INTRODUCTION

Epistemic Frames

My aim was always to go beyond descriptive and monographic work. I focused my research on the "epistemological" issues that gave apparently disparate empirical data their profound sense and internal 'logic'. Inspired by M. Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge,* I developed an instrument to unravels the intricacies of causal links, and discover the cognitive processes proper to the peoples native to Mesoamerica. The heart of my work rests there. In one chapter I elucidate the cognitive frame underlying healing practices. How do Mesoamerican people, heal with apparently disparate procedures? Why are these procedures effective? What does being ill and well mean? I try to systematically evade the concept "magic". I think that it, too often stands for ethnocentric and chrono-centric perspectives unable to go beyond their own explanation of reality.

In every area of research touched upon, I stand at the threshold between two worlds. I patiently collect data and try to uncover the other thread of "subjugated knowledges" that binds and weaves everything together. The still incomplete results of my efforts are here. 5, I move beyond to other issues which gradually emerged from the same field of research. First and foremost: How is gender conceptualized in a world with such a divide between what is deemed male and female?

The searching of primary sources for women's voices and ritual practices relies heavily on Spanish sources and translations. Being mainly the work of male chroniclers and Catholic clerics and conquerors, these sources are of limited bearing, to say the least, to the presence and contributions of women in society, myth and ritual. Even Sahagún often translates pictograms unambiguously representing women acting as doctors, midwives and ritual practitioners into the Spanish generic masculine that erases them from agency and preeminence. Only the occasional subversions of the original intentions of the chroniclers are an open window to comprehend Mesoamerican gender configurations. Critical re-

interpretations of pictographic or pictoglyphic codices, as well as recent Spanish re-translations from the original Nahuatl documents enlightened the recovery of ancestral meanings. Giving visibility to feminine presences made invisible or last amidst texts and documents has been one of my guiding objectives. In the Mesoamerican "episteme", gender is the root of duality. Its pervasive presence is simply occulted by the concealing of women.

In other chapters, I review the "philosophical" tenets implied in the Mesoamerican concept of duality. Eroticism is a puzzling presence scattered among the priestly clerical writings of Sahagun, and other colonial missionaries. Its paradoxical link to vitality and gender is open to interpretation. What is the Mesoamerican concept of god and goddess? It does not necessarily fit with our transcendent interpretations: nor is it endowed with exclusively beneficial qualities, nor is it in total insularity with respect to the human actions. I sometimes, reconcile texts reporting on the ancient pantheon with contemporary interpretations of "more than human" agents. The primary sources concerning god and goddesses are not only redundant, repetitious but contradictory and sometimes confusing. Frequently, the search of an order based in mutually exclusive categories has failed to pay honor to this other world. Its "logic" lies in deeper epistemological tenets. For gender theory, it is vital to unravel, the significance of the body as the preferred locus of our identity as women.

The amblings of oral thought, its circular and unpredictably innovative flow, reminds us of the river of the ancient Greek philosophers, ever the same and ever changing.
Its waters flow incessantly, murmuring over stones, disappearing down a ravine or flowing freely toward the sea that embraces them. The thought behind oral narrative resembles water that flows swiftly at times, and quietly at others, changing course unpredictably but always remaining the same river.

Mesoamerican commonalities

Combining records of the contact period with archaeological findings of previous periods, it is possible to conceive a commonality of certain Mesoamerican generative roots. Most scholars assume indeed a common cultural core, manifest in similarities of symbolic meanings, rituals and social practices, medical knowledge, architectural elements, and iconographies, writing systems (pictograms , hieroglyphs, pictoglyphs), and measurement

of time (calendars) among the diverse peoples of Mesoamerica . Some even affirm the existence of one broad *Mesoamerican religious armature*.

The geographical term Mesoamerica which is the universe of reference of my research, has historical and cultural connotations. As such, it refers to the cultures of an area extending between mid-Mexico to include most of Central America. In this region, complex and sophisticated civilizations attained a peak in religion, art, architecture, agriculture, medicine and calendaric knowledge. The communities in the area are not identical, but they all keep a common hard core and generative roots that allows us to make some generalizations.

Data about the earliest periods of Mesoamerican religions are basically archaeological. Iconographic studies, hieroglyph decoding, as well as the examination of mural paintings and sculpture have revealed the importance of feminine presences in myth and ritual.

The first written records properly speaking about Mesoamerican peoples and religion are from the so-called contact period. It was indeed a time of "contact" or "encounter", as some scholars like to call it, in the sense that both sides contributed to the creation of a new configuration. Yet this encounter was decidedly disadvantageous for the natives: in order to survive they had to become subservient and silently suffer cruel impositions. The records of that period consist mostly of transcriptions of poetry, chants, and mythic narratives preserved by oral custom from the time immediately previous to the European invasion of the territory that had been ruled by the Aztecs or Mexica. In the course of this book we use alternatively the term Aztec, Nahua, (which refers to one of the native or language groups of the area) and Mesoamerican for the regional overview.

The primary sources or "texts" on which this book is based are "hybrid," in the sense that they belong to both oral and written narrative forms and styles. W. Ong, might call them "residually oral". In the long run, I feel that it is their characteristic of "oral texts" that gives unity to the universe of study presented in this book. They were *taken from the lips.* From the lips of the wise elders of the communities Fray Bernardino de Sahagún researched in 1542 or from the lips of Maria Sabina. Her chants, in 1981, are close morphologically and symbolically to the "Cantares Mexicanos" that A. Garibay and M. Leon Portilla have

translated from the collections in nahuatl. We could also say that they are taken from the lips of contemporary indigenous women struggling for justice.

I do not use modern ethnographic data with the assumption that Mesoamericans are living today in a pristine state unaffected by change. Neither do I conceive of every community in the area to be identical. I have insisted on presenting this region inserted in a permanent process of change. To be coherent with Mesoamerican epistemic frame, I would affirm that change and continuity do not exclude each other. It has changed profoundly and remained much the same.

PART I Decolonizing Practices and Deconstructing Captivites

The Public Arena: Facing the Mexican Parliament: Indigenous Justice Demands

We Come to Ask for Justice, not Crumbs

The 28 March 2001, at about 10:00 A.M., a crowd of barefoot Indians, dressed in multicolored garments, wearing hats of different forms and sizes, adorned with ribbons, carrying packets in old plastic bags, entered the House of Parliament, meekly but triumphantly, through its main entrance. The wards and the doorkeepers could not believe their eyes. Many invited non-indigenous lawyers, professors, politicians and supporters accompanied the indigenous retinue. Minutes later, as the session started, a small figure moved up to take the tribune. She was dressed in white with embroidered flowers. Reminiscent of the countenenance recommended to women and men in the traditional discourses of *ilamatlatolli* and *huehuetlatolli*, the ancient moral sayings of the mesoamerican peoples, (Sylvia Marcos 1991), she bore herself with indigenous composure, taking small steps and with head covered by a ski mask. Her eyes blinked when she started speaking. It was *Comandanta* Esther. "Here I am. I am a woman and an Indian, and through my voice speaks the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional."* A murmur of surprise rose from the assembly. How dare she—a woman and an Indian, so desperately poor—take this stance? The audience was flabbergasted. She started shyly, almost faintly. But as her voice progressively rose, her strength came through her words. She made clear that she was there as a commander and as such taking the decisions, of the Zapatista Revolutionary Clandestine Committee.

Those who heard her could recognize in her speech stylistic resources that reminded us of pre-Columbian poetry. Among them were an "indigenous" syntax in Spanish, with a certain use of parallelisms and of diphrasing (Leon-Portilla 1969). The influences of the indigenous language were present in the choice of words, the non-matching singulars and plurals, the use of metaphors, and the rythmic repetition of words (Sylvia Marcos 1997). Especially conspicuous was her use of the word "heart" in a context where it did not refer to feelings. "Heart," in her discourse, referred to reason, to history, to truth (*Perfil de la Jornada* March 29, 2001, IV). All of these characteristics revealed the influence of her Mayan ancestry and her cosmology upon her language.

Six times she was interrupted by roaring applause. Her discourse proved that culture is not monolithic, culture is not static. Both fallacies must be debunked if we are to respect the indigenous world. In accordance with the multiple indigenous voices heard these last years, she insisted that she wants both to transform and to preserve her culture. "*Queremos que sea reconocida nuestra forma de vestir, de hablar, de gobernar,de organizar, de resar, de curar, nuestra forma de trabajar en colectivos, de respetar la tierra y de entender la vida, que es la naturaleza que somos parte de ella."* [We want recognition for our ways of dressing, of talking, of governing, of organizing, of praying, of working collectively, of respecting earth, of understanding nature as something which we are part of.] (*Perfil de La Jornada* 2001, March 29, IV).

The second woman to address Mexico's Congress that day was Maria de Jesus Patricio, *"Marichuy,"* representing the CNI, (the largest network of indigenous political groups). In her speech, she stated firmly and repeatedly that it is not only in the indigenous communities that women's rights are not

respected. Applause came from the floor. *"[…Q]ue si los usos y costumbres lesionan a las mujeres indigenas en los pueblos en las comunidades, pensamos que es un problema no solamente de los pueblos indigenas, no es de ahi, es de toda la sociedad civil tambien. Dicen que si se aprueba esta iniciativa de la Cocopa, va a lesionar a las mujeres. Nosotras decimos que no."* [if customary traditions injure indigenous women's rights in our communities, we think that this is a problem not only for indigenous people. It is not only there; it also belongs to the whole society.] With the eloquence of her oral tradition, she started to list the positive *"usos y costumbres,"* such as collective collaboration for communal tasks, spiritual leadership of women in rituals, political representation as service to the community rather than as means of acquiring power and wealth, respect for the wisdom of elders, and consensus decision-making. Then she mentioned some of the influences of the hegemonic legal system and religious institutions that surrounds them, which have had a negative impact on the situation of indigenous women.

On a later date, on December 2002 "The final declaration of the first summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas demands:

That the States accept, respect and promote in their public policies our cosmovision, specially ritual ceremonies and sacred places…We demand from different churches and Religions to respect the beliefs and cultures of Indigenous Peoples without imposing on us religious practices that conflict with our spirituality."

Mesoamerican peoples are preserving and recreating ancient traditions through the socio-political changes in which they are immersed. For millennia, the originary peoples of the Americas had created and lived within a civilization with their own parameters for comprehending, organizing and revering the world (cosmovision). They defended it throughout the

catastrophes of the Conquest, and today, they claim their rights to their own way of interpreting their symbolic and religious universes. To review this new spirituality in its historical context it is necessary to go beyond historical and ethnographic methodologies to incorporate the philosophical and educational domain in which these religious and gender configurations are based. This will illuminate how Mesoamerican peoples have perceived and constructed their cosmos and based it on the feminine-masculine duality. I argue that comprehending the particularities of local ways of knowing reveals hidden aspects of indigenous peoples' current struggles to resist even when they are adapting to contemporary situations. This apparent paradox can only be deeply understood when one recognizes the "Otherness" of an epistemic universe not based on binary mutually exclusive categories (Marcos 1998). For the indigenous subjects, the merging of opposites is a fact they regard as coherent. Deciphering the deep intricacies of "indigenous spirituality" and gender duality and women's rights , show us where the decolonizing efforts of this new spirituality are at work and how the indigenous originary peoples of middle America are deconstructing centuries old captivities in the "spiritual" and the political domain. A domain deeply embedded ,bound , and interdependent within their political struggles for social justice.

A few years ago, in his groundbreaking book "South and Mesoamerican Native Spirituality" Gary Gosseu defined his understanding of the concept:

> "…the key word spirituality seeks to make available—via translation—the inner states, worldview and cosmology of (indigenous) practitioners and believers." (p. 17)

Some ten years later a multi headed network of indigenous womens' groups congregated at the First Summit incorporated the term spirituality for themselves now without the need for translation. By the use of this word they

are challenging both the way their religious traditions and practices have been depicted (as ignorant and backward if not superstitious) and at the same time they demand a respect for their own beliefs ("spirituality") expressed through their cosmology and worldview. I will review some basic tenants of mesoamerican cosmology as they shape today's indigenous women's struggle for justice, resistance, and agency in their own way of defining them.

Parity or Equality – Duality

Inheritors of a philosophical ancestry where women and men are conceived as an inseparable pair, indigenous women often claim *la paridad*. *"Queremos caminar parejo hombres y mujeres,"* said an old wise woman *(Palomo* 2000, 450*)*. In their own search for the expression that suits their cosmological background they settled on *la paridad*: parity. *"Queremos caminar a la par que ellos"* or *"aprediendo a caminar juntos."* Learning to walk together.

In ancient Mexico, the feminine-masculine dual unity was fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, its (re)generation, and sustenance. The fusion of feminine and masculine in one bi-polar principle is a recurring feature of Mesoamerican thinking. This principle, both singular and dual, is manifested by representations of pairs of gods and goddesses, beginning with Ometéotl, the supreme creator whose name means "double god" or dual divinity. Dwelling beyond the thirteen heavens, Ometéotl was thought of as a feminine-masculine pair. Born of this supreme pair, other dual deities, in their turn, incarnated natural phenomena. Thompson (1975), for example, speaks of Itsam Na and his partner Ix Chebel Yax in the Mayan region. Las Casas (1967) mentions the pair, Izona and his wife; and Diego de Landa (1966) refers to Itzam Na and Ixchel as the god and goddess of medicine. For the

inhabitants of the Michoacan area, the creator pair was *Curicuauert* and *Cuerauahperi.*

Omecihuatl and Ometecuhtli are the feminine and masculine halves of the divine duality Ometéotl. According to an ancient Nahua myth, they had a fight during which they broke dishes, and from every shard that hit the ground a new dual divinity sprang up. While some scholars have inferred that this legend explains the multiplicity of gods, it also illustrates how the prime duality in its turn engenders dualities. Perhaps, then, gender itself—the primordial, all-pervasive duality—could be viewed as "engendering" the multiple specific dualities for all phenomena.

The life/death duality pervading the Mesoamerican world is but two aspects of the same dual reality. This is dramatically expressed by a type of figurine from Tlatilco with a human head that is half a living face and half skull. On the level of the cosmos, the sun and moon are regarded as a dynamic masculine-feminine complementarity (Baez-Jorge 1988). Like wise, during the ritual bathing of newborns, fenimime and masculine waters are invoked (Sahagun 1969, 1989). Cosmic duality is also reflected in the fact that corn was in turn feminine (Xilonen-Chicomeocoatl) and masculine (Cinteotl-Itztlacoliuhqui).

Duality as the essential ordering force of the cosmos was reflected in the organization of time. Time was kept by two calenders: one was a ritual calendar of 260 days (13 x 20) which some regard as linked to the human gestation cycle (Furst 1986), while the other was an agricultural calendar of 360 days (18 x 20), (Olmos 1973). Five days were added to adjust it to the astronomical calendar. As Candida Jimenez—a woman from CONAMI said, "La dualidad se da." We live within duality; it is there in the rituals, the processions, in our common life.

Both Frances Karttunen and Gary Gossen describe Mesoamerican duality as dynamic (Karttunen 1986, Gossen 1986). To the polar ordering of opposites, other authors add a complementarity that gives duality a certain "reversibility" of terms or movement to the concept. Fluidity deepens the scope of bi-polarity by giving a permanently shifting nature to feminine and masculine. With fluidity, femininity is always in transit to masculinity and vice-versa.

Fluid Reality

In a cosmos so constructed, there would be little space for pyramid-like "hierarchical" ordering and stratification. In the various Nahua narratives, whether we look at the *ilamatlatolli* (discourses of the wise old women), the *heuhuetlatolli* (speeches of the old men) or review sources that speak of pairs of deities, we can never infer any categorizing of one pole as "superior" to the other. Instead, a sustaining characteristic of this conceptual universe sees to be the unfolding of dualities. This elaboration of dualities manifests on all levels of heaven, earth and below earth as well as the four corners of the universe. The continuous unfolding is always in a state of flux, and is never rigidly stratified or fixed. Thus, duality permeated the entire cosmos, leaving its imprint on every object, situation, deity, and body.

When the concept of women's "Human Rights" arrived in Chiapas after the EZLN emerged on the national scene, the indigenous women were constantly hearing the term equality. Equality, as demanded by those helpful women who came to support their process, did not make sense to them. Within the Mesoamerican cosmovision, there is nowhere a concept of equality. The whole cosmos is conceived of elements that balance against each other—through their differences—and thus create an equilibrium (Lopez

Austin 1984). This balance is constantly shifting (Sylvia Marcos 1998). "Equality" sounds like stasis, like something that does not move. Furthermore, no two beings are equal in the sense of being the same. With the concept of duality anchoring their daily lives and rituals, equality will not be something they strive for (Sylvia Marcos 1998, Lopez Austin 1984). Those of us closely related to the indigenous movement have understood that *"caminar parejo"* (walking side by side) is the metaphor indigenous women use in working towards a just relationship with their men. The concept of equilibrium starts to appear as an alternative to equality.

Our Mother Earth/ Sacred Earth

Frequently, we hear the indigenous peoples' demand for their land, their earth, their territories. It seems that this demand is the central claim of all the indigenous peoples the world over. "The survival of native peoples is inextricably linked to land" (Smith 1998). But what do demands for earth and for land mean? For indigenous women, there are multiple meanings that can be read into their relationship to the earth. The symbolism of earth as mother ties women to it. They are earth's incarnations and reproducers. *Comandanta* Esther, recently addressing Congress, expressed it in the following way: *"Queremos que sea reconocida nuestra forma de respetar la tierra y de entender las vida, que es la natualeza que somos parte de ella."* [We want our way of respecting earth and understanding life to be recongnized; that it is nature and we are part of her.] *(Perfil de la Jornada*, IV, 29, March, 2001*)*. In her idiosyncratic Spanish, a very complex concept of earth came through. First, earth is a persona. At the National Congress of Indigineous Peoples in the city of Nurio, Michoacan, an indigenous woman spoke like this: *"Todavia nuestro rio, nurestro arbol, nuestra tierra, estan come estan…todavia estan*

vivos." [All our rivers, all our trees, our earth are as they are…they are still alive.] (RamonVera 2001, 4). Earth is alive; we must respect her as we respect other beings.

Some contemporary studies on the "more than human" beings that inhabit the world views of the indigenous peoples in the Americas give background to this interpretation (Morrison 2000, Appfel 2001). In much of the Mesoamerican mythology, the earth appears as a sacred place (Marcos, S. 1995). She is a bountiful deity. It is also a place where danger and evil could befall humans who inhabited it. Earth is also a slippery, perilous place (Burckhart 1989). It is conceived within the classic duality of good and evil. As a supernatural being, she could harm or benefit, depending on your deeds. Marcos, the EZLN poetic subcommander, expresses it this way: *"Y estos indigenas vienen a decir que la tierra es la madre, es la depositaria de la cultura, que ahi vive la historia y que ahi viven los muertos."* [These indigenous peoples come to say that this earth is the mother, she is the cultural matrix, in her lives history and in her live the dead.] (*Subcomandante* Marcos, 2001, 30).

The indigenous perspective on the earth is a moral one and the moral prescription is that one must act very carefully in all circumstances. The indigenous Maya Manuel Gutienez E. speaking of contemporary Christians expresses… "*…as inheritors of ancient…spirituality…[they] have developed a vigilant spirituality, characterized more by cautious expectancy than by messianic hope…"* (South and Mesoamerican Spirituality, p. 277).

The veneration and spirituality that earth elicits from the indigenous women is seldom taken into consideration. It is usually reduced to the right to own the land or the right to inherit it. It is translated as if "land" meant only a commodity. It is in today's world, where you can own a piece of land, that

indigenous women want to own or inherit a piece of land. In a society that has deprived the indigenous populations of the right to collective ownership, this demand is understandable and indispensable.

But the indigenous women demand the right to earth as a place of origins, as a sacred place, as a symbol that fuses with their identity. At the Summit the declaration of the Indigenous women read:

"We request that governments respect the value of our Mother Earth and the spiritual relation to indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands…" (p. 78).

Mandar Obedeciendo [Leading we Obey]

What does this phrase really mean? From which cultural influences was it coined? Lenkersdorf (1999) says it was not created by the *Zapatistas*. This phrase is a common expression of the Tojolabal Mayan indians in Chiapas, and occurs in the Tojolabal-Español-Tojolabal dictionary, which was composed during the 1970s. Obviously the phrase pre-dates this dictionary. According to Lenkersdorf, this phrase is an example of the way the *Zapatistas* incorporate wise ancestral Maya ideas and expressions—especially ancient sayings of the Tojolabal group—into the national political debate.

But, to return to the expression *mandar obedeciendo*, does it really imply that one commands over another, or that one subjects another, as some critics claim? Lenkersdorf continues decoding the deep meaning of this phrase (Ceceña 1999). The translation from the original Mayan phrase is: "Our authorities receive orders." The collective communal "we" is the one that gives orders. This "we" is the ultimate authority. Another level of meaning is "in the community it is we who control our authorities." Governing, in *Tojolabal*, means "work": those who govern are "those who

work." Sometimes, the phrase changes slightly, and it literally means: "the authorities-workers of the community." Everyone has a function in this communitary "we." It si a horizontal collectivity, but not everyone has the same function. Those who govern are not on a superior level to those who are governed. They work like everyone else. They are executors of the decisions of the communitary "we." There are presidents of the chapels, catequists, the municipal representatives. Everyone has her/his specific task, under the control of the communitary "we," which is the supreme authority.

As we see, the concept of *mandar* (command) is a totally different concept in these communities. This collective "we" as maximum authority may choose some people to speak in its name. The problem, Lendersdorf says, is that the (Mexican) dominant society, fully ignorant of the ways of the Mayans, mistakes these spokespersons for leaders. These are not leaders, they are only the spokes persons chosen by the communitary "we." If the already known spokespersons do not talk, it does not mean that the communitary "we" is silent. For example, in the years since *Zapatismo* emerged on the national scene, we have listened to several different spokeswomen. Ramona was for a certain period of time the one chosen. Ana Maria was also visible for a time, then came *Comandanta* Trini, as well as innumerable other women who appear and disappear. Now we hear *Comandantas* Fidelia, Yolanda. At the last Festival of Digna Rabia in 2009 one of the speakers was Comandanta Hortensia.

One would think that with the acceptance each of them has gathered, they should continue appearing, leading, directing, but this in not the basis of their presence. At Mexico's Congress, we heard two women who had not previously caught our attention: *Comandanta* Esther and Maria de Jesus

Patricio. "It is in the communal level of organization that we can identify several structures…organizing for creation and recreation of knowledge(education)—including spiritual life" (p. 174). The communitary "we" elects its spokeswomen. Esther, in her presentation in front of the legislators, expressed it this way: *"Nosotros somos los comandantes, los que mandamos en comun, los que mandamos obedeciendo a nuestra pueblos."* [We are the commanders, those that command communally, those that command obeying our peoples.] (*Perfil de la Jornada* 2001).

Thinking With Our Heart

If there is a word that is central in the indigenous women's demands it is *corazon*, "heart." The heart (*teyolía* according to Lopez Austin, 1984a), is the seat of the highest intellectual activities. Memory and reason reside in it. The heart is not a reference to feelings and love; it is the origin of life. A classical ethnography of the highland Maya in Chiapas, *Perils of the Soul* by Calixta Guiteras-Holmes, is very clear on what the heart meant to the peoples of the region. The heart has all wisdom, is the seat of memory and knowledge, "through it perception takes place" (1961, 246-247).

In the First National Indigenous Women's Congress in Oaxaca in 1997, the approximately five hundred indigenous women echoed each other: *"Grabar en nuestros corazones"* [imprint in our hearts]. They were keeping in this seat of memory all they were learning about their rights as women and as indigenous people (Marcos Oct.-Dec. 1997). In 1995, *Comandante* Ramona sent a message from the CCRI, *Comandancia General del Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional*: "I am speaking to the Mexican people, to the women of Mexico, to everyone in our country." At the closing of her message, she said: "I want all women to arise and sow (sembrar) in their

hearts the need to get organized to be able to construct the free and just Mexico that we all dream of." Obviously, the heart is the seat of work and organization. Feelings and emotions alone do not do the organizing (Ramona 1995). One of the main characteristics of the arts in Tojolabal, says Lendersdorf, is that they "manifest that which the heart thinks" (1996, 166). Again the heart—and not the head—is referred to as the seat of thinking.

Let's refer now to *Comandante* Esther's address to our *Camara de Diputados* on March 28, 2001. She said: "They [the legislators] have been able to open their space, their ears, and their hearts to a world that has reason on its side." The heart opens itself to reason. We could be missing the deep implications of the concept "heart" when the women use it. It is the center of life for them, of reason, of memory. Let's not sentimentalize, colonize, or reduce the references to the heart in their discourse as merely emotional, however lovingly we might translate it. This could involuntarily lead to ethnocentric interpretations. When they get together to organize themselves, they say: *"Se siente fuerte muestro corazon,"* "our heart feels strengthened" (personal communication).

At the Summit one of the documents states: "We propose ourselves to reconstruct our own identity reserving the ancient knowledge of the heart listening to the voices of our ancestors as well as our spiritual voices…" (p. 60).

Interconnectedness of all Beings: Mode of Being in the World

The world, for the mesoamericans was not "out there," established outside of and apart from them. It was within them and even "through" them. Actions and their circumstances were much more imbricated than is the case in Western thought where the "I" can be analytically abstracted from its

surroundings. Further, the body's porosity reflects an essential porosity of the cosmos, a permeability of the entire "material" world that defines an order of existence characterized by continuous transit between the material and the immaterial. The cosmos emerges literally, in this conceptualization, as the complementarity of a permeable corporality. Klor de Alva writes:

> …the Nahuas imagined their multidimensional being as an integral part of their body and of the physical and spiritual world around them (1988).

He adds that the "conceptual being" of the Nahua was much less limited than that of Christians at the time of the Conquest and more inclined toward forming "a physical and conceptual continuum with others, with the body and with the world beyond it…" (Ibid).

In the words of *Comandanta* Esther, earth is life, is nature, and we are all part of it. This simple phrase refers to the interconnectedness of all beings in the Mesoamerican cosmos complimentarity (Lopez Austin 1984). Beings are not separable from each other. This basic principle has been found consistently within contemporary indigenous medical systems and also in the first historical primary sources (Lopez Austin, 1984b). This principle creates a very particular form of human collectivity, with hardly any individuation (Klor de Alva 1988). The "I" cannot be abstracted form its surroundings. There is a permanent transit between the inside and the outside (Sylvia Marcos 1998). Lenkersdorf (1999), interprets an expression of the Tojolabal language (a Mayan tongue of Chiapas): *"Lajan, lajan aytik"* that can mean *"estamos parejos,"* meaning "we are all subjects." According to him, this expresses the "intersubjectivity" basic to Tojolabal culture. This also brings us back to the preferred term of the indigenous women mentioned above. Their insistance on parity (*caminar parejos, la paridad*) and not on equality

means that they are drawing form their common heritage alternative concepts for gender equity that fit better within their cosmovision.

Looking over these few pervasive spiritual and cosmological references, reproduced anew by the indigenous women of contemporary Mesoamerica, it is this one that seems to be at the core: the interconnectedness of everyone and everything in the universe. The intersubjective nature of men and women interconnected with the earth, sky, plants, and planets. How else can we understand the defense of earth "that gives us life, that is the nature that we are" of *Comandanta* Esther facing the legislators? How else to interpret that *mandar obedeciendo* is not an imposition of one over another? That the "we" is also "I"? That communities, as collective subjects, reflect a unity?

First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas: Mesoamerican Cosmological Spirituality

The indigenous women's movement has started to propose its own "indigenous spirituality." The basic documents, final declarations, and collective proposals from the *First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas*, as well as at other key meetings, reveal an indigenous spiritual component that differs from the hegemonic influences of the largely Christian, Catholic background of the women's respective countries. The principles of this indigenous spirituality also depart from the more recent influences of feminist and Latin American eco-feminist liberation theologies. The participants' discourses, live presentations, and addresses brought to light other expressions of their religious background.

