

Materiality, Faith and Violence: Themes of Aggression in Votive Practice

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Materiality, Faith and Violence: Themes of Aggression in Votive Practice¹

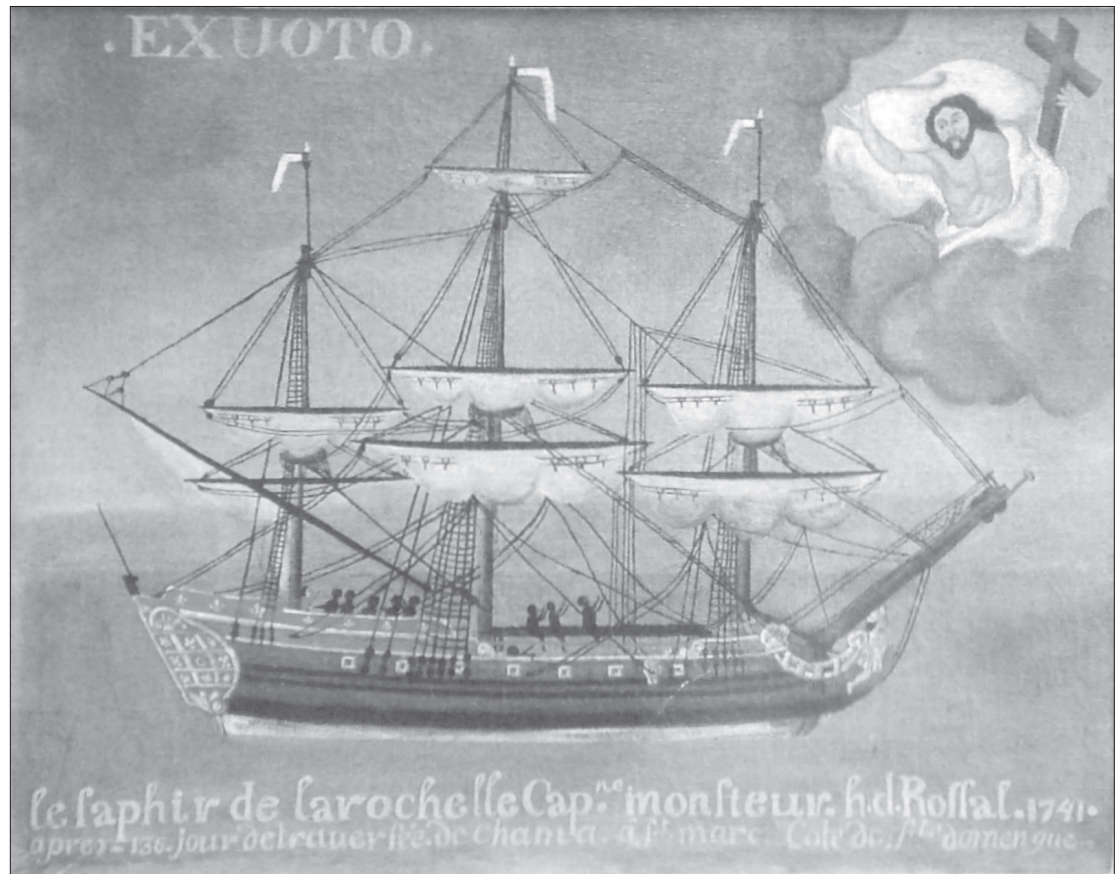
In 1739, those aboard the brig *Saphir* experienced a total of 136 days without wind. The unpredicted stoppage in the Atlantic Ocean led to health issues, food shortages, and disarray (Daget 1984). When weather conditions improved, the vessel was able to complete its journey to Saint Marc, Saint Domingue, and return to its home port of Rochelle, France. Once in France, crew members commissioned a votive offering, or *ex-voto*, in gratitude for divine intervention during the difficult passage (Fig. 1). At first glance, the offering—which is currently housed at the Cathedral Saint-Jean du Pérot, in La Rochelle—resembles typical nautical-votives (Monuments Historiques, n.d.; Inventaire Général Du Patrimoine Culturel, n.d.). It contains a visual rendering of a ship at sea, a floating deity, and a textual description. Yet closer inspection reveals deeper meanings. Pinkish-beige figures stand out through an assortment of blue and red uniforms, replete with faces, hair, and other details, while brown figures are devoid of any human characteristic beyond arms, heads and torsos, and blend in with their surroundings. Below the image, a textual description recounts the stoppage: “le saphir de la rochelle Cap.ne monsieur h.d. Rossal 1741 apres 136 jour de traversée de chama a s.t. Marc, Cote de s.t. Domengue.”

