CHAPTER 1

Lo Cotidiano as Locus Theologicus

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In the United States of America (USA), daily living (lo cotidiano, vida cotidiana) in its varied concrete expressions is explicitly or implicitly the starting point for much of the theologizing done latinamente. Attention to la vida cotidiana by Latin@’ theologians and biblical scholars shares a thread with other contemporary movements from the latter half of the twentieth century whose consideration of the quotidian is noteworthy. In Latin America, liberation theologians turned toward critical scrutiny of socioeconomic and political realities in order to articulate, encourage, and enact gospel-based praxis that was both liberative and transformative. The “turn to the subject” in European theologies influenced Karl Rahner, for example, to begin his analysis with such human experiences as knowing, freedom, and the search for meaning. The turn to the experiences of women, specifically, characterized the early efforts of primarily North American, feminist scholars to retrieve long-ignored stories across the span of the Christian tradition, resulting in a necessary re-evaluation of what had been considered normative. The focus on daily lived experience by theologians and other scholars from the global South and marginalized racial and ethnic communities in América insured that these investigations would not exclude the exploitative consequences of racism, colonialism, and imperialism as well as sexism in all its diverse manifestations.

Lo Cotidiano as Locus Theologicus

For any number of Latin@’ theologians lo cotidiano functions as locus theologicus. In other words, ordinary living is privileged as source, provides content, particularizes context, and marks the spaces and place(s) from which Latin@’s do theology. Such theologizing avoids abstraction and is admittedly polyvocal and fluid.
Latin@’s affirm that lived reality is source for divine revelation and as such worthy of theological reflection. Lo cotidiano as lived en nuestros barrios y nuestras casas, en comunidades y familias, in the particular and the local, from the underside, peripheries, and grassroots is a dynamic matrix of sin, grace, and ambiguity, of the perceived presence of God as well as of the perceived absence of the divine. The ordinary as experienced through our hybridities, bodies, senses, struggles, fiestas, socioeconomic status, and migratory and historical legacies offers legitimate starting points for critical investigation.

Lo cotidiano provides the content for theologizing. The concrete and miscellaneous stuff of life informs humble attempts to articulate understandings of the sacred and their implications for our relationships with each other and the whole of creation. A forthright preference for those who are poor and/or marginalized makes la vida on the borders, or on the move, or on the edges of poverty necessary foci for consideration of the imago dei. Bodies broken by addiction, violence, incarceration, or the burdens of conditions that disable speak to the mystery of the incarnation. Celebrations of life amid struggles, or praxis navigating the tensions of social justice, or popular religious practices taunting the sting of death signify eschatological hopes.

La vida cotidiana does not occur in a vacuum; neither does the theologizing that arises from within the rhythms and disruptions of the ordinary. While certain experiences such as death may be both inevitable and to a degree universal, theologizing from lo cotidiano appreciates the particularities of context in ways that challenge scholarly flights of abstraction and temptations to impose homogeneity. Such a stance takes seriously not only the questions arising from particular slices of life (trosos de la vida), but the multiple responses, expressions, and strategies for making sense, surviving, and thriving.

To conceptualize lo cotidiano as the place of theologizing is to admit the situatedness of all interpreters and perspectives. To do theology latinamente entails an intentional mapping of the theologian’s location in relation to the slices of the daily being explored and the communities to whom one is accountable. Presumptions of objectivity are dismissed as the biases and preferences of being implicated are critically taken into account and identified. Locating oneself within a web of relationships, influences, and experiences indicates an awareness of theologians as embedded and implicated insiders/outsiders. In the academy, this seems to be an expectation only of so-called “contextual theologians”; however, Virgilio Elizondo noted “I would like to see theologians and biblical scholars start with a brief biographical statement of their sociocultural conditioning. It would help the reader to appreciate both the richness and limitations of their work” (2009: 268, footnote 14).

Some would like to dismiss this careful concern for identity and its construction from rich and varied pieces and experiences of life; but for Latin@ theologians it is an ethical responsibility to be self-aware, especially for those who seek to articulate, signify, and make meaning from within faith communities. Biblical scholar Fernando Segovia points to the particularity of perspective that each theologian brings to this enterprise: “[a]t a fundamental level I have used my life story as a foundation for
my work as a critic in biblical studies, as a theologian in theological studies, and as a critic in cultural studies ... . I have relied on both the individual and the social dimensions not as binary oppositions but as interrelated and interdependent” (2000: 155).

**Methodological Considerations**

Doing theology from the departure point of la vida cotidiana is necessarily an interdisciplinary enterprise. This type of engagement draws on the wisdom, observations, and methods of other disciplines, fields of study, and interpretive perspectives. These include, but are not limited to, the natural sciences and social sciences; liberationist, postcolonial, diasporic, migration, linguistic, and culture studies; gender studies, and feminist and queer theories; critical race theory, literary theory, and philosophy; grassroots activism, street art, and even the culinary arts. Inevitably such scrutiny reveals the complexity of each trozo de cotidianidad and cautions against simplistic appropriations and forced correlations in order to bolster a predetermined theological supposition.