The First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas was a United Nations meeting that took place in December of 2002. It was promoted and organized by a collective of indigenous leaders of international reputation, such as Rigoberta Menchú, Myrna Cunningham, Calixta Gabriel, and other regional indigenous women from communities in the Americas. They were joined by Pauline Tiongia, an elder from a Maori community in New Zealand. The meeting grouped around 400 indigenous women representing most countries and many indigenous communities.[1] In attendance were women

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There are numerous definitions of the term, "indigenous." Here are some: To give just a few examples**,** according to Linita Manu'atu (2000), writing on Tongan and other Pacific islands peoples: "Indigenous refers to the First Peoples who settled in Aotearoa (New Zealand), United States, Canada, and so on. Other defi -nitions that have been proposed are Tangata Whenua, First Nations or simply the People" (80.) According to Kay Warren's writings on Guatemala, "indigenous …is itself, of course, a historical

from remote and isolated places such as the delta of the Orinoco River in Venezuela, where there are no roads, and the Amazon River basin. Prior to the Summit, the organizers arranged a series of focus groups designed by the *Centro de Estudios e Información de la Mujer Multiétnica* (CEIMM) from the *Universidad de las Regiones autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaraguense* (URACCAN), Nicaragua's indigenous university. The focus groups' methodology aimed at bringing together indigenous women representatives of the whole region to foster discussions on five main areas of interest: **1)** Spirituality, Education, and Culture; **2)** Gender from the Perspective of Indigenous Women; **3)** Leadership, Empowerment, and Indigenous Women Participation; **4)** Indigenous Development and Globalization; **5)** Human Rights and Indigenous Rights.

The women were invited, to gather and participate in several of these preliminary focus groups around the region. During group interactions, they expressed their own thoughts**,** perspectives, and experiences concerning spirituality, gender, education, empowerment, development, and their relationships to international funding and cooperation agencies. The groups' discussions, which were transcribed and lightly edited, constituted the basic documents for the Summit meeting.

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product of European colonialism that masks enormous variations in history, culture, community, and relations with those who are considered non-indigenous (112). The UN ILO Convention, n.169, specifies:

> indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those groups who have a continuous history that originates from earlier stages to the presence of the invasion and colonization. Groups that develop in their territories or part of it, and consider themselves different to other sectors of the society that are now dominant. These groups are today subaltern sectors and they are decided to preserve, develop, and transmit to the future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity. These characteristics are fundamental to their existential continuity as peoples, in relationship with their own cultural, social, institutional, and legal systems. ("Movimientos étnicos y legislación internacional" Doc. UN, ICN.41 Sub.2/1989/33 Add.3 paragraph 4, in *Rincones de Coyoacan*, 5. February-March,1994. Convention n.169 of the ILO of United Nations)

Situated knowledges

The importance of research led and designed by the same subjects (objects) of research inquiry cannot be overemphasized. The asymmetrical power relations between urban women and indigenous peasant women are evident throughout the Latin American continent. It is urban woman who have access to higher education, professional positions, and economic resources. Usually, it is they whose voices, proposals, and projects for research find support. The Summit selected its participants from a pool of indigenous women who are political leaders: senators, "regidoras," congresswomen, heads of social organizations, leaders of political grassroots groups. All these women had many years of experience exercising political and social influence and leadership. The Summit offered them a space where they could express their experiences and priorities in their own voices, without the mediations and interpretations of the area's elite and hegemonic institutions. One of the main themes was "gender from the indigenous women's vision." This was and is still a debated issue that has sometimes created barriers between mainstream feminism and the indigenous women's movement. I had the privilege of being invited to be one of the few "non-indigenous" women participants at the meeting and also a consultant for their gender and empowerment documents. The organizers knew of my research on early Mesoamerican cosmology and activist work and expressed the desire to hear the opinion of a feminist who has respect for indigenous cultures.

The theme of indigenous spirituality was transversal and intersected with every other issue addressed at the summit. It was so prominent that a study of the documents from the Summit, voted on by consensus, reveals the priorities of the contemporary struggles, concerns, and agendas of indigenous

groups in the Americas. The documents set "indigenous spirituality" as an origin and a motor for the re-creation of collectivities and for the emergence of a new pan-indigenous, collective subject in which women's leadership is emerging and potentially growing, defining the women as outspoken, strong, and clear agents for change.

The term "indigenous women" had no positive connotations as recently as a few years ago. It had never been used to name a self-constituted identity by the indigenous peoples themselves. Now it is the token for a collective subjectivity, a social actor that has been created by the indigenous women themselves through their political and spiritual practices. As workshop leader and consultant to indigenous women's organizations from several ethnic groups of Mexico and Latin America, I have witnessed their ties, their collective identification, and the strength of their spiritual and cosmological references.

The Vitality of Ancient Spirituality

The Latin American continent has long been known as a stronghold of Catholicism. Even today, the Vatican counts Latin America as one of the regions that boasts the greatest numbers of Catholics in the world.[2] Among indigenous social movements, claiming the right to develop and define their own spirituality is a novel attitude, yet one that is voiced with increasing

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[2] During the last 20 years, the percentage of Catholics has been decreasing consistently. In Mexico, we speak now that roughly only 82% percent of the population identifies as Catholic in contrast to the 96.5 % of two decades ago. The main domain of Catholic believers had been the impoverished and dispossessed of Mexico. Among them stand the 62 distinct indigenous peoples in the country.

intensity.[3] Beyond claiming a right to food and shelter, a decent livelihood, and ownership of their territory and its resources, the indigenous are turning an internal gaze toward their traditional culture. They are also daring to question the most ingrained sequels of Catholic colonization, rejecting the contempt and disdain with which their spirituality, beliefs, and practices are held by the Catholic majority. We will see an example of the mainstream Catholic perspective toward the indigenous peoples in the "Message of the Bishops to the Summit" below.

Despite conflicting perspectives held by scholars and other commentators, the indigenous social movements are the most visible transformational force in the Latin American continent (Touraine, 2000). The indigenous peoples no longer accept the image that was imposed on them from the exterior. They want to create their own identity; they refuse to be museum objects. It is not a question of reviving the past. Indigenous cultures are alive, and the only way for them to survive is to reinvent themselves, recreating their identity while maintaining their differences (Le Bot, 2000). The work of anthropologist Kay Warren offers insights into the genealogy of the pan-indigenous collective subject. What Warren calls the *pan-Mayan collective identity* was forged out of the peoples' need to survive the aggressions of the state in Guatemala. As the distinct ethnic groups were threatened with cultural annihilation, their guides, philosopher-leaders, formulated a collective identity drawn from their inherited oral, mythic, and religious traditions. As Warren explains, the bearers of cultural wisdom began to set forth an "assertion of a common past which has been suppressed and

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[3] This theme resounds around the world with other indigenous peoples. See the Maori claims in Linda Tuhiwai, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples (*2002*).*

fragmented by European colonialism and the emergence of modern liberal states. In this view, cultural revitalization reunites the past with the present as a political force" (Warren and Jackson, 2002, p.11). Whatever the possible explanations for the genesis of this pan-indigenous collective social subject might be, it engenders a political collectivity, and one of its central claims is often based on its own self-defined "indigenous spirituality."

As for indigenous women, they are claiming this ancestral wisdom, *cosmovision*, and spirituality. Theirs is a selective process. Issues within tradition that constrain or hamper their space as women are being contested. Meanwhile, those who have enhanced their position as women within their spiritual ancestral communities are held onto dearly, their survival supported and ensured by the community.

Addressing the Mexican Congress in March of 2002, *Comandanta* Esther, a Zapatista leader from the southern state of Chiapas, expressed the concern of indigenous women in this way: "I want to explain the situation of women as we live it in our communities,…as girls they think we are not valuable …as women mistreated…also women have to carry water, walking two to three hours holding a vessel and a child in their arms." (Marcos, 2005, 103) After speaking of her daily sufferings under indigenous customary law, she added: "I am not telling you this so you pity us. We have struggled to change this and we will continue doing it." (Marcos, 2005, 103) She was expressing the inevitable struggle for change that indigenous women face, but she was also demanding respect for their agency. They--those directly involved have to be the ones to lead the process of change. There is no need for pity and still less for instructions from outsiders on how to defend their rights as women. This would be another form of imposition, however well meant it might be. *Comandanta* Esther's discourse should convince those

intellectuals removed from the daily life of indigenous peoples that culture is not monolithic, not static**.** "We want recognition for our way of dressing, of talking, of governing, of organizing, of praying, of working collectively, of respecting the earth, of understanding nature as something we are part of" (Marcos, 2005, 103.) In consonance with many indigenous women who have raised their voices in recent years, she wants both to transform and to preserve her culture. This is the background of the demands for social justice expressed by indigenous women, against which we must view the declarations and claims for "indigenous spirituality" that emerged from the *First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas*..

Among the thematic resolutions proposed and passed by consensus at the First Summit, the following are particularly emblematic:

> "We re-evaluate spirituality as the main axis of culture." (*Memoria* 61) [4]
>
> The participants of the First Indigenous Women Summit of the Americas resolve: that spirituality is an indivisible part of the community. It is a cosmic vision of life shared by everyone and wherein all beings are interrelated and complementary in their existence. Spirituality is a search for the equilibrium and harmony within ourselves as well as the other surrounding beings". (*Memoria 60*)

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[4] Quotations from the *Memoria*, the raw materials and transcriptions from focus groups, and documents from the Summit vary in translation. Some of the documents are translated into English as part of the document, in which case the Spanish translation of a particular section has a different page number from the English. In some cases, the Spanish was not translated in the documents; this is particularly the case for the position statements, whereas the declarations and plans of actions are often in both Spanish and English in the documents. Unless otherwise noted, I am responsible for all translations.

> "We demand of different churches and religions to respect the beliefs and cultures
>
> f Indigenous peoples without imposing on us any religious practice that conflicts with our spirituality. (*Memoria* 19)

What Does Indigenous Spirituality Mean?

When I first approached the documents of the Summit, I was surprised by the frequent use of the self-elected term *spirituality*. Its meaning in this context is by no means self-evident and hence needs to be decoded. It has little to do with what the word usually means in the Christian traditions, in which I include all denominations. When the indigenous women use the word "spirituality," they give it a meaning that clearly sets it apart from Catholic and other Christian traditions that arrived in the Americas at the time of the conquest and the ensuing colonization:

> We indigenous Mexican women…take our decision to practice freely our spirituality that is different from a religion but in the same manner we respect every one else's beliefs. (Message from Indigenous Women to the Bishops 1)

This stance is strongly influenced by an approach that espouses transnational socio-political practices. Indigenous movements and in particular the women in them are being increasingly exposed to a globalizing world. The presence of a Maori elder at the Summit, as well as the frequent participation of Mexican indigenous women in indigenous peoples' meetings around the world, have favored new attitudes of openness, understanding, and coalition beyond their own traditional cultural boundaries. Through the lens of indigenous

spirituality, we can glimpse the *cosmovision* that pervades the worlds of indigenous women.

The Bishops' Message at the Summit and the Women's Response

Reports about the Summit's preparatory sessions, combined with the public status of its main organizer, indigenous Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchú, gained the attention of the Mexican bishops. They apparently feared that the indigenous worlds, which they regard as part of their domain, were getting out of control. Moreover, it was not only the indigenous peoples but the indigenous *women* who were taking the lead and gaining a public presence. There were also rumors about so-called "reproductive rights" being discussed on the Summit's agenda. Catholic authorities spoke out against indigenous agitation. They felt pressed to send a "message" and a warning:

> The Summit touches on indigenous peoples' spirituality, education and culture from perspectives such as traditional knowledge, loss and re-construction of collective and individual identities, and also from indigenous women's spirituality <u>from a perspective totally distant from the cultural and spiritual reality of the diverse ethnic groups that form our (sic) indigenous peoples</u>. (Bishop's Message 2, my emphasis)

This patronizing and discriminatory message was sent to the Summit by the *Comision Episcopal de Indígenas*, the Episcopal Commission for Indigenous peoples. This message is paternalistic throughout. Its tone is one of admonition of and condescension toward the indigenous "subject." It assumes rationality/truth is the private domain of bishops. They feel that it is their

obligation to lead their immature indigenous women subjects, that is, to teach them, guide them, and scold them when they think they are wrong. The reader gets the sense that, to the bishops, this collectivity of women is dangerously straying from the indigenous peoples as the bishops define them.

The indigenous women's response, *Mensaje de las Mujeres Indígenas Mexicanas a los Monseñores de la Comisión Episcopal de Indígenas*, emerged from a collective meeting. In this document, the 38 representatives of Mexican indigenous communities expressed their plight in the following words:[5]

> "Now we can manifest openly our spirituality. Our ancestors were obliged to hide it... It is evident that evangelization was an imposition and that on top of our temples and ceremonial centers churches were built." (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas* 1)
>
> "We Mexican Indigenous women are adults and we take over our right to practice freely our spirituality that is different from a religion…we feel that we have the right to our religiosity as indigenous peoples". (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas* 1-2)
>
> "We reconfirm the principles that inspire us to recover and strengthen reciprocity, complementarity, duality, to regain equilibrium." (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1*)
>
> "Do not worry" the document affirms , "we are analyzing them [the customary law practices that could hamper human rights], because we

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[5] The document was produced collectively after hours of proposals and debate. It was finally agreed on by a consensus vote, the only way to be truly "democratic" among indigenous peoples.

believe that the light of reason and justice also illuminates us, and certain things should not be permitted." (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas* 1)

This last sentence makes a veiled reference to centuries of colonial and post-colonial oppression. First the colonizers, and then the modern state, both with the Church's approval, denied the indigenous peoples the qualification of *gente de razón* ("people with the capacity of reason"). Even today, in some parts of Mexico, this qualification is reserved for whites and mestizos.

As a voluntary invited, "only listening" participant of this collectivity of thirty-eight Mujeres Indígenas Mexicanas, I paid careful attention to all the discussions. These speakers of several indigenous languages groped for an adequate Spanish wording to convey the ideas sustaining their formal response to the monolingual bishops. At one point, when I was asked directly what I thought about the use of a particular term, I ventured an opinion. After they discussed it, they decided not to go with my suggestion. The significance here is that my opinion was treated not as authoritative, but as simply as worthy of consideration as any other. In their own classification, I was a "non-indigenous" supportive feminist. Fortunately, long gone were the days when an urban mestizo university woman could impose an idea or even a term.

The women's discussions were horizontally collective. Women there represented the majority of the Mexican ethnic communities. Their native languages included Nahuatl, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, Zapotec, Mixe, Mazatec, Mixtec, and Purepecha, among others. The gathering was an expression of the new collective subject that is taking the lead in struggles for social justice. Notwithstanding traditional ethnic divides among them, all the women involved chose to emphasize their commonalities and identify themselves as Mexican indigenous women. Despite some language barriers, their discussions of ideas and words have stayed with me. They struggled

with Spanish as they forged the language of their text. The editing of the document took all of us into the early hours of the next day. It was finally passed by consensus, in which my vote as "non-indigenous" counted as any other, as it should in a consensus building process.

In addition to the constraints posed by the multiplicity of their languages, they expressed the deeply pressing dilemma of having to deal with a religious institution that, in spite of its evangelical roots, has traditionally been misogynistic, as well as, for the most part, culturally and ethnically prejudiced against indigenous worlds. The insistence of the women on being *adults* (*"las mujeres indígenas mexicanas somos mayores de edad")* is a response to the assumption implicit in the Bishops' message, namely**,** that not only women but also indigenous peoples in general are minors and, as such, in need of strict guidance and reprimand. The ecclesiastical message also implies that they, the (male) bishops and archbishops, know better than the indigenous social activists themselves what it means to be "indigenous" in contemporary Mexico.

Considering the cautious reverence paid to Catholic authorities by most Mexicans—whether they are believers or not—the indigenous women's response is a significant expression of a newly gained spirit of autonomy and self-determination. The women's declaration, in both tone and content, also speak of the erosion of the Church's dominion over indigenous worlds. These poor, unschooled women have shown themselves to be braver and less submissive than some feminist negotiators at a recent United Nations meeting with Vatican representatives.[6]

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[6] During several U.N. meetings of the reproductive rights network here in Mexico and in New York, I consistently noticed that many feminist activists, journalists, and academic researchers, though not necessarily Catholic believers, manifested a mix of fear and respectful reverence when in proximity of ecclesiastical

Decolonizing Epistemology

Several authors have argued that decolonizing efforts should be grounded at the epistemological level (Mignolo, 2007; Tlostanova, 2007; Marcos, 2005). When speaking of the future of feminism, Judith Butler recommends a "privileging of epistemology" as an urgent next step in our commitments. She also reminds us that "there is no register for "audibility" referring to the difficulties of reaching out, understanding, and respecting "Other" subaltern epistemic worlds (Butler 2004).

The following analysis of some basic characteristics of indigenous spirituality is an invitation to understand it in its own terms. It is an effort toward widening the "register for audibility," so the voices and positions of the indigenous may bypass the opaque lenses of philosophical ethnocentricity. This deepening of understanding will facilitate a less domineering and imposing relationship with women not only in society and politics but also in the spiritual indigenous domains. As an indigenous woman from *Moloj Mayib'*, a political Mayan women's organization, complained regarding her encounter with feminists,

> "…they question us very much, they insist that we should question our culture …what we do not accept is their imposition, that they tell us what we have to do, when we have the power to decide by ourselves. (I do not mean) …that the feminist comes and shares tools with us and we are able to do it: that she could support me, that she can walk by my side…but she should not impose on me. This is what many feminist

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garments and other paraphernalia of church officials, which prevented them from effectively negotiating with the Vatican representatives, despite their deep ingrained anti-religious stand.

women have done, be imposing. (Maria Estela Jocón, *Memoria*, 274-275)

The opinion of this indigenous woman is confirmed by Gayatri Spivak's critique of "the international feminist tendency to matronize the Southern woman as belonging to gender oppressive second-class cultures" (Spivak ,1999,407). A decolonial thinking grounded in another epistemological stand is required.

A World Constructed by Fluid Dual Oppositions, Beyond Mutually Exclusive Categories

To be able to comprehend contemporary "indigenous spirituality" it is important to review some of the tenets of Mesoamerican ancestral 'embodied thought' (Marcos, 1998.)

Duality is the centerpiece of spirituality understood as a cosmic vision of life. Duality—not dualism—is a pervasive perception in indigenous thought and spirituality. The pervasiveness of a perception without equivalent in Western thought could, perhaps, in itself largely explain the persistent barrier to penetrating and comprehending indigenous worlds.

According to Mesoamerican cosmology the dual unity of the feminine and masculine is fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, as well as its (re)generation, and sustenance. The fusion of feminine and masculine in one bi-polar principle is a recurring feature of almost every Mesoamerican community today. Divinities themselves are gendered: feminine and masculine. There is no concept of a virile god (e.g., the image of a man with a white beard as the Christian God has sometimes been represented) but rather a

mother/father dual protector-creator. In Nahua culture, this dual god/goddess is called *Ometeotl*, from *ome,* "two," and *teotl,* "god." Yet Ometeotl does not mean "two gods" but rather "god Two" or, better, "divinity of Duality." The name results from the fusion of *Omecihuatl* (*cihuatl* meaning woman or lady) and *Ometecuhtli* (*tecuhtli*, man or lord), that is, of the Lady and of the Lord of Duality.

The protecting *Ometeotl* has to be alternately placated and sustained. Like all divine beings, it was not conceived as purely beneficial. Rather, it oscillated–like all other dualities—between opposite poles and thus could be supportive or destructive. In addition, a multiplicity of pairs of goddesses and gods entered into diverse relations of reciprocity with the people. Elsewhere I have dealt more comprehensively with the gods and goddesses of the Mesoamerican *cosmovision* (Marcos 2006. See here below a chapter on duality) Scholars recognize that the religiosity of the entire Mesoamerican region is pregnant with similar symbolic meanings, rituals, and myths concerning the condition of the supernatural beings, the place of humans in the cosmos. One of our most eminent ethno-historians, Alfredo Lopez Austin, refers to this commonality of perceptions, conceptions, and forms of action as the *núcleo duro,* the "hard core" of Mesoamerican cultures (Lopez Austin 2001.)

Duality, defined as a complementary dual of opposites, is the essential ordering force of the universe and is also reflected in the ordering of time. Time is marked by two calendars, one ritual-based and the other astronomical. The ritual calendar is linked to the human gestation cycle, that is, the time needed for a baby to be formed inside the mother's womb. The other is an agricultural calendar that prescribes the periods for seeding, sowing, and planting corn. Maize (corn) is conceived of as the earthly matter from which

all beings in the universe are made (Marcos 2006.) Human gestation and agricultural cycles are understood within this concept of time-duality, as are feminine and masculine, but dualities extend far beyond these spheres. For instance, life and death, above and below, light and dark, and beneficence and malevolence are considered dual aspects of the same reality.

Neither pole invalidates the other. Both are in constant mutual interaction, flowing into one another. Mutually exclusive categories are not part of the epistemic background of this worldview, whose plasticity is still reflected in the way indigenous women deal with life and conflict. They seldom remain mired in a position that would deny the opposite. Their philosophical background allows them to resist impositions and at the same time to appropriate modern elements into their spirituality. Fluidity and selectivity in adopting novel attitudes and values speaks of the ongoing reconfiguration of their world of reference.

The principle of fluid duality has held indigenous worlds together over the centuries. It has been both concealed and protected by its non-intelligibility to outsiders, and it has guarded this "subaltern Other" from inimical incursions into their native philosophical depths. The "hard core" of indigenous cultures has been a well-kept secret. Even today, among many native communities in the Americas, exposing this concealed background to outsiders is considered a betrayal to the community.[7] It is only recently that the unveiling has started to be done directly by the indigenous women themselves. From my position as an outsider, I felt pressed to seek permission

[7] Inés Talamantes, a Native American Professor of Religious Studies who does ethnography on her own Mescalero Apache culture, once confided to me that she was forbidden by her community to reveal the deep meanings of their ceremonies.

of Nubia, a Tepoztlán Nahua indigenous leader, whether I could interview her about her beliefs, conception of duality, and ritual in the ceremonies of her village. She accepted but did not allow me to ask my questions without her explicit previous agreement. Presently, some indigenous women and men are becoming vocal carriers of their religious and philosophical heritage and have agreed to vocalize their heritage, to share it with the outside world.

The people incarnating living indigenous traditions have played almost no part in the formation of academic theories. They were rarely consulted, but neither did they care to validate or invalidate the views of the so-called "experts" who had officially "defined" their worlds. Silence was their weapon of survival. Only recently have they learned to use, critically and autonomously, whatever knowledge has been collected about them. The women explained that they want to "systematize the oral traditions of our peoples through the elders' knowledge and practices." (*Memoria* 62)

Duality and Gender

In the indigenous Mesoamerican world, gender is constructed within the pervasive concept of duality (Marcos, 1998, 2006). Gender, that is, the masculine/feminine duality, is the root metaphor for the whole cosmos. Everything is identified as either feminine or masculine, and this applies to natural phenomena such rain, hail, lightening, clouds; living beings: animals, plants and humans; and even to periods of time, such as days, months, and years (Lopez Austin 1988). All of these entities have a feminine or masculine "breath" or "weight." It is evident, then, that this perception of gender corresponds to a duality of complementary opposites, a duality, in turn, which is the fabric of the cosmos. Duality is the linking and ordering force that

creates a coherent reference for indigenous peoples, the knitting thread that weaves together all apparent disparities (Quezada Noemí 1997, Marcos 1993).

The documents from the Summit foreground and help to explain the concept that duality is also a basic referent of indigenous spirituality:

> "To speak of the gender concept presupposes the concept of duality emerging from the indigenous *cosmovision* …the whole universe is ruled by duality: the sky and earth, night and day, sadness and happiness, they complement each other. The one cannot exist without the other". (*Summit Doc. Género* 6)
>
> "Everything is ruled by the concept of duality, certainly, men and women". (*Memoria* 231)
>
> "Duality is something we live through, it is there…we learn of it within our spirituality and we live it in ceremonies, we live it when we see that in our families women and men, mother and father take the decisions". (Candida Jimenez, Mixe indigenous woman, *Summit Doc. Genero* 6)

Yet, despite the reverential espousal of the ancestral concept of gender duality and complementarity, contemporary indigenous women express some reticence and even rejection of some aspects of it. Their arguments are based on how it is lived today in many indigenous communities. For example, in the document of the Summit dedicated to *Gender from the Vision of Indigenous Women*, Maria Estela Jocón, a Mayan Guatemalan wise woman, remarks that duality today

> "…is something we should question, it is a big question mark, because as theory it is present in our *cosmovision* and in our customary laws, as theory, but in practice you see many situations where only the man

> decides…mass media, schools, and many other issues have influenced this principle of Duality so it is a bit shaky now." (Summit Doc, Genero 7)

Alma Lopez, a young indigenous self-identified feminist, who is a Regidora in her community, believes that the concept of duality of complementary opposites has been lost:

> "The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture would be equity, and complementarity between women and men, women and women, and between men and men. Today the controversial complementarity of Mayan culture, does not exist". (Duarte, 2002, 278)

However, beyond the reticence or even outright negations of the contemporary and lived practices of inherited philosophical principles, the indigenous women are still claiming them, still want to be inspired by them, and propose to re-inscribe them in their contemporary struggles for gender justice. They deem it necessary not only to recapture their ancestral cultural roots and beliefs but also to think of them as a potent resource in their quest for gender justice and equity.

> "Today there are big differences between the condition of women in relation to that of men. This does not mean that it was always like this. In this case there is the possibility of returning to our roots and recovering the space that is due to women, based on indigenous *cosmovision*." (*Memoria* 133)

The Summit document dedicated to gender has the subtitle: *De los aportes de las mujeres indígenas al feminismo,* The Indigenous Women's

Contributions to Feminism. In this portion of the document, too, the women cast off their role as recipients of a feminism imposed on them by outside forces and instead proclaim that their feminist vision has contributions to offer to other feminist approaches. Among their contributions to feminism are the innovative concepts of *parity, duality, and equilibrium*. The first paragraph explains that

"some key aspects from indigenous movements have to be emphasized. They are the concepts of duality, equilibrium and harmony with all the implications we have mentioned already". (*Summit Doc. Genero* 31)

It also proposes,

> "[t]o all indigenous peoples and women's movements a revision of cultural patterns …with the objective of propitiating gender relations based on equilibrium". (*Summit Doc. Genero* 37)

Duality, equilibrium, and harmony are among the basic principles of their feminist practices. Indigenous women claim that the demands for equality by the **other** feminist movements could better be interpreted within their spirituality and *cosmovision* as a search for equilibrium.

Equilibrium as Gender Equity

Equilibrium, as conceived in indigenous spirituality, is not the static repose of two equal weights or masses. Rather, it is a force that constantly modifies the relation between dual or opposite pairs. Like duality itself, equilibrium, or balance, permeates not only relations between men and women but also relations among deities, between deities and humans, and among elements of nature. The constant search for this balance was vital to the preservation of order in every area, from daily life to the activity of the cosmos. Equilibrium is as fundamental as duality itself.

Duality, thus, is not a binary ordering of "static poles." Balance in this view can best be understood as an agent that constantly modifies the terms of dualities and thereby bestows a singular quality on the complementary pairs of opposites that permeate all indigenous thought (as seen in the Summit documents and declarations). Equilibrium is constantly re-establishing its own balance. It endows duality with a flexibility or plasticity that makes it flow, impeding stratification. There is not an exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine being. Rather, beings possess these forces in different nuances or combinations. The imperceptible "load" or "charge" that all beings have--whether rocks, animals, or people--is feminine or masculine. Frequently, entities possess both feminine and masculine capacities simultaneously in different gradations that perpetually change and shift (Lopez Austin 1988).

The gender documents were direct transcriptions from the focus group discussions. The following rich and spontaneous evaluations of equilibrium express the indigenous manner of conceiving gender equity:

> "We understand the practice of gender perspective to be a respectful relationship… of balance, of equilibrium—what in the western world would be equity". (*Summit Doc. Genero* 6)
>
> "Equilibrium means taking care of life…when community values of our environment and social community are respected, there is equilibrium". (*Memoria* 132)
>
> "Between one extreme and the other there is a center. The extremes and their center are not absolute, but depend on a multiplicity of factors…variable and not at all exact… [Duality] is equilibrium at its maximum expresión". (*Memoria* 231)

Indigenous women refer to equilibrium as the attainable ideal for the whole cosmos, and as the best way to express their own views on gender equity.

