

Making Waves on the Historicised Atlantic

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Many [Eurocentred] narratives of the Atlantic world, and global meta-narratives, take 1492 as a point of origin, but this is not a politically neutral historical co-ordinate. “1492” is representative of a colonial mythology which the historiographical shift from “discovery” history to “encounter” history in the 1980s did little to challenge.¹ The paradigm shift from discovery to invention, first suggested by Edmund O’Gorman in 1961,² had the most critical potential, yet most of this went unrealised since the legends of Washington Irving et al had established an Atlantic mythology which was not easily displaced.³ Stated simply, 1492 is too important; it is essential to the structure of the meta-narrative of Eurocentred modernity. It is the point of origin for the start of a “New World,” a “global” world of “modernity,” capitalism, and coloniality. For example, the “world-system” depicted by Immanuel Wallerstein could emerge only in the sixteenth century, since there was no full world before 1492.⁴ 1492 is symbolic of the start of the

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¹ For examples of encounter history, see Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *New World Encounters* (London: University of Californian Press, 1993), Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounter: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), and Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings, Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). These studies have enriched our understanding of the complexities of encounter and the Atlantic world, but they have predominantly focused on cultural history. The term “encounter” facilitates the conceptualisation of the complexity of interactions more than “conquest;” this school has remodelled historical understanding of transcultural interaction, exploring adaptations and transformations at the micro level, but leaves space for further reflection on the macro level, for considering the politics of epistemologies and structures of historical narratives of the Atlantic world as some politicised epistemologies like “New World” and the significance of 1492 continue to play a role in modernity.

² Edmund O’Gorman, *The Invention of America an Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972).

³ This was predicted in a contemporary review of O’Gorman’s work, see Charles E. Nowell, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History*, by Edmund O’Gorman; Review by Charles E. Nowell, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 42 (1962), 234-236, 236. Washington Irving famously established the flat earth myth. See Washington Irving, *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (London: Cassell & Co, 1885). The discovery legends popularised by the Hakluyt series are also difficult to displace; this was noted by Inga Clendinnen, “‘Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty:’ Cortes and the Conquest of Mexico,” in *New World Encounters* ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 13.

⁴ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (London: Academic Press, 1974). Wallerstein sees 1450-1650 as the start of the world-system, but argues that this is “only a European world-system,” as the “world-system” was not completed until the seventeenth and eighteenth century; *The Modern World-System* Vol. 1, 10. Wallerstein states that “there could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas;” Aníbel Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System,” *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 134 (1992): 23.

journey, but Columbus's voyage to the "New World" is only a metaphor for the teleological meta-journey of "modernity,"⁵ which has been characterised both by capitalism and coloniality.⁶ Continually moving forward has been essential to the mythology and identity of "modernity" and capitalism. Challenging 1492 disrupts the fabric of this teleology and offers a renewed opportunity to explore the power dynamics governing the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of historical narratives.

It is important to challenge this narrative of modernity; as narratives prioritising the "discovery of the New World" sustain it, "modernity" continues to produce hegemonic, Eurocentred discourse.⁷ Carlos Alonso articulated this fear when he wrote that concepts of futurity and novelty lead to the "permanent exoticization of the New World," and that the "New World" constitutes an "ideological façade sustaining old world power."⁸ The marginalisation of Latin America – through the European discourse of modernity – has more recently, been lamented by the political philosopher Enrique Dussel.⁹ History can be complicit in this marginalisation if it conforms to the narrative structures of the discourse of modernity. Histories involving the "New World" are particularly complicit since the identity of this "New World" is tied to what Walter Mignolo has described as "modernity's mythical march toward the future."¹⁰ This is not just a narrative inconvenience, since the darker side of modernity is coloniality.¹¹

Eurocentred modernity is sustained by a number of historicised narratives. The Eurocentrism of modernity is not simply geographic but also epistemic. It has been linked to "Westernization,"¹² the mythology of "Westernization" is embodied in European uniqueness theories that posit that Europe developed the knowledge and skills to complete the journey west and "discover the New World."¹³ This narrative is also entangled with the narrative of capitalism;¹⁴ Pierre Chaunu posited that the Algarve was the essential base for discovery because of "its primitive capitalist trade, which orientated it towards discovery and adventure overseas."¹⁵ The narrative of the first European crossing of the Atlantic has complex, if subtle, overlaps with

⁵ Exploring the mythologies and Eurocentricity of conquest history, Matthew Restall notes that in an exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, "the exploratory achievements of mankind are placed within a trajectory beginning with Columbus's transatlantic voyages, running through the European settlement of the North American West, and climaxing in space travel," in Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 2.

⁶ The idea of "coloniality," and its link to modernity emerged in the work of Aníbal Quijano, See Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 168-178. Coloniality represents a multidimensional typology of power.

⁷ Enrique Dussel has examined this problem, and noted that "even James M. Blaut (1993) links the 'rise of Europe' with the discovery of America in 1492," Enrique Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," *Nepantla: Views from South* 3.2 (2002): 223.

⁸ Carlos Alonso, *The Burden of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8, 10.

⁹ Enrique Dussel emphasised this at his presentation to the *Society of Latin American Studies*, Newcastle, 2011.

¹⁰ Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), xix.

¹¹ See Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Michigan: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹² See S. N. Eisenstadt in "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129 (2000): 1-29. There are different narratives of modernity.

¹³ Pierre Chaunu, *European Expansion in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: North-Holland, 1979).

¹⁴ For an exploration of this historiography see J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and New: 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Dussel observes that "Marx himself (quoted in Wallerstein 1974, 77) notes that the discovery is a fundamental moment in the origin of capitalism and 'primitive accumulation,'" Enrique Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," 223.

¹⁵ Pierre Chaunu, *European Expansion in the Middle Ages*, 155.

Eurocentred narratives of the development of capitalism and modernity. Mignolo argues, that “the expansion of Western capitalism [which is seen as characterising ‘modernity’] implied the expansion of Western epistemology.”¹⁶ This is significant to Atlantic history as, according to Quijano and Mignolo, the link between coloniality and modernity is the consequence of the process of the emergence of capitalism in the Atlantic circuit as explained by Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel.¹⁷ Yet the Western epistemology behind Eurocentred modernity should not be reduced to this focus on capitalism. Religion is important to this epistemology, but its role is often overlooked. For example, the philosophy of modernity has been influenced by the universalism of Christocentric philosophy.¹⁸ A similar observation was made by Francis Fukuyama, who wrote: “it is not an accident that modern liberal democracy emerged first in the Christian West, since the universalism of democratic rights can be seen in many ways as a secular form of Christian universalism.”¹⁹ Christianity has influenced the epistemology of modernity in complex ways.