Interrogations from multiple perspectives yield insight yet point to the limitations of all analysis. These limitations highlight the need for collaborative engagement and alliances especially with others who similarly find themselves and their communities on the margins. The commitment to collaboration is manifest practically in a doing of teología en conjunto, in other words together in communities of mutual accountability, and de conjunto, in ways that affirm that the resulting creation belongs not to a single scholar but to the collective, to la comunidad. The use of the Spanish word for community is intentional here because it draws on a distinction made by Puerto Rican scholar Juan Flores that is helpful in comprehending both teología en conjunto y teología de conjunto. Flores observes that the term accentuates the two constitutive parts, común, i.e., what we share in common, and unidad, i.e., what binds us beyond our “diverse particular commonalities” (2000: 193).

For theologies done latínamente, this distinction emphasizes that the construction of knowledge is perceived in terms of a series of commitments to the networks from which they arise. Latin@ theologians are responsible to each other, especially to those with whom they engage in communal processes that allow for spirited and mutual exchanges of lived experiences and ideas within physical and/or virtual space. Under the umbrella of our latinidad, with its multiple particularities, the fruits of these shared labors are not only “ours” but belong to our communities and churches of accountability. This focus on la vida cotidiana serves as reminder that the work of theology is invested in and for the sake of real communities; therefore theology is always a matter of teología y pastoral en/de conjunto, a lived experience of acompañamiento.

Attention to daily living emerges from an appreciation for relationality, expressed in terms of convivencia, literally living (vivencia) together. Theologian Gary Riebe-Estrella explains that the “vida found in lo cotidiano, which forms the basis for vivencia, is not an individualistic kind of experience ... Rather, vida for Latinos is understood within our
sociocentric cultural world as a shared reality... not simply *vivencia*, but *convivencia* ... . As such, *convivencia* speaks of the intimacy out of which *la vida* comes” (1999: 211–12).

**Exploring the Daily by the Trozo**

This exploration of lo cotidiano is not intended to be exhaustive, comprehensive, or even representative. Instead the approach taken here is drawn from the lived experience of the Spanish gastronomic tradition of las tapas. These small plates of food typically are shared and are limitless in their variety; but any given taverna offers a limited selection based on local tastes, available resources, and culinary creativity. Tapas are rooted in the ordinary and some tales of their origins include provenance of a practical nature. They serve as invitation to enjoy the possibilities of a rich culinary cuisine, yet taken together they can suffice as a filling meal. Tapas inspire conviviality, because of the spaces and manner in which they are served; however, they are often complex in taste and sophisticated in presentation.

The same can be said for this selection of la vida cotidiana as investigated by a cross-section of Latin@ Christian theologians and biblical scholars. These slices of life are organized thematically, and highlight the contributions of particular theologians and scholars. This organizing principle does not suggest that these are the only aspects of lo cotidiano accessed by each scholar, or that these trozos are mutually exclusive, or that these are the only sources forming and informing theology done latinamente. In fact often they intersect in ways that demonstrate the complexities of la vida cotidiana and the social location of the respective theologians. For the most part, commentaries on Latin@ theologies identify these trozos as characteristics of doing theology latinamente and/or as theological loci (for example, Gonzales 2002). I am proposing instead that these are all slices of daily life that provide points of departure and are accessible from a rich variety of sources and investigated with any number of diverse analytical tools. As part of our daily weave they serve as loci theologici, tapas on an inexhaustible menu of possibilities.

**Tapa: Hybridity**

One of the earliest sources for theologizing latinamente was the daily lived embodiment of hybridity, articulated as mestizaje, by Virgilio Elizondo, one of the padrinos of Latin@ theologies. A Mexican American Catholic from Texas, Elizondo experienced dis-location as a mestizo in the borderlands between the USA and Mexico. In this region, Latin@ descendants born of centuries of religious, cultural, linguistic, political, racial/ethnic, and biological mixture were frequently despised and considered as belonging to neither side of a contested border. From this experience of being mestizo in this land conquered by imperial powers, first by fifteenth-century Spanish conquistadores and later by
nineteenth-century USA Anglo-Europeans, Elizondo conjectured Galilee as a borderland characterized by hybridity and peripheral to Jerusalem which he suggested was at the center of Jewish life in first-century CE Roman-occupied Palestine. From this marginal crossroads God acted in a self-revelatory manner in the person of Jesus, who proclaimed a gospel of inclusivity. For Elizondo, “Galilee would never become the center, but it was the point of departure for the beginning of a new creation, as the Galilees today continue to be points of departure for new humanities to emerge” (2009: 277–8).

While he acknowledged the violence of the conquest that made possible the mezcla of América, his assessment of mestizaje is optimistic. Elizondo took up the hybrid bodies at la frontera (border) that have for generations been reviled for their impurity, the “stones neglected by the builders” of both the church and the USA nation, and he reconceptualized them as the “new creation.” He infused these hybrid stones with theological significance, positing christological, ecclesiological, soteriological, and eschatological dimensions.