The Spirituality of Immanence

In the fluid, dual universe of indigenous spiritualities, the domain of the sacred is all-pervasive. There are strong continuities between the natural and the supernatural worlds, whose sacred beings are closely interconnected with humans who in turn propitiate this interdependence in all their activities. Enacting this principle, at the Summit, every single activity started with an embodied ritual. The women from Latin American indigenous communities wake up early in the morning. I was given a room on the second floor, directly above the room of Rigoberta Menchú. The sounds of the early morning sacred ritual were a reminder that I was hosted, for those days, in an indigenous universe. The processions and chants were led by a couple of Mayan ritual specialists: a woman and a man. We prayed and walked through the gardens and premises of the hotel where we were hosted. A fancy four-star hotel that had never witnessed anything like this was taken over by the indigenous world. Nothing ever started, at this United Nations protocol, without rhythmic sounds and chants, offerings to the four corners of the world, of "copal" (a sort of Mexican incense), fruits, flowers, and colored candles. The sacred indigenous world was there present with us; we could feel it. It was alive in the atmosphere and within each of the participants. It was also in the flowers, candles, and fruits and in the rhythmic repetition of words.

In striking contrast with indigenous spirituality, the dominant tradition in Christian theology stresses "classical theism," defined as centered on a metaphysical concept of God as ontologically transcendent and independent from the world. This concept of God has met with increasing criticism,

particularly among eco-feminist and process theologians (Keller 2002, Gevara 2001). In indigenous spirituality, the relationship to the supernatural world lies elsewhere:

> "The cosmic vision of life is to be connected with the surroundings, and all the surroundings have life, so they become SACRED: we encounter earth, mountains, valleys, caves, plants, animals, stones, water, air, moon, sun, stars. Spirituality is born from this perspective and conception in which all beings that exist in Mother Nature have life and are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a sense of COMMUNITY in which all beings are interrelated and complementary". (*Memoria* 128)

Ivone Gevara, a Brazilian eco-feminist theologian, recalls how an Aymara indigenous woman responded to Gevara's theological perspective: "With eco-feminism I am not ashamed anymore of expressing beliefs from my own culture. I do not need to emphasize that they have Christian elements for them to be considered good… they simply are valuable." (Gevara, 2001,21)

Eco-feminist theology promotes complex and novel positions centered on a respect for earth and reverence for nature. Many indigenous women perceive this feminist theology to be easier to understand and closer to the standpoint of their indigenous spirituality than Catholic theism. These bridges between Christian and indigenous spiritualities become more intelligible when we reflect on the main characteristics that shape indigenous spirituality's relationship to nature: its divine dimensions, the personification of deities in humans, the fluidity between immanent and transcendent, and the fusion with the supernatural that women can and should enact. There is no exclusive relationship to a transcendent being called God; there is no mistrust of the flesh and the body; there is sanctity in matter:

> "We recover indigenous *cosmovision* as our "scientific heritage," recognizing the elders as ancient carriers of wisdom". (*Memoria* 60)
>
> "That the indigenous women of different cultures and civilizations of Abya Yala do not forget that they are daughters of the land, of the sun, of the wind and of fire and that their continuous relation with the cosmic elements strengthen their political participation in favor of indigenous women and indigenous peoples". (*Memoria* 63)

The woman's body, a fluid and permeable corporeality, is conflated with Earth as a sacred place; they regard themselves as an integral part of this sacred Earth. The spirit is not the opposite of matter and neither is the soul of the flesh.

Embodied Religious Thought

According to dominant western epistemic traditions, the very concept of body is formed in opposition to mind. The body is defined as the place of biological data, of the material, of the immanent. Since the seventeenth century, the body has also been conceptualized as that which marks the boundaries between the interior self and the external world (Bordo and Jaggar, 1989, 4). In Mesoamerican spiritual traditions, on the other hand, the body has characteristics that vastly differ from those of the western anatomical or biological body. In the Mesoamerican view, exterior and interior are not separated by the hermetic barrier of the skin. Between the outside and the inside, permanent and continuous exchange occurs. To gain a keener understanding of how the body is conceptualized in indigenous traditions, we must think of it as a vortex, in whirling, spiral-like movement that fuses and expels, absorbs and discards, and through this motion is in permanent contact with all elements in the cosmos.

A Spirituality of Collectivity and the Interconnectedness of All Beings

For indigenous peoples, then, the world is not "out there," established outside of and apart from them. It is within them and even "through" them. Actions and their circumstances are much more interwoven than is the case in western thought, in which the "I" can be analytically abstracted from its surroundings. Further, the body's porosity

reflects the essential porosity of the cosmos, a permeability of the entire "material" world that defines an order of existence characterized by a continuous interchange between the material and the immaterial. The cosmos literally emerges, in this conceptualization, as the complement of a permeable corporeality. It is from this very ample perspective that the controversial term "complementarity" should be revisited according to its usage by indigenous women. From their perspective, it is not only feminine and masculine that are said to be "complementary," but, as *Comandanta* Esther insisted in her address to the Mexican Congress, complementarity embraces everything in nature. She explained that earth is life, is nature, and we are all part of it. This simple phrase expresses the interconnectedness of all beings in the Mesoamerican cosmos (Lopez Austin,1988). Beings are not separable from one another. This principle engenders a very particular form of human collectivity with little tendency to individuation. This sense of connectedness has been found consistently within contemporary indigenous medical systems and also in the first historical primary sources (Lopez Austin 1988). The "I" cannot be abstracted from its surroundings. There is a permanent transit between the inside and the outside (Marcos 1998). Lenkesdorf (1999) interprets an expression of the Tojolabal language (a Mayan language of Chiapas): *"Lajan, lajan aytik."* The phrase literally means *"estamos parejos"*

(we are all even) but should be understood as "we are all subjects." Lenkesdorf holds that this phrase conveys the "intersubjectivity" basic to Tojolabal Culture.

"Spirituality," say the women at the Summit, is born from this vision and concept according to which all beings that exist in Mother Nature are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a communitarian sense for which all beings are interrelated and complement each other in their existence. (Memoria 128)

Among the examples of several pervasive spiritual and cosmological references reproduced by the indigenous women of the Americas, this one seems to be at the core: the interconnectedness of everyone and everything in the universe. The intersubjective nature of men and women, interconnected with earth, sky, plants, and planets. This is how we
must understand the defense of the earth "that gives us life, that is the nature that we are," as *Comandanta* Esther explained to the legislators (*2001*).

"Indigenous peoples' spirituality," the Summit document declares:

"revives the value of nature and humans in this century. The loss of this interrelationship has caused a disequilibrium and disorder in the world".(*Memoria* 134)

> "a cosmic and conscious spirituality aids to re-establish equilibrium and Harmony…as women we have the strength, the energy capable of changing the course for a better communal life". (*Memoria* 135)

Spirituality emerges from traditional wisdom, but the document also stresses that, "we have to be conscious of the richness of the worldwide cultural diversities" (*Summit Doc. Género* 31). Here again, we perceive a characteristic of openness, a "transnational" consciousness that has been influenced by women's movements and feminist practices.

Indigenous ethnicities are not self-enclosed but rather envision themselves in active interaction with a world of differences: national, bi-national, and transnational. The international indigenous movements are building bridges all over the world and gaining momentum. There is a growing transnational language of cultural rights espoused by the "indigenous" world-wide. They all acknowledge the damage that diverse colonialisms have done to their worldviews and have begun to echo each other concerning the value of recovering their own spiritualities and cosmologies.[8] In recent years, indigenous peoples have intensified their struggle to break free from the chains of colonialism and its oppressive spiritual legacy.

Indigenous women's initiatives to recover their ancestral religious legacy constitute a decolonizing effort. Through a deconstruction of past captivities, they recreate a horizon of ancestrally inspired spirituality. They lay claim to an ethics of recovery while rejecting the violence and subjugation suffered by their ancestors within the religious and cultural domain. "We only come to ask for justice," the organized indigenous women have repeatedly declared. Yes, justice is their demand: material, social, and political justice. They also seek recognition of and respect for their cosmological beliefs as an integral part of their feminist vision.

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[8] See Kepa, 2006; Tuhiwai, 1999; Siem, 2005; Palomo et al.2003; Linita Manu'tu, 2000; Champagne and Abu-Saad, 2005; Villebrun, 2005.

Deliberations Inside Zapatista Territory: The EZLN's Women's Revolutionary Law as it is lived today

> "The capitalists had us believing this idea … that women are not valuable"
> – *The Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government*

We know that the Women's Revolutionary Law was passed by consensus within the ranks of the EZLN many months before their public emergence twenty years ago that January 1, 1994. From one of Subcomandante Marcos' letters, we know that reactions to it were varied within the EZLN ranks, and that its acceptance had to be defended vigorously as a central objective in their struggle for justice.

We know that both Comandanta Ramona and Comandanta Susana spent over four months traveling through those then-Zapatista communities. That they visited each and every community and dialogued with the Zapatistas collectively through community assemblies, as is the custom of the people of the region. Once accepted in each Zapatista community and village, it was proposed that the Law be included in the EZLN publication, *El Despertador Mexicano, Organo Informativo del EZLN, México, No 1. Diciembre 1993.*

I remember the newness of it, on that December of '93, when I came across this publication; the first of a revolutionary social movement or "guerrilla," which included as part of its first public appearance – of its "letter of introduction" – its demands for women's rights. Some Mexican intellectuals, like Carlos Fuentes, called it a "post-marxist guerrilla" .It was truly innovative at the time. One could hardly believe it, and much less so

when the first images appeared confirming the undeniable presence of women in authority positions. It would be a woman – a *Mayora* – who would lead the taking of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas; it would be a woman – Comandanta Ramona – who would be at the center of the subsequent peace dialogues in the Cathedral.

Ever since, this Law has expressed itself through the Zapatistas' own practices. If there is something that has given Zapatismo its distinctive characteristic, its color and its flavor, it has been its emphasis on including and defending women's rights as defined through the Women's Revolutionary Law.

What has happened with this law over the past twenty years?
How is it being practiced among the Zapatistas in their everyday lives?

Throughout the *Escuelita* (Little School) in August 2013, in the communities that housed those 1,700 invitees, we heard and saw the possibilities and the advances, but also the difficulties encountered in implementing this Law in all its implications. It must be said that in all of the *Escuelita's* sessions, the Zapatistas constantly tempered any possible triumphalism for their success in creating and maintaining their autonomy throughout these years. They often stated self-critical positions and made references to the "little bit" that they have advanced; to the errors they have made throughout this process; how they are trying to amend them; to how difficult it has been to accomplish what they have.

"…nos ha costado mucho" [it's been an uphill battle]

From each one of the five *caracoles* [civilian units of self-government], their experiences emerged in detailed description. They distributed four books which they themselves put together as a way to present their work to us. Entitled *Freedom According to the Zapatistas*, they were divided into four volumes:

I) *Autonomous Government I*

II) *Autonomous Government II*

III) *The Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government*

IV) *Autonomous Resistance*

In these books, once again, women's rights were prioritized. One might think that, as in other revolutionary struggles, the "issue" of women might only remain implied or relegated as marginal. But this is not the case here. Zapatismo has defined itself as a radical political movement that places women at the center and renders them visible. In the volume devoted to them (III), the ten points as they were initially outlined in the Women's Revolutionary Law are reviewed to see how they have been practiced since then and how they are lived today. Each point is listed together with reports on daily practices, their difficulties, and their advances.

In their own voices, Zapatista indigenous women describe to us their experiences, their priorities, their difficulties in taking up command, and their desires for change. Theirs are highly relevant voices for gaining a deep understanding of the process through which indigenous Maya women walk, emerge, accept, and collaborate within the Zapatista proposal. This process is presently the most successful proposal for constructing another world that is

more just for women and, indeed, for everyone. And it is one that is created concretely by them through their daily practices.

"We are not only in the house or in the kitchen… we work together with the male *compañeros*." "We go along little by little in this work that is autonomy, and we are going to encourage others who don't yet want to get out of the house…" affirmed a 17 year-old *compañera* and teacher in the *Escuelita*. She showed in her voice and in her strength, and through the position that she held in this pedagogical space, that many of them have advanced well beyond that which many of us feminists from the "outside" of Zapatista territory have managed to. "As you know, the Women's Revolutionary Law was created precisely because of the condition that the *compañeras* were living; because they were suffering a lot before. We now have this Law written down and we have it in the five *Caracoles*. But this problem that we have does not only belong to the *compañeras*; it also includes the *compañeros* because when a *compañera* is tasked with work, sometimes the *compañeros* do not let their wives or daughters leave to go do it. There are times when they do not allow them the right to freedom, and because of this problem, the Law also includes the men… we will analyze little by little how much we have been able to comply with this law as women."

Looking over the ten points of the Women's Revolutionary Law, I selected these responses to the question: "How is the Women's Revolutionary Law lived today in the *Caracoles*?" I present them below in the order of the "Ten Points" themselves.

First: ***Women have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and at the level that their capacity and will dictates without any discrimination based on race, creed, color, or political affiliation.***

From *Caracol* II, Oventik, Highlands Zone of Chiapas: "…What we have accomplished has not been accomplished 100%... [several] *compañeras* are taking charge of education and health as coordinators in the zone… when this law was made it was not because women wanted to give orders… dominate their husbands, their *compañero*… we do not want to create something that continues on the same history [of domination] that we have been in… where the *compañeros* rule and they are chauvinists… and now the *compañeras* rule… and now the *compañeros* are valued less…

Second: ***Women have the right to work and to receive a just salary.***

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "Women have the same rights as men to receive the same salary because we are of the same blood… here there are no salaries in the organization, whether to males or to females…"

From Oventik: "… nobody within the organization is salaried… unless the *compañera* goes to the city…"

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "…those who deserve a salary are those women who work in the cities… They are the ones that deserve a just salary…"

Third: ***Women have the right to decide on the number of children they have and can take care of.***

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "We as women have the right to decide how to live in our homes and we have the right to decide with our partner how

many children we can have and take care of. We have the right to not be obligated by anyone to have more or less children, not to be obligated to use birth control if we don't want to, and we have the right to have our decisions and opinions respected. In our autonomy, we want all of these rights to be respected. Before, the bad government in our villages would promote a lot of bad ideas, saying that women are worthless and that they have no right to speak."

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "We saw it was better if decisions were made between partners…"

Fourth: ***Women have the right to participate in community affairs and hold authority positions if they are freely and democratically elected.***

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "Here we are able to say that this is now being achieved…"

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "As women we have the same rights as men, we have the right to decide which duties we can carry out in the communities as we can now take up positions as *agentas*, *comisariadas*, and *promotoras* of health, sexual reproduction… and education."

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "We see that this is being fulfilled in our zone…"

Fifth: ***Women have the right to primary care in terms of their health and nutrition.***

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "On this point, we see that some communities do have their health clinics. Where health clinics exist, it is not

difficult to find the *compañeras* in good health, and they can also find medical attention for their children there. The women go with the health *promotoras* to the clinic, and here is where this point is being realized… in some communities if there are no clinics they go to other nearby communities that do have clinics." "In terms of feeding ourselves in our zone, our food is not far away from us. We *compañeros* and *compañeras* ourselves must follow our ancestors' customs, how they lived before, how they ate. It is what we see in our zone, that we do not abandon farming what is ours, the *chayote*, the yucca (manioc/cassava), the squash, and everything else that exists in our community. If we do not do this, if we do not produce, then we will die of hunger. It is there where malnutrition comes from, when we do not eat what we have…"

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "…we work in the field, harvesting our natural foods such as corn, beans, coffee, and other things."

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "With women who are nursing their child or are pregnant, it is important to eat well, rather than how sometimes women are the last ones to eat, that is, if food was leftover and if not, then no… we see that this is already being changed."

Sixth: ***Women have the right to education.***

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "In the case of girls, when they are in their community this is accomplished all the more because they attend the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Primary Schools (EPRAZ).

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "…we do not want it to be like before when we were really exploited, when we did not have a good education as we have today… with women we also continue moving forward in education."

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "In our zone, we talk about how women did not go to school before. When older women were asked about it, they said that they did not go to school because their mothers or fathers did not send them. It is not their fault if they did not learn to read and write, and we realized that it was also not their mothers' fault. The capitalists had us believing this idea, their story that women are not valuable; that if a girl is born then she is worthless. We realized that the parents of the family were not at fault. The blame is with this bad idea that they have put into our heads."

"…in our struggle we have everything, we have education."

Seventh: ***Women have the right to choose their partners and are no longer obligated to marry by force.***

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "On this point, as we see today, the *compañeras* decide who they would like to marry. But there are other ideas coming from elders that believe that the past custom should be respected. And so there are occasions when young women have not exercised this right… yet, it must be exercised with the revolutionary struggle in mind."

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "It is no longer how it used to be when the fathers and mothers would force us women to marry someone they chose… we have the right to decide who our partner is and who we want to marry."

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "We know that before they could not decide… they were traded in for liquor, for animals, for money… the majority of the fathers now ask their daughters if they want to marry or who they want to marry, and this is why we say that we have made progress on this point."

Eighth: ***No woman should be beaten or mistreated by either family members or strangers. Rape and attempted rape should be severely punished*****.**

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "There are still cases of this in our communities because that is a bad custom that persists in the mind, that contaminates, where machismo still exists: 'I am stronger than you, so you have to respect me,' are words that still exist… Those of us who have been authorities, the ones that have spent some time working, perhaps we understand all of the talks that we receive… but there are some *compañeros* that do not…"

From *Caracol* IV, Morelia: "…there are also some things that are not being carried out; there are still *compañeras* that are mistreated and there is still fear in demanding rights."

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "When we travel, we sometimes come across accidents, and sometimes the men do not behave while traveling… Some men from other organizations mock those us women who go out to fulfill a post, laughing when they hear that we are tasked with responsibilities… they say that what we are doing is worthless. This is where the problem is, but in those organizations there are many problems of rape and mistreatment, while with us, Zapatistas, it is not that way because we are always explaining the Women's Law."

Ninth: ***Women can occupy positions of authority in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.***

From *Caracol* IV, Morelia: "…as women we hold authority posts in areas such as autonomous health, education, and production. There are

compañeras who have understood the work well, although there have been obstacles that we encounter while walking. But we have come out to put out our efforts…"

From *Caracol* V, Roberto Barrios: "Over in the northern zone, this is being done as we say, although we are moving along slowly in participation. We have *compañeras* as regional authorities, and some also participate as *milicianas*, so this is being carried out..."

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "…we say that this point is being carried out because there are *compañeras* integrated in all authority positions. There are women at the local, regional, and zone level positions. And there are *compañeras* occupying different military ranks… they have exercised their rights depending on their will and capacity."

Tenth: ***Women have all the rights and obligations set out by the revolutionary laws and regulations.***

From *Caracol* III, La Garrucha: "We well know that in our Zapatista struggle, that we don't only say that we have rights, but that in our autonomous struggle, we have obligations to realize these rights as we want to within our villages by way of organizing." "In 1994 it became known that we had the Women's Law. It is so good that this law existed and that we have been able to participate… The *compañeras* suffered a lot before '94: humiliation, mistreatment, rape. But none of that ever mattered to the government… and neither to the landowners. Neither of them ever took women into consideration. The landowners had the *compañeros* in peonage, and the *compañeras* had to get up very early to work. Those poor women had to continue working alongside the men. There was much slavery, but we don't

want this anymore and that's why we as *compañeras* began to participate. … What we want now is for our autonomy to function, for women to participate, to not stay behind. We will continue to go forward so that the bad government can see that we will not let them exploit us as they exploited our ancestors."

From *Caracol* II, Oventik: "What we seek is something like a re-construction of humanity… that is what we are trying to change; another world is what we want… it is the struggle that we are all a part of, men and women, because it is not a struggle of women and it is not a struggle of men. When one speaks of a revolution, they go together, among men and women, and that is the struggle."

"We women who are here today know who made that Revolutionary Law. Somebody had to struggle for it and somebody defended us. Who was that somebody who struggled for us, the *compañeras*? Comandanta Ramona was the one who put that effort in for us. She did not know how to read or write, or speak Spanish. But why do we, as *compañeras*, not make the effort? She is an example, that *compañera* who already made the effort, for us to continue moving forward and keep on working in order to demonstrate what we know in our organization."

Reflecting from the "outside" of Zapatista territory

What would we write today if we could attempt to express what the Zapatista experience shows us about the women's struggle to live and practice the Women's Revolutionary Law? We can anticipate that these struggles do not end here. It is a process that continues on and on. It is also a process that transforms itself. The quotes from *Volume III* compiled above suggest various routes, questions, and interpretive proposals.

The Internalization of Oppression: "…a bad custom that persists in the mind, that contaminates"

Through these phrases, we are given a trace of the progress made today with respect to the so-called "Women's Law." A prime example is when a *compañera* says that it is not the fault of the fathers and mothers who did not

send their daughters to school previously. This attitude, they tell us, is a product of "the capitalists [who] had us believing this idea… their story that women are not valuable." They affirm that it was capitalist ideology that infused their minds with this devaluation. It is not the fault of the mothers or the fathers who did not allow women to study, nor was it their own fault when they did not put in efforts to study. It is a product of the slave condition they were forced to live.

Here a sophisticated analysis appears, one which some psychologists call the "internalization of oppression." It expresses itself when we ourselves become convinced of our own lack of value as we appropriate and reproduce the values of the dominant order that reduces and exploits us. The process of self-awareness appears in various responses throughout *Volume III: Participation of Women in Autonomous Government*, where they recount their experiences as Zapatistas. As they have mentioned many times, they are "working under sheer political awareness," putting into practice their demands for autonomy and freedom as women. Today they recognize that this internalization/appropriation of the dominant values continues to be present in the minds of their cultural environment, in males, fathers, brothers, sons, and even within themselves because it "contaminates" the mind.

Rights and Duties

Something also worthy of comment is the recognition, by the *compañeras*, that it is not only rights that are demanded, but that they also have a counterpart: accepting these rights' corresponding obligations and duties. This has been theorized as the "inter-relational" aspect of rights.(Morny Joy, 2013) This is a mature and reflexive appropriation of what claiming women's rights

implies. It is not about claiming "my rights" without limits, without measure, but about constructing them within a new normativity that emerges from the process of constructing their collective autonomy. "It is not my right only and I get to do whatever I want." This level of analysis also appears when they refer to girls' freedom to decide whom they will marry. This right to select their partner, which most young girls today exercise, must adhere to and enter into harmony with the Zapatista struggle's proposals and priorities. "It must be exercised with the revolutionary struggle in mind."

With these phrases, a profound collective and inter-relational elaboration is expressed on how to go about walking along living women's rights – fully linked and interwoven with collective rights. These phrases clearly demonstrate that women's rights are not conceptualized as the rights of individual entities that would respond only to the needs of an "individual" woman. They also do not refer to a collective made up exclusively of women. Rather, they go "together and side by side" (*juntos y a la par*).

A Simultaneous Struggle: Individual and collective rights

"…when one speaks of a revolution, they go together, among men and women, and that is the struggle." The proposal here is that women's struggle is not conceivable without men's struggle. A revolutionary struggle consists of both men and women, and there are many references throughout *Volume III* on the inextricability of all walking together. These references implicitly resolve the interrogations put forth by many academics over the exercise of human rights. Their analyses debate what is convenient and/or what are the appropriate ways of resolving the dilemma between prioritizing the individual or the collective subject of rights. They assume a hierarchical ordering to the

priorities of struggle: either individual rights take priority, or collective rights do. Their philosophical reference is the "principle of the excluded third." That is, they pit seemingly mutually exclusive categories against each other, understanding them within a hierarchical ordering: individual rights are first and later collective rights, or vice versa.

The Zapatistas' thinking has another reference. For them, individual rights and collective rights form a duality of opposites that are at once complimentary. The foundation of and referent to this duality's poles, fluidly opposed, allows them to speak and act according to a fusion of both sets of rights in their practice as well as in their thought. This fluid duality prevents hierarchization; its range is horizontal. They speak and present us with a way of *simultaneously* living individual rights (of women) with those emerging from the collective rights of their people in struggle. "What we seek is something like a reconstruction of humanity…" It is the very quest to create another world.

In the broad Zapatista proposal, the struggle for women's rights is never arranged hierarchically as an inferior or secondary end. "…This is why for us there is no hierarchy of domains: we do not claim that the struggle for land takes priority over gender justice… On the contrary, we think that all emphases are necessary…"(Subcommander Marcos, 2009)

This inclusive form, based on simultaneity of doing/thinking, while seemingly paradoxical, is part of the Mesoamerican philosophical heritage that is also revealed in the story of the cat/dog or the dog/cat. This epistemic category of thought is present, in a certain way, in the fusion of the cat/dog and its many metaphorical adventures that allow it to continue being a dog and a cat at the same time.(Subcommander Marcos, 2013)

This is how they move beyond the "…encasing of the entire world into a closed box of mutually exclusive options." (Subcommander Marcos 2013)We have to rethink the world, struggle, and gender beyond binary dichotomies in order to "fully understand the grammar of the Zapatista rebellion." (Sergio Rodriguez Lascano,2013)

Women Walking in Equilibrium and On Par with Men

Continuing on in the analysis of the *compañeras'* responses on how they live the Women's Law today, some emphasize that their struggle against *machismo* does not imply that what they now seek is to dominate males or "value them less." On the contrary, they are asking for a "reconstruction" of society, a different ordering where dominant and dominated do not exist: whether they be women or men.

They want to escape the inevitable hierarchies found in the world of capitalist production and in any thought rooted in mutually exclusive categories. (The duality of opposites and complimentary inspires and sustains their efforts as, again, this duality prevents hierarchization in that its range is horizontal.) It is another world they seek to build through their demands as women, and in living their Revolutionary Law of Zapatista women.

Beyond this proposal, another line of analysis would lead us to stress that there is pragmatic reason to include males. The *compañeros*, the women tell us, "sometimes do not allow them the right to freedom" to a *compañera* who has been assigned a task and "because of this problem, the Law has also to include men" so that the Law can be carried out.

It is a search for a masculinity without overtones of domination and with an understanding of how to live on par, the fullness of the Women's Revolutionary Law.

The Devaluation of Women

"They say that women are not worth anything." This grievance comes to us from the voice of Comandanta Esther at the plenary session of the *Congreso de la Unión* (House of Representatives) in Mexico City in 2001. She turned to the public audience in the Chamber of Deputies to speak about one of their "bad customs" that they were attempting to eradicate. She assured us "…I don't tell this story so that you feel sorry for us… We are struggling to change this and we will continue doing so…"

What Zapatista women show us here is that culture is neither monolithic nor static.

In their deliberations on how to implement the Women's Law in the *Caracoles* today, we find an analytical element for further comprehension. It is a historical review of how this devaluation of women originated. It is interesting to note the similarities that may exist between the Zapatistas' reflections and scholars' use of the Psychohistorical analytical method, or that of the History of Mentalities. From this perspective, it is no longer simply correcting a "bad custom" that exists in the Maya villages and communities where Zapatismo settled into. It is also not about simply changing "bad customs." The Zapatistas speak up denouncing its origin: the exploitative practices from the plantation and land owners. It was these plantation owners who considered women to be inferior. It was they who put "this bad idea… into our heads." One dramatic aspect of this devaluation of women is the

derecho de pernada (“right of the first night;” literally, “right of the thigh”) whereby landowners had the “right” to abuse and use young indigenous women for their sexual satisfaction. This wretched “right of the first night” was still in force recently, and the rape of indigenous women did not occur only on young virgins. Indigenous women can report multiple cases of abuse later in the lives of many of their *compañeras*, for example, when plantation owners, landowners, and *coletos* (urban males from San Cristóbal de las Casas) raped and abused Indian women claiming they were “improving the race.” Rosario Castellanos’ literary stories report these abuses in Chiapas. These violent chauvinistic customs tried to transform these women into objects and property to be at the disposal of those *macho* rapists. They abused with impunity “those human beings” that are Indian, poor, and female, encouraging through their contempt, the devaluation of women by their own fathers, partners, brothers, sons and more broadly, within their customary habits.

Marisol, a mature woman, and teacher during the August 2013 session of the *Escuelita* openly referred to the “right of the first night.” “Our grandmothers were raped,” she told us indignantly and explained further: “our grandfathers carried that same idea from their *patrones* y *capataces* (bosses and foremen), not taking us women into consideration.”

