

Beard and Conquest: the Role of Hair in the Construction of Gendered Spanish Attitudes towards the American Indians in the Sixteenth Century

Barba y conquista. El papel del pelo en la construcción de actitudes de género del español hacia los indígenas en el siglo XVI

Barba e conquista. O papel do pelo na construção das atitudes dos espanhóis com os indígenas no século XVI

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RECEPCIÓN
1 de septiembre 2012

APROBACIÓN
15 de marzo 2013

DOI

DOI 10.3232/RHI.2013.V6.N1.05

Throughout the history of Western culture, hair has been a physiological attribute with considerable semiotic implications. It has played, and still plays, a highly significant role in shaping the ideal of beauty, and defining ethnic identity as well as social status. However above all, it has always been a criterion for defining gender. All these derivatives have a pronounced occurrence in the profusion of descriptions of the human reality the Spaniards encountered in 16th century America. In this article, I claim that hair -a beard and body hair in the case of the Spaniards, and long hair and the absence of a beard or body hair in the case of the Indians- played a vitally important role in shaping the Europeans', especially the Spaniards', attitude towards the natives of the New World. The natives' physical appearance -analyzed through the prism of gender- especially their long hair and smooth skin, is one of the various possible explanations of the instinctive sense of superiority the Conquistadors felt when they first met the American Indians. This aspect, so far insufficiently researched, is an important key to understanding the root cause of the Europeans' perception of the natives as human beings that could legitimately be subdued.

Keywords:

Gender; American-Encounters; Colonialism; Ethno-History; History of hair; History of the body

A través de la historia de occidente el pelo ha sido un atributo psicológico con significativas implicancias semióticas. Ha jugado, y lo continua haciendo, un importante papel dando forma a un ideal de belleza y definiendo identidades étnicas como también el estatus social de los individuos. Pero, por sobre todo, ha sido siempre un criterio para definir el género. Todos estos aspectos tuvieron una marcada presencia en las muchas descripciones que los españoles hicieron de la realidad que encontraron en la América del siglo XVI. En este artículo argumento que tanto el pelo como el vello corporal en el caso de los españoles, y el cabello largo y la ausencia de barba y vello corporal en el caso de los indígenas, jugó un papel de vital importancia en dar forma a las actitudes que europeos, y especialmente españoles, tuvieron hacia los indígenas del nuevo mundo. La apariencia física de los nativos, especialmente su pelo largo y piel suave, es una de

las claves que no ha sido suficientemente investigada, para entender las raíces de la percepción que los europeos tuvieron de los indígenas como seres humanos que podían ser legítimamente sometidos.

Palabras clave:

Género; Encuentros americanos; Colonialismo; Etnohistoria; Historia del pelo; Historia del cuerpo

Ao longo da história do Ocidente, o pelo foi um atributo psicológico com implicações semióticas significativas. Tem jogado, e continua jogando, um papel importante ao dar forma a um ideal de beleza e definir identidades étnicas e o nível social dos indivíduos. Mas, principalmente, sempre foi um critério para definir o gênero. Todos esses aspectos tiveram uma marcada presença em muitas das descrições feitas pelos espanhóis da realidade encontrada na América do século XVI. Neste artigo argumento que tanto o pelo como o véu corporal, no caso dos espanhóis, como o cabelo longo e a ausência de barba e de pelos no caso dos índios jogou um papel fundamental em formar as atitudes que os europeus, especialmente os espanhóis, tiveram com os indígenas do Novo Mundo. A aparência física dos nativos, sobretudo seus cabelos longos e peles suaves, é uma das chaves que não tem sido suficientemente investigada para entender as raízes da percepção que os europeus tiveram dos índios como seres humanos que poderiam ser legítimamente submetidos.

Palavras-chave:

Género; Encuentros americanos; Colonialismo; História étnica; História do pelo; História do corpo

Introduction

Throughout the history of Western culture, hair has been a physiological attribute with substantial semiotic implications. It has played, and still plays, a highly significant role in shaping the ideal of beauty, and defining ethnic identity as well as social status. Above all, though, it has always been a gender-defining criterion. All these derivatives had a pronounced occurrence in the profusion of descriptions of the human reality the Europeans encountered in sixteenth century America. In this article, I will argue that hair -the Spaniards beard and body hair, and long hair and the smooth bodily and facial skin in the case of the Indians- played a significant -although not exclusive- role in shaping the Spaniards' attitude towards the natives of the New World. The natives' physical appearance -analyzed through the prism of gender- especially their long hair and smooth skin, is one of the so far insufficiently researched keys to understanding one of the many causes for the Spaniards' perception of the natives as human beings that could legitimately be subdued. Still, I would like to stress that it is not my intention to claim that the gender oriented approach was the only factor present in the construction of the relationship towards the American Indians. Neither do I claim that this approach is an alternative interpretation to the construction of this approach. Rather I suggest adding it to other factors that influenced the European approach towards the natives, put forward by other scholars, such (among others) as the theory recently proposed by Rebecca Earle, on the importance played by food and diet in the Spanish understanding of the American reality and the nature of its inhabitants¹.

In early modern Spain, beard was the main physiological feature that characterized the male. The Indians' lack of a beard and their smooth skin made the ethnic difference between conquerors and conquered more pronounced; but it mainly strengthened the Spaniards' feeling of manliness. This perception underscored the characteristics of the Spaniards' self-identity, which

viewed itself intuitively as the “male” side in a gender based equation, as opposed to the Indians, who played the “female” side of it. The implicit and largely unconscious emphasis of the Spaniards’ “manliness” compared with the Indians’ “womanliness” or at least what was perceived as an imperfect masculinity, resulted in the constructing of a reciprocal relationship, with a Christian/European Self that viewed the Indian Other as a weak, effeminate creature, whose physiological traits attested also to an inherent inferior morality. This in turn, made it legitimate, in the eyes of the Spaniards, to gain control over the natives’ property and their bodies. This was not a classical case of effeminization of the Other as part of a conscious campaign intended to present him as inferior (for example, as the Greeks did to the Persians in ancient times). Quite the contrary: the natives’ allegedly feminine or imperfect masculine traits were implied, rather than explicitly stated, in the various sources reporting on the New World in the sixteenth century.

The hair as an indicator of the Indians’ Alterity

Skin color and hair types were the physiological features of the natives that drew the greatest amount of attention of the Europeans (mainly the Spaniards), who arrived in the New World. It is hardly possible to find a description of the natives’ physical appearance that does describe in detail how the natives wore their hair, the smoothness of their skin, and their custom of religiously removing the little hair they had on their bodies, and more especially -the men’s lack of a beard. The Europeans who described the natives’ hair were concerned with three main issues. The first was why the natives had no beards (mainly their incapacity to grow one, as well as the custom to remove of it if it grew). The second was their custom to grow their hair long, and the third was their custom to thoroughly pluck out their body hair whenever it grew. A good illustration of this point is found in Pietro Martire de Anghiera’s description of the natives of the island of Lucayas, north of Cuba:

The men’s hair is long and reaches down to their waist. The women’s hair is even longer, and wavy. Members of both sexes tie their hair. They are beardless, and it is impossible to tell whether they are naturally so, or whether this is caused by the use of a drug, or because they pluck out their hair like the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán. At any rate, they like to be smooth-skinned².

