-40). Keres were violent and embodied harbingers of death, identified with the chaos of a battlefield (ibid.). Keres were *daemons* that used their teeth to hold a person in the darkness of death (ibid., 39-41). The term daemon (also spelled *daimon* meaning "distributor") refers to patron protectors, psychopomps, chthonic beings, or entities invoked for binding, justice, and good fortune (Bremmer 2007, 138; Lesses 1998, 15-16; Pachoumi 2017, 10-18, 39, 114; Versnel 1991a, 64). The Keres resembled the *Sphinx* (a human head with a winged body of a lion) and were a form of *Succubus* (redefined in medieval Christendom as a female demon that seduced men) invoked during Greek binding rituals (see figure 2) (Faraone 1991, 5; Vermeule 1979, 69, 152-153, 171).

The ancient Greek poet *Sappho* (Fagles 1996, 536 and Graf 1991, 189) invoked the Fates presiding over human life and death, in conjunction with *Persephone* (wife of *Hades* and co-ruler of the Greek Underworld). The Fates (*Moirai* in Greek and *Parcae* in

Latin) consisted of a daemonic cohort of three female figures that determined if a *psyche* (soul) entering *Hades* (the Underworld) was destined for *Elysium* (the Isle of the Blessed) or *Tartarus* (a deep pit of eternal punishment) (Forty 2004, 274; Littleton 2002, 192).



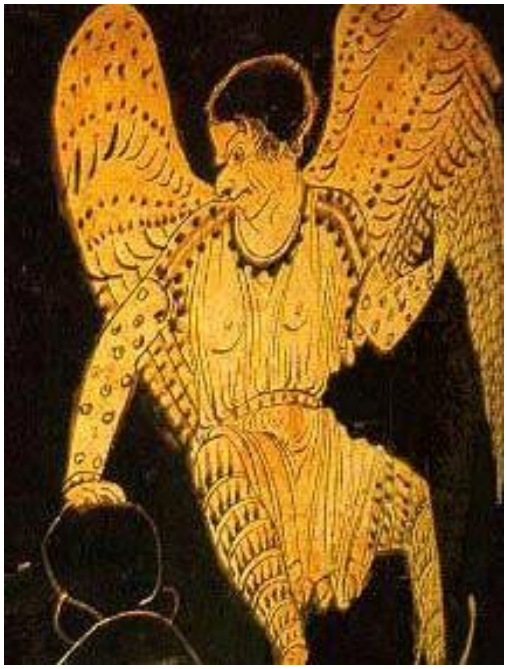


Figure 1 Above. Hermes center, Thanatos right, and Hypnos left, carrying Sarpedon to the Underworld. 6th century BCE. ©Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero. No changes were made.

Figure 2 Left. Ker, "daemon of cruel death." 4th century BCE. ©Cleveland Museum of Art. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero. No changes were made.

In Cooper's (1997, 1220, 1223) edited translation of Plato's *Republic X*, Plato describes the appearance and roles of the Fates as,

> And there were three other beings sitting at equal distances from one another, each on a throne. These were the Fates, the daughters of Necessity: Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos. They were dressed in white, with garlands on their heads, and they sang to the music of the Sirens. Lachesis sang of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of the future…After all the souls had chosen their lives, they went forward to Lachesis in the same order in which they had made their choices, and she assigned to each the daemon it had chosen as guardian of its life and fulfiller of its choice. This daemon first led the soul under the hand of Clotho as it turned the revolving spindle to confirm the fate that the lottery and its own choice had given it. After receiving her touch, she led the soul to the spinning of Atropos, to make what had been spun irreversible.

As described in *Republic X*, the Good Life, or *eudaimonia*, was a concept derived from being under the influence a "good" daemon who was a personal protector (in Cooper 1997, 1220; Wan 2017, 147-148). The Good Life was a Greek ideal related to heroism and virtue that early Christians adopted and linked to a Good Death in everyday practices related to devotion, confession, repentance, and atonement (Korpiola and Lahtinen 2017, 1-2; Tkacz 2012, 67-69). As Binski (1996, 30) notes, the early Christian notion of a Good Death arose from Greco-Roman medicine because it followed ancient Mediterranean practices and structures based on the curing of the soul from the sickness of the body, or sin.

As Greek philosophy further contemplated the notion of the Good Life—evinced in Plato's *Republic X* (in Cooper 1997, 1217-1223)—the Fates dictated an individual's eschatological judgment. Plato (in ibid., 1220) associated the Fate *Atropos* (Greek) or

Morta (Latin) with the death of individuals as it was her role to cut the lot, or life thread, spun on the wheel of Necessity. Atropos was the vilest of the Fates because, like Thanatos, she was pitiless, obdurate, and unyielding (McLerran and McKee 1991, 11). During the 4th and 5th centuries when Christianity redefined the Roman Empire, the Fates became the *Parcae* (plural) and *Parca* (singular) (Forty 2004, 274). The Parcae remained part of Christian material culture related to death, as demonstrated in their depiction in the 16th-century tapestry "The Triumph of Death" based on Petrarch's 14th-century poem "Triumphs" (see figure 3) (Forty 2004, 275).

Figure 3.
The Three Fates.
16th century;
Netherlands.

Besides Keres and the Fates, there were at least four other female figures related to death and binding in ancient Greece (Faraone 2003, 49-51; Versnel 1991a, 64;

Wilburn 2016, 197, 215). The most complex female entity associated with death is the triune being of *Hecate*: virgin (birth and the past), mother (life and the present), and crone (death and the future) (McLerran and McKee 1991, 66). The Greeks linked Hecate to a pre-dynastic ruler in Egypt whose name, *Hekau*, became known as a word of power associated with creation and death (ibid.). Three other feminine figures of death include: *Selene* (the Moon), *Artemis* (the huntress), and *Persephone* (the co-ruler of the Underworld) (ibid.). The invocation of Selene's aspect of Hecate in ceremonies demonstrated a relational knowledge of the Lady of the Dead (a title also associated with Persephone) (Graf 1991, 196-197). There is overlap between Hecate and the Fate Atropos in ancient Greece as both feminine figures were prototypes for crones or witches in medieval Western Europe (McLerran and McKee 1991, 11, 67).

The Greco-Roman world influenced 1st-century Christian practices that would later inform Church doctrines related to Purgatory (Le Goff 1984 [1981], 23-25). Dante (1909 [1320], 147-287), for example, chose Virgil as his guide through Hell and into Purgatory until the Roman poet could not ascend any higher. The sixth book of Virgil's *The Aeneid* (in Fagels 2006, 200-201) reveals a depiction of the Underworld that is symmetrical to Dante's description of Purgatory when describing pathways to Hell (Tartarus in *The Aeneid*) and Heaven (Elysium in *The Aeneid*) (see also Le Goff 1984 [1981], 24). Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil's *The Aeneid*, and Homer's *The Odyssey* all contain a *katabasis* (journey into the Underworld) and a *nekyia* (dialogue with a psychopomp or a deceased person in the Underworld to gain knowledge) (Luck 1973, 148; Solmsen 1972, 31-32). Historians and philologists used *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*

to analyze how Greek perceptions of the afterlife transformed in the centuries prior to the rise of Latin Christianity (Solmsen 1972, 31-32).

The Roman Stoic adoption of Platonic philosophy along with the diffusion of Eleusinian Mystery rites were both catalysts for altering perceptions regarding the afterlife in the time between the writings of *The Odyssey* (circa. 8th century BCE) and *The Aeneid* (29-19 BCE) (Luck 1973, 148). The Eleusinian Mystery was a group of practitioners devoted to the Great Mother *Demeter* (also referred to as *Magna Mater* and *Cybele*) and her daughter Persephone (*Proserpina*) both of which were responsible for the cycle of life and death (Stein 2016, 4-5). The Eleusinian Mystery consisted of initiation rites transmitting knowledge regarding life, death, and fertility (ibid.).

Initiations on the island of Eleusis began at a shrine dedicated to Hecate—regarded in the Mystery as the Underworld's manifestation of the Great Mother—connoting a connection to Demeter, Magna Mater, and Cybele (Stein 2016, 5). Members then led initiands into a cave called the *Ploutonion* (a gateway to the Underworld) toward a life-like statue of Persephone seated on a throne in the *Telesterion* (an initiation rite chamber) (ibid., 5-7). Persephone's statue was the material focal point of the rite where initiates had a unitive experience with the Lady of the Dead as induced by hallucinogens (ibid., 9-10).

The Eleusinian Mystery also influenced Christian communities when the latter first developed in the Mediterranean region (Angus 1975 [1928], vii,1-4). For example, the New Testament book of Ephesians was a letter advising 1st-century Hierapolis' Christians living among the *Galli* (Kreitzer 1998, 51-53). The Galli were a Phrygian

equivalent of the Eleusinian Mystery who occupied a region in southwest Anatolia (Kreitzer 1998, 51-53). According to Kreitzer (ibid), the letter to Ephesians reveals how preexisting cultural practices were difficult for early Christian communities to leave behind. Furthermore, archaeological evidence of invocations for Hecate gleaned from inscriptions on amulets further indicate a blending of Christian, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Judaic propitiations to the female daemon (Kotansky 1991, 120-121). Engraved amulets dated close to the 11th century demonstrate that Neoplatonic invocations of angels and daemons remained within popular Judaic and Christian practices well into the medieval era in Europe (Lesses 1998, 273).

The Angel of Death

Judaic invocations of angels and Greek incantations of daemons are representative of a collection of formulaic adjurations used across cultures in the Mediterranean world (Lesses 1998, 15-16). Judaic and Christian invocations of angels and daemons exist in non-canonical texts like the *Hekhalot* dated between the 4th and 8th centuries CE (ibid., 16). Daemonic incantations consist of human beings requesting the presence of tutelary beings (ibid., 16). In Christian and Judaic canonical literature, angels reveal themselves only through divinely inspired revelation and do not appear as the result of human volition (ibid., 273). 1 Samuel 28:14-19 does describe an act of conjuring, when Saul uses the "Witch of Endor" to invoke the deceased Samuel; however, this act also seals the king's fate in his subsequent suicide (Reis 1997, 4). Apocalyptic literature also features interactions between angels and human prophets but

its political rhetoric and lack of adjuration demarcates it from other scriptural texts (Pagels 2012, 2). Death, judgment, and subversion of authoritative power are central themes of Judeo-Christian apocalypticism (Pagels 1991, 119-120).

The apocalyptic books of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible and Revelation in the Christian New Testament both mention the archangel Michael as a prominent figure. In Daniel 10:10-21, 12:1, the archangel Gabriel reveals to the prophet that Michael is a heavenly warrior, the destroyer of kingdoms, and the protector of Israel. Revelation 12:7-10 depicts Michael as saving the Woman in the Apocalypse. According to Coogan (2010, 1248n.13), in Revelation 14:13-20 it is Michael that reaps souls with a sickle. Jude 1:9, further depicts Michael as arguing with the Devil for the deceased body of Moses. The book of Jude's reference to Michael, derived from Zechariah 3:2 in the Hebrew Bible, also resonates with pseudepigraphic plotlines that center on interactions between the Angel of Death, Michael, and the main Hebrew prophets (ibid., 1768n.9-10).

Allison (2003, 38-39, 324-325) suggests that Hellenized Jews conceived of Death as an angel in the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Abraham* (dated between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE) because Thanatos was a daemon adorned with wings. In the *Testament of Abraham*, God orders Michael to bring Abraham's soul into paradise (in ibid., 319-363). When Michael is unable to convince Abraham that his time on Earth is over, God tells the archangel to remind Abraham that all descendants of Adam and Eve are born to die (see Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 126-127). God sent Michael to receive Abraham's soul into heaven as a demonstration of his love for the patriarch by withholding the sickle of Death from him (ibid.). Michael shows Abraham where

judgment of the deceased occurs but the angel fails to retrieve the patriarch's soul (Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 127, 151). After Michael's failure, God sends the archangel Samael to collect Abraham's soul. People's souls would reportedly leap from their bodies by merely glancing at Samael (Allison 2003, 320-321; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 128, 519).

Abraham intensifies his negotiations to remain alive after Samael reveals itself as Death; however, when the angel tricks the patriarch into touching Death's hand, Abraham immediately ascends into paradise (Allison 2003, 320-321, 382). Abraham's negotiations to delay his own demise were in vain because he failed to realize that Death's presence was an articulation of God's will (ibid., 391). Michael and Samael are binary positions of good and evil respectively yet both share the role of acquiring souls at God's command (Diamond 1995, 77-78, Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 519). The polarization of Michael and the Angel of Death in the *Testament of Abraham* comes from their distinctive tactics though they fulfill the same role (Mirguet 2010, 253-254). Samael and Michael function as mirrors to each other in their actions and in their characteristics (ibid., 269). Samael is an efficient psychopomp and a crafty executioner of God's will (ibid., 271-273).

Allison (2003, 324-325) describes the Angel of Death as follows,

> Death resembles the angels in 12:1, because he can look like an archangel (v.6), and because he dwells in heaven (see on v.2), he is some sort of angel.… Later Judaism, personified Death as the Angel of Death… This angel acts at God's bidding… He is often called Sam(m)ael, which may mean "poison of God"…16.2. Michael, the incorporeal, who is (in contrast to Abraham) obedient as always, goes away and speaks to Death, who is evidently not far away.

Michael and Samael are similar in that God sends both to retrieve Abraham's soul and they are obedient to God's commands (Allison 2003, 44-45). Only Death has the obdurateness and callousness needed to retrieve Abraham's soul when the patriarch refuses to accept his own bodily demise (Allison 2003, 44-45; Mirguet 2010, 273).

Although Michael serves as a deliverer of souls, he is also a messenger and bears a resemblance to the Greek Hermes who functioned as psychopomp, messenger, border crosser, and killer of giants (Allison 2003, 35, 76; Littleton 2002, 194). Michael is a compassionate military leader, destroyer of kingdoms, and protector (Allison 2003, 77; Coogan 2010, 1253n.13). Death is obdurate, unyielding, and pitiless (Allison 2003, 35, 44-45, 329). Thanatos is to Hermes in ancient Greek thought as Samael or the Angel of Death are to Michael (see Diamond 1995, 77-78; Fagles 1996, 530; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 519; Littleton 2002, 194).

The Angel of Death shares a likeness to Satan in that both are foils to the archangel Michael (see Coogan 2010, 1786n.3, 1786n.7; Mirguet 2010, 253). Ginzberg (1998 [1909], 49) explicitly states that the Angel of Death, as Samael, is Satan. Burge (2010, 217) also relates the Angel of Death to the Angel of Hell since *ʿEzrāʾēl* resembles the Islamic Angel of Death, as *ʿAzrāʾīl* or *ʿIzrāʾīl* (Azrael). The *ʿZRʾL* root demonstrates a regular exchange of non-doctrinal beliefs and practices between Jews, Christians, and Muslims (ibid., 222). For example, Burge (ibid., 220) found the *ʿZRʾL* root on two amulets dated in the 6th century CE and five Aramaic incantation texts dated in the 7th century CE. *ʿZRʾL* also appears in incantations of non-canonical texts such as the Judaic *Hekhalot* and the Christian *Apocalypse of Peter* (ibid., 222).

Revelation 14:13-20 describes two angels that reap souls with a sickle. One angel resembles the Son of Man who, according to Coogan (2010, 1248n.13), is a reference to the archangel Michael; the other angel is unnamed but has the attribute of having "authority over fire." Ginzberg's (1998 [1909], 49, 98, 131-132) collection of pseudepigrapha and Revelation 12:7-10 both contain a vision of the archangel Michael battling with the great dragon (referred to in Revelation as the ancient serpent, Satan, and the Devil) (in Coogan 2010, 1786n.3, n.7-12). Pseudepigrapha and Revelation, then, share a motif that juxtaposes Death and Satan with the archangel Michael (Allison 2003, 44-45; Coogan 2010, 1786n.3; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 49, 131-132; Mirguet 2010, 269).

According to Coogan (2010, 1786n.3), the dragon in Revelation 20:1-10 is a historical reference to the Canaanite Leviathan (a sea monster mentioned in the Hebrew Bible that indexes enemies of Israel). Another interpretation refers to Michael's victory over the dragon as a defeat of the Angel of Death as Samael (Burge 2010, 217; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 49). According to much later medieval Western European interpretation, Michael's victory over the dragon was a metaphor for Christ's resurrection being a triumph over death (see figure 4) (Coogan 2010, 1795n.20.1-6). Victory over death during the Black Death gave hope to medieval Christians who hoped the Horseman of Death was a metaphorical forecasting of the plague that would usher in the Last Judgement (Aberth 2010, 25, 252).

Practices and Material Culture in the Black Death

The 13th-century Franciscan monk Alexander of Breman based his illustrations of Revelation on the writings of the 12th-century theologian Joachim of Fiore (see Cambridge Digital Library 1249-1250, 27v, 78v, 96r, 97r). Using Roman Emperors to represent Apocalyptic Horsemen, Breman illustrated the Apocalypse as a Roman historical event (see figure 5). The Black Death altered apocalyptic literature and material culture from Italy to England, as noted in illustrations of a sword wielding shrouded skeleton that represented the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse, described in Revelation 6:8, that had the authority to kill with sword, famine, and disease (see figure 6) (Aberth 2010, 215-221). This figure of Death was part of apocalyptic images, literature, and performances utilized for contemplating the incorruptible and unbiased justice of the Last Judgement (Aberth 2010, 130; Pagels 2012, 37).

Figure 4. Michael Slaying Death. Jan Van Eyck's Altar Screen of the Last Judgment. 15th century; Netherlands. ©Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero. No changes were made.

Figure 5. Pale Horse from Revelation Domitian Killing Christians. Alexander of Breman, Lower Saxony, 1249-1250. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Figure 6. Death the Horseman. *L'Apocalypse au château d'Angers*. Apocalyptic Tapestery in Angers, France 1377. Tenture Apocalypse Angers cavalier. © Rémi Jouan, CC-BY-SA, GNU Free Documentation License, Wikimedia Commons. No changes were made.

14th-century outbreaks of plague followed 6th-century examples established in Gaul, Mesopotamia, and Rome (Aberth 2010, 125). The laity shunned priests and monks after a plague outbreak in Constantinople in 542 CE because of their associations with death (ibid.). Christian officials attempted to pacify the masses with rogations and processions credited with ending epidemics in 543 CE in Gaul, 573 CE in Mesopotamia, and 590 CE in Rome (ibid.). At the onset of the Black Death, the Church ordered routine processions because officials feared the epidemic was the result of God's vengeance (ibid., 127-129). Prior to the Black Death, there was a pervasive belief that death was divine punishment for sin (Jones 2010, 80). The high levels of communal suffering during the Black Death, however, induced a public anxiety that death could come for anyone at any time (ibid., 81). The ubiquity of death in the 14th century, then, transformed beliefs in divine retribution for sin to apocalyptic hopes of an impending Last Judgment (Eire 1995, 249; Jones 2010, 80; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52-53).

In 1336, Pope Benedict XII (Papal Encyclicals Online 2002) issued a papal decree that Christians would receive an immediate judgment upon death and that the Beatific Vision (coming face to face with God) could occur immediately or prior to the Last Judgment. Pope Benedict XII's ruling emphasized the Catholic notion of Purgatory as an intermediate place of saintly intercession propitiated by the living on behalf of the dead (Aberth 2010, 226). The theological importance of the Last Judgment no longer rested on the reckoning of souls but shifted to the resurrection of the physical body (ibid., 226, 252). From this theological shift, a sense of renewal congealed in the Christian

imagination wherein the Last Judgment would usher in a new era of justice and eternal life in the resurrection of an idealized body (Aberth 2010, 252).

Aberth (2010, 252) interprets *transi tombs* (two-tiered marble sepulchers having a sculpted rendition of the corpse on the covering while set on the tier above said covering was an idealized image of the deceased when alive) as depictions of the victory of the Christian over the Apocalyptic Horseman of Death. While transi tombs were for wealthy elites such as bishops and noblemen, the *Ars Moriendi* texts (15th and 16th centuries) stressed the importance of the Good Death for non-elites (ibid., 239, 252). Within the *Ars Moriendi*, the embodied figure of Death as a skeleton carrying a scythe, approaches a character by the name of "Everyman" who attempts to negotiate with Death for more bodily time on Earth (see figure 7) (ibid., 241). Death grants Everyman a brief but undisclosed amount of time and thus demonstrates that ordinary people, if only to make minor amends in their lives, can negotiate with Death (ibid.). Conversely, the Hebrew Bible, the Christian book of Revelation, and the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Abraham* depicted negotiations with the Angel of Death as impossible (Allison 2003, 391; Jones 2010, 80; Whyte 1977 [1931], 55).

The *Ars Moriendi* quotes Revelation 20:12, "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne…The dead were judged according to their works," at which point the character Everyman reunites with his own idealized body at the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010, 242). According to Aberth (ibid.), this final scene represents the 14th-century hope of renewal realized in bodily resurrection at the Last Judgement. The *Ars Moriendi* links the figure of Death as a scythe wielding Christian psychopomp to the

eschatological harvest described in Revelation (Coogan 2010, 1789n.13; Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84; Jones 2010, 81). The notion of Death as an embodied figure who participated in one's death allowed Christians to envision their own demise as part of Christ's victory and resurrection (Aberth 2010, 222-224, 252; Malvido 2005, 23; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51). The death figure that emerged from the Black Death era became an embodiment of the herald of the Last Judgment, an intermediary between life and death, a reckoner of souls, a gateway to the afterlife, an emblem of social justice in the Last Judgment, and a guide to Purgatory (Aberth 2010, 231, 269; Jones 2010, 81).

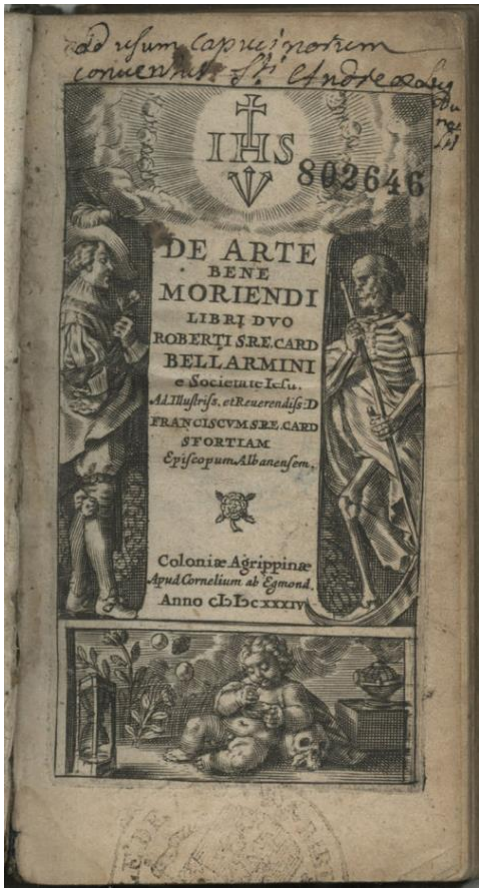


Figure 7. Ars Moriendi. Author Saint Robert Bellarmin. 1542-1621. 17th century. ©Bibliothèque Numérique de Lyon. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

Metonymy and the Grim Reaper

The figure of Death—as depicted during the Black Death and again later within apocalyptic imagery—was an eschatological actor with god-like powers in the Last Judgment bringing incorruptible and unbiased justice (Aberth 2010, 222-224). The conceptualization of Death as a herald of the Last Judgment and as a psychopomp that brings souls to justice without personal attachment and discrimination is the basis for popular imagery referred to as the Grim Reaper in English and La Parca in Spanish (Aberth 2010, 252; Jones 2010, 80; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Turner 1996, 78). The image of the Grim Reaper is a composite of metonyms derived from representations created for the Christian contemplation of the ever-presence of death (Coulson and Oakley 2003, 75; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52).

Radden and Kövecses (1999, 21) define metonymy as a blending of two distinct objects in which the first leads one to think of the second by way of a culturally patterned conceptualization. Metonyms are not arbitrary signifiers but arise from causal associations in everyday experience that provide insight into how cultural representations remain continuous yet transform over time (Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980], 39-40). Metonymy is a form of cognitive modeling that produces cultural meanings within a "contained-as-a-part relationship" (Lakoff 1987, 18-19). The Grim Reaper's scythe, for example, is only part of Revelation's apocalyptic plotline yet the scythe contains, through its relationship to Revelation, the meaning of the eschatological harvest in medieval Christendom (see Aberth 2010, 231-237; Lakoff 1987, 18-19; Revelation 14:13-20).

Each metonym within the Grim Reaper composite carries historical significance connected to apocalyptic beliefs associated with the Black Death. The clothing of priests attending to funerals and the rites of the dying during the Black Death era forms the metonymy of the Grim Reaper's cowl (Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84). The metonymical relationships contained within the Grim Reaper are a series of Christian referents, like the scythe from Revelation 14:13-20, linking skeletons in the Dance of Death with priests consoling the communities affected by large numbers of people dying from disease (Coogan 2010, 1789n.13; Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84; Jones 2010, 81). The connection of priests to the eschatological harvest through apocalyptic sermons during bouts of epidemics, blends the cowl to the scythe while the skeleton blends to the scythe through the metonymical links of reaper, death, killer, and skeleton (Aberth 2010, 125; Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84; Jones 2010, 80; Turner 1996, 78).

Fauconnier and Turner (1999, 77-84) refer to the Grim Reaper's composite structure as a conceptual integration network because the cowl, skeleton, and scythe are metonyms that "blend" or combine their meanings to create an emergent structure with its own meaning. For example, the cowl, skeleton, and scythe metonymically refer to disparate social actors (i.e., a priest, a dead human, and a reaper), yet each referent together created a culturally recognizable fourth social actor (i.e., the Grim Reaper) (ibid., 83-84). The Grim Reaper conceptual integration network is a "topology" because additional elements may blend new meanings into the already established significance of the original metonymic composite (ibid., 85). As both a conceptual integration network and a metonymic topology, then, the Grim Reaper transforms death as an abstract

concept into an embodied material composite capable of taking on new meanings as additional blends occur (Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84-85; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562).

The scythe, the skeleton, and the cowl form a material composite embodying an abstract concept that Págan Cánovas (2011, 562) refers to as a causal tautology (Death causes death). In this tautology, the scythe transforms from a harvesting tool to an eschatological instrument because it combines with the skeleton of a deceased human and the cowl worn by Christian monks (Turner 1996, 80). The Grim Reaper as a causal tautology exemplifies how material composites can experience longevity within cultures (Págan Cánovas 2011, 574). As a material composite that emerged out of the Black Death milieu, the Grim Reaper is a causal tautology that contains the metonymic relationships of a scythe (eschatological instrument) which blends to a skeleton (deceased person), and then blends to a cowl (used in medieval Christian death rites) (Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84; Jones 2010, 81; Lakoff 1987, 18-19; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562).

As a causal tautology, the Grim Reaper is a logical psychopomp for envisioning and contemplating the Christian conceptions of life and the afterlife (Eire 1995, 10, 309; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562). The Grim Reaper parallels psychopomps of ancient Greece and Rome as well as the Angel of Death from Judaism in terms of shared characteristics (obdurate, unyielding, and pitiless) and similar function (a guide to the afterlife) (Cooper 1997, 1217-1223; Faraone 1991, 3-6; Graf 1991, 191-197; Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 205-206, 211; Littleton 2002, 194-195; McLerran and McKee 1991, 66-67; Exodus 12:23-29; 2 Kings 19:35; Revelation 6:4, 20:14). The Grim Reaper is an icon signifying

through resemblances of characteristics found within already existing figures of Death (see Keane 2003, 239; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562; Peirce 1998 [1895], 13).

The Grim Reaper, then, is an icon of Death derived in characteristics and function from Greek, Roman, and Judaic representations that blended with apocalyptic Christian referents—as per the metonyms of scythe, cowl, and skeleton—constituting an emergent structure (Chesnut 2012, 6; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Turner 1996, 77). The scythe, the skeleton, and the cowl within this iconic structure portray the material composite of Death as an embodied eschatological actor (Turner 1996, 78). The Grim Reaper is such a common blend of Christian imagery and apocalyptic allegories that the mere inclusion of Death into a work of art or fiction connotes an eschatological actor devoid of personal volition but who acts upon divine orders (Coulson and Oakley 2003, 75). The Grim Reaper further connotes mystery, solitude, and non-ordinary human social interactions (Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84).

Cognitive processes shared by humanity form the metonymic composition of Death; however, the Grim Reaper only exists in societies exposed to apocalyptic Christian referents (Kövecses 2005, 282). The metonyms of skeleton, scythe, and cowl formed the Grim Reaper as an icon—featured in Dance of Death performances, on transi tombs, and within the *Ars Moriendi* literature and rites—that became understood as an eschatological actor present at the Apocalypse described in Revelation (Aberth 2010, 252; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562, Turner 1996, 77). In late medieval Western Europe, Grim Reaper imagery connoted a combined sense of social leveling and eschatological judgment (Eire 1995, 309; Jones 2010, 80-81). From the 15th through 16th centuries, Grim

Reaper-like depictions of Death existed in paintings such as the *Triumph of Death* in Italy; as frescos in *The Three Living and the Three Dead* in England; as illustrated poetry in *La Danse Macabre* in France; and as theatre in *La Danza de la Muerte* in Spain (see figures 8 and 9) (Aberth 2010, 228-229).

Figure 8. The Three Living and the Three Dead. 14th century England. ©British Library Board. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

Figure 9. La Danse Macabre. Bernt Notke, 1440-1509. 15th century, Tallinn, Estonia. ©Art Musuem of Estonia. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

The Dance of Death

Various forms of poetry, artwork, and performances circulated throughout medieval Europe that featured skeletons leading people of all social classes to their deaths and celebrated their dying (Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Seaton 1996, 235). In contrast to the focus on individual death—as noted in the *Ars Moriendi*, the rite of Extreme Unction, memento mori, and transi tombs—artists oriented the Dance of Death toward social well-being (Aberth 2010, 233, 238; Ariès 1981 [1977], 607; Muir 2005, 57). While debates remain regarding the origins of the Dance of Death, Whyte (1977 [1931], vii-xi, 52-60) suggests that the *Testament of Abraham* led to its particular use in Iberia.

The Dance of Death likely originated as an illustrated poem in which Death was a guide that brought souls to their ultimate judgment without discerning judgment of its own (Aberth 2010, 229-231; Jones 2010, 81). Early Dance of Death poems used derogatory ethnocentric sentiments to show that Death treats a Jewish usurer and an Eastern Orthodox Patriarch the same as a Catholic bishop (Aberth 2010, 231). By the end of the 15th century, the Dance of Death had the psychological effect of projecting a utopian vision of an afterlife without social rank onto human death and dying (Muir 2005, 57). Dance of Death illustrated poems thus portrayed Death as an embodied skeletal figure who was a social leveler that abates all hierarchical social structures while responding to more than thirty victims (Aberth 2010, 231; Eire 1995, 10).

Dance of Death woodcuts featured dancing skeletons that came for the deceased and provided a sense of macabre comfort on the way to eschatological judgment (see figure 10) (Jones 2010, 81). Skeletons depicted in theatrical performances of the Dance

of Death, however, became more than comforters and reminders of impending death (Aberth 2010, 229-231; Jones 2010, 81). Medieval Europeans used the Dance of Death in the 14th and 15th centuries to keep individuals from contracting the plague (Aberth 2010, 230). Dancers in Germany, for example, allowed people to trample them after the dance to ward off the feared disease (ibid.).

Iberia was under Muslim rule at the height of the Black Death and Iberian Christians thus interpreted the bubonic plague as a form of mercy and martyrdom (Aberth 2010, 130). The Dances of Death on the Iberian Peninsula were not woodcuts or paintings, rather, they were performances featuring costumed dancers, further reinforcing the embodied appearance of the figure of Death (see figure 11) (Aberth 2010, 230, 237; Whyte 1977 [1931], 38, 48-49, 51). Spanish performances of the Dance of Death (*La Danza de la Muerte*) also associated the redemptive powers of the Virgin Mary in relations to Death as feminine figure (Whyte 1977 [1931], 41-43, 51, 63). *La Danza de la Muerte* existed in at least six forms during the 15th and 16th centuries: *La Dança general de la Muerte* (The General Dance of Death); *Las Coplas de la Muerte* (The Couplets of Death); *La Farsa de la Muerte* (The Farce of Death); *El Coloquio de la Muerte* (The Colloquium of Death); *Farsa Llamada Dança de la Muerte* (Farce Called the Dance of Death); and *Las Cortes de la Muerte* (The Courts of Death) (ibid., 50, 52, 71, 80, 93, 100).

La Danza de la Muerte is a corpus of devotional songs and performances accompanied with musicians and choregraphed dancers (Whyte 1977 [1931], 38). The corpus extends from *Ad Mortem festinamus* (we rush into death) a devotional song that

begins, “Arise from your mortal sleep! Death comes swiftly and spares no one;” and ends, “Let us cease to sin! May the Virgin be our mediator when this earthly exile is over” (Whyte 1977 [1931], 38). *La Danza de la Muerte* and *Ad Mortem festinamus* were both devotional practices that honored the Virgin of Montserrat, a dark effigy “miraculously” found after Muslim occupancy began in Iberia (ibid., 38, 42-43). *La Danza de la Muerte* performances were the end point of pilgrimages to the Montserrat monastery where devotees climbed mountainous terrain to dance as a form of Marian devotion and penance (ibid., 42-43).

Figure 10. Dance of Death woodcut. Hans Holbein, 1497-1543. 16th century; Netherlands. ©Rijksmudeum. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

Figure 11. La Danza de la Muerte. Verges, Girona, Spain. 2013. Photo by User:Ferber1 Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0. No changes were made.

The Dance of Death involved more than a representation of the state of being dead since the Grim Reaper depicted death as an incorporeal entity (Aberth 2010, 231-237). During the 16th century, Death in *La Danza de la Muerte* was neither abstract nor an incorporeal entity, rather, the drama depicts Death as an embodied being with teeth, rough hands, and an ugly face (Whyte 1977 [1931], 51). For example, *La Farsa de la Muerte* depicts Death in bodily terms when an old man claims Death's weakness exists in her being both a woman and the daughter of sin (Sánchez de Badajoz 1985 [1554] and in Whyte 1977 [1931], 79). Through the dialogue in *La Farsa de la Muerte*, Death is an embodiment of the "gate to eternal life" that Christ's death and resurrection opened for humanity (Sánchez de Badajoz 1985 [1554] and in Whyte 1977 [1931], 79).

La Dança general la Muerte juxtaposes dancers painted as skeletons with a scythe wielding female Death who speaks directly to the audience (Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48). Whyte (ibid.) interprets *La Dança general de la Muerte* as evidence that the Spanish Dances of Death depict the female embodiment of Death rather than various skeletons representing a multitude of deceased people. *Las Coplas de la Muerte* depicts Death as an obdurate negotiator in a similar manner to the *Testament of Abraham* and thus reversing the 15th-century depiction of Death in the *Ars Moriendi* that allows the character of Everyman to plead successfully to make changes in his life (in Aberth 2010, 241 and see Whyte 1977 [1931], 52-55). *Las Coplas de la Muerte* is indicative of Death becoming increasingly thought of as a participant in the reckoning of individual souls, a gateway to the afterlife, and an emblem of social justice in the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010,231, 269; Jones 2010, 81; Whyte (1977 [1931], 52-65).

Female Death and Mary

Swiss, Germanic, and English Dances of Death depict Death as a masculine hunter armed with a bow and a quiver of arrows (Rothkrug 1980, 108-109). The metonymic association of the priest's cowl and the allegorical connection of Death to the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse further implies masculinity (Coulson and Oakley 2003, 74-75; Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 83-84; Kövecses 2005, 281; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562; Turner 1996, 76). While angels in Revelation 14:14-20 wield the scythe as a weapon (Págan Cánovas 2011, 562); McLerran and McKee (1991, 134) suggest the scythe connotes both death and renewal due to the instrument's association with the

Greek *Kronos* or the Roman *Saturn* (beings associated with agricultural cycles). After the Black Death, the scythe transformed from indexing renewal to a metonym that signified the Christian notion of redemption in the Apocalypse (Aberth 2010, 131, 252; McLerran and McKee 1991, 134; Turner 1996, 80; Whyte 1977 [1931], 63).

Renewal and redemption are traits embodied in Mary that Pope Benedict XII's (1334-1342) theological ruling on the Beatific Vision reinforced (Rothkrug 1980, 45). Pope Benedict XII's 1336 papal bull connected Marian intercession to Purgatory for the purpose of ameliorating social anxiety caused by large-scale epidemics (ibid.). Christian practices related to Mary and dying began in the 12th century (Binski 1996, 121-127); however, Pope John XXII (1316-1334) maintained that only after the Last Judgment were souls released into heaven (Rothkrug 1980, 45). Benedict XII's edict allowed for prayers to invoke the intercession of Mary as an advocate for the souls of the dead who could conceivably exit Purgatory with a redeemed soul before the Last Judgment (ibid.).

Mary's Assumption—a 4th-century belief claiming that the mother of Christ ascended to heaven in full body—perceived her in angelic terms, distinguished her from other saintly intercessors, and made her the model for a Good Death (Rothkrug 1980, 28). From the 12th to the 14th centuries, depictions on cathedral entrances featured the Virgin Mary lifted in full body by angels toward heaven (Binski 1996, 112). As the Black Death intensified, Marian devotion became increasingly tied to apocalyptic Christian understandings of the Last Judgment (ibid., 121-127). In the 14th century, *The Book of Hours* emerged as a prominent medieval liturgical manual designed for the laity. The manual featured illustrations of Mary and the figure of Death holding a scythe as

instructive to achieving a Good Death (see figures 12 and 13) (Binski 1996, 53-54). Cemetery shrines featuring depictions of Mary also became ubiquitous during the Black Death throughout Europe (Rothkrug 1980, 75).

Figure 12. Book of Hours: Death. Book of Hours (Hours of the Virgin, Office of the Dead, calendar, liturgy); written and illuminated in northern France, probably in Paris, ca. 1490. Gift of Ralph Friedman, 1988. MS M.1080, ©The Morgan Library and Museum, New York. No changes were made. http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/18/145175

Figure 13. Book of Hours: Mary. Books of Hours. Paris, France, ca. 1520. John of Patmos, Vision of Woman in the Apocalypse. Purchased by J.P. Morgan (1867-1943) in 1919.MS M.632, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York. No changes were made. http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/icaimages/6/m632.013v.jpg

Funding for artworks featuring the Virgin Mary as the Woman in the Apocalypse rose exponentially during epidemics following the Black Death (Cohn 1992, 254). Pagels (2012, 37) states that Europe's Black Death revitalized the apocalyptic fervor of both Christian clergy and laity. As mentioned, apocalyptic hope emerged from the trauma of the Black Death that articulated the final victory of Michael and Christ over Death and the Devil as a prelude to the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010, 252). Patronage for artistic renditions of Mary in Italy after the Black Death was five times greater than what it was prior to the pervasive epidemic (Cohn 1992, 256). Two transi tombs constructed after the Black Death exemplify the apocalyptic vision of the Christian victory over death in the renewal of the idealized body (Cohn 1973, 117-118). The two transi tombs include a carving of a youthful body set above skulls with wings that face toward a resurrected Christ and a depiction of Mary praying (ibid.).

The Last Judgment appealed to medieval notions of a collective eschatology relating to the resurrection of deceased Christians on a renewed Earth's New Jerusalem (Aberth 2010, 252). A typical mode of medieval depiction of the Last Judgment featured the archangel Michael in conjunction with Mary as the Woman in the Apocalypse (Cohn 1992, 110-112). Christians in 16th-century Spain carried banners of Mary as the Woman in the Apocalypse in processions to propitiate her to end epidemics, floods, fires, earthquakes, and crop infestations (Christian 1981, 42). Interpretations of the Woman in the Apocalypse (possibly as the Queen of Heaven) in Revelation differed according to context. Popular, or vernacular, practices in medieval Christendom first identified Mary as present in the Last Judgment because of Revelation 12:1-17 (Aberth 2010, 152-153).

Late medieval European Christians associated apocalyptic death imagery with a sense of renewal linked to beliefs regarding Mary in the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010, 248, 269; Ariès 1981 [1977], 605-608). The Black Death also initiated a feminine piety (Jesus as Mother) stressing the bodily suffering of Christ (Aberth 2010, 131; Bynum 1982, 18). Self-flagellation movements of the 15th and 16th centuries maintained the connection between the veneration of Mary to physical suffering and the feminine ideal (Francomano 2007, 17). Iberian forms of feminine piety expressed a dualistic tendency in penitent movements that stressed Mary's presence during Christ's crucifixion and regarded Death as a singular feminine entity (Whyte 1977 [1931], 43, 63).

The connection between Mary and an embodied female figure of Death is part of a common *Eva-Ave* typology illustrating the perceived dual nature of medieval life in Iberia (life and death; good and evil; desire and law) (Burke 1998, 5). The dichotomous Christian cosmos of medieval Europe facilitated diametrically opposed images of heaven and hell, the material and the spiritual, and is a concept dating back to Platonic philosophy (Binski 1996, 166-167). Medieval notions of the Last Judgment brought both sides of the duality together in a collision of heaven and hell as depicted with death imagery that was macabre yet sublime (ibid., 173). Heaven and hell imagery depicted in Gothic styled cathedrals reveals a medieval European dualism that both delineated and linked the earthly realm and the heavenly kingdom conceived in the notion of a redeemed Earth as a New Jerusalem per Revelation 21:1-8 (Binski 1996, 168 and see Coogan 2010, 1796n.2). Medieval Spanish literature and theatrical performances utilized the *Eva-Ave*

typology to fashion an aesthetic juxtaposition wherein Eve was the sinful progenitor of death while Mary was the innocent creator of life (Burke 1998, 5).

Medieval Western European dualistic thinking also furthered contradictory Christian views on femininity (Binski 1996, 174, 202). During the 15th century, accusations of women engaging in witchcraft and copulating with the Devil were common (Rothkrug 1980, 105-107). Midwives in the 15th century, however, also used Marian invocations to reduce the pain of childbirth and many believed Mary drove disease out of Rome (Thomas 1971, 31, 85). Femininity became simultaneously associated with Mary (life and purity) and Eve (death and sin) (Binski 1996, 174, 202). The gendering of Death in artistic depictions resulted from whether medieval Europeans thought of Adam or Eve as the individual responsible for original sin (Guthke 1999, 4). The associations of women with Death in the medieval context exemplified a gendered discourse within Christianity that sought to expose the female as treacherous, alien, and aberrant (Binski 1996, 163).

Christian medieval artwork transformed the Greek conception of death as the male Thanatos into a feminine figure (Binski 1996, 158-163; Guthke 1999, 10-32). 13th-century European Christian artwork often intertwined feminine images of Death with Eve and serpents (Binski 1996, 163). The 14th-century painting, *The Triumph of Death*, in the Camposanto at Pisa, features Death as a female with a scythe and bat-like wings (see figure 14) (Binski 1996, 158). An image of a female Death was also a consistent aspect of theatrical performances of the Dance of Death in Spain (Binski 1996, 157; Guthke 1999, 115; Whyte 1977 [1931], 47, 51). According to Whyte (1977 [1931], 51), Death is

without question female in *La Dança general de la Muerte* which is, again, performed as a devotion to Mary. As stated previously, Iberian Dances of Death are performances that occur in proximity with a Marian shrine and explicitly mention the Virgin Mary (Whyte (1977 [1931], 38, 48).