To investigate the mythology and epistemology of modernity, historians should also consider the role of religious philosophies, cultures of belief, and dynamic religious groups. The hegemonic system of modernity is a thought system that operates through the coordination of time, space, and ideas. Therefore if we are to challenge the hegemony of modernity, its coloniality and its marginalisation of alternatives, we must think about how it is created through the interaction of time, space, and ideas. We must interrogate the politics determining the accepted identity of time (characterised by periodisation), space (characterised by a West-and-rest hierarchy and a cartographic centralisation of the Northern Atlantic), and ideas (characterised by a European epistemology). In doing so we must not be restricted by the categorisations of the epistemology of modernity, as this would lead us to simply reproduce the discourse of modernity.

Enrique Dussel has written that modernity is “a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity.”²⁰ Dussel accepts 1492 as the date of birth of this modernity.²¹ To counteract the hegemony of Eurocentred modernity, Dussel would subscribe to what Mignolo calls a “Fanonian perspective” on the “discovery of America;” the use of the perspective on non-Europeans to counteract the perspective of Europe and modernity.²² However, as Quijano and Mignolo have observed that the discourse of modernity itself has colonial agency, it follows that there are other ways to counteract the hegemonic perspective of

¹⁶ Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” 59.

¹⁷ Ibid, 60. Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) opposes the notion that Braudel influenced the concept of Atlantic history.

¹⁸ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World, Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500 – c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) discusses the link between the Christocentric notion of *Monarchia Universalis* and European imperial ideologies, but there is still space for reflecting on how this contributes to a Eurocentred notion of modernity.

¹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, “History is Still Going Our Way,” *Perspectives* 23 (August, 2002). First published in *Wall Street Journal* (5 October 2001).

²⁰ Enrique Dussel, “Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures),” in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, ed. John Beverley, José Oviedo and Michael Aronna (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 65. Dussel notes that he differs from Wallerstein who would see “modernity” as starting in the “Enlightenment,” in “World-System and “Trans”-Modernity, 223.

²¹ Ibid, 66.

²² Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, xi.

Eurocentred modernity, since alterities were also produced within Europe and have been marginalised by the discourse of “modernity.”²³

Eurocentred modernity is a complex semiotic system that functions by the suppression of all alternatives. It is a common postcolonial assumption that there are “all sorts of submerged voices that dwell in the body and margins of texts.”²⁴ A great body of literature has been devoted to recovering these in locations that have been geopolitically designated as subaltern, such as Latin America, but subaltern identities were also produced within the European Middle Ages. Realising the complexities of the Middle Ages and placing 1492 within a space of continuity is not about expanding teleologies, but about listening for the legacies of ambiguities, anxieties and power dynamics that played a role in the invention of the European epistemology of modernity. There are studies of the medieval Atlantic world that demonstrate the medieval context of 1492,²⁵ but these have not focused on exploring the complexities of coloniality or geopolitics of modernity. The worst excesses of the Hakluyt paradigm of discovery history may no longer monopolise historians’ conceptions of the Atlantic world,²⁶ but there has not yet been a comprehensive study of the geopolitics of knowledge and identity involved in the medieval invention of the “New World” which may cast light on our understanding of Atlantic epistemologies. Mignolo sees the history of European epistemology beginning in the sixteenth-century Renaissance,²⁷ but in this model 1492 also constitutes a break, and this underlines the importance of Early Modern Europe and ignores the agency and complexity of the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages have also played a role in the European identity of modernity. Eurocentred modernity has been sustained through the notion of a break from the past,²⁸ which become the dark ages, or, as John Dagenais wrote, “a temporal wilderness, ripe for modernist colonisation.”²⁹ Yet the Middle Ages, long stripped of their agency and identity,³⁰ can provide fertile ground for the recovery of alternative historical narratives. Recovering the complexities, ambiguities and power dynamics that developed in the late Middle Ages and may have influenced the Early Modern Atlantic world is important for challenging some mythologies of modernity. Heiko Oberman posited that the Franciscans were vehicles of an alternative

²³ Existing explorations of alternative histories have focused on indigenous American and African societies, including John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁴ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World, Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 9.

²⁵ In addition to Felipe Fernández-Armesto, see David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind, Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁶ For a summary of contemporary Atlantic historiography, see Jack D. Greene and Philip D. Morgan eds, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). There are many Atlantics, and Bernard Bailyn notes that “no comprehensive bibliography can be compiled;” Bernard Bailyn, “Reflections on Some Major Themes,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History, Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²⁷ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra explores the importance of the Enlightenment for European epistemology and disagrees with some of the details of Mignolo’s arguments about the Renaissance.

²⁸ This notion is exemplified by Pagden who wrote that in the sixteenth century ceased to be a boundary and became a highway; A. Pagden, “Politics, Possessions and Projection, Changing European Visions of the World,” in *Gegenwarten der Renaissance*, ed. Michael Matthiesen and Martial Staub (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004), 187-188. This notion sustains a Eurocentric vision of the Atlantic world, and elsewhere Pagden has referred to the sixteenth century as the “expansion of Europe,” in *Lords of All the World*, 1.

²⁹ John Dagenais, “The Postcolonial Laura,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 65 (2004): 374.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

historical and intellectual tradition,³¹ and they could therefore be useful tools for rethinking our historicisation of the Atlantic world. Exploring the Franciscans in Europe and the Atlantic represents an opportunity to consider the geopolitics of history and ideas and begin to search for a new paradigm for historicising the Atlantic.³²

It is important to reflect on structures governing our historicisations of time and space. Dipesh Chakrabarty observed that the identity of modernity has been sustained through a historicist narrative and that historicism was itself integral to the idea of modernity.³³ Chakrabarty defined this historicism as “the idea that in order to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development.”³⁴ It is therefore important to conceive of narrative structures that represent heterogeneity, complexity, and ambiguity.

1492 is still an important structure in Atlantic historiography.³⁵ Atlantic and transatlantic historiography has challenged some of the imperialist nineteenth-century narratives of European discovery and expansion which cast 1492 as the start of a Eurocentred modernity,³⁶ but new interest in global history and the history of globalization seems to be repeating old problems by emphasising the significance of 1492 and re-visiting European uniqueness theories.³⁷ Some new global histories and histories of globalisation are re-emphasising the significance of 1492 and the genesis of world-systems without problematising the geo-politics of this narrative.³⁸ Atlantic history has responded to the questions raised by global history; in the foreword to the *Atlantic in Global History*, Thomas Bender wrote that “the challenge is not that of writing a global history but rather that of being ready to move out from the local, the particular, to find translocal, even global, contexts, connections, interactions, and interdependencies that have explanatory value rather than offering a mere decorative show of erudition.”³⁹ In the new context of global history

³¹ Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (3rd edn, Durham, 1983).