Elizondo began his investigations into the lived experience of hybridity at the Institut Catolique in Paris, France, with his 1978 doctoral dissertation “Méttisage, violence culturelle, annonce de l’Evangile: la dimension culturelle de l’évangélisation.” This research became his groundbreaking 1983 book Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise, and its theological content was pastorally implemented in his years of ministry as rector of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas (2000a: 127–9). His ongoing reflections as a theologian led him subsequently to interpret the Guadalupe event as “the beginning of a new creation.” He found in the hybridity of La Morenita “the mother of the new humanity, the feminine heart and face of God” (Elizondo 1997: 70). Juan Diego, through his responses, in turn became “the new mestizo who is no longer ashamed of the ways of his people ... nor fearful of and subservient to the ways of the dominant” (Elizondo 1997: 112). In the Guadalupe event, Elizondo perceived an embodied hybridity with transformative power to resituate the relationship between conquerors and vanquished people in ways that transcended the limitations of both: “Whereas the mestizaje of the conquest was destructive of everyone, the mestizaje of Guadalupe is reconstructive of everyone” (1997: 112). By reading the Guadalupe event and the Nican Mopohua through the lens of mestizaje, Elizondo, in effect, produced a counter-narrative to the accounts of USA national origins that marginalized peoples, in particular Latin@’s, on the basis of race, culture, ethnicity, and language. Elizondo suggested such an appropriation offered another vision for reimagining mestizaje, one whereby the once rejected and despised are now the promise of a new humanity. At the same time he is loath to perpetuate cycles of violence by inflicting on others, including oppressors, what has been done unto mestiz@s. Instead he proffers a theological anthropology rooted in a progressive synthesis and in an inclusive vision where the future is mestizo (Elizondo 1997: 132; 2000b). Elizondo moves from the mestizaje born of two conquests in the Western hemisphere toward claims of universal mestizaje found in contemporary permutations of mixture that are in part facilitated by globalization and migrations. His assessment remains hopeful: “Mestizo peoples inhabit the
‘in-between’ of nations and cultures, playing a painful but creative mediating role in processes of intercultural encounter that foster a gradual movement from closed particularities to a more open universality” (2009: 279).

Elizondo’s systematic attempt to establish a particular expression of embodied biological and cultural mixture as locus theologicus is a major contribution that opens doors for other Latin@’ considerations of hybridity lived in lo cotidiano. One of the more comprehensive and critical surveys of this usage is Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism by the diasporic Guatemalan Pentecostal theologian Néstor Medina. In his careful treatise, Medina notes concerns about rehabilitating a highly racialized category with its destructive legacy rooted in colonial constructs that sought to classify people in order to exercise power over them. He specifically attends to the erasure and/or sublimation of indigenous peoples that occurs in the celebration of mestiz@s as a new humanity through categories and symbols focused on intermixture. Medina’s caution cannot be dismissed easily, especially since the treasured mother of the new creation is also “the perennial reminder of the conquest and eradication of the indigenous religious traditions” (2009: 123). Rubén Rosario Rodríguez notes an additional obstacle in ecumenical terms: “For Elizondo, the Guadalupe event is foundational for Latino/a cultural and religious identity, and it is granted the same authority as Scripture, a move that creates rather than eliminates barriers between Roman Catholic and Protestant Latino/as” (2008: 94). Any number of Latin@’ theologians with roots in the Caribbean have raised doubts that a term created with a specific intermixture in mind can adequately embrace all hybridity. Their additional misgiving is that such a configuration tacitly eliminates the African diasporic root from Latin@ identities, thus replicating cycles of omission and racism. Biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz is among those theologians questioning the rehabilitation of mestizaje, and while he too explores hybridity, he is averse to the construction of the Galilean Jesus in ways that detract from his Jewish identity (Ruiz 2010: 18–22).

The promising work of Latin@’ scholar Robyn Henderson-Espinoza takes a new and challenging approach to mestizaje as embodied reality. Like Elizondo, the influence of Chican@ theorist Gloria Anzaldúa is especially noticeable here as well. Henderson-Espinoza chooses to reread mestizaje by the “mauve light of Latino queer theory” (2014: 1). In the process, mestizaje is not rehabilitated; rather it is queered: “Queering Mestizaje re-imagines desire not as an act of Eurovision invasion but as a form of desiring difference” (Henderson-Espinoza 2014: 10). This destabilizes mestizaje, yet at the same time creates “new spaces of in/betweenness,” blurring identity and resisting dominant impositions that privilege gender binaries and complementarity (2014: 11). At the intersections, Henderson-Espinoza imagines queering mestizaje as an intentional act with ontological significance and opening up new directions in relationality: in the construction of familia, in the interstices between “institutionalized religion and queer spiritual practices” (2014: 12). Ultimately Henderson-Espinoza’s developing thought evolves toward consideration of a proposed MezQueerTaje reality, an eschatological horizon, a not-quite-yet in/between space where intermixture does not entail the suppression of difference.
A number of Latina theologians were among the first to explicitly examine and take seriously lo cotidiano as locus theologicus, primarily self-described mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Latina feminist theologian María Pilar Aquino. While their respective approaches vary, their scholarship displays a profound respect for the lived experience of women; exercises a hermeneutical privileging of the preferential option for the poor; and the demarcation of public and private spheres that leaves the experiences and wisdom of women, and poor women especially, on the margins.