Figure 14. Death as female with scythe. Triumph of Death. Fresco by Buonamico Buffalmacco 1226-1340. 14th century; Camposanto, Pisa, Italy. ©Board of Directors Opera della Primaziale Pisana. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

La Danza de la Muerte is distinct from other forms of the Dances of Death because they are performances where Death is an embodied female juxtaposed with Mary (Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-47). Iberian performances of the Dance of Death—still performed in Catalonia (Aberth 2010, 230)—portray Death as a feminine figure with a scythe that becomes an index to the gateway to eternal life when juxtaposed with Mary

(Whyte 1977 [1931], 79, 115, 140). Whyte (ibid., 62-65) interprets *Las Coplas de la Muerte* as revealing how Death is an embodied female who unyieldingly preempts negotiations at the end of a person's life; while treating everyone equally and bringing souls closer to the compassionate mercy of Mary. At the end of *Las Coplas de la Muerte*, Death guides a pilgrim lost in Purgatory, despite pleas for his life, to the celestial court where Christ judges his soul (ibid., 62-63). A demon and an angel both claim ownership of the soul in the celestial court; however, the soul remains in Purgatory until the Last Judgment due to the intercession of Mary (ibid.). Juxtaposing Mary with a female Death reveals a relationship where Death brings the soul before the stern judgment of Christ while Mary advocates for the soul to enter Purgatory (ibid., 63).

When Spaniards conceived of female Death in the 16th century as the gateway to eternal life in the Spanish Dance of Death, she coincided with Mary because together they alluded to individual salvation in Purgatory (Whyte 1977 [1931], 43, 63, 79). Spanish belief asserted that Purgatory was a place where Death, Mary, and Christ participated in the reckoning of souls (Brandes 1998, 199; Clendinnen 1990, 108; Eire 1995, 15; Whyte 1977 [1931], 62-63). Literature and artwork associated with Purgatory served as another set of reminders regarding the importance of the Good Death (Ariès 1981 [1977], 107, 153-154, 288).

The Doctrine of Purgatory

In the 12th century, when Purgatory became official Church doctrine, Julian of Vézeley drew from Isadore of Seville to write about his own demise and how Death

would drag his soul into Purgatory on Mount Etna, Sicily (in Le Goff 1984 [1981], 99, 202-203). Le Goff (ibid., 97) cites Isadore of Seville, Tajon of Saragossa, and Julian of Toledo as 7th-century Iberian theologians that delineated how purgation occurred. For Julian of Toledo in particular, souls were semi-corporeal substances allowing for the possibility of torture so that the soul could experience purgation with varying intensities of fire (ibid., 99). Between the 3rd and 7th centuries, a reordering of social values concerning the dead and the living occurred as Heaven and Earth became conceived as being close to one another (Brown 2015, 43). This reordering featured relics of Christ and Christian martyrs serving as conduits between the living and the dead (Brown 1981, 6).

Christian anxieties among the *non valde mali* (not bad living) arose because they might die with the taint of original sin or venial sins not removed during Extreme Unction (Brown 2015, 54-61; 2010, 45-46). Between the 3rd and 7th centuries, Christians became concerned with the time lapse between individual death and the Last Judgment (Brown 2015, 8-16). Social practices like the veneration of martyrs and good works, like alms giving, only partially ameliorated fear concerning the possibility of damnation and the length of purgation for sin (ibid., 42-46). After the 14th century, Christian anxieties regarding death intensified partly due to the trauma of the Black Death (Aberth 2010, 252). The Catholic notion of Purgatory was integral from the era of the Black Death through the Counter Reformation in the 16th century because it created a space where the possibility of interactions between the living and the dead could exist (ibid., 272).

Dante's description of Purgatory was thus a relief to anxious Christians consumed with questions regarding what happens between individual death and the Last Judgement

(Le Goff 1984 [1981], 352-353). Dante revealed depictions of Purgatory that conjoined a folkloric or popular understanding of the Christian cosmos with the erudite theology of Church fathers and doctors (ibid., 337). Dante's (1909 [1320], 147-282) Purgatory was a mountain on Earth, which begins with the highest level of a subterranean hell with a green pasture populated by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, artists, and poets. Dante's (ibid., 287) Purgatory ends at the mountain's summit where he senses God's presence as promised in the Beatific Vision.

Dante's vision of Purgatory was impactful because it gave a physical place for divine retribution for the individual on Earth (Muir 2005, 55-56). The idea of Purgatory as a physical place resulted from a blending of Augustinian notions of the ascent of the immortal soul and Thomistc notions of the "subsistent soul" (Le Goff (1984 [1981], 2-4, 271-278; McMahon 2006, 1-9). While Augustine of Hippo (2014 [419], 108) and Thomas Aquinas (1947 [1270], 482-483) both argued against the corporeality of the soul, their respective ideas—regarding the soul's ascension (Augustine 2006 [397-400], 66, 195) and the soul's need for purgation after death resembling living penance (Aquinas 1947 [1270], 4030-4031)—contributed to late medieval popular beliefs resembling Dante's (1909 [1320], 147-282) description of Purgatory as a physical place (see Le Goff 1984 [1981], 62, 278; McMahon 2006, 5).

Christian values regarding the dead and one's own death also slowly changed after the 12th century, in part, because of a greater emphasis placed on the immortal soul (Brown 2015, 43; Bynum 1995, 290-291). Between the 11th to 17th centuries the Christian understanding of the afterlife became more remote spatially, yet death was more

immediate temporally (Ariès 1981 [1977], 604-605). As the eschatology of "ascension of the immortal soul" became more integral to Christian doctrine, attitudes toward death reflected a greater temporal fear in terms of imminence (ibid.). The concentration on individuality that logically followed the reintroduction of an individual and immortal soul created a sense of social distance between the living and the dead (Ariès 1981 [1977], 606 and see McMahon 2006, 1-9).

The growing use of the *Ave Maria* prayer in the rite of Extreme Unction pacified anxious Christians uncertain about their afterlife destination; while placing greater emphasis on the individuality of the dying person (Ariès 1981 [1977], 607). Ariès (ibid.) claims that 16th-century Western European Christians still felt that death was close temporally but that deceased loved ones were increasingly distant. As the living and the dead grew farther apart, death became more individualized and the afterlife of individuals became more distinct from the collective eschatology of the Last Judgment (Ariès 1981 [1977], 607). Eire (1995, 15) disagrees with Ariès' (1981 [1977], 607) that all of Christendom experienced death as imminent in time yet remote in space. Eire (1995, 15) cites the belief in the proximity between the living and the dead in 16th-century Spain as an underlying cause for Purgatory remaining a place located in local graveyards.

Local brotherhoods devoted to souls in Purgatory in 16th-century Spain were responsible for the burying of the deceased (Christian 1981, 143). These brotherhoods promoted belief in Purgatory as a material reality located in local graveyards (Eire 1995, 15). Purgatory may have kept space between Heaven and Earth relatively close in spatial proximity but the gap separating the wealthy and the poor widened in terms of time spent

in purgation (Brown 2010, 44-47; Eire 1995, 15; Muir 2005, 55-56). As noted in the elaborate tombs and sepulchers that the nobility constructed on the Iberian Peninsula, a Spaniard's death was an indicator of their material wealth and social status (Vivanco 2004, 1).

The perceived ability for the wealthy to seemingly buy their way out of Purgatory reached an apex in 16th-century Spain through donations to the Church and elaborate tomb building (Eire 1995, 249). A rigid social stratification of death emanated in 15th-century Castile where there was a re-articulation of the Greek notion of the triumph of fame over death (Vivanco 2004, 28-44). Castilian soldiers' funerals, for example, were memorials demonstrating that living a heroic life was the source of a Good Death and immortality (ibid.).

Notions of Purgatory continued the medieval belief that a Good Death was the reward for the Good Life (Ariès 1981 [1977], 305-306). Purgatory practice featured prayers and petitions to Mary to advocate for the release of souls trapped in purgation (Ariès 1981 [1977], 305-306; Binski 1996, 121-122). In 16th-century Spain, Purgatory as a material place contributed to the conceptualization of Death as a psychopomp-like entity (Christian 1981, 143; Eire 1995, 15; Le Goff 1984 [1981], 202-203). Late medieval Christian representations of Death intertwined with Purgatory to lend greater importance to the image of La Parca in Spain (Aberth 2010, 222-224; Binski 1996, 158-163; Le Goff 1981 [1984], 17-34; Malvido 2005, 23; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52).

Purgatory in the 16th century was a physical place where the compassion of Mary abated social inequality and retribution for sins (Ariès 1981 [1977], 305-306; Binski

1996, 121-122; Eire 1995, 15). Spaniards on the Iberian Peninsula and in the Americas, during the 15th and 16th centuries, conceptualized Death as a female social leveler as contrasted with Mary (Aberth 2010, 252; Binski 1996, 158; Guthke 1999, 90-91, 115-117; Malvido 2005, 23-25; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51). Presenting Mary with female Death as a skeleton, wearing a cowl, and carrying a scythe was a common apocalyptic trope throughout 16th-century Spain that Iberians transferred to New Spain (Eire 1995, 309; Malvido 2005, 23-25; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52).

The Medieval Catholic Nation of Spain and Colonial New Spain

The reconquest of Iberia, or *Reconquista*, merged apocalyptic death imagery with Virgin Mary iconography (Harrington 1988, 28). Under the guise of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, Iberians thought Mary was responsible for the victory over Iberian Muslims as a matter of "Divine Providence" (ibid.). The Reconquista ended at the end of the 15th century when Jews and Muslims had to choose between conversion to Christianity, exile, or execution (Barta 2000, 69). The reconquest of the Iberian Visigoth kingdoms supposedly begins in 722 CE with the Christian victory over Muslims at Covadonga, Asturias, Spain (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 27). 9th-century Asturian writers claimed the battle of Covadonga was not only a holy crusade but also miraculously won through the intervention of Mary (ibid.).

The Iberian monarchs of Asturias, León, and Castile dated the beginning of the Reconquista at 722 CE to establish a Spanish ancestry that was purely Visigoth and thus devoid of Judaic and Islamic influence (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 27-28). The Church,

therefore, legitimized the Reconquista as an extension of the Holy Crusades because it was a reacquisition of Christendom from "infidel" occupation (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 28-29). Christian authorities during the Reconquista claimed a renewal of Visigoth theology and rituals in the acquiring of lands later to become the nation of Spain (ibid., 36). As a result of these claims of renewal, Christian officials reinterpreted medieval Iberian artwork anachronistically, in arguing that Judeo-Islamic-Christian blended motifs were Visigoth (Kogman-Appel 2002, 264).

The historical revisioning of a thoroughly Visigoth Iberia contributed to apocalyptic beliefs and expectations, in addition to an emerging Spanish identity manifested in material culture (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 28-29; Williams 1977, 10). For example, Spaniards interpreted a mixture of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian engravings at the cloister of *Santo Domingo de Silos* in *Santiago de Compostela*, as Visigoth apocalyptic imagery depicting the triumph of Christ over death (Valdez del Alamo 1990, 168, 176, 181). Reconquista Spaniards also reinterpreted a tympanum in the 10th-century cathedral of *San Isidoro* in León as depicting the presence of Death (in the form of a Horseman of the Apocalypse) at Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Williams 1977, 3). The portion of the tympanum interpreted as the Horseman of Death; however, is a depiction of the Islamic version of the Moriah narrative (ibid.).

The monarchs of Asturias, León, and Castile thus promoted apocalyptic beliefs in claiming a Christian continuity through revising the Visigoth history of Iberia (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 27-28; Kogman-Appel 2002, 264). Apocalyptic notions of the second coming of Christ permeated the Iberian imagination in the 12th and 13th centuries as the

Reconquista gained momentum (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 41). Apocalyptic hopes for a New Jerusalem in 15th-century Iberia resulted from the expulsion of Muslims and Jews and intensified with the colonization of the Americas (Delaney 2006, 261). An apocalyptic scenario permeated the religious beliefs of Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus) and other colonizers during the 16th century (ibid.). Iberian missionaries obsessed over the establishment of a New Jerusalem and the evangelization of all peoples as preliminary requirements for the Last Judgment (ibid.).

16th-century apocalyptic zeal affected Iberia and its American colonies similarly in terms of institutions, practices, and materiality regarding death and dying (Delaney 2006, 261). Brotherhoods across Spain, for example, featured elaborate statues of Death, such as *La Canina* in Seville, that depicts Death as a skeleton holding a scythe and sitting on a sphere alongside a dragon while displaying the Latin inscription *Mors Mortem Superavit* to denote Christ's victory over death (see figure 15) (Malvido 2005, 23). Similar images depicted Death as the herald of the apocalypse throughout New Spain in the 16th century (Clendinnen 1990, 108). The colonization of the Americas following the Reconquista further magnified the mixture of apocalyptic fervor and Marian devotion (Harrington 1988, 28). Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 124-125) states that Spanish colonial authorities used apocalyptic Christian ideals articulated in the image of Mary to legitimize their rule. As Poole (1995, 74-75) notes, the difference in representation between the Virgin of Guadalupe in Extremadura (Spain) and the Virgin of Guadalupe on Tepeyac (Mexico) is the depiction of the latter as the Woman in the Apocalypse (see figure 16) (see also Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 124-125).

Figure 15. La Canina. Brotherhood of the Holy Burial. Seville, Andalusía, Spain. Photo by CarlosVdeHabsburgo, March 31, 2018. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. No changes were made.

Figure 16. Virgin of Guadalupe, Extremadura, Spain. Photo by Emman Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0. No changes were made.

Figure 17. Virgin of Guadalupe, Tepeyac, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo by Katsman Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0. No changes were made.

Eschatological views associated with Marian iconography in 16th-century New Spain were strongest in lay brotherhoods emphasizing Mary as an intercessor in death and dying (Gruzinski 1990, 206). Liturgical dramas of the Dance of Death in medieval Iberia and didactic plays in colonial New Spain both featured Death as a singular, embodied, and feminine figure placed in juxtaposition with Mary (Burkhart 2004, 51; Whyte 1977 [1931] 42-44). Colonial Mexican Cathedrals featured engravings of skulls on atrium crosses and frescos of Roman Catholic Death imagery (see figures 18 and 19) (Brandes 1998, 195-196). For example, a chapel in Tlalmanalco, Central Mexico, contains carvings of the Dance of Death enacted by skeletons holding hands (ibid., 197). As Brandes (ibid., 199) shows, skeletons in the Dance of Death were not meant to depict deceased individuals; rather, the depiction of multitudes of skeletons in the Dance of Death was meant to represent a singular figure of Death manifesting in several skeletal forms, demonstrating the ubiquity of death (also Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48).

Spanish authorities kept figures of Death close to the faithful in colonial New Spain as a method to constrain apostasy and as political rhetoric amidst Indigenous Central Mexican populations experiencing high death rates (Lomnitz 2005, 126-128; Graziano 2007, 99; Seaton 1996, 235). An 18th-century fresco in San Diego's cathedral in Pitiquito, Sonora, Mexico, for example, depicts a skeleton—resembling those in the Dance of Death—referencing Daniel in the Hebrew Bible (Graziano 2007, 99). The passage from Daniel 5:26-28 states, "MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and left wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians." The

skeleton with the passage from Daniel accompanies a painting of the Woman in the Apocalypse (see figures 20 and 21) (Graziano 2007, 99).

Figure 18. Atrium cross at Cathedral of the Ascension in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. 16th century. Photo by author.

Figure 19. Atrium cross at the Church San Jerónimo in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. 16th century. Photo by author.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, apocalyptic hopes continued to mix with invocations for Mary's intercession at death in New Spain (Clendinnen 1990, 127; Eire 1995, 68; Poole 1995,21, 74-75). As Harrington (1998, 27) states,

> Columbus's reference to the Book of Revelation opened a rich vein of meaning for Europeans coming to terms with the New World…Apocalyptic prophesies have both heartened and terrified; they speak of a paradise being born, but born out of the ruins of war, death, and destruction. In the Spanish encounter with America there was plenty of death and destruction. The violence was often interpreted in apocalyptic terms—and over it always was the watchful face of the Virgin Mary.

From Iberia to the Americas, the correlation between the Virgin Mary and Death in conjunction with apocalyptic expectations ties directly into popular interpretations of Christian practices related to Mary as well as the cult of saints and their relics (Binski 1996, 121-122; Harrington 1998, 27; Whyte 1977 [1931], 51). A deeper inquiry into the history of Mary, the saints, and devotional objects follow in the next chapter to illustrate how Grim Reaper like images came to be a sacred presence in the context of New Spain.

Figure 20. The Woman in the Apocalypse; San Diego Cathedral, Pitiquito, Sonora, Mexico. 18th century. Photo courtesy of Bruce Waldon, permission for use granted on August 14th 2020. No changes were made.

Figure 21. Death; San Diego Cathedral, Pitiquito, Sonora, Mexico. 18th century. Photo courtesy of Bruce Waldon, permission for use granted on August 14th 2020. No changes were made.

3 THE SAINTS, MARY, AND DEVOTIONAL OBJECTS

Early medieval Christians selected relics associated with past people as material evidence that the deceased remain active in the world of the living (Brown 1981, 6; Schopen 1998, 256-260). Kieschnick (2003, 49), however, warns us against generalizing theories of sacred objects, like relics, because not all adherents perceive or react similarly. As Bynum (2013, 10-16) notes, Christians perceived and debated the relation of divine presence and materiality differently. Christian practices associated with material representations of the saints, Mary, as well as other devotional objects, created theological disputes and discourses from the 13th century through the 16th century (Bynum 2013, 5-7; Orsi 1997, 6-7).

The Rise of Christian Relics

The establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire was tenuous in its first three centuries and the relics of martyrs played a key role in spreading Christianity throughout Europe (Abou-El Haj 1994, 8-10). As Brown (1981, 28-29) notes, Christianity of late-antiquity did not spread through mass conversions, as it did during 16th-century colonization. Early Christianity, instead, expanded through an extended sense of kinship that developed in communities united through a common hero or martyr (ibid., 31). Proximity to the dead had been repugnant in the Mediterranean world prior to Christianity (ibid., 4). While Greeks and Romans valorized and immortalized dead heroes and ancestors, there was no desire to be close to a human corpse (ibid., 5). Christian

authorities, however, constructed the first churches in Rome on the purported sites of buried martyrs (Abou-El Haj 1994, 8).

The closeness Christians maintained to the skulls and bones of martyrs, especially those considered criminals by the Roman Empire, baffled imperial officials (Brown 1981, 7). In the early 4th century CE—when Constantine the Great erected churches above the remains of Christian martyrs and apostles—proximity to the dead bodies of heroes gained a positive perception throughout the Roman Empire (Abou-El Haj 1994, 7). After Constantine's death in 337 CE, Julian the Apostate pointed to the lack of scriptural support for the intercession of martyrs to denigrate the emerging cult of the saints and restore the Roman Empire to its pre-Christian practices (Brown 1981, 7). Despite Emperor Julian's efforts, Christian bishops perpetuated the cult of the saints in seeking to consolidate their authority within and beyond Roman towns (ibid., 8).

According to Brown (1981, 37-38), there is a general misunderstanding that rural peoples favored the cult of the saints. Bishops, Brown (ibid.) notes, promoted the use of relics as it expanded private veneration of saints into socially binding public ceremonies. Saints were intermediaries with God because their perceived virtuous and/or heroic lives placed them close to divinity (ibid., 6). The belief that a martyr's bodily remains did not decay led to the assumed efficacy of relics on the lives of the faithful (ibid.). Saint Augustine and Sulpicius Severus first popularized biographies of Christian saints and miracles, as associated with relics, between the 4th and 5th centuries (Abou-El Haj 1994, 8-9). During the 6th century, Georgius Florentius (2015 [538-594]) documented claims regarding the divine intercession of relics. Stories of the miraculous demonstrated that

martyrdom allowed one to transcend death (Binski 1996, 44). Church officials recognized the potential of narratives of miracles and martyrdom associated with relics to consolidate the power of the Church across distant communities (Brown 1981, 31).

Initially, officials in 4th-century Iberia considered the cult of the saints vulgar on the grounds it distracted the increased number of the faithful from scripture (Brown 1981, 32). The Visigoth invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in the 5th century brought Arian Christianity and the practice of burying grave-goods with deceased warriors (Rothkrug 1980, 13). As Arianism collapsed in the 6th century, the new Roman Catholic influence reinterpreted Visigoth grave-goods as saint offerings, which altered ancestral practices on the Iberian peninsula (Head 1990, 150-151; Rothkrug 1981, 13). Similarly, during the 6th century, clergy in Gaul claimed that grave-goods of the Franks were ex-voto offerings to reconceive of their ancestral heroes as Christian martyrs (Rothkrug 1981, 13). According to Brown (1981, 121), by the end of the 6th century the cult of the saints was so pervasive in Iberia and Gaul that Latin Christianity replaced any remnants of Celtic culture.

Sacraments, liturgy, and calendars were universalizing aspects of Latin Christianity but reliquaries were most influential in consolidating local communities (Head 1990, 3). Reliquaries were material structures encapsulating the vitality and prowess of local Christianized heroes (Brown 1981, 10-11). In the 6th century, Christian missionaries understood that new communities developed around reliquaries that created solidarity among converts throughout Europe (Abou-El Haj 1994, 10). The sites of martyrs' graves thus gave legitimacy to a new Christian community which encouraged them to adhere to the authority the Church (Brown 1981, 31). Later, in the 9th century,

Charlemagne further constructed Christian reliquaries throughout Western Europe for political and economic consolidation (Abou-El Haj 1994, 10). In the 11th century, the Church continued building reliquaries where power was thin to further centralize and consolidate authority (ibid., 13).

Enduring material culture established a sense of solidarity across newly Christianized communities where pilgrimages, processions, and shrines allowed repeatable practices to flourish (Brown 1981, 42). For example, pilgrimages to the city of Santiago de Compostela, or *El Camino de Santiago* (the Way of Saint James), established Iberian centers of revenue and monastic authority through the public veneration of relics (Francomano 2007, 20). El Camino de Santiago was a trans-regional pilgrimage traversing local brotherhoods and shrines from southern France and over the Pyrenees onto the shrine of Saint James in northwestern Galicia (Abou-El Haj 1994, 18, 29; Rothkrug 1980, 22). The cult of the saints connected Christian communities together not only through pilgrimage but also through relic trading networks extending from North Africa to Italy and onto Gaul (Brown 1981, 90-91). From the 9th through 10th centuries, relic trading networks spread saintly remains throughout Europe while simultaneously connecting distant reliquaries to one another (Abou-El Haj 1994, 12).

Authenticity was a concern for Church authorities because some local clergy bought relics from unreliable sources (Abou-El Haj 1994, 12). Issues regarding authenticity, however, did not always devalue a relic (ibid.). Christians rationalized a questionable stolen relic as the corresponding saint demanding an alternate place of veneration (ibid.). Hagiographies presented another way to authenticate relics in alternate

locales (Ferrero 2013, 898). Iberian hagiographies of Saint James, for example, reimagined the New Testament martyr as *Santiago Matamoros* (Saint James the Moor Slayer) (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 39; Williams 1977, 11).

As late as the 9th century, Christianity and Islam coexisted peacefully in southern Iberia, near Córdoba, but in the northern mountains near the modern border with France, relics gained popularity due to their claimed ability to perform actions against Muslims (Christian 1981, 126; Ferrero 2013, 893). Two hagiographies, for example, describe the deaths of the Vandal King Gunderic and the Muslim ruler al-Mansūr independently after each desecrated the shrine of Saint James (Bonch-Bruevich 2008, 39). Narratives and pilgrimages related to Saint James created an extended and cohesive Christian history during the Muslim rule of Iberia (Williams 1977, 11). Claims of Saint James apparitions inspired Christians to victory in battles over Muslims and Santiago's depiction as El Matamoros solidified disperse Christian communities in Iberian territories and fostered a burgeoning sense of Spanish identity (ibid.).

Saint James-based narratives, relics, and pilgrimages, then, established an Iberian Christian identity that would fuel the Reconquista (Francomano 2007, 20; Head 1990, 14). In addition to apparitions of Saint James the Moor Slayer and the patronage of Iberian martyrs and local saints, devotion to the Virgin Mary was integral to Spanish identity during and after the Reconquista (Christian 1981, 126; Francomano 2007, 20; Head 1990, 179; Williams 1977, 11). By the 16th century in Spain, Marian shrines outnumbered all devotional edifices to Saint James, aspects of Christ, and the archangel Michael combined (Christian 1981, 72-73). Folk practices related to the Great Mother or

Queen of Heaven influenced Marian devotion in Greece, Italy, France, Ireland, and Spain, where Mary remains more popular than any other saint (Benko 1993, 130; Dundes 1980, 248, 256).

The Great Mother, Mary, the Harvesting of Souls, and the Scythe

Devotion to Mary began in the 5th century with the title of *Theotokos* (God-bearer) (Benko 1993, 5). Between the 5th and 12th centuries, healing and protection were the main uses for saint relics, while Mary's central value was for redeeming souls (Rothkrug 1980, 9-10). Mary as a redeemer made the Great Mother relevant again in reestablishing the centrality she occupied in Mediterranean pre-Christian cultures (Dundes 1980, 248). The Virgin Mary's folk association to Magna Mater, or the Great Mother, is the source of both Mary's popularity and theological polemics against Marian devotion (Benko 1993, 17-18; Carroll 1986, 10). Benko (1993, 20) suggests that the Roman Catholic Mary is a variation of devotional practices attributed to Magna Mater and adopted into Christianity. As Dundes (1980, 248-249) argues, the Mary and Jesus narrative resembles several Mediterranean Great Mother and Consort relationships such as *Ishta*r and *Tammuz*, *Astarte* and *Adonis*, *Isis* and *Osiris*, and Cybele and *Attis*.

Phrygian rites in Anatolia traced back to 6000 BCE reveal the possible starting point of the Great Mother, as Cybele, in the Mediterranean region (Benko 1993, 70-71). Cybele later became a focal point for petitions on the Italian Peninsula during the Punic Wars (264-146 BCE) when the Great Mother mixed with Greek and Roman practices (Benko 1993, 71; Carroll 1986, 194). The foundation for Cybele's relationship to her

consort, Attis, is an agricultural theme resonating with Greek depictions of Demeter and Persephone in that the deaths and rebirths of Attis and Persephone are both linked to seasonal cycles within Mediterranean Mysteries (Benko 1993, 71). The scythe is a consistent aspect of various Cybele-Attis legends because the consort uses the harvesting tool to punish himself for his infidelity (ibid., 71n.136). After Attis' death, Cybele takes pity and resurrects him (ibid., 71). Chastity, renewal, and redemption are Cybele's central tropes (ibid., 74-75).

According to Dundes (1980, 248-249), early Christianity suppressed Cybele devotion; however, suppression weakened over time as popular Christian relations with the Virgin Mary slowly replaced the Great Mother. For example, Pagels (2012, 30) states that the "Woman in the Apocalypse" originally signified Israel but centuries later Christians conflated her with the mother of Christ. Christians did not refer to the Virgin Mary as the "Queen of Heaven" until sometime around the 13th and 14th centuries (Rothkrug 1980, 42-43). Benko (1993, 130) claims the Woman in the Apocalypse is a direct reference to Cybele as the Queen of Heaven. Revelation 12:1 depicts the Woman in the Apocalypse as "[C]lothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."

Coogan (2010, 1786n.3) notes that the model for the Woman in the Apocalypse was the story of *Python*, a serpent or dragon-like creature that attacked *Leto* while she was pregnant with *Apollo*. In Revelation 12:1-17, the archangel Michael defends the Woman in the Apocalypse from the dragon. Leto was yet another Greek version of the Great Mother blended with the Phrygian Cybele (Borgeaud 2004 [1996], 24-26). The

home of the purported author of Revelation, John of Patmos, is the basis for Benko's (1993, 130) claim. Patmos is a Greek island off the western coast of Anatolia close to the geographical origin of Cybele's cult (Benko 1993, 130; Pagels 2012, 4). John of Patmos' vision of the Queen of Heaven likely resonated with Great Mother devotees at the time and location of the writing of Revelation (see Borgeaud 2004 [1996], 24-26; Coogan 2010, 1786n.12.1-17; Pagels 2012, 30).

Rites, festivals, and propitiations associated with Cybele coexisted with Christianity (Carroll 1986, 97). Devotion to Cybele spanned from Gaul to North Africa between the 1st and the 4th century CE and was prolific in the Roman Empire until it was either eradicated or absorbed by Christianity near the end of the 5th century. (Borgeaud 2004 [1996], 111-113). Prior to the relative disappearance of devotion to Magna Mater, the Greeks, Romans, Gauls, Celts, and Phrygians had all attributed war victories to Cybele as the Great Mother (ibid., 77-84). During the Punic Wars, for example, the Great Mother and Cybele received a temple in Rome after the defeat of Hannibal's invasion (Benko 1993, 70; Carroll 1986, 104-106). Christian Visigoth battles in Iberia in 722 and French wars linked to crusades for the Holy Land in 1095 and 1320 likewise credited the Virgin Mary with intervening in their respective victories (Bonch-Bruevich 2006, 27; Rothkrug 1980, 42). Popular 14th-century beliefs asserted that Mary, as the Queen of Heaven, bypassed God's judgment to bring her devotees to her celestial court in paradise (Rothkrug 1980, 42-43).

The Saints and Mary in Late Medieval Europe

A French depiction of the Queen of Heaven featured Joan of Arc depicted simultaneously as the ideal woman exemplifying the chaste Virgin Mary and as an armored knight serving the archangel Michael (Rothkrug 1980, 32, 36). The image is propaganda created during the coronation of Charles VII to illustrate the new king was a virtuous crusader against infidels and heathens (ibid.). At the time of Charles VII, Marian veneration blended Christian victories in battle with eschatological themes such as Purgatory and the Last Judgement (Binski 1996, 32; Rothkrug 1980, 32). During the same era, medieval death rites in the 15th century used the *Ave Maria* prayer to invoke Mary as an advocate for the dying individual caught in a metaphorical battle between good and evil forces (Binski 1996, 32). The belief in Mary attending to an individual's Good Death during the rite of Extreme Unction was a distinguishing feature of Italian, Iberian, and French forms of medieval Catholicism (ibid., 52). In France, the cult of Mary was a device for reintegrating people that emphasized local political allegiance within confraternities over and against the imperial authority of Rome (Rothkrug 1980, 35).

The use of Mary's cult to consolidate weak areas of centralized authority had mixed results throughout Western Europe (Williams1980, 262). The cult of the saints was more successful in centralizing authority in medieval Europe because it brought together rural areas with urban centers and because it incorporated the marginalized, such as women and the poor, into a sense of citizenship (Brown 1981, 41). The patron-client system became the ideal Christian social relationship because it fostered understandings of power, mercy, and disciplined practice (ibid., 63). In the late medieval era, belief in the

Good Death of the martyr within the cult of the saints blended the patron-client relationship with practices associated with the Good Death and beliefs associated with Purgatory and the Last Judgment (Brown 1981, 65).

As noted in the previous chapter, an emphasis on a Good Death in the 14th century led to the increasingly elaborate construction of tombs, shrines, and reliquaries that were indicative of the heightened status of individuals (Binski 1996, 78). In the 15th century, the cult of the saints expanded to include the remains of war heroes as well as nobility (ibid., 69). For example, Iberians venerated the remains of those who died in battle against Muslims during the Reconquista like early Church martyrs (Head 1990, 179). While not considered as powerful as saints, medieval Christians believed nobility remains also had the ability to intercede in the lives of the living (Binski 1996, 78). Feudal Christendom refashioned the Roman patronage system—previously conceptualized as amnesty and civic duty—in terms of sin and forgiveness within the lord and vassal relationship (Brown 1981, 65). As Brown (ibid., 41) notes, the cult of the saints was the reaffirmation of the patron-client system of the ancient world where public displays of wealth and power minimized envy and violence.

The cult of the saints served two distinct, yet, intertwining purposes in early medieval Europe (Head 1990, 197). First, the system of patronage provided the necessary wealth to build grandiose reliquaries and shrines (ibid.). Second, patron-client relationships based on the curing power of saintly intercession created and fostered a sense of community health (ibid.). Relationships of patronage between saints and laity

not only fostered the growth and stability of Christian communities but were the source of a saint's perceived miraculous efficacy (Head 1990, 200). As Head (ibid., 197) states,

> The miraculous did not depend on physical contact with the relics. Miracles were not some sort of "sympathetic magic" or "thaumaturgy," but resulted from the personal patronage of the "fathers." They often involved contact…through the saint's name, veneration of the saint's relics, or a vision of the saint. Such contact was subordinate to the duties of patronage which required a saint to act on behalf of a servant. Saintly patronage was based on the powerful bond of exchanged gifts

Reciprocal exchanges between servant and saint were stronger in uniting Christians than theological doctrine could produce (ibid., 197). The miracles and social relationships associated with saints existed within a hierarchical chain in which the layperson was a servant to the saint who, in-turn, was a servant of Christ (ibid., 151). The Christian laity thus came to believe that their patron saints mediated Christ's divine power (ibid.).

The laity did not always receive proper doctrinal instruction regarding proper relationships with Christ and the saints strictly through writings in Latin because these doctrines required translation and exposition from the local clergy (Head 1990, 198). The Church, therefore, instructed laypeople as to what it meant to be a good Christian by living in communities structured through relationships of patronage with a local saint (ibid., 199-200). The structure of medieval social hierarchies featured bishops on the highest level and then the nobility, then local clergy, and lastly local saint brotherhoods (ibid., 3). The Beatific Vision papal bull in 1336 later challenged this social structure because it strengthened the laity's connection to the divine through saintly intercession that depended upon a holy person's proximity to God (Tuchman 1978, 45-46).

Christian veneration of relics began in the 4th century but reached its apogee in the 12th century when monasteries and cathedrals firmly established the cult of the saints throughout Europe (Abou-El Haj 1994, 1). Resistance to the cult of the saints started in the 12th century when clergy began to suggest that lay veneration focused more on the beauty of reliquaries than the sanctity the shrines represented (ibid., 16). Pilgrimages associated with the cult of the saints funded massive ecclesiastical building projects in the 12th century that led to a greater urbanization of saint veneration (Tuchman 1978, 31). In the 14th century, relics were still part of an enormous effort by successive French popes in Avignon to generate revenue for a growing class of nobility in Paris and Rome (Tuchman 1978, 26).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Benedict XII's 1336 papal bull (Papal Encyclicals Online 2002) pronounced that God judged individual Christians upon their death and, therefore, intercession for souls in Purgatory challenged the importance of the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010, 226). His ruling meant to maintain the importance of the saints and Mary as intercessors but the papal decree also brought about several theological conundrums (Rothkrug 1980, 183; Tuchman 1978, 45-46). Discourse emerging from the papal bull led to arguments claiming that the sale of indulgences (remissions for moral sin through saintly intercession) made prayers by the living to assist the dead in Purgatory less relevant (Rothkrug 1980, 183). Opposition to the sale of indulgences first arose because it weakened the Pope's centralized authority as it questioned papal monopoly over the Treasury of Merit (a celestial storehouse of penance

accumulated from the works of Christ, the Apostles, and other saints) (Rothkrug 1980, 183).

The strongest resistance to the cult of the saints in the 14th century was the claim of an alteration in lay Christian penance (Rothkrug 1980, 183). The sale of indulgences and the cult of Purgatory grew in the 14th century because Christians believed their dead required penance that only the living could provide (ibid.). The sale of indulgences linked to the purchasing of relics ameliorated the penance of pilgrimage; however, this incited theological disputes among Christian authorities demanding a truly penitent and pious laity (Tuchman 1978, 28). By the 15th century, ecclesiastics feared the purchase of indulgences altered medieval Christian understandings of penance and indirectly contributed to an increase in the number of saints (ibid.). Popular or folk practices, however, are inconsistent with such doctrinal concerns (Head 1990, 17).

Devotional Objects

In the 13th century, a proliferation of local saints led to greater papal restrictions on sainthood, which resulted in the 14th-century delineation of *beati* (beatified persons), who attained a local cult without either papal recognition or denunciation (Kleinberg 1992, 37-39; Vauchez 1997 [1988], 6, 22-23, 94-95, 448-453). An official canonization process did not exist until the 20th century wherein: 1) papal authority declares a state of "venerable" after eight accounts of a miracle; 2) beatification then occurs after verification of the miracle; 3) but papal canonization still requires verification of a second miracle (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 1918, 10-11). In the 14th century, however, beliefs in the

thaumaturgic-like powers of local beati iconography already replaced the centrality of penance in saint patronage (Kleinberg 1992, 37; Head 1990, 197-200; Rothkrug 1980, 183; Vauchez 1997 [1988], 448, 452, 536).

Discourse on the proper use of devotional objects (e.g., saint iconography and relics, as well as Eucharist wafers and the monstrance) are abundant in Western Christian theology from the 12th century through the end of the 16th century (Bynum 2013, 16-17; Orsi 2016, 27-29, 48-49). According to Bynum (2011, 31-32), late medieval debates regarding the material presence of divine power run parallel to current sociocultural theories of attributive agency of objects (see Gell 1998, 17), subject/object hybrids (see Latour 1993 [1991], 59), and responses to the perceived presence in images and objects (see Freedberg 1989, xxiii). Late medieval debates on efficacious matter differ from the recent sociocultural theories in that the former involved specific ontological questions including: what is the relationship between divinity and matter, are sacred objects divine presences (e.g., the image *is* the saint, the Eucharist wafer *is* Christ's body), and the possibility of manipulating matter (e.g., alchemy, thaumaturgy) (Bynum 2011, 30-35).

Theological discourse pertaining to the possible materiality of divine presence arose in a climate of anxiety and speculation concerning heresy and witchcraft (Bynum 2011, 34). Pope Gregory VII's 11th-century reforms created greater centralized authority of the Church including direct attempts to eradicate heresy (Asad 1986, 360; Lambert 1992, 36-37). For example, Church inquisitorial authorities considered Cathars and Lollards heretics for their Gnostic-like dualism (strict dichotomy of spirit and matter) because these so-called heresies repudiated devotional objects, baptism, and the Eucharist

(Lambert 1992, 10-11, 56-57, 118, 280-281). Cathars, Heresy of the Free Spirit doctrinaires, Waldensians, Lollards, and Hussites were also heretics because of their strict opposition to Marian devotion (Carroll 1986, 15); however, Cistercians and Franciscans approached charges of heresy for proposing a quasi-divine status of Mary (Wolf 1969, 295-296). The persecution of heretics in the 11th through the 13th century led to medieval concerns related to magic and witchcraft (Lambert 1992, 25-26, 32, 37-38).

In 1326, Pope John XXII further broadened the scope and authority of the inquisitorial process with his papal bull, *Super Illius Specula* (Upon His Watchtower) (Deane 2011, 203). John XXII's bull states that Christians who use "things for magic purposes and bind themselves with demons…ally themselves with death and make a pact with hell" (in Kors and Peters 2001, 119-120). The inquisitorial processes that followed sought out to eradicate both alleged heresies and miracles contested as demonic magic or witchcraft (Kieckhefer 1989, 189-192; Thomas 1971, 28-29, 199-200). The Black Death in the 14th century opened the opportunity for xenophobic populations to scapegoat Jews and alleged heretics as "witches" (Lambert 1992, 220-223; Thomas 1971, 667-668). The Avignon Papal schism, also in the 14th century, weakened papal authority and increased Christian anxieties regarding heresy (Lambert 1992, 217-219). Anti-papal sentiments grew within the Church as allegations of heresy and witchcraft threatened the tenuous social fabric of a medieval Christendom vexed by what it meant to be a Christian (Bynum 1995, 321, 328; Lambert 1992, 389).

By the 16th century, in addition to the burgeoning sense of economic and political autonomy in towns like Basel, theological controversies weakened the papacy to the

point where local rulers could protect a favored heterodoxy from papal charges of heresy (Eire 1986, 63; Lambert 1992, 364). Carroll (1986, 23) suggests that the Catholic Church used the image of Mary to establish a commonality within splintered groups in the early stages of the Protestant Reformation. Prior to the Reformation, however, Hans Behem's received a vision of Mary that called him to bring about a "social revolution" in the Germanic regions of the 15th century (Wunderli 1992, 9-11). Nevertheless, the resulting Peasant's War did lead to Catholic ecclesiastics asserting that the centripetal of power within the cult of the saints had weakened and that relic trading networks no longer protected the nobility from rural insurgency (Rothkrug 1980, 148). The Protestant emphasis on divine election also later clashed with the idea of Purgatory, further lessening the importance of Mary and the saints (Williams 1980, 263). The reformers disdain for intercessional practices, then, were key issues that eventually led to the erosion of saint and Marian devotions in much of Western Europe (ibid).

Emerging theological polemics—that regarded miracles as being the result of superstitious misinterpretations, misplaced beliefs in magic, or acts of demonic intervention—contested long standing practices associated with Mary and the saints (Thomas 1971, 87-89). The cult of the saints at one time allowed for social order, justice, and penance to remain close to the established ancient Roman notion of patronage that increased through exorcisms that spread a public "infectious mood of panic" (Brown 1981, 110-111). Personal relationships with saints resembling the patron-client system of mutual service, oath taking, and gift exchange, then, became demonic, unclean, and

conjuring if thought to coincide with individual acquisition or avarice (Brown 1981, 111; Head 1990, 151).

The differences between miracles and witchcraft were difficult for the Roman Catholic Church to distinguish. As Thomas (1971, 28-33) states, binding spells, coercive propitiations, and necromancy were forms of magic or witchcraft, yet, these practices could seem analogous to saint veneration and the ensuing expectations of miracles (also Kieckhefer 1989, 54-55, Kieckhefer 1994, 356, 376-377, and for comparison Georgius Florentius 2015 [538-594], 125-141). Theological debate regarding the boundaries between magic and piety often hinged on concerns of maintaining a penitent laity (see Kieckhefer 1994, 359; Thomas 1971, 764-765; Tuchman 1978, 318). Witchcraft, for example, was synonymous for creating pacts with the Devil and some medieval Europeans understood it as a method to gain material pleasures without penance (Tuchman 1978, 318). For example, from the 13th to the 15th centuries, the delineation of miraculous events as caused by either saintly intercession or propitiating the Devil through magic merged with already established suspicions surrounding women (Brown 1981, 111; Thomas 1971, 55; Tuchman 1978, 318). Inquisitorial authorities accused women of creating pacts with the Devil or of using witchcraft and sorcery when they petitioned saints to act against former lovers (Tuchman 1978, 318).

Protestant accusations of superstition, magic, or demonic intervention later in the 16th century revolved around theological argumentation that liturgical practices within the Catholic Church were idolatrous (Eire 1986, 16-17). As elaborated by Thomas (1971, 52-53),

> The Church was other-worldly in its main preoccupations. Most of the magical claims made for religion were parasitic to its teaching, and were more or less vigorously refuted by ecclesiastical leaders… Medieval ecclesiastics stressed the primarily intercessionary nature of the Church's rites. The recitation of prayers, the worship of saints, the use of holy water and the sign of the cross were all propitiatory, not constraining…[However,] at the popular level such agencies were credited with inexorable and compelling power…[T]here were several circumstances which helped consolidate the notion that the Church was a magical agency, no less than a devotional one.