³² This differs from historical models of continuity, and studies exploring the legacies or uses of the ancient and medieval periods in the Americas in the Early Modern period, such as Pagden *Lords of all the World*. Sabine MacCormack *On the Wings of Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) provides an important exploration of the role of classical epistemology in shaping interactions between Spain and the Americas and historiography in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In these works the culture of the Renaissance is important. For the role of the Renaissance in the colonisation of the New World see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Michigan, 2003).

³³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2000), 6. Chakrabarty defined this historicism as a “gift” of the nineteenth century, but the nineteenth century does not monopolise historicism.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ It coordinates work on the medieval Atlantic, for example David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind, Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *1492: The Year the World Began* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987). It is also used as a starting point in many Atlantic histories, including Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik Seeman eds. *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2006), and J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

³⁶ For example Thomas Benjamin *The Atlantic World, Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and some of the articles in Jack D. Greene and Philip D. Morgan eds., *Atlantic History*.

³⁷ For example, taking 1500 as a turning point in global history, Noel Cowen writes: “developing superior technologies, the Europeans responded longer and more successfully to the global impulse;” Noel Cowen, *Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

³⁸ For example Charles Mann *1493, Uncovering the New World Columbus Created* (New York, 2011).

³⁹ Thomas Bender, “Foreword,” in *The Atlantic in Global History*, xviii.

there is also a challenge to develop perspectives, which are conscious of the politics of their narrative structures (such as periodisation) and of the geopolitics of epistemologies.

This article outlines the example of the “translocal” Franciscans as an alternative narrative.⁴⁰ The Franciscans emerged in Assisi in the thirteenth century and were characterised by their radical doctrine of poverty. Their Rule asked the brothers “to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience without anything of our own, and in chastity.”⁴¹ The Franciscan interpretation of poverty was more extreme than that of other mendicant orders, such as the Dominicans, as they renounced common as well as individual property. They claimed to be pursuing the model of perfection demonstrated by the example of Christ. The Franciscans explored the paradoxical notion at the heart of the Christocentric tradition that poverty was perfection. The meaning and boundaries of Franciscan poverty were continually debated throughout the Middle Ages. Franciscan poverty was not stable and universal but experienced many transitions.⁴² It could also be interpreted in different ways by different Franciscans.

Poverty was a complex phenomenon in the Middle Ages.⁴³ It was connected to the management of resources, but it was also embedded within a socio-cultural complex of charity which had many functions. Charity operated like a community insurance scheme, but, as the Franciscans reminded Christian society, it also had spiritual and theological meaning. The voluntary poverty of the Franciscans interrogated the boundaries of this delicately balanced system at a critical time of economic change. Barbara Rosenwein and Lester Little argue that, “the friars were born from a spiritual crisis brought on by the spread of the cash nexus.”⁴⁴ Through their performance of poverty they articulated the anxiety felt by many people in Western Europe about the moral ambiguity of monetarisation.⁴⁵ Little observed that “the money economy was altering some of the individual’s relationships with nature, with work, with time, with human society and with his own deepest values and religious beliefs;”⁴⁶ the discourse of Franciscan poverty articulated the questions that these changes raised. The Franciscans’ poverty, their solidarity with the poor and marginalised, also enacted a criticism of the society from which they had chosen to exile themselves. This reflection on the moral concerns of economic change remained an important dimension of Franciscan identity; they became symbols of man’s anxieties about relationships with the material and spiritual worlds.

⁴⁰ The idea of “translocality” emerged in response to the problem that existing meta-narratives of global history fail to “establish links between the multitude of connections and flows below the elite level;” Ulrike Freitag, “Introduction: ‘Translocality’: An Approach to Connections and Transfers in Area Studies,” in *Translocality: The Study of Globalisation from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1-21, 3. The notion of “translocality” is still being developed.

⁴¹ *Regula bullata* (1223), in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 1, The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Con., William J. Short, O.F.M. (New York: New City Press 1999), 99-106, 100.

⁴² See G. Gál and David Flood eds., Nicolaus Minorita, *Chronica: Documentation on Pope John XXII, Michael of Cesena and the Poverty of Christ with Summaries in English: A source book* (New York, 1996).

⁴³ See Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty, A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

⁴⁴ Barbara Rosenwein, and Lester Little, “Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities,” *Past & Present* 63 (1974): 24.

⁴⁵ For more on this, see Giacomo Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth, From Voluntary Poverty to Market Society*, trans. Donatella Melucci, ed. Michael F. Cusato, Jean François Godet-Calogeras and Daria Mitchell (New York: Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure University, 2009).

⁴⁶ Lester Little, “Evangelical Poverty, the New Money Economy and Violence,” in *Poverty in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Flood (Werl/Westf.: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1975): 15.

The Franciscan questioning of the boundaries of poverty, permissibility, necessity, and moral and spiritual obligation during this time of economic change placed the Franciscans in a difficult position in relation to the authorities that controlled resources. In the Middle Ages the Church was one of the biggest landowners, and the Franciscan reminder of Christ's poverty, and the reminder that true spiritual perfection was reached through poverty was disadvantageous. Franciscan poverty raised questions about legitimate authority as Francis had quoted the Gospel: "let the one who does not eat judge the one that does."⁴⁷ However, the Church had a powerful grip on identity in the Middle Ages, and other socio-religious commentators of the late Middle Ages, such as the Waldensians, were repressed for making claims about poverty.⁴⁸ Francis had prevented the condemnation of his poverty only by stressing his commitment to existing Church structures, including the sacraments and the clergy, and by actively canvassing papal approval.⁴⁹ Yet the Franciscan interpretation of poverty continued to be controversial and caused logistical and conceptual problems for the authorities of the Church.

In the mid-thirteenth century Bonaventure clarified Franciscan poverty, arguing that the Franciscans sustained themselves in the condition of poverty through "simple use" of the things of necessity (such as bread), without ownership.⁵⁰ Nicholas III endorsed this separation of use and ownership, issuing *Exiit qui seminat* (1279), which arranged that the papacy would own the things that the Franciscans needed to use.⁵¹ This bull approved the Franciscans' position, but it also intensified their entanglement in the legal web of the Church. Following the work of Bonaventure and the ruling of Nicholas III, the Franciscans could claim that they lived a life of poverty free from property and rights. Despite attempts to situate Franciscan poverty within the Church, it remained controversial.

Fear of the radical implications of Franciscan poverty and its criticism of the morality of property came to a head in 1317 when the inquisitor of Provence, the Dominican John of Belna, decided that the proposition that Christ and the Apostles had nothing either in common or individually was heretical.⁵² Shortly afterwards John XXII demonstrated his opposition to the Spiritual Franciscans, issuing the bull *Quorundam exigit*, which condemned the teachings of the Spirituels, four of whom were burnt in 1318.⁵³ The fourteenth-century poverty dispute ensued. In 1322, Pope John XXII revoked papal approval of the Franciscan interpretation of poverty.⁵⁴ The dispute articulated papal fear of the Franciscans' position that they could use the things that were necessary to sustain their existence, such as daily bread, without owning those things, which contained the suggestion of social anarchy.