A Cuban exile, Isasi-Díaz investigated lo cotidiano with the aim of understanding oppression and enacting liberative praxis. She sought change in structures and functioning at both the macro and micro levels, yet was apprehensive about top-down approaches that rarely impacted life for the women who were among the poor and oppressed. She accessed la vida cotidiana of Latinas in grassroots communities in the USA via ethnographic research and by accompanying particular communities and cultivating relationships. She paid special attention to la lucha, the struggle to survive and live that most affected those who found themselves marginalized by their socioeconomic status and gender; and to the narratives and practices that sustained these women.

Isasi-Díaz readily admitted that it was difficult to define lo cotidiano but possible to describe its multilayered complexity. The daily encompasses the point of initial contact with the world as well as the milieu of ongoing engagement. It is configured by space, time, place, materiality, and proximity. Lo cotidiano refers “to the problematized daily reality – that is, to the limitations imposed by the material-historical reality one faces every day, and to the personal situations in which we find ourselves as we try to deal with such problematized reality” (Isasi-Díaz 2011: 48–9). It embraces responses to the trials of life as well as the points of departure for imagining different ways of living, being, and relating; thus it has the potential for resistance and subversion. Precisely because of its specificity with regard to social location, relationships, tribulations, and narratives, it challenges claims of universality and tendencies toward abstraction: “lo cotidiano is the reality strung along the hours in a day: it has to do with the food we eat today, with the subway or bus fare we have to pay today, with how to pay today for the medicine for a sick child or an elderly parent” (Isasi-Díaz 2011: 50).

For Isasi-Díaz, beyond the descriptive task, lo cotidiano has hermeneutical and epistemological importance. As part of its hermeneutical function, lo cotidiano exposes power differentials and their role in securing the status quo and obstructing liberation. Attending to la vida cotidiana and engaging the interpretive task makes day-to-day oppressions visible and unmasks those who benefit from them (Isasi-Díaz 2002: 12). Isasi-Díaz is careful to note that Latinas are not defined by their suffering of quotidian oppressions; rather it is la lucha, the struggle to survive, and overcome oppression, that generates self-understanding (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 39). Finally, Isasi-Díaz attributes epistemological significance to lo cotidiano. The source and framework for theologizing that seeks to be transformative is to be found in the construction of knowledge from within la
vida cotidiana of grassroots Latinas, on their own terms, in their own words, and in response to their challenges of navigating daily living on the margins. For Isasi-Díaz, this is so because these Latinas “know reality in a unique way because they transform it when they manage to survive by somehow providing shelter, food, clothing, medicines for themselves and their families” (2002: 14). Isasi-Díaz’s theologizing remained grounded in la vida cotidiana when she was waiting for a bus (2011: 52–4), accompanying Latinas in grassroots communities (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango 1992, or reflecting on her own lived experience of exile (1999: 13–28, 35–56). This living fueled her commitments, which in turn were enacted in liberative praxis and lived in hope of the justice of God’s kin-dom.

Maria Pilar Aquino frames her reflections on lo cotidiano from the self-designated location of being

a Mexican woman linked by background to the migrant-worker bracero tradition; as a Latin American feminist scholar who lives and works in the United States but is linked by moral imperative and intellectual demand to the worldwide critical feminist theologies of liberation; and as a Roman Catholic Christian woman linked by hope to all those around the world who believe that another world of justice for the well-being of all is possible. (2005: 132)

She asserts that lo cotidiano, as an analytical category, arises not from “androcentric liberation theologies” but from the contributions of critical feminism, particularly from European and Latin American contexts responding to totalitarianism (Aquino 1999: 38). In lo cotidiano, kyriarchical and patriarchal power are exposed especially as they impact the institutions and relationships that constitute daily life, including family, church, politics, and culture. In turn, Aquino examines critically the historical and spiritual experiences of oppressed women and interprets them in the light of faith in order to contribute to the liberation of all humanity (1993). With a hermeneutic starting point in an explicit option for poor and oppressed women, she engages and critiques systematic formulations of theology, including Latin American liberation theologies, for their disconnect from the lived realities consigned to the margins of private and domestic spheres. For Aquino, liberation theology done by women, rooted in the concrete realities of lo cotidiano, is a specific form of women’s struggle for their right to life (1993).