The ambiguity of appeasing saints and holy objects, as well as who could perform such practices and for what reasons, obfuscated the demarcation of witchcraft (or magic, or superstition) and religion (or doctrinal Christianity) (Thomas 1971, 55).

16th-century ontological debates regarding the material presence of the divine created public discourses seeking to denigrate Catholic practices as idolatrous and part of a "Pagan" past (Orsi 2016, 37-38). The resulting reformations evolved from a transcendental humanism that reintroduced Platonic and Augustinian notions of the ascent of the soul (Eire 1986, 28-35, 311-313). Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the humanist influences in Erasmus of Rotterdam's theology led to his claim that the Christian adoration of liturgical objects as divine presences were improper (ibid.,2-3, 30-34). For Erasmus, attaining the knowledge that God was immaterial and transcendent resulted from the realization that scripture, the cross, and the Eucharist wafer were mere representations of divinity (ibid., 36-41). After Erasmus, polemics increasingly arose disparaging saint veneration as idolatry (Eire 1986, 25; Thomas 1971, 50-61). Eventually, Protestant theologies claimed that saint veneration, transubstantiation, and other Catholic liturgy were antithetical of true religion (Thomas 1971, 87-92).

Catholic saint devotion featured an outward or visible piety toward God and propitiations for materialist motives (e.g., healing, political rivalry, economic gain, and settling civic disputes) (Eire 1986, 237-239; Kleinberg 1992, 18-19). Protestant theologies focused on an internal piety and on public admonishments of Catholic practices (e.g., Calvin's rebuke of Nicodemites in France) (Eire 1986, 237-239). Erasmus and Luther discouraged the iconoclastic urges their theological stances incited; however, Zwingli's transcendentalism and Calvin's fear of not achieving salvation fueled iconoclasm (ibid., 39-41, 67-70, 83-85, 216-218). Protestant iconoclasm stressed that images and objects were without power, therefore, Catholic practices were nothing more than idol worship and false religion (ibid., 112). The 25th session of the Council of Trent (*Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235) articulated a Catholic response to Protestant discourses on popular devotions to images and objects,

> [T]he images of Christ, the Virgin Mother of God, and the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent; in such wise that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ; and we venerate the saints, whose similitude they bear: as, by the decrees of Councils, and especially of the second Synod of Nicaea, has been defined against the opponents of images.

Influences from the Protestant Reformation formed a Christian discourse further removing images and objects from common usage as notions of the miraculous fused

with the magical (Thomas 1971, 70). Praying to mediating saints instead of Christ became diabolical and requesting a Good Death from a saint or Mary became conjuring within Protestant thought (ibid., 71). 16th-century Protestant theologies—especially those that favored salvation as a divine grace through faith in Christ over liturgy, sacraments, and clergy—outright challenged the belief in Marian intercession (ibid., 65). Protestant discourse and iconoclasm affected Spain nominally as Catholic officials argued for their own sense of true religion (Eire 1995, 222-228).

Marian and Saint Devotion in 16th-Century Spain

The Virgin Mary is a multi-vocalic symbol that links Mary as the mother of Christ with that of conquering death and sin (Dundes 1980, 250; Wolf 1969, 294-295). As noted in the previous chapter, medieval Spain utilized an *Eva-Ave* typology that expressed Eve and Mary as opposite poles within a bifurcated cosmos (Burke 1998, 5). Eve brought sin and death to mankind while Mary provides victory over sin and death (Wolf 1969, 295). Identifying Mary as the progenitor of God incarnate redeems Eve as an instigator of original sin (Dundes 1980, 254). After the Protestant Reformation altered Christianity in Europe, Spanish Catholicism continued to maintain that Mary was a redeeming intercessor who achieved her status in vindicating the sins of Eve (Wolf 1969, 295).

For Spaniards, devotion to the Virgin Mary emphasized discipline, chastity, and redemption in death (Carroll 1986, 67; Francomano 2007, 17). There is an important distinction in Spanish Catholicism between theological devotion to Mary and the individual power of specific Marian icons (Lee 2007, 107-108). Each Marian icon has its

own biography (Lee 2007, 108). Specific icons of the Virgin Mary were powerful in being a divine presence themselves and not necessarily as a representation (ibid.). For example, many practitioners in 16th-century Spain believed that specific shrines of Mary could lose their miraculous power by removing its corresponding icon (ibid.). In other words, a practitioner might recognize a statue as a representation of Mary, but the actual Virgin's power was inseparable from its material representation (ibid.). As an instrument for generalized theological devotions, Mary was a source for consolidating power in rural Iberia and was also an inspiration for fighting Muslims during the Reconquista and Holy Land crusades (Rothkrug 1980, 22). The Virgin Mary's qualities of redemption in death, and her intercessor capabilities in politics and war, remained alive in Iberia during Muslim rule (Borgeaud 2004 [1996], 110; Carroll 1986, 14-16).

Marian devotion remained strong in Spain, in part, because of how Muslim societies in Iberia influenced the veneration, worship, or adoration of Mary (Carroll 1986, 73). Muslim occupation on the Iberian peninsula provided a buffer from the increasingly high level of anti-Marian movements that began in the 12th century in other parts of Europe (ibid., 14-16). Iberian Christianity and Islam both recognize the Annunciation (when the archangel Gabriel told Mary she was going to birth a son despite her virginity) (Thurlkill 2007, 27). Medieval Iberian Islam—through beliefs associated with *Fatima* (daughter of the Prophet Muhammad) and the acceptance of the Annunciation—held a theological position conducive to a Christian piety representing Mary as the feminine ideal and as a vessel for salvation (ibid., 45).

Christianity and Islam share a notion of a heavenly kingdom rooted in a patriarchal God that usurps mundane political unrest (Wolf 1969, 298). Islam, however, acknowledges a line of agnatic succession that is bore through Fatima (ibid.). Both the Virgin Mary and Fatima, then, surmounted the patriarchal cultures of Iberia in being progenitors of hallowed bloodlines (ibid., 299). Popular belief in Fatima as the forbearer of Muhammad's *baraka* (power), established precedent in Muslim Iberia of a woman representing political consolidation in a male dominated society that continued in Christian Spain with the Virgin Mary (ibid.). The Black Madonna of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura, for example, was a Marian icon that, through warring with Muslims, became a signification of Christian apocalyptic and eschatological hopes as well as a powerful consolidator of political authority in the 16th century (Harrington 1988, 28; Wolf 1969, 299).

The abundance of Black Madonna icons throughout Europe exemplify North African and Arabic Muslim influences related to Marian devotion (Benko 1993, 213). The various Black Madonnas existing among fair-skinned Europeans, like those of France and Spain, are not only the result of Arabic and North African influences but are also the cultural holdovers of pre-Christian cults devoted to the Great Mother (Barham 2003, 326-328). European Church officials claim that ancient artisans constructed Black Madonnas coincidentally from black materials, or that, the elements darkened the effigies over time (Benko 1993, 213). Benko (ibid.), and later Barham (2003, 328), however, conclude that artists purposefully created Dark Virgins and they are not the result of tarnishing. The Black Madonna is a direct representation of the Great Mother and

attributable to African, Persian, Anatolian, and Arabic influences through sustained periods of contact with Western Europe (Barham 2003, 326; Benko 1993, 213). The level of importance placed on Dark Virgins such as Our Lady of Montserrat and the Guadalupe of Extremadura are unique to Iberia in terms of their local concentration relative to other parts of Europe (see figures 22 and 23) (Carroll 1986, 73; Harrington 1988, 28; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-43).

The Black Madonnas of Montserrat and Extremadura carried with them a sense of Spanish identity and apocalypticism that began in the Reconquista (Francomano 2007, 16). The understanding of the feminine ideal as the Virgin Mary led to a political ideology mediated through the disciplining of women's bodies (ibid., 17). For example, veneration of Mary was central to self-flagellation movements of the 15th and 16th centuries that Spaniards used for instructing the feminine ideal (ibid.). At the end of the Reconquista, the Virgin Mary remained a tool for consolidating power in a transitioning political state (Wolf 1969, 299). Spaniards surmised that battle victories during the 16th century were the indirect result of women fulfilling the chaste ideal of Mary who redeemed the original sins of Eve (Francomano 2007, 17).

As noted, the localization of images and relics promoted a sense of community pride and competition among villages and cities in 16th-century Spain (Christian 1981, 141). Communal competition encouraged ideas that a local saint enriched a community (ibid., 139). In both Spain and Italy, as early as the 15th century, there were weekly processions sponsored by local brotherhood officials displaying images of their patron saints (Delaney 2011, 22-23). These processions were didactic and featured illustrations,

statues, and relics accompanied with apocalyptic sermons, rhetoric against Jews and Muslims, as well as denunciations of witches and devil worshippers (Delaney 2011, 22-23). Spanish friars established the cult of the saints in New Spain under a similar paradigm as colonial authorities stressed communal solidarity, apocalyptic instruction, and the denigrating of non-Christians (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 161).

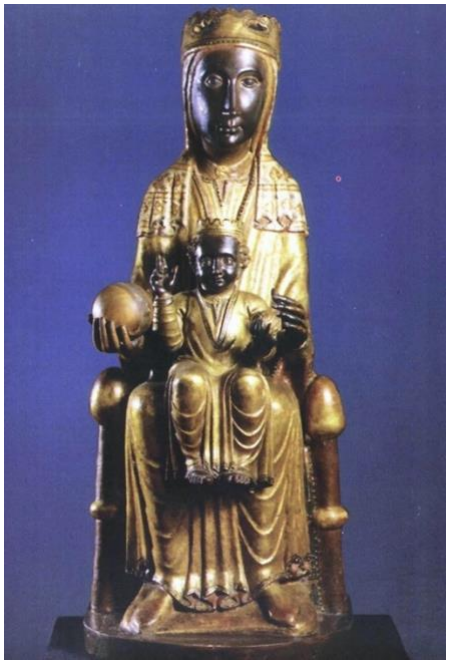


Figure 22. Our Lady of Montserrat, Santa Maria Monastery of Montserrat; ca. 12th century. Photo by Ras67 Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0. No changes were made.

Figure 23. Cybele. Delos Museum, Delos Greece. Date unknown. Photo by Zde Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 3.0 Unported License. No changes were made.

Delaney (2006, 261) argues that apocalypticism from Revelation permeated the Spanish conquistadors and therefore, resulted in a New Spain context where apocalyptic

fervor mixed with Marian devotion (also Harrington 1988, 28). As stated previously, the use of Marian icons to consolidate power was prolific in medieval Europe (Rothkrug 1980, 32; Wolf 1969, 299). The Reconquista context transformed the Guadalupe of Extremadura into a heavenly general credited with vanquishing Muslims and Jews (Harrington 1988, 28). Along with the conquistadors' apocalyptic fervor, then, Spaniards transferred Mary's role in consolidating authority to New Spain (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 33, 125).

Mary, Saints, and Death in New Spain

Visions of the Virgin Mary repeatedly arose in New Spain from the 16th century to the 18th century during epidemics (Poole 1995, 119-120, 68, 90, 175-176). The Virgin of Guadalupe in Extremadura and the Virgin of Guadalupe on Tepeyac both resulted from apparitions sharing similar features (Carroll 1986, 184-185); however, as noted in the previous chapter, a difference in representation between the Virgin of Guadalupe in Extremadura and the Virgin of Guadalupe on Tepeyac is the result of the Woman in the Apocalypse's depiction (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 124-125; Poole 1995, 74-75). Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 121-125) states, for example, that Catholic officials and artists styled the depiction of the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac closer to the Woman in the Apocalypse—moon under her feet, clothed in the sun, and on her head a crown of twelve stars—because Spaniards believed New Spain to be the New Jerusalem.

In the colonization of New Spain, Mary took on a heightened apocalyptic status as the locus of victory over death and Christian enemies through her earthly intercessions (Harrington 1988, 28-29). As Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 33) states,

> [T]he "Old Christian" attachment to images…contributed to mold the identity of the Spanish Christian and their religious practices… [M]any miraculous images were dug out from isolated areas—not the least of them—the Virgin of Guadalupe, venerated in the mountains of Extremadura and dearer than all others to the hearts of the conquistadors.

The Virgin of Guadalupe was an apocalyptic index to eschatological hopes and fears that Spaniards would eventually use in the attempt to create a common ground between conquerors and the conquered (Harrington 1988, 25-26). Cofradía brotherhoods featured medieval European apocalyptic beliefs articulated in images—such as the archangel Michael battling with the Devil to save Mary as the Woman in the Apocalypse—throughout New Spain and well into 18th-century Mexico (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-166; Ingham 1986, 106). Cofradías evangelized Indigenous Central Mexicans in a manner that emphasized the Christian understanding of the Good Death through the veneration of Mary (Gruzinski 1990, 206).

Medieval Europe already established utilizing Mary as an intercessor during sickness, dying, and death (Binski 1996, 30-32). Missionaries and conquistadors, then, transferred the medieval intermixing of Marian devotion with death rites to the colonial context of New Spain (Radding 1998, 195); where it seamlessly meshed with the cult of the saints (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 161; 1990, 206). The use of relics in New Spain

encouraged Spanish attempts to establish communal solidarity through cofradías (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 161).

In the 16th century, the veneration of various saints' days brought individuals together for feasting and dancing (Clendinnen 1990, 113-114). Spaniards venerated European saints' icons and established new patronages rooted in the colonial context (Gruzinski 1990, 217). Linking superficially similar connections of Indigenous Central Mexican practices with Catholic imagery, language, and liturgical practices was a common method utilized for conversion (Radding 1998, 203). For example, the Catholic use of relics and Indigenous Central Mexican veneration of ancestral bones appears similar because both involve continued social relationships between the dead and the living (Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 164; Malvido 1997, 29-32). Indigenous Central Mexicans, however, frustrated 16th-century Spanish authorities because they continued to communicate with their deceased rather than praying to saints during holy occasions such as All Saints' Day (Haley and Fukuda 2004, 132).

All Saints' and All Souls' Days, as well as Holy Week, included apocalyptic Christian death imagery featuring dancing skeletons (Brandes 1998, 208). Indigenous Central Mexican veneration of ancestors, Catholic veneration of relics, and apocalyptic Christian images of the embodied figure of Death all inhabited the same spaces in New Spain (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164). The desire to filter out Indigenous Central Mexican practices exacerbated the theological ambiguity of sainthood and what constituted proper veneration (ibid.). Franciscan interpretations of Erasmus' humanism in New Spain contrasted with Tridentine Catholicism (Cervantes 1994, 129-132; Ingham 1986, 35).

Imagery and practices condemned as magical or demonic in the Counter-Reformation, for example, were potential sources of salvation as a matter of "Divine Providence" (Cervantes 1994, 129-132; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 151, 158). Franciscans in New Spain argued, then, that since the Devil was under God's control, illicit images could lead to demonic possession and the subsequent suffering of the practitioner would later culminate in his/her stronger faith (Cervantes 1994, 129).

Spaniards used relics in colonial New Spain for devotional practices, miraculous cures, and for binding (Brown 1981, 111; Christian 1981, 126; Few 2002, 54, Thomas 1971, 55; Tuchman 1978, 318). As Few (2002, 54) states,

> [R]eligious authorities in Europe and the New World encouraged and promoted this view of body parts as powerful ritual items but [only] in the form of religious relics and the material remains of saints…The faithful were attracted to relics because they hoped to receive a cure or some other miraculous occurrence…Since official religious practices highlighted the power of religious relics, it is not surprising that women turned to the use of body parts in ritual claims of power.

In New Spain, then, elites ceremoniously enacted relics for legitimizing their social stratification, the marginalized used relics and body parts for social leveling, and women of all social classes appropriated body parts for the purposes of binding (ibid.).

Veneration of body parts, like saint relics, occurred for centuries in medieval Europe (Binski 1996, 69; Rothkrug 1980, 13). Ancient Greeks and Romans employed the Lady of the Dead and other chthonic beings in binding rituals to seize sexual favors and justice from unsuspecting victims (Faraone 1991, 4). Though altered in the colonial setting, the history of the cult of the saints, from its 4th-century inception to its

establishment in New Spain, reveals a continuation of the European understanding of patron-client social relationships (Brandes 1998, 214; Head 1990, 197). Death and the proximity to dead bodies in New Spain, however, occupied a place of power and controversy that went beyond what occurred in Europe (see Brandes 1998, 214; Brown 1981, 4; Head 1990, 197).

Close associations of Mary to a Good Death in colonial Mexico, just like in Iberia, led to a Marian devotion entangled with images related to the Apocalypse and the embodied figure of Death (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164). The mixing of saint and Marian veneration with apocalyptic Christian death imagery intensified as waves of epidemics established a cult-like following of Death in New Spain (ibid.). A "cult of death" in New Spain evolved from apocalyptic interpretations and imagery first produced in Europe in the forms of the Grim Reaper image, practices like the Dance of Death, and the intercessory power of relics (Aberth 2010, 231-237; Binski 1996, 69; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 201; Jones 2010, 81). In the 18th-century Querétaro region of Mexico, the mixture of saint veneration and apocalyptic Christian death imagery produced heterodox petitions to Holy Death (a green skull with golden earrings) and the Just Judge (a red skeleton) (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 201).

Cofradías in New Spain contained Death icons in the late 18th century before an edict meant to eradicate idolatrous practices removed them from use (Malvido 2005, 25). Members of lay brotherhoods in Central Mexico prayed to Death with the hope of ending epidemics (ibid.). 18th-century Enlightenment thinking, as demonstrated in "Chambers' *Cyclopedia*," designated that any view claiming the presence of divine power as

embodied in material objects was irrational superstition (see Hanegraaff 2012, 162). Until the middle of the 18th century, however, New Spain Franciscans argued their right to maintain practices deemed as improper in the Counter-Reformation (Cervantes 1994, 159-161). In the 18th century, Franciscan logic utilized Giambattista Vico's relativistic or nominal interpretation of "Divine Providence," in which all cultures found God arising from their own "vulgarities," or on their own terms (ibid., 154-156). By the end of the 18th century, however, the Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavigero's theological position gained prominence over Vico's, as the former argued that sin was the result of human error and that there was no divine purpose, such as Providence, for relating to images and objects in a non-representational manner (ibid., 151-153).

Catholicism, in both Spain and colonial Mexico, commonly used images of embodied Death to instruct the laity on how to live the Good Life through a Good Death (Burkhart 2004, 29; Eire 1995, 5). Since the 16th century, Indigenous Central Mexican conversion involved didactic plays featuring Death alongside Mary, Michael, the Devil, and Christ (Burkhart 2004, 50-51; Ingham 1986, 106, 120). Devotees in cofradías of Central Mexico prayed to images of Death resembling the Grim Reaper in hopes of ending epidemics until the late 18th century (Malvido 2005, 25). Holy Week ceremonies like the Descent and Burial of Christ featured images of Death until the late 19th century (Wroth 1981, 150). The next chapter focuses on pre-Columbian and colonial death imagery to better understand how the image of Death emerged in Central Mexico.

4 PRE-COLUMBIAN AND COLONIAL DEATH IMAGERY

Spanish colonization, evangelization, and diseases altered *Mexica* (Meshica) cultural practices associated with death (Burkhart 2004, 29). Mexica is the self-referential name of the *Nahuatl* speaking peoples of *Tenochtitlan* (Mexico City) (Arnold 1999, 19). Based on the writings of 16th-century Europeans, modern scholars of Mesoamerica assigned the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan the name "Aztecs" due to a cultural narrative of their origin in *Aztlan* (ibid.). In this chapter I will, therefore, refer to the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan as the Mexica and the pre-Columbian people of the Valley of Mexico as Indigenous Central Mexicans.

Death in Pre-Columbian Central Mexico

Arnold (1999, 180, 223) cautions that modern research on the Mexica and other pre-Columbian peoples is an uncertain interpretive enterprise because of its reliance on early modern Christian monastic sources (see also Carrasco 1982, 11-12). González Varela (2018, 36) further cautions that historical scholarship of pre-Columbian people in Mexico is prone to generalization; research, therefore, requires a localized understanding of material culture and practices. Mexica practices associated with life and death remain vaguely understood because of the influence 16th-century religious orders' agendas have on modern theories and interpretations (Arnold 1999, 180; Carrasco 1987, 128). Prior to colonization, the Mexica regarded life and death as continuous and fluid with no concept of hell or sin (Brodman 2011, 28-29; Burkhart 2004, 30); rather, complementary dualistic forces constituted Mexica understandings of life and death (López Austin 1988 [1980],

59-60). The Mexica understood life and death as oscillating forces existing within the human body (Arnold 1999, 56, 111, 164; Johansson 2012, 80-81). For example, *miquiztli* (death and/or dying) referenced when blood flowed into the heart at rest, and *nemiliztli* (to exist and/or move) was the heart contracting to circulate blood throughout the body (Johansson 2012, 80-81).

These oscillations of life and death observed in the flow of blood to and from the heart took place similarly within the earth (Johansson 2012, 80-81). *Tlaloc* was a living entity associated with the landscape of the Valley of Mexico that produced life but also consumed it (see figure 24) (Arnold 1999, 35-39; Johansson 2012, 80-81; Knab 2004, 17). Within this conception of the lifecycle, Tlaloc was a provider and *Tlalocan* (the place of Tlaloc) was a water-filled bountiful garden (Arnold 1999, 35; Knab 2004, 55). Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, Central Mexicans engaged Tlaloc within a reciprocal relationship based on ritual and ceremony (Arnold 1999, 77).

The Mexica expressed the fluidity of life and death through Tlaloc in practices related to fertility and regeneration (Arnold 1999, 35; Knab 1991, 41). The Mexica observed the oscillating lifecycle forces of nemiliztli and miquiztli as vegetative growth and decomposition (Johansson 2012, 80-81). Vegetation sprouted from the earth like blood pulsating from a contracting heart (or nemiliztli) and then decomposed back into the land like blood entering the relaxing heart (or miquiztli) (ibid.). Life and death, then, were opposite yet complementary forces within an oscillating process manifested in both the flow of blood and the growth of vegetation (ibid.). Maintaining these oscillations of

the lifecycle within a living landscape demanded a reciprocal relationship between humans and Tlaloc (Arnold 1999, 164, 248; Johansson 2012, 80-81).

Figure 24. Tlaloc. Date unknown. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico, City, Mexico. Photo by Ivanpares Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. No changes were made.

A correspondence existed between food, land, and the human body in which deceased family members functioned as mediators of a reciprocal relationship with Tlaloc (Arnold 1999, 111). The Mexica perception that existence was hostile and violent formed the basis for their reciprocal relationship to their living landscape (ibid., 81, 163-164). Within this reciprocal relationship, blood was the medium of exchange required for humans to maintain the lifecycle in a process where life was potential food consumed by an "eating landscape" (ibid., 163-164, 233-236). Reciprocity with the landscape as a living entity, therefore, was an exchange of offerings that expressed life and death as creative acts where one was either eating or eaten (ibid., 163). The Mexica understood death as nourishment for the earth in a process resembling the digestion of food and the gestation of a human fetus (Johansson 2012, 83-91).

Mictlan was the place within the earth that digested deceased humans and other putrefied substances over a nine-month period coinciding with human gestation (Johansson 2012, 91). *Mictlantecuhtli* (lord of Mictlan) and *Mictecacihuatl* (lady of Mictlan) were the inhabitants of Mictlan, which was also geographically associated with a mountainous area north of Tenochtitlan referred to as *Mictlampa* (see figure 25) (Arnold 1999, 2, 3, 12, 84, 111; Johansson 2012, 80). The modern Nahuatl speaking inhabitants of Sierra de Puebla in Central Mexico still understand Mictlan, which they refer to as *Mictalli*, as the place of the dead (Knab 1991, 41). While the Mexica thought of Mictlan as the place that consumed the deceased, modern researchers claim that some aspect of a human transmigrated after death and thus often speculatively refer to a Mexica belief in an "afterlife" (see Andersson 2001, 172-174; Burkhart 2004, 30; Brodman 2011, 28n.2; Johansson 2012, 84, 91).

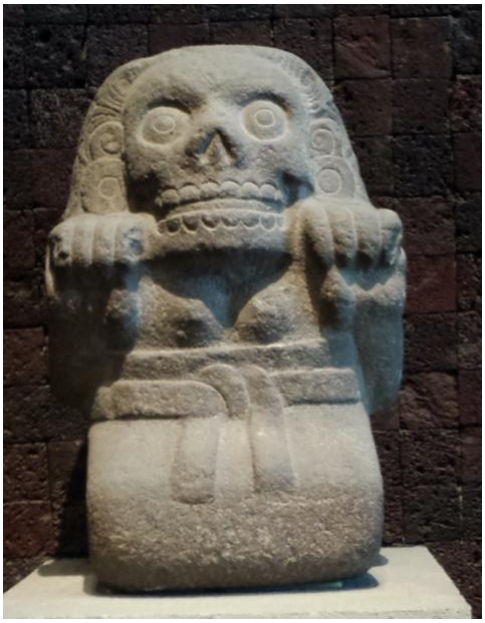


Figure 25. Female being of Mictlan. Date unknown. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo by author.

Any European conception of an "afterlife" associated with Indigenous Central Mexicans prior to Christian influence, however, is more accurately a continuation of relationships with ancestors and their living landscape (see Arnold 1999, 56-57; López Austin 1988 [1980], 8, 205). Interactions that related the Mexica to their ancestors centered on landscape, blood, and other "vital substances" (Arnold 1999, 55, 111; López Austin 1988[1980], 168, 173). Burkhart (2004, 29) refers to Mexica understanding of vital substances as "animating essences" or life sustaining "components." Indigenous Central Mexicans considered bones, breath, blood, and the liver to be vitalities, essences, or components that Spanish friars tenuously compared to the Christian notion of the soul (Johansson 2012, 80; López Austin 1988 [1980], 313-316).

For example, the Mexica thought of bones, or *omicetl*, as a hardened form of semen and thus an aspect of human vitality (Arnold 1999, 56; López Austin 1988 [1980], 176). Omicetl was, therefore, an enduring aspect of vitality that connected groups and individuals to their deceased ancestors (Burkhart 2004, 30). In the colonial era, evangelizing friars mistakenly associated the vitality of *teyolia* as being equivalent with the Christian notion of the immortal soul (or *ánima* in Spanish) (Sahagún 1961 [1578-80], 28 and see Arnold 1999, 59; López Austin 1988 [1980], 230n.123.492). Teyolia was a vitality associated with the human heart, knowledge, and feeling (López Austin 1988 [1980], 320). The Mexica further identified teyolia with breath and shadow and it possibly accompanied the deceased to Mictlan as well (Arnold 1999, 56, 59; López Austin 1988 [1980], 320).

Tonalli was a vitality identified with the mind and it entered a body through the head's fontanel (Arnold 1999, 57-59; López Austin 1988 [1980], 204-207). The Mexica linked tonalli to blood and the heat of the sun, and loss of tonalli could result in sickness and death (Arnold 1999, 57-59; López Austin 1988 [1980], 204-207). *Ihiyotl* was the vitality associated with the liver and it was the source of an individual's energy and strength (Arnold 1999, 57-59; López Austin 1988 [1980], 192, 232-236). Ihiyotl could leave the body and the Mexica identified it as "night air" or "death air" (Arnold 1999, 59). It could linger around the body after death, which linked the vitality to the smell of a cadaver (ibid.). At the time of death, teyolia, tonalli, and ihiyotl gradually dissipated or separated from the body (López Austin 1988 [1980], 224, 230). Where each deceased individual's vital essences resided after death was not morally determined. Nor was it conceived of as being dependent on an inner quality like that of the Christian concept of faith (León-Portilla 1982 [1963], 127).

For the Mexica, how someone died determined their physical transformation (León-Portilla 1982 [1963], 127; López Austin 1988 [1980], 230). The Mexica buried those that died of old age or sickness in the ground where some aspect of their vitality remained intact (Andersson 2001, 174; López Austin 1988 [1980], 230). For women who died in childbirth some aspect of their vitality went to the sun after the burial of their bodily remains (Andersson 2001, 172; Brodman 2011, 28n.2; López Austin 1988 [1980], 288). Deceased children dwelled in a place called *chichihuacuauhco* where they suckled milk after their burial close to a "milk-tree" (Andersson 2001, 174; León-Portilla 1982 [1963], 127). Executed Mexica war prisoners went to the sun in a place referred to as

Ilhuicatl-Tonatiuh and transformed into humming birds or plumed-birds after four years (Andersson 2001, 172, 174; Brodman 2011, 28n.2; León-Portilla 1982 [1963], 126 and see Durán 1994 [1574-76], 286).

Indigenous Central Mexican practices associated with death, the relationship between Tlalocan and Mictlan, and the way the Mexica interacted with a living landscape defies Western understandings and do not square with Christian concepts like soul and afterlife (Arnold 1999, 233-234; Astor-Aguilera 2010, 2, 15, 152; Broda 1987, 83). Spanish apocalyptic hopes of creating a New Jerusalem in the Americas, then, diametrically opposed Mexica conceptions of land, life, death, and fertility articulated in Tlaloc and Tlalocan (Arnold 1999, 239). European cultures of the 16th century committed themselves to a "utopian ideology" that sought to create the Christian ideal of a New Jerusalem (ibid., 238). The Spanish means of creating this New Jerusalem relied on transforming Indigenous Central Mexican conceptions of land, life, death, and fertility into otherworldly and transcendent ideas that aligned with a Christian worldview (ibid., 238-239). Spanish friars, for example, attempted to transform representations of Tlaloc as depictions of a Mexica "god" and, therefore, Catholic reasoning followed that its images were idols representing the Christian Devil (Cervantes 1994, 15, 17, 94). Reconquista apocalyptic hopes and motivations, coupled with accusations of Indigenous "idolatry," thus authorized the cultural subversion of Indigenous Central Mexicans (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 32-33).

Transforming Mesoamerican Worldviews and Subjugation

Spanish authority legitimatized the cultural devastation of Indigenous Central Mexicans as a matter of Divine Providence (Arnold 1999, 239; Cervantes 1994, 129-132 and see Sahagún (1982 [1578-80], 75, 77). The subjugation of Indigenous Central Mexicans began with apocalyptic hopes of establishing a New Jerusalem in the Americas, but justified the continuation of oppression with accusations of idolatry (Arnold 1999, 218, 238-239). The desire to eradicate Indigenous "idolatry" and convert them to the Catholic faith and Iberian social structure were the sources of the missionizing friars' concern for understanding Mexica practices (Poole 1995, 21, 34-38).

The Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún (1982 [1578-80], 84, 94), for example, studied indigenous customs and Nahuatl with the admitted intent of converting Indigenous Central Mexicans. One of Sahagún's (ibid., 49-50, 98-99) greatest fears was that Indigenous Central Mexicans might die before completing their conversion away from idolatry. The Dominican Diego Durán (1994 [1574-76], xxi, 10) intended to understand Indigenous languages, histories, and cultures to convey the sacraments within an approximate translatable context. For Durán (ibid., 3, 6, 10-11), the sacraments were paramount because he thought the Mexica were a lost tribe of Israel fallen to idolatry. Impressing King Phillip II of Spain was the main agenda for the Jesuit José de Acosta (2002 [1590], 6, 69-74, 513) whose writings claimed that Indigenous Central Mexicans were "savage and fugitive men" rather than apostates or heretics. Acosta (ibid., 275) wrote that Indigenous Central Mexican idolatry was the result of "how the devil in his

arrogance, and in competition with God... strives to imitate and pervert" (see also Cervantes 1992, 29-33).

The apocalyptic hope of the first Franciscan friars led them to believe that God would ease the Indigenous Central Mexican conversion to Christianity (Arnold 1999, 186-187). Later religious orders used charges of "idolatry" and "human sacrifice" to justify the Mexica suffering incurred from conquest and disease (Arnold 1999, 234, 236; Sahagún 1982 [1578-80], 94). In describing the perceived success of the religious orders' fight against Mexica "idolatry," Durán (1994 [1574-76], 560-563) inadvertently emphasizes the cultural devastation and subjugation of Indigenous Central Mexicans,

> The "Twelve Apostles" [as the first Franciscan friars referred to themselves] gained many converts because of their religious and holy lives...They preached and baptized in all provinces with apostolic zeal, filled with spirit and divine fervor…These natives were much moved by the words, labors, and abnegation shown by the Franciscan friars…They [the later Dominican friars] fought the great cruelty and inhumanity that the Spaniards had discharged upon these natives… After the country had been conquered, a plague of smallpox broke out… [T]housands died, men, women, and children, and the pestilence was attributed to the Spanish men who had brought it.

Arnold (1999, 238) refers to this European subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples of the Americas as being part of a "culture of massacre."

The colonial state sanctioned its "culture of massacre" with apocalyptic hopes of creating a New Jerusalem in a part of the world where Spaniards believed the Devil had dominion (Arnold 1999, 238-239; Cervantes 1992, 29-33 and see Acosta 2002 [1590], 258-275). Routinized violence and subjugation were part of the bestialization of Indigenous Central Mexicans (Las Casas 2003 [1552], 7-17; Malvido 1997, 30-31). Juan

Ginés de Sepúlveda (1892 [1547], 1), for example, argued for the complete subjugation of Indigenous Central Mexicans in claiming they were an "inhuman" and "barbaric" people. Sepúlveda's claim countered the position of Francisco de Vitoria (1917 [1532], 125) who previously argued that Indigenous Central Mexicans were a "civilized" people with their own religion and laws which made them rightful owners of their land. Vitoria (ibid., 85-86, 127-128) argued for their autonomy with the caveat that Spaniards should intervene in Indigenous life to preach the Gospel and protect victims from "human sacrifice."

Malvido (1997, 30-31, 49) suggests the Spanish view of Indigenous Central Mexicans as simultaneously "civilized" and "barbaric" was the result of justifications for Catholic inquisitorial practices. The Counter-Reformation in Europe extended to New Spain as a battle ground against "heretics" and "idolaters" with the same inquisitorial motives (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152-153). Iberian inquisitorial practices used torture to gain confessions and vanquish political enemies (Cervantes 1994, 52-53; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152). The Spaniards used the same techniques and reasoning on Mesoamerican peoples to try and rid them of their supposed "idolatry" (Astor-Aguilera 2010, 63). Mesoamerican, per Kirchhoff (1960 [1943], 6-7), refers to pre-Columbian peoples at the time of European contact that lived north of the Gulf of Nicoya in Costa Rica and south of the Sinaloa (north of Culiacán, Sinaloa) and the Panúco (south of Tampico, Tamaulipas) rivers in Mexico.

Prior to 1571, Spanish inquisitors imprisoned and tortured the Mexica for continuing to make "sacrifices" to their "diabolical idol" Tlaloc (Cervantes 1994, 15).

From 1536-1543 the Franciscan friar and Bishop of Mexico City, Juan de Zumárraga, utilized an "Indian Inquisition" to arrest, exile, and torture 19 Central Mexican Indigenous leaders in the Valley of Mexico for idolatry (Lopes Don 2006, 27). In 1543, Bishop Zumárraga relinquished his interrogations into Central Mexican idolatry, but in 1571 the Inquisitorial tribunals resumed (ibid., 27-28). The difference in 1571 was the result of Counter-Reformation politics in Europe where the Holy Office of the Inquisition refocused its prosecutorial directives toward heresy (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152).

Due to the switch of focus to heresy, Inquisitorial tribunals after 1571 withheld Indigenous Central Mexicans unless they converted to Christianity prior to their perceived offense (Lopes Don 2006, 28). Indigenous conversions in the 16th century, however, included the mass baptism of unsuspecting Mesoamericans (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152). In addition, the Inquisition could still prosecute an unconverted Mesoamerican if they suspected the individual of leading the converted back to "idol worship" (ibid.). Inquisitorial tribunals in Mexico between 1571 and 1820, then, were responsible for transforming Mesoamerican worldviews associated with ancestors and land into those that more closely resembled Tridentine Catholcism (Astor-Aguilera 2010, 63; Cervantes 1994, 52-53). The Spanish colonial regime's reorganization of Indigenous Central Mexican social structure led to continued subjugation and exploitation beyond the seizure of Tenochtitlan and the religious orders' fight against idolatry (Las Casas 2003 [1552]; Pérez de Ribas 1968 [1644], 38-39).

In the 16th century, free labor enforced on Indigenous Central Mexicans took the form of mines and *encomienda* (Weber 1992, 94-95, 124-125). In Central Mexican

mines, Spaniards forced Indigenous peoples to work to the point of bodily collapse and death (Acosta 2002 [1590], 144). New Spain's encomienda system was a feudal-type institution legalizing slave-like working conditions on plantations that exploited consecutive generations of Indigenous families (Weber 1992, 94-95, 124-125). Spaniards used the encomienda to keep down rebellions and devise a workforce large enough to transform resources found in the Americas into the capital needed to support its burgeoning global empire (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 5-6; Weber 1992, 2).

The overwhelming death rate exacerbated New Spain's colonial economy because more land owners demanded more tribute and labor from fewer Indigenous Central Mexicans (Lominitz 2005, 204). In the first 60 years of Spanish occupation, an estimated 20 million Mesoamericans or 80 percent of the population, died from disease, warfare, and forced labor (Arnold 1999, 218). The ubiquity of the dead among Indigenous Central Mexicans and their contested views regarding death created an avenue for Spanish officials to impose an Iberian form of social structure, regarding the Good Life and the Good Death, in New Spain (Burkhart 2004, 50-51; Malvido 1997, 30-31, 49).

Good Death, Purgatory, and Iberian Social Structure

Accusations of idolatry were instrumental in imposing Iberian social structure in New Spain (Pérez de Ribas 1968 [1644],38-39; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 5-6). Theological polemics regarding the proper use of devotional objects—devised in Europe for the purpose of establishing a Catholic defense to Protestant iconoclasm—were the foundations of a colonial discourse claiming liturgical objects associated with the

sacraments had divine power while the "idols" of Indigenous cultures were demonic (Cervantes 1994, 142). The fear of Protestantism gaining traction in Europe was a deciding factor regarding the Catholic religious orders' focus on eradicating idolatry in New Spain (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152). Ecclesiastics could dismiss Protestant accusations of Catholic idolatry if missionary activity in the Americas could demonstrate an ability to combat "false-religion" (ibid.).

Catholic friars in New Spain, like Acosta (2002 [1590], 275-276), believed that an autochthonous basis for Christian instruction already existed, which the Devil hid from Indigenous Central Mexicans behind a veil of deception (Cervantes 1992, 33). Conversion, therefore, required translating Indigenous worldviews within Christian belief structures (Cervantes 1992, 15, 25; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 98). As Acosta (2002 [1590], 270) notes, "[T]he devil, in whose veneration they were made, liked to be worshipped in ill-featured figures… [T]his kind of idolatry flourished more than anywhere in the world in the provinces of New Spain."

Converting Mexicans to Christianity involved "transitioning" so-called Paganism to Christianity as had occurred centuries earlier in the Christianization of Europe (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 98). For the Mexica, the process of conversion involved identifying Tlaloc with the Christian Devil (Cervantes 1994, 15; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 98). Spaniards further translated Mictlan into the Christian Hell, which force-fit Indigenous practices regarding a regenerative lifecycle into Christian conceptions of an afterlife and resurrection (Ingham 1986, 184, 188 and see Ortega and Baltasar 1944 [1754], 29).

Conversion through conflation, however, had the reverse consequence of its intent (Cervantes 1994, 15). Within the violent and traumatic context of New Spain, Indigenous Central Mexicans established modes of resistance opposing Spanish authority (Arnold 1999, 193; Cervantes 1994, 94). Due to the religious orders' misrecognition of Indigenous worldviews, they accused Central Mexicans of "stubbornly clinging to idolatry," which rendered them incapable of achieving a Good Death (Lomnitz 2005, 199-201). Instead, the most the Spanish expected from Indigenous Central Mexicans was that they witness Christ's presence at their death (ibid., 200). Theological reasoning denying Mesoamericans the right to a Good Death allowed New Spain's clergy and officials to enforce property laws consistent with those in late medieval Iberia (ibid.).

A Good Death was central to enforcing forms of Iberian social structure in New Spain because it included the public reading of a will to pass down property to immediate blood-relatives (Lomnitz 2005, 100-101). Iberian property rights in New Spain technically allowed Indigenous Central Mexican communities to gain personal property, however, the process of achieving a Christian Good Death was rarely available to them (ibid., 204). Distributing property through a Good Death transferred land away from Indigenous families leading to the creation of the Church's wealth in New Spain (ibid., 200-216). The colonial regime was thus able to legitimize its feudal-like workforce based on property laws associated with a Good Death that subjugated Indigenous Central Mexicans for generations (ibid., 180-182). Not dying a Good Death—dying violently, dying without the sacrament of Extreme Unction, and dying without a publicly read will—and Indigenous "idolatry," became intertwined through the doctrine of Purgatory in

creating a colonial discourse seeking to maintain social control in New Spain (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 152).

Prior to Spanish colonization, Mesoamerican access to land and its resources belonged to community members considered descendants, real or fictive, of the same ancestors (Astor-Aguilera 2010, 34). Death for Mesoamericans was a transformation and, therefore, the possibility of communication with ones' ancestors remained part of daily life (ibid., 35). Ancestors thus remained close to the living in shrines related to ones' dwelling (ibid.). As noted in the previous chapter, Central Mexicans in the 16th century continued to communicate with deceased family members, as opposed to them praying to saints on All Saints' Day and for souls in Purgatory on All Souls' Day (Haley and Fukuda 2004, 132). The doctrine of Purgatory and corresponding practices associated with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day played an important role in disrupting Mesoamerican social life where, previously, ancestors functioned as mediators of reciprocal relationships between Indigenous Central Mexicans and a living landscape (Arnold 1999, 111; Lomnitz 2005, 100-101).

Initially, Spaniards believed the feast days of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day were practices capable of altering Indigenous Central Mexican social relations between the living and the dead (Lomnitz 2005, 100-101). As Lomnitz (ibid.) suggests, *El Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) was a Spanish construction used to further instruct the Catholic belief in Purgatory to Indigenous Central Mexicans. The Mexican Día de los Muertos, however, became a harvest festival incorporating former Indigenous Central Mexican notions of community and reciprocity into Christian beliefs regarding death and

the afterlife (Lomnitz 2005, 114-116). Spaniards hoped that eventually the Day of the Dead would lead to Indigenous communities accepting the Catholic notion of prayer for souls in Purgatory (ibid.). Instead, Indigenous Central Mexican resistance to the doctrines of Purgatory and All Saints'/All Souls' Days became further evidence of continued Indigenous "ancestor worship" and "idolatry" (ibid, 100-101).

By the late 16th century, Spanish friars already noticed differences between Día de los Muertos and All Saints'/All Souls' Days (Lomnitz 2005, 113-114). Conflicting Indigenous understandings of the Days of the Dead and All Saints'/All Souls' Days appeared to Spanish authorities as an ongoing act of defiance (ibid., 100-101). Since Indigenous Central Mexicans struggled to fully adopt the All Saints and All Souls doctrines, defying Purgatory demonstrated Indigenous reluctance to relinquish their "idolatrous ways" (ibid.). The doctrine of Purgatory was also a means to introduce the Western European Christian concept of an individual and immortal soul to Mesoamerican worldviews (ibid., 205). Eventually, the notion of a personal soul led to conceptions of individualism that further undermined reciprocal structures of Indigenous Central Mexican communities (ibid.).