⁴⁷ Rom 14.3, St Francis, in "Part One: Writings from the Early Period to 1223," in Regis J. Armstrong, *St Francis of Assisi, Writings for a Gospel Life* (Slough: St Pauls, 1994), 78.

⁴⁸ See R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

⁴⁹ See *The Life of St Francis by Thomas of Celano*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol 1*, 180-308, 210-212.

⁵⁰ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants (Apologia pauperum)*, Jose de Vinck trans. (Paterson N.J.: St Anthony Guild Press, 1966), 241.

⁵¹ Nicholas III, *Exiit qui seminat*, in *Liber Sextus, Corpus iuris canonici*, Vol. 2, (Leipzig, 1879), (2nd edn, Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), col. 1109-1121, col. 1114.

⁵² This is according to The *Chronica* of Nicholas the Minorite, cited in Virpi Mäkinen, *Property Rights in the Late Medieval Discussion on Franciscan Poverty* (Leuven: Peters, 2001), 143.

⁵³ John XXII, *Quorundam exigit*, in *Bullarium Franciscanum 5*, ed. C. Eubel (Rome, Typis Vaticanis, 1898), 128-131.

⁵⁴ John XXII, *Ad conditorem canonum*, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, col. 1225-1230.

The poverty dispute led to the redefinition and control of the meaning of Franciscan poverty, property and rights.⁵⁵ Since the meaning of poverty was essential to Franciscan identity, this papal legislation could be seen as a manipulation of Franciscan identity. John XXII not only challenged the credibility of the Franciscan claim to poverty by revoking its legal basis but also redefined the conceptual and spiritual boundaries of poverty.⁵⁶ The Franciscans remained identifiable by their poverty, but what this poverty could represent had been manipulated. Yet it was difficult to control the entire meaning of Franciscan poverty, and it continued to represent an unvoiced criticism of the immorality of greed and the system of property developing in late medieval Europe.⁵⁷

The Franciscan doctrine of poverty as freedom from property and rights was suppressed, yet the Franciscans retained their identification with poverty, which was now characterised by anxiety over property. This anxiety became an intrinsic component of Franciscan identity; for example Franciscan chronicle accounts of their early American missions meticulously described clothing, goods, and the materials of their buildings, in order to emphasise their poverty, which was compromised by the demands of mission.⁵⁸ The Franciscans themselves experienced colonial semiosis within medieval Europe, yet they also had roles within the colonial system that emerged in the Atlantic world, as missionaries whose presence justified the colonial enterprise within the paradigm of European thought. The Franciscans challenge the colonised/coloniser binary,⁵⁹ another characteristic of the Eurocentred meta-narrative of modernity and the Atlantic world. The case of the Franciscans reveals some of the complexities of power and identity in the European and colonial context.⁶⁰ The Franciscan example helps to fragment the homogeneity of Eurocentricity and contributes to our problematisation of colonialism.

The Franciscans' complex relationship with power and authority began in medieval Europe but was intensified in the Atlantic world.⁶¹ Inga Clendinnen has observed that, "ambivalence towards authority had marked the Order from its earliest days."⁶² This ambivalence toward

⁵⁵ See Annabel Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature; Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ John XXII, *Quia quorundam*, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, col. 1230-1236.

⁵⁷ For more on the history of property in Western Europe, including the influence of the Franciscans, see Peter Garnsey, *Thinking about Property, From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ See Padre Jose Torrubia, O.F.M., *Cronica de la provincia franciscana de santa cruz de la Español y Caracas, libro de la novena parte de la Novena Parte de la Crónica General de la Orden Franciscana*, ed. and notes Odilo Gomez Parente, O.F.M. (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1972), and Nicholas Glassberger, O.F.M., *Chronica, ad. a. 1500, MS. In the Archives of the Franciscan Province of Bavaria, Munich, folio 270v-270r*, in Rev. Livarius Oligier, O.F.M., "The Earliest Record on the Franciscans in America," *Catholic Historical Review* 6 (1920/1921): 62-65.

⁵⁹ This is important since the colonised/coloniser binary produces an identity of victimhood; see B. Zachariah, "On Not Understanding the Stranger: Histories, Collective Victimhood and the Futility of Postcolonialism," in *Cultural Politics and Identity: The Public Space of Recognition*, ed. Barbara Weber, Karlfriedrich Herb, Eva Marsal, Takara Dobashi and Petra Schweitzer (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011), 101-116.

⁶⁰ Tibesar explored the role of the Franciscans in the Spanish empire and argued that the Franciscans' philosophy of poverty made them better able to relate to and interact with the Amerindians. Antonine Tibesar, *Franciscan Beginnings in Colonial Peru* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953).

⁶¹ For an example of the colonial role of the Franciscans see: Robert Howard Jackson and Edward Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans and Spanish Colonization, The Impact of the Mission System on Californian Indians* (Mexico D.F.: University of Mexico Press, 1996).

⁶² Inga Clendinnen, "Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Sixteenth-Century Yucatán," *Past & Present* 94 (1982): 38.

authority, a consequence of the Franciscans' doctrine of poverty, was a key source of their ambiguity in the colonial context. Franciscan poverty was meant to be void of power and authority, and Franciscans were supposed to subjugate themselves by rejecting all personal authority, but maintaining and organising this was difficult. Clendinnen has written that, apart from the minister general, authority was not permanently assigned, and "lesser offices rotated by election, ensuring that the authority experience was transitory, and always followed by the antidote (and preferred) experience of powerlessness."⁶³ According to David Burr, Francis saw poverty "as one aspect of a self emptying which involved the surrender not only of possessions but of prestige and power."⁶⁴ Yet the relationship between poverty, power, and authority was often strained, especially in the colonial context of the Atlantic world.⁶⁵ Further, Franciscan identity was used and manipulated in the Atlantic world, where the enactment of Franciscan poverty became a source of authority.⁶⁶ Not only was Franciscan poverty subjected to manipulation within Europe, but the ambiguous symbolism and power of Franciscan identity was also exploited in the colonial context of the late Medieval Atlantic world.