Like Isasi-Díaz, Aquino too aims for transformation and sees it as a theological task:

what makes Latina thought theological is that it formally focuses on our day-to-day practices sustained by the liberating visions and traditions of Christian religion and faith. There may be other religious languages that reflect on our religious customs and traditions, but what makes Latina thought liberative is that it deliberately focuses on our daily activities aimed at transformation toward greater justice. (2002: 152)

For Aquino, lo cotidiano bears salvific value, in that the presence of God is experienced and witnessed to in the daily struggles of people for a just and better life; and this
invites active participation “toward a new humanity ... until we reach God’s definitive salvation” (1999: 39).

Catholic women are not alone in making a theological option for the daily lives of Latinas. Latina evangélica Loida Martell-Ortero addresses salvation as an embodied event experienced in the ordinary spaces of la vida cotidiana (2013: 43). Such particularity and concreteness demand an ethical imperative manifest in a commitment to justice. Martell-Ortero explains that the locus theologicus for evangélicas can be found in the marginal and powerless spaces of the everyday, places described by the women in her congregation as threatening to themselves and their families. These women shared their stories of their struggles for the basics, their efforts to survive and protect their young, “how they sought to shield their babies from rats in dilapidated buildings, or how they covered up broken windows with cardboard in the dead of winter, fearing for the health of their children” (Martell-Ortero 2013: 43).

From this evangélica perspective, Martell-Ortero affirms the role of the Holy Spirit as part of the incarnational presence of the divine, active within the community. In the daily, the lived experience of God is professed in personal testimonios, sung in familiar coritos, and interwoven with the biblical narratives that provide counter-narratives to the stereotypes and fallacious myths that seek to debase the dignity of those who live on the margins and in-between (Martell-Ortero 2013: 47). Situated within la vida cotidiana, with all its complexity, messiness, and struggle, Martell-Ortero perceives soteriology arising from Latina evangélicas as posing a challenge to soteriologies from the center: “When seen from the lens of liminal spaces of survival, salvation must by necessity become an incarnational event that responds to the daily suffering of forgotten people” (2013: 52).

**Tapa: People on the Move**

There is no ubiquitous experience of displacement and/or migration, a reality confirmed by the diversity of theological reflections on these trozas de nuestra vida cotidiana emanating from Latin@’s. Theologizing that takes into account the social locations of theologians results in a spectrum of insights depending on the particularity of the lived daily experience as well as the analytical tools employed for interrogation. A recent study of Latin@’ theological and biblical scholarship identified and explored three tropes with broad appeal: frontera/border, exilio/exile, and diáspora/diaspora (Nanko-Fernández 2013). It is worth considering some of the findings from this survey.

The border surfaces as primary locus for any number of Mexican American and Tejan@ theologians. The theologies of Virgilio Elizondo, Arturo Bañuelas, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, and others reflect the fluidity of life along contested fronteras. Reflections on exile are especially predominant among Cuban American interlocutors. The work of biblical scholar Francisco García Treto, theologian Justo González, and mujerisata theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz is among some of the prime examples of
exiles reflecting theologically on their own cotidianidad. For Boricuas, Nuyoricans and other dispersed Puerto Ricans such as theologians Luis Rivera-Rodríguez, ethicist María Teresa (MT) Dávila, and biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz, postcolonial interpretations open up experiences of diaspora and internal migrations – a complex relationship of being simultaneously colonized and imperial citizen.

**Frontera/Border**

On the border between the USA and México, the people are not only “on the move” but have historically been “moved in on!” These lands are the product of multiple conquests and varying movements of peoples for centuries. This reality complicates any reflection latinamente and is at the root of conflicted responses to the ongoing migrations reshaping populations in North America. Borderlands are characterized by spatial, human, and material hybridity and motion. From a theological perspective this creates a new historical moment. Arturo Bañuelas, a Mexican American theologian and pastor of a Catholic parish on the El Paso–Juárez border, suggests “the unique mestizo border reality is a kairos, a moment of grace and opportunity experienced in the decisive action to act as bridge people between the Americas” (1992: 294). Movement of peoples, in all its good and sinfulness, in this case has soteriological and eschatological significance. From the standpoint of mestizaje, Bañuelas contends that the role of bridge “has as its task the elimination of all cultural, political, sexual, and economic boundaries to pave the way for the fashioning of a new historical project that subsists in the unfolding of God’s reign” (1992: 294).

Such a project is rooted in an appreciation for solidarity, a concept Bañuelas grounds in latinidad. He writes,

> Tu eres mi otro yo is the Latino way. We are all linked as one. We stand together, or we fall together. We are each other, and we need to help each other. Our ancestors teach us: If I despise you, I despise myself. And if I promote the good in you, I promote the goodness in me and everyone else. (2010)

From this perspective, immigration reform is about all Latin@’s because all are impacted by the lies that cut to the heart of Latin@’ identity. For Bañuelas, “The lie is that immigrants, and by association all of us Latinos, are disposable as human beings and not worthy of human dignity and respect. And this lie is killing us” (2010). He locates life’s meaning in solidarity, especially en conjunto with those who are poor and struggling, and in this particular case those living on the edges and in the shadows because of their immigration status. While both a concern for solidarity and the protection of human dignity are enshrined in Catholic social teaching, Bañuelas contextualizes these principles, as well as the teachings of Christ, as that which our “fathers, mothers, and abuelos” have always taught, as “Latino good news” (2010).
Bañuelas does not romanticize poverty or struggle, nor does he canonize those who are on the margins because of their condition or situation. He recognizes that those who are marginalized and poor aren’t all good or saintly people, but the very fact that they live in hopeless situations calls us to ask whether our own lifestyle is gospel-based or materialistic. It makes us hungry for a deeper spirituality and makes us wonder if we’re living shallow, artificial lives. The poor are saying: yes, you are. (2009: 28)

For Bañuelas, responding in lo cotidiano from a posture of solidarity with those who struggle, especially the immigrant and the poor, is transformative.