In all the descriptions of the natives’ physical appearance in Anghiera’s *Décadas*, the excessive attention to hair is pronounced. Anghiera’s report carries a great deal of weight, as he based his writings on a collection of reports, letters, and interviews with some of the people who had actually participated in the voyages of exploration and conquest; hence, his sources reflect the general interest that the natives’ hair aroused in the Europeans. Unlike Anghiera, who based his work on spoken and written testimonies, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés based his reports on the ethnical groups he actually saw in the Caribbean in the very first years after the first encounter with the New World: “Both the men and the women are beardless, and have no hair on their bodies. If any a man or woman among them does, it is as rare as one in a thousand”³.

Most of Oviedo’s attention focuses on the fact that the Indians -both the men and the women- have no beard or body hair. Oviedo provides the unconscious significance this had in

the eyes of the Europeans: “both the men and the women”. In other words, this is a characteristic of the natives’ physical appearance that indicates a blurring of gender boundaries. If we look more closely at his statement, we find that in his eyes, it is not that the male natives have neither body hair *nor* beard, but that neither the men nor the women have body hair or a beard; hence, and contrary to what could be expected by Oviedo, this characteristic is of no apparent use in distinguishing between the two sexes.

The reference to hair is sometimes made in conjunction with or right next to a description of what in the view of the Christians, was the natives’ low moral standards, as if the natives’ different attitude to hair also expressed their lack of virtue, their non-observance of moral codes pertaining to sex, and even worse, as an expression of the male natives’ natural tendency towards homosexuality. Thus, in an anonymous report from 1572 relating Cortés’s campaign, we find:

They are bareheaded, they let the hair on their heads grow, and they pluck out their beards. The women, if married, cover what should be covered, and if virgins, they walk around completely naked. Irregularities between men and women are frequent⁴; they have a strong tendency towards sexual promiscuity and sodomy⁵.

Sometimes there is no linkage or proximity between the description of the natives’ physical appearance and their moral virtues, but attention is paid to precisely the very elements that distance the natives from what is thought to be acceptable in the Christian world. The Spanish conquistador Francisco de Ulloa, who in the late 1530s explored the western coast of New Spain, describes a group of Indians he fought against in 1539, who were ‘naked, of average height, some had long, black hair and others had hair that had been cut to the length of two or three fingers’⁶. Nakedness and hair: the former casts doubt on whether the natives are descended from Adam and Eve, because nakedness contradicts the story of the Original Sin; the latter contradicts what in Christian society was the accepted fashion in hair, and played a role in stating the difference between the sexes.

Nakedness, skin color, and hair are always mentioned first and are repeated almost as a topos by nearly everyone who described the natives of the New World. In the conclusion of his impressions of the natives’ appearance, Huguenot priest Jean de Léry, who arrived to Brazil in the 1550s, includes the hair as one of the first features that ought to be mentioned along with the Indians’ nakedness: ‘Imagine a naked person, well-built, in the right proportions, who has had every single hair on his body plucked out, and the hair on his head cut the way I have described.’ Léry tries to assist the reader who has not come in direct contact with the American reality figure out what the natives looked like. The hair and the way it was worn were noteworthy components in conveying the picture of the American reality to Europe. In Léry’s case, the insistence on an accurate description of the smoothness of the natives’ skin seems to stem from what could be defined as a crisis of expectations. He explains that he had expected the natives to be very hairy; in fact, not only were they not hairy, but if any hair did grow on their bodies, including their eyebrows and eyelashes, they plucked it out with their fingers⁷. Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara -who himself never visited the New World- also focused on how the natives wore their hair, and on the way they treated their body hair and beard. He describes the natives

of Cumaná (in today's Venezuela), who cut their hair above the ears; if their beard hair grows, they pluck it out with a kind of tweezers, "because they do not want to have any hair there [on their face] or on their bodies even though they are naturally beardless and smooth-skinned ...and whoever has a beard, like the Spaniards, is called a beast"⁸.

It should be noted that as the key physiological criterion for distinguishing between the Spaniard "Self", and the Indian "Other", it was the hair, the most unstable and changeable external physiological feature, that the Spaniards intuitively chose. Hair can be of different color, length, and thickness. It can be dyed, shortened, combed in various ways, and sometimes it sheds of its own accord. However, for the very reason of its versatility hair was given significance, as it could be used as a social criterion for providing signs that characterize identity and gender.

Thus, hair is a prominent feature in a person's appearance, which was given a significance that affected the way one regarded oneself and the way one regarded the Other. A distinction should be made between long hair and the absence of a beard, especially the incapacity to grow one. Letting the hair on one's head grow long was a native custom, whereas the absence of a beard and a smooth skin were considered mainly as genetic, as if indicating to a sort of incomplete or imperfect masculinity. Together the two phenomena, the long hair and the absence of a beard formed an image, where not only were the natives born lacking one of the clear marks of a male (the beard), they also plucked it out if it grew, and they grew their hair long, a custom that in Spanish eyes characterized mainly women. Of the two phenomena, the absence of a beard aroused real wonder, and the word "marvel" (*maravilla*) is frequently repeated in descriptions of the natives.⁹ Oviedo writes, 'Indians are generally beardless; it is considered a wonder, or very rare, to find an Indian with a moustache, or a few beard hairs, or hair on any part of the body. Either [in the case of] of the men, or [in the case of] the women'¹⁰.

Diego Álvarez Chanca, a physician to Queen Isabella of Castile who accompanied Columbus in his second expedition to the New World in 1493, uses as well a terminology expressing wonder: "All of them, the Caribbean islanders and others, are beardless people, and it would be considered a marvel to find a bearded man". In his *Historia De Los Reyes Católicos D. Fernando Y Doña Isabel*, Spanish ecclesiastic and historian Andrés Bernaldez repeats what Chanca (who was one of his sources) writes and remarks that it would be a wonder to find a bearded man among the natives. Bernaldez added to what Chanca had said, namely, that the absence of a beard resulted from the natives' custom to shave off their beards "or pluck them out before they grew, so that it seemed as if their facial hair never grew". This addition by Bernaldez is significant as it proves the difficulty that people in Europe had in "digesting" the American reality, especially those who did not have the opportunity to see the New World with their own eyes. The testimonies in almost all the sources that describe the Indians based on a direct encounter with them, attest that it was in the natives' nature that no hair grew on their faces and that if a few hairs did grow there, they plucked them out. Bernaldez on the other hand, who did not visit the New World, apparently found it difficult to accept a reality where a man did not grow a beard. Hence, he described a situation where facial hair was shaved or plucked out. In his opinion, it was obvious and natural for a man to have facial hair. Therefore, it is no wonder that Bernaldez also embraces Chanca's statement that "looking at [the faces of the natives] makes one laugh... and what is done here [in Spain] to the head of a madman, the best of them [the Indians] will see himself as fortunate if it is done to his head"¹¹.