Reflections on the So-called “Exchange” of Women

We know through multiple ethnographic studies and monographs that this exchange has existed in many cultures worldwide. Its basis, both in matrilineal and patrilineal societies, is that women are especially valuable for their capacity to bring new beings into the world. Moreover, ancient economies

were often centered on the family. When a family member of the "productive core" abandons the family – for example, to integrate into another familial network as would happen through marriage – that member must be replaced by another or by goods that would compensate for the loss in the family's subsistence production. These customs, in all their ethnic and historical variations, are based not on the devaluation of women but in their valuation, and consequently, in the desire to acquire compensation for the loss of their contributions to the production unit.

Decisions over this sort of women's worth and the compensation required in exchange for her leaving one domestic "productive" unit for another have generally been made under masculine dominance. Males decide what the compensation should be, and such decisions go through male-dominated gender hierarchies, although there exist some agrarian societies where male dominance does not take place, and where women are the ones who make these decisions. This exchange within households has been ritualized in multiple ways.

It is clear that the Zapatistas insist on transcending these patriarchal traditions. Anthropologically, the transformation of this custom, from a form of compensation to something that can be considered as a "sale" of women is a process that has transited across time and cultures since antiquity. Under contemporary capitalist societal values, where everything is subject to sale and valuation under market logic, has induced this change. It has taken diverse paths before reaching the point today that the *compañeras* Zapatistas critique: "they were traded in for liquor, for animals, for money…"

Here, we might be able to initiate a type of clinical anamnesis reviewing this process as it happens in the Highlands Zone and throughout the State of Chiapas more generally. Certainly, the intensification of patriarchal values

reinforced this custom, in Chiapas they reached frenzy with the "right of the first night." The rape and abuse of women with impunity, coupled with the colonialist contempt for the "*indio*" (indigenous) and the slavery to which the indigenous peoples were subjected to, contributed to the transformation of women, patriarchally considered a "value" that must be adequately replaced; on an object of scorn to be discarded and exchanged for liquor, a cow, or money. Women's productive and reproductive contributions to the domestic unit and to the community, as well as a review of the several kinds of patriarchal abuses suffered by women, have been theorized profusely within Marxist feminisms. Yet the main paradox of this custom is that one cannot sell what is considered worthless.

Through the Zapatistas' organization, the *compañeras* have dramatically advanced in resisting this "bad custom" of exchanging women by putting forward constructive proposals for eradicating it. Field research in the same region reports that this is the area of Mexico where human rights violations are most frequent, precisely because of the so called "sale" of women.

Agroecology and Subsistence Farming

In many of the *Caracoles,* they have developed original methods of farming for autonomous subsistence. This subsistence is never absolute, as these methods also generate surpluses that they sell on the market. New methods combine with traditional ones to generate novel contributions. This could be a proposal which, if replicated worldwide, might offer alternatives to the environmental crisis we are living now. Regenerating the fields through

agroecological means could foster the survival of not only human beings but of the entire planet. Indeed, it could offer ways of ensuring food sovereignty.

"Family Farming" is the theme driving the United Nations (UN) in 2014 throughout the world. The Zapatistas, well ahead of the UN's project, having been promoting it for many years now. "Culture is working the land." "They will not be able to take away our culture. We will not allow it. We continue working in producing everything that we need, from seeds to everything else that is necessary… the seeds that we continue selecting and storing." It is a call to support their own ancestral self-sustaining cultivation traditions which the Zapatistas know are appropriate to their lands. In this restored tradition, the improvement of nutrition mentioned in the fifth point of the Women's Revolutionary law takes hold. "In terms of feeding ourselves in our zone, our food is not far away from us. We *compañeros* and *compañeras* ourselves must follow our ancestors' customs, how they lived before, how they ate… that we do not abandon farming what is ours, the *chayote*, the yucca (manioc/cassava), the squash…"

In an era in which the small farm has by now been obliterated in most countries, and in which peasants, in order to survive, must emigrate and abandon their land and crops for other activities in other places, the Zapatistas enact a better future on the land. These experiments and their successes, although still in their initial stages, promise a revitalization of traditional farming practices and a return to a survival agriculture that many alternative projects worldwide today seek.

The Zapatistas have started on a path that contributes a future of hope, which does not only allow them to survive, but also serves as an example and as encouragement so that other people and other impoverished rural communities take their subsistence back into their own hands.

Health Care: Revitalizing traditional methods

The achievements of the Women's Revolutionary Law on issues of the right to primary health care and nutrition reveal the Zapatistas' path that at once offers a service and a political contribution.

They have created various health facilities, and in fact, just about every community or village has its own "*casa de salud"* that could be called a health clinic. Through them, the Zapatistas receive primary care, and they have insisted for years on revitalizing and relearning traditional Mesoamerican medical practices. Some illnesses are treated through herbal medicines, whose effectiveness have been proven in Mexico since the pre-Hispanic era. It is known, for example, that in Oaxtepec, a place in the State of Morelos, ancient Mexicans established a botanical garden with well over 400 species of medicinal and healing plants. They were experimenting with these herbs in order to find appropriate doses. This was all being practiced before the Spanish invasion.

In addition to the revitalization and recovery of knowledges through herbal teas and poultices, and through recipes of concentrated healing herbs, the tradition of midwifery has been reappropriated and today flourishes. It is practiced in each *casa de salud,* together with massages and *manteadas* (manipulations of the fetus), attention is given to the process of pregnancy through the ingestion of medicinal teas. This traditional prenatal and childbirth care has been reclaimed through their very precise efforts to recover these techniques of ancestral midwifery, whose level of success had already surprised Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in the sixteenth century, as detailed extensively in his *General History of the Things of New Spain*.

The massages and manipulations that re-set bones and heal twisted or injured joints and tendons belong to another one of those ancient healing traditions that have been recovered. These are knowledges of female "bonesetters" that continue to be practiced in many parts of contemporary Mexico. Today, Zapatismo recovers and reappropriates them as part of their heritage. It is a cultural recovery and a cultural defense, as they told us during the *Escuelita*.

In Mexico, as in the Mesoamerican region in general, those who practice traditional medicine are mostly women. The bonesetters, midwives, and herbal healers are the medical service providers in both the *casas de salud* and the bigger health clinics throughout Zapatista territory. These healing capacities are much appreciated collectively, and provide women a community space of respect, self-esteem, and power.

It is mostly Zapatista female health promoters who are engaged in these tasks and preserve ancestral knowledges, relearning those that have been lost. This allows for a combination of traditional Maya medicine with allopathic care both in *casas de salud* and in the health clinics in each *Caracol*. The clinics that have been constructed in the *Caracoles* can then offer the highest quality attention, making allopathic medication accessible, as well as offering an infrastructure that allows for complicated and delicate surgical interventions.

Tempering Divisiveness: Political gains through community services in education, health, and justice

The health care offered by the State is of bad quality and often inexistent. It is well known that in rural regions, many people must walk hours and hours before reaching the nearest *Secretaria de Salubridad y Asistencia* (SSA) health clinic. Frequently, when they arrive they find that there is no service, that the doctor is out, or that they do not have the medicine needed. The Zapatistas have made up for this absence and offer their own services, and it is well known that they provide medical attention to all adjacent villages and communities, many of whom are non-Zapatistas. They are indigenous "brothers" and "sisters" as they told us during the lessons at the *Escuelita*. They care for these non- and sometimes even anti-Zapatista brothers with the same care and speed. Needless to say, in offering quality services to all who need it in those areas abandoned by official services, the Zapatistas have been able to defeat rivalries and confrontations fomented by the three levels of State power (municipal, state, and federal) that seek to deal with the peasants' struggles for justice by dismantling the solidarity links among them. The methods used to divide the indigenous communities include every kind of

handout (for example, the programs "Oportunidades" or "PROCEDE"), or even arming indigenous people so they become mercenaries who, in exchange for payment, function as paramilitaries at the service of the State. Once becoming illegal soldiers, these indigenous attack the Zapatistas with the intention of ruining their autonomous project.

The services the Zapatistas provide to indigenous people living in adjacent areas – to non-Zapatistas and even ex-Zapatistas – include, beyond the health services mentioned above, the possibility for children to study in the autonomous schools as well as participate in conflict resolution for all kinds of offenses through the Zapatistas' own form of "autonomous justice." Throughout the sessions of the August 2013 *Escuelita*, we also had the opportunity to learn in detail about how they resignify, broaden, and improve, autonomous education and autonomous justice, and how they redefine them conceptually by putting them into practice.

Through their proposals that address community needs in health care, education, and justice, the Zapatistas move toward dissolving the inter-community clashes purposefully created by the State. Their calm response, given without violence and even without raising their voice, without using force, and also offering a solution to the needs of their indigenous "brothers and sisters," has been the most effective antidote against the fratricidal confrontations that the "bad government" and the geopolitical models of the Global North have fomented. Per the instructions found in the counterinsurgency manuals developed by the Global North, "ethnic wars" should be promoted or manufactured and "religious fundamentalisms" should be created or intensified in order to divide, control, and destroy the justice struggles that start from below.

Final Considerations

Returning now to the experience of the *Escuelita*, we recognize how the Women's Revolutionary Law has advanced through practice. As it is inserted into the Zapatistas' collectivity, any conventional feminist approach, whether theoretical or practical, cannot help us here. From the comments we have detailed and expounded upon here, we see that the Women's Law escapes any rigid framework. It proposes and resolves some practical feminist demands, such as women's "empowerment" and the advance of women's "reproductive rights." Under the aegis of Zapatista autonomy, with the enormous differences this political context offers, what is found is an "other" type of empowerment and an "other" type of sexual and reproductive rights, as they are transformed and permeated by collective identity, interdependence, and inter-relatedness.

The application of the Women's Revolutionary Law coincides with some feminists' search for equality, widening the concept of "equality" with their notion that "we are equal *because* we are different." It also seems to follow some theoretical legacies of the *feminism of difference* which it also subverts with the expression of "egalitarian aspirations."

It broadens all referents, expands them, transgresses them, and joins them "illogically" with its practices of inclusion into the autonomous collectivity that exceeds, while seeming to embrace, the narrow categories of gender, binaries and the mutually exclusive notions of the feminine and the masculine, and those feminist pursuits to correct them.

The Zapatista women's struggles and demands for their rights do not fit neatly in any feminist theories or practices; they transcend them all. They sometimes sound as ecofeminism, as egalitarianism, as the revindication of

difference, of empowerment, of reproductive rights, and sometimes as an elaboration of gender racialization with all its complex theorizations.

If their own music "has the rhythm of polka-balada-corrido-ranchera-cumbia-rock-ska-metal-reggae-trova-punk-hiphop-rap-and any others that want to pile up…," it is because their proposal, as it is lived today within Zapatista autonomous practice, contains every color, sound, tonality, and dissonance.

And if we manage to perceive them: "…there will then be new eyes and ears that understand our commitment."

Because, as in Subcomandante Marcos' story of the cat-dog, a big challenge for the deep understanding of Zapatista women's history is that "…all categorical options are a trap… The answer is neither here nor there. It is better to make a new path that goes where one wants to go."

This new path is being created right now by Zapatista women.

Sharing: Zapatista Women meet Women of the World :

Encuentro "Comandanta Ramona" de Mujeres Zapatistas con Mujeres del Mundo.

"Las zapatistas no estamos ni cansadas ni desanimadas"[9]

"we are not tired neither disheartened"

Estuve participando en este Encuentro en el Caracol "Resistencia hacia un nuevo amanecer", en La Garrucha, en la zona tzeltal de las cañadas de la Selva Lacandona, territorio rebelde zapatista. Caracol es el nombre que se da a las unidades civiles autónomas del EZLN.

El caracol, en la filosofía antigua llamada *cosmovisión*, era un símbolo que marcaba el fin y el inicio de un período astronómico, acontecimiento que conllevaba la regeneración y el renacimiento de la vida misma. Decodificando el símbolo, podemos comprender por qué se ha denominado Caracoles a estas nuevas formas de gobierno zapatista autónomo.

Los primeros Caracoles se fundaron el 6 de agosto del 2003, después de la negativa gubernamental de dar seguimiento al cambio constitucional acordado en la Ley Cocopa,[10] a la que tantos de nosotras y nosotros dedicamos energías, tiempos, esfuerzos por vía de la negociación pacífica con el gobierno mexicano. Así, los Caracoles marcan el fin de un período, como también señalan un nuevo inicio, una regeneración y un renacimiento.

La cosmovisión está implícita en mucho del quehacer zapatista.

Durante esos días, escuché con atención a aquellas mujeres, maestras de la

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9 Notas de la autora, tomadas durante el Encuentro de Mujeres Zapatistas con Mujeres del Mundo, llevado a cabo del 28 al 31 de diciembre de 2007.

10 Estudios de éste y otros textos relacionados aparecen en: http://www.cedoz.org/site/content.php

lucha social.

Recordaba cómo resumía el subcomandante Marcos su experiencia inicial de contacto con el movimiento indígena en Chiapas: "Escuchar, aprender".[11]

Eso hacía yo ahí con las mujeres zapatistas: escuchar y aprender —como lo he hecho desde la aparición pública del zapatismo—.

Fruto de esas horas escuchando a 150 autoridades zapatistas mujeres y aprendiendo de ellas, vengo a compartirles algunas reflexiones. Son mías, pero son inspiradas por ellas, las zapatistas. También guardan correlación con mis investigaciones sobre la situación de las mujeres, con mi compromiso por colaborar hacia un cambio social equitativo, y con los muchos años que tengo estudiando en las fuentes primarias y los libros de historia para descubrir las características de ese pensamiento antiguo llamado *cosmovisión*, que siempre me ha fascinado y que ahora veo transformándose en opción viable, política, contemporánea.

Esta *cosmovisión* ahora está inspirando estrategias de lucha que sorprenden mundialmente por su "nueva" forma de quehacer rebelde, político, pacífico, innovador y, sobre todo, que busca establecer relaciones equitativas con y desde las mujeres:

"…les pido que vayan a sus lugares de origen y platiquen que nuestro corazón está contento, porque vamos a luchar".[12]

"…en su medio y a su modo, l@s otr@s intelectuales seguramente producirán análisis y debates teóricos que asombrarán al mundo…"[13]

Los movimientos sociales más relevantes en este siglo XXI son, sin lugar a dudas, el movimiento de mujeres —en toda su amplia gama de

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11 En Le Bot, Y., y subcomandante Marcos, El sueño zapatista, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1997, citado en Baschet, Jérôme, L'Etincelle zapatiste : Insurrection indienne et résistance planétaire, París, Denoël, 2002.

12 Comandanta Kelly, 31 de diciembre de 2007, notas de la autora.

13 Subcomandante Marcos, "¿Otra teoría?", en La Jornada, 25 de marzo de 2006, p. 18.

heterogeneidades y con sus hegemonías dispersas[14], y el movimiento de pueblos y nacionalidades originarias indígenas. Ambos movimientos conjugan la esperanza de lograr un mundo más justo y vivible.

Los movimientos indígenas en las Américas son "la fuerza de transformación más visible en el continente" dice el sociólogo francés Alain Touraine, quien alguna vez visitó a los zapatistas en Chiapas. "…los indígenas reclaman tanto respeto por su identidad cultural cuanto derechos democráticos para todos los mexicanos […] son los actores sociales más relevantes en la actualidad".[15]

"…son más modernos que los movimientos clásicos que hemos conocido en el siglo XX" escribió, por su parte, otro francés, el antropólogo Yvon le Bot, también estudioso del zapatismo y entrevistador del sub Marcos para el libro *El sueño zapatista*. Lo que los hace extraordinariamente modernos, según este autor, es "la actuación horizontal que han alcanzado en su lucha generacional en contra del sistema jerárquico de la comunidad y de la mujer en contra del poder exclusivamente masculino".[16]

El movimiento de las mujeres se enriquece con las propuestas de los movimientos indígenas. Las propuestas del movimiento indígena se completan con las demandas de las mujeres.

El Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres Indígenas es la síntesis de ambos. [17]

Funde, sintetiza y conjunta los dos movimientos sociales más relevantes de

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14 Grewal, I., y C. Caplan. op. cit.

15 Gil Olmos, "México, en riesgo…", op. cit.

16 Le Bot, op. cit.

17 Este movimiento es plural y diverso. Podría mencionar muchas instancias organizativas dentro de éste como El Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas, con sede en la ciudad de Lima, Perú; La CONAIE en Ecuador, la Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas, de México; La Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas en America Latina. Existen movimientos de mujeres indígenas también en Argentina, en Chile; Venezuela, Bolivia, Brasil, Colombia… y en Norteamérica y Europa. Los hay en Australia, en Nueva Zelanda con las Maorí, y qué decir del activismo sw mujeres en el llamado arco "indígena" entre Europa y China... He tenido el inmenso privilegio de compartir y aprender con mujeres "indígenas" en el Kurdistán turco; en Irán, en Israel con las Beduinas, en el nordeste de la India con las mujeres Naga. Las mujeres de cada una de estas regiones están ahora reclamando sus derechos como pueblos y al mismo tiempo como mujeres.

nuestro tiempo. Sus propuestas son tercamente inclusivas de ambas equidades: indígena y de género. Esto hace que las mujeres indígenas encuentren poco eco y, algunas veces, rechazo a sus posturas por parte del feminismo hegemónico que no logra —como lo dice Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak— "desaprender el privilegio"[18] de pertenecer a las élites de sus sociedades. Esto de ninguna manera es privativo del feminismo sino que incluye las actitudes de otros grupos de luchadores sociales no conscientes de cómo sus privilegios educativos, de clase social, y económicos están influyendo en su forma de evaluar y relacionarse con el movimiento indígena.

Se ha teorizado sobre el cómo integrar ambas luchas.[19] Para definirlo se ha hablado de la interseccionalidad; de centros y periferias; de descolonialidad del poder y del saber. Estoy convencida de que la nueva teoría la tenemos que aprender y sistematizar a partir de las luchas concretas que las compañeras —mi elección son principalmente las zapatistas— están llevando a cabo en sus prácticas cotidianas. ¿Cómo integran los principios de la cosmovisión a sus luchas? ¿Cómo los re-formulan? ¿Cómo los llevan a cabo? ¿Cómo negocian la política dentro de sus organizaciones? ¿Les sirve el sistema de cuotas o cómo lo reformulan? En estas y otras, múltiples, encrucijadas, podemos detectar la mano y el corazón activo de las mujeres sabias, fuertes decididas.

Con mi corazón zapatista caminaba yo el 28 de diciembre de 2007, a registrarme en el *Encuentro de Mujeres Zapatistas con Mujeres del Mundo*.

De pronto vi un gran cartelón que casi impedía la entrada al espacio:

"En este Encuentro no pueden participar los hombres en: relator, traductor, exponente, vocero, ni representar en la plenaria. Sólo pueden trabajar en: Hacer comida, limpiar y barrer el Caracol, limpiar las letrinas, cuidar a los

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18 Spivak, op. cit., 1998.

19 Sandoval, C., Lugones, M, hooks, b., Oyewumi,O. y Mohanty, C., (Véase la Bibliografía).

niños y niñas. Estos días 29, 30, 31 de diciembre, 07. El 1 de enero todo vuelve a lo normal".[20]

¿Quién duda aquí de que los esfuerzos de equidad de género están tomados muy en serio por estas mujeres?

Lo que hemos logrado las feministas organizadas ha sido crear nuestros propios espacios de "sólo mujeres". Pero tener a los varones encargándose de la infraestructura para que cada una de nosotras podamos tomar la tribuna, sin obligaciones con los hijos o con otras tareas, yo francamente lo he visto poco o, mejor dicho, nunca, en mis treinta años de
feminista activa.

How Does Mayan Cosmovisión Inform Zapatista Practices?

De cómo la cosmovisión sustenta las prácticas zapatistas

Durante el Encuentro me concentré especialmente en analizar las prácticas sociales y políticas. Éstas fueron las que demostraron su firme raigambre en la cosmovisión. En otros lugares he podido percibir, a partir de mis análisis, las influencias de la cosmovisión en los discursos y declaraciones de las mujeres zapatistas.[21] En esta ocasión, me concentré en algunos conjuntos de prácticas que revelan su anclaje en la cosmovisión mesoamericana maya: no son, de ninguna manera, excluyentes entre sí, sino que se complementan unas a las otras: 1) El trabajo "en pura conciencia"; 2) la búsqueda del "acuerdo" con los varones; 3) la toma de decisiones por consenso; y 4) el respeto por los conocimientos y las creencias antiguas sobre salud y enfermedad.

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[20] Notas de la autora.

[21] Véase, por ejemplo, "Las fronteras interiores: el movimiento de mujeres indígenas y el feminismo", dentro del libro, *Diálogo y diferencia; retos feministas a la globalización*, México: UNAM, 2008.

We Work in "Pura Consciencia" as a Service to the Community

"Trabajamos en pura conciencia"

Bien es sabido que en las comunidades indígenas de la zona —y de muchas regiones más de México, de América y del mundo— el trabajo de gobernar es un servicio, no un medio de enriquecimiento personal o de adquisición de poder. Por los hoy llamados usos y costumbres se dan "cargos" de autoridad que dan prestigio y una autoridad relativa que se define como "mandar obedeciendo" a lo que el colectivo en asambleas decide por consenso.

Era posible inferir en las intervenciones de las mujeres que todas ellas habían accedido a esos "cargos" en una innovadora estructura colectiva zapatista en los cinco Caracoles. Estos cargos les dan responsabilidades a nivel local, municipal y regional. Son *consejas* agrarias, *consejas* autónomas —variante femenina de los cargos dentro del Consejo Autónomo—, *dirigentas*, *insurgentas*, *milicianas*, *capitanas*, *comandantas y… jóvenas*… —¡y la computadora me corrige automáticamente los femeninos no propios del español! Sólo tras mi insistencia sobre el teclado se quedan en femenino—.

Como lo decía con voz firme una compañera participante: "Trabajamos en pura conciencia" ¿Qué quiere decir esta conciencia? Pues, el trabajo no remunerado que, además —según contaba—, no tenía horario ni días feriados. Imposible pensar que no estuviera dispuesta a atender asuntos en domingo o a altas horas de la noche. Sin remuneración; simplemente como "cargo" otrora sólo accesible al varón. Sabemos que todas las monografías y etnografías en la zona mencionan el ritmo intenso y sin salario de estos "cargos" que, incluso, empobrecen a quien los acepta y se hacen por responsabilidad con el colectivo.

Están inscritos en una *cosmovisión* cuyo suelo es la reciprocidad colectiva.[22]

In Search of the "Acuerdo": Collective Decisions Taken by Women and Men

La búsqueda del "acuerdo" con los varones

Aunque parecería que esos carteles que señalan las tareas invertidas entre varones y mujeres fueran eco de algunos feminismos sectarios, contra los hombres, resulta que el análisis de lo que las compañeras zapatistas hacen nos ofrece una nueva lectura. El género en la dualidad oscila permanentemente entre un polo y el otro: "que tengamos respeto hombres y mujeres", "luchemos junto a ellos", "podemos caminar juntos compañeros y compañeras".

Este tema emerge en casi todas las conclusiones y también en las respuestas a las preguntas —algunas tan incisivas como incrédulas— desde el público. Por ejemplo, recuerdo una pregunta: "¿Cuál es la diferencia cuando un hombre tiene cargo y cuando lo tiene una mujer?" Aunque alguna expresó que "la problema es cuando se tiene esposo", la respuesta clara y concisa en este caso, como en la mayoría de ellos, fue "no tiene diferencia, pues cuando tiene cargo hace acuerdo con el esposo".

Formuladas las preguntas por las mujeres urbanas de una veintena de países —que no entendían, muchas de ellas, cómo esas mujeres indígenas habían avanzado en sus relaciones con los varones—, se recibían respuestas de este tipo: "…no hay problema porque hay 'acuerdo'". Este acuerdo habla de una decisión colectiva votada por consenso, en donde los privilegios masculinos van desdibujándose gradualmente, en donde la colectividad decide que las

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22 Carlos Lenkersdorf la analiza a partir del idioma tojolabal, en Lenkersdorf, op. cit.

mujeres pueden asumir la dirigencia, pueden permitirse la ausencia del hogar, y tener tantas libertades y derechos como los varones.

Son decisiones colectivas —votadas en las asambleas tanto por los varones cuanto por las mujeres— que llegan a incidir en las relaciones de pareja, otrora integralmente patriarcales. El proceso de re-creación de autoridades femeninas entre las comunidades rebeldes zapatistas no es un "siempre adelante" mecánico. Es un proceso plástico, en permanente cambio; una vez puesto en marcha, va haciéndose y transformándose en el día a día.

Aquí se refleja la dualidad femenina/masculina de opuestos y complementarios de la cosmovisión mesoamericana maya. La dualidad que organiza y ordena, y que desde el colectivo llega al hogar. Nunca desecha un polo en contra del otro ni los organiza jerárquicamente… Son misterios de la revitalización de relaciones de género ancestrales.

La fluidez de género nos remite a esta capacidad de negociación entre varones y mujeres y a la distribución de tareas no exclusivas por sexo.

Collective Decisión Making for Consensus Building

La toma de decisiones por consenso

Es simplemente lógico que, en un mundo que es concebido como uno, en el que todos los seres están interconectados, las decisiones sólo se puedan tomar por consenso. Era una imagen colectiva muy especial aquélla de las mujeres zapatistas sobre el templete del "auditorio". Aun en las ocasiones en que era sólo una de ellas la que se dirigía a las y los asistentes, siempre la acompañaba al menos una treintena de compañeras.

Sabemos que los mensajes que leyeron en un español vacilante, los habían redactado colectivamente desde cada uno de los espacios: juntas de buen gobierno, comandancia, insurgentas, milicianas, consejas, etc. Eran las

declaraciones y mensajes que todas juntas elaboraron en sus propias lenguas, para después traducir al español, de manera que las "mujeres del mundo" las pudiéramos entender. Segura estoy de que nada se dijo que no fuera decidido por consenso. En las asambleas, todos los asuntos y temas se deciden así. La interconexión de todos los seres en el universo, característica vital y envolvente de la cosmovisión mesoamericana maya, le da un cariz muy especial a este colectivo. No es un colectivo formado de unidades individuales, como lo son frecuentemente los nuestros. Es un colectivo que emerge desde sus posturas epistémicas en las que no hay concepto de separación tajante entre una y otra persona.

Respect and Implementation of Ancestral Knowledges and Beliefs on Health and Well Being

El respeto por los conocimientos y las creencias antiguas sobre salud y enfermedad

Las parteras y curanderas desfilaron para entrar y salir del improvisado auditorio. Eran, en su mayoría, señoras abuelas, con el pelo cano, las sabias.

Ellas contaron cómo hacían sus tés medicinales, cómo elaboraban cataplasmas y infusiones y cómo —por medio de estirones— acomodaban los huesos y el feto cuando éste venía en mala postura. Todos estos saberes y su farmacopea están detallados en la Historia de las cosas de la Nueva España, recopilada y escrita por fray Bernardino de Sahagún.[23] Hace unos años, impartí un taller sobre las técnicas curativas en Sahagún a compañeras indígenas promotoras de salud. Fue toda una revelación encontrar que la mayoria de sus prácticas tradicionales eran casi idénticas a las reportadas por este fraile en el

[23] Sahagún, B., véanse los distintos libros en torno a este título en la Bibliografía .

siglo XVI.

Desde los tiempos prehispánicos son mujeres las "médicas" de las comunidades.

Ahora las zapatistas reconocen esos saberes, los atesoran y trasmiten a través de esas sabias y viejas mujeres. Las clínicas incorporan —al lado de necesarias intervenciones hospitalarias de medicina alopática— todos los otros saberes originados en su *cosmovisión*, construidos con base en concepciones de la corporalidad porosa y permeable de un cuerpo interconectado con el cosmos, en el que no existen las frontera de la piel que divide exterior e interior.

Quisiera cerrar recordando las palabras de una compañera zapatista, a quien escuché al final del Encuentro, el 31 de diciembre del 2007, en las cañadas tzeltales de la selva, en el territorio autónomo y rebelde zapatista:

"Exigimos a todos los hombres del mundo que nos respeten porque México sin mujeres no sería México, y un mundo sin mujeres tampoco sería mundo […] Nuestra lucha no es sólo para nosotras las mujeres indígenas, sino por todos los pueblos indígenas y no indígenas".[24]

[24] Notas de la autora.