Exilio / Exile

Biblical scholar Francisco García-Treto situates himself in the broader, centuries-old tradition of Cuban exilic experiences, “not only when I locate myself in the contemporary Cuban diaspora for whom exile from the patria (fatherland) is a historical reality, but when I use that location as a standpoint from which to reflect on the biblical exile and its literary products as a target for interpretation” (2009: 72; 2000: 134). For him, “exile,” with its connotations of expulsion and loss, better expresses his experience than the less specific term “immigrant”; however, he prefers the term “diaspora” because it connotes openness to life in both Cuba and the USA (2000: 135). This experience also brings bilinguality as a constitutive aspect that informs his scholarship and his identity as a biblical hermeneut. He juxtaposes biblical texts, such as Lamentations, with Cuban exilic texts drawn from the works of other writers of Cuban diasporas, such as José Martí and Daína Chaviano, in order to focus his emotional resonances with the loss caused by exile from “the City,” be it Jerusalem or Havana, even to the choice of a victimized and defiled “Daughter City” as a central figure whose suffering puts into question the fairness or applicability of former values. (2009: 77)

This interaction of survival literatures across time marks García-Treto’s stance in reading “the Hebrew Bible as exilic, not only chronologically (product) but discursively (content)” (Segovia 2009: 372).

In his interpretation of the patriarch Joseph in Genesis, García-Treto finds resonance with the lived experience of some Cubans in exile, a move from the peripheries to assimilation to success (2000). While Joseph became Egyptianized, he never totally abandoned his roots, though it would certainly have been understandable considering the betrayal by his kin. He retained his language, familial obligations, cultural patterns, and a desire to be buried at home. It was through the ministrations of this hyphenated immigrant that the future of his people was insured and the host nation survived catastrophe. For García-Treto, those who read Genesis 39-41 as exiles in some sense look in a mirror, finding their own risks and dangers and survival choices reflected; however, they also
turn there to read hope into their own situations, “hope that their pilgrimage will somehow turn out for the best, that it was to ‘save life’” (2000: 144). Ultimately, García-Treto finds a tale of salvation and a message to people on the move and the communities that receive them: “José is a human being and not a stereotype, who, given a chance, may contribute considerably more than we can imagine to our common good” (2000: 144).

**Diáspora/Diaspora**

Puerto Rican theologian Luis Rivera-Rodríguez self-identifies as a “transnational diasporan,” in other words, “one who has come from another country, conditioned by colonial relationships with Spain and the United States, and who has resettled in the United States while keeping real and imaginary relationships and connections to the place of origin” (2006: 23–4). He reads biblical texts and migratory contexts, aware of the variety and distinctiveness of migrations and diasporic survival strategies. He urges a critical retrieval of biblical texts, seeking to avoid interpretations that marshal texts on behalf of social justice while ignoring inconvenient aspects of their non-innocent histories. As an example of caution, Rivera-Rodríguez reminds contemporary audiences, “The God of the Deuteronomist is also a god who promotes the conquering of territories, the destitutions of indigenous populations, the genocide of native peoples, the discrimination of foreigners, and allows the subordinate and dependent status of resident aliens” (2006: 32).

For Rivera-Rodríguez, theological, ethical, and pastoral responses to migrations in all their complexities call for a “practice of a political hermeneutics.” This entails recognition of differences and commonalities across historical contexts as well as a critical appreciation for and appropriation of “the possibilities, limits, and ambiguities of these traditions as resources” (2006: 34). A political hermeneutic acknowledges the interaction between interpretation and the situatedness of hermeneuts especially in terms of “our social locations, ideological commitments, strategic agendas, reading strategies, and religious and ethical options” (2006: 34). Rivera-Rodríguez advocates what can be described as an intertextual approach between biblical texts and the lived experiences and sources that provide direction for addressing the complexities of migration in lo cotidiano. Rivera-Rodríguez seeks to avoid imposing anachronistic and shallow correspondences across texts and contexts dealing with people on the move. At the same time he is cognizant of intersections across texts and contexts and finds such connections illuminative. This leads him to posit what he calls “a mediating liberation model of critical correspondence or, in Hispanic/Latino theological lingo, ‘reading in Spanish (correspondence) from the diaspora (otherness and engagement) through Hispanic eyes’” (1998).