While drawing attention to the absence of a beard, the explorers also took care to interpret the way the Christians' beards were perceived by the Indians: considerable importance was attributed to the Christians' beards, not only as a means by which they were identified by the Indians, but also as a decisive bodily component that shaped the image of the Europeans in the eyes of the natives, as creatures who generated fear, and an intuitive sense of submission. Regardless to the significance the natives actually attached to the beards of the Spaniards, which is out of the scope of this article, the Spaniards were the ones who considered their beards important, and they chose to put this interpretation into the mouths and the actions of the Indians. Gómara, for example, writes that the Indians "would approach the Spaniards and some of them would touch their beards, some would touch their clothes, and some their swords, and would circle them like imbeciles"¹². Beard, garments, weapons. In Gómara's opinion, the Indians' admiration of the Spaniards' appearance was focused on three components, which in the eyes of a sixteenth century Spaniard very clearly symbolized power: clothes, as a mark of Christian culture (after the Original Sin), the beard as a symbol of masculinity, and the sword, as a symbol of the Spaniards' technological superiority. According to Gómara, the Indians walked around the Spaniards "like imbeciles" (*bobos*) because, if we interpret his statement, they wore no clothes. In other words, it was doubtful whether they were humans; they were beardless, which put their masculinity to question; and they had no sophisticated weapons, such as the sword, which enabled an "exemplary man", who ought to be bearded and dressed to overcome his foes. In another place, Gómara comments on "the bearded men and horses" of Cortés's rival, Pánfilo de Narváez, which caused the natives to fear¹³.

In the 1590s, Antonio Ruiz described as follows conquistador Pedro de Tobar, one of the leaders of the Coronado expedition to (today's) New Mexico: "Just by looking at him the Indians became frightened, because of the long beard he always grew, which reached down below his chest, and because he always used glasses, which made the Indians of this country call him 'four eyes'"¹⁴. The Spaniards were quick to understand the role of the beard in the power game with the Indians and made the most of it. Anghiera writes that conquistador Gil González Dávila, who explored in the 1520s the southern regions of Central America, noticed that the natives had no beards and that they feared bearded men. Therefore, in order to intensify their fear, he cut the hair of some of his younger soldiers, who had not yet grown a beard, and glued it onto their cheeks so that they too could take part in the "psychological warfare" against the Indians. Anghiera writes that the trick did indeed affect the course of the battle¹⁵.

It is worth noting that in visual representations, such as paintings and engravings, the Indians were also depicted as having long hair and especially as lacking beard. These visual representations, that were mostly based on written accounts that arrived to Europe from the New World, were generally drawn by artists that never actually saw an Indian. Still, the lack of beard was a noteworthy detail that found its way to the visual representations of the written descriptions. This point is remarkable, since, as expressed for example by the French Franciscan friar, André Thevet, who wrote in the 1550's, the widely accepted idea in early modern Europe about the looks of the wild men was that they were supposed to be covered with hair, as a sign of their savageness¹⁶.

The natives' hair: associations with femininity

One of the most frequent associations made in reference to the Indians' hair was that it resembled the way in which European women wore their hair. Columbus remarked that the natives were "naked, and had very long hair, like the women of Castile"¹⁷. In another description, he mentions the smoothness of the natives' skin in close proximity to his description of tribes of women, who fought like their husbands:

They are no different from the others, except that as it is customary for women, they have long hair. They use bows and arrows...hence they are to be regarded as savages... and they live with certain women...who are not engaged in work that is appropriate for members of their sex, as they use bows and arrows exactly as I reported their husbands do¹⁸.

Columbus points to a blurring of gender boundaries. He compares the Indian men's physiological traits to those of the women, and the women's involvement in warfare to that of the men. Like Columbus, many add the explanation 'as is customary for women' to a description of the way the natives wear their hair. For example, Bernáldez does this when he says that the Indians' hair is "as long as women's hair"¹⁹.

Diego de Landa, bishop of Yucatán in the second half of the sixteenth century, made in this regard a fascinating observation about the Maya:

They did not grow a beard and it was said that from childhood, their mothers would burn their faces with hot pieces of cloth so that they would not grow a beard. Now they are growing a beard, but it is a very rough beard, like horsehair. They grow their hair long as women do... and all the men use mirrors, but the women do not²⁰.

According to Landa, the reason why the Indians' hair does not grow is not genetic, but rather the result of a deliberate act. What makes matters worse in this case as in the other cases mentioned before in which the Indians were reported to pluck out their beard or body hair, is that the Indians themselves perform the shedding of these characteristics. The natives intentionally remove one of the most salient symbols of masculinity: the beard. Moreover, as if that is not enough, they even grow their hair long like women. Hair is accompanied by feminine behavior, such as the use of mirrors, a feminine utensil, which does not attract the attention of the female natives. This is a clear example of how the native world is viewed: a world where the gendered division of social and family roles is unclear, and where men have conspicuously deficient masculine traits if not feminine. Landa also adds, "Now they are growing a beard". This was the result of the work of the monks, who put a stop to the women's custom of singeing the hair of the native boys. Growing a beard therefore, heralded the Indians' initiation into the Christian world. Juan Farfán wrote in the 1540s that previously, the Yucatán Indians had hair that was "long, as women's hair that reached down to the waist and even lower, but now they cut their hair, because the monks made them adopt this custom"²¹.

Contextualization: hair and gender in sixteenth century Europe

In order to grasp the full effect that various kinds of hair had on shaping the attitude towards the natives, we need also to understand the importance of hair as a key gender criterion in early modern European society. In the following paragraphs I do not intend to present a comprehensive review on Europeans' view on hair, but rather to give a sample of relevant references that show to its importance.

Londa Schiebinger observes that although the beard's precise significance and importance varied from one culture to another, and even changed over time, in general, the beard (and I may precise, the capacity to grow one) symbolized masculinity, virility, and physical strength²². Augustine and Isidor of Seville are just two early of many examples of the perception of the beard as a natural sign of masculinity in Christian Europe²³. This view was also the norm in sixteenth century England, as expressed in the words of William Shakespeare:

What should I do with him [a husband that hath no beard]? Dress him up in my apparel, and make him my waiting gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth; and he that hath no beard is less than a man²⁴.