The case study of the Franciscan poverty dispute indicates how complex mechanisms of control of identity and memory did not begin with European overseas colonisation but were engineered within Europe. The papacy denied the Franciscan position that freedom from property was possible and spiritually commendable. It did so by denying the collective religious memory that had underpinned this position, namely that there was no property in the Garden of Eden,⁶⁷ and that Christ had owned nothing.⁶⁸ Hervaeus Natalis contributed to John XXII's argument that there was property in the state of innocence.⁶⁹ He reasoned that, "if the time of innocence had endured to the present day, a person would have a right to take the necessities for his life, use them, and exercise dominion over them."⁷⁰

A shared understanding, or collective remembrance, of the state of innocence was a way of disseminating Christian belief about the perfect condition of man. Understanding about the state of innocence would have been transmitted in the Middle Ages as an act of collective memory.⁷¹ The state of innocence is the starting point of the Christocentric narrative of man, and so altering how this should be interpreted was akin to an attempt to manipulate the Christian collective memory. Natalis and John XXII were creating an image of the past that served their needs in their dispute over Franciscan poverty. They would have been aware of the significance of the argument that there was property in the state of innocence. It had political implications as it

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: The Origins of the Usus Pauper Controversy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 6.

⁶⁵ For example, see *Ambivalent Conquests, Maya and the Spaniards in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Revised Edition, 2003).

⁶⁶ For example, Columbus is thought to have adopted the identity of a Franciscan tertiary, although the exact date of this act is unknown; see Francis Borgia Steck, 'Christopher Columbus and the Franciscans', *The Americas* 3 (1947): 319-341, 327.

⁶⁷ In 1329 John XXII issued *Quia vir reprobus*, arguing that there was property before the Fall. See John XXII, *Quia vir reprobus*, in *Bullarium Franciscanum* 5, C. Eubel, ed., (Rome, Typis Vaticanis, 1898).

⁶⁸ In 1323 John XXII issued *Quum inter nonnullos*, which decreed that it was heretical to claim that Christ and his Apostles owned nothing or in common. See John XXII, *Quum inter nonnullos*, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, col. 1229-1230.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ For the majority of medieval Christians, religious understanding was not derived through textual exegesis but through collective remembrance.

justified the paradigm of property, which challenged the value of poverty and the freedom of use, which it implied. This manipulation of religious memory represents a dimension of the coloniality of power in the European Middle Ages, and this may also have had implications for coloniality in the Atlantic. During the Franciscan poverty dispute the papacy altered the meaning of the Garden of Eden. When, on his third voyage in 1498, Columbus described the possibility of finding the Garden of Eden in the Americas,⁷² this had become a place where dominium was possible.

The process of this manipulation of the meaning of Franciscan poverty and identity illustrates how control operated in the Middle Ages. The papal regulation of Franciscan poverty reveals subtle processes that may be concealed by other investigations of control (for example, those focusing on physical disciplinary processes like inquisition) and may provide an example of “colonial semiosis” from within medieval Europe.⁷³ Walter Mignolo has explained that colonial situations “are largely shaped by semiotic interactions and by their cultural productions.”⁷⁴ The process of colonisation involves complex and often hidden processes; it impacts on linguistic meaning (poverty, property, and rights in the case of the Franciscan poverty dispute) identity and memory. Investigating the manipulation of the meaning of Franciscans in Europe in the late Middle Ages is a way to reflect upon the scope of colonial semiosis and suggests that we should continue to think about how power structures have affected language and ideas historically.

Writing a history of the Franciscans in the Atlantic world in a way that represents their complexity helps fragment the hegemonic discourse of Eurocentred modernity.⁷⁵ The Franciscans suggest the plural histories and power dynamics that existed within Europe but have been concealed by narratives which essentialise the Early Modern period as the beginning of modernity, colonialism, and the Atlantic world.⁷⁶ The Franciscans constitute the appropriate historical tools for this challenge since they operated across the axes of space, time, and ideas, which have been essential to the discourse of modernity.⁷⁷

Spatially the Franciscans transcended “Europe,” through their network that stretched from the Far East to Africa and the Atlantic World. They demonstrate the global dimensions of the Middle Ages. The Franciscans can help historicise the Atlantic in a different way since they represented a philosophy of space that was driven by their poverty. The Franciscans transcended the dominant order of space by resisting the paradigm of space as property and thinking instead of

⁷² Christopher Columbus, “Narrative of the Third Voyage of Christopher Columbus to the Indies, in which He Discovered the Mainland, Dispatched to the Sovereigns from the Island of Hispaniola,” in *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, Being his Own Log Book, Letters and Dispatches with Connecting Narratives Drawn from the Life of the Admiral by his Son Hernando Colon and Other Contemporary Historians*, ed. and trans., J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1969), 218.

⁷³ Walter Mignolo coined the term “colonial semiosis” and defined it a way to “suggest processes instead of places in which people interact.” Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, xvi. For an example of a study of colonial semiosis in the New World, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷⁴ Walter Mignolo, “On the Colonization of Amerindian Languages and Memories: Renaissance Theories of Writing and the Discontinuity of the Classical Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 329.

⁷⁵ The need to fragment hegemonic Eurocentred modernity was outlined by Arturo Escobar in “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 179-210. It is also the agenda of Dussel, Mignolo and Quijano.

⁷⁶ Walter Mignolo has critiqued hegemonic Eurocentred modernity, but his focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth century denies the agency and complexity of the Middle Ages. Understanding the Middle Ages can play a role in fragmenting the confidence of the historicisation of Eurocentric modernity.

⁷⁷ This framework is influenced by Mignolo’s “geopolitics of knowledge” approach demonstrated in *The Idea of Latin America*.

space as a spiritual journey. As a mendicant order they developed a broad network that was sustained by movement. Franciscans dispersed across the globe not only to fulfil their obligation as missionaries but also to comply with the demands of their poverty. St Francis had demanded that the brothers should go “as pilgrims and strangers in this world.”⁷⁸ Thomas of Celano recorded how St Francis and the brothers left the Spoleto valley where they had been staying “so the continuity of a longer stay would not tie them even by appearance to some kind of ownership.”⁷⁹ This doctrine of poverty, which questioned the bonds of property and prevented the friars from being linked to space, conditioned the translocality of the Franciscans. The Franciscans questioned man’s location in the world. Franciscan translocality was as much philosophical and theological as it was a spatial; their history encourages reflection on the epistemology of space.

Temporally, the Franciscans transcended the historicist rupture between the Middle Ages and modernity. The Franciscans also had a specific narrative of time and vision of the future which structured their perception of space and influenced their interpretation of the Americas.⁸⁰ The Franciscans incorporated elements of the mystical and apocalyptic traditions of late medieval Europe. Many Franciscans were influenced by Joachim of Fiore and saw themselves as having a unique role in ushering in the future and shaping its identity.⁸¹ Joachim had posited that at the dawn of the third age (the age of the spirit) there would be a new order of spiritual men similar to Christ’s Apostles, practicing poverty. The Franciscans saw themselves as these prophesised spiritual men,⁸² and Gerard of Borgo San Donnino (d. 1276/7) identified St Francis as the angel of the sixth seal of the Apocalypse. This gave the Franciscans a unique eschatological role in the negotiation of the future.⁸³ Phelan has emphasised the importance of Mendieta, but effectively it was Gerard of Borgo San Donnino who created the notion of the millennial kingdom, or Franciscan-led New World of the Spirit, which became spatialised in the Americas. Phelan has emphasised the importance of understanding the equation that “the new world equals the end of the world;”⁸⁴ these ideas shaped early European interpretations of the Americas.⁸⁵

The Franciscans were also important intellectually. As proponents of a philosophy based on poverty, they interrogated the meaning of property and articulated the anxieties provoked by economic change. Their grey habits were a reminder of man’s obligations to the poor and the spiritual value of poverty, alternatives to the confident expansion of European economic power. The Franciscans also established their own global knowledge network, based on knowledge

⁷⁸ *Regula bullata*, 103.