The visual elements of the painting, the brig’s itinerary—La Rochelle, the Atlantic Ocean, Saint Domingue—and supplementary documents identify the ship as a slave-carrying vessel. The *ex-voto* likely represents an idea of miraculousness that varied among crew members and enslaved passengers. Instead of being just another example of a fulfilled petition or nautical-votive, the *Saphir* offering is a complex intersection of faith, violence, and materiality.

In many ways, *ex-votos* attempt to memorialize uncapturable events. For a fleeting moment, they encapsulate the embodiment of a personal exchange between individuals and deities, during which offerings become both material and immaterial. Thereafter, object-roles shift in accordance to context, meaning, and intent. Some offerings are recycled back into daily use, others enter gallery or museum settings, while a number remain where they were originally deposited. In some variations of the practice, like *nadhr* (نَذْر) in Islam, the destination and use of the offering is carefully articulated when it is donated (Meri 2002). In others, as in earlier versions of *ema* (絵馬) in Japan, shrine priests actively engaged in the petitioning process as intermediaries between people and divine entities (Anderson 2002). Such variations, as well as diverse expressions of the practice from Greek *tamata* to Spanish or Latin American *milagros*, illustrate the practice’s broad presence across space and time in diverse cultural and religious settings.

Scholars have examined votive offerings through multidisciplinary approaches, contributing to Religious Studies, Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy, Art History, and Folklore, among other fields. Some have traced the practice to pre-historic origins (Atwood 2002), while others situate it within Eastern and Western Antiquity (Ashikaga 1954; Bercht 1985; Wolfgang 1939). Thematic contributions of contemporary practice include votive offerings and migration by authors like Eileen Oktavec (1995) as well as Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey (1995); Sidney M. Greenfield and Antonio Mourão Cavalcante’s studies on *ex-votos* and pilgrimage (2006); ontologies like *Faith and Transformation* (2007); or José Cláudio Alves de

Fig. 1
Ex-voto for the vessel
La Saphir. Offered in
1741, France. Image
from Wikimedia
Commons.



Oliveira's ongoing multimedia documentation of votive shrines in Latin America. More recently, Ittai Weinryb's *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place* (2018) combines a selection of studies that explore similarities and differences of expression within a global context.

The most common votive themes are health, wellness, fertility, survival, economic wellbeing, overcoming accidents or natural disasters, and achievement of personal goals. But since the practice is a reflection of the multifarious nature of human experience, offerings also express themes related to symbolic and physical forms of violence and aggression. This latter category can involve intersections of competing agents, where one's fulfilled petition can become another's demise. Understanding competing petitions, particularly through the material evidence, is instrumental in further comprehending the overall complexity of the practice.

This study contributes to the scholarship of ex-votos by seeking to understand aggregating thematic examples of competing petitions through a votive theme identification project

modeled after Edward Morris Opler's work on cultural theme analysis (1945), Dennis Wiedman and Iveris L Martinez's longitudinal cultural theme analysis (2017), and the matrixes in Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies* (2001). A sample of 220 votive offerings (paintings, photographs, and objects) that exhibit visual, textual, or contextual elements related to violence or aggression have been aggregated from field work in religious sites, as well as museum collections, exhibition catalogues, manuscripts, and private collections. It represents items in two belief systems, Christianity and Shintoism, that were commissioned or deposited between 1792 and 1964, in or in relation to eighteen counties and regions.²

At the time of publication, forty-seven themes and subthemes have been identified (see Table 1). This article discusses the themes with greatest reoccurrence through the umbrellas of "physical manifestations of aggression" and "structural mechanisms." Treatment of each theme is accompanied by proposed theoretical models and historical or contextual information that can aid both individual and collective

analysis. The study lacks examples from antiquity, additional faiths, and intangible expressions, but offers a point of departure that can and should be expanded to be more inclusive and representative of votive practice.