With the discovery of hairless peoples from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the capacity to grow a beard also became a criterion for distinguishing between the Europeans and the natives of the newly discovered realms, and a correlation was made between a beard and a white skin. Elliott Horowitz writes that before the sixteenth century, there were about five hundred years during which the beard was not in fashion in Europe and was generally used to identify the Other, mostly the Muslim. Horowitz claims that the turnabout came in the sixteenth century. The beard was back in fashion and it was the very absence of a beard in the newly discovered peoples that turned the beard into a criterion for identifying the bearded Self as opposed to the smooth-skinned Other. Horowitz draws the attention to what he defines as the enormous impact that Pope Julius II's decision in 1510 to grow a beard had in Italy and elsewhere: growing a beard became fashionable throughout Europe. Horowitz brings additional examples to reinforce his claim about "Europe's changing face", namely, that in the sixteenth century Europe's face was being covered by a beard. Indeed, the issue at stake is not the role of fashion regarding the growing of a beard (the Italian *condottieri* had themselves portrayed as beardless; Columbus is shown beardless and so forth) but as argued before, rather the *capacity* of growing one. Although in the second decade of the sixteenth century growing a beard may indeed have become very fashionable, it would seem something of an overstatement to claim that before 1510, Europe was clean-shaven and that compared to the fifteenth century, the sixteenth century was "bearded". This claim is inaccurate, at least with regards to Spain, where the beard played a key role as a sign of masculinity much earlier than the sixteenth century. Horowitz is right in determining that in the sixteenth century the beard came to symbolize power, conquest, Empire, and the key physiological criterion for distinguishing between the Spaniards and the Indians²⁵. However, Horowitz only analyzes the beard's role in shaping the European identity vis-à-vis the American one from an ethnical angle and does not delve deeply into the gender issues that derive from this view of the beard. The distinction between Europeans and Indians was made not only because

the former had a beard and the latter did not, but was also significant in creating an equation in which the Self and the Other stood one opposite the other not only ethnically, but also in terms of gender.

In the historical treatise of King Alfonso the tenth, “el Sabio” *Primera Crónica General de España*, which was written in the thirteenth century, and was very popular in the sixteenth, there is frequent reference to the beard and to hair. One of the more interesting references is based on the story of Emperor Hadrian’s meeting with Secundus, “the silent philosopher”. According to this legend, Emperor Hadrian heard a rumor about a philosopher called Secundus, who resided in Athens, and had taken a life-long vow of silence. Hadrian was intrigued. He summoned the silent philosopher and threatened to execute him if he did not open his mouth and speak to him. Secundus persisted in his refusal to speak, and the Emperor, who was impressed by the man’s resolve, changed his mind about executing him.

In return, Secundus agreed to reply in writing to a list of short questions on weighty issues. Hadrian asked him about the essence of the universe, the sea, the gods, the moon, man, etc. About twenty-five of the questions (depending on the manuscript) relate to the functions of various parts of the body and one of the questions was “What is a beard?” And the answer was “That which distinguishes between the sexes” (Quid Barba? – Sexus discretio). As far as we know, the text of the conversation between Hadrian and Secundus had five versions. One in Arabic, one in Greek, one in Amharic, and two in Latin, which are chronologically later versions (from the early thirteenth century). It is interesting to note that the questions about the human body are probably a later addition and they appear only in the Latin versions²⁶. One of the two Spanish versions of the tale, which is based on the Latin version attributed to Vincent de Bovais, is the one cited in Alfonso’s *Crónica*: “What is the beard? That which distinguishes between a man and a woman” (Qué es la Barua? Departimiento del maslo et de fembra)²⁷. The Latin version speaks of the distinction between the sexes in a general way (sexus discretio) whereas the Spanish version explicitly relates to the difference between a man and a woman. The Spanish version turns the beard into part of a binary opposition that distinguishes clearly and not just in general terms between a man and a woman. It explicitly mentions the man and the woman, and in so doing, it underscores the importance of the gender aspect of the question at the time the *Crónica* was written. Both the *Crónica* and Secundus’s tale played a part in shaping, or at least expressing, the gender awareness of the people who lived in Spain in the sixteenth century. Hence, the importance of understanding the way in which the Spaniards related to the absence of a beard on the faces of the Indian males.

The debate about the significance of the beard in terms of gender is reiterated in Lope de Vega’s play *La Vengadora de las Mujeres*. According to Lope de Vega, not having a beard grow on a man’s face (and not necessarily shaving it off) is a sign of femininity. This point deserves special attention given the attitude to the natives’ beardlessness. The conventional meaning of beardlessness was femininity. Lope de Vega also directs the spectators to the accepted convention according to which, the beard is a man’s beauty (“A la barba la hermosura del hombre”)²⁸. One can infer from what Lope de Vega writes that the particularly disturbing issue is not that of shaving off the beard, but rather, the fact that no beard grows, as the absence of a beard is all a man needs to be taken for a woman.

One of the texts that best illustrates the importance of a beard as a symbol of manliness and valor in war is a tale by Juan de Timoneda, (ca.1520-1583). As in the biblical story of Gedeon, in this tale too, the commander is screening soldiers and dismissing many of them. One of the dismissed soldiers, a very young person, refuses to accept his dismissal and asks the commander why he has been disqualified. Without hesitating, the commander explains that it is because he has no beard and that it is unseemly for a soldier to have no beard. In the commander's opinion, the lack of a beard was proof that the young man is not cut out for war and that he did not have what it takes to be a good soldier. The commander adds that in the case of soldiers, a beard is a symbol of bravery, and a beardless soldier would not appear valiant enough and make the impression required in battle. The young soldier sets then out to prove that there is no connection between a beard and valor. He asks the commander how much of a beard a person needs in order to be considered a good soldier. The commander replies that one has to have enough of a beard to be able to stick a comb into it and the comb will stay put. The soldier then, takes a comb and sticks its teeth deep enough into the skin of his face for it not to fall. The commander was so impressed by what the young beardless soldier did that not only does he took him on, he also made him his aide²⁹.

There also are references to hair and beard in medical essays of sixteenth century New Spain. Such is Juan de Cárdenas's *Problemas y Secretos Maravillosos de las Indias*, published in 1591. At least two chapters are devoted to the issue of the hair and the beard. The fourth chapter is devoted to 'The amazing reason why the Indians do not lose their hair as the Spaniards do and why they are beardless':

Another trait these Indians have, which is the known fact that they never go bald, and if they do, it is very unusual, whereas going bald is something that happens to Spaniards as a matter of course as they grow old. I think when discussing this issue, one should also question why the Indians' beard does not grow, or if it does, it is only a scanty one. There is a great deal to say on this issue, and many reasons for pondering the issue, because apparently, we all live in the same region, enjoy the same air, use the same water and the same foods; in short, we have the same constitution and organization.

Cárdenas then replies:

The reason why the Indians do not go bald lies in their natural constitution. Namely, the Indians naturally have more phlegm, and this natural phlegm makes the composition of their organs softer, more moist, and more prone to metabolic activity and to emptying the waste material their hair produces. Hence, their soft and moist constitution makes it impossible for them to become bald, because they do not become sufficiently dry as they grow older. In the case of the Spaniards, the opposite is true: they are choleric and dry, and this dryness increases significantly as they grow older, and their natural dryness is added to that of old age. As these come together, they close off the scalp, thus preventing the growth of any additional hair. This is how they become bald.