The belief in an individual soul was a central aspect of dying, death, and the dead that disrupted former Indigenous social relations connected to ancestors (Lomnitz 2005, 205). Spaniards continually reinforced Iberian notions of the individual soul in practices related to Purgatory through the 17th century (ibid., 200-205). Purgatory, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day, then, were instrumental in creating social control in New Spain's colonial environment (ibid., 105, 114-116). The Church, for example, sought to establish

belief in Purgatory among Indigenous Central Mexicans through catechisms in Nahuatl (Burkhart 2004, 47-49). The circulation of *Ars Moriendi* confessional books written in Nahuatl demonstrates a reluctance on the part of priests to conduct the rite of Extreme Unction to Indigenous communities (ibid.). Translations teaching the art of dying a Good Death and associated guidebooks into Nahuatl assume an unmet need among Indigenous Mexicans to receive the rite of Extreme Unction (ibid., 48).

Burkhart (2004, 48-52) suggests that the figure of Death further provided a contemplative focal point, in lieu of dying a Good Death. As the death toll approximated forty million after the first century of colonization, the Spanish occupation of Mesoamerica nearly doubled the estimated loss of human life during the European Black Death (Restall 2003, 128, 187n.80). Spanish images of Death, therefore, became ubiquitous throughout New Spain due to the physical devastation caused by military colonization, forced labor, forced conversion, and disease (Lomnitz 2005, 184-185).

The Figure of Death in Central Mexico

Spaniards brought with them a specific figure of Death from Iberia that represented and sometimes embodied a reckoning of souls, a gateway to the afterlife, social justice in the Last Judgment, and a guide to Purgatory (Aberth 2010, 231, 269; Brandes 1998, 199; Jones 2010, 81; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185). The icon of Death that arrived in New Spain as a tool for conversion became a means to cope with the trauma of colonialism (Burkhart 2004, 51; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54). Death as a servant of God was a feature that appeared in liturgical dramas in

Iberia, but early friars utilized as didactic plays in New Spain (Burkhart 2004, 31, 51; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44). Friars used these didactic plays featuring the figure of Death alongside angels, demons, Jesus, and Mary to instruct Indigenous Central Mexicans on Christian notions of sin, the 10 Commandments, the immortal soul, and a bifurcated afterlife (Burkhart 2004, 32-38).

The figure of Death—in plays like *How to Live on Earth*, *Final Judgment*, and *The Life of Don Sebastían*—is an actor dressed as a skeleton carrying a scythe working as the "Constable" for the "Just Judge," or Christ, and alongside Mary as the "Advocate" for souls who are on trial (Burkhart 2004, 31). In the Nahuatl didactic plays, contemplating Death was a means to learn how to be conscious of one's sins and to perceive death as a natural and spiritual good for the true Catholic (ibid., 38). In *The Life of Don Sebastían*, for example, a demon brings Don Sebastían in front of Death who then tells the dead man, "Abandon the things of the earth, the pleasures…Save your soul; may your sins trouble you" (ibid., 287). Death reads off the charges levied against Don Sebastían, which correspond directly to the 10 Commandments, as a chorus of demons and angels confirm the dead man's sins (ibid., 299-303).

Spanish portrayals of Death as an embodied actor led to an understanding among Indigenous Central Mexicans that Death was a person-like figure in Catholic cosmology (Burkhart 2004, 52). Indigenous Central Mexicans thus adopted an Iberian figure of embodied Death that Spaniards presented to them in didactic plays derived from the Dance of Death (Malvido 2008, 66 and see Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-47). The clergy also taught Dance of Death songs and plays to Indigenous Central Mexican children to

inculcate Iberian social structure in New Spain (Malvido 2008, 64-65). Children's versions of the Dance of Death revealed Death to be both an abstraction and an embodied actor (ibid., 66). Using Death in the abstract demonstrated that human mortality resulted from original sin (ibid., 64-65). As an embodied actor, Death was the executer of "divine justice," who functioned as a social leveler (ibid., 69-71).

Since didactic plays like *The Final Judgment* portrayed Christ, Mary, Michael, the Devil, and Death together as ethical teachers, Holy Death imagery became vital to converting Indigenous Central Mexicans (Burkhart 2004, 29, 50-51). In *The Final Judgment*, Death announces the arrival of the Last Judgment and proclaims that the people of Earth are "piteous" and "blind" (ibid., 195). The apocalyptic hope of establishing a New Jerusalem in the Americas and the desire to eradicate so-called Indigenous "idolatrous beliefs" were comingling forms of Catholic instruction that fostered colonial subjugation (Burkhart 2004, 195, 299-303; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 32-33, 164; Malvido 2008, 64-68). Focusing on the figure of Death in popular forms of "Holy Death" imagery, however, angered some Catholic authorities since the Church deemed images of Mary and Saint Joseph (as Mary's husband) as the only proper representations of a Good Death (Burkhart 2004, 48-49; Lomnitz 2005, 130-131).

According to Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 164), Indigenous Central Mexican imagery that Catholic officials admonished as idolatry—including a depiction of *Justo Juez* (Just Judge) as a red skeleton carrying a bow and arrow—was intentionally subversive. Indigenous Central Mexicans transformed the European image of the Just Judge as a depiction of Christ's crucifixion into a red skeleton as part of a growing corpus of "Holy

Death" imagery utilized to contest Spanish authority because Mary was the main protagonist of a Good Death, and her imagery was vital to New Spain's power structure through cofradías (Burkhart 2004, 48-49; Gruzinski 1990, 206; Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 164; Lomnitz 2005, 130-131). During large scale epidemics, colonial inquisitorial records further show that Indigenous Central Mexicans whipped images of both Christ and Death at funeral services (Gruzinski (2001 [1990], 199). There were also instances where subversive images of "Holy Death," depicted as "a skull of green stone with enormous teeth, and wearing golden earrings" received offerings for curing and ending epidemics (ibid., 164).

Conflicting views of death were a source of contention that Spaniards used to reinforce New Spain's social hierarchy (Burkhart 2004, 29; Lomnitz 2005, 153-156, 200, 261-262; Poole 1995, 21). New Spain's Iberian Death imagery became emblematic of *mestizo* (Spanish and Indigenous mixed ancestry) culture because Death as a social leveling person-like entity provided an outlet to colonial trauma (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185, 199-204, 261-262).

A Persistent Image of Death

As noted previously, Spaniards introduced Nahuatl translations of *Ars Moriendi* texts and Catholic guidebooks for the dying in the late 16th century in the hopes of allowing Indigenous Central Mexicans a Good Death (Burkhart 2004, 48-49). Spaniards created Indigenous cofradías in the 16th century to encourage Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary, to instruct the Christian way of dying, and to help communities cope with

large-scale epidemics (Gruzinski 1990, 206). Indigenous confraternities dedicated to Christian images and objects as holy beings referred to as "*santos*" and "*santas*," proliferated in the 17th century (ibid., 206, 217-219). By the 18th century, objects of devotion in the form of Holy Death or "*la santa muerte*" arose in inquisitorial records at Indigenous confraternities (ibid., 219).

Since the 17th century, confraternities in Spain like *La Hermandad del Santo Entierro* (the Brotherhood of the Holy Burial) in Seville, enact processions during Holy Week that feature Death imagery of a skeleton holding a scythe (see figure 15) (Malvido 2005, 23). Similarly, 17th-century Guatemalans credited death imagery related to the Spanish Saint Paschal Baylón, or San Pascual Bailón with ending an epidemic (ibid., 24-25). After the purported miracle had taken place, however, inquisitorial officials forced the devotion to the "skeleton saint" to cease (ibid.). Beginning in the late 18th century in Mexico and Spain, intellectual elites increasingly associated imagery related to an embodied figure of Death with irrationality and superstition (Viqueira 1981, 44-45).

Enlightenment (1688-1789) intellectuals designated views claiming the presence of divine power as embodied in material objects as irrational superstition (Hanegraaff 2012, 162). A royal edict in 1775, attempting to rid New Spain of superstition and idolatry, began the official removal of Death iconography from confraternities (Malvido 2005, 25). Further 19th-century political reforms, geared toward secularization, forced any remaining Death iconography in Mexican cofradías into private households (ibid.). For example, in the 19th-century Church officials removed an effigy associated with both Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Holy Death from San Agustín, a small church in

Tepatepec near Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico (see figure 26) (Malvido 2005, 26). To this day, the statue remains in a private sanctuary at a family home in Tepatepec (Chesnut 2012, 34).

According to Chesnut (2012, 34), the Cruz family maintains the Death statue in a chapel funded by donations from the public. The statue was at one time used in town processions during Holy Week but currently the image only has an annual feast day on August 20th (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 125-127). The statue of Saint Bernard/Holy Death in the Cruz family's chapel resembles the image of *l'Ankou*; a figure of Death that acts like a psychopomp and harbinger of death in Brittany, France, and Cornwall, England (see figure 27) (see Badone 1987, 99; Doan 1980, 29; Thomas 2013, 349). Since the Cruz family's statue does not resemble other figures of Death in Mexico, perhaps initially British miners brought the image to Tepatepec (see Badone 1987, 99; Chesnut 2012, 34-36; Doan 1980, 29; Onstott 2010, 226; Randall 1985, 622; Thomas 2013, 349). The Mineral Real del Monte was a British mining company from Cornwall that mined silver in nearby Pachuca since the early 19th century (Onstott 2010, 226; Randall 1985, 622).

The Roman Catholic Church has never wavered on prohibiting veneration of Death images (Malvido 2005, 21). Vernacular "lived" forms of Catholicism in Europe and elsewhere; however, have long histories of the faithful engaging in everyday relationships with devotional objects rather than strictly adhering to official doctrine and clerical authority (Orsi 1997, 12). Communities in New Spain venerated the figure of Death amidst persecution from Catholic authorities since the 17th century (Navarrete

1982, 25-40). Likewise, in Argentina, veneration of San La Muerte (a male Death Saint resembling the Grim Reaper) began in the 18th century and continues to this day (Graziano 2007, 98). By the 19th century, Central Mexicans began conflating the figure of Death with Satan, the Devil, and the dragon from Revelation 12:1-17 (Ingham 1986, 105-110). The conflation resonates with motifs found in the *Testament of Abraham* and Revelation, and results in a juxtaposition of Death and Satan with the archangel Michael (Allison 2003, 44-45; Coogan 2010, 1786n.3; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 49, 131-132; Mirguet 2010, 269).

Anthropologists first noted La Santa Muerte, identified as La Santísima Muerte in Mexico in the early 20th century (Toor 1947, 141-145). Until the middle of the 20th century, the aristocratic urban class and the impoverished rural class negotiated Mexican social values through the lenses of death rites and El Día de los Muertos celebrations (Lomnitz 2005, 271-277). Various conceptions of life and death in Mexico resulted in establishing social hierarchies and a reordering of social values that regarded one view of the world as reasonable and all other competing views as irrational (Burkhart 2004, 52, 56-57). Western nations, like Mexico, that sought to define themselves as modern and secular in the 19th century produced a popular yet clandestine fixation on Occultism (Hanegraaff 2012, 220-223, 254). Early 20th-century Mexican social currents related to folk Catholicism and the Occult, influence how academics understand the relationship Muertistas form with La Santa Muerte as a saint (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 2; Gil Olmos 2007, 193-197; Michalik 2011, 162; Munoz 2013, 8; Reyes-Cortez 2012a, 108; Reyes-Cortez 2012b, 124; Thompson 1998, 420-422).

Figure 26. Holy Death/Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Tepatepec, Hidalgo, Mexico; 19th century. Photo by author.

Figure 27. L'Ankou. Saint Anne Chapel and Ossuary, La Roche-Maurice, Brittany, France; 16th century. Photo by Félix Martin-Sabon. ©Ministry of France, Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine, diffusion RMN-GP. No changes were made.

The violent and hostile context of 16th century New Spain birthed the icon of Death in Mexico; however, it was the politically turbulent 20th century that made Death into a Mexican "national totem" and "tutelary sign" (Lomnitz 2005, 58-59). José Guadalupe Posada's (1852-1913) artwork, during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), was instrumental in the rebirth of colonial Mexican Death imagery as it reiterated Death's equalizing prowess as a social leveler (ibid., 417). José Guadalupe Posada's political

work (1910-1913) satirized Mexican society with portraying social actors as embodied figures resembling Death (see figure 28); while, Occultist pamphlets circulated in the Mexican public (Kristensen 2014, 7-8; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54). Thompson (1998, 423) suggests that prayers directed to Holy Death as a saint are a recent invention derived from 19th-century Occultic influences like *Espiritismo Trinitario Mariano* (Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism or simply *Espiritismo*). Espiritismo (Spiritualism) rose to relevance in the early 20th century as a form of resistance to Catholicism (León 2004, 166).

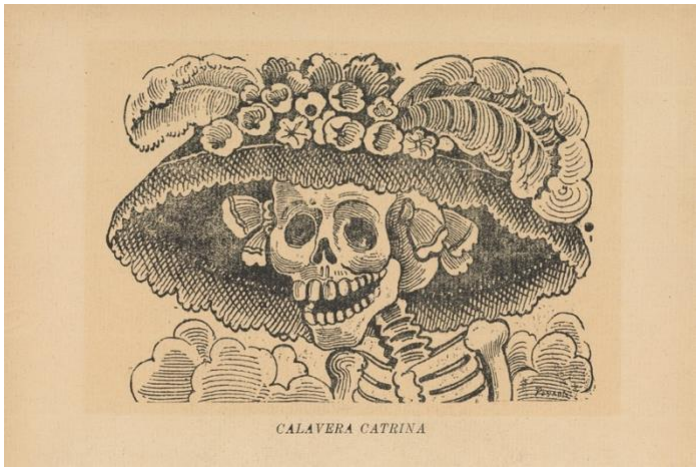


Figure 28. La Calavera Catrina. José Guadalupe Posada, 1910. Zinc etching. Image by Wmpearl Wikimedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero. No changes were made.

Late 20th-century Mexico experienced a heightened receptivity to African diaspora traditions, Spiritualism, Protestantism, and folk Catholicism as responses to Vatican II and Liberation theologies (Vásquez 1999, 2-3). Mexican religious identities have undergone tremendous shifts since the 1960s due to rapid but uneven industrialization and urbanization that generated new religious movements (González Torres 1996, 7). 20th-century Mexican Catholicism created innovative popular saints that have roots in its 17th and 18th-century confraternities (Hughes 2012, 5, 8-9). At the same

time, the nation-state of Mexico built upon a colonial regime that utilized the image of Death to index its continued cultural struggle, therefore, making the icon of Death one of the nation's cultural signifiers (Lomnitz 2005, 11, 28).

Iberian Death imagery rearticulated in New Spain's colonial context, then, remained an important signifier as Mexico developed from part of the Spanish Empire to becoming a nation-state (Lomnitz 2005, 26, 28, 495). León (2004, 124), for example, shows how Mexican cultures commonly view Death when quoting the following story,

> A very poor man who always made sacrifices to provide for his large family decides that just once he would like to know the feeling of a full stomach. He asks his wife to prepare a special lunch for him that he may take off into the countryside and have all to himself. To his dismay he runs into an old man who asks him to share his food. He refuses and feels justified when he learns that the old man is God, for God is not just in his dealing with men. [God] provides some [people] with wealth, while He condemns others to poverty. [The man] is about to settle down once more to his meal, when he is approached by an old woman… When he learns that she is Death, he very willingly shares with her, exclaiming that Death does treat all men equally.

León (ibid.) and Lomnitz (2005, 490) independently reference La Santa Muerte as "Death the social leveler," which is consistent with medieval iconography. La Santa Muerte resembles the medieval icon of Death transferred to the colonial context of New Spain and reborn in the 21st century as a popular saint (ibid, 190). The following chapter details the rise of La Santa Muerte devotion in 20th-century Mexico and its proliferation in the 21st century.

5 THE EMERGENCE OF LA SANTA MUERTE

In the early 20th century, La Santa Muerte emerged into the public sphere in *amarres* (binding spells for love) printed on Catholic-like prayer cards (Thompson 1998, 406; Toor 1947, 144). Widespread public devotion to an embodied figure of Death, however, did not begin to proliferate until 2001 when Doña Enriqueta Romero built her shrine in Mexico City (Chesnut 2012, 8; Kristensen 2014, 2-3). Both scholars and devotees credit the surge in devotion since 2001 to Death's purported efficaciousness in fulfilling quotidian and sometimes illegal petitions (Bigliardi 2016, 319; Bromley 2016,10-11; Chesnut 2012, 8; Flores Martos 2008, 61-62; Michalik 2011, 176; Munoz 2013, 3-4; Kristensen 2014, 2-3). Following Aguiar (2014, 166), research on La Santa Muerte requires an examination of Death's iconicity and a critical evaluation of dominant and emergent expressions of Muertista practice.

Holy Death and Mexican Folk Saints

San La Muerte in Argentina, *Rey Pascualito* in Guatemala, and *San Esqueleto* in Paraguay have devotions that developed Death iconography derived from Spanish colonization (Graziano 2007, 78). The difference between La Santa Muerte and other Holy Death cults is that the former does not have a biographic narrative (Kristensen 2014, 10; Graziano 2007, vii, 78). Devotees consider La Santa Muerte to be "death itself," or a being that Muertistas describe as the "spirit of death" that performs saint-like functions (Chesnut 2012, 54; Kristensen 2014, 9-10). As noted in the previous chapter, the construction of Holy Death in Mexico first occurred during the colonial era but

reemerged in the 20th century (Lomnitz 2005, 58-59). Various scholars trace the cult's origins to clandestine practices in colonial brotherhoods that emerged publicly within revitalization movements corresponding to the rise of 20th-century folk saints (Gruzinski 1990, 219; Hughes 2012, 4-5; Malvido 2005, 25; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 32-33, 122-127; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53; Smith 2019, 58-83). Antecedents to the cult of La Santa Muerte first arose between the 17th and 19th centuries in confraternities from Chiapas to Zacatecas (Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53).

Muertistas in the 21st century travel to a Catholic heritage museum in Yanhuitlán, Oaxaca, Mexico, where they pay homage to *Nuestra Señora, la Muerte* (Our Lady Death) (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 122-123). Yanhuitlán's 17th-century figure of Death is a skeleton seated on a throne, carrying a scythe, and wearing a crown (see figure 29) (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 123; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53). Similarly, Navarrete (1982, 25-40) identifies Holy Death devotion with the cult of Rey Pascualito or San Pascual Bailón, depicted as a skeleton in a cowl, in 17th-century Guatemala. The cult continues to this day in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico, with a feast day on May 17th (see figure 30) (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 32-33, 124-125; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53). In the 19th century, miners prayed to an image of Holy Death before entering the central mine at *La Noria de San Pantaleón* in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, Mexico (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 122; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53).

After the closing of the mine in 1967, the people of Sombrerete moved the Holy Death image to a nearby chapel where they associated it with San Pantaleón by honoring the image on the saint's annual feast day on July 27th (see figure 31) (Gil Olmos 2010,

67). As noted in the previous chapter, Muertistas attend the annual feast day on August 20th for San Bernardo (an image dated to the 19th century) depicted as a skeleton carrying a scepter with a crown and tunic in Tepatepec, Hidalgo, Mexico (see figure 26) (Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 125-127; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53). La Noria de San Pantaleón's and Tepatepec's predecessors to La Santa Muerte chronologically coincide with the rise of popular saint devotions in Mexico (Gil Olmos 2010, 153-177; González Torres 1996, 10-11; Hughes 2012, 4-9). As stated in chapter three, there was no clear outline for the canonization process until the 20th century (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 1918, 10-11; Orsi 2016, 35-36). Correspondingly, local saint cults arose on the margins of Mexican Catholicism amidst political and religious changes in the 19th and 20th centuries (González Torres 1996, 10-11; Hughes 2012, 9).

Beginning in the 1860's, the Reform Laws of President Benito Juárez diminished Roman Catholic authority in Mexico (González Torres 1996, 6; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53). By 1925, however, José Joaquín Pérez Budar founded the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church, which promoted the 20th-century revitalization of colonial practices like popular saint propitiation, *curanderismo* (healing practices), and San Rey Pascualito Holy Death iconography (Butler 2009, 537 556-558; Ramírez Rancaño 2002, 104). Revitalization here being the attempt to vindicate and revive ecclesiastically suppressed devotions to local iconography of the saints and Mary (Bricker 1981, 59; Smith 2019, 65-66). In addition to the revitalization of Holy Death iconography, colonial era forms of saint propitiation and curanderismo have also been central to the development of the cult of La Santa Muerte (see Bravo Lara 2013, 21; Burkhart 2004, 51; Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-

106, Lomnitz 2005, 184-185; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Michalik 2011, 169; Torres Ramos 2017, 38; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47).

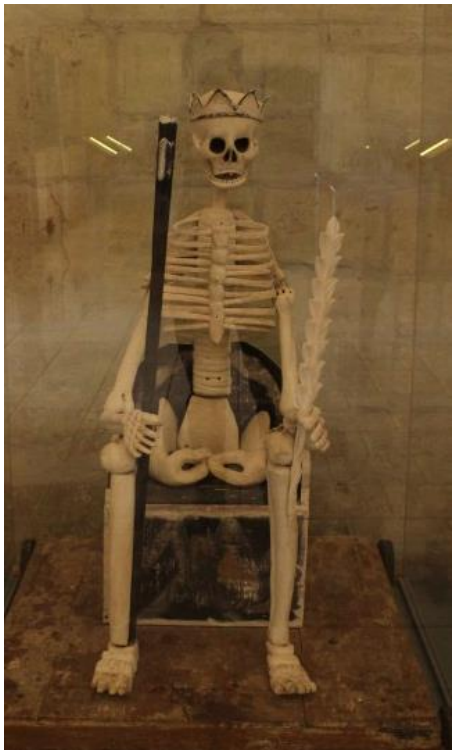


Figure 29. Our Lady Death. Yanhuitlán, Oaxaca, Mexico; 17th century. Museum of Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlán. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. No changes were made.

Figure 30. Rey Pascualito. Chiapas, Mexico; 1982. Photo by Dr. Daniel Schávelzon. Permission for use granted on August 14, 2020. No changes were made.

Figure 31. Holy Death in Zacatecas. La Noria de San Pantaleón in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, Mexico; 19th century. Photo by Guillermo Correa Pacheco. Permission for use granted on August 14, 2020. No changes were made.

Continued revitalization efforts since the 1920's empowered the beliefs and practices of local Catholic laity (González Torres 1996, 5-11; Smith 2019, 76-80). The Mexican Revolution and Consolidation (1910-1940)—including the anti-clerical politics of President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), the founding of the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church (1925), and the *Cristero* Rebellion (1926-1929)—further led to an increased revitalization of folk Catholicism in Mexico (Butler 2006, 465-466; Smith 2019, 76-80; Ramírez Rancaño 2002, 106-107). After the Consolidation of the Mexican Revolution (1920-1940), organizations like the Confederate Movement for the Restoration of Anáhuac (1959) attempted to reclaim a sense of authentic Mexican religiosity and *Mexicanidad* (Mexican-ness) (González Torres 1996, 8). During the 1960's, Mexicanidad movements created novel cultural identities for groups threatened with unequal industrialization, urbanization, capitalist exploitation, migration, and the 1968 student massacre in Mexico City (González Torres 1996, 7, 10). Revitalization and

Mexicanidad movements both contributed to the proliferation of folk saints among the working class in urban areas (Frigerio 2016 [2013], 45; González Torres 1996, 7, 10; Smith 2019, 76; Torres Ramos 2017, 38).

Folk saints are humans that died tragically and posthumously provide healing and protection for their devotees (Graziano 2007, vii, 21, 29). La Santa Muerte was never human, but rather, it is the embodied entity of death itself (Chesnut 2012, 54; Kristensen 2014, 9-10). La Santa Muerte, however, resembles a folk saint, in that Muertistas and folk devotees share the view that modern institutions have abandoned them (Chesnut 2012, 54; Graziano 2007, 29; Gil Olmos 2010, 153; Hughes 2012, 8; Kristensen 2014, 9-10; Martín 2017, 15). The life histories of *Jesús Malverde*, *Juan Soldado*, *La Santa de Cábora* (Teresa Urrea), *El Niño Fidencio*, and *San Pancho Villa* elucidate how colonial Holy Death iconography acquired the folk saint-like attributes of healing and protection for those on the periphery of Mexican society in the late 20th century (Gil Olmos 2010, 153-177; Martín 2014, 32-104). For example, law enforcement in Mexico and the United States has linked both Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte to drug trafficking as "narco-saints" (see figure 32) (Chesnut 2012, 75; Deibert 2014, xvi-xvii, 6-7, 16).

Devotees further consider La Santa Muerte, Jesús Malverde, and Juan Soldado to be protectors against an unjust legal system (Smith 2019, 79-81). Jesús Malverde (1870-1909) was a bandit from Culiacán, Sinaloa, whose illegal actions benefitted poor communities until his death at the command of President Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) (Gil Olmos 2010, 155). A local cult developed to Malverde in the 1950's followed by an "official chapel" in 1979 where devotion spread from Culiacán (Smith 2019, 79-80). In

1938, community members in Tijuana, Baja California, accused a Mexican soldier, Juan Castillo Morales (1918-1938), of raping a young girl (Gil Olmos 2010, 161-164). A mob swarmed and burned the local police station killing Castillo Morales (ibid., 164). Devotion to Juan Soldado spread from Northern Mexico to Arizona and California after purported miracles at Castillo Morales' grave led to his assumed innocence and his folk saint status (Gil Olmos 2010, 165-167; Smith 2019, 78-79).

Figure 32. Santa Muerte DEA coin reads: "Saint Death will not protect the drug trafficker;" on front and back reads: "Tough Job, Vital Mission." Photo by author.

Curanderos in northern Mexico commonly use a combination of La Santa Muerte, Teresa Urrea, El Niño Fidencio, and San Pancho Villa for healing purposes (Gil Olmos 2010, 172; Ingham 1986, 176; Martín 2014, 40, 68; Pansters 2019, 3; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47). After the assassination of General Pancho Villa (1878-1923), his bodily remains gained relic-like status and purportedly performed healings across Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, and Chihuahua (Gil Olmos 2010, 172-174; Martín 2014, 66-68). Both Teresa Urrea (1873-1906) and El Niño Fidencio (1898-1938) were

healers who faced marginalization and died young (Gil Olmos 2010, 157-159, 168-172; Graziano 2007, 196-197; Martín 2014, 38-40). Despite support from President Plutarco Elías Calles' anti-clerical government, Mexican health officials and the Catholic Church publicly denounced El Niño Fidencio's healing practices (Graziano 2007, 196-197). As La Santa de Cábora, Urrea's popularity grew, President Porfirio Díaz exiled her to Clifton, Arizona (Gil Olmos 2010, 157-159; Martín 2014, 38-40).

Teresa Urrea developed her healing practices within Mexican and Anglo forms of Spiritualism (Martín 2014, 37; Seman 2017, 4). Spiritualism blends communicating with the dead and 19th-century notions of scientific progress in establishing a religious movement based on social reform within in a Christian cosmology (Gutierrez 2016, 237-244). Mexican Spiritualists claim to have channeled San Pancho Villa and El Niño Fidencio (Graziano 2007, 50; León 2004, 253-255; Martín 2014, 68-69; Trotter II and Chavira 1981, 35). Marian Trinitarian Spiritualist mediums channel various "healing spirits," which includes La Santa Muerte as a "spiritual protector" that provides justice as Death the social leveler (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; de la Torre 2016 [2013], 27; de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 353-354; Flores Martos 2008, 63; León 2004, 124; Lomnitz 2005, 490; Michalik 2011, 162; Thompson 1998, 427). Marian Trinitarian Spiritualist's use of La Santa Muerte for protection, justice, and healing intertwines with spells for domination and love magic that use Death and resemble binding rituals in the ancient Mediterranean region (see Faraone 2003, 49-51; Thompson 1998, 427).

Mexican Spiritualism and Love Magic

Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism, or "Espiritismo," is a unique form of Spiritualism that mixes theological polemics against Roman Catholicism with Theosophy-styled healing, clairvoyance, and mediumship (León 2004, 166). Roque Jacinto Rojas Esparza (1812-1879) founded Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism in 1861 at which time he changed his name to Padre Elías upon receiving a vision that he was the return of the Hebrew prophet Elijah (Ingham 1986, 176; León 2004, 171). Espiritismo developed from the Spiritualist movement that arose on the wake of the Great Awakenings in Hydesville, New York in 1848 and that Allen Kardec (1804-1869) later established in France between 1857 and 1868 (Gutierrez 2016, 239, 241; León 2004, 171; Stover 2014, 270-271). Espiritismo differs from Spiritualism in that the former bestows channeling as a gift within a Catholic-like hierarchy (León 2004, 166). In broader Spiritualism, anyone can be a medium, which aligns more with congregational Protestantism (Gutierrez 2016, 240-243). Both Spiritualism and Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism were separately influential in Mexico during the 20th century (León 2004, 166-167). Mexico elected Francisco I. Madero, a known Spiritualist, as President in 1911 and by 1977 there was an estimated 8 million followers of Espiritismo in Mexico (León 2004, 166-167; Stover 2014, 271).

Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism promoted Occult healing and knowledge in the 1960's as a response to social unrest as exemplified in the 1968 student massacre (González Torres 1996, 10-11). Enriqueta Romero, creator of the first public shrine to La Santa Muerte, claims that during the same decade in Mexico City her aunt prayed at night regularly to Death (Kristensen 2014, 4). From 1947 to 1965, anthropologists in Mexico

City, Veracruz, Coahuila, and Durango cited Holy Death as a "love charm" used in "occult love magic" (Kelly 1965, 108, 161; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Toor 1947, 144-145). Paz (1985 [1961], 23) draws a correlation in Mexican cultures, in which, love connects life to death, stating, "Our cult of death is also a cult of life, in the same way that love is a hunger for life and a longing for death."

Thompson (1998, 414) suggests the correlation of Holy Death and love charms in Mexican cultures may result, in part, from magical texts, like the *Picatrix*, that Spanish colonists brought with them to New Spain (see also Wasserstrom 2005, 273). The *Picatrix* is an Arabic instructional manual translated into Spanish in the 13th century (Hartner 1965, 439; Wasserstrom 2005, 273). The text contains binding love spells and invocations of Samael that an unknown Arabic author adapted from the *Greek Magical Papyri* written between 100 BCE and 400 CE (Hartner 1965, 439; Porreca 2010, 19, 20, 27). Neither text directly links Samael to binding love spells (Porreca 2010); nevertheless, invocations of chthonic beings for seizing erotic love from unsuspecting victims were commonplace at the time of the *Papyri* (Faraone 2003, 49-51). Archaeological evidence from Empúries, Catalonia, Spain, further demonstrates the use of Roman chthonic beings in binding rituals for erotic love on the Iberian Peninsula as early as the 1st century CE (Wilburn 2012, 219, 255).

Connections between Death and *Eros* (erotic love) existed in Western cultures since the Hellenistic period (776-30 BCE) when ancient Greeks and Romans linked amorousness to physical torment, seizures, and sudden sickness (Faraone 2003, 51; Ogden 2007, 1; Págan Cánovas 2011, 568, 571, 574). According to Lakoff (1987, 107-

111), “when categories get extended throughout history [e.g., linking erotic love to the metonymic composite of Death], there has to be some sort of cognitive basis for the extension.” Cognitive links between Death and Eros exist as both are material composites of abstract concepts (Págan Cánovas 2011, 574). “Apollo as archer” is the root composite linking “Death as reaper and/or archer” with “Eros as archer” (ibid., 564). Eros, like Death, is a material composite of an abstract concept that forms a causal tautology (Eros causes erotic love) (ibid., 574). As noted in chapter two, causal tautologies exemplify why material composites experience longevity within cultures (ibid.). Long lasting mental schemas like this do not persist because of “some transcendental rationality;” rather they result from cognitive categories that structure how individuals make sense of their worlds, as demonstrated in “contained-as-a-part” metonymic modeling (Lakoff 1987, 18-19, 77, 287).

La Santa Muerte Metonymy

The iconicity of La Santa Muerte conforms to a female Grim Reaper as a causal tautology (Death causes death) (see Chesnut 2012, 27, 41-47, 173-176, 189; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562). As noted in chapter two, the Grim Reaper is a metonymic topology in which additional elements may blend new meanings into the already established significance of the original metonymic composite (scythe, cowl, and skeleton) (Fauconnier and Turner 1999, 84-85). *La Biblia de la Santa Muerte*, a “spell-book” edited by González Olivo (2010, 6, 66-68), describes La Santa Muerte’s accouterments as indices of Death’s functions and characteristics. Additional metonymic blends aggregated

to the Grim Reaper as La Santa Muerte are: the world, the lantern, the scales of justice, the owl, and the hourglass (see González Olivo 2010, 66-68; Lakoff 1987, 18-19).

The world, as a sign, connotes the lifecycle contained in a sphere (McLerran and McKee 1991, 60). The figure of the Grim Reaper emerged from the Black Death as a triumphant and inescapable harbinger of apocalyptic justice in the Last Judgment (Aberth 2010, 222-224) and, therefore, the world held in La Santa Muerte's left-hand indexes Death's dominion over humans (González Olivo 2010, 66). The world, then, blends La Santa Muerte to eschatological justice found in the triumph of death during epidemics in medieval Western Europe and Mexico.

The lantern associated with La Santa Muerte relates to Proverbs 20:27, "A lamp from the Lord is human life-breath; it searches through the inmost being" (see McLerran and McKee 1991, 83). In 15th-century England, "soulers," praying for the souls of the dead, carried candle-lit carved turnips, early *jack-o'-lanterns*, from house-to-house on the night before All Souls' Day, that is, All Hallows Eve (Rogers 2002, 29). Spaniards, likewise, used lanterns to pray for souls in Purgatory, and they additionally believed lanterns kept away "evil spirits" (Howes 1929, 388). The lantern blends La Santa Muerte to the soul's guide and a protector from evil forces.

The scales or balance held by La Santa Muerte likely originate from Baroque depictions of the Apocalypse that depicted the archangel Michael weighing souls in the Last Judgement (see Coogan 2010, 1245, 1794; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 127-128; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-166; Jones 2010, 81). There are depictions of the scales found throughout the Mediterranean world that include Christian iconography, the

Qur'an, and Persian Mithraic traditions (Chevalier and Ghreebrant 1996 [1969], 829-830). Ancient Greek renditions of Hermes depicted the daemon holding scales. Homeric poetry further mentions the balance in relation to the Keres and the Fates (Fagles 1990, 103, 233, 660; Forty 2004, 274; Littleton 2002, 191-192, 194; Vermeule 1979, 39-40). The scales blend La Santa Muerte to justice because of the balance's association with judgment.

Muertistas conflate the owl (*el búho*) with *el tecolote* (the screech owl) and consider it an index to La Santa Muerte's Mexica roots (Chesnut 2012, 67; Lorusso 2011, 48). The Mexica associated el tecolote with forecasting death (López Austin 2019, 22-23); however, Muertistas transformed the pre-Columbian harbinger of death into La Santa Muerte's messenger (Arredondo and Labrado 2020, 7-8; Lorusso 2011, 48). The owl was a messenger of God's judgment in Zephaniah 2:14-15 (see Schmitz 2009, 59 and in Coogan 2010, 1327-1331) and was also a feature of ancient Phoenician iconography associated with healing souls after violent deaths (Schmitz 2009, 56). Romans associated the owl with their own aspects of Hecate—*Minerva* the crone, *Juventus* the Virgin, and *Juno* the Mother—that they used frequently in binding rituals (McLerran and McKee 1991, 66, 112; Versnel 1991a, 64). The owl thus blends La Santa Muerte to ancient Mediterranean judgment, binding, and healing.

La Santa Muerte's hourglass is an aspect derived from Thanatos who is a Homeric psychopomp (Littleton 2002, 195). The hourglass signifies the passage of time, an individual's life span, and the lifecycle (Chevalier and Ghreebrant 1996 [1969], 528-529). Like Death in the *Ars Moriendi*, the hourglass is a reminder that life is short and

one needs to do good deeds in everyday life to die well (McLerran and McKee 1991, 70; Aberth 2010, 241-242). In the *Ars Moriendi*, as noted in chapter two, Everyman negotiates with Death to make amends in his everyday life (in Aberth 2010, 241-242). The hourglass, then, blends La Santa Muerte to the brevity of life and the ability to negotiate with Death during life for everyday concerns.

La Santa Muerte, like the Grim Reaper, is a psychopomp, a reckoner of souls, a gateway to justice in the afterlife, but Muertistas also conceive of Death as a powerful advocate that they petition for justice, love, protection, healing, and binding (Lomnitz 2005, 184-185; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54). Holy Death transitioned from an icon representing a Good Death in cofradías in the 18th century, to an Occult love charm in the 20th century, and to a folk saint in 21st-century Mexico and the Southwestern United States (Chesnut 2012, 4; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1995], 164; Gruzinski 1990, 219; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Lomnitz 2005, 490-491; Malvido 2005, 25; Thompson 1998, 423; Toor 1947, 145).

San Judas Tadeo and Cultic Development

La Santa Muerte's connection to *San Judas Tadeo* (Saint Jude Thaddeus) reveals Holy Death's transition into a saint-like entity petitioned for everyday concerns (Kristensen 2019, 155; Pansters 2019, 50). The cult of La Santa Muerte grew alongside San Judas Tadeo devotions in Mexico City during the 1990's (Kristensen 2019, 155). Saint Jude Thaddeus is a canonized saint yet La Santa Muerte and San Judas commonly share public altar space in Mexico City (Pansters 2019, 30, 50). Saint Jude is the patron

saint of “lost causes” because Catholics ignored his miraculous abilities for centuries (Orsi 1996, 99). The reason for the turning away from Jude was a popular association between “the apostle” San Judas with Judas Iscariot “the betrayer of Jesus” (ibid.). Saint Jude’s National Shrine in Chicago, Illinois, produced corrections to the association in the form of a didactic children’s comic book in 1954 (ibid., 98-100). The comic, *Jude: The Forgotten Saint* (2018 [1954], 3), depicts Jude as the relative, childhood playmate, and loyal apostle of Jesus. Saint Jude’s notoriety as a miracle worker extends from non-canonical texts that claim he experienced martyrdom for being more powerful than his “pagan” rivals (Orsi 1996, 98).

San Judas’ popularity in the Americas began in 1929 when his image replaced the Virgin of Guadalupe on the main altar in a predominantly Mexican parish in Chicago (Orsi 1996, 8). Devotion to San Judas Tadeo began to grow in Mexico City in 1982 when *El Templo de San Hipólito* first displayed the saint’s image on the main altar (Martín 2014, 15). Hernán Cortés had the Temple of San Hipólito constructed after the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521 on the day of Saint Hippolytus (Hernández Hernández 2011, 42). The Temple of San Hipólito in Mexico City celebrated the fall of Tenochtitlan with processions every August from 1529 until 1820 (ibid.). Processions ceased at Mexican Independence (1821) and San Hipólito did not return to relevance until gatherings began in the late 1980’s honoring San Judas’ feast day on October 28th (ibid.). Due to cultic expansion in the area, the 28th of every month now brings thousands of devotees to the Temple of San Hipólito (Hernandez 2011, 157).

Devotees in Mexico City petition San Judas Tadeo, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and La Santa Muerte publicly for everyday concerns (Hernandez 2011, 160-161). Popular Mexican Catholic devotees often depict San Judas as the middle path between the Guadalupe and La Santa Muerte as Jude is the provider of "one last chance" (ibid., 160-161). If San Judas gives "one last chance," La Santa Muerte is the "last resort" when uncertainty and fear become embedded in everyday life (Hernandez 2011, 161; Hernández Hernández 2011, 50; Pansters 2019, 30). A shift in devotion from San Judas to La Santa Muerte begins when a devotee needs the latter to intervene because the former has not or will not answer a petition (Chesnut 2012, 192; Flores Martos 2019, 92, 106; Flores Martos 2008, 61-62; Hernández Hernández 2011, 50; Pansters 2019, 30). Potential devotees turn to Death because they regard other saints as either "ineffective" or "unwilling" to fulfill a petition (Chesnut 2012, 192; Flores Martos 2019, 106; Flores Martos 2008, 61-62; Martín 2017, 4).

La Santa Muerte became internationally known in the 1990's due to Adolfo Constanzo and Daniel Arizmendi López (Chesnut 2012, 15; Roush 2014, 138; Thompson 1998, 426). As the leader of *Los Narcosatánicos* (a gang of self-proclaimed satanic drug dealers), Adolfo Constanzo was responsible for the torture and murder of over 20 people in Mexico City (Roush 2014, 138; Thompson 1998, 426). In 1989, the arrest of Constanzo revealed his self-styled form of *Palo Mayombe* (an African diaspora practice) that included La Santa Muerte effigies (Roush 2014, 138-139). Police arrested Daniel Arizmendi López, known as *El Mochaorejas* (the ear chopper), in 1998 for kidnapping and ransom (Chesnut 2012, 15-16). When police arrested El Mochaorejas, the news

media revealed that he brought his La Santa Muerte effigy with him to prison (Chesnut 2012, 16). La Santa Muerte's association with violence continued into the 2000's with drug cartels (Deibert 2014, 73, 205, 212).

After the 2008 arrest of *Las Zetas* cartel members in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico, police found a La Santa Muerte altar along with 11 decapitated bodies (Deibert 2014, 73). Officials later stated publicly that Las Zetas used the 11 missing heads in a La Santa Muerte "ritual" (ibid.). In 2012, police in Nacorazi de García, Sonora, Mexico, discovered three people murdered in what the media dubbed a "human sacrifice" to La Santa Muerte (ibid., 205). The same year in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, police found La Santa Muerte tattooed body parts scattered across a federal highway (ibid., 212). These acts of violence led the Archdiocese of Mexico City spokesperson in 2013 to denounce La Santa Muerte as blasphemous due to associations with violent crime (ibid., 238).

Since the 1990's in Central Mexico, prisons and the family homes of prisoners have been the locus of sustained cultic growth (Kristensen 2015, 545). Mexican monetary devaluation, increased violence, law enforcement corruption, and poor prison conditions are possible explanations for cultic growth among the incarcerated (ibid.). According to Kristensen (Kristensen 2015, 545; 2019, 148-149), prisoners and their family members form intimate relationships with La Santa Muerte because they consider Death to be "both a solution to and a cause of insecurity." This circularity appears to be a likely source of the folk saint's purported efficacy and initial popularity among the incarcerated (Kristensen 2015, 545). Public devotion to La Santa Muerte expanded from this nexus of

devotion in Central Mexico, in part, because of reforms made in *La Ley de Asociaciones Religiosas y Culto Público* (The Public Worship Act, 1992) (Roush 2014, 139). The Public Worship Act legally secured freedom for public displays of religiosity and threatened the overwhelming influence Roman Catholicism has on Mexican cultures with increased alternatives and novel approaches to traditional practices (see Roush 2014, 139; Vargas 1998, 464-465).