⁷⁹ Thomas of Celano, *Life of St Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 1.*, 180-308, 214.

⁸⁰ For example see John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

⁸¹ See Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁸² The special role of the mendicants in the apocalyptic narrative was stressed by the *Postilla vidit Jacob in somniis* and the *Super Hieremiam*; the authors of these are unknown but thought to be Franciscan. See Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 88.

⁸³ For more on the Franciscan view of history see Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1975).

⁸⁴ John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 24.

⁸⁵ For example, Franciscan philosophy impacted heavily on the intellectual landscape of Columbus; see Pauline Moffitt Watts, “Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus’s ‘Enterprise of the Indies,’” *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 73-102.

acquired through their journeys and ideas developed through study.⁸⁶ This is best represented by the *Book of Knowledge*, written by an unknown Franciscan of the fourteenth century, which describes many places that appear only much later in the traditional discovery and conquest narratives of the Hakluyt series.⁸⁷ In the Middle Ages the Franciscans' missionary network was the most extensive, and they were the first to endeavour to learn the languages of non-Christian peoples.⁸⁸ This information fitted into a particular Franciscan epistemology, which was linked to their commitment to global conversion. Europe and the boundaries of states diminished in importance from the perspective of this world-view. Theology was essential to conceptions of the world in the Middle Ages, and medieval projections of the world rarely centralised Europe.⁸⁹ The Franciscans act as a reminder that there were global visions in the Middle Ages and that these were seldom Eurocentred; their epistemology centralised the whole world, which was relativised within a Christian eschatology.

The Franciscans, and their translocality, represented a coordination of space, time, and ideas. Yet this alternative system, coordinated by eschatology and poverty, has not made a great impact on the historiography of the Atlantic world, despite being essential to the early conception of the Atlantic world. Many Atlantic world narratives neglect the mystical and theological dimensions of the European interpretation of the broadening of transatlantic links, whose significance has instead been interpreted in terms of its economic significance and role in the genesis of capitalism and modernity.⁹⁰ Franciscan history suggests an alternative historicisation of the Atlantic world, which can question Eurocentricity and the identity of modernity.⁹¹

The history of the Franciscans in the Atlantic world contributes to the disruption of the notion that 1492 represented a spatio-temporal rupture, which has dominated narratives of the Atlantic world.⁹² 1492 did not radically change epistemologies of space.⁹³ For the Franciscans, 1492 did not constitute a rupture in space or time. The practices and patterns of movement of the Franciscans in the Atlantic world had already been conditioned by their experiences in the

⁸⁶ St Francis had begun this global missionary tradition by seeking to engage with Muslims in Northern Africa. See André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi, The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael F. Cusato (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 82. Franciscans were the first missionaries to travel to the Far East, see Christopher Dawson, *The Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia* (London: Harper & Row, 1980). Franciscans were present in Northern Europe, and had a notable presence in the Atlantic. Missionary knowledge would have circulated within the Franciscan network as Franciscans were required to move convents. In *Exiit qui seminavit*, Nicholas III had stipulated the legitimacy of the circulation of books "for the advantage of the friars, and for their consciences." For more on Franciscan life, see J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), and Michael Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ An Unknown Friar of the XIV Century, *Book of the Knowledge of All the Kingdoms, Lands, and Lordships that Are in the World, and the Arms and Devices of Each Land and Lordship, or of the Kings and Lords Who Possess Them*, ed. Jiménez De La Espada Marcos and Clements R Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1912).

⁸⁸ Jill R. Webster, *Els Menorets, the Franciscans in the Realms of Aragon from St Francis to the Black Death* (Wetteren: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 125.

⁸⁹ For examples of world maps produced in the Middle Ages, see P.D.A. Harvey, *Medieval Maps* (London: British Library, 2006).

⁹⁰ This is the model established by Immanuel Wallerstein.

⁹¹ Gruzinski observes that the sixteenth-century Franciscan historian Juan de Torquemada "developed a Franciscan history of Mexico" of "inter-continental proportions," and he cites this as an example of non-Eurocentric history; Serge Gruzinski, *What Time is it There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 69.

⁹² 1492 has played a role in the historiographical schema of the Atlantic world, with narratives either focusing on, or beginning or ending with this date.

⁹³ This is explored in J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New*.

Canary Islands (and along the coast of Africa) from at least the fourteenth century.⁹⁴ The Franciscans were the dominant European presence in the Canary Islands during this period. Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo suggests that this was because the Kings of Castile and Portugal asserted their conquest rights, which prevented the papacy from placing the islands under papal fiefdom and forced it instead “to limit its activity to sponsoring peaceful evangelisation by the Franciscans.”⁹⁵ The second and third bishops of the first Canarian bishopric of Telde (established in 1351) were Franciscans,⁹⁶ and the first three bishops of the second Canarian bishopric of Rubicón (established in 1404) were Franciscans.

The Franciscans entering the Atlantic in the Middle Ages were not just another element of transitory nautical traffic; many Franciscans stayed in the Canary Islands and moved beyond the harbours. For example, testimonial discovered in the region of Telde in 1403, indicated that the missionaries that arrived in 1386 lived with the Native Canarians until they were martyred in by the Canarians in 1393.⁹⁷ Despite this evidence that Franciscans were in the Canary Islands in the fourteenth century, Jean de Bethencourt’s conquest of the islands in 1402 has dominated their historical landscape.⁹⁸ The islands’ history has been cast within a Eurocentred narrative of their “rediscovery” by Europeans.⁹⁹ For the Franciscans, the Canaries were the logical extension of a network, which from the late thirteenth century encompassed diverse regions of Europe, East Asia, and North Africa; the Franciscans’ establishment in the Balearics made them well-situated to be part of the medieval journeys of Europeans to the Atlantic.

The Portuguese had established a pattern of transatlantic movement before 1500,¹⁰⁰ a reminder that transatlantic networks continued larger, established flows and networks.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁴See Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *El Obispado de Telde, Misioneros mallorquines y catalanes en el Atlántico* (Madrid: Las Palmas: Patronato de la Casa de Colón, Biblioteca Atlántica, 1960).