In reply to the question why an Indian's beard does not grow, and if it does, it is a scanty one, I say that growing a beard is like [a person's] coloring: there is a likeness to the parents. In other words, as a dark-skinned father naturally has a dark-skinned son and a white-skinned father a white-skinned one, such is the case with growing a beard. If the father is beardless or has only a scanty beard, the same thing will happen to his son.

Hence, I say that because the Indians have this trait, which they inherited from their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, who were already beardless, this is the way they are today in whichever province of this country they live. This is why they are born beardless and remain so.

Cárdenas's account gives the impression that the smoothness of the natives' skin is congenital. However, it is learnt from what he subsequently says that in his view, it is natural for a male to be hairy and grow a beard. If that is not the case, one should search for an explanation in ancient times, because, in words that resemble Lope de Vega's quotation above, "It is so natural for a male to have one [a beard] to adorn his face".

"My reply to that", says Cárdenas is that:

The first Indians did not have a beard because when they first settled down, they lived as savages, and did not have houses to protect them from the sun and the air, and what's more, they did not use anything to protect themselves from the rains and the storms, as they usually walked around exposed to the sun and the wind, which burnt their necks and the skin on their faces so much that their skin hardened, the pores through which the hair grows became clogged, and so they began to be born beardless.

Cárdenas had a logical explanation for why the natives did not grow a beard or body hair, but had an abundance of hair on their heads. According to him, the hair on the head is naturally stronger and grows more potently than beard hair, which is weaker and any little thing can prevent its growth. The women and children, says Cárdenas, lack vigor and warmth; hence, they are weaker and this prevents the growth of a beard in their case. We can also infer this rule to the male natives, as they do not grow a beard either and they too, are said to be languid (*laxos*). Hence, this Indian attribute can be regarded as essentially feminine, which indicates that the Indian males are inherently weaker than the Spanish males and that their physiological attributes have feminine resemblance. Cárdenas also explains women's menstrual pains. He says that as of the age of 14, the young girls' bodies accumulate an excessive amount of blood, which they are rid of once a month. However, the man does not need to rid himself of excess blood, as he uses more energy, among other things because he is growing a beard³⁰. Here again we can see how the beard is a most basic gender-related trait. In fact, we could add, a beard is to men as menstruation is to women.

Londa Schiebinger mentions that in the mid-eighteenth century, there were several historians of nature (as Buffon and Cornelius de Pauw) who regarded the male Indians' lack of a beard as an indication that they were an inferior kind of human beings³¹. This view, which was explicitly expressed in the eighteenth century, was only implied in the sixteenth. However, according to various sources, it is clear that the absence of a beard gave the impression that the natives were congenitally inferior.

The Europeans' obsessive preoccupation with the natives' hair raises three questions. The first is why were they so preoccupied with this issue? The second is which cognitive and cultural associations did the natives' hair evoke? The third is which conscious, and more particularly, which unconscious conclusions, did the Europeans reach regarding the natives' hair?

In reply to the first question, it seems that the reaction to the natives' hair was very similar to the reaction to their nakedness. The natives' nakedness was inconsistent with the Europeans' most basic social and cultural conventions and generated a profusion of explanations for why the natives walked around naked. The observation is gender-related, given that by merely looking at the naked Indians, one could clearly see the difference between members of the two sexes. However, the scrutiny was in search for a hierarchy, for signs that would enable the Europeans to position the Indians within their social structure. The gender division was part of this social structure. In early modern Europe, division according to gender was not based on the sexual difference between male and female, but on the social significance of this difference, in other words: on gender. Hair, like clothing, was supposedly a key factor that helped discern social hierarchy and make it possible for the Christians to position the Indians in what they saw as the 'right' place in the human hierarchy and on the social scale. The male Indians' smooth skin was inconsistent with what was expected of a man, while long hair was considered an essentially feminine trait. Now for the second question: Instead of accepting a reality where it was possible to be a man, even if beardless, the Spaniards chose to tag the Indians with a conventional label, according to which a human being without hair on his face and body was not a perfect man. The Spaniards were unaware when making these linkages: it was not explicitly said that the Indians looked like imperfect men, in other words, feminine, because they lacked a beard. However, the descriptions of what the natives looked like were consistent with what was conventionally regarded as feminine. At best, the association the Indians' looks evoked in the Europeans was that of immature human beings. At worst, they associated their looks with femininity. This answers the third question: the specific effect that seeing the natives as feminine creatures had on the conquerors' attitude to them on a daily basis. These implications were fateful because they generated the conquerors' instinctive view of the natives as incomplete men, feminine, cowardly and of a weak (although well built) body and that it was only natural to exploit them and confiscate their property. We can speak of a "natural triumph" feeling, stemming from the Europeans' impression of the natives' apparently feminine looks.

“As women do”: gendered associations stimulated by the natives' appearance and behavior

It was not only in the natives' appearance that the Spaniards detected a lack of manliness; they also detected a lack of gender clarity in their behavior. At the end of the sixteenth century, Juan Suarez de Peralta, of the first generation of Mexican creoles, described local customs that contradicted the Spaniards' most basic gender conventions. After a debate about the origins of the Indians (Carthage, China, the ten lost Israelite Tribes), he wrote:

According to another assumption, their origins are from the Ethiopians or the Egyptians, because it is the custom of these peoples that the women are involved in trade, in bringing in goods, and other jobs that are done outside the home, while the men stay at home, knit, and perform other household chores. The women urinate standing up, while the men urinate sitting down...and many other customs the Indians also have, especially the Indians of New Spain. And because they tie a strap to their heads...with which they hold the loads they carry on their backs. It is said that in the new kingdom of Jalisco, the men carry their loads on their heads as women do...The women trade in markets...where they eat in public, urinate standing up, whereas the men urinate sitting down, and most of [the men] can sew and knit³².

Although there are other points of comparison between the Egyptians and the Africans and the Indians, most of the speculation presented by Peralta regarding the Indians' origin is based on gendered similarities, which are the opposite of conventional gendered behavior in Europe. In the 1550s, Pedro de Cieza de León wrote similarly about some Indians of Peru:

Some of the women are good-looking and quite a few of them burn with carnal desire and pair off with the Spaniards. These women are willing to do a great deal of work, as they are the ones who plough the earth, sow, and reap. Most of the husbands stay at home, knit, weave, and take care of their weapons, their clothes, and their faces and are engaged in other womanly chores³³.