Physical Manifestations of Aggression

For the purposes of this article, physical manifestations of aggression refers to overt pre, post, or mid-action instances of direct human-action that result in physical or material harm. Overtness is interpreted through visual cues or descriptive statements that suggest intentionality, as opposed to accidents, though an individual might suffer by being in the “wrong place at the wrong time.” Themes in this category include assault, robbery, physical fights (altercations), arson, murder, and crossfire. Many are accompanied by accessories like daggers, machetes, swords and guns. In the examples analyzed, textual descriptions illustrate both indiscriminate and arbitrary victimization, as well as targeted attacks through organized crime or personal disputes. Often, the resulting offering is commissioned and submitted by the individual(s) violated, though some have been made in tribute to victims by relatives or friends. And while many refer to isolated, generic or non-descript cases, a number can be cross-referenced to support greater societal trends in certain

regions or time periods. The general openness³ of the practice, particularly in non-policed environments where anyone can freely walk into a chapel or when there is less possibility of retaliation, have given numerous people the opportunity to memorialize events from their perspective. Often, offerings also reflect tangential consequences, revelations, and forms of healing.

Physical Altercations

In one example, a family thanks Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos for the recovery of a family member who was stabbed in 1935 (Fig. 2). The composition of the painting is split into two sections. The first scene shows a man leaning against a wall as blood gushes from his head onto the floor, while the culprit can be seen running away from the scene with a knife in hand. The second scene shows a group of people, two males and two females, holding candles and kneeling by a statue of the Virgin Mary. A shadowy figure who appears to be holding a garland-like object hovers by them. The textual description identifies both the victim and perpetrator by first and last name, the precise date and location of the encounter, the wounds endured, and the moment in which the victim called on the Virgin Mary for help. Although it appears that the victim survived the attack, a final line reveals that he passed

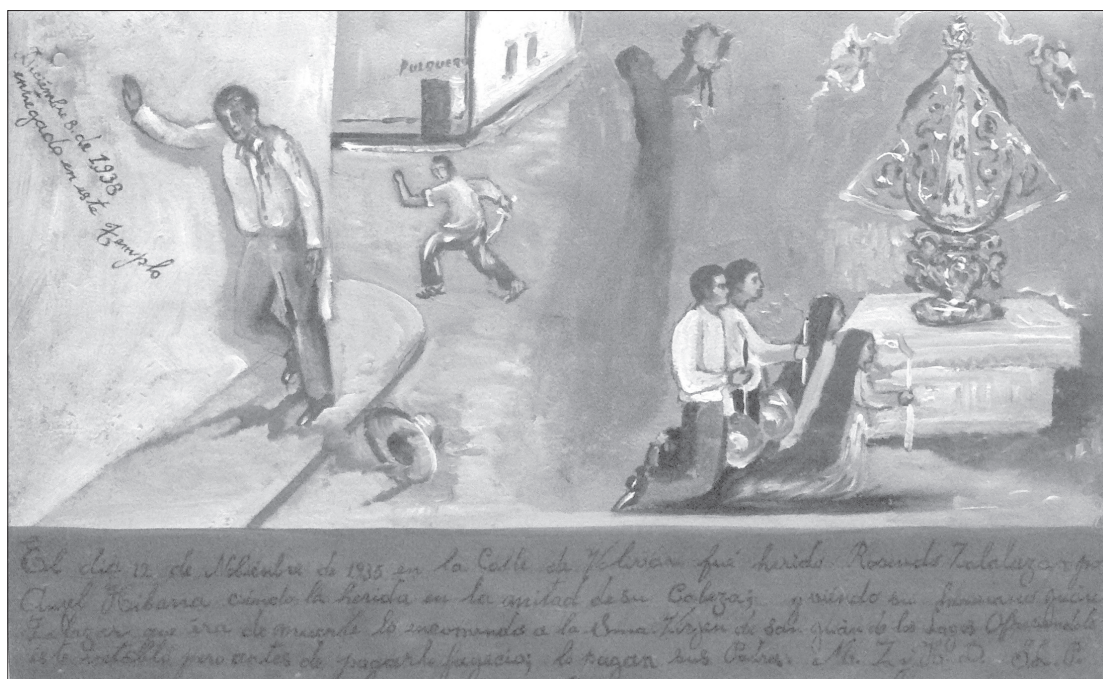


Fig. 2
Votive painting of a person who was stabbed. Offered in 1938, Mexico. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

away before completing his vow, prompting his parents to commission and offer the painting on his behalf in 1938. The offering communicates some of the consequences of violent actions. First, the individuals portrayed by the statue allude to the road families and relatives undertake in carrying or worrying for victims. In this case, it includes fulfilling the petition of a loved one. Secondly, the inclusion of explicit details, such as full names and street addresses, is a form of informal justice. Although there is no evidence of formal involvement by the relevant authorities, the family is able to receive justice on a religious ground (calling on a higher power) and within the community (their version of the event being displayed in the chapel).

Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

Information about themes in votive practice can be gathered through available offerings, as the one discussed above, or their absence. This is true of domestic and gender-based violence, which are subthemes of aggression. María J. Rodríguez-Shadow explores the context of these subthemes in votive shrines in the book *Women's Prayers: The Aesthetics and Meaning of Female Votive Paintings in Chalma* (2003). During fieldwork in various shrines, Rodríguez-Shadow observes that votive depictions of violence against women were disproportionately absent (in comparison to other themes), while some topics, such as rape or sexual assault, were holistically absent. Rodríguez-Shadow hypothesizes these absences to be the result of social or religious taboos, social pressure to avoid legal intervention, and the notion that in some areas "male aggression against women is seen as a private matter, a natural affair consequently condoned by society" (2003: 180). Grappling with these issues, and the possibility of having one's safety jeopardized through a public accusation, might influence victims to seek other forms of petitionary action.

Nonetheless, a number of examples have been documented overtime. The book *Infinitas Gracias* (2003), which contains works by retablo painter Alfredo Vilchis Roque, includes examples related to both domestic and gender-based violence. The former includes an offering commissioned by a teenager, who pleaded against physical

altercations occurring between her mother and father, while the latter included a retablo by a female sex-worker who endured violence from a male client. In these, and other examples in the sample, offerings of such subthemes almost exclusively reflect violence against females or males by males. Out of the offerings analyzed, only one portrayed gender-based violence of a female against a male appears. The example is illustrated in the collection *Dones y Promessas*, and documents the story of a woman who shot her male partner: "*Doi gracias al Dibino Rostro de Acapulco porque mate a mi marido y no me isieron nada. Rosa Perea*" (Agraz and Beltrán 1996: 181). In other words, "I killed my husband and did not suffer any consequences." Relative absence of domestic or gender-based violence with male victims or female perpetrators is subject to the same framework Rodríguez-Shadow applied to offerings of female victims. Societal pressure, religious settings, censorship by shrines or disinterested collectors reflect both possible aversions towards offering votives in this genre or reasons they are less accessible than other categories.

Violence Against Minors

These motivations, along with agency, could also reflect a relative absence of offerings related to violence against minors. Thus far, the only example of this subtheme in the sample were found in *emas*, or Japanese votive tablets, about infanticide practices in Japan's Edo period (1603 to 1868). These *ema* depict mother figures suffocating their infant, whose soul is sometimes represented as a white fog rising from the newborn's body. Other variations include demonized characters, either the mother or infant, in reference to certain deities.

The practice took place primarily at times of harsh economic hardship, during which some families saw unexpected newborns as potentially furthering the difficulties of caring for living family members. Hilary Katherine Snow proposes that in this case, perhaps to evade guilt or sadness, infanticide was seen "not as the outright killing of children but rather as sending them back to the gods" (2010: 33). Opponents of the practice, however, sought legal and moral campaigns against it. Fabian Drixler (2013) and others pro-

pose that the way figures appear to be demonized and dehumanized in infanticide-related *ema* are examples of such anti-infanticide campaigns (see also Jolivet 2000 and Snow 2010). Within this context, displayed infanticide *ema* convey a degree of violence, although it remains contextual and societal since individuals who engaged in the practice might have viewed it differently.

Self-Harm and Suicide

Offerings related to self-harm, sacrifice, and suicide also evoke constructed ideas of violence. In the sample, self-harm votives include individuals' attempt to hang themselves. In each case, they were stopped or taken down by family members, divine intervention, or both before death. In some instances, textual descriptions allude to mental health issues, substance abuse, or other hardships. Akin to the issues described earlier by Rodríguez-Shadow in regards to domestic violence, offerings about self-harm have not been as populous as offerings in other themes. Their relative absence might reflect fear of retaliation, social stigmas against mental health, or religious constraints surrounding the topic. It is possible, however, that sites where such offerings have greater prevalence have yet to be documented.

In the themes discussed above, individuals engaged in direct action for or against one another. Although individual cases may ultimately reflect greater social structures, such as disputes arising from economic hardship or discrimination, they mostly exemplify one-on-one or small-group conflicts. The relative degree of rarity in the material representation of some of the topics considered demonstrates that the practice may be limited to local or regional conceptions of controversy or safety, or an area where further fieldwork is needed.