La Santa Muerte devotion spread into the United States/Mexico borderlands during the 1990's (Thompson 1998, 427). In the same decade, a Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism Center that adopted Afro-Caribbean practices began displaying an effigy of La Santa Muerte as *La Flor Blanca de Universo* (The White Flower of the Universe) (Flores Martos 2008, 63). African diaspora traditions first blended with the cult in southeastern coastal regions like Veracruz and then advanced to Mexico City where the amalgamations continued into the northern borderland (Michalik 2012, 608). Shrine iconography, Muertista self-identifications, and *yerbería* (herbal market) products reveal an entangling of La Santa Muerte with African diaspora traditions (e.g., Palo Mayombe, *Santería*, and *Candomblé*) (Bigliardi 2015, 79-80; Pansters 2019, 3; Roush 2014, 138-139).

La Santa Muerte and African diaspora hybridity emerges from similar colonial Catholic contexts (see Graziano 2007, 78; Johnson 2007, 69-74; Lomnitz 2005, 58-59; Michalik 2012, 608; Walker 1986, 29). For example, the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Good Death (*Irmandade da Senhora da Boa Morte*) is an Afro-Brazilian confraternity devoted to a material representation of the Virgin Mary's Assumption in Cachoeira, Bahia, Brazil

(Walker 1986, 29). 17th-century Jesuits promoted Our Lady of Good Death as a tool for instructing the feminine ideal and the Christian notions of the Good Life expressed in a Good Death to Indigenous Brazilians and African slaves (Mulvey 1982, 45; Russell-Wood 1977, 4). Afro-Brazilian women founded the Sisterhood to secretly perform Candomblé practices in the 19th century as a form of colonial subversion (Johnson 2002, 75; Sansi Roca 2005, 191-194; Walker 1986, 27-30). Flores Martos (2019, 101, 106) follows Martín (2014, 31) in suggesting that modern practices that invoke colonial Holy Death iconography appear to arise wherever there is a preexisting belief that the power and presence of Death subverts everyday injustices.

In 2001, in the Mexico City neighborhood of Tepito, Enriqueta Romero's son returned home from prison with a La Santa Muerte effigy (Chesnut 2012, 38). That same year, Enriqueta built her Santa Muerte shrine and invited David Romo Guillén, a priest in the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church, to conduct her shrine's first public ceremony (Kristensen 2019, 138). After a noticeable growth of participants, Romo Guillén left to start the first La Santa Muerte church (Kristensen 2019, 138; Pansters 2019, 36). In 2003, President Vicente Fox's administration legally approved Romo Guillén's *Iglesia Católica Apostólica Tradicional México-Estados Unidos* (Traditional Holy Apostolic Church Mexico-United States) that later became *El Santuario Nacional de la Santa Muerte* (The National Shrine of La Santa Muerte) (Bigliardi 2015, 74; Chesnut 2012, 41-43; Kristensen 2019, 137; Pansters 2019, 36-37). The Mexican government revoked the legal standing of Romo Guillén's church in 2005 and in 2012 he went to jail for kidnapping and money laundering (Deibert 2014, 150; Pansters 2019, 37).

Jonathan Legaria Vargas, who had associations with Romo Guillén, was born in Tepito and was a Palo Mayombe initiate (Bigliardi 2015, 79-80). On January 27, 2008, Legaria Vargas founded *El Templo Internacional de la Santa Muerte* (International Temple of La Santa Muerte) in Tultitlán near Mexico City with a Santa Muerte effigy that stands 22 meters, 72 feet, high (Bigliardi 2015, 76, 82). Legaria Vargas never applied for government recognition of his temple but he had a radio broadcast that publicly promoted the cult (ibid., 79). In 2008, anonymous shooters murdered Legaria Vargas in his car which added to questions concerning the cult and violence (ibid.). After his death in 2008, Legaria Vargas' mother, Enriqueta Vargas (or *La Madrina*), took control of the Temple in Tultitlán and promoted a positive public perception of the cult until her own death in 2018 (Chesnut 2018, SkeletonSaint.com).

Enriqueta Romero's shrine in Tepito flourished since 2001 while Romo Guillén's church membership dwindled; however, influence from both temples remains strong (Kristensen 2019, 137-138; Pansters 2019, 36-37). The shared notoriety and influence of Romero and Romo Guillén continues partly from the magazines *La Santísima* and *Devoción a La Santa Muerte*, both of which started publication in 2003 (Kristensen 2019, 140-141). Both magazines feature devotee biographies, displays of home altars, and the detailing of "correct" practices, but only *Devoción a La Santa Muerte* remained in print after 2013 when it cut publishing back to once a month (ibid., 141). Dwindling magazine sales point to the lack of concern for a central authority among devotees in a cult where public shrines and private altars remain the dominant expressions of devotional activity (Bromley 2016, 4-6; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Martín 2017, 4).

Petitioning Death

Petitioning La Santa Muerte at private altars and public shrines involves the offering of cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, soft drinks, *pan dulce* (pastry), apples, or candy (Chesnut 2012, 72-74, 192). Devotees also receive blessings for their private altar's effigies from a shrine owner at public rosaries (devotional prayer services that ask for Death's intervention) and anniversaries (celebrations for a shrine's inception) (Kristensen 2019, 147; Roush 2014, 132 and see Orsi 2016, 172-174; Gómez-Rossi 2019, 36). Muertista rosaries and anniversaries feature a central effigy dressed in special clothing intended to provide the statue with a personal presence (Perdigón Castañeda 2015, 45-46, 48, 59, 61). Popular dresses include: *tres metales* (gold, silver, and bronze) for requesting prosperity, a bridal gown to petition for help in a troubled marriage or for love binding, and traditional or regional dancing dresses for strengthening one's personal relationship with La Santa Muerte (ibid., 50-51).

Muertistas devise petitions based on a system of correlating the colors of statues and candles with La Santa Muerte's efficacy (Bigliardi 2015, 72; Kail 2010, 93). Some devotees follow "the three robes tradition" and others follow the "s*iete potencias* (seven powers) tradition" adopted from African diaspora practices (Bigliardi 2015, 72; Chesnut 2012, 26, 93-94; Kail 2010, 93-100; Rollin 2017, 79-82). The three robes tradition marks out the signification of colors as: black for protection, hexes, and counter-hexes, white for healing and cleansing, and red for love and binding (Chesnut 2012, 22-23; Kail 2010, 100). The seven powers tradition redesignates the meanings as black for protection and vengeance, white for cleansing and consecration, red for love and passion, brown or blue

for wisdom, gold for monetary gain, green for justice, and purple for healing (Bigliardi 2015, 72; Chesnut 2012, 22-25; Kail 2010, 93-99).

La Santa Muerte effigies range from pendants that are only a few centimeters to life size statues (Bigliardi 2016, 305; Chesnut 2012, 148). Effigies are Grim Reaper-like figures; however, there are variants to the posturing or form that changes in accord with the petition (see figure 32) (Bigliardi 2016, 305; Perdigón Castañeda 2015, 48). For example, a woman wanting to conceive a child can use a pregnant La Santa Muerte effigy to petition (Bigliardi 2016, 305). When Muertistas identify with a particular style of effigy, they share gossip, food, cigarettes, and beverages with it and thus humanize Death into a powerful friend (see Pansters 2019, 33; Perdigón Castañeda 2015, 45-46, 59, 61; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 78).

A popular statue is the half-woman and half-skeleton figure resembling Tomás Mondragón's *Alegoría de La Muerte* (1859) that represents the transition from life to death (see Lomnitz 2005, 167; Malvido 2005, 20). Most effigies reflect the Muertista affiliation with Roman Catholic iconography, for instance, an apocalyptic horseman, a queen seated on a throne with a crown and scepter, an angel with bat-like wings, or as a substitute for Mary in Michelangelo's Pietà (see Bigliardi 2016, 305). Devotees that link La Santa Muerte to pre-Columbian Mexican practices use a so-called "Aztec" effigy of a Grim Reaper-like figure wearing a Mexica headdress and holding an image of Mictecacihuatl (see Chesnut 2012, 75). The color, style, form, or dress of an effigy personalizes a Muertista's relationship with Death as a presence in their everyday life

(see Bigliardi 2016, 305; Chesnut 2012, 148; Pansters 2019, 33; Perdigón Castañeda 2015, 45-46, 50-51, 59, 61; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 78).

Figure 33. Variations of La Santa Muerte. Status for sale at Crisamur, an esoteric store in Puebla, Puebla, Mexico. Photo by author.

Nicknames used in petitions further create relationships of loyalty, trust, and intimacy (Reyes Ruiz 2011, 56). Some nicknames include: *La Bonita* (pretty girl), *La Hermosa* (beautiful lady), *La Niña Blanca* (white girl), *La Flaquita* (skinny girl), *La Huesuda* (bony girl), *La Madrina* (godmother), *La Comadre* (dear friend), *La Hermana Blanca* (white sister), *La Madre* (the mother), *La Señora* (the lady), *La Santita* (little saint), and *La Santísima* (most holy one) (Bigliardi 2016, 305; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 56). Devotees also acquire tattoos as a form of an ex-voto exchanged for a perceived intervention or to develop a deeper relationship with Death (Perdigón Castañeda and Robles Aguirre 2019, 179-180).

Overview of Cult Characteristics

The relationship a Muertista forms with La Santa Muerte is the basis for the cult's characteristics (Huffschmid 2019, 114; Kristensen 2019, 148-149). Flores Martos (2008, 59-63) outlines the characteristics of La Santa Muerte devotion as: 1) individualistic, 2) operating like economic exchange, 3) a form of protection, 4) rooted in Catholicism but without the institutional oversight, 5) constructed around Death's mestiza identity, and 6) expanding internationally. Devotion is individualistic because Muertistas' petitions are for personal gain and no mediating ritual specialist is necessary (Flores Martos 2008, 60). Muertistas' individualistic petitions to La Santa Muerte operate in a reciprocal relationship resembling economic exchange (Kristensen 2019, 148).

Petitioning resembles economic exchange because offerings function like payments for protection, vengeance, healing, money, and requited or erotic love (Kristensen 2019, 148-149; Lomnitz 2019, 188; Roush 2014, 143). As Roush (2014, 143) states, "The only theological debate among Santa Muerte devotees is a friendly one about whether she can be negotiated with and how expensive her fees are." The practice of making a *manda* (a vow or promise to a saint) exemplifies the severity of Muertista negotiations with Death (Kristensen 2019, 149; Roush 2014, 143). Some devotees believe that if they do not fulfill a manda, Death will punish the devotee by taking their life as payment (Kristensen 2019, 146, 148-149). While Muertistas do not question the possibility that Death could take their life, they do seem to think that a manda calls the devotee's character into question (ibid., 148-149). If a devotee makes a promise out of desperation or arrogance and cannot fulfill it, then Muertistas consider La Santa Muerte's

punishment as warranted and just (Kristensen 2019, 149). Devotees thus weigh the cost of owing La Santa Muerte favors against the price of not having sufficient protection (Roush 2014, 143).

Muertistas seek Death's protection due to expectations of institutional injustice, random street violence, and an enemy's hex (Roush 2014, 130). Devotees often reside in communities where fear and anger are commonplace among those who experience economic inequality, political corruption, street violence, and high mortality rates (Bromley 2016, 4). As a result of oppressive everyday life experience, Muertistas tend to mistrust police, judges, laws, the state, and institutions (Martín 2017, 4). The Roman Catholic Church rebukes devotees' petitions for "protection against arrest, revenge against enemies, and romantic relationship problems" (Bromley 2016, 6); yet most Muertistas still consider themselves Catholic (Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bravo Lara 2013, 21-22, 25; Chesnut 2012, 80). La Santa Muerte, like other folk or popular devotions, allows devotees to feel connected to Catholicism without the mediation of potentially corrupt authorities and institutional restrictions (Bravo Lara 2013, 21-22, 25).

When regarded as a mestiza, La Santa Muerte most resembles other Catholic saints and Mary because Death embodies Muertistas' needs, fears, and anxieties (Chesnut 2012, 192; Pansters 2019, 33 and see Orsi 2011, 15-16). Whitehead (2018, 83) similarly describes the Virgin of Alcalá de los Gazules in Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain, as a local entity that devotees consider to be "kin" to their community (also Pansters 2019, 33). The assertion that La Santa Muerte is just like her adherents is the source of Muertista devotional intimacy (Chesnut 2012, 192). At its most intimate, devotion to La Santa

Muerte resembles a relationship with a loving mother or a castigating wife (Kristensen 2019, 150). Muertista intimacy with Death and its perceived mestiza cultural identity, then, is what provides La Santa Muerte with folk saint-like devotional qualities (see Bastante and Dickieson 2013, 436; Bromley 2016, 4; Chesnut 2012, 12; Flores Martos 2008, 61; Hernández Hernández 2011, 50; Kristensen 2015, 546; Martín 2014, 190; Roush 2014, 129-130).

A characteristic that distinguishes La Santa Muerte devotion from Mexican folk saints is the cult's international growth (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 4; Michalik 2011, 174). International devotion developed from English language spell-books and the Internet, where information on La Santa Muerte is available to curious New Agers (Bigliardi 2016, 312; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165; Torres Ramos 2017, 42). Authors of English language spell-books are self-proclaimed Pagan witches, followers of Aleister Crowley's Thelema, masters of European and/or Afro-Caribbean magic, and New Age gurus (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 4-6). The intended audiences for these spell-books are those wanting to invoke immanent "pagan" entities, saints, and/or demons for personal gain (ibid.).

Cultic Expansion and the New Age

Hammer (2016, 353) outlines the New Age as consisting of consumers that meet the following characteristics: 1) a proclivity to reject modern religious institutions, 2) a desire to adopt practices assumed to be ancient or exotic, 3) a responsiveness to novelty and innovation, 4) a view of life as an individualistic quest, 5) a need to transform

everyday life, and 6) a preference for alternatives to mainstream medicine. These New Age attributes align with characteristics of La Santa Muerte devotion (see Flores Martos 2008, 59-63; Hammer 2016, 353). For example, despite the Muertista use of rosaries and iconography, they tend to reject institutional aspects of the Roman Catholic Church and favor their own individual interpretations (Argyriadis 2014, 192).

In rejecting institutional aspects of Catholicism, some Muertistas claim that their practices are pre-Columbian (Munoz 2013, 7-8; Valadez 2008, 32). Other Muertistas incorporate African diaspora traditions into their practices (Michalik 2011, 162). Muertista claims of using pre-Columbian practices and the incorporation of African diaspora traditions fits within New Age characteristics of adopting practices assumed to be ancient or exotic (see Hammer 2016, 353). The majority of Muertista prayers, spells, and invocations, however, are novel 20th-century innovations (Thompson 1998, 422-423). This use of newly created practices resonates with the New Age's responsiveness to novelty and innovation (see Hammer 2016, 353).

Muertista's innovative prayers, spells, and invocations at public shrines and private altars, further fosters a "subjectivity of individualism," or an individualistic bias against collective control (Flores Martos 2008, 60). Muertistas' subjectivity of individualism corresponds to the New Age view of life as an individualistic quest (see Flores Martos 2008, 60; Hammer 2016, 353). Within this individualistic view, New Agers seek to transform everyday life by avoiding stress to increase vitality and creativity (Hammer 2016, 353, 355). As previously noted, Muertistas petition Death for love, financial success, protection, healing, or sending harm to someone (Flores Martos 2008,

60). The goal of practices for both Muertistas and New Agers, then, are individual gain and only differ in how one qualifies their respective everyday needs (see Chesnut 2012, 12; Flores Martos 2008, 6; Hammer 2016, 355; Kristensen 2015, 546).

The curandero use of La Santa Muerte on both sides of the Mexico/United States border (Pansters 2019, 3; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47), parallels the New Age attribute of a preference for alternatives to mainstream medicine (Hammer 2016, 353). Curanderismo and New Age healing are both alternative practices with a shared Western European Christian history (Trotter II and Chavira 1981, 30; Hanegraaff 1998, 89). This shared historical connection is evident in Teresa Urrea, who lived on the support of "Anglo-Spiritualists" during her exile in Arizona (Seman 2017, 7-9). Curandero utilization of the icon of Death, Holy Death's reputation as an "Occult" healer, and the recent Muertista adoption of *reiki* (channeling "energy" to heal) are the strongest links La Santa Muerte has with the New Age (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Chesnut 2012, 22-23,165, 189-193; de la Fuente Hernández 2016, 183; Kelly 1965, 108, 161; Michalik 2011, 169; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47).

The New Age is a made up of a loose affiliation of practitioners that engage in not only healing. It also involves channeling and alternative forms of psychology and physics expressed through holism (Hanegraaff 1998, 19-20). New Agers and Muertistas both practice similar forms of healing and channeling, as revealed in the intermingling of La Santa Muerte and Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism (Argyriadis 2016, 44; de la Torre 2016 [2013], 27; de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 353-354; Flores Martos 2008, 63; Michalik 2011, 162). The practices of healing and channeling used by Espiritistas,

Muertistas, and New Agers date back to 19th-century Spiritualism and its precursors (see de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8-11; González Torres 1996, 3-5; Hanegraaff 1998, 19; Hernández Hernández 2016a, 13-14). Even though spiritualism began in earnest in the United States with the Fox sisters in 1848, 19th-century channeling has its roots in 18th-century Swedenborgianism (Gutierrez 2016, 240; Hanegraaff 1998, 35-41, 438-441). Emanuel Swedenborg's (1688-1772) theology regarding the afterlife influenced Spiritualism and Espiritismo, as well as later New Age and Muertista supposed communications with the deceased and non-human entities (see Gutierrez 2016, 240-241; Hanegraaff 1998, 35-41, 378-379, 517; Stover 2014, 271; Thompson 1998, 427).

The New Age began in Europe and the United States during the 1960's and became a category of self-identification when diverse practitioners discovered their mutual associations in the 1970's (Hanegraaff 1998, 522). Channeling throughout North America became popular in the 1960's and 1970's among those anticipating the arrival of the "Age of Aquarius" (an era of transformation in astrology) forming the basic structure for the New Age (ibid., 10, 29, 94). As with the United States and Europe, the New Age developed in Mexico from an increased desire for personalized practices that embraced inclusivism (all perspectives are valid) and universalism (historical and cultural differences are superfluous to an ultimate reality) (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8 and see Hanegraaff 1998, 185, 188, 195). In Mexico during the 1970's, for example, the "Universal Great Brotherhood"—a countercultural group linked to psychedelia and rock music—began creating novel dances and invocations that they perceived as pre-Columbian (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 17-18). The New Age in Mexico consists of a

mixture of original practices that practitioners claim as being authentic to pre-Columbian Mexico, pre-Christian Europe, India, and Tibet (Frigerio 2016 [2013], 43, Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre 2016 [2013], 373). By 1990 there were nearly 70 organizations in Mexico that self-identified as New Age (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 19).

During the 1980's, the New Age throughout North America gained a greater focus on individualized practices, especially those associated with "Pagan magic" (Hanegraaff 1998, 90-93, 104-110). Pagan magicians were the first New Age adopters of La Santa Muerte (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 4-6). Books like Sophia Digregorio's (2013) *Grimoire of Santa Muerte: Spells and Rituals of Most Holy Death, the Unofficial Saint of Mexico*, and Tracey Rollin's (2017) *Santa Muerte: The History, Rituals, and Magic of Our Lady of Holy Death* exemplify contemporary Pagan adoptions of Muertista practices. Contemporary Pagans and Muertistas also share beliefs in the presence of powerful immanent beings and both groups perceive themselves as marginalized by modern institutions (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Clifton 2016, 343; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hanegraaff 1998, 408-409; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4).

Muertistas do not appear to share the New Age's attraction to alternative psychology and physics that developed from 19th-century Transcendentalism and 20th-century holism (Michalik 2016, 93; Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 72, 518). Holism in both New Age psychology and physics refers to an "ultimate source" that maintains the interrelatedness of everything in the universe (Hanegraaff 1998, 67-68, 120). New Age psychology and physics utilize terminology like "harmony," "cosmos," "energy," and "vibration" that distinguished the New Age from popular Catholicism (de la Torre 2016

[2013], 16). Muertistas, however, blend with New Agers in combining claims of cultural authenticity with the rhetoric of universalism and inclusivism (Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre 2016 [2013], 375). For example, esoteric shops in Mexico intermix magic, tarot, Espiritismo, Santería, reiki, and transcendental meditation with prayers and spells related to La Santa Muerte (Argyriadis 2016, 44).

La Santa Muerte and New Age Appropriations

New Agers and Muertistas share a propensity for seeking out heterogeneous practices and perspectives on social media (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Grieve 1995, 98-99; Hanegraaff 1998, 330, 366; Torres Ramos 2017, 46). Muertistas' virtual communities allow New Agers to learn about La Santa Muerte's feast days, prayers, rosaries, as well as, spells for binding, protection, and healing (Torres Ramos 2017, 44-45). Customized websites show potential New Age devotees where to find specific locations of public shrines in both Mexico and the United States (ibid., 46). New Age novices receive advice from more experienced traditional practitioners on Facebook where the buying and selling of candles, rosary beads, herbs, potions, effigies, and amulets also takes place (ibid.).

Through social media Muertistas and New Agers develop inclusive networks that foster an intermingling of practices and perspectives (Torres Ramos 2017, 51). These inclusive networks, however, are prone to conflicts between practitioners who negotiate correct practices from differing backgrounds and interests (see Frigerio 2016, 267; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). Since inclusive networks cut across economic, political, and cultural

boundaries, they are subject to complex questions of cultural appropriation that threaten collective solidarity (Fragoso 2011, 16; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209). Death at first appears to be a social leveling entity available to all, yet accusations of misappropriation arise when New Agers disassociate La Santa Muerte from Mexican culture and history (see Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Torres Ramos 2017, 51; Yllescas Illescas 2016, 82).

New Age appropriation seeks to universalize local traditional practices through a process of decontextualization (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 17-27; Frigerio 2016 [2013], 52; Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre 2016 [2013], 371; Hanegraaff 1998, 373). New Agers intentionally decontextualize local practices behind the veil of instituting an era of universal peace and prosperity (see González Torres 1996, 8-27; Hanegraaff 1998, 521-522; Hanegraaff 2000, 311; Hanegraaff 2012, 233). In the 1980's and 1990's, for example, the New Age influence on Mexicanidad movements was evident in the latter's adoption of Buddhist, Hindu, and contemporary Pagan worldviews to establish a new "planetary doctrine" aimed at global justice (González Torres 1996, 25-27). Mexicanidad movements have used New Age decontextualization to incorporate Indian and Tibetan cultural meditative practices into their repertoires (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 24, 27). New Agers incorporate and decontextualize Mexicanidad practices in the hopes of channeling pre-Columbian entities (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 17-27; Gutiérrez Zúñiga 1996, 15-16). The coalescing of New Age and Mexicanidad movements, therefore, bring together insiders who seek "a counter-narrative of the nation" with those who exoticize outsiders (Frigerio 2016 [2013], 45).

Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre (2016 [2013], 372) refer to decontextualizing locally specific cultural practices as "New Ageing." The cult of La Santa Muerte engages in New Ageing when Muertistas utilize a complex discourse of "authenticity" and "ancestry" where the differences between cultural mixture, appropriation, and revitalization are not always initially clear (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8-11). Some Muertistas claim their practices originate from pre-colonial lineages; however, the association appears to be a product of 20th-century revitalization (Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bravo Lara 2013, 21-22, 25; Bricker 1981, 59; Chesnut 2012, 28-29; González Torres 1996, 3-5; Kristensen 2014, 4; Michalik 2011, 162; Munoz 2013, 7-8; Valadez 2008, 32).

Flores Martos (2019, 86, 104-106) analyzes the projection of a mestiza identity onto the medieval Western European icon of Death as "cultural patrimonialization," or the strategic claim to cultural heritage. Cultural patrimonialization, in this sense, parallels de Certeau's (1984, xiii) notion of "secondary production" as,

> The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socio-economic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.

In other words, petitioning the medieval Western European icon of Death as a saint-like entity with a mestiza identity is a reproduction (or secondary production) that alters the relation of things and people within an already established social structure (following de Certeau 1984, xiii; Sahlins 1981, 67).

Since Death's iconicity is recognizable across cultures historically linked to Western Europe, the reproduction of La Santa Muerte's materiality can simultaneously reinforce and counter claims of cultural heritage (see Flores Martos 2008, 62; Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Michalik 2011, 165). The material iconicity of Death as a saint-like entity that works through thaumaturgic exchanges is what brings Muertistas and New Agers together in inclusive networks (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Keane 2003, 239; Torres Ramos 2017, 45; Yllescas Illescas 2016, 82). Devotee relationships with an icon—that both resembles and embodies—seemingly transforms Death into a divine person-like presence resembling other New Age entities and Mexican Catholic folk saints (Kristensen 2014, 20 and see Maniura 2011, 53). New Age appropriations of La Santa Muerte on social media and English language spell-books are the latest reproduction of practices within the iconology of Death (see Torres Ramos 2017, 38-51).

Medieval Europeans first produced the icon that signified pre-Christian figures of death in resembling psychopomps and female chthonic beings from ancient Greece, and a 1st-century Angel of Death (see Allison 2003; Cooper 1997, 1217-1223; Faraone 1991, 3-6; Graf 1991, 191-197; Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 205-206, 211; Keane 2003, 239; Págan Cánovas 2011, 562; Peirce 1998 [1895], 13; Revelation 6:4, 20:14). Spaniards then reproduced the Dance of Death liturgical performances as didactic plays for conversion in colonial Mexico (see Burkhart 2004, 51; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44). Later, popular Mexican Catholics reproduced colonial imagery signifying a Good Death in cofradías as an early 20th-century Occult love charm used for healing (see Gruzinski 2001 [1995], 164; Kelly 1965, 108; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Malvido 2005, 25;

Navarrete 1982, 25-40; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 123; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53; Toor 1947, 145). La Santa Muerte finally emerged as a saint-like entity reproduced from clandestine love magic in Mexico (see Chesnut 2012, 4; Malvido 2005, 25; Thompson 1998, 423).

While the Roman Catholic Church socially stigmatizes Muertisa values and practices, the New Age reproduction of the icon of Death lends social legitimacy to the cult of La Santa Muerte (Fragoso 2011, 16). When New Agers acknowledge La Santa Muerte's mestiza identity their cultic inclusion is unproblematic and practitioners openly exchange thaumaturgic techniques and tools across cultural divides (Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). Questions regarding cultural co-option and misappropriation, however, remain sources of contention because Muertistas and New Agers continually utilize the icon of Death in similar yet contested practices derived from popular Catholicism and 20th-century Occultism (see Torres Ramos 2017, 45).

The comingling of Mexican folk Catholicism and the New Age is part of a slow but steady merging of practices within the United States and Mexico (Hernández Hernández 2016a, 16). Popular Catholic thaumaturgic tools sold to New Age consumers include "amulets, talismans and images of saints to give protection against the evil eye or to get a good job, or a spray for invoking spirits and getting the love of the man who is wanted" (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 27). The New Age has in-turn brought Westernized interpretations of karma, yoga, and reincarnation into contact with popular Mexican Catholicism (ibid.). While academic sources in the United States identify "spiritual or therapeutic practices" as New Age, they ignore its overlapping interests with popular Catholicism, African diaspora traditions, and Espiritismo (Frigerio 2016 [2013], 30-31).

The expansion of La Santa Muerte into the New Age, therefore, results in scholarly claims that such blending is the result of the malleability and inclusivity of Mexican folk Catholicism with new and unprecedented appropriation (Michalik 2011, 165; Pansters 2019, 51).

Hedenborg-White and Gregorius (2016, 12) consider the New Age reception of La Santa Muerte as the former's continual search for new forms of "re-enchantment." Michalik (2011, 174) suggests that similarities between La Santa Muerte devotion and the New Age are misleading and superficial. There are obvious connections where phenomena (e.g., La Santa Muerte tarot) appear as "eclectic hybrids;" however, popular devotion is not based on the consumerist effort to merge distinct traditions in the same respect as the New Age (Michalik 2011, 174-175). Both emergent New Age and dominant folk Catholic expressions of La Santa Muerte, nevertheless, contain iconography and practices developed from ancient Greece, Rome, Judaism, and Christianity; the Black Death in Western Europe; and the colonization of Mexico (see Aberth 2010, 222-224, 231, 269; Allison 2003, 324-325; Brandes 1998, 199; Burkhart 2004, 51; Cervantes 1994, 94; Fagles 1990, 233, 657; Fagles 1996, 530; Faraone 1991, 4; Few 2002, 54; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-165; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Mirguet 2010, 253-254; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54; Thomas 1971, 55; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51).

The recognizable Western European iconography, questions of appropriation and reproduction, and the use of channeling, healing, and magical practice reveal the cult of La Santa Muerte's affinities with the New Age (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; de la Torre

2016 [2013], 27; de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 353-354; Hanegraaff 1998, 19-20; Flores Martos 2008, 63; Michalik 2011, 162; Torres Ramos 2017, 38). The cult of La Santa Muerte, however, fits better alongside but not included within the category of the New Age. Despite their affinities, there are no strong Muertista associations with the holism on which the New Age so centrally depends (see Hanegraaff 1998, 385, 518; 2012, 182-184). The New Age resides within the larger academic category of Occultism as constituted by practices regarded as anti-modern and, more specifically, contemporary Pagan propitiations of powerful immanent entities (Hanegraaff 1998, 408-409; 2012, 370). The following chapter, then, analyzes Occultist reproductions of the icon of Death paradoxically utilized as a 21st-century Mexican folk saint.

6 DEATH, MAGIC, AND THE OCCULT

La Santa Muerte's notoriety outside of Mexico developed from migration, social media groups, and the cult's counter-cultural aesthetic appeal (Lomnitz 2019, 188; Pansters 2019, 3, 51; Perdigón Castañeda and Robles Aguirre 2019, 175; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-4). Movies, television, video games, journalistic news, and academic writings further increased the cult's public exposure (Huffschmid 2019, 125, 127-128; Torres Ramos 2017, 42). Due in part to this public exposure, Occultist reproductions of La Santa Muerte have intensified since 2015 (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1; Michalik 2016, 93). Occultist reproduction is the most recent development in an iconology of Death that includes Pre-Christian Mediterranean non-human entities, the Black Death in Western Europe, Iberian liturgical theater, didactic plays in New Spain, clandestine love magic in Central Mexico, and saint-like devotion in Mexico and the Southwestern United States borderlands (see Aberth 2010, 222-224; Allison 2003, 324-325; Burkhart 2004, 51; Chesnut 2012, 4, 27-33; Ginzberg 1998 [1909], 519; Graf 1991, 189-191; Kelly 1965, 108, 161; Kristensen 2014, 3-4; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Strubbe 1991, 45; Thompson 1998, 422; Toor 1947, 141-145; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44; Yllescas Illescas 2016, 82).

La Santa Muerte and the Occult

La Santa Muerte captured the interest of 21st-century Occultists due to its purported efficacy in performing *milagritos* (small miracles or interventions resulting from a devotee's petition) (Bigliardi 2016, 304, 312, 316, 319; Hedenborg-White and

Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020a, 31; Kristensen 2014, 20; Kristensen 2015, 563; Kristensen 2019, 140-141; Michalik 2011, 162-163, 165; Pansters 2019, 31; Roush 2014, 140, 143). La Santa Muerte's appeal to Occultists is also the consequence of shared practices and associations with deviancy (Bromley 2016, 6; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Martín 2014, 204-206; Michalik 2011, 163, 174-175; Styers 2004, 17-19). Occultism and the cult of La Santa Muerte both include practices related to tarot, amulets, animated statues, binding spells, and invoking spirits (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Hanegraaff 1998, 385; Hanegraaff 2012, 182-184, 369, Hanegraaff 2016, 396, 400; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Michalik 2011, 174-175; Versnel 1991b, 192). Film, television, and literature further portray both La Santa Muerte and the Occult as forms of "deviant magic" (Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Huffschmid 2019, 125, 127-128; Styers 2004, 19-21, 223).

The category of magic is problematic due to late 19th-century academic theories that classified it as unscientific and related to an intellectual regression (Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Styers 2004, 17-20; Versnel 1991b, 177). Magic is a biased term utilized to contextualize practices construed as deviant since late antiquity in the Mediterranean world (Kieckhefer 1994b, 823-828; Versnel 1991b, 190-191). For example, Romans referred to Christianity as a magical practice in the 3rd century based on the perception that the latter engaged in incest and cannibalism (Versnel 1991b, 183). The term magic, however, first developed from the Greco-Roman identification of the Persian *Magi* as charlatans (Hanegraaff 2012, 169; Kieckhefer 1989, 10; Versnel 1991b, 182). The Magi's assumed disreputable behavior stemmed from Greeks attributing the former to sorcery

(*goès* or *goetia* in Greek and *magus* in Latin) (Hanegraaff 2012, 36; Versnel 1991b, 182; 188). Sorcery relates to magic as the intention of the "envious other," who invokes spirits to harm another person (Dickie 2007, 361, 363, 365, 369; Taussig 1987, 370). In medieval Christendom this envious other was the "Pagan," and was a label for practitioners of *magia* (magic) as well as Neoplatonic philosophers (see Fraser 2009, 131-132; Hanegraaff 2012, 172-175, 369; Kieckhefer 1994, 815; Taussig 1987, 373; Versnel 1991b, 182).

Beginning in the 4th century, Christian theologians regarded Pagan magical practice as idolatrous (Hanegraaff 2012, 172-175). Similar practices that asserted the presence of divinity in materiality returned to prominence during the 14th and 15th centuries as "nature magic" (ibid.). Accusations of witchcraft in the 15th and 16th centuries demarcated demonic magic as the deviant derivative of nature magic (Styers 2004, 183). Behaviors identified with witchcraft, like cannibalism, sodomy, bestiality, and fornication with the Devil, were the distinguishing features of demonic magic (Roper 2004, 32, 91, 101, 69-81, 229). In the 17th century, nature magic became associated with *qualitates occultae* (the hidden qualities of things) and briefly developed a positive connotation (Hanegraaff 2012, 178-184). This study of hidden qualities was part of an "occult science" that examined the correspondence of affinities, which correlated with accepted forms of knowledge during the Renaissance (Foucault 1970 [1966], 32; Hanegraaff 2003, 362-367; Hanegraaff 2012, 178-184). Later, Enlightenment scholars juxtaposed occult science against empirical science, which led to magic's association with intellectual error (Hanegraaff 2012, 177, 184).

Pagan magic regained saliency in colloquial language following the Enlightenment's delineation of Neo-Platonic philosophy from so-called Greco-Roman "superstitions" (Fraser 2009, 131-132; Hanegraaff 1998, 407; Hanegraaff 2012, 369). When late 19th- and early 20th-century social science classified magic in opposition to religion and science, the new taxonomy conflated Pagan, nature, and demonic forms of magic (Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177 and see Frazer 2015 [1890], 10, 60-61). This conflation led to magic's association with "primitivism" (intellectual regression, or an anti-modern ethos), which promulgated the Occult's perceived relation to deviancy (Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Styers 2004, 6-7, 17-20).

Hanegraaff (1999, 146) suggests that associations of the Occult with deviancy are the result of the "secularization of 19th-century esotericism." Secularization in this context refers to the doctrinal rejection of practices within Christianity (Hanegraaff 1998, 481; 1999, 145). Esotericism, here, implies more than secretive or hidden, because practices described as such are often historically well-known and continually garner public attention (Hanegraaff 1998, 385; 2012, 233). According to Hanegraaff (1998, 384), the term esoteric emerged in the 2nd century in referencing the unlawful use of binding spells performed in secret (and see Versnel 1991b, 179). Esotericism thus connoted deviancy since the term's inception (Fraser 2009, 133). The secularization of 19th-century esotericism, then, is the process of categorizing an eclectic mixture of practices dismissed by Christian theologians as deviant (Hanegraaff 1998, 408, 481).

Esoteric and Occultic remain terms that scholars use interchangeably to classify practices that seek to gain material advantages through invoking powerful non-human

entities (see Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177; Versnel 1991b, 191). Since the late 19th century, the Occult references an eclectic grouping of practitioners who share an association with magical practice and an anti-modern ethos (Hanegraaff 1998, 481, 517; 2012, 164-177). The Occult's anti-modern ethos refers to the willingness to engage in practices that intellectuals construe as primitive, superstitious, irrational, or counter to empirical thinking (Hanegraaff 1998, 517). The Occult also inherited a correlation with "perverse sexuality" formerly associated with magic in late antiquity and witchcraft, or demonic magic, in the 15th and 16th centuries (Styers 2004, 18-19; 183 and see Kieckhefer 1989, 54-55; Roper 2004, 229; Thomas 1971, 50-61, 87-92, 764-765, Versnel 1991b, 191).

According to Styers (2004, 30-31, 215), Occultism intertwines with notions of sexual deviancy because of practitioners' rejection of social conventions. For example, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875) was an Occultist and Rosicrucian (an esoteric Christian brotherhood developed in the 17th century) who developed an "affectional alchemy" that countered Victorian sexual conventions (Urban 2016, 435). Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) created Thelema (an Occultic movement in the early 20th century) and "sex magick" as reactions to what he perceived as his repressive Brethren upbringing (Bogdan and Starr 2012, 3-7 and see Crowley 1969 [1929], 41-45, 77-79). In the 1960's, accusations of sexual deviance that defied Christian social structure led to a resurgence of Occultic practices within the counter-cultures of Europe and North America (Styers 2004, 18-19, 30-31). Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church's labeling of sex workers, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals as deviant contributed to La Santa Muerte's

popularity among those communities because it creates a subversive space for practitioners that identify as Catholic (Howe et al. 2009, 34; Martín 2017, 7).

La Santa Muerte's emergence among Occultists in the United States has led Michalik (2011, 165) and Hedenborg-White and Gregorius (2016, 1) to separately inquire into the apparent novelty of a Mexican Catholic folk saint's association with the Occult. An examination of the categorical distinction between popular Catholicism and the Occult, however, reveals an underlying compatibility (see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 2; Huffschmid 2019, 125, 127-128; Michalik 2016, 93). The categorical fluidity between the Occult and popular Catholicism, therefore, allows for the cult of La Santa Muerte's amorphous classification.

The Occult and Popular Catholicism

Martín (2014, 14) categorizes devotion to La Santa Muerte as a form of "secular sanctity," or practices rejected by Roman Catholic doctrine. Like Hanegraaff (1998, 481; 1999, 145), Martín (2014, 14) uses the term secular in a manner that is synonymous with Christian's (1981, 178) description of popular religion. Christian (ibid.) describes popular religion as "[T]he only defensible distinction involved between *popular religion* and whatever else it is being compared with is that between religion as practiced and religion as prescribed." Similarly, Torres Ramos (2017, 39) refers to the cult of La Santa Muerte as a "popular religiosity" because the Roman Catholic Church condemns it as blasphemous and idolatrous. Popular religiosity is a term that Torres Ramos (ibid., 37) borrowed from the Second Episcopal Conference (1968) of the Latin American bishops'

vision of “pastoral care” (evangelization that combines compassion for the poor with doctrinal instruction).

The Second Episcopal Conference followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in efforts to modernize the Roman Catholic Church with a new sense of ecumenicalism that embraced cultural diversity, yet, also sought to eliminate popular devotions (Galilea 1978, 77; Orsi 1996, 32-33, Vásquez and Marquardt 2003, 76). The Second Vatican Council pleased many Roman Catholic officials in North America who viewed popular practices as “superstitious,” or as “survivals” of pre-Christian practices (Orsi 2005, 152). Since the Second Vatican Council, nevertheless, popular Catholicism has flourished in Mexico and its shared border with the United States (Martín 2014, 14).

To distinguish social analysis from the Second Vatican Council’s theological assertions, Bowman and Valk (2014, 6) suggest the use of the term “vernacular religion” as an alternative to “popular religion.” Bowman and Valk (ibid.) state that popular religion tends to divide “beliefs into pagan ‘superstitions’ versus Christian religious creeds, or Catholic ‘survivals’ versus Protestant faith.” Prior to the emergence of vernacular religion, Redfield (1973 [1930], 1-3) and Dundes (1965, 2) used the term “folk” to reference customs and traditions that developed independent of written texts, yet, still united individuals into collectives. According to Dundes (1980, 1-2), the term “folk” arose from the scholarly reformulation of the Latin *vulgus in populo* (or non-elite classes). Folk, then, connotes what modern civilization has transcended and should be able to do without (ibid., 1). Civilization in this context refers to an assumed intellectual

progress resulting from diminished Christian authority since the Reformations and the Enlightenment (Eagleton 2016, 17-18; Lincoln 2003, 55-59).

The revaluation of popular and folk as academic categories led to the "lived religion" approach to the study of unsanctioned practices (Orsi 2005, 167-179; 186-191). Orsi (1997, 9) defines lived religion as, "[T]he necessary and mutually transforming exchanges between religious authorities and the broader communities of practitioners, by real men and women in situations and relationships they have made and that have made them." Lived religion is an analytical framework developed from sociocultural theories of practice that examine quotidian life as a relationship between structured systems of power and individual agency (Knauft 1996, 106-107; Ortner 1984, 148). Ortner (1984, 144) states that practice theory is a consequence of the need to better understand how "real people do real things." Lived religion and practice theory both utilize history and ethnography to investigate everyday interactions among individuals that reproduce and/or transform dominant social structures (Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 4; de Certeau 1984, xiii; Knauft 1996, 106-109; Orsi 1997, 8-10; Ortner 1984, 144-148; Sahlins 1981, 67-68).

The cult of La Santa Muerte, popular Catholicism, and Occultism intersect within the scholarly terminologies of folk, secular, popular, vernacular, and lived religions (see Bowman and Valk 2014, 6; Christian 1981, 178; Dundes 1980, 1-2; Martín 2014, 14; Orsi 1997, 9; Torres Ramos 2017, 39). All five terms of classification include practices that late 19th- and early 20th-century social scientists and theologians uncritically labeled as superstitious and regressive (Hanegraaff 1998, 407; Hanegraaff 2012, 180-190; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Hernández Hernández 2016a, 16; Michalik

2011, 162; Sebald 1980, 173). Critical examinations have revealed, however, that the cult of La Santa Muerte, popular Catholicism, and the Occult are all modes of lived practice that loosely bind individuals together who seek alternatives to institutionally approved practices (see Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Lincoln 2003, 55; Orsi 2016, 40-41). As Hedenborg-White and Gregorius (2016, 12) suggest, the Occult's reproduction of La Santa Muerte demonstrates a categorical fluidity of "lived religious phenomenon." This categorical fluidity of lived practices is a consequence of Christianity's adoption of Platonic dualism (see Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317).

Theologians between the 3rd and 5th centuries utilized Plato's (in Cooper 1997, 1018) notion of the Good Itself and Plotinus' (in MacKenna 1992, 43) notion of the One as the basis for describing the Christian God as transcendent, self-sufficient, self-contained, beyond time, and perfect (Fraser 2009, 145-147; Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317). Within Platonic dualism, however, there is also Plato's (in Cooper 1997, 1235-1244) demiurge, or a "God of things," which is the creator of an imperfect material world (Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317). Neoplatonists associated this demiurge with practices related to daemonic theurgy (see Fraser 2009, 145-147; Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114). Neoplatonist philosophers from the 3rd to the 5th century relegated daemonic theurgy as *superstitio* or a depraved attachment to private practices (Fraser 2009, 145-147; Hanegraaff 2012, 160). In the same era, Saint Augustine of Hippo (1890 [413-426], 269-273) linked the Greek daemon to the Christian demon which

contributed to accusations of theurgy as a deviant practice within early Christianity (see also Fraser 2009, 140-141,151, Versnel 1991b, 182).