The use of gender as a category of historiographical analysis was proposed as early as 1986 by Joan Scott in a groundbreaking article in this field³⁴. Scott proposed that gender be used as a historiographical category in addition to the social and racial ones used for analyzing various historical developments. In her opinion, those three categories are essential for an analysis of how relations between conquering and subaltern groups are formed. According to her thesis, inequality in the balance of power is organized along at least three axes: the social axis, the racial axis, and the gender axis. Scott underscores that gender is not to be taken as a historiographical category that is the crux of the matter, because applying the gender category exclusively is ahistorical, and not only does it ignore other cognitive and social aspects, it also neglects to take into account the effect of events where gender plays a minor role, and detaches the developments from other weighty contexts. However, it is important not to ignore the enormous effect of gender-related issues. Gender is not the only field, explains Scott, but it is ever-present in everything related to shaping the balance of power in the West, in both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions.

In the case of the Indians, these underlying gender issues were highly significant for the very reason that they were not part of the conquerors' explicit discourse. Scott claims that attention to gender-related issues in the historical sources is often inexplicit, but plays a key role in organizing equality and inequality in society. According to her, social hierarchal structures rest on global understandings of what is generally referred to as the natural balance of power between male and female. The terms used in the discourse, are not overtly gender-related, but they allude to male-female relations. The use of terms such as weakness, submissiveness, exploitation, or alternatively, productivity, power, protection, are not unequivocally gender-related, but they allude to traditional, normative division of attributes and roles according to gender. In the encounter with the Indians, the gender codes Scott speaks of abound; hence, the model she proposes can in my opinion be applicable to the encounter, among other potential interpretations³⁵.

The validity of Scott's model can be evaluated by analyzing some of the references made by Columbus and others: "They all of them lack, as I said above, iron of whatever kind, as well as arms, for these are unknown to them; nor are they fitted for weapons, not because of any bodily deformity, for they are well built, but in that they are timid and fearful". Columbus also says that the Indians "walk about naked, and what's more, they are too cowardly"³⁶.

In these references, the discourse is saturated with terms pertaining to fear and weakness. Even nakedness can be regarded as a sign of weakness, because although the Indians are said to be well built, their nakedness symbolizes defenselessness. Hence, this is an unconscious

reference to the Indian deficient masculine character or even feminine behavioral traits. To these one might add references in which the gender analogy is more explicit. Columbus, for example: "It appears that the women work harder than the men"³⁷.

All the above references relate to the behavioral aspects of the natives' lives, but they do not become part of the explicit discourse about their nature and place in the "Great Chain of Being". Columbus makes statements pertaining to the natives' appearance, especially to their hair, which indicate an implicitly gendered view of the Other. For example, he writes, "They are no different from other island people except for the fact that they grow their hair long, as women do"³⁸. In another account, Columbus notes, "When the boat reached land, there were behind the trees, fifty-five naked men with very long hair, like the hair of the women of Castile"³⁹. Bernáldez also finds it of an essence to report that the Caribbean natives had hair that was "as long as women's hair"⁴⁰.

Margaret Hodgen insists that when Columbus described the Indians' physical appearance, it was only their long hair that he found unusual. Hodgen's interpretation of what Columbus said served her claim that Columbus saw the New World realistically and was not caught up in superstitions and religious beliefs⁴¹. Alongside this interpretation, stating that the Indian males wore their hair as the women of Castile wore theirs can be taken as proof that Columbus's view of the Indians was also a gendered one. In addition to describing them as weak, cowardly men, whose custom it was work less hard than the women do; there is also the physiological aspect of their long hair and beardlessness, which are also feminine traits.

The Spaniards found many instances in the natives' conduct that attested to their being naturally lazy, a trait that was essentially attributed to women, and to which Galen also referred⁴². Franciscan friar Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía), one of the first missionaries to be sent to New Spain in the 1520s, for example, presents an early and undeveloped version of the thesis that would fully develop in the eighteenth century about the natural biological inferiority of the American continent: "What one can say about this generation [of Indians] is that they are very different from us in the way they are made, because we the Spaniards, have a big heart, as invigorated as fire, while these Indians and all the animals in this country are humble and meek"⁴³. The Europeans found other proof of the natives' gendered inferiority in their widespread homosexuality, which was one of the key issues that made them see the natives as inferior beings.

There were, of course, a small number of Europeans who consciously and explicitly attributed feminine traits to the Indians in order to promote a political agenda aimed at forcing them into submission. The most prominent of these was Juan Gines de Sepúlveda. Rolena Adorno claims that the main argument on which Sepúlveda based his theory was not the natives' "sins against nature" (although those obviously carried a substantial weight in the arguments against the Indians) but particularly concerning their conduct in battle. According to Sepúlveda, the natives were mainly deficient in traits connected to the art of war. "Thousands of them are running away like women", he wrote. Later, he changed some of his arguments, perhaps in order to glorify the Spaniards' victory over the Indians: "They were not men of a feminine spirit, they were

strong people"⁴⁴. In making this statement Sepúlveda contradicted not only what he had written earlier, but it appears that perhaps he was also arguing with the implicit convention of viewing the Indians as deficient masculine beings. According to Adorno, the knightly values were the conceptual framework through which the Europeans judged the Indians⁴⁵. The Indians' cowardly conduct in battle created an immediate link with the conduct expected of women.

In a debate about the natives' right to their property, Jesuit missionary and naturalist José de Acosta uses arguments that can also be defined as gendered. He compares the natives' legal status to that of the women or the children. Although Acosta does not rule out the natives' right to their property, he determines that they are inferior to Spanish men (like women and children) and as such, they are to be ruled⁴⁶. Similar arguments were made by Sepúlveda, but unlike Acosta, who wished to protect the Indians' rights, Sepúlveda's arguments were part of the claims made regarding the legitimacy to enslave the Indians⁴⁷.

Carnal desires, homosexuality, impotence

Another aspect with markedly clear gendered associations is that of sexual performance. In several descriptions of the encounter between the Europeans and the Indians, reference is made to the natives' sexual promiscuity, especially to the considerable carnal desire of the Indian women, who usually initiated and led the sexual relations. The Indian men, on the other hand, were often described as so passive that the women had to resort to subterfuge in order to arouse their sexual appetite and reach sexual satisfaction⁴⁸. It is against this backdrop that the reports about the considerable sexual attraction the Indian women felt towards the Europeans should be seen. Their wish to enter into sexual relations with the foreigners was so strong that they succeeded in Vespucci's words, "succumbing and staining all remnants of Christian modesty"⁴⁹. The intensity of the native women's sexual appetite, the fact that the native males did not satisfy them and their considerable attraction to the Europeans glorified the manliness of the Spanish males vis-à-vis the Indian males' allegedly impaired manliness.