Structural Mechanisms

In comparison to individual or small group conflict, the presence of identifiable human agents in broader scenarios decreases. In addition, themes and subthemes that reflect greater degrees of social mechanisms are also likely to include forms of violence that are unaccompanied by visible bodily harm. Their inclusion in the sample

is based on the work of Johan Galtung, who states that there is a “basic distinction between violence that works on the body, and violence that works on the soul...” (1969: 169). Following this amplified definition, he asks whether violence can exist “when nobody is committing direct violence,” when there is no identifiable human subject conducting a violent act (Galtung 1969: 170). This question refers to instances where harm, whether physical or psychological, trace back to structures rather than single individuals, hence the idea of structural violence. Many of the offerings that connote structural violence might also engage with symbolic violence. As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1993) have demonstrated, violence can be implied or exerted through systems of dominance and oppression. The pictorial absence of chains and weapons in the painting of the *Saphir*, for example, does not mean the slaves aboard were free and unharmed (see Fig. 1).

Incarceration

Incarceration-related offerings convey such multilevel depictions of implied and explicit violence. In the sample, crimes or convictions were mostly absent from textual or pictorial renditions, the exception being cases where individuals were released after proving wrongful incarceration. A number of offerings within this category focused on family separation, guard or inmate violence, and poor conditions or treatment. Many featured physical violence between individuals, structural violence related to the hierarchy between guards and inmates, and symbols, like uniforms or flags, that are related states. As some scholars point out, the mechanisms behind many judicial systems are inherently unequal, and likely to disproportionately affect disenfranchised communities, thus adding other social components (Reis 2016). Ex-votos about incarceration can become vehicles where one can omit culpability for a given crime, find restitution, or feel spiritually connected to a greater power. In the absence of contextual information—what devotees might or might not have done—we see physical violence as the pain of the punishment, and structural violence through the system that determines the punishment. Though the system is composed of humans,

tracing specific agents can lead towards a long, winding path and ultimately land on institutions like governments or judiciary branches. Despite physical or structural violence, some might associate incarceration offerings with public safety, order, and control. The same could be said about offerings related to capital punishment.

Immigration

Offerings related to immigration, particularly in cases of undocumented, evoke similar issues. Within immigration and migration debates, tracing an agent largely depends on one's own political or social affiliation. Some might revert to the systems that caused one's misplacement, while others might blame the individuals commissioning the offering as producers of their own circumstances. Often, such ideas are further complicated by complex and dynamic relationships related to contested border crossings. A number of immigration-related offerings in the sample document U.S./Mexico border crossings, evoking not only what the devotee chose to picture but also a wide set of historical precedents and contemporary ideas (Young 2017). Immigration offerings in the sample, which belong to a broader set of border-related religious expression (Leon 1999), included geographical landmarks such as the Rio Grande river, images of military helicopters, and border control personnel. To date, immigration related offerings have been procured on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border (Oktavec 1995), to the point of becoming important cultural and religious symbols. Their prominence has been captured by artists in both gallery settings and through public art. In the installation *Parade of Humanity: Border Milagros*, for example, artist Alfred J. Quiroz's created large sculptures in the shape of *milagros*, a form of votive offering made out of metal into charms (Silva 2015). The enlarged charms depict the reasons that prompt border crossings, like money or love, while also warning against its dangers.

At face value, many border-crossing offerings capitalize on the dangers endured during the crossing by visually depicting difficult situations, like running out of water in the desert or hiding from border patrol in the river. Textually, some go on to articulate other themes, such as possibility

of family reunification, consequences of family separation, the ability to send back remittances to family members that did not migrate, and future goals the devotee may have. As the previous paragraph demonstrated, however, historical and contemporary knowledge influence how one might read offerings within this genre. Beyond the themes articulated pictorially or textually are potential challenges that individuals go on to face after the crossing is complete, rendering political, social, economic, and cultural factors that have made elements of immigration⁴ into human rights issues (Holmes 2013; Ibarra 2003). As a whole, the genre has the power to connote diverse elements of structural, symbolic, and physical violence.