**Tapa: Lo Popular**

From the beginning, Latin@ theologies made an option for “lo popular”; in other words, that which because of its origins in ordinary participants and in ordinary places is literally “of the people.”
Popular religion

Catholic theologians such as Orlando Espín, Roberto Goizueta, Virgilio Elizondo, Gilbert Romero, and Jeanette Rodriguez were among the first to consider, as loci theologici, popular expressions of faith experienced in lo cotidiano. This move was a departure from the disdain or indifference expressed toward popular religion by the strands of Latin American liberation theology most known to English speakers. In the USA, Latin@ theologians saw in popular Catholicism tactics for navigating the daily, ways of handing on cultural and religious values, and a means of surviving and resisting especially in environments hostile toward la vida latina. For Espín (1997) the faith of the people presented “an epistemology – a way of knowing and constructing the ‘real’ by means that are culturally specific, grounded in equally culturally specific experiences of God and of the Christian message” (2006: 9). These ritual texts of and in lo cotidiano

in all of their complexity, are embedded and embodied theological reflections that evoke and reflect creative, affective, sensuous, and even kinetic means of responding to the divine presence in the concrete circumstances and quotidian rhythms of human existence. These popular religious expressions are forms of traditioning, catechizing and pastoral caregiving; they do not separate strands of living or place them in contrived correlations that seek to distinguish culture from religious tradition. These manifestations of the “faith of the people” blur distinctions between secular and sacred activity, public and domestic space, official and unofficial church ritual. (Nanko-Fernández 2014b: 22)

Among the varied expressions explored by Catholic theologians are local Via Crucis (especially in San Antonio and in the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago); devotions to particular saints and Marian manifestations; practices related to Día(s) de los Muertos, Posadas, and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe; home altars, fiestas, and rites of passage such as Quinceañeras. Latin@ theologians from other Christian communities and denominations have identified and reflected upon popular expressions within their traditions as well including coritos and testimonios.

The Via Crucis in particular is a significant expression of popular Catholicism for many Latin@ Catholics. Theologians such as Roberto Goizueta (1995), Orlando Espín (2002), and more recently Christopher Tirres (2014) have reflected on the intersections of this expression of popular Catholicism and the daily lived experiences of Latin@ individuals and communities. They see in these expressions recognition that God is present in daily living and accompanies people through las luchas they face on a daily basis.

Consider, for example, the Via Crucis organized by Asociación Tepeyac in New York City. The Stations of the Cross are familiar but the text discloses particular challenges weighing on this local community. At the Second Station, “Jesus Carries his Cross,” the script declares, in English and Spanish,
Jesus carries a cross he does not deserve and suffers what he need not suffer. We do not deserve to emigrate, to leave our land and our people, nonetheless, we have to work to support ourselves and support our family, for lack of possibilities in our own land. (Gálvez 2006)

On Viernes Santo (Good Friday) this Vía Crucis del Inmigrante winds through the corridors of financial and federal power in lower Manhattan. Latina cultural anthropologist Alysha Gálvez describes the confusion of employees on Wall Street spilling into the streets at the end of the business week confronted by the drama unfolding before their eyes (2010). In first-century garb with twenty-first-century taunts, Roman soldiers shout “Walk! Walk, illegal! Camina Ilegal!” as the crucified Christ passes 26 Federal Plaza, the historic address of the office of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (Gálvez 2010). The scandal of the crucified Christ is retold with all its complications in idioms contemporary and ancient. The absurd stumbling block is contextualized, ritualized, and performed in expressions and practices that continue to invite investment and challenge all that demeans life. The message and medium are intertwined in ways that engage the senses and situate the participants, willingly or accidentally, in the midst of the action. The incarnation, God-among-us, as one-of-us, is mediated concretely in relevant ways that open imaginations to encounter and grapple with the complexities of the mystery of the Incarnation. In these expressions of the “faith of the people” there is recognition that God is present in lo cotidiano. In turn, through the Vía Crucis, the faithful accompany Jesus and his mother in a time of profound suffering. These practices function as resistance to conditions that violate human dignity, that defile the reign of God, and at the same time, as in the case of the Vía Crucis del Inmigrante, they call for transformative praxis. In the words of Espín, such popular expressions constitute “a rejection of the privatization of religion which negates the potential role of religion to denounce social sin and advocate a more just social order” (2002: 151).

Popular culture

In a worldview where distinctions between the sacred and secular are blurred, the faiths of the people find expression in multivalent practices that need not be explicitly religious. Scholarly reflections on the daily are not limited to theologians. Latin@ culture scholars have long considered the representation of lo cotidiano as constructed in sport, art of all kinds, performance in various media, space, and place, as not simply reflective of life but as active in the construction of complicated identities, in imagining new possibilities, and in creating an improved future. These formats and fora “are crucial because they open spaces, counter-sites and conditions of possibility” (Habell-Palán and Romero 2002: 7). These expressions of lo popular similarly engage multiple modalities of human engagement – creative, affective,
sensuous, kinetic; serve to tradition and/or resist; and are investigated from an array of analytical lenses and interdisciplinary tools.