The Europeans viewed with severity the Indians' widespread tendency to what they considered to be an unnatural manner of having sex: heterosexual intercourse through the anus and more especially, homosexual relations. Oviedo says that the Indians "are lascivious and they engage in sodomy"⁵⁰. In the 1550s, Alvar Nuñez Cabeça de Vaca reports that "some of them are in the habit of sinning against nature"⁵¹. Cabeça de Vaca had the opportunity to observe these phenomena at close range, as he resided among the Indians for a long time. In addition to young boys who dressed as women and offered sexual services, he met male couples who lived as husband and wife, where the man playing the woman's role was "castrated and impotent" and wore women's clothes⁵². Cieza found it difficult to understand why despite the fact that there were so many beautiful women among the Indians, the men committed the sins of Sodom; moreover, they did so in public, without any shame, and even bragged about it profusely⁵³. Bernal Díaz del Castillo also refers to this issue. He says that while Montezuma, the Aztec Emperor, was "very clean" of sodomy⁵⁴, there were among his people, young boys dressed as women who attempted to earn a living "from this accursed profession"⁵⁵.

All the above stamped the Indian man as an imperfect male, who was weak and impotent. It reinforced the view that the Indians had feminine traits. Hence, the impression is that the gendered discourse had an effect on shaping the natives' image. In his, *Sex and Conquest*, Richard Trexler focuses on the erotic aspect of the conquest of the New World⁵⁶. He examines Europe's seizure of America from the point of view of relations between the sexes, especially the widespread homosexuality among the natives, which ostensibly gave the conquerors the legitimacy to oppress them. There is a particular emphasis in his research on the Indians' exploitation of the feminine boys (the berdache) and the commitment the Spaniards felt to fight against the practice. I wish to challenge Trexler's claim and state that regardless of the extent of homosexuality among the natives, it was their very physical appearance that created the impression of a deficient masculinity and with it the Spaniards' instinctive feeling of superiority, regardless the Indians' behavior or to the sexual leaning of some of them. Rather than contradicting Trexler, I wish to add another aspect to his work. While Trexler's innovation was to add the sexual behavioral aspect to the various cultural ones on which the Spaniards focused when they constructed their attitude towards the natives, I wish to add their feminine, or in the least of the cases, their deficient manly looks.

Gender and History: the Spanish – American encounter as a test case

"Completely naked, simple and pure, in the open field, living only on the means and the food provided by Mother Nature"⁵⁷. Thus, Michel de Montaigne describes the purity of the New World and its extreme closeness to nature, as opposed to the degenerating of the world and human society by the Christians. However, without being aware of it, Montaigne also expressed an approach prevalent in the sources, which described the natives' extreme closeness to nature and their dependency on its benevolence. For example, in André Thevet's words: "As nature created them, they eat roots and walk around permanently naked, the women as well as the men"⁵⁸. According to Wilcomb Washburn, this approach stemmed from a non-judgmental observation of reality in the New World, and from an almost intuitive search for proof of the existence of a paradise on earth in the New World, or alternatively, to find man in his natural condition or in the Golden Age of antiquity⁵⁹. David Brion Davis too, speaks of the Indians' connection to Nature as it was perceived by the English, and of the impact this connection had on the construction of a social hierarchy between Europeans (in Davis's case study, the English) and the natives⁶⁰. The natives' connection to Nature and their dependency on it, and their existence in a natural state is a recurring theme in the sources. As will be shown below, even the natives' dependency on nature can be interpreted as having a gendered aspect.

In a controversial article published in 1974, Sherry Ortner claimed that in every human society, the woman is identified as being closer to nature, while the man is closer to culture⁶¹. As each society extols the harnessing of nature to man's will ("Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air". King James Version, Genesis 1:28) the woman becomes a symbol of inferiority because of her closeness to the natural condition. According to Ortner, because a woman's body functions differently from a man's, it places her closer to nature, to that which is not controlled by man.

Ortner also claims that given the way a woman's body functions, she takes on social and cultural roles that are considered inferior to those of a man. Hence, the woman is universally positioned as inferior to man. The interesting point here is that Ortner links woman's dependency on nature's mercy and her closeness to it to her inferior status vis-à-vis man.

The claim that the Indians are dependent on nature's mercy and are close to it makes Ortner's thesis about women also relevant to the Indians. In other words, as women are closely aligned with nature, so are the Indians, and as women's inferiority derives from their close alignment with nature, so does the Indians'. To this, one should add the Indians' behavior and physical appearance, which the Europeans regarded as effeminate. Viewing all the above through the prism of gender makes it easier to understand why most Europeans intuitively felt that the Indians were inferior to them. According to Ortner, the man was given the role of creating culture, and this completes the dominance equation between the Spanish male, who is strong, detached from nature's mercy, and is in control of it, and the effeminate Indian, who is dependent on nature's mercy and who needs a male Christian to gain control over him in order to be granted the gift of culture and the true faith.

Gerda Lerner too, studied the roots of men's dominance over women⁶². She claims that society's patriarchal structure is imprinted in the human race. Lerner explains that patriarchy is not a prerequisite. Furthermore, she explains that although it is customary to claim that perceiving the woman as inferior is a result of Aristotle's teachings, Aristotle only expressed an attitude that had existed in European society from time immemorial. Intuitively, man perceives woman as a creature that can be dominated. In fact, the first subjugation in human society is woman's subjugation to man. What is more, in wars, the custom was to kill the men of the vanquished side and enslave the women and children because they were weaker and were not perceived as a threat to the victor.

In society, the male is naturally aggressive, says Lerner, and he dominates society because he is physically stronger, which grants him the role of he who brings the food, lifts heavy loads, etc. The man's gendered roles grant him social superiority. In Indian society, although dominance was also granted to the males, the distribution of gender roles was in various aspects blurred.

An interesting phenomenon took place here: It was not only a question of ruling out the Indian men's limited maleness, but also a concern about the existence of an alternative masculinity that undermined the accepted gendered male identity in Christian society. A report about the existence of a society in which the gendered division of roles was different from the conventional one can also be found in the work of Francisco de Arceo, who wrote in the 1530s about villages in Nueva Galicia (currently in central-western Mexico), where the "women are queens or leaders of the tribe and absolute ladies, not their husbands" ("mugeres son reynas ó cacicas é no sus maridos")⁶³. Although Europe had known female rulers and queens, in this instance de Arceo is pointing to a case where the woman is the ruler, as opposed to the husband, who had to obey her. This was not only a question of a tribal head, but of an entire society where the women ruled. As seen above, even in their bravery in battle, the Indian women were in some cases depicted as superior to the men. Francisco de Aguilar, the conquistador turned Dominican friar, writing about New Mexico in the early sixteenth century indicates that in the eyes of the Christians, the Indian women were physiologically similar to men. He adds that in the final stages of the battle of

Tenochtitlán, the female natives were armed and fought courageously and that it was only after the Spaniards had killed them that they discovered they had in fact been fighting against women⁶⁴.

Conclusion: hair and gendered colonialism

The “discovery” of the American cultures generated an intense theological-philosophical debate in Europe, mainly in Spain. In the American reality however, the “contact zone”, to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, between the Europeans and the natives, produced an encounter that generated a reaction that appealed to the most basic instincts and the most deeply seated cultural sub-conscious. The first reaction was generated by what was viewed through the prism of a gendered balance of power: the Indian males looked weak and effeminate. Hence, there was no need to kill them as they did not pose a threat, but it was possible to enslave them, as was traditionally the custom with the women and children of the vanquished.

Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne underscore the tremendous importance of the physical and gendered aspects of colonialism. They determine that in fact, colonialism is “very prosaically, an exercise in gender”⁶⁵. Hence, issues related to the natives’ physical appearance must not be underrated in the construction of the mutual relations between conquerors and conquered. Similarly, Susanne Zantop wrote that gender and sexuality play a crucial role in the fantasies that set colonial ideas in motion. According to her, gender plays a key part in the balance of power created in the encounter between the Self and the Other; in fact, it was the gendered balance of power that enabled the Europeans to see themselves as human beings who were meant to dominate all others. Zantop claims that the colonialist experience had unmistakable sexual connotations⁶⁶. These were manifest in the attitude to the woman of the Other (rape, enslavement, etc.) and in viewing the act of conquest as an act that simulated the penetration of a woman’s body; the bringing of culture to the savage as comparable to the act of the male providing the sperm, and the woman receiving it. Although Zantop discusses Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a careful analysis of the sources reviewed above shows that these claims are also relevant to Europe’s encounter with America in the sixteenth century.

Trexler’s work also points to the relevance of Zantop’s approach to learning about the encounter with the natives of the New World. Trexler underscores the effect of the encounter’s erotic aspects and the part played by the Christian confrontation with the Indians’ homosexuality, on shaping the reciprocal relations between conquerors and conquered. To these behavioral aspects, one should add those that are connected to the natives’ physical appearance, as discussed above. Trexler claims that the discovery of America included the Europeans’ attempt to understand the sexuality of the New World as a geographical entity and the sexuality of the people living in it too. The example he gives is that in the eyes of the Spaniards, the fact that a man was armed played an integral part in his sexual identity, whereas the fact that the Indians had no substantial weapons was interpreted as an indication of their femininity⁶⁷. As we saw earlier, the beard was also an integral part of the European men’s sexual identity; on the other hand, the natives’ beardlessness was intuitively interpreted as another indication of their deficient masculinity, equally if not more so than the fact that they had no weapons.

Louis Montrose claims that it was those gender-related issues that set in motion and shaped Western Europe's pre-colonial discourse and policies in the sixteenth century. The gender-related issues shaped the nature of the exploitation and enslavement of the newly discovered territories, which were conceived as 'womanly' territories and in fact reflected the "genderization" of the conquest. However, Montrose refers to seeing the entire continent as an entity, a female phenomenon⁶⁸, whereas I set out to prove that the gender-related view was not only conceptual, it was also based on the practical and daily contact with the autochthonous population. The difference in their physical appearance and their different hair -with the gender-related associations connected to it -determined the reciprocal relations between conquerors and conquered.

James Axtell states that on their arrival in the New World, the Europeans' most urgent need was to learn enough about the Indians and their territories to be able to classify them, exploit them, and eventually rule them. He adds that the basic assumption in this learning experience was that the Indians were inferior beings, culturally and religiously, and somewhat less so, racially⁶⁹. Although it is true that the natives were generally regarded as inferior beings, the explanation that their inferiority was due to cultural and religious issues and less so to racial ones, seems somewhat too easy a way out. It is difficult to base the explanation for the way the reciprocal relations between conquerors and conquered were shaped only on their religious and cultural differences. The conquerors were well aware of the differences between the various ethnic groups that populated the New World and were also able to distinguish between their different levels of development. Anyone who examines the attitude towards the natives based only on the philosophical and theological arguments that took place in Europe regarding the nature of the natives, would easily reach the same conclusion reached by Axtell. However, the study of travel logs and other sources that reported on the human reality encountered in the New World shows that the Indians' deficient manly looks, in addition to behavioral issues perceived as feminine contributed to create a basic common denominator for all the peoples of the American continent, be it the primitive tribes of the Caribbean or the well developed Aztecs or Incas. In other words, the natives' physical appearance had a significant, if not exclusive role in the foundations on which the attitude towards the natives was constructed.

In conclusion, hair -the Spaniards' beard and body hair, and the Indians' long hair and smooth skin- played a key role in the needed redefinition of the Spaniards' self-identity vis-à-vis the human reality they encountered in America. Physical appearance, especially the hair, is an important -though not exclusive- key to the understanding of the root reason for why the natives of the American continent -as a whole- were perceived by the Spaniards and other Europeans as inferior beings. This key is a gendered key, strongly connected to the Spaniards' perception of the American -Indians sexuality. The beard characterized the Spaniards, but it also characterized the male. Hence, the Indians' beardlessness reinforced the Spaniards' and other Europeans' national and religious identity, as well as their feeling of manliness. This was an interaction of two kinds between identity and space: the geographical space and the bodily one. As a result of this interaction, the characteristics of the Spaniards' self-identity, which intuitively regarded itself as the "male" in the gender equation, were emphasized. The implicit and largely unconscious emphasis on the Spaniards' "manliness" in contrast to the Indians' "womanliness" generated reciprocal gendered relations, where the Christian Europeans viewed the Indian Other as a weak, effeminate

human being, with physiological traits that indicated also to moral inferiority. This alleged inferiority -among other social, political and religious reasons- gave the Europeans the legitimacy to gain control over the natives' body and their property. This perception of the Indians later became in the eighteenth century an orderly biologically based racial theory on the inferiority of the American continent and its native inhabitants.

Notwithstanding the thesis presented here, it should be clear that just as certain physical features of the American Indians were unconsciously perceived as negative, a positive approach developed already in the early stages of the encounter, and especially in later stages of the conquest, based on the very same inner qualities reflected by the natives' outer appearance. The Indian docile, non-violent character inspired people as Bartolomé de las Casas, Michel de Montaigne and other's positive view of the Indians, later known as the "Noble Savage" myth, although in this specific respect, the native's outer appearance played a relatively minor role.

Effeminization of the other is a very frequent element to be found in the discourse towards the Other in any civilization, certainly in European one. In antiquity, Greeks claimed the Persians to be effeminate; in the Middle Ages, Christians did the same with the Jews, Byzantines with crusaders and vice-versa and so forth, in what sometimes appears to be almost a topos. In these cases, the effeminization of the Other was part of an overt discourse and part of a political-rhetorical agenda intended to denigrate the Other. This was not the case with the Indians, even if we can find in their descriptions by the European sources some traces of these topoi. Attention was paid to their feminine traits, generally between the lines, but there was not -for unique exceptions, as Sepúlveda- any conscious or orchestrated effort to depict the Indian Other as feminine. That is exactly why I believe gender played a significant, although not an exclusive role in defining the Indians' nature. It was not just a rhetorical-propagandistic discourse, but also a real impression of the Indians external physiological traits. It is not to say that gender is the only valid tool, and that all of the encounter should be viewed through gender or sexuality lenses. However, gender should be brought to the fore when trying to understand the in depth reasons for the construction of the European approach towards the Indians.

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