Initial Steps: First Indigenous Women National Congress and Foundation of CONAMI (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indigenas)

La Fundacion de la Coodinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (CONAMI)

> Guardo un entrañable recuerdo de aquella ocasión. Decidí sumarme a la caravana desde la Ciudad de México; en el autobús viajaban mujeres provenientes de regiones indígenas de todo el país. Cientos de kilómetros recorrimos durante toda la noche para llegar a primera hora de la mañana. Recuerdo ese evento como algo inaudito: mujeres de 26 pueblos indios llegadas para conformar una nueva organización política: de ellas como mujeres y, simultáneamente, como representantes indígenas.

En los últimos días de agosto de 1997 tuvo lugar, en Oaxaca, el Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas. La agenda era clara: que las mujeres indígenas de casi todo el país unieran sus voces para reclamar derechos, para denunciar abusos, y también para proponer cambios en su situación de mujeres. Y así fue. Se dijeron: "Nunca más un México sin nosotras".

El congreso fue organizado de tal manera que permitió que las mujeres tomaran la palabra públicamente. Reflexionaron en voz alta, formularon sus quejas e incluso se cuestionaron a sí mismas. Lo más interesante se dio en las mesas de trabajo, en las cuales las respuestas a preguntas preseleccionadas permitieron adentrarse en esos universos de mujeres, pobres e indígenas. A través —pero también al margen— de estas respuestas, se oyeron propuestas

ancladas en la visión de nuevos horizontes, reclamos de derechos no atendidos, denuncias de abusos cometidos.

"Siguiendo con el espíritu de nuestros antepasados... nuestras antecesoras eran gobernadoras, sacerdotisas y diosas. Siéntanse en su casa compañeras".[25] Con estas palabras se dio la bienvenida al casi medio millar de mujeres indígenas que habían acudido de todas las regiones del país. Eran purépechas, totonacas, tzotziles, tzeltales, tojolabales, mazatecas, mixes y mixtecas, cuicatecas, ñähñu (otomí), driquis,[26] nahuas, zapotecas, zoques, choles, tlapanecas, mam, chatinas, popolucas, amuzgas, mazahuas, y más. Venían también de muchos estados: Chiapas, Veracruz, Puebla, Michoacán, Guerrero, Morelos, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Distrito Federal, Estado de México, Sonora, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Querétaro.

"Hermanas, los pueblos sin voz ni mañana nacimos... ganamos el derecho de ser escuchadas, por eso llegamos hasta ustedes... representamos las bases de apoyo del EZLN. Venimos a escuchar su palabra y a conocer su lucha". Así se presentó la delegación zapatista. Representantes de las diversas organizaciones de mujeres indígenas ahí presentes respondieron: "Nos sumamos a la lucha que han iniciado... Si los de Chiapas iniciaron una lucha, no lo están haciendo sólo por ellos sino por todos nosotros, los indígenas". Guadalupe, del EZLN, contestó: "Ustedes, compañeras, son parte de nosotras..."

Era evidente que las zapatistas eran una fuente de inspiración para todas las indígenas presentes. "Ya que el primero de enero llegó la luz, nos abrió los ojos", decían. Esperaban compartir un poquito de esa luz. Largas filas se formaron para acercarse con respeto a hablar con ellas. Desde los discursos

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25 Las palabras de las congresistas aquí citadas corresponden a notas de trabajo de la autora, a menos que se indique otra fuente.

26 Castellanizada: triqui.

iniciales, se manifestó la intersección entre el género y la etnia. En la teoría feminista de la posicionalidad, el objetivo de demandas y luchas debe construirse alternativamente desde perspectivas ya sea de género, de etnia —o raza, para bell hooks—[27] o de clase. Este objetivo no es fijo, sino que se presenta en fluidez. Hoy estoy en la posición en que la etnia demanda prioridad. Mañana, la clase impone sus exigencias, y ciertamente el género será primordial en otra ocasión. No es siempre en el mismo orden, ni siempre las prioridades van de una a la otra. En el feminismo —cuando se es mujer indígena y pobre— esas prioridades se entrelazan con fluidez. Eso pasó en el Congreso Indígena de Mujeres. En varias ocasiones durante el congreso, este fue el estilo de las intervenciones.

Ciertamente, oímos decir que "las mujeres debemos tener muchos hijos para dar muchos miembros a la lucha". También escuchamos la queja —como si fuera un hecho que las feministas no queremos a los hombres (!)—: "Nosotras queremos luchar también con nuestros compañeros". También se dijo: "diariamente luchamos porque nuestros derechos como mujeres y especialmente como indígenas sean reconocidos". En la mayoría de las intervenciones destacaba una consciencia feminista que también incluía la reivindicación de derechos indígenas.

Más de un debate feminista se ha empeñado en decidir cuál es la prioridad: ¿el género o la clase? ¿La etnia o el género? No es uno o el otro sino todos a la vez, en posiciones móviles. No queremos solamente el cambio en las relaciones de género. Queremos un cambio en los patrones de opresores oprimidos que permean todas las relaciones sociales y económicas.

Algunas mujeres parecían privilegiar ya las demandas de los pueblos indios o aquéllas de los pobres y marginados, pero la mayoría no hizo esto sin

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[27] hooks, bell, op. cit

incorporar los derechos específicos de ellas como mujeres. Algunas de las demandas consignadas en las relatorías eran: “Que el hombre no maltrate a la mujer”, “que cambiemos desde la casa”, “que la educación sea igual para hombres y mujeres”, “que estas propuestas se den a conocer a las jóvenes para que sepan cuáles son sus derechos”. “El gobierno no nos respeta pero muchas veces ni nuestros esposos ni nuestros hijos”. Lo personal es político, decíamos desde los inicios del feminismo en los años 70. Hay que comenzar en casa, en el dominio de lo privado.

Varias veces escuché cosas como: “…los hombres, ellos también tienen que conocer nuestros derechos... que los hombres sepan nuestros derechos porque a veces ellos nos impiden”.

Y'aha, compañera driqui, dice en la mesa: “Queremos que se respeten usos y costumbres... debemos guardar nuestras tradiciones... nuestras ropas” —y señala su huipil largo de bordados multicolores—. Continúa su discurso diciendo: “También las mujeres y las niñas tienen sentimientos y se nos tiene que respetar nuestros sentimientos e ideas... realmente somos igual que ellos y podemos hacerlo mucho mejor que ellos. Las mujeres tenemos el derecho al descanso, a la salud pero a veces ni nosotras mismas lo sabemos”.

A la pregunta de cuáles son algunos de sus derechos, una mujer totonaca contesta: “Si queremos casarnos o no, si queremos seguir estudiando, si queremos tener hijos, cuándo”.

Se oyeron las tonalidades de lenguas generalmente habladas en secreto y en la clandestinidad, fuera del alcance del oído mestizo que las desautoriza y desprecia. Ahora resuenan en un espacio público y político. En chocholteca y en náhuatl oímos discursos inaugurales y las respuestas en mixe, tzotzil y zapoteco. Las invitadas no indígenas escuchábamos, preguntándonos: ¿quién, en México, no tiene ni sangre ni parentela india?

“Queremos que ustedes conozcan la situación difícil que vivimos. Saludo a nuestras hermanas indígenas que se organizan para una vida con dignidad. Viva las mujeres organizadas”.

Las vi y las oí. El hecho de que tantas mujeres indígenas tomaran la palabra estimuló a las otras a decidirse a hablar también, en español, con trabas y vacilaciones. Se motivaban y reforzaban unas a otras, y así se sobreponían a timideces propias del ser mujer, india y pobre. Tomar el espacio público requiere mucha fuerza, decisión y empuje. Si a mí —sólo por mi condición de mujer— ¡me ha costado tanto…!

¡Qué peso cargan esas mujeres, qué lastre! Por eso es tan admirable verlas erguidas, hablando con voz fuerte, demandando derechos, denunciando abusos, aun —y más aun— cuando buscan con dificultad la palabra adecuada, la pronunciación correcta, el tiempo del verbo y el género gramatical de cada palabra. Atreverse a hablar en público con esas limitaciones... ¡mi mayor respeto!

Pero, también se cuestionaron a sí mismas. “En nosotras está el cambio”. “La educación comienza desde nosotras porque somos madres”. “¿Quién decide en la casa la comida? Pues nosotras. ¿Quién decide en la casa los trabajos de los niños? Pues nosotras. ¿Quién decide quién sigue en la escuela y quién no? Pues nosotras”. Palabra de mujer driqui. La escuché decirlo tal cual. El ritmo de sus tres alocuciones, sus repeticiones y redundancias me recordaban a la poesía nahua antigua.

The Poiesis of Orality

La oralidad poética

¡Cuántas veces los discursos del congreso se estructuraron en estas formas de una oralidad ancestral indígena! Y no sólo en los discursos formales, sino cada

vez que alguna mujer tomaba la palabra. Sus palabras vibraban con esos ritmos orales. La Palabra, así con mayúscula, es casi sagrada en las tradiciones orales. Con las palabras no se juega. No son —como lo son a veces para nosotras—, "puras palabras". "A las palabras se las lleva el viento" reza un refrán. Para el que cree esto, el peso y la solidez son privilegio de lo escrito, lo firmado, lo que se puede volver a leer tal cual.

La mentalidad oral se confrontaba con la mentalidad alfabetizada. A eso se debieron los desencuentros entre mujeres indígenas y no indígenas invitadas y observadoras. Estos desencuentros no fueron forzosamente explícitos. Más bien las invitadas pensaron frecuentemente que el discurso era circular, repetitivo, que no se lograba gran cosa. Las indígenas escuchaban la Palabra. Repetida ésta, redundante, grababa en sus corazones las nuevas posibilidades de las mujeres indias y pobres.

Y grabar en sus corazones, como se oye repetidamente en los discursos de las mujeres indias, no implica la sentimentalidad dulzona de las emociones que nosotras asociamos con el corazón. Cuando las mujeres indígenas hablan de que "nos da tristeza en nuestros corazones" están hablando de las funciones intelectuales y de memoria que nosotras asociamos con el cerebro o la mente. El corazón, en más de una etnografía contemporánea, guarda todavía las funciones del teyolía. Según López Austin —y muchos otros investigadores del México antiguo— el teyolía era la sede de la razón, la inteligencia, los recuerdos, la vida.

En la oralidad, las palabras tienen peso y solidez. "Un desparramamiento de jades" llamaban metafóricamente los antiguos a las exhortaciones dirigidas a los jóvenes en la sociedad mexica. Estos discursos rituales eran puras palabras. Palabras-jades, atesoradas como piedras preciosas, que resisten el paso del tiempo.

Las formas orales, la redundancia, el ritmo, el paralelismo me envolvieron durante esos días. Más aun, los errores de sintaxis y de pronunciación en español, cumplieron generalmente la función de poetizar el discurso. De volverlo más musical y rítmico. Es el recurso de las amonestaciones y pláticas como los ilamatlatolli y huehuetlatolli llamados por los estudiosos "testimonios de la antigua palabra". Su finalidad es enseñar algo pero con belleza musical. Pasar la tradición, como la "Historia del Tohuenyo" del Libro III de fray Bernardino de Sahagún,[28] con mitos e historias, que a nosotras quizás nos parecen circulares y repetitivos. Aun los reclamos de desatención en los centros de salud llegaron revestidos y animados de musicalidad:

"A nosotras, como no podemos hablar bien,
ellos no nos hacen caso
nosotros tenemos la idioma,
es muy valiosa nuestra idioma
no nos avergonzamos de nuestra idioma,
yo me siento orgullosa de tener idioma que es el mixteco,
pero a ellos no les gusta..."

¡La forma pura de la oralidad poética!

Militarization and Abuse

Militarización y despojo

Las denuncias de los abusos del ejército fueron las más frecuentes. En varias zonas del país, el ejército viola los espacios y derechos elementales de la gente. Se acusa a los soldados de robo y otros crímenes. Violan a las mujeres.

[28] Sahagún, Bernardino de (fray), Códices matritenses de la Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España. Libro III: El origen de los dioses. segunda edición, revisada, 1978.

“Cuando la mujer sale a la milpa, la agarran por la fuerza, luego la dejan embarazada nomás así”. Eso en Loxichas, Oaxaca.

“En algunos lugares, ponen sus campamentos donde está la milpa, cuando van a buscar leña van a seguir a la señora y la violan. Eso están haciendo allá en la zona de Marqués de Comillas”, en Chiapas. Estas quejas se expresaron más frecuentemente en los estados de Guerrero, Oaxaca y, por supuesto, Chiapas.

Suplica la compañera de otra comunidad de Oaxaca “que nos uniéramos a exigirle al gobierno que todos los militares regresen a sus cuarteles”. “Se exige que el ejército abandone los municipios indígenas”, puntualiza otra indígena. “Compañeras”, dice Guadalupe de la delegación zapatista, “queremos que nos ayuden a buscar una forma de retirar la ejército. Queremos sus fuerzas, compañeras, para poder avanzar”.

Education as a Right

La educación como derecho

Las demandas también incluían frecuentemente el acceso a la “capacitación”, a la “educación”. “No hay escuelas en mi región”, dijo Andrea Lorenzo, zoque de la región fronteriza con Guatemala. Me veía con mirada intensa, casi dura. No podía decir mucho más en español. Pero en su forma de pararse, de verme, estaba la exigencia. Con su lenguaje corporal interrogaba: ¿Cómo se le puede ocurrir al gobierno no tener escuelas para los niños? ¡Cómo quisiera haber hablado zoque para platicar a fondo con ella!

Zapatista Struggle as a model and a guide

Y el zapatismo como guia

La comandanta Ramona fue recibida con veneración. Todo mundo se acercaba a tocarla, a darle flores de cempasúchil, a hacerle peticiones. Una santa viva.

Al hacer su discurso inaugural, Ramona entró al auditorio materialmente sostenida por todo un contingente de zapatistas que la protegían de periodistas, curiosos y devotos. Se había transformado en el epítome de las luchas desesperadas de los más desposeídos. Era india, era pobre y era mujer.

Recuerdo a la comandanta Ramona, justo antes de leer su discurso: empieza hablando espontáneamente. Dice: "Pues 'stá bien compañeras, venimos varias pueblos indígenas pobres. Luchemos juntos lo que queremos. Porque si hay muchas divisiones no se puede. Hay que unir más, hay que organizar más, hay que enlazar más... Las mujeres no tienen valor para hablar, para organizar, para trabajar. Pero sí podemos las mujeres trabajar con mucho cariño con los pueblos. Muchas resistencias tuvimos que vencer para venir. Les da miedo nuestra rebeldía. Por eso en el EZLN nos organizamos para aprobar la Ley revolucionaria de mujeres. No quieren que nosotras participemos como ellos..."

Su discurso fresco está puntuado por el acento tzotzil. Su cadencia es la de esa lengua. Todo mundo sabe que Ramona fue de las primeras zapatistas y que la ley de las mujeres se debe, en mucho, a sus esfuerzos. "El zapatismo no sería lo mismo sin sus mujeres rebeldes y nuevas", hace una pausa y finaliza: "Las indias también hemos levantado nuestra voz y decimos: Nunca más un México sin nosotras. Nunca más una rebelión sin nosotras. Nunca más una vida sin nosotras".

PART II SUBVERSIVE ROOTS: A PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT FOR JUSTICE STRUGGLES.

Duality, Fluidity and Equilibrium

> The law of this world if the fluctuation of distinct, sharply cut qualities that eternally dominate, withdraw and appear again.
> (J. Soustelle, 1955, p.85)

Years of participative field research have enticed me to delve beyond what is apparent and verbalized. My participation in healing rituals as well as other gender focused research propitiated the underlying cosmology to emerge with an increasing tenacity.

Some recurring epistemic components constitute the background for all meanings of actions and thoughts about gender of the Mesoamericans. From the daily religious rituals, to cooking, weaving, healing, and giving birth, gender is always a key to any profound understanding. I took note and found that, then, my intersecting presence gave another depth to my views of the Mesoamerican people. Trying to understand them on their own terms, I started to grope for appropriate words. In this chapter, I will specially focus on concepts that permeate and structure the ancient data as well as contemporary ethnographic studies and I will propose English approximations of them. These concepts are part of what has been recognized by scholars as *nucelo duro* (hard core, Lopez Austin, 2001,) *pervivencias* (N.Quezada, 1997,) or "historically deep generative roots"(G. Gossen, 1986, p.4.) Anticipating on this chapter`s reflections, I contend that what they have in common is the sense of a duality of fluid polarities kept in balance through a homeorrheic equilibrium.

"Todo esta en par" (all comes in pairs) is according to anthropologist Lourdes Baez the typical response to her inquiries in the Sierra Norte de

Puebla. (2005, personal communication .) "Todo es dualidad" confirms Griselda de la Cruz, a Chontal Indian woman from the southern state of Tabasco, with whom I drank coffee last night. These women take it for granted. Duality is not some elusive concept that sits somewhere in the cosmos. It is reality as they perceive it when they are cured, when they eat and when they pray. "God is a 'pair', a double, God both mother and father, female and male" says Rosa Alba Tepole , Nahua woman from the sierra de Zongolica, in the state of Veracruz. (author's notes.)

Doña Lety Popoca, from the state of Morelos, insists that she can not have dessert, "We have eaten much *frio* (cold) and dessert is again *frio.* She then looks at me and says: "Señora, you should understand what hot and cold mean. It has nothing to do with temperature. We have had too much *frio*, we should now eat something *caliente."* She looks at me with the despair of a teacher in front of a bad behaved and hard headed student. She finds it strange that I, a Mexican, do not grasp this distinction instinctively. She looks at me as if she felt almost impossible to make me understand deeply what she really means.

The hot-cold duality has been an ingrained classificatory principle. This ordering device is applied to the fruits of the earth like food, plants, roots and other edibles. It is also an organizing principle for time. It is used also for periods of the calendar like days and months and years. It contributes to guide the Mesoamericans as to when and how to maintain the required equilibrium to guard them from extremes that bring illness and misfortune. This basic Mesoamerican dual classificatory principle is based on and reflects the gender duality.

Gender Duality

The idea of a divine pair was deeply rooted in Mesoamerican thought. This dual male and female unit was held to have generative and protective powers. It was the ultimate expression of the pervasive concept of duality permeating all reality from daily practices to cosmology. Man and woman, death and life, evil and good, above and below, far and close, light and darkness, cold and hot were some of the dual aspects of one same reality. Not mutually exclusive, not static, not hierarchically organized, - at least not in the modern pyramidal way - all elements and natural phenomena were construed as a balance of dual valences. If the divine pair was the ultimate duality in the cosmic realm, its most pervasive expression in the intermediary human domain was gender

As an analytical tool in theory, gender has often been defined in contrast to sex, as culture to nature (S. Ortner and H. Witehead, 1989.) However, to be relevant to the Mesoamerican universe, gender must be freed from assumptions of fixed dichotomous characteristics grounded on anatomical distinctions, "a commonplace of the modern European intellectual tradition" according to R. Joyce (2000, p. 7.) Gender relations in Mesoamerica are much more than that. They are embedded in cultural settings and shaped by local contexts. Accordingly, gender constructions are closely related to concepts of duality. Gender was nothing less than a root metaphor for everything existing in the cosmos and in society. The following definition of gender brings us closer to an understanding of what it means in Mesoamerica: "Gender categorizations are often based …on what women and men do, rather than on anatomy….The North American *berdache* is now a rather well-known example of a third gender categorization which counters the one-to-one equivalence of binary categories of sex and gender…" (H. Moore, 1994, p.24.)

The sex-gender distinction is an analytical tool that has been useful in forging feminist theory. However, concerning gender relations and ideas of the feminine and masculine in Mesoamerican primary sources, this tool can lead to distortions. Its roots in the mind-body (or spirit/matter) split inherited from the all pervasive classic traditions of thought proves to be more of a hindrance than help in elucidating gender in Mesoamerica. (Marcos, 1996, p.3.) Rosemary Joyce (2000) referring to J. Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), writes: "Judith Butler has argued strongly for the decoupling of gender from the 'natural' body." In her archaeological Mesoamerican studies, Joyce confirms that gender is defined by what people do, thus a performance. She insists that, "as performance, gender is a way of being in the world" (p. 7.)

If we now turn to the primary sources and to the archaeological evidences in search of an "epochal" concept of gender, we find that it is inseparable from the following characteristics of the ancestral Mesoamerican duality:

-mutual openness of categories

-fluidity between poles

-absence of hierarchical stratification between these poles.

Hence a Gender Theory true to Mesoamerican sources must, of course, be open, fluid and non-stratified if it is to embrace the distinctive fluidity and mobility of Mesoamerican pairs of opposites. Contrary to the mutually exclusive categories inherited from the classical tradition, the sense of feminine-masculine that emerges from the sources has the same quality as does the cosmic balance, a quality that I will call "homeorrheic" rather than "homeosatatic. A binary order of mutually exclusive categories such as the dichotomies of culture vs. nature, public vs. private are in themselves products

of an epistemology constrained by the conventional philosophical training (G. Lloyd, 1993, p107-109.)

If we ascribe the term "Mesoamerican gender categories" to the concepts of feminine and masculine emerging from Mesoamerican sources, we will have to define them as indeed opposite, but also fluid, open, in an unceasingly shifting balance, making and remaking themselves without ever reaching any fixed hierarchical stratification.

Gender, neither immutable nor completely unstable, permeated every aspect of Mesoamerican life. It was the primordial dynamic polar ordering that blended feminine and masculine valences in ever changing degrees and manifested itself in religion as well as in everyday life (G. Gossen 1986, p. 6). As the original feminine-masculine dual unity, it was fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, its (re)generation, and sustenance. The combination of feminine and masculine in one bi-polar principle is a recurring feature in Mesoamerican thinking. It is this principle, both singular and dual, that is manifested by representations of gods in pairs.

Most Mesoamerican deities were pairs of gods and goddesses, beginning with *Ometeotl*, the supreme creator whose name means "double god" or dual divinity. Dwelling in *Omeyocan*, beyond the thirteen heavens, *Ometeotl* was thought of as a pair whose feminine and masculine poles were, respectively, *Omecihuatl* and *Ometecutli*, the Lady and the Lord of Duality. Born of this supreme pair, other dual deities, in their turn, incarnated natural phenomena. (Andrews and Hassig, 1984, p. 14)

With other specialists on Mesoamerica (Kirchoff, 1968) A. Lopez Austin explains that the cultures of Mesoamerica, "…view the world ordered and put in motion by the same divine laws, adore the same gods under different names" (Lopez Austin) Thus, the concept of "dual oneness" is found

in the entire Mesoamerican region. Mayanists, for their part, speak in the same terms of *Itzam Na* and his partner *Ix Chebel Yax* (Thompson, 1975.) Las Casas (1967,[1552])mentions the pair, *Izona* and his wife; and Diego de Landa (1986 [1574]) refers to *Itzam Na* and *Ixchel* as the god and goddess of medicine. For the inhabitants of the Michoacan area, the creating pair was constituted by the union of *Curicuauert* and *Cuerauahperi*. Cipactli, the mythic monster that was lord of the earth, was male and female.

Divine (Primordial) Gender

A brief, unelaborated manuscript from the sixteenth century attributed by Angel Garibay (1973) to Fray Andres de Olmos [1533] already records this concept of duality. It is precisely its unelaborated quality that marks this work by one of the first Christian chroniclers as one of the least altered primary sources. This early manuscript, the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*, depicts a mythical universe in which the pervading divine dual unity unfolded in almost endless dual multiplicities.

For gods as for humans, there was no masculine without a feminine. "A Nahua myth in the *Leyenda de los soles*," comments C. Klein, citing J. Bierhorst's translation to English (J. Bierhorst 1992, p. 603, n. 18):

relates that the god Quetzalcoatl found the bones of the previous inhabitants of the earth neatly laid out in two piles in the underworld; one pile contained the bones of women, the other of men. He wrapped them up to take them back to earth but, on the way, fell into a pit and spilled them. Quails nibbled the bones before the god gathered them up, rewrapped them, and took them to the goddess Cihuacoatl / Quilaztli, with whose help he then produced

from them the first humans...” (C. Klein, 2001, p. 237.)[29]

This myth accounts for the observable reality of the fluidity and fusion of masculine and feminine in the human realm as well as in the cosmos at large.

Both genders fused, for example, in Coatlicue, the serpent-skirted Aztec goddess (Fernandez, 1959.*)* In contrast, Tlaloc, the rain deity, as it is pictured in the Tepantitla mural of Teotihuacan, has no specifically female or male traits. (Nash and Leacock, 1982.) Feminine and masculine attributes merged in Tlazolteotl, the deity associated with birth and ‘that which is cast off’ (Karttunen, 1988; Heyden, 1977.) Among the explicitly dual divinities we find: *Mictlantecuhtli-Mictecacihuatl,* Lord and Lady of *Mictlan* (land of the dead); *Tlaloc-Chalchiuhticue*, Lord and Lady of the waters; *Quetzalcoatl-Cihuacoatl*, feathered serpent and female serpent; *Tezcatlipoca-Tezcatlanextia*, mirror that obscures things and mirror that makes them brilliant. With slight variances, all other Mesoamerican peoples constructed their pantheon around dual gods-goddesses. Among the Zapotecs, the supreme dual god was *Pitao Cozaana-Pitao Cochaana.* He-she was also called *Pije-Tao*, and was, as such, the deity of time.[30]

The gods-goddesses possessed few attributes that were exclusively and unambiguously theirs. Although scholars have attempted to structure the various gods-goddesses of the Mesoamerican pantheon into clear orderings (A. Caso, 1968; H. B. Nicholson, 1971) with evolutionary or theogonic

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[29] Bones symbolized for the Nahuas not only death but life and fertility. Life and death are in a dialectical (dual) relationship. Earth was both a tomb and an uterus. Lopez Austin reports the belief that semen originated in bone marrow (Lopez Austin 1988). Behaving morally required following the guidelines of the ancestors.

[30] In this book, I respected the Nahuatl orthography of the sources. Alphabetization of Nahuatl terms has led to many variations in the spelling of one same word.

approaches, it is virtually impossible to portray them as discrete, non overlapping categories. The gods did not have fixed unitary meaning (E. Hunt, 1977, p.55)

According to an ancient myth, the creators had a fight during which they broke dishes, and from every shard that hit the ground a new dual divinity sprang up. While some Mexicanists have inferred that this legend was used to explain the multiplicity of gods, it mainly illustrates how the prime duality in its turn engenders dualities. (A. Garibay, 1973, p. 25.)

Life/death is another example of the duality that pervades the Mesoamerican cosmos. That life and death are but two aspects of the same dual reality is dramatically expressed by a type of figurine from *Tlatilco* with a human head that is half living face and half skull. Or, to turn to the cosmos, the sun and moon are regarded as constituting a dynamic masculine-feminine complementarity (Baez-Jorge, 1988.) Likewise, during the ritual bathing of newborns, feminine and masculine waters were invoked (Sahagún,1989.) Cosmic duality is also reflected in everyday life: corn, for example, was in turn feminine (*Xilonen-Chicomeocoatl*) and masculine (*Cinteotl-Itztlacoliuhqui*.)

Division and Measure of Space and Time

The earth was conceived as divided in four great quadrants of space whose common point was the center or *navel* of the earth. From this point, the four quadrants extend out to the horizon, the meeting place of the heavens and the surrounding celestial water (*ilhuica-atl.*) Above and below the horizontal world (*cem-a-nahuac)* are thirteen heavens and nine underworlds. Just as space was structured in quadrant and polar pairs, so was time itself. That duality, the essential ordering force of the cosmos, was reflected in the

ordering of time is interestingly illustrated by the fact that time was kept by two calendars. One was a ritual calendar of 260 days (13 x 20) which some regard as linked to the human gestation cycle (Furst, 1986, p.69), while the other was an agricultural calendar of 360 days (18 x 20) (Olmos ,1973 [1544], p. 29-31.) Five days were added at the end of the year to adjust it to the astronomical calendar.