Propitiations of saints that resembled Greco-Roman daemonic theurgy continued for centuries within medieval Christendom (Kieckhefer 1994b, 815-816; Lesses 1998, 273 and for comparison see Elsner 2018, 4-6). The cult of La Santa Muerte, Occultism, and popular Catholicism are modern reproductions of those medieval Christian practices related to daemonic theurgy and Plato's (in Cooper 1997, 1235-1244) demiurge (Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4; Orsi 2016, 29). Muertistas, Occultists, and popular Catholic practitioners, then, appear to share a common foundation in Plato's (in Cooper 1997, 1235-1244) demiurge and Greco-Roman daemonic theurgy (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 4; Clifton 2016, 335; Flores Martos 2019, 101; Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Kristensen 2014, 13, 106; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317; Orsi 2016, 29).

Intellectual and religious challenges posed by Platonic dualism continue to confront modern scientific rationality (see Pels 2008, 270-278). After Platonic other-worldly rationalism developed into the Western religious norm, early 20th-century scholars combined an eclectic mix of practitioners who favor this-worldly lived experience into the category of the Occult (Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 408-409, 516; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 35-47, 316-317; Styers 2004, 223-226). Christian authorities dismiss a modern attraction to material practices associated with this-worldly lived experience as trends among superstitious people (Hanegraaff 2000, 311; Torres Ramos 2017, 39).

For example, Orsi (2016, 27) states that the demarcation of "modern religion" features a dismissal of devotional practices related to the presence of Mary and the saints in material form as superstitious leftovers of a "medieval credulity." However, a large contingent of those identifying as "religious" and/or "spiritual" seek out everyday assistance from assorted immanently powerful non-human entities (Chavez 2017, 83-84; Clark 2003, 9-13; de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 349-362).

The most recent polling conducted in the United States in 2014 (Chavez 2017, 83-84) and in Mexico in 2016 (de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 349) reveal an increased attraction to Occultism in both countries. In Mexico, data shows a correlation of growth in Occultism and the cult of La Santa Muerte (ibid.). Mexico remains a Catholic country; however, polling shows that the nation has become more religiously diverse since the 1960's (ibid., 349, 353). Much of this diversification is due to Catholics engaging in newly created practices regarded as "neopagan" (ibid., 353-354). While the Virgin of Guadalupe remains Mexico's most popular icon (59.4% of the population) a significant portion of those devotees (12%) consider themselves to be "unaffiliated" (ibid., 353-355). The unaffiliated are those "whose spiritual practices now take place outside the scope of religious institutions" (ibid., 352). The unaffiliated include popular Catholic practitioners, Muertistas, Spiritualists, and Occultists (ibid., 353, 360, 362). Also included in the unaffiliated category is 26.3% that self-identify as Pagan (ibid., 362).

The Occult and the cult of La Santa Muerte entwine the most amongst those self-identifying as Pagan (see Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10, Hanegraaff 2012, 369). Clifton (2016, 338) refers to this self-identification as "contemporary Paganism."

Contemporary Pagans are Occultists who perceive nature as a creation of immanent beings that effect the world according to a rationale that opposes empirical thought (Clifton 2016, 338). Contemporary Pagans claim that the hegemonic authority of modernity disparages practices that bring practitioners into contact with immanent beings (Clifton 2016, 343; Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177). Similarly, Muertistas view La Santa Muerte's iconic form as a material presence of Death and consider themselves opponents of modern Catholic and political institutional authorities (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 4; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Kristensen 2014, 13; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4).

The modern self-identification with Paganism insinuates an anti-Christian positionality because of the historically negative connotations that theologians placed on the term (Hanegraaff 1998, 77). Still, contemporary Paganism and Christianity share historical, material, and ideological frameworks (Hanegraaff 1998, 89). Archaeological evidence from the Anatolian peninsula reveals a blending of Christian and Pagan iconography that nullified practical distinctions within Mediterranean material culture from the 4th to the 7th century (Talleon 2011, 575). Whitehead (2008, 181) shows that devotees of the contemporary Pagan Our Lady of Avalon in Glastonbury, England, and the Spanish Catholic Virgin of Alcalá de los Gazules in Andalusia, Spain both perceive their effigies as embodied and tangible entities.

Relationships between people and icons were, and remain, intrinsic to practices related to popular Catholicism, contemporary Paganism, and the cult of La Santa Muerte (Kristensen 2014, 13; Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 408-409; 516; Styers 2004, 223-226;

Whitehead 2008, 18). Theologians have accused contemporary Pagans, popular Catholic practitioners, and Muertistas of "idolatry," because of a long and contentious history regarding the presence of immanent beings in iconography (Bigliardi 2016, 309; de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 361; Whitehead 2010, 97). The 8th-century Byzantium iconographic controversies, the Protestant Reformation, European colonialism, the Enlightenment, and scholarly writings of 19th- and 20th-century social scientists and theologians highlight a continued contestation over delineating and delegitimizing practices as idolatrous (Maniura 2011, 52; Whitehead 2010, 97).

Maintaining an antagonistic position to societal conventional norms is a shared trait of Muertistas, contemporary Pagans, and folk Catholic practitioners (see Clifton 2016, 335; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4; Orsi 2016, 29). Contemporary Pagans and Muertistas commonly use Catholic materiality to carve out their own unique lived practices that counter social conventions (Hanegraaff 2000, 310; Torres Ramos 2017, 39). For example, Tracey Rollin (2017, xi-xv) left Catholicism for contemporary Paganism and then adopted Holy Death into her magical practice that utilizes Catholic-inspired rosaries and novenas. She states, "This [La Santa Muerte] belief system is in opposition to the teachings of so many social and religious authorities, who condemn certain behaviors as immoral" (ibid., 19).

Occultic Adoption of La Santa Muerte

Rollin (2017, xiii-xv) is a self-proclaimed Pagan and "chaos magician" of German descent who started her devotion to Holy Death because of personal disagreements with

her Catholic upbringing. Chaos magicians reproduce practices from diverse cultures in the hopes of unleashing sexual energies to liberate oneself from repressive social structures (Urban 2006, 19). Priya is an Occultist devotee of La Santa Muerte who lives in Rotterdam, Netherlands. I met Priya in *The Santa Muerte Tradition*, a Facebook group that a "folk magician" of Mexican descent created for social learning purposes in 2019. Folk magic refers to prayers, rituals, ceremonies, and incantations associated with both the Occult and popular Catholicism (Sebald 1980, 173). Priya began her spell-work with Death in 2019 and, by the end of 2020, developed a clientele for whom she performs hexes, protections, cleansings, bindings, and vengeance. The experiences Priya shared with me and the practices Rollin (2017) describes in her book, elucidate several similarities and differences of Occultist adoptions of La Santa Muerte.

Rollin (2017, 50-66) and Priya both perceive institutionalized religion as having a crippling effect on individual experience and practice. This factor aligns them with both the Occult and the cult of La Santa Muerte (see Flores Martos 2008, 59-63; Hammer 2016, 353). Priya has a strong disaffection for modern institutions, including Christianity, corporations, European colonies, or "anything that bleeds the common folk dry in its greed." Rollin (2017, xiii) grew up dismayed with institutional Christian teachings of an abstract God and, yet, the tangible relationships she found with saints appealed to her. Neither Priya nor Rollin (ibid., xiii) are of Mexican descent and, unlike other Muertistas who claim an ancestral lineage, both adopted Death through a "calling." Rollin (ibid., xiv) asked Holy Death to "reveal herself" to her when she first saw La Santa Muerte in a

candle section of a New Mexico grocery store. Priya, in somewhat like manner, found a statue of La Santa Muerte at a local esoteric shop that "wanted" to go home with her.

Rollin (2017, xiii) sees her childhood fascination with saints and her Catholic education as her initiation into magic. Her use of seven-day-candles in chaos magic is what led her to find La Santa Muerte (ibid., xiv). She originally used Chesnut's (2012) academic research on La Santa Muerte as a guide to her non-traditional but "authentic living natural practice" (Rollin 2017, xv). Despite using scholarly work to initially guide her own practice, she distinguishes the academic investigation of the origin of Holy Death with a magician's perspective (ibid., 55). From the magician's perspective, La Santa Muerte arose from an emerging *aeon* (refers to a span of time in magic lexicons) (ibid., 57-58). She refers to this new aeon as a return of the divine mother that existed prior to the Christian aeon that she considers to be waning (ibid., 59-61).

Priya's understanding of La Santa Muerte is less systematic. At age five, Priya began to sense that there was a spirit protecting her that "was not human." She later came to believe that this spirit was La Santa Muerte. She remembers always having an attraction to skeletons and skulls. She was also "obsessed with red apples [a popular La Santa Muerte offering] to the point of writing poetry about it." As a teenager she dressed in the Goth aesthetic (a subgenre of clothing, music, and literature featuring the macabre) (see Fischer 2019, 144). She chose this aesthetic because she envisioned, "a ghost lady, beautiful and half skeleton with a skull painted face, and that was before I learned about Día de los Muertos." When Priya did learn of the Day of the Dead, she became fascinated

with Mexican culture. Despite these interests, Priya did not learn of La Santa Muerte until she and her young son moved into a woman's shelter in 2018.

She and her mother had a difficult and complex relationship and this led Priya to leave home at the age of 16. She reasons that her difficult relationship with her mother was why La Santa Muerte looked after her from such a young age. Priya became a mother in her early 20's and, after problems arose with her child's father, Dutch Youth Care and Child Protection placed her and her son in a women's shelter. In the shelter, she learned through social media how to start a connection with La Santa Muerte. As her relationship with Death developed, she claims to have gained the ability to communicate with other "spirits." She defines spirits as, "Powerful and knowledgeable sentient beings that communicate with humans and affect their lives." Spirits, for Priya, include both deceased humans and powerful non-human entities like La Santa Muerte.

Priya and Rollin (2017, xv) have developed their own unique practices as La Santa Muerte devotees. As Priya states, for example, "I do it my own way because I listen to what La Santa Muerte tells me directly." Her ability to "listen" to La Santa Muerte resembles the Occultic practice of open channeling (see Hanegraaff 1998, 28n.12; Kilmo 1987, 366-368). Kilmo (1987, 366) describes open channeling as "the ability to act as a vehicle for thoughts, images, feelings, and information from a source that is beyond the individual's self" and, yet, "occurs in an apparently ordinary way." Listening for Priya involves interpreting messages she believes to receive in dreams, random songs on her cell phone, and "angel numbers" (repeated numerical sequences she encounters).

Listening to La Santa Muerte led Priya to place her own blood in a vial on Death's altar. Members of The Santa Muerte Tradition state that blood offerings are not traditional; however, she asserts that "Madrina only blesses the blood for me, it is not an offering." *Madrina* (Godmother in Spanish) is a popular nickname for La Santa Muerte (see Bigliardi 2016, 305; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 56). Priya uses the term "Madrina" due to the extended family-like intimacy she feels with Death. As she states, "That's kinda of what you sign up for in the first place, it's a lifetime commitment. It's not a trade as with other entities, you are part of her family if she likes you." Utilizing her blood on Death's altar binds La Santa Muerte and her together. This binding has increased her magical abilities allowing her to rationalize the spells she performs for protection and revenge. As she further elaborates, "Madrina now lives through me. It does explain why I'm getting so powerful…I feel like she's going through my memories to see who hurt me and in essence her, since we're now connected."

Priya's perceived bodily connection to Death changes the way she makes offerings to La Santa Muerte. She considers Death to be a spirit that feeds off her energy through offerings "like a parasite on a host." According to her logic, spirits like La Santa Muerte cannot physically consume food and, therefore, the body of the practitioner must become a medium for the exchange of offerings and services returned. As she states, "I feed Madrina by feeding and sustaining myself. If she wants me to eat something, I do it." In return La Santa Muerte supplies Priya with material needs, like a Godmother would, to continue this exchange in an ongoing act of mutual dependency.

Priya's relating to Death through her own body seems to operate according to what Csordas (1990, 15) calls "embodied self-objectification." Csordas (ibid., 6, 13-16) discusses embodied self-objectification in terms of demonic possession in medieval Western Europe. In demonic possession, an incorporeal demon transgresses the boundary of an individual's body (ibid., 6, 13-16). Within this transgression, the practitioner perceives their sense of self as transformed from an acting subject to the object of the transgressor's agency (ibid., 13-16). This form of embodied self-objectification allows Priya to assert that La Santa Muerte is the one responsible for her own wants, desires, successes, and failures (see ibid.). Her relationship with La Santa Muerte, then, affords Priya reasons for why things happen in her life, absolves her from shame when things go wrong, and gives her a sense of purpose. Through her embodied self-objectification, she is certain that Death helps her survive her daily life in effecting her circumstances, "Like causing you to be late when something bad happens and you miss it."

Priya feels that La Santa Muerte guides her to the point that she has little to no freewill left. She believes her actions are the result of La Santa Muerte affecting her everyday life, which makes her feel "burdened with this arcane knowledge." Despite feeling burdened, she is happy to remain close to La Santa Muerte whom she claims she likes more than the living. The closeness she feels toward Death brings her into contact with other Muertistas and Occultists on social media. This lessens the social isolation Priya experiences due to the demands of being a single mother of a special needs child. Additionally, devotion and spell-work has caused Priya to develop a personal relationship of reciprocity with a spirit she believes is more powerful than herself.

Priya started her devotion with only giving her effigy offerings. She then began praying to Death and learned the Catholic rosary. Eventually, she claims that La Santa Muerte forbid her form doing rosaries and instead guided her toward personalized prayers and magical workings. She says her relationship with La Santa Muerte is unique because Death knows she does not like "orthodox things." As she stated, "It makes sense if you think about it, I am not Catholic nor have I ever been, so why would Madrina want me to pray like that." She instead prays to and invokes Death in her own customized manner, as she noted, "First you have to learn the rules to break the rules."

Per her construction of Pagan rosaries and novenas for Holy Death, Rollin's (2017, 144-155) practices are closer to Catholicism than Priya's. The Catholic rosary involves the recitation of God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary. Rollin's (ibid., 144) version of the Pagan rosary, instead, uses the name La Santa Muerte or Holy Death. The Catholic novena is a prayer recited at varying intervals over nine days to petition a saint in a time of crisis. The magician follows the same repertoire, yet, like the Pagan rosary, Rollin's (ibid., 154) novena seeks to invoke La Santa Muerte. She is aware that Catholic novenas are petitions to saints as mediators to God, who, is the actuator of the miracle (ibid.). She denies, however, that there is any logical difference between a Catholic prayer to a saint for a miracle and a Pagan spell used to cajole a powerful spirit into "altering reality" (ibid., 154-155).

Tylor, Frazer, and Early 20th-Century Discourse

Rollin's non-distinction between Catholic prayer and Pagan spell mirrors the reasoning of Robert R. Marett (1866-1943). Marett's (1904, 132-133) reasoning came in response to Frazer's (2015 [1890], 10, 60-61) distinction between magic and religion. Marett (1904, 161-164) agreed with Frazer (2015 [1890], 159-163) that magical spells cajole spirits into acting on a petitioner's behalf, while religious prayers are more supplicative. However, for Marett (1904, 164), both prayers and spells share the intent of achieving an "inter-subjective transaction" (Marett 1904, 164). The difference between a magical spell and religious prayer, then, is the result of an abstract classification and not a pragmatic distinction of differing practitioners' intentions (ibid., 163). Rollin (2017, 154-155) following Marett's (1904, 161-164) views of prayers and spells is an example of how scholarly discourse in the late 19th and early 20th centuries mirror Occultists' current understandings of their magical practices (see Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Styers 2004, 17-20).

Modern Occultism developed within the same cultural and historical milieu as late 19th- and early 20th- century social science (Hanegraaff 2003, 359-360; Styers 2004, 23). For example, James George Frazer (1854-1941) was frustrated with Victorian Spiritualists that adopted practices from his popular *The Golden Bough* (2016 [1890], 10, 60-61 and see Styers 2004, 18-19). Late 19th- and early 20th- century theories of religion reflected modern Occultic practices because of like-minded thinking that developed under a veil of "naturalized rationalism" (Styers 2004, 23). Naturalized rationalism, here, is a logical claim to objective truth within an aura of scientific authority and factuality without sufficient supporting evidence (see Smith 1969, 423-424; Styers 2004, 23).

Foucault (1984, 109) suggests that scientific discourse in the 17th century gained authority as a logical consensus that established accepted truths based in anonymity. In the late 19th century, scientific authority became "transdiscursive," or an aperture to multiple interpretations of truth that reformulated an original theory according to biases and presumptions (ibid., 113-116). Transdiscursive forms of naturalized rationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were widely accepted truths that produced multiple interpretations (following Foucault 1984, 109-116; Styers 2004, 23). Occultists' understandings of their practices developed in correlation with this transdiscursive naturalized rationalism (Foucault 1984, 109-116; Hanegraaff 2012, 165-167; Styers 2004, 23, 77-79). An example of transdiscursive naturalized rationalism in the late 19th and early 20th century is Frazer's (2015 [1890], 48-49) theory of magic, religion, and science as ascending steps in humanity's social evolution (Hanegraaff 2012, 165-167; Styers 2004, 23, 77-79 and see Foucault 1984, 109-116).

The social evolutionary triad of magic, religion, and science was a theory that Frazer (2015 [1890], 48-49) developed from the work of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) (Hanegraff 2012, 165-167; Smith 1969, 19; Styers 2004, 77-79). Social evolution asserted that all human cultures passed through the same stages of intellectual advancement (Smith 1969, 409-412 and see Frazer 2015 [1890], 711). The theory of social evolution built upon the concept of "psychic unity" that claimed similar cultural phenomena arose in distinct cultures due to shared human mental structures (Sansi Roca 2018, 3; Smith 1969, 409-412). Psychic unity and social evolution together universalized the provincial European categories of magic, religion, and science (Sansi Roca 2018, 3;

Smith 1969, 409-412; Zwissler 2018, 3 and see Frazer 2015 [1890], 711). This universalization of provincial categories decontextualized locally specific cultural practices that Occultists then adopted as their own (Styers 2004, 18-19; Zwissler 2018, 3 and see Frazer 2015 [1890], 711).

Within his understanding of social evolution, Tylor (1920 [1871], 16) first formulated the concept of cultural "survivals," or traditional practices that continue as a "force of habit" throughout evolutionary stages of progress. Tylor's (ibid.) notion of survivals provided a framework from which Occultists could further adopt practices construed as ancient (Zwissler 2018, 3). Tylor (1920 [1871], 137) further noted that "modern Occult sciences," like Spiritualism, were not merely "passive survivals" but were "active revivals." Revivals, for Tylor (ibid., 138, 142), were like infectious diseases of superstition that afflicted the uneducated masses in "progressive societies." Tylor's (ibid., 159) disdain for Spiritualism, Occult sciences, and other revivals of "antiquity and savagery" were rooted in his Quaker upbringing and his later naturalized rationalism (Stocking Jr. 1971, 103-104).

The "psychic force" supposedly responsible for sound and movement in Spiritualist seances, for example, resonated with Tylor's (1920 [1871], 426) Quaker-based sensibilities that God's "Spirit" had the power to affect the material world (Stocking Jr. 1971, 96, 103 and see Brinton 1959, 2, 9; Tylor 1920 [1871], 134, 144, 426). His departure from his Quaker background for 19th-century naturalized rationalism, however, committed him to perceiving the Occultist phenomenon as fraudulent (Stocking Jr. 1971, 103-104 and see Styers 2004, 23). Tylor (1920 [1871], 141-142, 426) linked

Spiritualism to an Animistic revival because he perceived the former as a corollary to "savage philosophy and peasant folk-lore."

Animism was a theory that Tylor (1903 [1871], 153) developed to break from former notions of fetishism that proposed so-called "primitive" people worshiped objects (Sansi Roca 2018, 2-3). He argued that fetish-theory overlooked the Animistic belief that spirits embodied such objects (ibid.). Tylor's (1920 [1871], 137-142, 426) research on Spiritism was the basis for Animistic theory because he correlated both to a belief in how "Spiritual beings are held to affect or control the events of the material world, and man's life here and hereafter." His theory of Animism, therefore, directly mirrored Occultist practices that sought to utilize "Spiritual beings" from diverse cultural and historical contexts to alter the material world (Zwissler 2018, 3 and see Tyler 1920 [1871], 134, 144, 426). Frazer's (2015 [1890], 44-48) notions of magic built upon Tylor's (1903 [1871], 153; 1920 [1871], 16 134, 144, 426) framework of survivals and Animism, which correlated with Occultist appropriation of ancient and distant cultural practices (Styers 2004, 18-19; Zwissler 2018, 3).

Both Frazer (2015 [1890]) and Tylor (1920 [1871]) utilized a comparative method that searched for cross-cultural similarities across geographical regions and historical contexts (Smith 1969, 19). Their comparative projects incongruously universalized locally specific practices (ibid., 427). Smith (ibid.) states that this incongruity is deliberate, as Frazer (2015 [1890]) manipulated historical and cultural data to support his theories of social evolution and psychic unity. Tylor's (1920 [1871], 424-428) theory of Animism had further established a theoretical predisposition within transdiscursive

naturalized rationalism that made Frazer's (2015 [1890], 48-50 159-163, 711) explanations of magic widely accepted (following Foucault 1984, 113; Hanegraaff 2012, 165-167; Styers 2004, 23, 77-79; Smith 1969, 409-412). As Wittgenstein (1993 [1967], 119) noted, Frazer's (2015 [1890], 48-50 159-163, 711) reasoning appealed to his fellow Englishmen because they already thought similarly.

Tylor (1920 [1871], 134, 141-144, 424-426) used contemporaneous Spiritualist practices to develop his theory of Animism; however, modern Occultists directly reformulated Frazer's (2015 [1890], 44-48, 159-163, 711) understanding of magic (Hanegraaff 1998, 87; Zwissler 2018, 3 and see Crowley 1995 [1944], 19, 40, 55, Styers 2004, 23). Frazer (2015 [1890], 48) stated that while magic "has done much evil, it has been the source of much good," in that, it gave way to scientific understanding. He concluded that magic was a "primitive" scientific rationale that observed natural laws, yet, magical practitioners believed human will could influence natural processes (Frazer 2016 [1890], 48-50 159-163, 711). As the Occultist Crowley (1995 [1944], 40) states, "Magick is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the Will. In other words, it is Science, Pure and Applied. This thesis has been worked out at great length by Dr. Sir J. G. Frazer."

Occultists share a like-minded understanding of religion with Marett, Tylor, and Frazer despite that the three all wrote from atheistic or agnostic viewpoints (Styers 2004, 10). Theories of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that defined magic and situated it within social evolution, then, coincided with the way Occultists viewed their own practices (ibid., 18). These theories provided reasoning that supported both Occultic and

positivistic assumptions regarding the universality of religious and magical practices (Zwissler 2018, 6 and see Foucault 1984, 109-116). Similarly, early 20th-century scholarly discourse appears to mirror how Muertistas conceptualize their own practices (see Bigliardi 2016, 312; Kristensen 2019, 140-141; Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165; Styers 2004, 18-19).

Manual Valadez (2008, 32), in the magazine *Devoción a La Santa Muerte*, for example, advises a new Muertista that no church can honor La Santa Muerte because current devotees received their practices from curanderos and shamans. Valadez (2007a, 4; 2007b, 32) further provides instructions on a "*trabajo de magia negra*" (black magic spell-work) involving La Santa Muerte and he advises a reader that the cult is not a religion. As a self-proclaimed expert on La Santa Muerte and esotericism, Valdez (2005, 23; 2007a, 4; 2007b, 32; 2008, 32) associates Muertista practice with magic in a manner that is antithetical to his own ideas of church and religion. Valadez's (2007a, 4; 2007b, 32; 2008, 32) understanding of La Santa Muerte echoes Durkheim's (2001 [1912], 43-44) claim that "[M]agic does not bind its followers to one another and unite them into a single group living the same life. *A church of magic does not exist*… Religion by contrast is inseparable from the idea of church."

Furthermore, Valadez's (2008, 32) use of the term "shaman" in describing practitioners that preceded modern Muertistas is an appropriation of Tungus ritual adepts in Siberia (Kehoe 2000, 1-5). This appropriation comes from Eliade (2000 [1961]) who first decontextualized shamanic practice within a universal classification of supposed

religious experience (Kehoe 2000, 1-5). Research in the 19th and 20th centuries, like that of Eliade (2000 [1961]), further promoted the Occult's cultural appropriation of local practices through "religionism" (see Hanegraaff 2012, 149). Religionism is an approach to the study of religion that posits religion is neither reducible to, nor contingent upon, society or culture (*sui generis*); rather, it exists independently as a matter of "direct, unmediated, personal experience of the divine" (ibid.). The religionist works of William James (2004 [1902]), Carl Jung (2014 [1969]), Mircea Eliade (1959), and Joseph Campbell (2008 [1949]) all influenced Occultists (see Hanegraaff 1998, 328-329; 2012, 327).

James, Jung, Eliade, and Campbell

James' (1842-1910) research on religious experience and the "Mind Cure" influenced Christians in North America looking for alternatives to doctrinal practices throughout the 20th century (Hedstrom 2012, 17). Jung (1875-1961) further helped to revitalize the Occult as it neared obscurity in the first half of the 20th century (Hanegraaff 1998, 294). Both James (2004 [1902]) and Jung (2014 [1969]) also influenced the transpersonal psychology movement within New Age holism (Hanegraaff 1998, 51). Eliade's (1907-1986) popularity in the 1960's built upon Jung's work when the former's books were best sellers among Occultists (ibid., 307). Campbell (1904-1987) utilized Jung's (2014 [1969], 8) notion of archetypes and the collective unconscious to develop a universalistic understanding of myth that influenced the Occult through 20th-century literature and cinema (Hanegraaff 2012, 208; McCutcheon 2014, 59).

A blending of Jung's (1966 [1938], 7) personal beliefs and his psychological research led him to investigate the psychology of "*homo religiosus*" or "religious man" (Ellwood 1994, 41). His interest in the psychology of religious man was first apparent in his dissertation "On Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena" (ibid.). Jung's pursuit for understanding the psychology of the Occult stemmed from his youth when he had an attraction to Swedenborgian teachings and Spiritualism (ibid.). The psychology of religious man developed with his conceptualization of the "archetype" and "individuation" that combined late 19th-century reproductions of Gnosticism and Romanticism (ibid., 44, 67). When combined, Gnosticism and Romanticism create a worldview that rejects materialist explanations and searches instead for universal knowledge thought to be innate within the human psyche (Ellwood 1999, 11; Hanegraaff 2008, 133; Hanegraaff 2003, 376n.36).

Archetypes are ideal representations within the supposed human collective unconscious that included: "the Father, the Mother, the Hero, and the Shadow" (Ellwood 1999, 44). Individuation is "the harmonious arrangement of these archetypes within the modern individual" (ibid., 67). Jung (1966 [1938], 112) claimed that individuation was the aligning of archetypes that produced a "transformation of man into a divine being." This transformation for Jung (ibid., 113) was the source of a religious experience that he considered "absolute" and as "a source of life, meaning, and beauty that has given a new splendor to the world and to mankind."

Eliade (1959, 14-15) followed Jung's (1966 [1938], 7) understanding of religious man. Eliade (1959, 14-15), however, defined "homo religiosus" in terms of the sacred

and the profane binary (Ellwood 1999, 110-112). For Eliade (1959, 14-15), "religious man" experienced place and time as sacred and was ontologically different from "non-religious" (modern) man's profane perception of an instrumental reality (Ellwood 1999, 110-112). Eliade (1959, 16), like Jung (1966 [1938], 112-113), viewed religious experience as a human universal that revealed an "ultimate reality." Eliade (1959, 16) rejected Tylor's (1920 [1871], 1) and Frazer's (2015 [1890], 711) claims that cultural uniformity—within the theories of psychic unity and social evolution—led to what they perceived as universal religious and magical practices. Instead, Eliade (1959, 16) warned that culture and history conditioned human religious experience. However, like Frazer (2015 [1890]) and Tylor (1920 [1871]), Eliade (1959) also disregarded historical and cultural differences so that his selective data supported his conception of religious man (Saliba 1976, 111; Smith 1969, 19, 409-412, 423-427).

Eliade (1959; 1991 [1961], 2020 [1961]), then, decontextualized local practices and restructured social phenomena to suit his already established presumptions (Gill 1998, 8; Saliba 1976, 115). His restructuring of social phenomena arose from a comparative approach and a phenomenological interpretation, in which, "the local submits to the universal" (Ellwood 1999, 5, 17; Gill 1998, 9; Hanegraaff 1998, 307). Phenomenological interpretation, here, refers to a methodology seeking to penetrate supposed hidden truths found within religious experience (Saliba 1976, 30). This phenomenological approach to religion begins with a gathering of data across cultures (ibid., 31). The researcher then attempts to find similarities across cultures that reveals a

universal experience of an ultimate reality that transcends the practitioner's own comprehension (Gill 1998, 8; Saliba 1976, 31).

Comparison within the phenomenology of religion accentuates similarities and disregards differences due to an assumption that cultural and historical contextualization obfuscates universal truths of an assumed ultimate reality (Saliba 1976, 33). Eliade's (1991 [1961], 44-45) notion of the "cosmic tree" is one example of his phenomenological interpretations that dismiss cultural and historical differences. For Eliade (ibid., 42), the cosmic tree was an *axis mundi*, or world center, that links "Earth, Heaven, and Hell," thus, allowing practitioners to transcend the profane everyday world. The cosmic tree is a phenomenological interpretation that conflates the culturally specific variations of the tree of the world, the tree of good and evil, and the tree of life (ibid., 42-45, 161-162). This conflation overlooks that the tree of good and evil and the tree of life are separate phenomena even within a singular cultural source (Astor-Aguilera 2004, 138-139; Genesis 2, 3, 3:22).

Like Eliade (1991 [1961], 42-45, 161-162), Campbell (2008 [1949], 334-336) interprets the tree of life as a world center that links humans to divine realms. Campbell (ibid.) also asserts the tree of life is a protector that transforms the "hero's" physical existence. Crowley (1995 [1944], 24), preceding Eliade (1991 [1961], 42-45, 161-162) and Campbell (2008 [1949], 334-336), had similar ideas concerning the tree of life. Crowley (1995 [1944], 16, 24, 31), in his view of the tarot, suggests the tree of life is "a map of the Universe" providing "Law, Restraint, Power, Protection and Stability." Following Crowley (ibid.), Priya creates a "tree of life" as she performs tarot within her

magical practice. Oddly, she rejects the notion that Crowley's (1995 [1944], 16, 24, 31) understanding of the tree of life informs her spell-work. As she states, "All Crowley did was take things from other cultures and claim he invented it. I get my information directly from my spirits and Madrina."

Priya created her tree of life by applying blood from her La Santa Muerte altar to one of her houseplants. This act gave sentience to the plant, she claims, so that it could protect her from harmful spirits that may enter her home. She states, "The tree of life is my first line of defense. The plant takes the hit for me if someone or something tries to harm me." Giving her plant love and care creates an expectation that she will receive the same in return. As her tree of life grows, she claims her magical powers increase and her insights deepen. Despite Priya's rejection of Crowley's (1995 [1944], 16, 24, 31) influence, his and Campbell's (2008 [1949], 334-336) conception of the tree of life appears to have informed her magical practice.

Campbell's (2008 [1949], 3-46) "monomyth" had a more direct, yet, subconscious, influence on popular culture than Eliade's (1959; 1991 [1961]; 2020 [1961]) phenomenology or Jung's (1966 [1938; 2014 [1969]) psychology. For example, George Lucas admits that Campbell's (2008 [1949]; 3-46) "monomyth" impacted the writer/director's vision for his *Star Wars* films (Gordon 1978; 324). These films saturated the public imagination with individuals transcending an alienating and desacralized world (Ellwood 1999, 127-129; Gordon 1978, 324). For Campbell (2008 [1949], 385-386), myth provided a social narrative that directed social change toward an individual finding of one's "higher self" (Ellwood 1999, 164). Like Jung (1966 [1938], 2, 7-9, 112-113) and

Eliade (1959, 14-16, 87-93), Campbell (2008 [1949], 3-46) developed his understanding of myth in subverting the particular for the universal and emphasizing the potential for social change through individual transformation (Ellwood 1999, 176-177).

The writings of Campbell (1988; 2002 [1968]; 2008 [1949]), Eliade (1959; 1991 [1961]; 2020 [1961]), and Jung (1966 [1938]; 2014 [1969]) did not merely have an academic intent; they were also attempts at providing a meaningful existence to their readers (Ellwood 1999, 176-177). The psychology of Jung (1966 [1938]), the monomyth of Campbell (2008 [1949], 3-46), and the phenomenological interpretations of Eliade (1959) inspired like-minded people throughout North America and Western Europe to seek transcendence in the middle of the 20th century (Ellwood 1999, 174-178). Campbell (1988, 284-285), for example, exhorted his students to "follow your bliss" as a method for overcoming the alienation of modernity. The universalization of locally distinct phenomenon and the promotion of social change through individual transcendence in the thinking of Jung (1966 [1938], 2, 8-9), Eliade (1959, 87-93), and Campbell (2002 [1968], 183-186; 2008 [1949], 3-46); however, also paralleled fascist ideations of the early 20th century (Ellwood 1994, 32-33).

For example, Jung (1966 [1938], 2, 8-9) believed there were "spiritual forces" within the human psyche that had transforming capabilities to liberate souls from the alienation of modern materialist worldviews. Ellwood (1999, 54) notes that Jungian psychology resonated with a fascist rejection of materialism and the promise of a spiritual transformation resulting from a nationalistic sense of self. This association with fascism relates to the 16th-century colonial reproduction of La Santa Muerte, as both developed

from the Enlightenment's Eurocentric appeals to universal human truth (following Hesse 2007, 659). Eliade (1959, 87-93) claimed that religious man sought a return to a time of origins, "to recover the *strong, fresh, pure world*." Ellwood (1999, 88) states that Eliade's nostalgia for origins began with his affiliation with the Romanian fascist group *The Legion of the Archangel Michael*. Campbell (2002 [1968], 183-186) claimed that Jewish influences on Christianity weakened the "wealth and glory" of individualism in modern Western cultures. It is Campbell's (ibid.) comments, backed by his lack of support for the United States' involvement in World War II, that led critics to accuse him of anti-Semitism (Ellwood 1999, 149).

Dubuisson (2003 [1998], 172-173) uses "metaphysical prejudice" to refer to phenomenological approaches to religion, like those of Eliade and Campbell, that resonate with fascist ideations (see Ellwood 1999, 29). Dubuisson (2003 [1998], 172-173) asserts that metaphysical prejudice results from a veiled theological agenda that maintains a Eurocentric superiority in phenomenological abstractions that disregard cultural specificity (see Hanegraaff 1998, 502; 2012, 277n69, 303, 352, 359-366, 370). This theological agenda, or "Pagan phenomenology," is a consequence of the lack of division between scholar and practitioner in religionist research (Davidsen 2012, 186; Dubuisson 2003 [1998], 172-173; Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177, 369). As Davidsen (2012, 186) states,

> The religionist, or loyalist-supernaturalist, research program within the study of paganism is the larger and more self-conscious one. Here paganism is studied from an explicitly pagan point of

> view, most often by pagans who have "gone native in reverse" by becoming academics, or, more rarely, by academics who have "gone native" by becoming pagans.

Eliade (1959), Jung (2014 [1969]), and Campbell (2008 [1949]) attended the annual conferences of Eranos (1933-1988) that brought practitioners and academic researchers together in search of the so-called "universalistic experiences of religion" (Hanegraaff 2012, 277, 307-308, 352).

Through interactions between scholars and practitioners, like at Eranos, a religionist perspective helped give rise to contemporary Pagan cultural appropriation (Hanegraaff 2012, 370). The contemporary Pagan/religionist perspective resembles James' (2004 [1902], 385) notion of "piecemeal supernaturalism," or, loosely structured organizations that search for a universalized experience of divinity that "breaks into the material world" (see Grieve 1995, 94). For James (2004 [1902], 385), piecemeal supernaturalism aligned his understanding of religious experience with practitioners who universalized experiences of divine immanence (see Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114; 2012, 277-352). Loosely structured organizations that bring practitioner and researcher together in piecemeal supernaturalism, then, appear to have transitioned to virtual forms of social life (Davidsen 2012, 188; Grieve 1995, 94; Hanegraaff 2012, 277, 307-308, 352).

Cultural Misappropriation of La Santa Muerte

Grieve (1995, 88), when the Internet was first available to the public, examined the extensive presence of virtual contemporary Pagan communities in 1993. Grieve (ibid., 87), at that time, suggested that a shared "feeling of energy" bound contemporary Pagans

together in “a virtual religious community.” Since then, contemporary Pagans have extended these virtual communities to include Muertistas and academics on their social media interactions (see Frigerio 2016, 267; Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020b, 196; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). R. Andrew Chesnut who, for example, authored the first English language academic book on La Santa Muerte, *Devoted to Death: The Skeleton Saint*, in 2012, posts regularly on the Facebook group Devoted to Death that, probably not coincidentally, bears the title of his book. His involvement with Muertistas is also evident in his SkeletonSaint.com website. According to Kingsbury and Chesnut (2020a, 27), Facebook features nearly one thousand La Santa Muerte groups with memberships now in the thousands.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Occultists, New Agers, contemporary Pagans, and Muertistas engage in an intermingling of practices and perspectives on social media (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Grieve 1995, 98-99; Hanegraaff 1998, 330, 366; Torres Ramos 2017, 46-51). The inclusive networks established by practitioners of various ethnicities on social media leads to negotiations of correct practices and accusations of cultural appropriation (see Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). While Muertistas of Mexican descent permit Occultic adoption of La Santa Muerte on social media, the decontextualizing and ignorance regarding the cultural roots of practices invites accusations of cultural misappropriation (see de la Torre 2016 [2013], 17-27; Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016 [2013], 52; Frigerio 2016, 267; Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre 2016 [2013], 371; Torres Ramos 2017, 51; Yllescas Illescas 2016, 82). Interactions between scholars and

practitioners on social media further exacerbates concerns of an Occultic misappropriation of La Santa Muerte among Muertistas of Mexican descent.

For part of my doctoral research, I engaged in regular conversations with The Santa Muerte Tradition Facebook group where members discussed Chesnut's (2012) book. Members follow his postings on social media and repost items they disagree with; for example, "I just read Andrew Chesnut's reply about many devotees asking for revenge…does he not know that one has to be careful that no hate or ill intentions are in the heart before approaching Santísima? We won't just ask for revenge right away." Group members perceive academic writings of La Santa Muerte as filtered through a "white lens" since Anglo authors are considered unlikely to "raise other voices besides their own." As of August 2021, the group had 130 members with 76 of those members being Muertistas of Mexican descent. While the group welcomes scholars and Occultists as members, there is concern that both could potentially invalidate La Santa Muerte traditions with cultural misappropriation. For example, after I first joined The Santa Muerte Tradition, a group member redressed myself as a colonizing Anglo researcher, which became an opportunity to educate me on the colonial history of the icon of Death.

The Santa Muerte Tradition Facebook group does not translate La Santa Muerte's name to Holy Death so I asked if the translation from Santa Muerte was more applicable to Saint Death or Holy Death. A devotee halted my inquiry by stating,

> If someone is correcting you about *Flaka* [La Santa Muerte], especially if it is someone who is from Mexico, or if their family are devotees, take into consideration that they probably know more than these so-called "scholars." A lot of the published work on her are from people who have no

> love for our saint and are just trying to make money. There is a certain way to pray, practice, and love our saint, go colonize someone else's culture.

This interaction highlights how aware and sensitive group members are of La Santa Muerte's European colonial legacy. Based on their awareness of colonialism the group has concerns regarding cultural misappropriation from both researchers and Occultists.

Occultists universalize disparate cultural practices similarly to that of Tylor (1920 [1871]), Frazer (2015 [1890]), Marett (1904), Durkheim (2001 [1912]), James (2004 [1902]), Jung (2014 [1969]), Eliade (1959), and Campbell (2008 [1949]). However, some members of The Santa Muerte Tradition also resonate with postmodern critiques that utilize a "hyperrelativitism" and challenge "the inequities of scholarly power" (Knauft 1996, 18). Postmodern literature, philosophy, and anthropology critiqued modern Western notions of universal truth and intellectual progress as discourses rooted in European colonialism (ibid., 19). Since the 1980's, postmodern influences on the political economy of Europe and North America shifted academic and popular thought toward a revaluing of "localized truths" over "universal truth" (Eagleton 2016, 40-41; Knauft 1996, 66).

The administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition, further accuses European and Anglo-North American Occultists of misappropriation when they dismiss or overlook Mexican culture within their devotional practice and/or spell-work. The group's understanding of misappropriation corresponds to colonial forms of cultural exploitation, or a domineering social group's use of elements from a subjugated collective without sufficient reciprocity (see Rogers 2006, 477). Some of these members, that have

researched how La Santa Muerte arose during the colonial period in Mexico, assert that they received their practices through oral history. As stated, for example, by the group's administrator who descends from a Mexican ethnic background,

> What makes things hard is that there isn't much of a time line to reference. Because of the attempt at wiping out Aztec history and how things were hidden it makes things hard sometimes. It is hard when secrecy was huge and so many were conditioned to fear the worship of our own gods and goddesses. It wasn't a peaceful transition when the Spaniards came, it was conform or die. Dress like us and put clothes on or die. Take our names we give you or die. Speak our language or die, and so on. This Santa Muerte, how we know her now, was adopted out of necessity.

For some group members, La Santa Muerte is an entity with a specific Mexican history and to use the name "Holy Death" is a form of "whitewashing." Translating La Santa Muerte's name also creates confusion regarding other descendants of Spanish Holy Death iconography like San La Muerte in Argentina and San Rey Pascualito from Guatemala. Associating La Santa Muerte with other Holy Death iconography brings about suspicions of ethnic ignorance on the perpetrator. As one group member stated regarding Holy Death iconography in the Philippines, "That's San Rey Pascualito, I don't get it…they're not even the same, and he's a dude. His powers are barely a fraction of one of Santísima's aspects." Another responded, "How can you look at that and go like 'yeah that's totally Madrina?'" Lastly, "It's like the death family and all the cousins keep claiming they are her…those are the Karens of the family."

The Santa Muerte Tradition favors the three robes tradition over the seven powers tradition, due to the latter being a marker of colonial entanglements with the transatlantic slave trade. The administrator of the group cited the seven powers as what "our

Caribbean brothers and sisters added to the Santísima." The groups' correlations of "translation" to "whitewashing," differing Holy Deaths as "Karens," and the acknowledgment of "our Caribbean brothers and sisters," demonstrates a resistance to colonial discourses that decontextualize cultural phenomena within a supposedly post-colonial context (see Frigerio 2016 [2013], 47; Rogers 2006, 500).

For the group's administrator, not translating La Santa Muerte's name and keeping track of where practices originate from are important because popularity of the cult is "skyrocketing" and respect must be shown to "how she has presented herself to us." As she states, "Too many times people will not know Santa Muerte or her history and they just see her acting fast so they cling to her without any knowledge." The name "La Santa Muerte" reveals its cultural identity, even though, group members admit that the icon of Death originated in Europe as a social leveler that comes for everyone regardless of one's cultural or religious identification.