A few Latin@ theologians have ventured into explorations of popular culture as part of a broader conceptualization of lo cotidiano. Examples can be found in the anthology *Creating Ourselves: African Americans and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression* (Pinn and Valentin 2009), and in several articles published in the online *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* on telenovelas (De Anda 2008; Cavazos-González 2008), cyberspace (Hidalgo 2008) and border wall art (González-Andrieu 2008). The most sustained effort in the consideration of popular culture as locus theologicus is the scholarship by Carmen Nanko-Fernández on baseball/béisbol (2014a: 68–87; 2011: 73–5; 2010: 87–109).

Sport is intricately intertwined in the fabric of our daily living and its complexities are worthy of our theological attention. While to any number of fans professional sport is primarily a form of entertainment, for others there is more – a link to treasured memories or loved ones, an expression of local identity or loyal affiliation – even across generations. For fans, however, sport too can be the source of suffering brought about by misguided loyalties, exacerbated rivalries, or destructive celebrations that end in violence. Sports speak to the passions of the heart, precisely because they invoke memories, sustain identity, and bind us to people and places.

I self-identify as an Hurban@ theologian, a hybrid urban Hispanic from the Bronx, NY. By geography I was born and raised a Yankee baseball fan, and later chose to be ecumenical by supporting the crosstown Mets. Mi tía worked for the Yankees, so that meant summer hours at the stadium, and an occasional gorra or bat came our way from promotional give-away days. My father taught me how to play baseball and, like many poor kids in the Caribbean, I too fashioned a glove out of cardboard, until finally at the age of 12, years of praying paid off and I got my first leather glove. In 2004, I was “traded to Chicago,” as I understand my move to teach on the faculty of a theological graduate school located in the “Windy City.” It coincided with the trade of then Yankee pitcher José Contreras to the White Sox. My first homesick act was to attend this Cuban exile’s first game in his new south-side stadium – an act of solidarity among urban migrant workers.

When explored latinamente as un trozo de cotidianidad, baseball becomes a contested site where race, colonization, heteronormativity, migration, and poverty complicate idealistic and nationalistic interpretations of the USA “national pastime.” For any number of players, béisbol is more than just a game. Take, for example, the reality that for most aspiring peloteros from the Dominican Republic, béisbol is about work, with the expectations of being able to put food into many mouths or a solid home over the heads of extended familia or building a safe ball field in el barrio. This web of responsibilities that weigh on those who are invested with the communal hope and obligation to get out of poverty is captured best in an expression the players use to describe their competition against the more economically privileged USA players. They want to “take away their food,” “quitándo les la comida” (Bretón and Villegas 1999: 48). This expression reveals
the uncomfortable fact that baseball really is about daily survival and access to those most basic staples of human rights: food, shelter, and life; and sometimes that occurs by employing any means necessary.

The role of Major League Baseball (MLB) in exploiting the labor resources from the global South coupled with the struggle to use baseball as a ticket out of poverty complicates ethical considerations, for example, on the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDS). Employing a postcolonial lens in an investigation of this slice of life exposes levels of hypocrisy and complicity that leave many, including those of us wearing our team colors, con las manos sucias (with dirty hands). To see MLB latinamente is to complicate a slice of daily life that holds up a mirror and implicates us in ways that demand we consider the ethical obligations of convivencia.

An Open Menu

For Latin@́ theologies, lo cotidiano is not abstract, monolithic, or univocal. To comprehend la vida cotidiana as locus theologicus is to appreciate the accessibility of divine revelation in the daily, the particular, and the local. To explore lo cotidiano is to recognize its complexity and the posture of humility necessary in the presence of mystery. To embed en nuestra cotidianidad is to accept the ethical obligations that convivencia demands. Tapas serve as an appetizing introduction to the depth and breadth of a greater culinary tradition. From the classic to the eclectic, they provide a taste of what is already available as well as a hint of the endless possibilities open to creative as well as practical imaginations.

Note

This chapter employs Spanglish as both an intentional writing strategy and a metaphor for the hybridity constituted by the Hispanic presence in the USA. Spanglish is one of many terms used to describe the fusion of Spanish and English in daily communication. It is manifest in this chapter through the following conventions. First, words and expressions in Spanish are not italicized unless they appear as such in direct quotations. At times sentences include both languages; words without obvious English cognates will be translated in the text only the first time they appear. Second, I created @́, the ‘at’ symbol (el arroba) with a combining acute accent mark. I borrow the use of @ from others because it conveniently combines the “o” and “a” into one character that is gender inclusive and at the same time destabilizes gender polarities. I add the acute accent (@) as a reminder of the fluidity of language, culture, and identity and to emphasize the significance of location in theology done latinamente. I develop these themes in my book Theologizing en Espanglish (2010). Please note that “América” refers collectively to the lands of the Western hemisphere and not solely to the USA.

The section “Tapa: People on the Move” includes some material previously published in Nanko-Fernández (2013). This material was excerpted, edited, and modified with permission.
References