> "…Mexican cosmological thinking does not radically distinguish space and time; it particularly avoids to conceive space as a neutral and homogenous medium, independent of the employing of duration. On the contrary, it moves within heterogeneous and singular *milieus*, whose peculiar characteristics follow one another in a cyclical way, according to a given rhythm. For this way of thinking, there is not one space and one time , but *spimes* encompassing all natural phenomena as well as human actions pregnant with the qualities proper to every place and instant….(J. Soustelle 1955, p. 85.)

Oratory and Literary Devices

Even the arts of poetry and oratory had to reflect the dual makeup of the universe. Verses were repeated twice with minimal but significant changes.

"Among the most frequent stylistic procedures, in Aztec poetry is *parallelism.* It is a repetition of two ideas and /or two expressions of sentiment." *Difrasismo*, is the yuxtaposition of two metaphors or two parallel phrases in Aztec oratory and poetic traditions. Sometimes a thought will be complemented or emphasized through the use of different dual metaphors which arouse the same intuitive feeling, or two phrases will present the same idea in opposite form (M.Leon Portilla, 1969, p.76.) This rhetorical device has been also studied by Angel Maria Garibay in his extensive review of

Nahuatl literature and poetry.(2000,[1954]) as well as by Thelma Sullivan, (1983.) In the metaphoric realm “a skirt and a shirt”, for instance, meant a woman in her carnal aspect.

We will see, in the narratives quoted in Chapter 5, with extensive references to the chants of the healer Maria Sabina, in Chapter 7 on erotic poetry, and in Chapter 8 citing the ancient moral discourses, how these stylistic procedures got incarnated in language by means of oratory devices embedded in a cosmological frame. Such poetic devices permeate until today the contemporary discourses of politically active indigenous women (Marcos, 1997.)

Another dual device, says Leòn Portilla, “consists of uniting two words which also complement each other…” Some examples are “flower and song” which metaphorically means poetry…, “seat and matt” which suggests the idea of authority (p. 77.) Epic singers
also alternated pairs of verses whose order varied but were always sung in sets of two. These dual couplets cannot be separated from each other without loss of meaning.

Among others, Alfredo Lopez Austin stands out for his perception that Mesoamerican thought was *totally* permeated by dualities (Lopez Austin 1988.)[31] Thelma Sullivan echoes this understanding when she speaks of "redundant pairs" as an oratorical and narrative device (T.Sullivan 1986.)

The Specificity of Mesoamerican Duality

[31] This expression by Lopez Austin, 1984, seems to be echoed by Lauretis, Teresa de, “Introduction: The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy” in Milan Woman´s Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A theory of Social Symbolic* Practice, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p.4: “The question then, for the feminist philosopher is how to rethink sexual difference within a dual conceptualization of being 'an absolute dual' in which both being woman and being man would be primary -- as 'being there from the beginning' in both woman and man." Introduction, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Several authors have attempted to define the ever present and elusive concept of Mesoamerican duality. For example, both Frances Karttunen and Gary Gossen define it as dynamic. To the polar ordering of opposites, other scholars add *complementarity* that gives duality a certain 'reversibility' of terms and gives movement to the concept (A. Lopez Austin, 1988)

Dennis Tedlock on his part defines Mesoamerican duality as "…complementary rather than oppositional, contemporaneous, rather than sequential" (1985.) On another register, Cecilia Klein, affirms that "[g]ender duality refers to entities who simultaneously incorporate within themselves both a wholly male and wholly female aspect" (2001, p. 186.) Duality is thus, a paradoxical and elusive interpenetration of masculine and feminine. Still debatable, and to a certain point, in words of Marjorie Garber, "non apprehensible", [this concept] "introduces an epistemological crisis by destabilizing and thus challenging the inevitability of bipolar gender categories." (cited by C.Klein, 2001,p.190 emphasis mine.) This is one of the most characteristic and distinctive Mesoamerican 'philosophical tenets', that sets Mesoamerican thought decisively apart from philosophical European traditions in which most scholars have been trained.

"[Nahuas]…did not see sex and gender as inherently bipolar and necessarily biologically determined. Rather both sex and gender could be determined socially and supernaturally"(C. Klein, 2001, p.184.)

Reading *La Pensée Cosmologique des Anciens Mexicains,* the pioneering work of French anthropologist Jacques Soustelle (1955), I find someone who was able to express the essence of Mesoamerican cosmological thought.

> Thus [in] Mexican cosmological thought…what characterizes [it] is precisely the connecting of traditionally associated images. The world is a system of symbols that mutually reflect each other… Colors, times,

> oriented spaces, celestial bodies, gods, historical phenomena, [gender] are in correspondence. Rather than "long chains of reason" [what we have] is an implicit and reciprocal imbrication of all in all, in every instant. (p. 9.)

Duality and the idea of equilibrium

Duality in the Mesoamerican cosmovision was not fixed or static, but fluid and continuously changing. This fluidity is another core characteristic of Nahua thought. Deities, people, plants and other elements in nature as well as space and time all had a gendered identity that shifted constantly along a continuum. Fluidity is thus a further characteristic that affects the meanings of gender and other dualities by allowing a continuous shifting from one pole to the other. Thus, femininity is always in transit to masculinity and vice-versa. No duality of the Mesoamerican cosmovision was fixed and static; all were fluid and ever changing.

Yet, the idea of duality was enhanced by still another concept, no less pervasive, that of *equilibrium* or *balance*. Rather than the static repose of two equal weights or masses, it can be conceived as a "force" that constantly modifies the relation between dual and/or polar pairs. Like duality itself, equilibrium or balance not only permeated relations between men and women, but also relations among deities, deities and humans, and elements of nature. Of equilibrium, more is known by its effects than by its nature: it determined and modified the concept of duality. Besides, it was the condition for the preservation of the cosmos (Lopez Austin, 1984, p.105; Burckhart, 1989, p.79.) The existence of the Mesoamericans was thus the constant pursuit of an ever to be regained balance that did not call for a pragmatic compromise between static opposites, but rather for a dynamic equilibrium, always in the making, between shifting poles. For example, the image for the path to walk in

life was conceived as a "ridge between abysses" (W.Gingerich, 1988, p.521.) This implied keeping a balance not only between right and left but also between up and down. This search of a never definitely fixed point of balance was an absolute cosmic necessity if a human world was to be maintained at the edge of threatening chaos.

Thus, Mesoamerican duality cannot be a binary ordering of "static" poles such as appears implicit in some gender theory. The idea of "balance" can best be understood as an "agent" that constantly modifies the terms of dualities and thereby bestows a singular quality on the opposite and complementary pairs. It endows duality with flexibility or plasticity and makes it flow, impeding stratification. This fluidity of Mesoamerican equilibrium - reflected by the narrative style in which it is expressed - is only understandable as a reflection of oral thought, filtered through the hybrid *ora-transcribed* character of the texts through which it is accessible to us. We will revisit in more depth the characteristics of oral thought and traditions in the last chapter of this book.

In the already quoted *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* (A. Garibay, 1973,) we find the following account of the separation of heaven and earth: "When the four deities saw the sky falling on the earth, they ordered four paths be made from the center of the earth so they could enter. . ".(p.32) Lopez Austin decodes the myth and adds:

> (T)he four pillars which support the heavens, separating them from the earth's surface. . . (are) described as four trees through which flow currents of influences from the gods of heaven and the underworld toward the center (1984a, p.104.)

Gender fluidity

Essential to the symbolic construction of this universe, fluidity was the characteristic that fostered the constant contact among the thirteen heavens, the four intermediate earthly levels, and the nine levels of the underworld.

Fundamental to the maintenance of the cosmos, *fluid equilibrium* is incompatible with closed, immutable, unitary categories. An equilibrium that is always reestablishing itself within a universe in movement also keeps all other possible points of balance in motion. In a similar way, the categories of feminine and masculine were open and changing, as Lopez Austin seems to suggest when he affirms that there was not a being exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine but rather different nuances of combinations.(1988).

Shifting continuously, gender categories in Mesoamerican thought were thus in fluid equilibrium. The "critical point" of balance had to be found in continual movement: it redefined itself moment to moment, and was subject to the change and flux of the entire cosmos. Likewise, what was feminine and masculine oscillated, continuously reconstituting and redefining itself. In a state of permanent movement and continuous readjustment between the poles, neither pole could dominate or prevail over the other except for an instant. A sometimes overwhelming, sometimes imperceptible gendered "charge" or "load" affected all beings (Lopez Austin 1984a) whether rocks, plants, animals or people. Everything was feminine or masculine and, frequently, both simultaneously in different gradations that perpetually changed and shifted (C.Klein).[32]

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[32] Cecilia Klein (ed.), *Gender in pre-Hispanic America*, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001 gives rich and detailed references to what she defines as "gender ambiguity". These references, which include primary sources as well as monographs on contemporary Mesoamerican practices, beautifully exemplify the characteristics of what I call here "gender fluidity." See especially her pp.183-254. However, her interpretations are not always coincident with mine. If the motility and fluidity of Mesoamerican gender are forgrounded, an ex-post characterization of gender as ambiguous "uncertain, unpredictable or incomplete" seems superfluous.

Some Contrast between Mesoamerican and classical Greek concepts of Balance

To understand how equilibrium affects duality, we can begin by acknowledging how this concept differs from and is foreign to most European intellectual traditions of thought. I will start with a consideration of Greek classical thinking in order to see what Mesoamerican thought is not, then move to an examination of oral traditions because the sources examined here are essentially the reflections of an oral culture, and finally, I will discuss metaphor, one of the characteristics of oral traditions and a key element in Nahua thought.

The Nahua and more generally Mesoamerican concept of equilibrium is of a different order than the "golden mean" said to be inherited from Greek thought. In the discussion of the Mesoamerican concept of equilibrium by some Mesoamericanists, we repeatedly find comments on precepts for living based on this notion of dynamic balance that contrast it with the Greek notion of the middle way. Gingerich, for example, writes, in relation to the Nahuatl metaphor used to express a proper life that appears in the *ilamatlatolli* (discourses of the wise old women) that:

> [t]he doctrine of the middle way, therefore, was a central principle in the formulation and interpretation of this ethic. . . this middle way definitively is not the Aristotelian golden mean. This concept [is] profoundly indigenous" (Gingerich 1988, p.522).

The *meden agan* , the Apollonian "nothing in excess" was, like the Delphic "know thyself", part of the philosophical baggage of personal virtue, as much public as private (L. Martin 1989.) The "golden mean" of Antiquity is an inherent part of the western cultural heritage. In its successive

reinterpretations by European societies, the "golden mean" became a *stasis* or fixed point of balance, that is, an intermediary hub between two opposing fixed positions. Accordingly, equilibrium was defined as homeostasis.

Departure from the "golden mean" in classical thought meant a lack of personal virtue on the part of the transgressor and went against proper behavior within the limits set by *Nemesis*. To stray from the golden mean did not necessarily pose a danger to the structure and survival of the entire cosmos as it did in Mesoamerica. Among those who have noted this sense of radical urgency that characterizes the Nahua collective responsibility for achieving a vital, fluid and mobile equilibrium is Louise Burckhart: "The Nahuas had a sense of collective responsibility… and they believed that human actions could provoke a final cataclysm" (1989, p.79.) This Nahua "middle road," even though it was also an expression of personal virtue, was above all the fulfillment of a requirement for cosmic survival and, thereby necessarily, for participation in the sustenance of the universe.

In reference again to the classical conceptual world, we could say that more than a kind of *homeostasis,* Nahuatl equilibrium could be called a *"homeorrhesis"* (from *rheoo,* to flow) or balance of conjunctions in flux. Being situated between opposite poles implied, for the Nahuas, the necessity of working or "negotiating" constantly with the movement and plasticity of opposites as these transformed themselves continuously within an endless flow.

To amend the classical *stasis* by the dialectics of the Hegelian tradition would likewise be inappropriate. The Nahuatl *"homeorrheic"* equilibrium is not a balance achieved by a "synthesis" between a "thesis" and an "antithesis," nor is it a pragmatic compromise between irreducible opposites. More exactly, it is a state of extreme dynamic tension, such as when two

forces meet without resolution and veer precariously toward the edge of chaos. Barbara Myerhoff comes close to the concept of Nahuatl *homeorrhesis* when she defines the notion of balance as a non-static condition gained by the resolution of opposites (1976,p102.)[33]

From birth, the Nahua individual was defined in terms of balance: "... the Nahuatl concept defines the individual as a product of a particular alchemy of good and bad characteristics" (W. Gingerich, 1988, p.532.) The condition of a child born among the Aztecs is described as neither totally deficient nor totally beneficent, not totally free and independent, nor totally determined. ".. .the new-born was endowed with its deserts and merits -- *in iilhuil in imahceual"* (Ibid. Gingerich, p. 526.) The child was born with his/her own unique combination of moral qualities determining the boundaries within which s/he may influence her/his identity.

Since the equilibrium was fluid, not fixed, it could be modified. If the child was born under an inauspicious sign, there was hope that when the ritual for newborns was performed on a propitious day, its *tonalli* (the body's principal animating force or entity, see Chapter 6) would acquire positive tendencies and inclinations.

> If a harmonic balance was achieved, the individual could obtain great advantages from the inclinations and tendencies defined by the *tonalli;* if not, the tendencies could take the individual toward less beneficial directions and reduce vitality. (Lopez Austin, 1984, p….)

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[33] I had just written this article when I discovered that Louis Dumont describes the categories of Hindu thought in terms of fluid "segmentation" and "openness" of concepts. See Dumont, Louis, *Essais sur I'indvidualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne*. Paris: Seuil, 1983, p. 245: " [As] I was saying to you concerning India, the distinctions are many, fluid and flexible, they run by themselves independently in a web of reduced density; likewise, they are variously accented according to situations, appearing at times in the forefront, at other times almost vanishing in the background. For us, we generally think in black and white, projecting ourselves on a vast field of clear disjunctions (either good or bad) and employing a small number of rigid, thick frontiers that define solid entities." (Author's translations)

Because balance - as equilibrium in motion - is one of the most important keys to Mesoamerican thought along with the concept of duality, it was important to illustrate here its specific nature by further describing what it isn't. In sharp contrast to the practices associated with what Foucault calls 'the care of the self' of late Antiquity, Mesoamerican balance carried a very particular call. The responsibility of keeping equilibrium required that every individual in every circumstance had to constantly seek the central hub of the cosmos and coordinate him or herself in relation to it. To sustain this balance is to combine and recombine opposites. This implies never negating the opposite but rather advancing toward it, embracing it in the attempt to find the fluctuating balance.

The principle of the excluded third -- the *tertium non datur* of formal classical logic – definitively has no place in the Nahuatl universe. In this realm of thought, opposites are integrated: cold and hot, night and day, sun and moon, sacred and profane, feminine and masculine. "The extremes, although they did not have to be completely avoided, did have to be offset one with the other" (Burckhart 1989: 130-131.) This fluid position summed up the equilibrium of the cosmos. The fusion/tension of contraries proper to the Mesoamerican cosmos was the measure and means to achieving the fundamental, primordial equilibrium or any particular local balance.

Cosmic and moral equilibrium

The collective responsibility of not only sustaining balance but also participating in its achievement produced a very particular set of moral codes. The best expression of these moral codes is found in the ***huehuetlatolli*** and

ilamatlatoll. (see Chapter 8.) Many Mexicanists regard Book VI of the *Florentine Codex, Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España,* of Sahagún as a sort of *summa* of Nahuatl thought. Like none other, this text probes deeply into the beliefs and rules of Aztec society. The rhetorical admonitions of the *Florentine Codex* are explicitly about the type of equilibrium required in the conduct of women and men:

> . . . (D)o not walk hurriedly nor slowly. . . because walking slowly is a sign of pompousness and walking quickly shows restlessness and little sense.
>
> Walk moderately. . . Do not walk with your head lowered or your body slouched,
>
> but also do not carry your head overly high and upright because this is a sign of bad upbringing. (Sahagún, 1989, p. 371.)
>
> . . . (Y)our garments (should) be modest, suitable. Do not dress strangely, nor extravagantly, nor eccentrically. . . .Nor is it appropriate that your garments be ugly, dirty or torn. . . (Ibid.)
>
> When you speak, do not speak rapidly. . . do not raise your voice nor speak too softly. . . Don't use a thin, high voice in speaking and greeting others, do not speak through your nose, but let your voice be normal (Ibid., p. 383.)

In these recommendations, we can appreciate the Nahua requirement of equilibrium incarnated in daily life, in relations between genders, and bodily attitudes. ”If a harmonious balance is established, the individual can derive great benefit from the inclinations and tendencies that the *tonalli* had given. .

." (Lopez Austin, 1984, p. 206)

Non-Hierarchical Organization

In a cosmos so constructed, there would be little space for the pyramid-like "hierarchical" ordering and stratification that characterizes classical philosophical traditions. In the various Nahua narratives, whether we look at the *ilamatlatolli* (discourses of the wise old women), the *huehuetlatolli (*speeches of the wise old men) or review primary sources that speak of pairs of deities, we can never infer any categorizing of one pole as "superior" to the other. The unfolding of dualities manifests itself on all levels of heaven, earth and below the earth as well as the four corners of the universe. This fluid duality permeated the entire cosmos, leaving its imprint on every object, situation, deity, and body.

Within all this flux of metaphorical dualities, divine and corporeal, the only essential configuration was the mutual necessity to interconnect and interrelate. It was the missionaries who, in their need to find familiar elements in the world so "other" that they encountered, called the upper and lower levels of the Nahuatl universe "heaven" and "hell" respectively. Yet Tlalocan, a place filled with birds and streams where those who died by drowning were privileged to go, was located in the eastern part of the Nahuatl underworld. Here was a place of election and privilege not located up in heaven (Lopez Austin, 1994).[34]

Not even in good and evil, nor between the divine and earthly, nor death

[34] Lopez Austin, Alfredo, *Tamoanchan y Tlalocan*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1994, does a very careful re-translation and re-interpretation of the several original primary sources in Nahuatl. He traces the origins of the misconceptions of these two sacred places to the evangelization enterprise. These were the two sacred places that early missionaries associated respectively with the catholic concepts of heaven and the original paradise. The early missionaries, in their efforts to find equivalents in the Nahua imagery, distorted the information collected in their chronicles.

and life did hierarchical values stratified into superior and inferior exist. Life, for example, is born from death:

> . . . Life and death: interplayed on Great Mother Earth, forming a cycle of complementary opposites: life carried within it the seed of death; but without death rebirth was impossible because death was the pregnancy from which life emerged (Lopez Austin, 1984. p.103.)

Similarly, Lopez Austin mentions that the decaying semen in the womb gave place to new life . Divine forces dwelt in the underworlds ("hell") and the Flower Wars -- a form of destruction -- kept alive not only their divinities but the entire universe. "Dynamic" as some authors call it (Gossen, 1986), or "complementary" according to others (Lopez Austin, 1988,) this dual ordering is specific to Mesoamerican thought and is characterized by the absence of mutually exclusive, closed categories. Not only do the deities participate in the duality that flows between opposite poles such as good and evil, but all entities play a dual function, shifting between aggressor and benefactor. As Alfredo Lopez Austin states, that from the four pillars of the cosmos at the four comers came the heavenly waters and the beneficial and destructive winds (Lopez Austin, 1984, p. 59).

Mesoamerican cosmology implied a concept of duality that was not fixed nor static but constantly transforming itself. Hierarchies between poles do not seem to exist either. An essential ingredient of Nahua thought, this motility gave its impulse to everything. Divinities, objects, time and space with its five directions, had gender ascription: they were feminine or masculine in proportions which continually modified themselves.

Gender permeating all areas of life was itself the movement that

engendered and transformed all identity. In the universe, feminine and masculine attributes weave together in the generation of fluid, non-fixed identities. The shifting balance of opposing forces that made up the universe, from society to the body itself -- as its reflection and image -- should be understood as a manifestation of this interpenetration of genders. From the cosmos to the individual body, dual gender is revealed as the fundamental metaphor of Mesoamerican thought.

Earth as Sacred and as a Persona

> My daughter. .. Here in this world we walk along a very high, narrow and dangerous path like a very high hill with a narrow path along the top of it, and on both sides it is endlessly deep.
> (Florentine Codex 1577)

For Mesoamerican peoples the earth is respected as soil. The soil is where we stand. Today the idea that we have of the earth is informed by satellite photography: the astronomer's blue planet, lost in the dark immensity of space. It is hardly the soil that our feet no longer touch. On the contrary, like all pedestrian peoples, Mesoamericans drew their world view from their embeddedness in the soil of their particular place. The layer of soil that supports all life on earth was regarded by them as living. This view is in sharp contrast to the contemporary view of the earth in which that top life-supporting layer is subject to exploitation and destruction.

One day a gardener from a Nahuatl-speaking region was working in my garden.

I told him to throw the dirt from a planter into the garbage bin. He answered with a shocked but polite, "No, no, Señora, soil shouldn't be treated like garbage." Another time, an indigenous woman helping me at home heard me complaining about the dirt and dust blowing into the house. She chastised me saying, "Señora, you shouldn't speak like that of dust, because it is soil and soil is our mother, *la madre tierra,* who nurtures us."

The implicit ecological dimensions associated with Mesoamerican views of the earth and soil were brought home to me by these comments. What my interlocutors
were reacting to was my acquired contemporary concept of soil as inert matter that can be discarded like refuse or complained about like an intrusive pollutant.

In nearly all agrarian civilization the earth is sacred. Exactly how this sacredness is expressed and what forms it takes vary from one particular location to another. The
unique features of the sacrificial sacredness of the Nahuas or Aztecs arise from their
cosmovision. Many elements of the Mesoamerican concept of the cosmos were often expressed in metaphor, a dominant mode of expression in Aztec culture.

Mesoamerican Cosmovision

Mesoamerican concepts and understandings of the earth differ radically from standard modern perceptions. Primary sources speak of the earth as a disk floating on water, a rabbit, an iguana or *Cipactli*, an alligator with a ridged back.

Leon-Portilla writes:

> The surface of the earth is a great disk situated in the center of the universe and extending horizontally and vertically. Encircling the earth like a ring is an immense body of water *(teo-atl*, divine water), which makes the world *cem-a-nahuac,* "that-which-is-entirely-surrounded-by-water " (León Portilla, 1990, p. 48.)

In anthropomorphic representations, the earth was a body with eyes, mouth, hair and a navel. Earth itself is simultaneously womb, mouth and bowels. Body imagery was transferred to the multiple levels of the cosmos. The center of the earth was its navel, the trees and flowers its hair. Grass was its skin. Wells, springs and caves were its eyes.
Rivers were its mouth and its nose was the origin of mountains and valleys.

The Earth was also a devouring monster. According to Nahuatl cosmology, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca* brought *Tlaltecuhtli* (lord of the earth, other name for *Cipactli*, the alligator) down from the heavens. *Tlaltecuhtli* was a mythic male-female monster that snapped and bit like a savage beast. The two gods divided *Tlaltecuhtli*, thus separating sky from earth (Y.Gonzalez Torres,1991, p. 169, 170.)

In ancient Mexico, the horizontal directions of space were emphasized much more than the vertical, contrary to the vision of the sixteenth century missionaries with heaven above and hell below. *Tlalocan* was thus the "paradise" of *Tlaloc*, the God of Rain, and was located to the east, rather than in the heavens. In contemporary christianized Nahuatl versions, "hell" is a cave in the forest. These examples indicate the strength of the horizontal metaphor in relation to the vertical, Christian one. Louise Burckhart speaks of "periphery and center" (L. Burkhart, 1989, p.67.) As we have seen in the previous chapter, vertically, above and below the horizontal world (*cem-a-nahuac)* are thirteen upperworlds and nine underworlds. This multi-layered symbolism is implicit in the concept of the four directions of the world:

> The universe is divided into four well-defined directions which, although coinciding with the cardinal points, encompass much more than mere direction; each includes whole quadrant of universal space. The directions are: the East, land of the color red

> and region of light, symbolized by the reed, representing fertility and life; the North, black, region of the dead-a cold and desert area symbolized by flint; the West, region of the color white, the land of woman whose symbol is the house of the sun; and the South, the blue region to the left of the sun, a direction of uncertain character represented by the rabbit, whose nest leap, according to the Nahuas, no one can anticipate.(León Portilla, 1990, p 46-47)

Above the upper worlds is the metaphysical beyond, the region of the gods. Ultimately above all is Omeyocan (the place of *omeyotl*, duality), dwelling place of the dual supreme deity, the originator of the universe. The god and goddess of the underworld were *Micltantecuhtli* and *Mictecacihuatl*.

Rivers, lakes, waterholes, mountain tops, caves, forests and deserts all had gods and goddesses who ruled over them and required rituals. Mountains had a particularly complex role in mythology. Rituals for mountain gods were celebrated throughout the yearly cycle as were those associated with the *cenotes* (underground lakes.) Contemporary Mesoamerican Indians have preserved some of the complexities of these rituals. Among the *Cuicatec*, for example, cave rituals, mountain ceremonies and waterhole rituals are quite important. This has also been observed among Nahua communities of the state of Morelos near Mexico City. (E. Hunt, 1977,p.135; Ana Maria Salazar, 2001, p.3.)

All deities which symbolized aspects of reproduction, birth and death had earthly aspects. Symbols of vegetable or animal deities were earthly too, because the earth was conceptualized as the primordial generating and regenerating principle.

Death was an integral part of these vital forces. The earth had both human and animal characteristics; it was both male and female, living and dead.

Centuries of observing the world and its workings from the macrocosm to the microcosm of the body itself had engendered the Nahua world view, with its distinctive characteristics of duality, fluidity and balance. Yet, bi-polar duality is ubiquitous in all Mesoamerican concepts of the cosmos. For instance, *Cipactli*, the mythic monster that was Lord of the earth , was male and female. It was both dual and singular, for opposites tended to form a complementary unit. Movement characterized the Mesoamerican universe, but fluidity was always in balance.

The urge for balance gave duality plasticity: since the critical point of balance had to be found in continuous movement , it redefined itself moment to moment. Change and flux in the entire cosmos had an impact on the way things here on the Earth were conceptualized. This bi-polar fluid, shifting and yet balanced universe framed the perception of beneficial as well as harmful events and actions, of good as well as evil forces, giving their relations a non-static, non-rigid quality. The duality implicit in all Mesoamerican cosmologies was in fact what gave its impulse to everything: divinities, people, objects, time, and space, with its five directions (Marcos, 1993):

> ... (F)rom the four trees [pillars of the cosmos] the influences of the gods of the upper and lower worlds radiated toward a central point, the fire of destiny and time, transforming everything in existence,…" (A. Lopez Austin, 1988, p.59.)

Metaphors

In the Nahuatl universe, everything was endowed with material, spiritual, temporal and spatial qualities. Consequently, it was a metaphorically

complex and allusorily sophisticated construction (Andrews and Hassig, 1984, p.13-14 .) León Portilla has called the Nahua culture a philosophy and culture of metaphors (1990, p.177-183.) Metaphorical language is found largely in prayers, rhetorical orations, admonitions (*huehuetlatolli),* songs *(cantares),* and incantations *(conjuros).* As the main means of transmission and preservation of an eminently oral tradition, they were often memorized. The visual metaphors in the codices of all Mesoamerican cultures are pictorial representations of their cosmos. Metaphors were cultivated as the highest and most valued means of expression of their vision of the earth and the divine forces that affected it.

Immaterial, non-physical entities were not set off from the material world but

were continuous with it, integrated into a single conception of reality. Only in first approximation can a tentative distinction can be made between "physical" and "ethical" metaphors: while there were special metaphors for the physical conception of the earth and for its position within the cosmos, other metaphors reveal the relationships that the Nahuas maintained with the earth and life on its aurface. As we shall see, the terms *tlalticpac* and *tlalticapacayotl* ("on the earth's surface" and "of the quality of the things on the earth's surface") are closely related to the moral perspective that guided them. .

Moral and Metaphoric Dimensions of Earth

The perspective on the earth is indeed a moral one. The earth is a "slippery" place (L.Burkhart 1989, p.130) and the moral prescription is that one must act very carefully in all circumstances. One must live according to the guidelines established by the ancestors. The earth is not a place of happiness. However, though it is primarily a place of effort and strain:

> . . . so that we would not die of sadness, our lord gave us laughter, sleep and sustenance, our becoming strong, our growing up; and moreover, earthliness (sexuality), in order that people go on being planted (Sahagún, Books VI, p…. .)