Some members of The Santa Muerte Tradition, then, including the group's administrator, promote the cultural patrimonialization of La Santa Muerte, or the projection of a mestiza identity onto the medieval Western European icon of Death (see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106). While La Santa Muerte's cultural heritage demands respect among members, the group paradoxically holds an inclusivist position that asserts new Occultist devotees must develop their own personal relationship with Death (see de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8; Hanegraaff 1998, 185, 188, 195; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). This inclusivist approach has its limits, as only Occultists that agree La Santa Muerte is not translatable to Holy Death remain in the group.

As a member of The Santa Muerte Tradition, Priya adheres to the cultural patrimonialization of Holy Death (see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106). While she contends that spirits operate according to cultural allegiances, she also claims that La Santa Muerte guides her to "make friends" with spirits that she links to Louisiana Voodoo and Indigenous North American cultures. Priya is Indo-Surinamese, but she believes her mom cut her off from Hindu devas because of their difficult relationship. In her view, La Santa Muerte, and "spirits" from other cultures, adopted her due to her mother's toxic parenting. This adoption narrative functions as a defense against accusations she receives on social media that Priya is guilty of cultural misappropriation (see Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209; Torres Ramos 2017, 51).

Accusations that she is guilty of cultural misappropriation are sources of frustration and angst for Priya. She states that it is only misappropriation if one treats other cultures as "mere commodities," or, when "People take from cultures to decorate their home with it, like some people do with African masks." Priya justifies her use of practices and objects from other cultures as being more respectful than the Western appropriation of Indian yoga. Like The Santa Muerte Tradition group, then, Priya's concerns over misappropriation are more closely related to ideas of cultural exploitation as a continuation of European colonialism (see Rogers 2006, 477, 500). Despite her birth in the Netherlands, Priya identifies with the historical trauma of colonialism, as she is the descendent of Hindustani indentured servants in the Dutch colony of Suriname.

The Santa Muerte Tradition disparages Rollin's (2017) book for using "Pagan" practices adopted from a multitude of cultures. For example, Rollin (ibid., 116, 128-130, 144-155) describes consecrating an altar for Holy Death with dirt from crossroads, which is a practice derived from African diaspora cultures (Matory 2016, 378; Johnson 2007, 111, 156, 179). She also prefers to use La Santa Muerte's seven powers schema as reproduced from African diaspora cultures (Rollin 2017, 80-82). She further decontextualizes cultural practices in her instructions on how to conduct a banishing ritual, as devised by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (a brotherhood of Occultists), which she blends with an "Aztec ritual" (ibid., 128-130). Rollin (ibid., 50-66), then, is less concerned than members of The Santa Muerte Tradition in adhering to the cultural particularities of the practices she adopts.

Rollin (2017, 62) links her devotion to La Santa Muerte with the return of the Great Mother, who she understands to have recently manifested as "Our Lady of Holy Death." For Rollin (ibid., 50-66), La Santa Muerte emerged previously as Mictecacihuatl, Cybele, the Fates, and Hecate. This Mother/Death complex has feminine powers that are equally creative and destructive (ibid., 62). According to her, she does not appropriate disparate cultural or religious identities because powerful beings of death and motherhood are universal personifications of impersonal forces (ibid., 56-57). Her rationale explains, in her logic, why there are so many interchangeable "Pagan gods" and Catholic saints that are used for "virtually any purpose" (ibid., 43). Rollin's (ibid., 56-57) understanding of La Santa Muerte as a personification of universal and impersonal forces

aligns with phenomenological interpretations that decontextualize local practices (see Ellwood 1999, 5, 17; Frigerio 2016 [2013], 47; Hanegraaff 1998, 307; Saliba 1976, 111).

John, who I met in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, self-identifies with the Occult and La Santa Muerte. For him, cultural inclusivity supersedes any ethnic boundaries constructed by some members in The Santa Muerte Tradition. John states, "La Santa Muerte is not some special Mexican avatar of Death. People of all cultures and languages die. There is no reason an English speaker cannot translate her name to Holy Death." Unlike Rollin (2017, 56-57) and Priya, John's emphasis on inclusivity, in his personalized Death devotion, comes from his cultural background. As he elaborates, "As a Mexican American growing up in Los Angeles, I felt like I lived in two worlds at the same time…I wasn't Mexican or white enough for either world." In his devotion to La Santa Muerte, then, he seeks to promote inclusivity with "no borders and no colors."

For the administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition, however, colonial history and cultural specificity trump concerns of inclusivity. Still, the administrator is careful to avoid what she considers to be religious intolerance while promoting her own version of La Santa Muerte orthopraxy. Her vigilance against cultural misappropriation diminishes when her personal beliefs align with Occultists. She permits conflictive views on La Santa Muerte if group discourse operates within her own specified parameters of cultural sensitivity. She creates a sense of tradition that she promotes as a self-evident truth, stating "just because La Santa Muerte has a reputation for acting swiftly, one needs to be aware of Death's history." She thus reasons that respect to La Santa Muerte's Mexican heritage is a vital aspect of correct devotional practice.

The group's administrator structures her discourses of "correct practices" that invites Occultic inclusivity but rejects universalizing La Santa Muerte. Her discourse operates according to Bourdieu's (1977 [1972], 164) notion of doxa, or the enactment of axioms that operate outside of theological claims of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Occultist emphasis on inclusivity and universalism or Muertista patrimonialization are discourses that developed socially, historically, and institutionally, yet, they persist into the present in a mostly unconscious way (following Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 72-73, 79, 164 and see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Hanegraaff 1998, 185, 188, 195). The oppositional discourses from Muertistas and Occultists reflects Bourdieu's (1977 [1972], 72-73, 79) habitus, or taken for granted structures in an individual's everyday life.

The Santa Muerte Tradition administrator is a woman of Mexican descent, living north of the Mexico/United States border, while John lives south of the border where concerns of cultural misappropriation of La Santa Muerte appear less magnified. The Southwestern United States borderland has a distinct culture with its own unique identities and everyday concerns (Vásquez and Marquardt 2003, 63). Religious traditions are important markers of identity within cultural networks of ethnic intermingling (ibid.). Vila (2005, 35), for example, notes that family members living in Mexico sometimes accost their relatives residing in the United States borderland for altering cultural traditions. In culturally hybrid contexts, like the mentioned Facebook groups and the Southwestern United States Borderlands, there seems to be a heightened vigilance against possible cultural misappropriations.

Magic and Materiality

Despite concerns of cultural misappropriation, La Santa Muerte's materiality gathers a diverse assemblage of individuals through Death's iconicity (following Dreyfus 1996, 2-3, 12; Heidegger 1971 [1951], 150-151). According to King (2010, 25), devotion to the same icon unites people across social divides and over generations. Muertistas and Occultist devotees of Holy Death both follow the Roman Catholic tradition of clothing effigies of Jesus, the saints, and Mary, which allows La Santa Muerte's iconic form to appear as a living sacred presence (Perdigón Castañeda 2015, 44 and see Whitehead 2008, 171-176). Views of La Santa Muerte's materiality as a living sacred presence stem from medieval ideas of divinity's correspondence with holy objects (see Bynum 2011, 30-35).

Questions regarding the life-like aspects of divine matter was central to theological discourses between the 12th and 15th centuries in Western Christendom (Bynum 2011, 255-256). As Bynum (ibid.) states, "[T]he eruption of the holy in matter…[as] the bursting forth of life could be understood as matter triumphing over exactly the change it represented… [O]bjects bodied forth transcendence and eternity as well as materiality." This medieval European association of materiality and divinity endowed life-like attributes to inanimate objects and images in modern forms of lived Catholicism (Freedberg 1989, 297; Orsi 2010 [1985], xviii-xix). Orsi (2010 [1985], xvi) refers to the attribution of life to devotional objects as a "logic of presence."

As noted in chapter three, Spanish Catholicism possessed a fluid distinction between generalized theological devotion to Mary and the individual power of specific

Marian icons (Lee 2007, 107-108). This type of Marian devotion is not unique to Spain. In Italy, for example, there are 397 unique titles for local Madonnas with their own processions, feasts, and sanctuaries (Carroll 1992, 59-62). As with devotees in the cult of Mary, Muertistas maintain that there is only one Death and, yet, devotees also establish personal relationships with their own La Santa Muerte effigies (see Kristensen 2014, 13). Orsi (2016, 40-41) shows that Roman Catholics who believe icons contain the immanent presence of Mary become figures of suspicion in the construction of modern secular nations. This logic of presence that conflates an icon with the (semi-)divine actor it represents resonates with modernity's rejection of magic as "an overinvestment in signs" (Styers 2004, 220 and see Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 7-11, 38, 249-252).

Conflating an icon with what it resembles results in relationships that attribute person-like qualities to La Santa Muerte effigies within a familial-like network of things and people (following Gell 1998, 123). As Kristensen (2014, 13) suggests, when devotees view Death as an icon that simultaneously embodies and resembles, they treat their own effigies in a relational manner. In this conflation of signifier and signified, La Santa Muerte's iconic form becomes a person-like presence that allows devotees to create intimate relationships with Death (see Kristensen 2014, 13; Maniura 2011, 52; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; 2011, 14). For example, a Muertista in the The Santa Muerte Tradition Facebook group referred to La Santa Muerte as "a good Mexican mother to her children." Occultist devotees I have met, also refer to La Santa Muerte as a mother-like figure who is capable of sentiments of compassion, love, and non-judgmental assistance.

The relationships devotees form with the icon of Death intertwines with sociocultural understandings of how practitioners attribute agency to objects (see Bynum 2011, 30-35; Gell 1998, 17). Social relationships that develop between objects and humans, however, are subject to empirical discourses that counter sociocultural observations (Latour 1993 [1991], 71). After the rise of empiricism in Western secular nations, the dominant cultural rationale asserted that human subjects are the only sources of agency within social contexts (Latour 1993 [1991], 71; Gell 1998, 9; Russell 2007, 76-77). Regardless of how or why one may ascribe agency to an object, it remains reducible to human attribution within empirical analysis (Latour 2004, 163-168; Russell 2007, 76). According to Russell (2007, 73), "Simply put, although 'object agency' seeks to unite a constructed dichotomy between humans and the objects which constitute the matter of their observations, it simultaneously supports the dualistic paradigm of subject and object, of agent and object."

Devotees in The Santa Muerte Tradition often grant agency to an effigy as evinced when they claim unwarranted movement on altars has occurred. Interpretations then follow as to what La Santa Muerte wants in moving the object. For example, if the scales held by La Santa Muerte tip in one direction or the other, it means the devotee has upset Death. The adherent then needs to figure out what they have done wrong to get the scales corrected. If the adherent adjusts the scales, or does not sincerely rectify the issue, then devotees fear that La Santa Muerte will take vengeance on the perpetrator. Devotees also appear to attribute agency to Death's material form in choosing an effigy. As noted previously, Rollin (2017, xiv) attributed agency to Death iconography in asking an image

of La Santa Muerte to "reveal herself " to her. Likewise, Priya attributed agency when suggesting a particular effigy "wanted" to go home with her.

Priya further attributes subjectivity to objects that she turns into "sentient beings" through her La Santa Muerte spell-work. For example, Priya applies the blood from her La Santa Muerte altar to a pair of dolls in her home, noting that such an act "enchants non-sentient things." Her enchanted objects become spiritual protectors that she claims are extensions of herself and La Santa Muerte. She knows how outsiders perceive this conflation of subjects and objects and admits that those close to her have accused her of having schizophrenia (see Latour 2004, 163-164). Priya's notion of "enchanted" objects is referred to in the modern context as "re-enchantment" (see Russell 2007, 74). The process of enchantment, then disenchantment, and finally re-enchantment, is an influential aspect of the academic study of religion that originated with Max Weber (1864-1920) (see Hanegraaff 2003, 358; Russell 2007, 74).

Weber (1958 [1919], 139, 148, 149, 158) borrowed his use of disenchantment from Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) in the latter's poetic imagining of the demise of ancient Greek daemons (Lyons 2014, 879). Schiller's (2012 [1788]) poem "The Gods of Greece" laments the death of the "enchanted" world of the ancient Greeks. According to Weber (1958 [1919], 148-149), enchantment refers to how practices that invoked a multitude of powerful non-human entities operated according to a relativism not bound by Christianity's universalizing worldview. Weber (ibid., 149) asserted that modernity's own version of a relativistic worldview developed because of medieval Western Christendom's failure to maintain a singular, ultimate, and objective Truth (see Asad

1986, 360). Weber (1958 [1919], 139, 149) utilized Schiller's (2012 [1788]) concept of disenchantment, then, to discuss modernity's reliance on relativism, but within an empirical, mechanistic, and impersonal view of nature.

Modern empiricism resulted in an "intellectualization" that made the human subject the only social actor of relevance (Latour 1993 [1991], 70-73; Latour 2004, 163-164; Lyons 2014, 875-877). Applying Weber's (1958 [1919], 139) intellectualization helps explain, and thereby dismiss, Priya's conflation of subjects and objects in her La Santa Muerte spell-work (see Hanegraaff 2003, 375; Latour 1993 [1991], 71; Whitehead 2008, 166). As Weber (1958 [1919], 139) concludes,

> The world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means.

Throughout the 20th century, intellectualization, or the so-called "secularization thesis," not only dominated academic thought but permeated popular thought as well (Hanegraaff 2003, 358; Lyons 2014, 873-874).

Later social analysis, however, problematized Weberian disenchantment due to the continued appeal of magic in modernity and critiques that empirical thinking dominates modern institutions (Clark 2003, 113-114, 250n.8; Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Hanegraaff 2003, 358; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20). For example, Evans-Pritchard (1965, 97) first addressed problems with the so-called secularization thesis in showing how Western rationality depicted in "socialism, parliaments, democracy, universal suffrage, republics, [and] progress" are more sentimental than empirical. Nevertheless, since practitioners

themselves internalized the secularization thesis, Hanegraaff (2003, 359-360) suggests that modern Occultist practice is a form of "disenchanted magic." This disenchanted magic is a reproduction of Renaissance theories of correspondences, the *spiritus*, and demonic intervention (ibid., 361).

Correspondences relate to a sense of harmony within an established order of things that resulted from God's singular act of creation (Hanegraaff 2003, 362). The theory of correspondence claimed that God's act of creation established a relationship between signifier and signified as real and tangible affinities (ibid., 366-367). This correspondence of affinities aligned magic with what constituted knowledge during the Renaissance (Foucault 1970 [1966], 32; Hanegraaff 2003, 362). An alternative to correspondences was the spiritus, or a mysterious and invisible "subtle body," that had more substance than a soul but was less tangible than a body (Hanegraaff 2003, 363). Due to its subtleness, the spiritus mediated between the spiritual and material realms (ibid.). Demonic intervention was more of an accusation than a theory and this led Renaissance magicians to formulate the previous two theories as a defense against charges of idolatry and witchcraft (ibid., 364).

According to Hanegraaff (2003, 366), disenchanted magic still functions according to correspondences, the spiritus, or demonic intervention, but now within a modern empirical rationale. The correlation of disenchanted magic to Renaissance magic is evident in Crowley's (1994 [1912], v, 9, 31) adding of a "k" to "magick" to differentiate "frivolous" modern stage magic from "serious" Occult practice (Taylor and Nolan 2015, 128 and see Crowley 1969 [1929], 725-727, 838-839). Crowley (1994

[1912], v) derived his "magick" spelling from 16th-century England as utilized by Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) on his work on the occult. Both Agrippa (1993 [1531], i-ii) and Crowley (1969 [1929], 838-839) wanted to restore magic to what they perceived as earlier states of grandeur in their respective eras (see Hanegraaff 2016, 400).

Correspondences for modern practitioners requires a belief in a personal creator-God (Hanegraaff 2003, 367). Nevertheless, as demonstrated previously in Rollin's (2017, 56-57, 144, 154-155) Pagan rosary, some Occultists assume they can circumvent a creator-God with a lesser spirit (see Hanegraaff 2003, 367). Modern Occultists, then, are more likely to ascribe to the disenchanted theory of the spiritus, wherein, spirits move between two distinct yet parallel spiritual and material realities (ibid., 368-370). Priya's view appears the closest to the theory of the spiritus in relating her understanding to the "stroboscopic effect." She states, for example,

> As I mentioned before, time isn't linear. It's pretty much like an image with billions and billions of layers stacked onto each other. Each layer has a picture of what happened in that moment. It is the stroboscopic effect, since every action has a consequence. Imagine how your room would look like if you walk around and every second there is another version of you. Now imagine spirits and deities to be able to navigate through these layers and give you a heads up about something that will happen soon. They give me things before I know that I need them… In short, spirits can navigate through dimensions.

Priya refuses to identify herself within demystifying classifications like the disenchanted spiritus. Instead, she states, "I do not have a fantasy name for myself, like necromancer…I have no lineage, no physical teacher. I am my own teacher with whatever spirits come to me." Like the development of demonic intervention to

legitimize the Renaissance theories of correspondences and the spiritus, modern Occultists and Muertistas defend themselves against stigmatizing classification (Hanegraaff 2003, 369 and see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 4; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 408-409, 516; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Styers 2004, 223-226). Muertistas that identify as Catholic, therefore, confront stigmas that they are making an error of faith and Occultists defend themselves against accusations that they are making an intellectual error (see Hanegraaff 2012, 162).

Muertistas and Occultists, therefore, share a rejection of an empirically rationalized everyday life that they perceive as conforming to repressive, and/or oppressive, modern conventions (see Luhrmann 1989, 277–279). As previously mentioned, Muertistas in Mexico and the United States Southwest Borderlands often mistrust the state and institutions in regions where economic inequality, political corruption, street violence, and high mortality rates are part of everyday life (Bromley 2016, 4; Martín 2017, 4). Occultists tend to feel that modernity disparages their practices in relation to spirits (see Clifton 2016, 343). What unites Muertistas and Occultists who have adopted forms of disenchanted magic, then, is the rejection of an empirical view of reality that claims to be all encompassing (following Hanegraaff 2003, 375).

Muertistas and Occultists are thus engaged in a "Romantic counter-ideology" that rejects authoritative scientific claims that there is only one rational basis on which to make everyday life decisions (see Hanegraaff 2003, 376n.36). As Crowley (1969 [1929], 125), for example, stated,

> From the nature of things, therefore, life is a sacrament; in other words, all our acts are magical acts. Our spiritual consciousness acts through the will and its instruments upon material objects, in order to produce changes which will result in the establishment of the new conditions of consciousness which we wish. That is the definition of Magick.

These new conditions of consciousness for Crowley (1969 [1929], 125, 350) came about from a rejection of modern institutions that restricted the individual into a "deformity of nature produced by its inadequacy to deal with its environment." Restrictions that Crowley (ibid., 350-362) claimed to suffer from in his childhood led him to create a form of magic that embraced social deviancy. For Occultists, this release from social constraints leads to a legitimization of their practices (Luhrmann 1989, 17).

Priya, for example, regularly felt the desire to legitimize her practices during our conversations. As she once stated, "I am a woman of science. Science is just magic explained to humans." She regards her understanding of magic and La Santa Muerte as deeper insights into science. Prior to starting her magical practice, she studied nursing and then structural engineering before the deaths of her parents and the birth of her son terminated those pursuits. She claims these forays into the medical and engineering sciences were really Death unwittingly preparing her for her magical training. In having a clientele that depends on her, she now feels like a "spiritual vigilante" whose spells are weapons that only work for those who suffer. She suggests that La Santa Muerte changed her life from a struggle for survival amidst material circumstances out of her control, to an everyday fight for what she perceives as social justice through spell-work.

The Icon of Death in the 21st Century

Just as Priya found self-growth in her devotion to La Santa Muerte, another devotee I met on social media shared a similar sentiment. Amy is a self-proclaimed astrologer and psychic who stated,

> Santa Muerte has recently developed a reputation of being a "gangster saint" due to some of her devotees being members of various mobs, gangs, and cartels. This also goes for devotees who are formerly or currently incarcerated… She is far more than just a saint of death; she represents redemption. For us to be redeemed and become our better selves, the old self must die… She is a saint of second chances and new opportunities. She believes that we can all become better people if we work hard and actively reflect on ourselves… Santa Muerte is known for being a saint of people who have been rejected or outcasted by society, such as LGBT people, disabled people, mentally ill people, the poor, and all people who have faced persecution. She adds kindling to the light inside us, so that we may shine out into our better selves, the selves we truly were all along.

Priya and Amy are not alone in their perception of La Santa Muerte as opening avenues for individual empowerment among those who feel rejected within their communities. This perception of Death as a pathway for self-growth appears to be a growing trope among Occultists and Muertistas within inclusive networks on social media.

The administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition, for example, created the Facebook group because she believes Death told her that she needed to share her knowledge with others. She thought a social media group would allow her to share the "proper way" to perform *trabajos* (spell-work) and catalog new information she receives from other folk magicians. She is intent on others learning "correct practices" from her. While she hopes her efforts will keep La Santa Muerte's "true traditions alive," she

considers herself a Muertista and folk magician, whom, from an early age had a natural inclination toward Occult practices. Her presence in the inclusive network she created is not politically neutral and she appears to have a self-imposed ethical obligation to her group members. For example, she exhorts group members to follow COVID-19 regulations and to educate themselves on the Black Lives Matter movement. She asserts that Mexican culture should be central to La Santa Muerte devotion and strives to achieve group solidarity where everyone is "brothers and sisters and will treat one another with respect."

She has established her own sense of tradition that group members seem to internalize as axiomatic. Through her charismatic presence in the group, she has become a "self-help guru," reminiscent of those popularized by New Age consumers (see Hanegraaff 1998, 488). She also encourages new members to follow her principles as a way toward self-growth. As she states,

> Sometimes it's best to just let Santa Muerte guide you even if you don't understand. A spiritual journey doesn't happen overnight, there's no cutting corners and there will definitely be times where you question your path simply because your growth allows you to see the bigger picture. Releasing old views to adapt to new ones is never easy, change isn't easy, but it's necessary. Sometimes it hurts. But in the end, you end up with something beautiful similar to a caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly, from crawling to flying.

Another devotee that is perpetuating La Santa Muerte, as a form of self-growth, is my previously mentioned informant named John who self-identifies as both Muertista and Occultist. He is an online Doctor of Business Administration student enrolled at

Apollo University. In his efforts to help new devotees, he has self-published five guide books and has his own La Santa Muerte website for practitioners of "magick." John's use of the "k" in his spelling of magick is attributable to his interest in the Occultic practices of Aleister Crowley. As a teenager, he spent his spare time at Glendale Public Library in Southern California reading about the Occult, magic, and mythology ascribed to pre-Christian cultures.

After serving as a military policeman in the United States Air Force and completing his bachelor's degree in criminal justice at American Military University, John worked as a marketing freelance writer in Los Angeles before he moved, for financial reasons, to Tijuana in 2016. At that time, he had his first encounter with La Santa Muerte at a Tijuana public shrine in a folk medicine shop. Since this first experience, John has come to think of Death as a source of love that embraces everyone equally. He believes that La Santa Muerte selected him for his writing abilities so that he could function as a teacher and guide for others. For John, La Santa Muerte is a personification of Death that he does not qualify as a spirit or deity, but as a reality greater than any "god." As he states, "None of us really know with any kind of certainty that God or any gods exist, but we all know, we are all guaranteed, that we are going to die." He refers to La Santa Muerte as the "great equalizer" which he knowingly correlates to medieval and colonial ideas of Death (see Aberth 2010, 231; Eire 1995, 10; León 2004, 124; Lomnitz 2005, 490-496). According to John, La Santa Muerte loves everyone equally regardless of personal behavior. He further claims that Death wants and inspires

people to enjoy material gain and to take advantage of all the physical pleasures life has to offer.

There is no sense of austerity or self-denial in John's practice which resonates with Crowley's (1969 [1929], 48-53, 125, 350-362) self-description of his own "magickal" practice. The attraction to La Santa Muerte, for him, is based on his understanding that devotion does not adhere to a strict moral code that represses human desires including the libido and material excess. The spells that he creates reflect this lack of a strict moral code and a devotion aligned with gaining material advantages. His spells are situated as balancing negative and positive aspects of the same concerns. For example, he has created spells for causing or curing male impotency; healing and creating relationship problems; causing and eliminating weight gain; causing success and failure in business; and hexing and hex protection.

Due to the oppositional formulation of his spells, people often ask John for advice on competing interests among rival practitioners. On issues of competing interests, he suggests that La Santa Muerte will always favor the one who is most deserving. He adds that there is no reason for one to feel discouraged if La Santa Muerte favors their rival. Instead, a failed petition is an opportunity to look inward at oneself and reflect on their character defects. His ideas on competing interests among rivals is an example of reproductions of the icon of Death that are unique to the 21st century. His guidance toward self-growth through La Santa Muerte, therefore, echoes the New Age focus on "spiritual development" (see Hanegraaff 2000, 288-289).

New Age spiritual development began with the human potential movement dating back to the 1960's in the United States (Hanegraaff 1998, 50-54). The human potential movement led to New Age holistic psychological healing, in which participants take personal responsibility for their actions and thoughts (ibid., 518). In the affirmations John created for practitioners, he asserts his understanding of La Santa Muerte as a pathway to self-growth or spiritual development (Hanegraaff 1998, 42-53; 2000, 288-289). For example, the following affirmation that John shared with me,

> I am loved by Santa Muerte. I am blessed by her favor. I am recognized by her power. I am happy that I awoke today. I am healthy in body and mind. I am able to pursue my dreams. I am powerful because I am alive. I am calm and collected. I am comfortable in my skin. I am better than I have ever been. I am more wise than ever before. I am strong enough to face the world.

This correlation to holistic psychology and the human potential movement demonstrates a continued slide toward New Age thinking that is a direct influence of Occultic reproductions of La Santa Muerte and is a trend that appears to be gaining momentum.

The New Age thinking within Occultist reproductions of La Santa Muerte is the result of individual responses to institutional authority within everyday lived practices (following Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 4; Knauft 1996, 106-108; Orsi 1997, 8-10; Ortner 1984, 144-148). Platonic dualism's "God of things" is the foundation for how Occultist and Muertista lived practices became initially entangled (see Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317; Orsi 2016, 40-41). Occultists adopted Muertista practices due to a like-minded approach to magic the former shares with academic theories of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and phenomenological

interpretations that subvert local differences for universal similarities (see Ellwood 1999, 5, 17; Hanegraaff 1998, 307, 408; Saliba 1976, 111; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20).

When Occultic adoption does not adhere strictly enough to the cultural patrimonialization of La Santa Muerte, accusations of misappropriation follow (see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). A logic of presence associated with La Santa Muerte devotion/spell-work, however, maintains the tenuous or loosely structured affiliations between Occultist and Muertista in virtual communities (see Grieve 1995, 87-88; Frigerio 2016, 267; James 2004 [1902], 385; Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020b, 196; Orsi 2011, 14; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). The materiality of La Santa Muerte, then, gathers Muertistas and Occultists through shared intimate relationships and practices associated with the icon of Death (see Dreyfus 1996, 2-3, 12; Kristensen 2014, 13; Maniura 2011, 52; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2011, 14). As Orsi (2005, 74) states, "Once made material, the invisible can be negotiated and bargained with, touched and kissed, made to bear human anger and disappointment."

Both Muertistas and Occultists engage in "an overinvestment in signs" that is part of a Romantic counter-ideology (disenchanted magic) that rejects scientific discourses as the final authority over reality (see Hanegraaff 2003, 375, 376n.36; Styers 2004, 220). In the 21st century, La Santa Muerte reveals how the reproduction of the icon of Death unites a diverse assemblage of people that negotiate cultural differences in inclusive networks. In what follows, all the previous chapters come together in an end discussion of how the icon of Death gathers diverse practitioners within devotions deemed deviant.

7 END DISCUSSION: SUBVERSIVE REPRODUCTIONS

A material culture approach to lived religion within this dissertation has analyzed how devotees interact with objects in practices that reproduce and/or transform prevailing structures (see Armstrong 1971, 4, 10; Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 4; Long 1986, 9; Orsi 1997, 9; Sahlins 1981, 67-68; Vásquez 2011, 6). The reproduction of the icon of Death as La Santa Muerte in everyday devotional practices transforms Death into a saint-like entity (following de Certeau 1984, xiii). These devotional practices altered the icon of Death from a material reminder of human dying to a spiritual entity associated with deviancy (Bromley 2016, 6; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Lomnitz 2005, 490-496; Martín 2014, 204-206; Michalik 2011, 163, 174-175 and see Styers 2004, 17-19). La Santa Muerte's iconicity signifies the social leveling aspects of human death, and therefore, creates a material focal point for a "gathering" of devotional practice perceived as deviant (following Dreyfus 1996, 2-3, 12-13 and see Bromley 2016, 6; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Lomnitz 2005, 490-496; Martín 2014, 204-206).

Gathering is a concept that stems from Heidegger's (1993 [1947], 228-235) view that human actions develop within a social ordering of things and people. This structuring of subjects and objects depends upon a particular culture's basic ontological assumptions (Dreyfus 1996, 2-3). For example, Christian understandings of divinity order things and people into the categories of "worldly" and "spiritual" (Heidegger 1993 [1947], 228-230). Heidegger (1971 [1951], 150-151) explicates his concept of gathering as,

> The bridge *gathers*, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities—whether we explicitly think of, and visibly *give thanks for*, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge, or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushed wholly aside…The bridge *gathers* to itself in its *own* way earth and sky, divinities and mortals…Gathering or assembly, by an ancient word of our language, is called "thing." The bridge is a thing—and, indeed, it is such *as* the gathering of the fourfold which we have described.

The icon of Death, then, is a "thing" that gathers devotees toward what they perceive as a divine "presence" (following Orsi 2011, 15-16; 2016, 4-11, 38, 249-252). Presence, here, referred to the appearance and attendance of a powerful entity in one's life (Orsi 2010 [1985], xviii-xix). Intimate relationships develop between devotees and La Santa Muerte through the mediation of a material representation that provides practitioners an outlet for their fears, love, and anger (following Orsi 2005, 74). Relationships with the icon of Death thus orders practitioners' actions toward a familial-like devotional network of things and people (following Gell 1998, 123).

La Santa Muerte is an icon of Death that developed from ancient Greco-Roman chthonic daemons, 1st-century Judeo-Christian pseudepigrapha, medieval European Grim Reaper-like figures, and 16th-century Spanish colonization (see Allison 2003, 324-325; Burkhart 2004, 29, 50-51; Chesnut 2012, 27-33; Farrone 1991, 4; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51). Devotees form intimate bonds with the icon of Death that resemble relationships between adherents and saints in Roman Catholicism (see Brown 1981, 4; Chesnut 2012, 6-7; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi-xix). Muertistas are lived Catholic devotees that favor the icon of Death over official saints due to poverty, hazardous or lack of employment, illegal immigration, sexual issues, criminal affiliations,

and imprisonment (Bastante and Dickieson 2013, 436; Bromley 2016, 4; Chesnut 2012, 12; Kristensen 2015, 546; Martín 2014, 190; Roush 2014, 129-130). Devotion to the icon of Death attracts Occultists because of an association with social deviancy that they share with Muertistas (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 6; Chesnut 2012, 165, 189-193; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hanegraaff 1998, 408-409; Martín 2014, 31, 204-206; Martín 2017, 4; Styers 2004, 17-19; Whitehead 2008, 181).

Death and Social Deviancy

On International Highway 15 exiting Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, there are over 30 shrines devoted to La Santa Muerte at a single site (see figure 34). I first visited these shrines in June 2015 when police questioned and searched me for contraband. I was at the site in the early evening and the police informed me that drug traffickers and other potentially dangerous people frequented the shrines at night. They escorted me back to the police station where they checked my driver's license and passport. After the police released me, I returned to the shrines; however, a few moments later two different officers arrived and directed me through the same process. The correlations of the icon of Death with violence and drug trafficking that I encountered in Nogales became prominent in 2009 when the Mexican government destroyed an estimated 40 La Santa Muerte shrines along the border (Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020a, 25-26). Those involved with violence and crime often turn to La Santa Muerte because they perceive Death as a "divinity that never discriminates" (Martín 2014, 185 and see Lomnitz 2005, 493).

Figure 34. La Santa Muerte shrines in Nogales. 2020. Photos by author.

The social leveling aspects of La Santa Muerte arose in my ethnographic field research when I stayed with a family of Muertistas in Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico, in 2017. I met the Castillo Gutiérrez family's matriarch through a mutual friend and she invited me to stay with her for a few months during my reconnaissance fieldwork in Central Mexico. Nezahualcóyotl is a suburb of Mexico City known for its high levels of poverty and street violence. The municipality is five miles southeast of Mexico City International Airport in Estado de México, with a population close to 1,100,000 people living within a roughly 25 square mile radius (DataMéxico 2018). At the time, I located nine public shrines in the

municipality devoted to La Santa Muerte. The shrines I encountered were all less than 10 years old. I spent most of my time in Nezahaulcóyotl going to two of these shrines with the matriarch's three sons, who were between the ages of 24 and 30.

The oldest son, Roberto, had a tattoo of La Santa Muerte on his outer left calf, which was the result of a vow. According to Roberto, Death maintained his safety during a short jail sentence. Police had arrested him for his involvement in a street fight. He told me he was the only person in the altercation that police arrested due to his "bad luck." After receiving the tattoo in jail, he claims that his luck changed and his subsequent legal problems dissolved. The middle son, Francisco, contended with more dire legal issues. Most of my time in Nezahualcóyotl revolved around court cases regarding the middle son's robbery and assault of an elderly man. I visited a shrine daily on Avenida Ferrocarril with Francisco, where he prayed to La Santa Muerte in the hopes of avoiding a probable prison sentence (see figure 35). The youngest son, Carlos, had been in a few violent altercations like his older siblings. Carlos had a bullet wound on his left bicep, which he perceived as proof that Death protected him from a more fatal outcome.

While the basis for correlating La Santa Muerte to social deviancy is violent crime, Deibert (2014, 7) states that the cult is "not exclusively the domain of criminals, but rather of those going through extremely difficult times." Public shrines, like those in Nogales and Nezahualcóyotl, provide devotees with a place to petition Death for protection from street violence (see Roush 2014, 130). During my time with the family in Nezahualcóyotl, we visited nine shrines devoted to La Santa Muerte. I met two of the shrine owners, who both told me that their shrines were the result of miraculous

interventions from Death. One shrine owner claimed that La Santa Muerte had protected her son from a near a fatal motorcycle accident. Death later came to him in a vision and guided him away from his previous life of criminal activity. The other shrine owner stated that Death protected her family from an assault on their home. Apparently, thieves were scared away from the presence of La Santa Muerte in a small private altar in the house. The following night the family placed their statue of La Santa Muerte in the kitchen window overlooking the street. They awoke the next day to find offerings outside the window, which convinced them to construct a public shrine for the neighborhood.

Figure 35. La Santa Muerte shrine on Avenida Ferrocarril. 2017. Photo by author.

I joined the Castillo Gutiérrez family in traveling to two shrines known for their heightened efficacy. One excursion was to Tepito in Mexico City where I met Doña Enriqueta Romero (see figure 36). She told me that people who attend her shrine struggle with poverty, criminal affiliations, poor health, and emotional discomforts, but they find hope within a community devoted to Death. The other was to Tepatepec, Hidalgo,

Mexico, where we visited the purportedly oldest La Santa Muerte shrine (see figure 26). The shrine owner in Tepatepec, like Romero, suggested that the shrine provides the desperate with a sense of community. As Martín (2014, 184-185) notes, "By asserting their equality and belonging through the death saint, marginalized devotees embrace their own ambiguous status in society."

Aside from aspects of social leveling and providing a sense of community, the icon of Death has an association to "magic, witchcraft, and esotericism" (Pansters 2019, 48). In seeking assistance from La Santa Muerte, the family in Nezahualcóyotl utilized Occult practices like tarot and palm readings from self-proclaimed *brujas* (witches, or traditional healers) for guidance in their everyday affairs. The matriarch, Camila, believed extended family members and former acquaintances cursed her. To counter the cursing, she embraced *brujería* (witchcraft) to protect her family and herself. The family utilized La Santa Muerte to manage their misfortunes and their successes within the framework of brujería. This witchcraft aspect of the icon of Death seems to attract devotees, like Camila, who feel anathematized (see Chesnut 2012, 116; Lomnitz 2005, 493; Martín 2014, 184-185).

Figure 36. Romero's shrine in Tepito. 2017. Photo by author.

When I returned to visit the Castillo Gutiérrez family in 2018, Camila had moved to the city of Puebla, where she frequented a La Santa Muerte shrine in an esoteric store (see figure 37). We visited the shrine daily where her devotion seemed to develop a communal sensibility while she gravitated toward Occult practices. At the esoteric store in Puebla, we attended a Mass for Death where I met several people who were struggling in life due to health, legal, financial, and relationship problems. After the benediction, the store provided free sandwiches and juice for all attendees. The store's owner said that he provided free meals after the monthly Mass because Death called on him to help the community. The store owner also offered personal "spiritual consultations," as well as tarot and palm readings for a donation. At the store, two other workers performed magical workings—spells constructed from seven-day candles—to solve family problems, gain success in business, to win the favor of a love interest, and protection. Camila purchased several of these candles to solve issues she was having with her sons.

Figure 37. La Santa Muerte shrine in esoteric store in Puebla. 2018. Photo by author.

The esoteric store owner in Puebla angered Camila during their spiritual consultation when he suggested her problems with her children were her own fault. The family struggled in their relationships with one another and there were some large rifts that existed due to envy felt toward extended family members. Despite their internal animosity, they bonded together against external conflicts. They seemed to understand themselves as victims of life circumstances that outsiders did not comprehend. Public accusations that they were guilty of socially deviant behavior led them to feel ashamed. In private, however, the family excused themselves of any fault by arguing that their troubles were the result of an unjust social system. Within their social context, Death provided the family with a small community of like-minded people and a glimpse of hope in a world they perceived as sociologically and spiritually hostile toward them.

Similar understandings of Death exist among folk magic practitioners that I met on social media and in the Southwest borderlands. The administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition Facebook group, for example, claims that spell-work with Death assisted her in resolving several court cases that she claims resulted from an unjust legal system. Priya also told me that she uses spell-work with La Santa Muerte to seek vengeance for those she considers victims of an unjust society. Folk magic intersects with La Santa Muerte in practices that deliberately challenge prevailing social norms and hierarchies of class, race, gender, and sex (see Lomnitz 2005, 495; Sebald 1980, 183). John, for instance, is a folk magician that writes spells for La Santa Muerte derived from his sexual orientation, his interest in the Occult, and his mother's consultations with a bruja.

Due to tragic events that occurred in her life, John's mother believed that a former acquaintance hexed her. These events included the death of John's father, the loss of her job, and a serious injury she sustained in an accident. Folk magic's association with witchcraft allows practitioners, like John and his mother, to assert a sense of power in their everyday life and to challenge social institutions with practices deemed deviant (Chesnut 2012, 116; Martín 2014, 185; Sebald 1980, 183). Because of John's self-identification as a gay male born into a Catholic context, he considers witchcraft, La Santa Muerte, and the Occult as desirable modes of resistance to Christian social norms that admonish his positionality. Similarly, Priya states that La Santa Muerte provides her with protection from racist and sexist social structures. In March of 2021, the Netherlands had an election where right wing politicians gained control of the lower parliament. This political development prompted Priya to perform a spell that utilized Death to protect her against what she feared would be a changing social climate.

For John, Priya, and the Castillo Gutiérrez family, their social worlds are inherently corrupt, and therefore, justice requires them to embrace a socially deviant positionality as a form of subversion. Muertistas and Occultist devotees that I have met, understand the icon of Death as providing hope and self-direction in social contexts they perceive as antagonistic to their everyday experience. My material culture approach to lived religion elucidates the historical and contemporary social processes that lead Occultists to convene with Muertistas in seeking hope and self-direction through the icon of Death as a Mexican folk saint.

A Material Culture of Death

Muertistas and Occultists seek hope and self-direction through reproductions of pre-Reformation understandings of divine presence in materiality (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bynum 2013, 5-7; Clifton 2016, 43; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hanegraaff 1998, 408-409; Hanegraaff 2012, 162; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4; Orsi 1997, 6-7). Perceiving the icon of Death as a divine presence is a consequence of Western Christian discourses on devotional objects (see Bynum 2011, 31-32; Cervantes 1994, 20-21; Eire 1986, 4-5; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 4; Orsi 2005, 193; Orsi 2016, 2-5). In the 13th century, Western Christian theologians began debating the credibility of divine presence in devotional materiality (Bynum 2011, 19-20; Maniura 2011, 52; Orsi 2016, 2; Whitehead 2010, 97). These late medieval debates on materiality extended from Christ's incarnation to ontological questions regarding the immanence of God (Bynum 2011, 33). By the 16th century, the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation both rejected the presence of divinity in materiality (apart from the Eucharist within the latter) (*Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235; Eire 1986, 2-3, 28-35, 311-313; Orsi 2016, 37-38; Thomas 1971, 70). Nevertheless, Occultists and Muertistas utilize Roman Catholic Holy Death materiality (i.e., saint effigies and seven-day candles) as a divine presence in practices that subvert social conventions (Kristensen 2014, 13; Hanegraaff 2000, 310; Torres Ramos 2017, 39; Styers 2004, 223-226; Whitehead 2008, 18; for example see Rollin 2017, xi-xv, 19).

Attributing the presence of a spiritual entity to the icon of Death did not begin until the late 18th century within lay brotherhoods (confraternities) of New Spain (see

Gruzinski 1990, 206, 217-219; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 199; Thompson 1998, 406; Toor 1947, 144). Due to the ubiquity of depictions in New Spain, an embodied figure of Death slowly became regarded as a common feature of Catholic cosmology (Brandes 1998, 208; Burkhart 2004, 52). Good Death imagery pervaded New Spain due to an overwhelmed clergy unable to contend with administering rites of the dying amidst catastrophic mortality (Burkhart 2004, 48-52; Hughes 2021, 23-26; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185). In 1576 alone, an epidemic took the lives of two million people, and within one century, Spanish colonization almost doubled the mortality rate of the European Black Death (Hughes 2021, 26; Restall 2003, 128, 187n.80). Such excessive mortality rates in New Spain led to the creation of a cult of death that propitiated Good Death imagery to end epidemics (see Brodman 2011, 39; Burkhart 2004, 50-51; Chesnut 2012, 27-33; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-166, 201; Malvido 2005, 20, 25).

Death imagery utilized in petitions to end epidemics eventually evolved into a means to subvert colonial authority (Gruzinski 1990, 206, 217-219; 2001 [1990], 164, 199). The use of Holy Death as a devotional object surfaced in inquisitorial records of the 18th century (Gruzinski 1990, 219). During this time, Holy Death devotional objects had developed into a means to cope with the trauma of colonialism (see Burkhart 2004, 51; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54). The marginalized blended cultures of colonial Mexico gravitated to Death iconography because it represented a social leveling entity within a rigid social hierarchy (Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185, 199-204, 261-262). In promoting Mary as the ideal of dying well, however, Catholic authorities labeled subversive devotions to Death as

idolatrous (Gruzinski 1990, 206, 217-219; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 199; Lomnitz 2005, 130-131; Malvido 2008, 66). Consistent exposure to high mortality rates in New Spain, then, transformed Good Death iconography from a contemplative focal point into "idolatrous" devotional practices because it resembled the intercessory power of saints (see Brandes 1998, 214; Brown 1981, 4; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164, 201; Head 1990, 197).