War and Combat

Complexities of individual experiences within state-sponsored mechanisms such as these are exacerbated in offerings related to war. Such offerings have a long history of documenting individual perspectives during civil, regional, and world wars. The symbols present in these offerings are capable of triggering diverse responses in individuals, from peace and safety to danger, loss, or pain. An *ema* featuring a samurai, for example, is difficult to categorize. A samurai sword, for instance, might not immediately relate to a battle or war, and instead refer to a legend or tradition unrelated to combat. A soldier representing a nation viewed as "the enemy" can evoke completely different responses than if he or she is viewed as a "patriot" or "saviour." All in all, it is imperative to assess war-related offerings on a case by case basis and consider that most interpretations will differ depending on the affiliations or positionality of the viewer.

Unlike the previous themes discussed in this paper, this category of offerings includes a wide assortment of everyday objects that are transformed into offerings through the votive gifting process. They include donated uniforms, swords, medals, and portraits. Some of these items are not related to duty in active war zones, and may reflect peace keeping missions instead. In a number of cases, devotees create compiled offerings made up of an object, letter, and photograph, further triangulating their experiences.

Textual and pictorial offerings within this genre provide additional contexts and elaborate renditions of conflict zones. Many illustrate depictions of military formation and training, active shootings, exploding bombs, as well as encounters with opposing armies that feature guns, swords, daggers, cannons, aircrafts, and tanks. Animals, such as horses, are also regularly present depending on the time period of the offering. Wounds have been depicted at various stages: before being inflicted, while being inflicted, or once the wound has started to heal.

Beyond the battlefield, offerings in this category also depict wartime challenges that affect civilians. One such subtheme are depictions of relatives and friends awaiting missing soldiers or welcoming them home. They often include figures kneeling by a deity near a closed or opened door. Sometimes the awaited soldier(s) can be seen walking through the door towards the kneeling figures without being noticed. Often, a door with no soldier symbolizes their eventual appearance, and point to an anticipatory offering, where the devotee presents the offering in anticipation of a future miracle. Another subcategory of civilian war offerings are postmortem *emas* offered on behalf of the parents of unwed soldiers who died in combat. This action would have eased the possible distress encountered by the fallen soldier by providing “marital solace in the other world” (Robertson 2008: 48).

While a number of offerings within this genre outwardly focus on individual experiences, as opposed to opinions directly related to politics and the nature or origins of particular wars, a number include layered or ambiguous messages. In regards to soldier *emas*, Jennifer Robertson states that the “...genre was a complex dialectic of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation ... deployed as expressions of self-interest and local autonomy ... soldier *ema* do not deal directly with the roots and causes of war, but rather with the disruptions and ambivalent attitudes war provokes in everyday life” (2008: 68). In contrast, a longitudinal survey of war-themed *emas* by Richard W. Anderson (2002) revealed political components of *ema* petitioning, including diverse agendas, prowar or antiwar sentiments. Anderson also stipulates on the positionality of the viewer, which may affect whether an offering is labeled

as peaceful or as a reflection of violence, or which symbols are identified.

Slavery

The sample also included various offerings related to slavery. As the introductory remarks on the *Saphir* offering illustrated, ex-votos related to slavery engage in contextual and historical elements of physical, structural, and symbolic violence. Such offerings, and their presence in houses of worship, reflect a range of imbalances, both in antiquity and in recent history that continue to affect present day societies. Offerings in this theme sometimes “blend in” with surrounding offerings, effectively obscuring their relationship or reference to slavery. This constraint, along with general disinterest in the topic by collecting bodies—in contrast, for example, to widespread collecting of health and wellness offerings—slows the identification process. Additional challenges to identifying slavery-related offerings include censorship, disregard, accidents, and other historical factors that have led to the destruction of some artifacts within this genre. LeGrace Benson, for example, has identified documents that describe large collections of nautical ex-votos in coastal chapels in Saint Domingue (2006: 168). Until objects or other supportive materials are identified, the descriptions she cited are the only evidence that votive ship sculptures were offered during Haiti’s colonial past.