⁹⁵ Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, “The Inter-Atlantic Paradigm: The Failure of Spanish Medieval Colonisation of the Canary and Caribbean Islands,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993): 520.

⁹⁶ Until the publication of Antonio Rumeu de Armas’ work in 1960, this bishopric was not known, and it was thought that Rubicón was the first bishopric in the Canaries; for example, see Fr. Atanasio López, “Fr Alfonso de Sanlúcar de Barrameda, primer Obispo de Canarias,” *Miscelánea*, in *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 1 (1914): 564-566. The first bishop of Telde was a Carmelite.

⁹⁷ *The Canarian*, Chapter XXXVI, 192-3, cited by Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *El Obispado de Telde*, 104. For more on this see Juan de Abreu de Galindo, *The History. Of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands: Translated from a Spanish Manuscript, Lately Found in the Island of Palma. With an Enquiry into the Origin of the Ancient Inhabitants. To Which Is Added, a Description of the Canary Islands, Including the Modern History of the Inhabitants*, ed. G. Glas (London: Hakluyt Society, 1764).

⁹⁸ This was possibly due to the Hakluyt Society publication of the manuscript which described Bethencourt’s adventures. See Pierre Bontier, Pierre and Jean Le Verrier, *The Canarian or, Book of the Conquest and Conversion of the Canarians in the Year 1402, by Jean de Bethencourt*, ed. and trans. R.H. Major (London: Hakluyt Society, 1872).

⁹⁹ For example, Clement Markham, “Introduction” to Alonso De Espinosa’s, *The Guanches of Tenerife, The Holy Image of Our Lady of Candelaria and the Spanish Conquest and Settlement*, ed. and trans. C. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1907), ii. The narrative of “rediscovery” also appears in more contemporary work, such as David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 203.

¹⁰⁰ The Portuguese, especially under Prince Henry the Navigator, were intensively engaged in a medieval transatlantic world. See Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Curto eds *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Greene and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*; P. Russell, *Prince Henry “The Navigator:” A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and *Europeans in West Africa 1450-1560, Vol. I*, ed. and trans. John Blake (London, Hakluyt, 1942).

¹⁰¹ These medieval networks have been described by Janet Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony, The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Felipe Fernández-Armesto explored

transatlantic flows of the medieval Atlantic can contribute to Cañizares-Esguerra's critique of the "Atlantic Paradigm," which, he argues, has promoted historiographies privileging studies along an east-west axis.¹⁰² Felipe Fernández-Armesto first noted the importance of the medieval Atlantic, but his description of the Canary Islands as a "conceptual 'half-way house' between Spain and America" framed the medieval Atlantic within a teleological narrative of becoming.¹⁰³ The medieval Atlantic can also be used to reflect on the politics of historicisations of the Atlantic, to transcend 1492 and consider its role in the mythology of modernity. Charles Verlinden explored the role of the medieval Atlantic in the development of colonialism but focused on economic systems, such as the spread of cash crops like sugar.¹⁰⁴ While it is important to realise that the pattern and character of transatlantic flows, including the movement of sugar, slaves, and ideas of conquest, were already established in a medieval Atlantic world which included Africa, Europe, and the islands, before the European discovery of the Americas, the medieval Atlantic can also be used to reflect upon the complexity of coloniality and to explore how other aspects of medieval culture have influenced the identity of the Atlantic and transatlantic histories. Recognising the importance, dynamics, cultures, and ambiguities of the late medieval Atlantic world contributes to the critique of the politicised 1492 coordinate.¹⁰⁵

The history of Franciscan networks can map some of the transatlantic movements of the Middle Ages; the Franciscans were in the Canary Islands from the fourteenth century and on board Portuguese vessels travelling down the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁶ They could offer an alternative narrative to discovery and conquest. Information about the world moved quickly through the global knowledge network of the Franciscans; for example, news of Columbus' First voyage had spread amongst the Franciscans of the Observance at their Chapter held in 1493,¹⁰⁷ and Franciscans mobilised quickly to take part in Columbus' second voyage and become the first missionaries in the Americas. The Franciscans' mission to the Americas was a continuation of their global missionary network.¹⁰⁸ Yet the early transatlantic history of the Franciscans has been overlooked, and historians often emphasise the arrival of the "twelve apostles" in 1524 as if these were the first missionaries in the Americas,¹⁰⁹ or infer that the Dominicans, who only journeyed to the Americas in 1508, were first. Franciscan history

continuities between the Mediterranean and Medieval Atlantic, but it is also important to think about medieval flows on a larger scale.

¹⁰² Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Some Caveats about the 'Atlantic' Paradigm," *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1.

¹⁰³ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 231. Fernández-Armesto continues this history, exploring the colonisation of the Canary Islands from c. 1496 to c. 1525, in *The Canary Islands After the Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). He places this colonisation in a broad context noting that it "followed the Portuguese settlement of Madeira and the Azores and overlapped in time with two comparable processes: Castilian colonization in Granada and the beginnings of European settlement in the New World," 1. Fernández-Armesto also notes the importance of discontinuity.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970).

¹⁰⁵ For more on 1492 as a politicised coordinate, see Robert Royal, *1492 And All That, Political Manipulations in History* (Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ J. Moorman, 577, and Santiago Olmedo Bernal, *El dominio del Atlántico en la baja Edad Media* (Valladolid: Sociedad V Centenario del Tratado de Tordesillas, 1995), 39.

¹⁰⁷ Livarius Oliger, O.F.M., "The Earliest Record on the Franciscans in America," *Catholic Historical Review* 6 (1920/1921): 60.

¹⁰⁸ The first Franciscan account of these first missionaries in the Americas was written by Nicholas Glassberger between 1506 and 1509. The narrative was based on a letter sent by missionaries in Hispaniola in 1500 (64-65), but, bizarrely, most Franciscan and Atlantic historians have neglected it. Nicholas Glassberger, *Chronica*.

¹⁰⁹ For example, Patricia Lopes Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1543," *Journal of World History* 17 (2006): 27-48.

encompassed the transatlantic flows of the late Middle Ages, and since these included the Americas by 1493, Franciscan networks are tools for exploring continuities between the Middle Ages and the Americas. The early history of the Franciscans in the Americas, and the influence of the Franciscans on Columbus, is often overlooked, helping conceal significant continuities. Franciscan history assists re-framing of the Atlantic and facilitates historical awareness of cultural and epistemological continuities with the Middle Ages, which are often obscured by the emphasis on the mythological identity of the “New World.”