While clerical authority never approved propitiations made to Death iconography, lived Catholicism in Mexico and Europe developed other cults to devotional objects that counter official doctrine (see Malvido 2005, 21; Head 1990, 17; Orsi 1997, 12). Differing cults to the Virgin, for example, propitiate variations on Marian icons as divine presences, despite theological rejection of such conflations of signifier and signified (Bynum 2013, 10-16; Carroll 1992, 59-62; *Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235; Lee 2007, 108; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi). Propitiations that seek miraculous intervention are conducive to approved saint veneration; however, ecclesiastics dismiss petitions as magic, witchcraft, or idolatry when they conflate the presence of a holy figure with its material representation (*Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235; Hanegraaff 2012, 162; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 4-11, 38, 249-252; Styers 2004, 220; Thomas 1971, 55). The labeling of practices as folk Catholic have coincided with these devotions that seek miracles from specific icons as sacred entities in material form (see Head 1990, 200; Lee 2007, 108; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2011, 14; Orsi 2016, 4-7).

Thaumaturgic-like use of devotional objects thus continued in lived Catholicism despite receiving official repudiation in the Council of Trent's (1995 [1545-1563], 234-

235) “On the Invocation, Veneration, Relics of Saints, and Sacred Images” (Brown 1981, 111; Thomas 1971, 55; Tuchman 1978, 318). In the Mexican colonial context, censured practices concerning divine presence in materiality during the Counter-Reformation remained justified as sources of salvation within Franciscan nominalism (Cervantes 1994, 129-132; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 151, 158). Nominalists claimed that punitive discipline of idolatry was part of a divine process that led to true faith (Cervantes 1994, 129-132; Ingham 1986, 35). Nominalism prevailed in colonial Mexico from the 16th century until 18th century Enlightenment thinking overturned it (Cervantes 1994, 129-132 and see Hanegraaff 2012, 162). The Catholic Church, however, did not delineate a clear canonization process for sainthood until the 20th century (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 1918, 10-11; Orsi 2016, 35-36). Folk or thaumaturgic-like propitiations of saints that resembled Catholic concerns of idolatry, therefore, continued clandestinely into modernity (see Head 1990, 197-200; Hughes 2012, 4-5; Kleinberg 1992, 37, 39; Rothkrug 1980, 183; Vauchez 1997 [1988], 94, 448, 452, 536).

Enlightenment intellectuals understood associations between divinity and materiality—including imagery related to an embodied figure of Death—as irrational superstition (Hanegraaff 2012, 162; Viqueira 1981, 44-45). Practices related to the icon of Death, therefore, entangled with discourses on idolatry and superstition (see *Council of Trent* 1995 [1545-1563], 234-235; Gruzinski 1990, 219; Hughes 2012, 4-5; Malvido 2005, 25; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 4-11, 38, 249-252; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 32-33, 122-127; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53; Smith 2019, 58-83; Styers 2004, 220). Colonial legislation of Mexico in 1775 sought to eliminate “idolatrous” Death iconography from

confraternities (Malvido 2005, 25). A century later in the 1860's, Reform Laws of the new independent Mexican government lessened Roman Catholic political authority, yet, these same laws further promoted the removal of "superstitious" Death iconography in confraternities (González Torres 1996, 6; Malvido 2005, 25; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53).

Protestant Reformers, Enlightenment scholars, and modern intellectuals claimed that propitiating miraculously efficacious images belong to the malleable classifications of idolatry and superstition (Hanegraaff 2012, 162; Styers 2004, 220; Thomas 1971, 70-71; Tuchman 1978, 318). This modern convergence of discourses on idolatry and superstition contributed to the construal of reproductions of magic and/or Occultic practices as deviant and irrational (Hanegraaff 2012, 177-184). Conflations of signifier and signified in devotions that seek access to divinity through material media, continue in modern forms of both lived Catholic and Occultic practices within the academic category of magic (Bynum 2011, 255-256; Freedberg 1989, 297; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi-xix; Orsi 2016, 7-11, 38, 249-252; Sebald 1980, 173; Styers 2004, 220).

Modern Occultic Reproduction of Magic

As mentioned, Occultist devotees like Priya and John reproduce Death as a social leveler in their magical practice to subvert social contexts they perceive as unjust. This use of Death as a social leveler is part of a larger historical process concerning reproductions of magic beginning with pre-Christian European folk traditions (see Caciola 2016, 346-348; Faraone 2003, 49-51; McLerran and McKee 1991, 11, 67; Versnel 1991a, 64; Wilburn 2016, 197, 215). As Caciola (2016, 349-350) states,

> [F]olk traditions that associated the deceased with fertility and abundance were reformulated as commentaries on a retributive afterlife. Likewise, the ancient role of seer and psychopomp was recuperated by clerics in order to offer insights into the world beyond the grave…Missionaries, religious chroniclers, and clerics reinterpreted indigenous pagan traditions [of medieval Europe] according to their own priorities, of course, and it is chiefly these reformulated versions, not the original ones, that we encounter in the written record. Yet the traces of their pagan past may readily be discerned.

Caciola's (2016, 349-350) discussion of "reformulated" pre-Christian traditions in medieval Europe resonates with de Certeau's (1984, xiii) modern description of reproduction (secondary production) as a "manipulation by users who are not its makers."

Death as a retributive social leveler articulated in the 1st-century *Testament of Abraham*—an obdurate negotiator and a divine actor working at God's behest—appears to have remained continuous from the medieval European Black Death era through the colonization of Mexico and into modern articulations of lived Catholicism (Aberth 2010, 252; Allison 2003, 391; Binski 1996, 158; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Guthke 1999, 90-91, 115-117; León 2004, 124; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185, 199-204, 261-262, 490; Malvido 2005, 23-25; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51). Modern reproductions of Death as a social leveler in subversive magical practice are also consistent with Renaissance theories that medieval practitioners created to legitimize reproductions of pre-Christian magic (see Hanegraaff 2003, 369; 1998, 48, 408-409; 2012, 172-184). Hanegraaff (1998, 407; 2012, 180-190) demonstrates that despite modern Occultist self-identifications with pre-Christian "Paganism," their practices are more likely 19th-century reproductions based in Renaissance terminology.

La Santa Muerte love magic exemplifies these 19th-century reproductions of Renaissance interpretations of pre-Christian Greco-Roman practices (following Hanegraaff 1998, 409; 2012, 220-223, 369). La Santa Muerte love magic resembles ancient Greco-Roman binding spells that invoked chthonic daemons associated with the Great Mother (e.g., Persephone/Demeter complex and Hecate) (see Faraone 1991, 4; Graf 1991, 190-191, 196-197; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Stein 2016, 4-5; Strubbe 1991, 45; Thompson 1998, 422; Toor 1947, 141-145). Invoking chthonic daemons and psychopomps for justice and binding love spells existed from Anatolia to the Iberian Peninsula during the 1st century CE (Faraone 2003, 49-51; Wilburn 2012, 219, 255). Muslims brought binding spells in magical texts that invoke chthonic daemons to Iberia and translated them to Spanish during the Renaissance (Hartner 1965, 439; Porreca 2010, 19, 20, 27). Spaniards then transferred these practices to colonial Mexico in the 16th century (Thompson 1998, 414). These binding spells then resurfaced on La Santa Muerte prayer cards in the early 20th century (Toor 1947, 141-145).

Beginning in the late 19th century, Occultists modified contemporaneous scientific findings to legitimize their practices that subverted Christian morality (Hanegraaff 1998, 412; Luhrmann 1989, 17). This process of subversion through a modified scientific rationale continues among Occultist devotees, as noted in chapter six, with Rollin's (2017, xiii, 19, 144-155) claims that her magical practice exceeds the morality and sensibility of institutional Catholicism. Following Crowley (1995 [1944], 40), Priya perceives her understanding of magic and La Santa Muerte as grounded in scientific rationality. 19th-century theories of religion seem to have affected the perceptions of

practitioners, like Rollin (2017, xiii, 19, 144-155), Priya, and Crowley (1995 [1944], 40), through analyses that operate behind a veil of naturalized rationalism (see Styers 2004, 23). The academic use of naturalized rationalism categorizes practices according to unquestioned assumptions based in Christianized Platonic dualism (Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114 and see Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317; Styers 2004, 23).

Christianity's adoption of Platonic dualism is the underpinning for similarities amongst Occultist practice and academic classifications of religion and magic (see Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317). Augustine of Hippo (1890 [413-426], 269-273) followed Neo-Platonic philosophers who related magic (daemonic theurgy) as diametrically opposed to religious faith in a transcendent and self-sufficient God (Fraser 2009, 140-141, 145-147, 151; Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317). The Platonic Christian dichotomies of religion and magic continued in academic discourses from the late 19th to the early 20th century (for examples see Durkheim 2001 [1912], 43-44; Frazer 2015 [1890], 44-50 159-163, 711; Tylor 1920 [1871], 137-142, 426).

This binary classification of magic as distinct from religion further coincided chronologically with 19th-century Occultic practices like Spiritualism (see Frazer 2016 [1890], 44-48; Hanegraaff 2003, 359-360; Styers 2004, 23; Tyler 1920 [1871], 134, 144, 426; Zwissler 2018, 3). From the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, academic theories of religion and magic continued to develop in step with Occultist interpretations of magic (see Crowley 1995 [1944], 19, 40, 55; Durkheim 2001 [1912], 43-44; Frazer 2015 [1890], 44-48; Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 328-329, 515,

Hanegraaff 2012, 327; Styers 2004, 10; Tyler 1920 [1871], 134, 144, 426; Valadez 2007a, 4; Valadez 2007b, 32; Zwissler 2018, 3). Occultists, then, utilize concepts resembling those developed by Frazer (2015 [1890]), Eliade (1959), Marett (1904), Jung (2014 [1969]), Campbell (2008 [1949]), James (2004 [1902]), and Durkheim (2001 [1912]) due to like-minded thinking arising from a particular cultural milieu (Davidsen 2012, 193; Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Hanegraaff 2012, 165-167; McCutcheon 2004, 189; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20).

These academic concepts led to universalizing magic as socially deviant practices that are distinct from religion as a belief in a transcendent reality (see Campbell 2008 [1949], 3-46; Durkheim 2001 [1912], 43-44; Eliade 1959, 14-15; Eliade 1991 [1961], 44-45; Ellwood 1999, 5, 17; Frazer 2015 [1890], 44-50 159-163, 711; Gill 1998, 9; Hanegraaff 1998, 307; Hanegraaff 2012, 149; Jung 1966 [1938], 7, 113; Saliba 1976, 115; Styers 2004, 23, 77-79; Tylor 1920 [1871], 137-142, 426). Occultists reproduce academic distinctions between religion and magic to create their own identities and to contest the identities of others (following Davidsen 2012, 193; McCutcheon 2004, 175). The academic study of religion still tends to regard magic as individualistic; projecting human subjectivity onto nonhuman things; and a favoring of material practices over beliefs in a monotheistic transcendence (Styers 2004, 18). Occultic magic, therefore, references deviancy and identifications with subversion because it contains a collection of practices discarded as superstitious and irrational (Hanegraaff 2012, 232-233; Luhrmann 1989, 277–279).

Christian theologians, Enlightenment scholars, and late 19th- to early 20th-century theorists, then, established a rational foundation for Occultists to view their practices as antithetical to religion (Styers 2004, 17, 18-20; Taussig 1987, 370; Versnel 1991b, 177; Wiener 2013, 494). Secularization in the 19th century, however, also produced a popular interest in the Occult and esotericism because these practices attempted to subvert the strictures of social norms stemming from religious piety (see Hanegraaff 1999, 146; Hanegraaff 2003, 375; Hanegraaff 2012, 220-223, 254; Styers 2004, 17-21, 213, 223). The rise of 19th-century Occultism that identified itself with a reemergence of pre-Christian philosophies and traditions led to new religious movements in the 20th century (Clifton 2016, 338; Hanegraaff 1998, 409; Hanegraaff 2012, 369).

Reproducing Death as a New Religious Movement

As 19th-century secularization allowed for novel esoteric worldviews to develop in the early 20th century, Mexican Catholic folk saints arose from practices originating in 18th-century confraternities (see Hanegraaff 2012, 220-223; Hughes 2012, 5, 8-9). In 1925, for example, the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church started revitalizing late colonial practices associated with local saints, curanderismo, and Roman Catholic Death iconography (Butler 2009, 537 556-558; Ramírez Rancaño 2002, 104). Likewise, 20th-century prayers directed to Holy Death developed from late 19th-century Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism (Thompson 1998, 423). The emergence of La Santa Muerte in love spells coincided with Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism's challenges to Roman

Catholic authority in the 20th century (León 2004, 166; Thompson 1998, 406, 420-423; Toor 1947, 144).

Since the 1960's in Mexico, uneven industrialization and urbanization, capitalist exploitation, Vatican II, liberation theologies, and migration created new cultural identities and religious movements (González Torres 1996, 8-10; Vásquez 1999, 2-3). These social innovations included a sense of Mexicanidad (an emerging sense of cultural identity) that intertwined with Spiritualism and lived forms of Catholicism (de la Torre, Gutiérrez, and Hernández 2020, 349, 353; González Torres 1996, 8-10; Vásquez 1999, 2-3). La Santa Muerte developed into a saint-like entity in this historical and social milieu under the perception that modern institutions have abandoned those on the lower portions of the Mexican social hierarchy (Chesnut 2012, 54; Gil Olmos 2010, 153; Graziano 2007, 29; Hughes 2012, 8; Kristensen 2014, 9-10; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Martín 2017, 15). In this historical process, representations of a Good Death in 18th-century confraternities transitioned to a 21st-century spiritual entity resembling a folk saint in Mexico and the Southwestern United States (see Chesnut 2012, 4, 54; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 1990, 219; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 164; Kristensen 2014, 9-10; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Lomnitz 2005, 490-491; Malvido 2005, 25; Thompson 1998, 423; Toor 1947, 145).

Shared altar space with San Judas Tadeo in Mexico reveals La Santa Muerte's orientation as a Mexican folk saint (Hernández Hernández 2011, 50; Pansters 2019, 30, 50). On these shared altars, devotees consider San Judas the saint of "last chances" and La Santa Muerte the "last resort" (Chesnut 2012, 192; Flores Martos 2019, 92, 106, Flores Martos 2008, 61-62; Hernandez 2011, 161; Hernández Hernández 2011, 50,

Pansters 2019, 30, 50). Devotees with dire, hostile, and perilous needs turn to the icon of Death over official saints like San Judas (Chesnut 2012, 192; Flores Martos 2019, 92, 106; Flores Martos 2008, 61-62; Hernández Hernández 2011, 50; Pansters 2019, 30).

Researchers and law enforcement officials have both attributed the cultic growth of La Santa Muerte in the 21st century to the icon of Death's appeal to prisoners, violent criminals, and drug traffickers (Chesnut 2012, 15; Deibert 2014, 73, 238; Kristensen 2015, 545; Roush 2014, 138; Thompson 1998, 426). For example, the first public shrine devoted to La Santa Muerte arose in 2001 within a high crime area of Mexico City because of a vow made by Enriqueta Romero after her son returned home from prison (Chesnut 2012, 38). The murder of cult leader, Jonathan Legaria Vargas in 2008, reinforced correlations between the cult and violence (Bigliardi 2015, 79-80). In 2011 police arrested David Romo Guillén, a prominent public figure within the cult, for kidnapping and money laundering (Deibert 2014, 150; Kristensen 2019, 138; Pansters 2019, 36-37). Since 2014, however, cult members have made concerted efforts to alter the public perception of devotion to La Santa Muerte (Bigliardi 2015, 79-80; Chesnut 2018, SkeletonSaint.com; Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020a, 26).

Devotees now assert that the power and presence of Death subverts everyday injustice and answers the prayers of the disenfranchised (Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Martín 2014, 31). La Santa Muerte's renown for intervening in the lives of the disenfranchised seems to have made the icon of Death popular among Occult practitioners (see Bigliardi 2016, 312; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165; Michalik 2016, 93; Torres Ramos 2017, 42). However, the cult

of La Santa Muerte has developed alongside Occultic practices like New Age healing throughout the 20th century (see Gil Olmos 2007, 193-197; Hanegraaff 2012, 220-223, 254; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 2; Thompson 1998, 420-422). For example, along the Mexico/United States border, curandero use of La Santa Muerte correlates with New Age healing practices (Hammer 2016, 353; Pansters 2019, 3; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47).

Curanderismo and New Age healing have parallel histories because of a shared foundation in Western Christianity, as noted in Anglo-Spiritualists' devotion to Teresa Urrea (see Hanegraaff 1998, 89; Seman 2017, 7-9; Trotter II and Chavira 1981, 30). Further examples of the blending of the New Age and the cult of La Santa Muerte include, esoteric stores that sell the icon of Death as a form of healing, and the Muertista adoption of Japanese reiki alternative medicine (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; de la Fuente Hernández 2016, 183; Kelly 1965, 108, 161; Michalik 2011, 169; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47). The cult of La Santa Muerte further shares characteristics with the New Age movement beyond healing (see Flores Martos 2008, 59-63; Hammer 2016, 353). Both Muertistas and New Agers participate in practices that are individualistic, meant to improve everyday life conditions, and opposed to institutional religion (see Argyriadis 2016, 44; Bravo Lara 2013, 21-22, 25; Chesnut 2012, 12, 22-23,165, 189-193; de la Fuente Hernández 2016, 183; Flores Martos 2008, 6, 60; Hammer 2016, 353, 355; Hanegraaff 1998, 89; Kelly 1965, 108, 161; Kristensen 2015, 546; Kristensen 2019, 148; Michalik 2011, 169; Munoz 2013, 7-8; Valadez 2008, 32; Zavaleta and Salinas 2009, 45-47). The New Age and the cult of La Santa Muerte are both loose affiliations of

practitioners that engage in practices considered modern forms of enchantment (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 27; Hanegraaff 1998, 19-20; Hernández Hernández 2016a, 16).

The intersections of the New Age with La Santa Muerte in practices like Marian Trinitarian Spiritualism are a consequence of cultural shifts toward "re-enchantment" throughout North America since the early 20th century (Frigerio 2016 [2013], 30-3; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Michalik 2011, 165; Pansters 2019, 51). North American understandings of re-enchantment originated from academic research that followed Weber's (1958 [1919], 139) notion of "intellectualization." Weber's (ibid.) intellectualization, or his secularization thesis, suggests that disenchanted worldviews replaced invocations of spirits with instrumentalized empirical reasoning (see Clark 2003, 113-114, 250n.8; Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Hanegraaff 2003, 358; Lyons 2014, 873-874; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20). However, Michalik (2011, 174-175) notes that academic associations of the cult of La Santa Muerte and the New Age are superficial generalizations that ignore the latter's consumerist motives in appropriating practices from other cultures.

It appears that shared perceptions among contemporary Pagans and Muertistas are the source for comparisons between the cult of La Santa Muerte and the New Age (see Clifton 2016, 343; Flores Martos 2019, 101, 106; Hanegraaff 1998, 385, 408-409, 518; Hanegraaff 2003, 358; Hanegraaff 2012, 182-184, 370). These shared perceptions include belief in the material presence of powerful entities and assertions that modern institutions manifest from unjust social structures (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Clifton 2016, 343; Martín 2014, 31; Martín 2017, 4). As demonstrated in chapters five and six, the New

Age, the cult of La Santa Muerte, and contemporary Paganism fit within the academic classification of Occultism (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Clifton 2016, 343; Hanegraaff 1998, 90-93, 104-110). Within prevailing academic taxonomies, Occultic, Pagan, folk, vernacular, popular, and lived are terms relegated to practices deemed irrational, superstitious, deviant, or subversive (see Bowman and Valk 2014, 6; Christian 1981, 178; Clifton 2016, 335; Dundes 1980, 1; Hanegraaff 2012, 233; Orsi 2016, 29). Occultist correlations with the cult of La Santa Muerte, then, reveals a categorical fluidity between lived religious and magical practices (see Dundes 1980, 1-2; Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 12; Lincoln 2003. 55; Martín 2014, 14; Michalik 2011, 165; Orsi 1997, 9; Orsi 2005, 167-179, 186-191; Orsi 2016, 40-41; Torres Ramos 2017, 39).

As noted previously, Occultist practices coincided with academic investigations of the 19th and 20th centuries that categorized magic in opposition to modern institutionalized religion (Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20). Academic investigation of the universality of religion as a transcendent reality across cultures, therefore, indirectly influences modern reproductions of magical practice (see Lease 1994, 455; McCutcheon 2004, 176-179; Orsi 2011, 12-13; Styers 2004, 103, 112). Occultists embrace a categorical distinction between magic and religion, while also perpetuating a universalist and inclusivist appeal to a non-institutional "spirituality" (see Hanegraaff 1998, 517; Hanegraaff 2012, 164-177; Kieckhefer 1989, 54-55; Pels 2008, 270-278; Styers 2004, 18-19, 183; Thomas 1971, 50-61, 87-92, 764-765; Versnel 1991b, 191, Wiener 2013, 494).

Academics, like Jung (1966 [1938], 7, 113), Eliade (1959, 14-15), and Campbell (2008 [1949], 3-46), mirror Occultists' beliefs that institutional religions degenerated from a "primordial spirituality" central to human experience (see Hanegraaff 2012, 327). According to the logic of a primordial spirituality, all modern religions contain transcendent human truths, but these truths remain obfuscated by cultural differences, or, concealed behind political agendas (ibid.). With a focus on "transcendent realities," this universalist perspective reflects how Occultists appropriate practices deemed magical from disparate cultures (ibid., 370). According to Hanegraaff (ibid., 330, 366, 370), Occultists assert their universalistic tendencies toward magic with an inclusivist sensibility that claims all individual perspectives are equally valid. Occultist devotees that I have met reproduce the icon of Death through diverse inclusivist interpretations and universalize magic as antagonistic to religion (see de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8; Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre 2016 [2013], 375; Hanegraaff 1998, 185, 188, 195).

Priya's use of Crowley's (1995 [1944], 24) tree of life exemplifies the Occultic blending of universalization and inclusivism. Academics like Eliade (1991 [1961], 42-45, 161-162) and Campbell (2008 [1949], 334-336), as well as Occultists like Crowley (1995 [1944], 16, 24, 31), described the tree of life— a world center that umbilically linked humans to divine protection—as a phenomenon that arose independently across cultures. As stated in chapter six, Priya applies her own blood to a house plant, which she claims renders it a sentient protector through the power endowed her by La Santa Muerte. Her use of blood in spell-work, however, is not a legitimate practice within The Santa Muerte Tradition. She justifies her practice in asserting the tree of life is a universal spiritual

phenomenon and with an inclusivist customization of her magical practice according to her own personal relationship with Death.

Rollin's (2017, xv) claim to a non-traditional but authentic practice is another example of Occultist inclusivism (see Hanegraaff 1998, 28n.12; Hanegraaff 2012, 330, 366; Kilmo 1987, 366-368). Rollin's (2017, 56-57) understanding of La Santa Muerte as the "Great Goddess" emanating in various forms exemplifies the Occult's use of academic universalization of culturally specific practices (see Hanegraaff 1998, 185, 188, 195). The writings of Frazer (2015 [1890]), James (2004 [1902]), Jung (2014 [1969]), Eliade (1959), and Campbell (2008 [1949]) disregarded historical or cultural contexts and it seems that practitioners, like Priya and Rollin (2017, xv, 56-57), have followed in the footsteps of these academic discourses (see Hanegraaff 2012, 303).

The academic universalization of religion, then, buttresses Occultist adoption of a Mexican folk saint due to a self-identification with folk magic that they share with lived Catholic Muertistas (see Bromley 2016, 6; Clifton 2016, 343; Hanegraaff 1998, 502; Hanegraaff 2012, 303, 369; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 10-11; Martín 2014, 204-206; Michalik 2011, 163, 174-175; Sebald 1980, 173; Styers 2004, 17-19). Occultists and Muertistas identify as folk magicians because their practices are materially oriented, which does not align with modern notions of religious transcendence (see Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 408-409, 516; Kristensen 2014, 13; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 7-11, 38, 249-252; Styers 2004, 220, 223-226; Whitehead 2008, 18). Folk magic consists of prayers, spells, hexes, invocations, and the use of objects for practices deemed antithetical to universalist abstractions of religion (Sebald 1980, 185; Styers 2004, 18).

Occultists and Muertistas further share an identification with folk magic through interactions on social media (see Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Torres Ramos 2017, 38-51).

Reproductions on Social Media

As exemplified in chapter six, social media allows Muertistas and Occultists to exchange thaumaturgic techniques and tools across cultural divides (Fragoso 2011, 16; Frigerio 2016, 267; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). On social media, Muertistas and Occultists observe similarities within their practices derived from a common Christian historical background and a shared rejection of institutionalized religion (see Graziano 2007, ix; Hanegraaff 1998, 515; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317; Orsi 2016, 40-41; Torres Ramos 2017, 45). Social media exposes Occultists to the recognizable imagery of the Grim Reaper receiving feast days, prayers, and rosaries, as well as the image's utilization in spells for binding, protection, and healing (see Coulson and Oakley 2003, 75; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6, 12; Torres Ramos 2017, 44-45). Occultism and the cult of La Santa Muerte recognize the same iconography arising out of ancient Greece, Rome, Judaism, and Christianity; the Black Death in Western Europe; and the colonization of Mexico (see Aberth 2010, 222-224, 231, 269; Allison 2003, 324-325; Brandes 1998, 199; Burkhart 2004, 51 Cervantes 1994, 94; Fagles 1990, 233, 657; Fagles 1996, 530; Faraone 1991, 4; Few 2002, 54; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-165; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185; Malvido 2005, 25; Malvido 2008, 62-63; Mirguet 2010, 253-254; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54; Thomas 1971, 55; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51).

Furthermore, Occultists and Muertistas on social media share similar thinking founded on internalizations of concepts that originated in popularized academic literature. As stated, late 19th- and early 20th-century theorists created a framework for Occultic assumptions regarding religion and magic as universal oppositions (Hanegraaff 1998, 407-408; Zwissler 2018, 6). Muertistas like Valadez (2007a, 4; 2007b, 32; 2008, 32) also identify their practices as magical in a manner that mirrors Durkheim's (2001 [1912], 43-44) distinction of magic and religion (see Styers 2004, 10, 18-19). Here again, the popular writings of Campbell (1988; 2002 [1968]; 2008 [1949]); Eliade (1959; 1991 [1961], 2020 [1961]); and Jung (1966 [1938]; 2014 [1969]) further contributed to Occultist universalization of culturally specific practices (Ellwood 1999, 176-177).

Dubuisson (2003 [1998], 172-173) linked this academic universalization of culturally diverse practices to a "metaphysical prejudice" that he suggests relates to early 20th-century fascism (see also Ellwood 1994, 32-33, and for examples see Campbell 2002 [1968], 183-186; Campbell 2008 [1949], 3-46; Eliade 1959, 87-93; Jung 1966 [1938], 2, 8-9). Similarly, the administrator of The Santa Muerte Tradition claims that when Occultists do not follow her form of "tradition" they are "doing what the Spaniards did to the indigenous people, they're trying to erase her [La Santa Muerte's] traditions and history." According to Hesse (2007, 659), the Enlightenment's Eurocentric appeals to universal human truth fostered racist processes and structures that conceptually bridge 16th-century colonization with 20th-century fascism.

An awareness of modernity's legacy of colonialism, then, appears to be the nexus of divisive disputes between Muertistas and Occultists on social media (following Pels

1997, 178). As noted in chapter six, some members of The Santa Muerte Tradition perceive Occultic reproductions of the icon of Death as violations of correct practices. The administrator claims colonial trauma descended from her Mexican heritage is the source for her traditional La Santa Muerte practice. Some group members, consequently, rationalize that those Occultists who defy the Mexican heritage of La Santa Muerte operate within a continuation of 16th-century European colonialism. There is no post-colonial world for some practitioners in The Santa Muerte Tradition, which leads them to accuse Anglo-Occultists of cultural misappropriation.

Interactions between Muertistas and Occultists on social media invites conflicting perspectives of authenticity, ancestry, and misappropriation across heterogeneous social contexts (de la Torre 2016 [2013], 8-11; Fragoso 2011, 16; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209; Torres Ramos 2017, 51). In culturally hybrid contexts, like the Southwestern United States or social media networks, there is a heightened tension regarding Occultist reproductions of La Santa Muerte that I never observed during my fieldwork in Central Mexico (see Vasquez and Marquardt 2003, 63; Vila 2005, 35). The inclusion of various cultures on social media appears to engender Occultist and Muertista conflicts that favor either the icon of Death's historical roots in medieval Western Europe or 16th-century colonization (see Flores Martos 2008, 62; Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Michalik 2011, 165; Torres Ramos 2017, 51).

Subversive reproductions of La Santa Muerte on social media, then, differentiate according to individual perspectives that reinforce claims of cultural authenticity or counter accusations of misappropriation. For example, some Muertistas within The Santa

Muerte Tradition will make conditional allowances to Occultist adopters. There is a Muertista pride of "converting" an Occultist who leaves their "adopter status" and becomes what they consider a "full-devotee" of La Santa Muerte. Priya is one such Occultist that became a full-devotee of La Santa Muerte. She protects her universalist and inclusivist Occultist tendencies with her claims of being a "colonized person" (she is a Hindustani Dutch national from Suriname). As a person of Western European descent, Rollin (2017, xiii-xv, 43-66) utilizes a different personal strategy than that of Priya, as the former embraces the universalization of Death. Rollin (ibid., xiii-xv, 56-57, 144-155) maintains an anti-Christian view of La Santa Muerte in maintaining a Pagan self-identification, yet, her practices paradoxically include Catholic inspired rosaries and novenas.

Unlike Muertistas in The Santa Muerte Tradition and Occultists like Rollin (2017, xiii-xv, 144-155), John disassociates himself from anything Catholic in his reproduction of La Santa Muerte. He thus creates his own prayers and spells because "the others are too Catholic for me." He also rejects Rollin's (ibid., 56-57) universalization of La Santa Muerte as a return of the "Great Goddess." His inclusivist emphasis instead leads him toward a "color-blind" approach to Death. As he states, "La Santa Muerte has no skin, therefore, trying to claim her as your own does not work because Death comes for all of us." John further argues that accusations of Occultist misappropriation of La Santa Muerte results from a "hypersensitivity" developed within social media's "cancel culture." Cancel culture on social media consists of "call-outs" against perceived social and political injustices posted in virtual communities (Bouvier 2020, 1). While call-outs

are useful strategies to limit the voices of those who stand opposed to social equality; critics like John, suggest cancel culture promotes a sense of moral superiority without any personal risk (Bouvier 2020, 1).

The various reproductions of La Santa Muerte on social media mirror what Keane (2007, 21) refers to as "semiotic ideology,"

> [A] reflection upon, and an attempt to organize, people's experiences of the materiality of semiotic form. Not only language but also music, visual imagery, food, architecture, gesture, and anything else that enters into actual semiotic practice functions within perceptible experience by virtue of its material properties… [P]eople's ability to recognize those forms as the "same" depends on ways of framing, since their very materiality means they are open to other unrealized possibilities.

As stated in chapter five, La Santa Muerte's iconicity invites diverse interpretations from an eclectic mix of adherents who recognize Death in its semiotic form, yet, frame it differently according to their cultural positionality (following ibid., 17).

For example, some Muertistas frame La Santa Muerte with a mestiza identity, which reifies Death's holiness as a cultural patrimonialization resulting from the image's colonial history (see Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Paz 1985 [1961], 57, 60, 216). The group's administrator refers to this patrimonialized Death entity as *La Otra Reina de México* (the other Queen of Mexico, implying that the Guadalupe of Tepeyac is the primary female monarch) (see figure 38). As noted in chapters three and four, however, the connection between Mary and female Death is a European conception originating in liturgical dramas that Spaniards brought to New Spain as didactic conversion plays (see Burkhart 2004, 29, 50-51; Ingham 1986, 106; Whyte 1977 [1931], 62-63). John's cultural

positionality—resulting from his youth when he did not fit easily into either Anglo or Mexican social contexts—and his rejection of Roman Catholic normativity, dissuades him from adopting this patrimonialization.

Figure 38. La Santa Muerte as Other Queen of Mexico. 2016. Artwork by Jesús Villa. Photo by author.

The negotiation of modern semiotic ideologies appears to have developed from reproductions within a genealogy of the icon of Death that spans centuries of cultural interactions (following Caciola 2016, 349-350; Keane 2007, 17). A genealogy of the icon of Death demonstrates why La Santa Muerte attracts both Occultists and Muertistas, despite sociocultural differences that strain an otherwise shared identification with folk magic (following Foucault 1984, 81and see Hanegraaff 1998, 48, 329-330, 366, 408-409, 516; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Kristensen 2014, 13; Sebald 1980, 185; Styers 2004, 220, 223-226; Torres Ramos 2017, 38-51; Whitehead 2008, 18).

A Genealogy of Reproduction

The tension between universalization and locality, and the elite and the popular, shifts from the medieval to the modern in a manner that makes lived practices concerning the icon of Death a useful means of tracing cultural genealogies (see Caciola 2016, 349, 352; Hanegraaff 1998, 329-330, 366; Yllescas Illescas 2016, 82). The iconic construction of Death across cultural interactions of pre-Christian Greco-Romans and Jews of the Mediterranean region, medieval Western Europeans, and the colonial context of New Spain reveals the genealogical foundation for 20th- and 21st-century reproductions of La Santa Muerte. The icon of Death's appeal to both lived Mexican Catholics and Occultists is the result of an identification with one or more of the following antecedents of La Santa Muerte: psychopomps and female chthonic daemons associated with binding in ancient Greece; an Angel of Death in 1st-century pseudepigrapha; material objects used to contemplate dying in the Black Death; liturgical dramas in 14th-century Iberia converted into didactic plays in 16th-century New Spain; and imagery signifying a Good Death in colonial Mexican confraternities (see Burkhart 2004, 51; Chesnut 2012, 27-33; Cooper 1997, 1217-1223; Faraone 1991, 3-6; Graf 1991, 191-197; Graziano 2007, 78; Gruzinski 2001 [1995], 164; Gruzinski 1990, 219; Malvido 2005, 20; Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum 1989, 205, 211; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 52; Seaton 1996, 235-237; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44).

As King (2009, 26) suggests, devotees of icons "choose to put their trust in a depiction that they can recognize." La Santa Muerte appeals to both Occultists and lived Catholic practitioners because they are familiar with Death's Western European iconographic roots, and they can also comprehend Death as an entity that binds, heals,

and protects against an assumed "hegemony of modernity" (see Bigliardi 2016, 312; Chesnut 2012, 4; Clifton 2016, 343; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165, 174-175; Orsi 2016, 40-41). The anti-modern ethos of Occultists and Muetistas stems from 19th-century esotericism that rejected both Christianity and positivism (see Bigliardi 2016, 312; Chesnut 2012, 4; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Michalik 2011, 163, 165, 174-175). Beyond a common recognition of the icon of Death, then, apparent affinities between Muertistas and Occultists also exist in shared practices descended from 19th-century secular esotericism that developed as an alternative to institutionalized Christianity and the rationale of positivism (see Hanegraaff 1996, 408-409; Michalik 2011, 174-175).

Consistencies within material culture and practices associated with Death that attract lived Catholic practitioners and Occultists are not the result of a transcendental rationality, nor are they the consequence of an objectivist rationalism (following Lakoff 1987, 18-19, 77, 107-111, 157, 287). Instead, the genealogy of the icon of Death reveals an analysis akin to Bourdieu's (1977 [1972], 72-73; 1990 [1980], 62-63) notion of the habitus. The taken for granted structures within the genealogy of the icon of Death result from an intellectual internalization of past socio-cultural interactions that individuals reproduce through externalized discourses and practices (Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 79).

Medieval Europeans reproduced pre-Christian folk traditions associated with death and fertility as a retributive and apocalyptic eschatological actor (Aberth 2010, 130, 215-224; Caciola 2016, 349-350; Pagels 2012, 37). Colonialism brought the icon of Death to the Americas, where Spaniards reproduced the Dance of Death liturgical

performances as didactic plays for conversion (see Burkhart 2004, 51; Whyte 1977 [1931], 42-44). Mexican Catholics later reproduced colonial imagery signifying a Good Death in confraternities as an early 20th-century occult love charm also used for healing (see Gruzinski 2001 [1995], 164; Kelly 1965, 108; Lewis 2011 [1961], 290; Malvido 2005, 25; Navarrete 1982, 25-40; Perdigón Castañeda 2008, 123; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 53; Toor 1947, 145). Occultists reproduced La Santa Muerte as a pathway to self-empowerment that is reminiscent of the human potential movement (see Chesnut 2012, 4; Hanegraaff 1998, 42-54; Malvido 2005, 25; Thompson 1998, 423).

Reproduction of the icon of Death, here, does not connote a "falsity or contrivance" like that of "invented tradition" (Plant 2008, 177, 188 and see Hobsbawm 2012 [1983], 1-14); rather, it references an alteration of "actors, things, and their relations" within already structured categories of thought and action (following Sahlins 1981, 67; Smith 1999, 11). Reproduction, in one sense, refers to the facilitation or prevention of practices and discourses within the organizing social forces of things and people (Smith 1999, 11). How individuals reproduce discourses and practices, however, is not a "mechanical reaction" (Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 79). Sahlins (1981, 67, 70) notes that while reproduction does not occur without alteration, such transformation remains limited to the cultural categories available to social actors. Within these cultural categories, individuals employ tactics according to their own logics, interests, and desires (de Certeau 1984, xviii-xix).

Muertista and Occultist reproductions continually evolve as they seek to ameliorate conflictive conversations, actions, and events that take place in their everyday

interactions within culturally hybrid social networks (following Fragoso 2011, 16; Knauft 1996, 109; Melucci and Lyyra 1998, 208-209). These evolving reproductions occurred as a consequence of shared iconography that arose in medieval Europe but was subsequently spread to the Americas through 16th-century colonization (see Aberth 2010, 222-224, 231, 269; Bigliardi 2016, 312; Brandes 1998, 199; Burkhart 2004, 51; Chesnut 2012, 4; Clifton 2016, 343; Gruzinski 2001 [1990], 163-165; Hanegraaff 1998, 408-409; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 1, 4-6; Malvido 2005, 25; Michalik 2011, 163, 165, 174-175; Lomnitz 2005, 184-185; Reyes Ruiz 2011, 54; Whyte 1977 [1931], 46-48, 51). Muertistas and Occultist devotees, however, find common ground within a logic of presence that conflates the signified with its signifier (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 4; Clifton 2016, 335; Flores Martos 2019, 101; Hanegraaff 1998, 113-114; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 9-10; Kristensen 2014, 13, 106; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317; Orsi 2016, 29).

Muertistas and Occultists come together in The Santa Muerte Tradition, then, through attributing agency to material forms of Death they both recognize as a divine presence (see Gell 1998, 123; Kristensen 2014, 13; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 7-11, 38, 249-252; Styers 2004, 220). Occultists and Muertistas attribute agency to material forms of Death because of a shared Romantic counter-ideology (see Hanegraaff 2003, 376n.36; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Lovejoy 2001 [1936], 316-317). Hanegraaff (2003, 376n.36) describes Romantic counter-ideology as a response to the dominant social narrative of empirical rationalism beginning with the Enlightenment. Empirical rationalism of the 18th century gained ideological strength in the 19th century

when attributing agency to a material forms became understood as "human fantasy" (Latour 1993 [1991], 35). By the 20th century, social scientists like Malinowski (2015 [1948], 70) related a denial of empirical rationalism to a primitive thought process related to magical practice (see also Frazer 2015 [1890], 48-50 159-163, 711; Tylor 1920 [1871], 137-138, 142). Occultists and Muertistas appear like-minded with late 19th- and early 20th-century theorists in understanding their folk magical practices as oppositions to the dominant ideologies of modernity (see Hanegraaff 1998, 408; Styers 2004, 17, 18-20).

The Romantic counter-ideology of both Occultists and Muertistas consists of an anti-modern ethos related to folk magic (see Argyriadis 2014, 192; Bromley 2016, 4; Clifton 2016, 335; Flores Martos 2019, 101; Hanegraaff 1998, 407; Hanegraaff 2003, 376n.36; Hanegraaff 2012, 180-190; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12; Kristensen 2014, 13; Kristensen 2019, 147-149; Michalik 2011, 162, 165, 174; Roush 2014, 130; Sebald 1980, 173). An identification with folk magic among communities on the periphery of their respective societies, links 15th-century Western European Christian notions of witchcraft to 21st-century practices (Sebald 1980, 173). Folk magic aligns with subverting dominant social narratives because its practices resemble 14th-century notions of witchcraft as an inversion of Christian normativity (ibid., 173-185).

Members of these communities find themselves as outsiders to dominant social narratives, and therefore, turn to practices delineated as deviant and anti-modern for the purposes of seeking justice (see Sebald 1980, 173-174, 183-185). Claims of justice are intrinsic to folk magic because it entails practices in which "everyone can participate regardless of social class, sex, and other differences of social or material power" (ibid.,

183). Cultic growth among Occultists and Muertistas, therefore, arises from a shared desire to receive protection, healing, binding, and revenge in social worlds they perceive as antagonistic to their survival (Flores Martos 2019, 86, 104-106; Hedenborg-White and Gregorius 2016, 12, 16; Huffschmid 2019, 114; Kristensen 2015, 545; Kristensen 2019, 147-149; Michalik 2011, 162; Roush 2014, 130).

The popularity of the cult of La Santa Muerte continues to grow in Mexico and rapidly expands among Occultists on social media in the United States and beyond. Everyday practices associated with the icon of Death thus gathers a diverse assemblage of people around the material presence of an entity believed to be divine (see de Certeau 1984, xiii; Dreyfus 1996, 2-3, 12; Heidegger 1971 [1951], 150-151; Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; Orsi 2016, 4-11, 38, 249-252). A Romantic counter-ideology that denies both empirical rationality and Christian normativity is the main impetus for the cultic growth of La Santa Muerte among Occultists (following Hanegraaff 2003, 376n.36; Sebald 1980, 173-185). In conclusion I contend, that the Romantic counter-ideology of both Muertistas and Occultists stems from a relation to the icon of Death as a real and tangible divine entity present in one's everyday life (following Orsi 2010 [1985], xvi; 2011, 14).

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECT AUTHORIZATION

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Miguel Aguilera
SHPRS: Religious Studies Faculty 480/965-8576 miguel.aguilera@asu.edu

Dear Miguel Aguilera:
On 8/28/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review: Initial Study	
Title: Documentation and Analysis of Interviews with Members of The Santa Muerte Tradition Facebook Group	
Investigator: Miguel Aguilera	
IRB ID: STUDY00012378	
Funding: None	
Grant Title: None	
Grant ID: None	
Documents Reviewed:	• Breault_Interviews in The Santa Muerte Tradition, Category: IRB Protocol; • consent_form_SantaMuerteTraditionInterviews.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Recruitment_Material_SantaMuerteTraditionInterviews.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • supporting documents_SantaMuerteTraditionInterviews .pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 8/28/2020.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Eric Breault Miguel Aguilera

Eric Breault