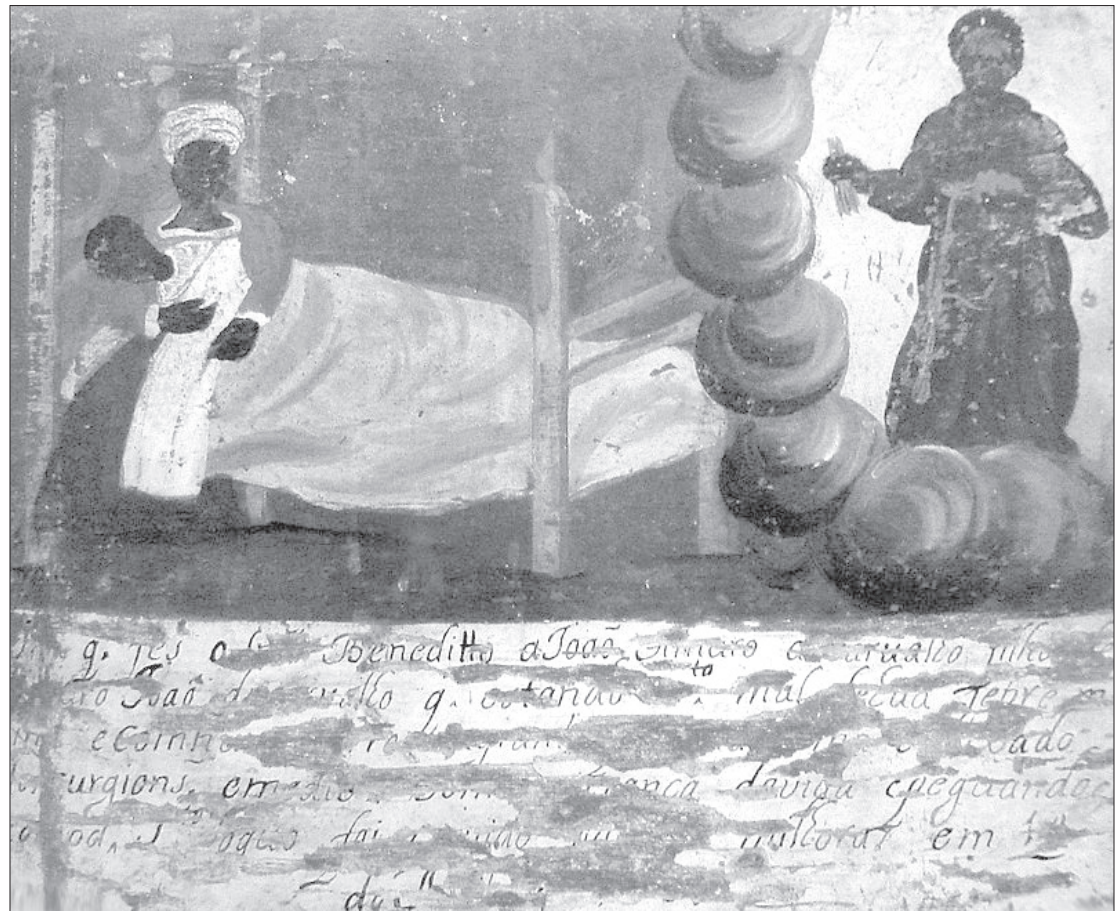
Nonetheless, a number of examples related to other regions have been identified, including France, the West-African coast, and Brazil. In Brazil, ex-votos related to slavery include depictions of slaves as observants and as subjects. Early examples include documentary images of the practice, as with depictions of slave-carrying vessels, that demonized slaves.⁵ Later examples transitioned into depictions of slaves in everyday contexts, and ultimately ended with emancipatory themes.⁶ Depictions of everyday contexts include the presence of slaves as spectators of events, such as by someone’s bedside, or as the ones receiving the miracle. Some offerings were commissioned by slaves or their family members, while others were commissioned on their behalf by owners (Abreu 2005).

Although some everyday cases might depict seemingly non-violent themes, such as health and wellness, they remain symbolically violent due to the imbalanced context of enslavement. They also serve as examples of how the practice was normalized in quotidian life, as well as within the Catholic Church, a longtime supporter of the practice and a place where slave-related offerings could be displayed. Similar to the preceding discussion on infanticide *emas*, the display of some slavery-related offerings engaged wider agendas. Francisco Eduardo de Andrade (2016), proposes that some slave owners commissioned ex-votos to project themselves as benevolent in both religious and societal contexts. This might explain why some owners credited themselves—by first, middle, last name and self-portrait—in the petitioning, commissioning, and administering of offerings related to a slave’s well-being (i.e. paying for their surgery). This form of “benevolence” became key in official attempts to continue normalizing and enabling slavery.⁷

A challenge of analyzing slavery related ex-votos is amassing the necessary contextual information to distinguish depictions of slaves in generic ex-votos from that of free peoples. Figure 3 illustrates this conundrum. The 18th-century tablet, which is part of the collection of the *Museu da Inconfidência*, in Minas Gerais, Brazil, depicts a woman embracing a bedridden man as a saint manifests by their side. The accompanying textual description is mostly illegible, revealing only the name of the man, João Amaro, and that he was suffering from a fever. While other words, such as “son” are legible, words that would have identified him as an enslaved person are either illegible or absent. Nonetheless, members of the public, through informal settings such as blogs, as well as academics, routinely refer to João Amaro as a slave without citing specific documents or preceding publications as a source.