The earth was above all a perilous place. The word *tlalticpac* synthesized many of the physical and moral meanings of earth and soil. It is formed by the substantive *tlalli* (earth) and the postpositional suffix *icpac* (on, above). However, its meaning is not just "on earth," but rather "on the point or summit of the earth," referring to a point of equilibrium on its crest and suggesting a narrow path between abysses. One linked oneself with the earth by acts of *tlalticpacayotl*, "earthliness" which included but was not restricted to sexual activity and its moral dimension (L.Burkhart 1989, p.58.)

Ancient chronicles are full of references to the relation between soil and "sexuality" as well as between soil and moral matters. For instance, the grandmothers in the discourses recorded by Sahagún say "our bodies are like a deep abyss." The *huehuetlatolli*, moral precepts that parents ought to transmit to their children, refer to the danger of earthly existence in these words:

> On the earth we walk, we live, on the ridge of a mountain peak sharp as a harpoon blade *chichiquilli.* To one side is ana abyss, to the other side is another abyss. If you go here or if you go there , you will fall, only through the middle can one go,or live.(Sahagun, Transl. byW. Gingerich, 1988,p.522)

An elder giving advice to his son would refer to the wisdom of the ancestors, whose bones are in the soil:

> They used to say, the elders, that on the earth we walk, we live on the ridge of a mountain peak. Here is an abyss, there is an abyss. Wherever you deviate, wherever you go astray, there you will fall, you will plunge into the depths. (Sahagun, Transl. W. Gingerich, 1988,p.522)

"Tripping and stumbling, falling off precipices and into caves or torrents appear over and over again in the sources as metaphors for moral aberration and its result" (L. Burkhart, 1989, p. 61.) Opposing poles should not be avoided completely, but must rather be balanced against each other. Walking on the ridged back of *Cipactli* (earth) implied the moral duty of carefully balancing the extremes to achieve a harmony of tensions. This shifting moral balance was expressed in people's careful and cautious pace on the narrow path everyone had to trace on the corrugated skin of earth's surface. Undoubtedly, the mountainous geography of Mexico provided the ancient Nahuas with the metaphor of the earth as a giant iguana or alligator.

Concepts of the divine

In Mayan religious thinking, gods depended as much on humans as humans depended on gods. All had a shared interest in the maintenance of the universe. Yet, the Aztec world was an animated place that had little room for the concept of an inert physical world ruled by a *deus ex machina.* Nahua deities were neither Aztec society writ large nor ethereal beings touching only tangentially on individual's lives (Andrews and Hassig, 1984, p.14.) A permanent interaction characterized the relations between the Nahuas and their divinities. The sacred domain was not distant; it was a presence that suffused every element of nature, every daily activity, every ceremonial action

and every physical being: flora and fauna, the sun, the moon and the stars, mountains, earth, water, fire were all divine presences. The Aztecs were so enmeshed in the "supernatural" and the "sacred" that the distinction between sacred and profane hardly holds for them.

Sharing divine attributes with the god of duality were other forces, forces of nature, that have been designated in popular thought as "innumerable gods." However, all these gods only embodied the powers that Ometeotl (two-god) had produced, among them the four elements earth, wind, fire, and water (León Portilla, 1990, p. 46.) Each one of them was conceptualized as a dual female-male couple.

Earthly Forces and Earthly Deities

The gods were not "unique solutions" in that they did not have fixed unitary meanings. One god could be conceived of as an aspect of another (Andrews and Hassig, 1984, p.10):

> The religious representation of earth in the symbolism of ancient Mesoamericans embodies some of the most complicated and diversified ideas (E. Hunt , 1977, p.129.)
>
> …earth as a symbol complex was coded and transformed into practically all other mythic and ritual codes, it is impossible to produce a complete list (ibid., p.133.)

Earth, like the images of the gods, manifested a fundamental ambivalence. This ambivalence can be understood as the expression of the duality which pervaded all Mesoamerican constructs. "The earth was both loving and destructive, both nurturing mother and carnivorous monster.

Reflecting ideas both complicated and disquieting, the earth was often represented as a demonic figure (Hunt, 1977, p. 131.) As we have seen, the mythic earth deity, *Cipactli* or *Tlaltecuhtli* was a monster with a ridged back like an iguana, a giant frog or an alligator , a fitting the metaphor for the mountains and the creviced valleys of the earth's surface (Y.Gonzalez Torres, 1991, p.40.)

Tlazolli - dirt, mud, foul matter, soil

The concept of dirt cannot be separated from soil. To the soil we bequest our excrement; our bodies go back to the soil, and to the soil we let fall what is no longer useful.

In the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs, there is a term that covers a whole range of impurities used in moral discourse to connote negativity. It is the word *tlazolli,* formed from the roots *tlalli* (earth, soil) and *zoli* (used, discarded.) In its most literal meaning, it refers to something useless, used up, something that has lost its original order or structure and has been rendered "loose and undifferentiated matter." It broadly denotes any sort of dirt, chaff, straw, twigs, bits of hair or fiber, excrement, muck. What one sweeps up with a broom is *tlazolli* (L.Burkhart, 1989, p .89.)

The *tlazolli* complex drew materials principally from the realms of excretions and decay and associated them, through the processes of moral rhetoric, with the less desirable activities. Yet, since most concepts were ambivalent, the word denoting "filth" also had multiple favorable connotations, for maize grows from mud, from the body of the earth deity, and one linked oneself with the earth by eating cultivated foods like maize. Besides, all acts of tlalticpacayotl (earthliness, as we have seen, often understood as sexual activity) put people metaphorically into contact with

tlazolli. Manure used to fertilize crops is tlazolli (Burkhart 1989). Therefore, most of the substances of the tlazolli semantic field have a fertilizing, creative role.

Tlazolteotl, the goddess of 'filth' and birth giving

Tlazolli was the realm of the deity *Tlazolteotl*, the goddess that ruled sex and sanctioned sexual transgressions. Associated to the sensuous, she was the patroness of dust and filth, as well as of adulterers and promiscuous women. She had the power to induce immoral activity as well as to punish people for it. But she could also remove impurities. In that function, she was called *Tlaelcuani*, (or *Ixcuina*) "eater of foul things," because she cleansed those who submitted to the indigenous confession rite by absorbing their impurities. This rite, as described in the *Florentine Codex,* was conducted by her diviners. *Tlazolteotl-Tlaelcuani* was closely related to the earth-deity complex (Sahagún 1989.) According to Thelma Sullivan:

> (Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina), in her quadruple aspect as the four sisters, is a
>
> metaphor for the generative and regenerative cycle of life. Her fourfold character represents the growth and decline of things. (...) She represents the Mother Goddess concept in its totality. This includes its negative as well as positive aspects (T.Sullivan, 1977, p.30.)

Earth's womb

Caves were metaphorically referred to as the earth's womb. Accordingly, the *temazcal*, Mexican "sweat bath," shaped like a cave, is still symbolic of the womb of Mother Earth. Earthquakes were thought of in the

same terms as uterine contractions: disorderly movements that could create, but could also kill. The duality in the conception of a life-giving, life-destroying deity is evident here.

Tonantzin and *Monantzin*, "Our Mother" and "Your Mother" respectively, are titles of the Mother Goddess. They name refer to the earth as the Great Womb. One incantation says, "Come here, you, my mother, Princess Earth" (H. Ruiz de Alarcón, in Andrews and Hassig, 1984, p.207.) Symbolism of the earth's interior, the mythical cave house-uterus still persists among contemporary Mayas in Zinacantan, Chiapas (Hunt 1977, p. 134.)[35]

Through this overview of the ancient Nahua concepts of the earth and divinity, especially as expressed in metaphors and attitudes concerning morality, we have come in contact with a distinct cosmovision. What bearing might it have on our contemporary ecological concerns? Natural phenomena elicited awe in the Aztec mind. Physical beings were regarded as infused with the divine. Reciprocity and understanding for other life forms are evident. This precludes abuse and exploitation of nature and natural resources.

Their entire belief system fostered and sustained a measured, non-exploitative use of the earth's resources. Aztec creation myths and stories did not give them the role of dominating nature nor were they created as the species that ruled over all life forms.

Rather, they were interconnected not only with "nature" in the form of flora and fauna and with natural phenomena like wind and rain, but with the divinities that represented the entire natural domain.

This connectedness, however, could also prove fearful. The duality that pervades the Mesoamerican concept of the universe included both the positive

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[35] These observations, that come from my own field data, are corroborated by Eva Hunt (1977, pp. 134, 5).

Ana Maria Salazar reports similar contemporary rituals in the area of Tepoztlan, Morelos,(2001).

and negative aspects of nature, the creative as well as the destructive, the nurturing and the annihilating forces.

The metaphors for earth and nature were never romantic. We cannot conceive of the Nahuas, and this holds true for contemporary Indians, "taking a stroll in nature." When they visit mountains and caves, it is to influence or placate the deities that live there. Because they have not lost their roots in nature, they still regard themselves as an integral part of earth. There is no sentimentality in their perception of the earth. Earth is a great nourishing deity and an unpredictable, fearsome monster: in all cases, it is necessary to move about on the earth with care.

In the moral domain, the *huehuetlatolli* speak often of the extreme care to be used walking on *Cipactli*'s slippery back with an abyss on each side. Behavior had to be such that balance was preserved -- and this was a collective obligation. For Mesoamericans, appropriate behavior while living one's life and enjoying the pleasures of earth was necessary to maintain the cosmic order.

Collectivity Forged by Oral Transmission: A Hermeneutics

> The effects of oral states of consciousness are bizarre to the literal mind and they can invite elaborate explanations which may turn out to be needless. (W. Ong)

An interesting fact is that the first use of the term "religion" to describe Indigenous forms of worship is to be found in the writings of the Spanish friars who came to Mesoamerica. J. Z. Smith (p. 269-270) cites nobody less than the Conquistador Hernan Cortez and the letters he wrote to the Emperor in1520, as well as the learned Jesuit Joseph de Acosta, who, between 1590 and 1604, wrote a *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*. Although the conquerors and the friars denounced the natives' practices that they encountered as "pagan," they were nonetheless able to recognize a religion – or religions - in the complex social organizations and highly elaborated rituals that they encountered in the "New World." It remains that, in most contacts with the inhabitants of Asia, Africa or America, the European colonizers first refused to grant the status of religion to the native's practices and beliefs (ibid., p.269.)

Indigenous religious traditions are mainly oral traditions. Texts, even if they exist, are not at the core of their belief structure. If we try to systematize the religions that are transmitted through oral traditions with the methods used for systematizing religions rooted in textual traditions, we will distort and misinterpret them. Historical and textual methods presuppose a fixed narrative as a basis for analysis. Oral traditions are fluid, flexible and malleable. The subtle shifting and changing of words, metaphors and meanings easily slip

through the "text" cast by historical and textual analysis. Different, in part new, methods are needed to capture a tradition that is in continuous change. As an unwritten code of regulations, tradition is the transmission of beliefs, rules, customs and rituals by word of mouth, and has, nonetheless a regulating power that is often more persuasive than written law and texts.

Another methodological issue raised by the study of indigenous religion, which I will not engage now, is the question of the "hybridization" of indigenous and colonizing religions in new oral traditions. Most indigenous religions show a great capacity to take on influences of the colonizing religions and to incorporate them into their own oral structures, thereby appropriating and transforming meanings that had been stabilized by texts.

Gender Women and Orality

A central focus in the study of Mesoamerican indigenous religions is the way a gender configuration based on duality plays out in the performance and preservation of oral religious traditions. Gender, as I have argued, needs to be conceptualized in terms of a fluid continuum of identities rather than polarized in a fixed and dichotomous way (see above.) Meticulously remembered, religious narratives are at the heart of indigenous religious traditions whose primary mode of expression is oral. Yet, it is especially in religions that depend on oral traditions, that women play a prominent role, presiding over rituals, preserving, and transmitting tradition. Women shape narratives, lead rituals of rhythmic oral invocations, elaborate and transmit myths using traditional formulae. They are often very visible within these religious contexts.

Women are central to the processes not only of sustaining but also of

creating and recreating indigenous religious traditions. Their contributions are so crucial that, without them, we could only have a partial and thus, distorted access to these traditions. Diane Bell states that a "woman-centered ethnography reveals that certain conducts of women, which appear anomalous if mapped with male as ego, are in fact a consistent set of religious practices"(1991, p 37.) In her *Daughters of the Dreaming*, she reminds us that when male researchers interview male practitioners, the religious world presided over by women disappears. The gender divide is often so pervasive that it renders the "other half" invisible (D. Bell, 1983, p. 18-33.) In the hands of the women, myths, symbols and rituals are especially malleable. Women shape and reshape oral traditions according to the needs of their communities. Any effort to reframe the meaning of religion for indigenous world views must include a reassessment of women's contributions. The gender relations that shape such religious universes have not yet been fully explored.

The vital link between the preservation of religious traditions and the assertion of women's authority is particularly well illustrated by the myth of *Changing Woman*, a multivocal symbol for mother earth common to several native nations of North America. As M.A. Jaimes Guerrero explains, "[t]his *creatrix* is not only about present day change in the fluctuating and transitional times for indigenous peoples and others, she is also about the restoration and renewal of Native women's rightful authority and leadership" (M.A. Jaimes Guerrero, 2000, p.38-39.) Studies focused on indigenous women provide a distinctive perspective on the way the oral and symbolic world of religious beliefs organizes the social and has an impact on the political world.

Religious Traditions and Orality

Because the transmission as well as the practices of indigenous religions operate in an oral mode, it must now seem obvious that they cannot be approached with the same methods as text-based religions. "Oral traditions, [are] profound and beautiful and as deep as any written traditions . . .," Ines Talamantez reminds us (1996, p.3.) Oral thought, according to Serge Gruzinski, is prone to do juxtapositions, unlikely combinations, and unexpected associations. It is inscribed in an ordering always marked by movement and change, and ready to cast experience into narrative. (S. Gruzinski, 1988, pp. 215, 228, 232, translation from the French by SM.)

Not only must our methodologies be scrutinized carefully before applying them to indigenous religions, but we must also question basic categories such as concepts of God or the deity, the sacred/profane dualism and our views and perceptions of nature. A careful analysis of the dynamics of indigenous beliefs provides grounds for a re-elaboration of several of the basic categories in the study of religion. Further, we must elaborate a "hermeneutics of orality" to be used as an interpretive method. Such a "hermeneutics of orality" would include a re-examination of certain rhetorical devices proper to oral religious traditions, particularly a re-visiting of words and formulae, redundancies, parallelisms, songs, stories, and mythical narratives. The profusion in the use of symbols and metaphors should be seen as genuine expressions of cogent modes of grasping the divine.

Approaches to Orality :A Methodology

Because they are traditions of the winged words (B. Peabody, 1975,) most indigenous oral religions must be approached through direct and

listening contact. Consequently, careful ethnographic methods are essential to the study of indigenous religions. A current trend in Religious Studies is turning increasingly from the study of texts to the study of social issues. Yet, as David Chidister warned in his keynote address at the *XVIIIth International Congress on the History of Religions* in Durban, South Africa in 2000, we must beware of "methods of denial, based on reluctance to enter a contested frontier." This is what happens when scholars refuse to grant indigenous rituals and practices the status of religions. Rosalind Hackett (1993, p.1) for her part criticizes a preoccupation with the field of Religious Studies that would privilege desk-bound theorizing and historicizing focused on religious texts at the expense of fieldwork and data collection.

Ethnographers, in their turn, recognize their own methodological limitations: they increasingly engage in participant observation, participatory research and the examination of self-other relations. The distortions originating in the process of 'othering' the subjects of research are poignantly discussed by several philosophers and anthropologists. B. Tedlock, who did a formal apprenticeship to a Mayan diviner in Guatemala, proposes a "human intersubjectivity" as the basis for ethnography (1982.) Karen Brown resorts to incorporating her own experiences, those of the Haitian Voodoo priestess Mama Lola, her family and community, the voices of the spirits, ethnographic reports as well as theoretical concerns (K. Brown, 2001.)

Diane Bell reflects: "...we anthropologists, too, have been part of the problem. Too often our power to define 'the other' has displaced and silenced indigenous voices. Here I am not speaking for indigenous peoples, rather I am turning the anthropological gaze on Western cultures so that we may understand why so many individuals seek healing, meaning and spiritual answers in the lives of peoples whose lands and lives have been so devastated

by western colonialism" (D. Bell, 1997, p.53.)

Nevertheless, the option for a direct contact with the field, limited as it might be, can, beyond the study of texts, be a catalyst for self-reflection and participatory research on the techniques of "collective remembering." In this respect, Havelock recalls that, more that eighty years ago, Milman Parry introduced the concept of the specificity of "storing materials in the oral memory" as the display of a state of mind diametrically different from the alphabetic subjectivity (E. Havelock, 1991, p. 39 of the Spanish translation.)

The researcher must learn to come to terms with her/his own 'alphabetized subjectivity' and to develop a stance of self-interrogation. Such a posture allows for a closer and more respectful approach toward traditions which are not encoded texts, in which the 'technologies of re-membering' are very distinct from what they are in the alphabetic writing/scripture based traditions. And Walter Ong confirms that "… many contrasts often made between 'western' and other views seem reducible to contrasts between deeply interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness" (W. Ong, 1982, p.29.)

Some guidelines for interpreting indigenous oral traditions might prove helpful. Because oral religious traditions operate within epistemic frames alien to the alphabetic mind set (see chapters 1 and 2,) they often cause perplexity to the scholar of text-based religions. A rigorous and respectful approach to traditions that do not rely on texts for their transmission and resilience must pay attention to formulae, redundancies, rhythms, imprint of utterances, ambiguities and polysemy of symbolization, metaphors, encoded meanings of customary songs and tales.

The Weight of Words Alone -- Maria Sabina, the wise woman of the mushrooms, speaks very concretely of her experiences of healing with Language: "….and I also see the words fall, they come from up above, as if they were little luminous objects falling from the sky…then with my hands I catch word after word" (A. Estrada, 1983, p. 94, translated by H. Munn, see chapter 5.) Words in the oral tradition are meaningful in a particular way. For example, "[n]ative American languages encoded the insight that speech is power all persons share . . .the Navajo think of language as generative rather than … representative. Navajo speech does not encode realities which might exist independently, objectively apart from itself" (Kenneth Morrison, 2000, p.34.) Oral traditions have absolute faith in the efficacy and power of the spoken word. We have seen that the Nahuas (Aztecs) used a beautiful metaphor for their *huehuetlatolli* and *ilamatlatolli*, the elders' admonitions and instructions: they called them a 'scattering of jades' (see chapter 8.) Words had weight, permanence, and were precious like gems. Oral languages tend to "actively call the world into being" by the power of words themselves. This is why ethnographers often report uses of spoken language that appear 'magical' to the alphabetized mind. In some, the rhythmic repetition of incantations and invocations, literally brings phenomena into being. In others, the articulation of rhythmic stanzas has the power to summon distant or past realities into the here and now.

Empirical facts are indistinguishable from the words that conjure them up: the spoken words are not meant to convey knowledge and still less "information". They are as substantial as the facts. Reflecting on her field data, Favret Saada says "[…] if the ritual is upheld it is only through words

and through the persona who says them … …for many months the only empirical facts I was able to record were words" (1980, p. 30.)

Formulae: Songs and Stories -- Songs or sung tales are highly formalized in structure; they bear the mark of metaphorical and other remembering techniques that elicit a creative interpretation on the part of the listener. The vitality and permanence, through encoded meanings, of oral formulae proper to indigenous religious traditions, as well as their pervasive influence needs to be re-assessed. Some of these formulae should be studied as vital expressions of beliefs and practices and even as recurrent characteristics of "orality-based texts," that is of what Millman Parry defined as texts obtained from the first transcription of an oral declamation (M. Parry, 1971 [1928].)

The various versions of Sahugún's *Codice Florentino* consist of transcribed oral narratives, including epic stories such as that of *Tohuenyo*, analyzed in chapter 6, as well as speeches giving moral and practical advices. As first transcriptions of traditional oral discourses, they probably correspond to Parry's definition of "authentic text" as the first transcription of a narrative that previously was exclusive oral.

An oral narrative is neither the recitation of a "text" learned by memory, nor is it a completely original creation of the narrator. It is in oral narratives that religious myths and symbols rest encapsulated. Remembering them, every time in a slightly different way, is a collective enactment. According to Parry, every such re-enactment is a *rhapsodia* , meaning a patchwork in Greek, a woven sort of composition based on ever new combinations of traditional formulae. It is in every such re-enactment, that the religious myths and

symbols are re-*membered*. The reciter of a fixed, memorized text unrolls a prefabricated tapestry, as it were, in front of the listeners. The oral narrator, in contrast, weaves the tapestry as he goes along, using elements familiar to his audience. Punctuated by breathing, the narration is given the pauses required by both the speaker and the audience (D.Tedlock, 1983, p.124-129.) In oral narrations, the epic actions of heroes are glorified, divine interventions are celebrated, rules of proper conduct are enhanced, and repetitions and redundancies are used for emphasis throughout (A. Garibay, 2000, p.409.)

The repetition of the same episode with comparable yet different formulae and enhanced by numerous metaphors is also one of the most notable characteristics of the Nahuatl "texts" and other recopilations of the ancient oral world by the first chroniclers. This is particularly the case of the *huehuetlatolli*. There are several versions of them: of Olmos, of Sahagún, and of Baptista, and none is exact to the letter to the other. Presumably, the original oral versions collected by both Olmos and Sahagún were themselves not exactly alike (see A. Garibay, 2000, pp. 403-420.) Both were oral narratives subjected to the fluidity of a *rhapsodia.*

Frequently, women held the patronage of these collective re-enactment. Songs like *El Canto de las Mujeres de Chalco* (chapter 7) defy classification (Garibay 1964; León Portilla, 1976.) They combine religious and political narratives in which the deeds of the ancestral beings interact with the living governing elite. Performed in front of audiences for their amusement they thus connected the performers with their audiences. Led by women they, sometimes, also evoked the domain of erotic practices and pleasures.

In my meetings with the indigenous women from the CONAMI (*Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas*), I often hear resonances of this *Cántico de las mujeres de Chalco*. Without any trace of false prudery,

some comments – that in order “not to offend chaste ears” I refrain from quoting here -, come close to this excerpt from the canticle: “ I have come to please my blooming vulva…” (León Portilla, 1976, p255.)

Inserted in a religious ceremony, the singing of songs was and still is a vital element of indigenous rituals. For the Warao living in the Orinoco river delta of Venezuela, wisdom is embedded in stories, for human knowledge is generated in the telling of tales (L. Sullivan, 1997, p. 4.) Ancestral knowledge is transmitted to the present generation through specialists of remembering techniques. Warao storytellers begin and end the day narrating dramatic episodes of life-bearing myths of dawn and dusk.

Redundancy -- Repetition is a key characteristic of oral conservation techniques (L. Sullivan, 1997, p. 4; A. Garibay, 2000, p.421.) Religious, moral or ethical precepts are ingrained in the participants by repetition. Redundancy, that is the repetition of a given semantic content, using different formulae, is another means of conservation. A form of this stylistic device has been called *parallelism* by analysts of the prose and poetry of the ancient Aztecs (León Portilla, 1969, p. 76; A.Garibay, 2000, p 418.) It is also a mnemonic device that articulates musically the discursive practices. Redundancy along with parallelism foster the remembering of the formulae, since in orality the unit of discourse is a formula, an utterance, not a word.

In a manuscript of 1629, approximately one century after the conquest of Mexico, Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón registered some of the formulae used by the mostly female healers of his dioceses. The whole manuscript is made out of transcribed *conjuros*: invocations or incantations (Andrews and Hassig,

1984.) Today, morphologically similar stanzas continue to be prayed out aloud by a *rezandera* in every significant ceremony of contemporary indigenous groups in Mexico (see the chants of Maria Sabina in chapter 5.) In her transcription and translation of the Prayers on the Wajxakib Batz' in her book, *Time and the Highland*,Barbara Tedlock records extensive use of these formulae called 'parallelisms':

Pardon my sin God. Pardon my sin Earth	(p. 231)
At the east. At the rising of the sun	(p. 231)
For our life	
For our very own life	(p. 233)
Now on this day, this hour	(p. 237)
It is handed over their work, their service	(p. 237)

Parallelism is a formulaic, rhythmic and repetitive expression consisting of two parallel phrases, meanings and/or metaphors, whose redundancy facilitates memorization. Such complex formulae are the basis of the ritual discourses. Each ritual specialist 'grabs' onto these formulae and, according to his or her own improvisations weaves them together like a kilt. His or her songs will never be twice word for word the same, but they will always be alike. There is seldom reference to an abstract concept of truth like the one linked to a written text that can be reproduced to the letter.

Metaphoric Orality -- In oral traditions, metaphors disclose the deep qualities of nature, people and events. In Mesoamerica, the innermost meanings of eminently metaphoric religious narratives still require further de-codification. Epic chants and invocations are performed in arcane

> metaphoric language. Even Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, after his first confrontation with Nahua cultures, complained about the difficulty in understanding his informants due to their predilection for metaphoric sayings (Sahagún, 1989, [1547], book VI, p. 454.) The Sacred Books of the Maya are composed in metaphoric language. "The *Chilam Balam*, for instance, is made out of synthetic formulae, archaic language, metaphors and multi-vocal symbolism that makes it esoteric or secret (M. de la Garza,1988, p.15.) W. Gingerich suggests that the paradoxical juxtapositions exemplified in the ritual discourses reveal a seamless unity which can only be discovered in the mytho-poetic, metaphoric context of ancient Mesoamerican world views, not through the application of purely western standards of syllogism (1988, p. 530.)

Jacques Soustelle (1970) reports that 'sweeping' the temple at early hours of the morning was a priestly activity preparing the way for the deity to arrive. In the *Codex Mendoza*, an early pictographic manuscript of the Aztecs, a broom at the side of the loom is one of the objects belonging to a girl's birth site. It binds a women's future life on earth. In several excerpts of the *huehuetltolli* referred to in this book, there are recommendations for both boys and girls to be prompt and dutiful in waking early and "sweeping" the temple. The broom as a metaphor for a girl, together with the metaphoric priestly sweeping have often been misinterpreted, and reduced to mean the typical menial domestic lot of women (G. Hierro, 1989, p.36.) During one of my recent researches among indigenous women, Ernestina, an Otomi Indian, commented to me that she had to prepare a great ceremony in which she would be the leader. It was a ritual for a little girl who was going to be given a broom as symbol of her duties. But, she hastened to clarify, it is not a broom

to sweep the floor, the meaning in our tradition is that it represents the powers of women to lead ceremonies of our religion.

Uses of Symbols **--** In oral religious traditions, symbols are polysemic and multi-vocal (V. Turner, 1978, p. 573.) Again and again, diverse symbols overlap and intertwine. No linear interpretation can grasp these complex layers after layers of meaning. These fluid characteristics shape the way we should approach symbolic indigenous universes. Gananath Obeyeskere (1981, p.51) states:

> When a symbol is conventionalized it loses its inherent ambiguity. Myths and symbols are part of the public culture, their syntactic looseness and ambiguity facilitates manipulation and choice. When a symbol is conventionalized it is deprived of its ambiguity and ipso facto of its capacity for leverage and maneuverability. One of the commonest occasions for conventionalization is when a popular myth or symbol is taken over by learned virtuosos and narrowed down and given limited and rigid meaning. Hence... one must be wary of myths and symbols as they appear in treatises of learned theologians. Their analytical status is quite different from that of symbol systems on the ground . . .The 'rational' explanation of symbols by academic anthropologists are of the same order. They also narrow the field of meaning and produce a conventionalization of symbols.

Difficult for alphabetized minds to grasp, this "non-conventionalized" process of symbolization should remain fluid in a frame of reference allowing to study it without immobilizing it. A static interpretation of symbols would

impede an authentic approach to oral religious traditions where meaning does not inhere only in symbols, but must be invested in and interpreted by acting social beings.

Oral ways of appropriating and expressing (defining) religious themes can be further comprehended if we review certain underlying religious concepts.

Nature as Divine **--** "The natural world is our bible," says Mohawk, "We do not have chapters and verses: we have trees and fish and animals. The creation is the manifestation of energy through matter…" (1996, p.11.)