Movement was important to Franciscans’ identity and their translocality, and it is possible to trace the history of Franciscans who travelled back and forth between Europe and the Americas.¹¹⁰ While these journeys constituted modes of knowledge exchange that were vital to both the European identity and the identity of the “New World,”¹¹¹ for many Franciscans, the process of moving mattered more than the direction as they enacted their poverty and translocality. More Franciscans continued their journeys farther west to Mexico, or joined the expeditions penetrating further into South America, than returned to Europe.¹¹²

In conclusion, the history of the Franciscans in the Atlantic world demonstrates that 1492 did not constitute a radical break but was a continuity of European engagement in the Atlantic, as typified by the Canaries. Some historians, Edmundo O’Gorman included, would situate this “radical break” years later, with Amerigo Vespucci’s realisation that the Western lands were in fact a new continent, a *Mundus Novus*.¹¹³ However, replacing the “radical break” does not challenge the 1492 principle, which stages a rupture in the Atlantic world, facilitating the Eurocentric conception of modernity. The European epistemology of modernity is sustained by the notion of a break from the past, and the European “discovery” of the Americas and genesis of a transatlantic trade system facilitates the conceptualisation of this modernity. However this model conceals continuities with the Middle Ages; understanding the role of the Middle Ages in conceptualising and negotiating the space of the Atlantic world is important since it enables us to see the complexities of the epistemology and politics of this space which are hidden by the confidence of narratives of modernity, which have been entangled with discovery narratives.¹¹⁴

Disrupting the historicist rupture of the 1492 principle is important since, the historiographical perspective of the Middle Ages helps us explore the mythology of modernity and identify the dimensions of its coloniality. This readjustment of our perspective of the Atlantic world reveals that the patterns of coloniality that came to dominate the identity of the “New World” and modernity were engineered in the late Middle Ages.¹¹⁵ Realising the agency

¹¹⁰ It is known that the two Franciscans who attended Columbus’s 1493 voyage, must have returned to Europe at some point as they were aboard the 1500 voyage, see Francis Borgia Steck, “Christopher Columbus and the Franciscans,” 334.

¹¹¹ Serge Gruzinski has placed this flow of global knowledge within a global framework and refers to the role of the Franciscans, see Serge Gruzinski, *What Time is it There?*

¹¹² See Mariano Errasti O.F.M., *El Primer Convento de América* (Santo Domingo: Custodia Franciscana del Caribe, 2006) and Antonine Tibesar, “The Franciscan Province of the Holy Cross of Española, 1505-1559,” *The Americas* 13 (1957): 377-389.

¹¹³ In 1504 Johann Ottmar published *Mundus Novus*, a description of Vespucci’s third voyage of 1501 from a letter from Vespucci to Lorenzo de Medici. J. H. Elliott locates the break later in the sixteenth century in *The Old World And The New*.

¹¹⁴ In the nineteenth century, Jacob Burckhardt linked Renaissance discovery with the European creation of modernity, writing that the Italian discoverers (including the Genoese Columbus) were driven “by passionate desire to penetrate the future,” Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1944), 174.

¹¹⁵ See Charles Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization*.

of the late Middle Ages is important for critiquing the Eurocentric politics of periodisation.¹¹⁶ Given the link between history and colonisation, temporal frameworks such as periodisation need decolonising. The late Middle Ages had a role in the construction of the European epistemology that came to characterise European colonialism and modernity. This involved the manipulation of language, memory, and ideas. The control of the meaning of poverty is one example of how the epistemology and strategies of European colonialism were developed in the Middle Ages. The history of Franciscan poverty demonstrates the asymmetries of power within late medieval Europe that have affected European epistemologies, manipulating the meaning of concepts such as property. The Franciscan example suggests how coloniality affects identities and reminds us that ambiguity and anxiety are important to histories of coloniality.

The problem of the Eurocentricity and coloniality of “modernity” has been raised.¹¹⁷ This model of “modernity” has been buffeted by decades of subaltern scholarship, which has denounced the asymmetry of the power relations and the Northern Atlantic centre of this dominant narrative. Yet many of the structures and assumptions of the historicist narrative of modernity remain; for example Pagden described the late fifteenth century as the “expansion of Europe,” which does not problematise Europe or consider the multidirectional nature of transculturation.¹¹⁸ It is in this context that the case of the transatlantic, translocal Franciscans is important. As agents of ambiguity in the Atlantic world both before and after 1492, representing poverty and the complexity of identity and colonial power, the Franciscans challenge the internal coherence and self-assurance of modernity. As agents of anxiety enacting a paradoxical poverty they suggest that a more heterogeneous interpretation of European identity and epistemology is needed for this period, particularly with regards to European conceptions of property. Fragmenting the perception of Europe can help obfuscate notions of the expansion of Europe, which have been linked to Eurocentred meta-narratives of modernity. The case of the translocal Franciscans does not simply dissolve 1492 to place continuity at the origin of transatlantic history. Nor does it aim to replace the uniqueness of Eurocentred modernity with the uniqueness of the Franciscans. The Franciscans present an example of an alternative historical narrative — one driven by poverty rather than wealth acquisition and ambiguity and anxiety rather than confidence.

Finally, it is important to think about movement, networks, identities, and interactions as the school of transatlantic history does, but it is also important to consider the way in which our narrative of this Atlantic world is punctuated. In doing so, we need to transcend not just the spatial rupture of the Atlantic, thinking about flows, movement, and connectivity across the Atlantic world, but also to transcend the temporal rupture of the Atlantic. This means contextualising 1492, restoring the agency of the Middle Ages, and challenging the continuous re-enforcement of the epistemology and mythology of modernity and its coloniality. The Franciscans assist the broadening of transatlantic history. Their network spanned from the Asia to the Americas across the medieval and Early Modern periods, and their poverty acts as a counter-narrative to wealth acquisition, discovery, and conquest, while their rich culture

¹¹⁶ Dagenais explained that modernity is sustained by the colonisation of the Middle Ages, since modernity “places in the medieval those parts of modernity that it cannot acknowledge: most notably, violence on a massive scale, the fine-tuning of the machinery of state for control and repression, poverty, censorship, superstition, epidemics, and routine torture;” John Dagenais, 374.

¹¹⁷ For example: Dussel, “World-System and ‘Trans’-Modernity,” Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, and Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.”

¹¹⁸ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All The World*, 1.

incorporated many significant elements of medieval thought (such as millenarianism and mysticism) which influenced conceptions of space and time.

This article has suggested that we look to the Middle Ages to expand the territory of postcolonial theory. Anne McClintock observes that the term *postcolonial* still has a “commitment to linear time and the idea of ‘development.’”¹¹⁹ It is important to reflect upon teleologies dictating the structures of our historical narratives and think about the geopolitics and epistemology of modernity by reflecting on periodisation and the Atlantic world. This article has also suggested that we can use the historiographical perspective of the late Middle Ages to explore the complexity of identities and coloniality that emerged within Europe and shaped the Atlantic world and that this can contribute to the fragmentation of Eurocentred modernity.

¹¹⁹ Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Social Text* 31-32 [1992]: 85, cited in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Introduction Midcolonial,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 3.