The unequal pictorial rendering (and unrendering) of people over time, particularly through white supremacy, has caused friction on how paintings are interpreted. There is violence

Fig. 3
Votive tablet of a person overcoming a sickness. Offered in the 19th century, Brazil. Museu da Inconfidência, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Public domain.



in this offering if João Amaro is a slave, but also if he is automatically thought of as such because of the colour of his skin. As Marcus Wood proposes in *Blind Memory* (2000), “visual art can transform how we read words, and words can transform images [and] ... interdependencies can be very powerful in the context of slavery...” (301). The first set of themes, particularly those of individual violence, might have been easier to read, interpret, and digest than those referencing slavery and other forms of inequality and oppression—the former being more difficult to read, in turn, than nonimplicated offerings about health or wellness. All categories, however, deserve our attention given the scope of votive practice.

Conclusion

The broad thematic analysis presented in this paper has illustrated complexities and ambiguities embedded in devotional depictions that interlace violence, healing, and religion. While theoretical analysis draws connections between various themes, each theme and subtheme—as well as the offerings within them—merit further individual attention and insight. Much remains to be learned about the role ex-votos play in each of these domains, including perspectives and opinions of devotees beyond material records. All of the subjects raised continue to afflict populations in diverse regions of the world, and in temples and shrines that still receive offerings today. The macro-view of these themes is a point of departure for greater examination on how each theme manifests in particular sites, time periods, or belief systems.

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes of Symbolic, Structural, and Physical Violence in the sample.

Physical Manifestations of Aggression

Arson

Domestic Violence

Abuse

Disputes

Murder

Physical Fighting

Shooting

Stabbing

Gender-based Violence

Fighting

Shooting

Murder

Murder

Personal Disputes

Group & Individual Fights

Robbery

Stabbing

Shooting

Shoot Outs

Organized Crime

Personal Disputes

Stabbing

Suicide Attempt

Hanging (Tree)

Torture

Tied to a tree and brutalized

Structural Mechanisms

Capital Punishment

Death Sentence

Officialized Torture

Immigration

(Undocumented border crossings)

Pursuits & Dangerous Crossings

Imprisonment

Prison Riot

Wrongful Incarceration

Organized Military Action

(Regional Battles, Armed Conflicts, WWI & II)

Active Combats

P.O.W./M.I.A.

Returning Home

Wounded Soldiers

Atlantic Slave Trade

Armed Conflict/Torture

Human Trafficking

Slavery/Indentured Labour

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented as “War, Slavery, and Aggression: Themes of Violence in Votive Practice” for the conference “Art, Materiality and Representation” at the Royal Anthropological Institute, British Museum & SOAS University of London in London, England in June 2018.
2. Regions included in the sample: Angola, Brazil, China, Cuba, France, Germany, Ghana, Haiti, Holland, Italy, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Vietnam and unidentified regions in Africa.
3. The practice of offering physical ex-votos has not been equally accessible to all members of any given society. Devotees may face financial challenges, such as not having the necessary funds to commission, purchase, or deposit an offering; security constraints due to the sensitive content of their petitions, or they are denied entry/deposit through discriminatory measures.
4. These include policy changes for asylum seekers, changing circumstances for migrant day labourers, external forces that destabilize safety in countries from which large groups of migrants leave, family separation, and so forth. While the particular offerings included in the sample relate to the border between the U.S. and Mexico, which is crossed by migrants of multiple nationalities, the theme of migration is present in votives of other regions and might be interpreted differently given the context.
5. See the *Ex-voto to Nossa Senhora do Vale, 1747* in the work of Junia Ferreira Furtado’s *From Brazil’s Central Highlands to Africa’s Ports: Transatlantic and Continental Trade Connections in Goods and Slaves* (2012).
6. See depictions of the statue of Amaro in the Santuário do Senhor Bonfim, in Salvador, Bahia (Oliveira 2008).
7. Over the course of the 19th century, slave owners in Brazil were to encounter increased abolitionist pressures both nationally and internationally as many sought to outlaw or shun the practice.

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