Andrews and Hassig (1984, p.14) observe that the Aztecs were enmeshed in the supernatural. For them, "...the gods represented (*were?)*...the physical world (sun, moon, stars...earth, water, and mountains) . . . the elements (rain, lightening, clouds, wind), flora and fauna (maize, tobacco, maguey, peyote, deer, eagles, snakes, jaguars, pumas) and major cultural functions (fishing , hunting, war, sex...)"

In indigenous Mesoamerica, the gods and goddesses do not seem to be conceptualized as they are in the institutional (historical) religions. The now classic monography by June Nash, "In the Eyes of the Ancestors," seems to encapsulate this point of view in its title (J. Nash, 1970.) Ancestors and other spiritual (super- and supranatural) beings seem to be as influential on earth as are the 'gods'. The deities' well-being is as dependent upon human offerings as vice- versa, .expressing the importance of a bi-directional flow of spiritual forces between the realm of the deities and the realm of human existence. A.

Geertz (1994, p.324) speaks of similar concepts among the Hopi: "[the] end of the world rests solely on the immorality of humanity. . ."

A deity outside the universe and acting upon it, is a completely alien idea. On the contrary, in Mesoamerica, the deity appears immersed in the cosmos. Yet, we are not speaking here of immanence versus transcendence. Neither one nor the other concept fits the way oral Mesoamericans relate and conceive of their deities. The thought of a perfect superior being, all good and always beneficial is also absent. Deities had to be sustained as well as placated. They could destroy as well as nurture.

Reading through an early pictographic manuscript, the *Codex Mendoza* mentioned earlier, Joaquin Galarza assures his readers that no gods or goddesses are represented in it (1998.) There are only 'personifications' of them, that is, humans that take on the attributes of the deity and thus impersonates her. The unity of the deity contrasts with the multiplicity of iconographic forms that it takes (E. Hunt,1977, p.55.)

The polarity sacred-profane has also been much questioned. 'God' is not distant but near. *El dios del junto y del cerca* was the meaning of *Tloquenauaque*, divine reference of the Aztecs (León Portilla, 1990, p. 91) If god is near and by our side, then the classical disjunction between sacred and the profane is inadequate for the comprehension of indigenous religions. Everything is interconnected in a vast web of sacredness.

We should speak of transcendence and immanence in the same vein. Using the expression that god is immanent in indigenous religious traditions, we are immediately projecting our gaze from the outside, judging from a philosophical background that constructs meaning and order through mutually exclusive polarities. Immanence and transcendence are not separate realms of reality. For instance, there are deep meanings involved in the feminine activity

of clapping *tortillas* and putting them to cook on the *comal*. Among contemporary Nahua groups in the town of Cuetzalan, Sierra de Puebla, the woman making *tortillas* sees herself reconfiguring the sun-earth relationship with planets represented in each flat *tortilla* (pancake) she places on the fire. This is why A. Lupo speaks of a 'domestic priesthood' referring to the sacralization of menial domestic tasks (1991, p.191.)

In Maria Sabina, a wise healer of the highlands of Oaxaca, we have an example of the powerful and central role played by women in contemporary rituals in oral Mesoamerican Indigenous Religious Traditions. Some excerpts from one of her rituals will close this chapter. These rhythmic formulae reveal words solid and permanent as jade, rhythmic, redundant phrases pregnant with meanings of the divine in nature, metaphoric stanzas and polysemic symbols that can provide some glimpses, like firestone sparks, of an Indian woman's perception of her participation in a religious ceremony. She is in resonance with the word still orally shaped and heard and shared communally. She expresses, in a nutshell, the elusive universes of indigenous religious traditions:

Woman of the principal medicinal berries
Woman of the sacred medicinal berries
Ah Jesus
Woman who searches, says
Woman who examines by touch, says
Woman who thunders am I . . .woman who sounds am I
Hummingbird woman am I …
Woman of the sacred, enchanted place am I
Woman of the earth and dusk

Woman . . . primordial being

. . . am I

Part III A POSSIBLE EPILOGUE

Epistemic Insurrection: Influences of Indigenous Womens' Movements on Gender Theory.

> "…Ese carácter esencialmente local supone, de hecho, hablar de algo que seria suerte de producción teórica autónoma, no centralizada, es decir, no necesitada de una aceptación desde el régimen común para establecer su validez."
>
> Sub Comandante Insurgente Marcos, 2007

Los discursos y propuestas de justicia de género de los últimos años empiezan a incorporar perspectivas provenientes desde los emergentes movimientos indígenas en las Américas. Nos enriquecen con sus propuestas y reflexiones, pero, no son fácilmente comprensibles a profundidad. Esas posiciones de mujeres "indígenas" están frecuentemente marcadas por influencias filosóficas mesoamericanas, andinas u originarias del cono sur o las riveras del Amazonas.

Existe una profusión de visiones, creencias y prácticas que desestabilizan las certezas de una emancipación femenina de corte individualista y liberal. Esa profusión es un reto a algunos de los propósitos feministas clásicos de estos años. Estos han sido forjados por influencias filosóficas del Norte geopolítico que tienden a definir la lucha de las mujeres como una exigencia de igualdad de género universal.

Una revisión panorámica de algunas de las etapas del feminismo de izquierda en México[36] nos induce a identificar resignificaciones subversivas

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36 Varias pensadoras feministas mexicanas han hecho aportes invaluables a la teoría feminista. Recordando que el feminismo tiene un historial descentralizado y horizontal, y que, como tal, está formado en la pluralidad y recoge posturas múltiples, diversas y a veces contradictorias, es imposible cubrirlas

desde los feminismos indígenas emergentes. Estos pueden ofrecernos otras modalidades de teorización feminista descolonizada y anclada en mundos de colectividad, del nosotros, y de la defensa del sujeto "madre tierra".

Feminism as Critical Social Theory

El feminismo como teoría social crítica

El concepto de género, que aparece sustituyendo y ampliando el de la "situación de las mujeres" o de los "roles y estereotipos sociales" (Marcos, 1977) a principios de los años noventa, tiempos de la creación del *Programa Universitario de Estudios de Genero*, PUEG, de la UNAM, confirma la evidencia de relaciones de poder y desigualdad estructural entre los sexos, cuyas manifestaciones alcanzan todas las esferas de la vida social y privada, a tal punto que su erradicación es parte de los compromisos éticos impostergables, no sólo de las sociedades, sino sobre todo de los movimientos comprometidos con la articulación de propuestas alternativas al despojo de las mayorías avalado por las sociedades "modernas" neoliberales.(Lamus, 2007)

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adecuadamente en este espacio. Remito al lector a obras sobre el pensamiento feminista. Entre otras: *Las ideas feministas latinoamericanas,* por Francesca Gargallo, Ediciones desde Abajo, 2004.

Y al estudio *De lo Privado a lo publico: 30 años de lucha ciudadana de las mujeres en América Latina,* coordinado por Nathalie Leblon y Elizabeth Maier, publicado por Siglo XXI, en coedición con LASA y UNIFEM, en 2006. Ambas publicaciones incluyen en su recorrido el trabajo y el pensamiento de muchas mujeres feministas renombradas Invito especialmente a descubrir a una de las precursoras pensadoras y activistas feministas de principios del siglo pasado: Concha Michel (Gomez Rubi, 2000) y su resistencia inflexible a los patriarcados comunistas de su organización en esos años. Recuerdo también a las intrépidas y creativas Adelina Zendejas y Benita Galeana. Con estas tres precursoras tuve el honor de compartir luchas en un momento de mi propia trayectoria en la cual dejaron huella indeleble.

En este nuevo dominio, se empezó a teorizar sobre las "relaciones de género" en sociedades patriarcales[37]. Estas son también relaciones de poder y

[37] Todo el andamiaje teórico feminista que emerge desde 1949 con Simone de Beauvoir, con su afirmación de que la mujer no nace sino que se hace, es recogido por Gayle Rubin (1975) quien introduce la categoría sexo-género. Ella asigna al *sexo* biológico (dualidad macho/hembra) unas determinaciones inscritas en la "naturaleza" y en la fisiología humana, mientras que el *género* es el repertorio de conductas aceptadas socialmente vinculadas a un sexo determinado (varón/mujer).

En 1982, en *El género vernáculo*, Iván Illich (2008) contrastó dos tipos de dualismo que tienen ambas que ver con la diferencias entre hombres y mujeres, pero insistiendo en los sentidos radicalmente opuestos de ellas. La primera, el género, *vernáculo* porque propio de un lugar, es el principio organizador fundamental de casi todas las sociedades premodernas y da su particular color de género no sólo a las mujeres y los hombres, sino también a los tiempos y los espacios, las herramientas y los modos de hablar. El sexo, católico, es decir universal y, hoy, económico, postula un ser humano neutro dotado de caracteres sexuales secundarios. Según Illich, el proceso de modernización es inevitablemente un paso de un tipo de dualismo a otro y el capitalismo es el predominio del *sexo económico*.

Judith Butler, a lo largo de toda su obra, ha ido desmontando la categoría binaria míticamente afincada en la fisiología sexual e inevitablemente natural: se es macho o hembra por características genitales. En contraste, todos los repertorios culturales aceptados son de varón o de mujer y conforman el 'género'. Desafortunadamente, a pesar de las múltiples matizaciones y sofisticaciones posteriores en un variado abanico de posturas que se aproximan, lo reformulan, lo desarrollan y aun lo critican, este andamiaje sexo-género ha quedado como el inevitable e invulnerable referente binario de un gran número de teorizaciones feministas. Si empezamos con este referente, descubrimos que, con el oído atento, la escucha cuidadosa e informada, no podemos reducir los discursos sobre el género en las voces de mujeres indígenas a esta fórmula sexo-género de categorías mutuamente excluyentes.

Joan Scott (1990), usa el género como una categoría analítica y sostiene que "el género es una elemento constitutivo de las relaciones sociales basadas en las diferencias que distinguen los sexos" y "una forma primaria de relaciones significantes de poder". El género tiene en la definición de Scott, cuatro aspectos o dimensiones en que es particularmente útil, 1) lo simbólico, 2) la dimensión conceptual normativa, 3) nociones políticas, instituciones y organizaciones sociales, 4) la dimensión subjetiva de género (Scott, 1990, 44-49).

A finales de los años ochenta e inicios de los noventa la noción de género es introducida por las feministas académicas norteamericanas como categoría analítico-política y, luego, reintroducida en el discurso de los organismos internacionales, especialmente en los de cooperación, como concepto técnico, es decir, supuestamente neutro. En esa epoca llega con fuerza a America Latina , encapsulado en los esloganes "genero y desarrollo", "mujer y desarrollo", rápidamente apropiados por el aparato discursivo de los

se refieren a sometimientos, subordinaciones, desequilibrios entre hombres y mujeres. Es importante conocer las formas en que la construcción social y cultural de las relaciones de género permite, a través de la socialización, que los mandatos sociales sean internalizados y considerados "naturales". Hablo de lo que he llamado la "naturalización" del género (Marcos, 2000). Así, en el ámbito académico, el concepto de género en tanto categoría analítica sirvió de base para la subsiguiente teorización. La delimitación de este útil analítico permitió estudiar las diferencias socioculturales atribuibles a la diferencia entre hombres y mujeres y volver ésta extensiva a la comprensión de otras categorías sociales que marcan diferencias y jerarquizan las relaciones de los seres sociales tales como la raza, la clase, la etnia, la preferencia sexual. Así se empezó a elaborar una nueva perspectiva teórica en el feminismo: la teoría de las *intersecciones* (Hill, 1998; Lugones, 2008). Se habla así de una "matriz de dominación" en la cual se encuentran interconectadas todas esas otras formas de exclusión y despojo. Se requiere una configuración feminista en la cual el género sea una variable teórica más, pero que no debe ser separada de otros ejes de opresión. Los esfuerzos teóricos y las propuestas prácticas y organizativas en torno las *intersecciones* complican, pluralizan y particularizan el significado del concepto "mujer". Este es el desafío que enfrentan hoy en día las investigadoras y activistas de izquierda que quieren forjar, proponer y construir articulaciones estratégicas por encima de las diferencias teóricas y políticas fundadas en diferencias de raza, etnia, clase y preferencia sexual, para desafiar las definiciones mismas del discurso intelectual, académico y hegemónico sobre el género.

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organismos internacionales económicos y políticos del *establishment* del desarrollo y sus contrapartes del sur. Este discurso se reviste, frecuentemente , del termino /demanda: "derechos sexuales y reproductivos" , termino que ha sido moldeado y reconceptualizado por algunas propuestas de mujeres indígenas.

Este "quiebre epistémico" (Lamus, 2009:114), que abre a una nueva comprensión del feminismo, se inicia con los planteamientos del feminismo cultural norteamericano con sus llamados a la diversidad, en rechazo al feminismo de los setentas al que considera monolítico, elitista y poco abierto a la pluralidad racial y económica. Las analistas y activistas denunciaron el "etnocentrismo clasista" de la teoría dominante (Alarcón, 1990), exigiendo reconocimiento, poder y respeto para las perspectivas emanadas desde las situaciones sociales y económicas desfavorecidas de las mujeres "de color" e instaladas en el imperio (Anzaldua, 1987; Lorde, 1984; Trinh, 1989).

Indigenous Women's Movements "abajo y a la izquierda" , where the heart remains.

Los movimientos de mujeres indígenas: "abajo y a la izquierda"

Rescatar la tradición intelectual feminista, desde "abajo y a la izquierda", implica mucho más que elaborar un análisis feminista utilizando las referencias y criterios epistemológicos establecidos. Se requiere de una epistemología feminista descolonizada.

Es crucial reinventar nuevas herramientas conceptuales que den cuenta de las formas específicas que cobra la opresión de género en contextos como el de las indígenas Mayas, Kichuas, Aymaras, Mapuches, por ejemplo. Además, cabe plantear varias preguntas: ¿Qué puede aportar el saber producido por un movimiento indígena al feminismo en tanto que teoría social crítica? ¿De qué manera el vínculo entre identidad/fusión comunitaria e identidad de género marca derroteros sobre un movimiento indígena? Esas preguntas invitan a poner a debate el lugar otorgado al género en las agendas políticas de los movimientos sociales que reivindican sus raigambres ancestrales.

Conjuntamente a la redacción de los documentos de la *Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América* (*Memoria*, 2003), las mujeres indígenas organizadas, produjeron colectivamente un documento intitulado "Género desde la visión de las mujeres indígenas". El análisis de este documento -como de otro intitulado "El empoderamiento para garantizar la plena, activa y propositiva participación de las mujeres indígenas"- da pautas para rastrear raíces filosóficas culturales ancestrales a la vez que para revisar las re-conceptualizaciones y resignificaciones de ciertos términos feministas que las mujeres indígenas van haciendo. Es un proceso de intercambio pero sobre todo de apropiaciones filosóficas multidimensionales (Marcos, 2009 b).

La afirmación arrogante de la superioridad de unas formas de conocer sobre otras -y ya no sólo de una raza sobre otra, prevaleciente desde la conquista y la colonización de México- está implícita en el "borramiento epistémico y político" (Mignolo, 2003) de las formas locales de aprehender el mundo que perviven en las cosmovisiones: maya, en particular; y de las Américas, en general. En contraposición a estas pretensiones hegemónicas, el movimiento social y político más relevante de nuestro tiempo, el zapatismo, ha construido sus propuestas políticas, sus formas de autonomía y autogobierno, sus objetivos de lucha sobre una re-creación de saberes ancestrales mesoamericanos. Como lo reconociera José Saramago en el acto final de una reunión con la comandancia del EZLN, "su propuesta política es otra".

No es de extrañar que, justamente para el zapatismo, la inclusión de las mujeres y su participación equitativa en los puestos de autoridad, su capacidad de asumir responsabilidades en sus comunidades *a la par* con los varones y su exigencia de un trato digno y respetuoso hacia ellas sean *la* propuesta política zapatista, en el sentido de que no es "una más" entre prioridades organizadas

jerárquicamente. “No sostenemos que la lucha por la tierra es prioritaria sobre la lucha de género” como lo señalara el Subcomandante Marcos (Subcomandante Marcos 2009:230).

Desde una perspectiva social crítica, lo que emerge del zapatismo en sus prácticas políticas es un principio según el cual todos los énfasis son necesarios y están imbricados unos en otros, se interconectan y se yuxtaponen. No se organizan en pirámides jerárquicas ni tampoco en esquemas binarios, así se logran evadir los esquemas teóricos basados en las oposiciones centro y periferia o superior e inferior y otras clases de categorías polarizadas que subrepticiamente se reproducen influidas por tradiciones filosóficas occidentales dominantes. “Habría que desalambrar la teoría y hacerlo con la práctica” (Subcomandante Marcos, 2009:33). “Las grandes transformaciones no empiezan arriba ni con hechos monumentales y épicos, sino con movimientos pequeños en su forma y que aparecen como irrelevantes para el político y analista de arriba…” (Ídem: 33).

Esta es la propuesta política que le da al zapatismo su color y su sabor y se manifiesta como el meollo de una postura que caracteriza los “nuevos” movimientos sociales. Al irrumpir, en la sociedad y en los imaginarios políticos de entonces, a fines de 1993, el zapatismo incluía en su primer boletín, una *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* que, en su parquedad, no deja resquicios para los machismos ni androcentrismos institucionales o cotidianos. A través de los años, esta ley ha sido retomada, re-enfatizada e implementada, con persistencia,(ver arriba el capitulo sobre Cotidianidad y Actualidad de la Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres) para no desviar la atención y el esfuerzo colectivo de esa propuesta zapatista por “otro mundo y otro camino” con las mujeres como eje.

Llegamos así, a los testimonios de las 150 mujeres autoridades zapatistas que compartieron sus experiencias en la Garrucha. Nos hablaron de sus dificultades, y de ese perpetuo caer y volver a levantarse, para seguir con ese proyecto político tan suyo, tan complejo y tan nuevo. Se ha recorrido un largo camino, ya trazado desde el inicio con la ley revolucionaria de mujeres.

En mayo 2014, las compañeras con cargo de "Escucha" y las maestras durante la "Escuelita Zapatista" son jovenas nacidas durante y en la autonomía zapatista y ya expresan actitudes de fuerza y seguridad, ellas han crecido en otro contexto de justicia de género en donde la dualidad de opuestos en fluidez se reclama y se vive.

La propuesta zapatista no es una propuesta exclusivamente feminista. Es, sobre todo, una propuesta política. Las mujeres de "color" en los Estados Unidos habían elaborado terminologías, conceptos y demandas que hacían justicia a la particularidad de su opresión. De ahí emergió la teoría de las intersecciones que ha servido para ampliar, profundizar y distinguir los lineamientos de un feminismo de "color" entre las diásporas culturales dentro de los Estados Unidos.

En los movimientos de mujeres indígenas en México y en América latina y, específicamente en el zapatismo, emergieron demandas y prácticas en parte convergentes, pero desde otras coordenadas que no son importaciones ni imitaciones del feminismo urbano del Norte geopolítico - mexicano o internacional- ni tampoco restauraciones estrictas de raigambres de cosmo-visión ancestrales fundamentados en la dualidad femenino/masculina. Algunas de sus coordenadas epistémicas son notables por sus particularidades forjadas desde los movimientos de mujeres indígenas. Son productos de una interacción dialógica y creativa entre múltiples influencias, herencias, diferencias, contiendas y reclamos. Así es como se dan adentro del

movimiento indígena, en permanente creación y recreación. En las comunidades, las mujeres discuten, comparten, reformulan, combinan, cambian o usan estratégicamente los conceptos sociales sobre justicia y derechos de género y los términos con los que se habla de ellos. (ver especialmente parte I arriba) Están, además, en diálogo permanente con la comunidad internacional y los grupos de mujeres que las apoyan y las visitan.

Innovations: Aportes desde los movimientos de mujeres indígenas

Innovations: Contributions from Indigenous Women's Movements

Los principios filosóficos inherentes a la cosmovisión mesoamericana se podrían relacionar con ciertas coordenadas indígenas y feministas (Marcos, 1994, hooks, 1984**)**. Las referencias "teóricas" posibles del movimiento de mujeres indígenas en México y en América latina se nutren de raíces milenarias. Están a la vez en un encuentro con los reclamos feministas, en un flujo y reflujo de discursos, prácticas, uso de términos y de conceptos (Mahmood, 2008, Butler, 2001) que se entretejen, se cruzan, se confrontan, se separan y se re-significan mutuamente, siempre imbricados unos con otros. Esto ocurre tanto en el campo discursivo propio cuanto en el quehacer de la vida cotidiana y en las prácticas politicas. En este tipo de encuentro, el campo privilegiado para su expresión máxima es el de las luchas de las mujeres indígenas zapatistas. Como mujeres, pobres, entretejidas en colectivos, con filiaciones ancestrales mayas y expuestas a las propuestas feministas, ellas reconocen aportes a la justicia de género, pero, a su vez, son el origen de nuevas propuestas. Estas son formas de concebir un feminismo "indígena" que, por extensión, revitalizan aquellas expresiones del feminismo, urbano, teórico, complejo pero desterritorializado y pobre en raigambres culturales.

Embodied 'Theory'

La encarnación o corporizacion de la teoria

Estas formas de concebir lo que podría llamarse su "teoría" feminista se encuentran arraigadas en sus cuerpos y en la materia, materia que forma un conjunto inestable y fluido con la naturaleza y todos los seres que la integran. No es "teoría" de ideas y conceptos abstractos, de lenguaje simbólico y semiótica. Es teoría hablada, vivida, sentida, bailada, olida, tocada. "Queremos agarrar con nuestra mano el derecho"… "pero agarrarlo con fuerza, con las manos, para que no se escape" dirá, palabras más palabras menos, la mujer autoridad de la Junta de Buen Gobierno del Caracol de Morelia Chiapas, en junio de 2009. Estas formas de expresión encarnadas, "corporizadas", son características de los discursos y prácticas de los movimientos de mujeres indígenas. (Marcos, 1995).

En el mundo mesoamericano en general, y maya en particular, el cuerpo no se opone a la mente. No se define como el lugar de los datos biológicos, es decir de lo material e inmanente y tampoco es el límite que marca la frontera entre el ser interno y el mundo exterior. En las tradiciones de las mujeres indígenas organizadas, el cuerpo tiene características muy distintas de las del cuerpo anatómico o biológico moderno. El exterior y el interior no están separados por la barrera hermética de la piel (López, 1984). Entre el afuera y el adentro, existe un intercambio permanente y continuo. Lo material y lo inmaterial, lo exterior y lo interior están en interacción permanente y la piel es constantemente atravesada por flujos de todos tipos. Todo apunta hacia un concepto de corporalidad abierta a los grandes rumbos del cosmos. La ritualidad de las mujeres indígenas lo expresa, por ejemplo, cuando, al iniciarse una ceremonia, los cuerpos se dirigen alternativamente a cada rumbo o dirección del cosmos. No es un folklore, no se trata de un simple formalismo

litúrgico que deberíamos respetar por cortesía. Expresa conceptos profundos de interconexión de los cuerpos y del cosmos, una corporalidad a la vez singular y móvil que incorpora en su núcleo sólidos y fluidos en permanente flujo: aires, vapores, humores y materia. La nueva vida que se gesta en esos cuerpos toma otra dimensión moral y ética que la vida que puede ser objeto de servicios por el sistema biomédico moderno. Esa "nueva vida", hay que saberla vislumbrar.

El entendimiento y la asimilación de estos conceptos de cuerpo pueden enriquecer y dar un 'giro decolonial' (Lugones 2008 Castro y Grosfoguel, 2007) al concepto de salud reproductiva y a los esfuerzos feministas por los derechos de las mujeres a la salud. Es teoría, y no lo es, según como la definimos. No es por supuesto un conjunto de principios abstractos, pero *es* teoría si la consideramos encarnada y como propia de los universos filosóficos que la sostienen, si se acompaña de fiesta y de danzas, recordando así el lejano origen de la palabra teoría en la palabra griega *theoria*, que significaba festival.

El cuerpo y el espíritu, la materia y la mente no están concebidos como mutuamente excluyentes. Se viven como un *continuum* cuyos extremos son polos complementarios, "opuestos", pero que fluyen el uno hacia el otro. Así, no se puede hacer teoría sin cuerpo y sin acción y prácticas. Es en el *ejercicio* de los derechos que estos se actualizan y existen y, constituidos, son un reto a la lógica del Estado neoliberal (Speed, 2008:37). Reclamando y ejerciendo sus derechos, ejercitándolos, desempeñando cargos de autoridad en sus comunidades, así es como las mujeres crean la teoría feminista zapatista. Es 'saber como hacer' y no 'saber sobre", dos formas de construcción de conocimiento, dos *epistemès* antitéticas (Marcos, 2010). Cuerpo y espíritu fundidos.

Duality as perceptual device

La dualidad como dispositivo perceptual

Otro referente filosófico para explicar esta conjunción de pares aparentemente opuestos y excluyentes uno del otro, lleva a reconocer y re-descubrir la serie de dualidades que estructuran el cosmos mesoamericano/maya. No existe sólo *una* dualidad de opuestos complementarios (López Austin, 1984). Más bien coexisten múltiples dualidades que se desdoblan, empalman y retroalimentan sin cesar. La dualidad, se podría afirmar, es un *dispositivo perceptual mesoamericano.*

En el campo político, la dualidad de opuestos fluidos (Marcos, 2009a) puede ser una guía para entender cómo los referentes cosmológicos y filosóficos permiten arreglos, respuestas y soluciones en las prácticas de derechos individuales y colectivos.

Esta *dualidad* tan reclamada en los documentos, declaraciones y propuestas de las reuniones de mujeres indígenas ha sido, frecuentemente, descalificada por las teóricas/ feministas. Instaladas éstas en la concepción del sujeto liberal, construido como auto–contenido e individual. Ellas están proponiendo la independencia del sujeto "mujer" como ideal de realización personal al margen de su pertenencia colectiva. En las referencias cosmológicas y en las prácticas contemporáneas de las luchas sociales indígenas, no existe el concepto de individuo auto-contenido ni para la mujer ni para el varón. Existe el "nosotros" comunitario (Lenkesdorf, 2005). Así, no es contradictorio, en esos entornos, exigir a la vez los derechos de las mujeres y los derechos colectivos de los pueblos. En esos mundos, como lo manifestaron los discursos de las mujeres zapatistas en la Garrucha, (Marcos, 2009a), los derechos de las mujeres (conceptualizados convencionalmente como derechos

individuales) y los derechos colectivos de sus pueblos van juntos y a la par. No se organizan jerárquicamente, no se prioriza uno sobre el otro. No retrasa la lucha el que las mujeres también reclamen sus derechos, al contrario, esta demanda completa la demanda de los pueblos. Simplemente se prosigue enmarcados en esta *dualidad de opuestos y complementarios* sin priorizar uno sobre el otro. Al respecto, Shannon Speed, entrevistando mujeres de una comunidad de apoyo zapatista, les preguntó si los varones les habían insinuado que ellas deberían esperar para hacer su lucha como mujeres ya que en el momento era necesario un frente común. Obtuvo esta respuesta, después de un largo silencia reflexivo: "Lo opuesto es cierto, es a través de la organización que empezamos a luchar, que empezamos a estar conscientes de nuestro derecho como mujeres". (Speed, 2008:130)

Este *dispositivo perceptual mesoamericano* constituye un posible referente para el estudio del género en Mesoamérica. Sin embargo, la omnipresencia de éste es tan incluyente que abarca mucho más que el género en el sentido restringido que le dan las académicas y feministas urbanas. Hay que ver más bien el género mesoamericano como la metáfora raíz del universo cosmológico, pero aún así, sólo es uno de los posibles arreglos duales y fluidos en este universo.

Volvamos ahora al concepto de *intersecciones* como definido arriba. Este concepto, originariamente forjado como útil teórico para explicar y orientar las reivindicaciones de las feministas de 'color' en el Norte geopolítico, puede ser extendido a este *otro espacio social de lucha* que es el de las mujeres indígenas y en el cual se concretiza esta propuesta teórica no sólo discursiva sino práctica. Se habla al respecto de una *conjunción* entre derechos de las mujeres y derechos de los pueblos, derechos individuales y derechos colectivos. Estos, podríamos decir, se conciben en *intersección*. Si así los

definimos, entonces no puede existir el uno sin estar incluido y modificado por el otro. La "matriz de dominación" estaría identificada con el Estado nación neoliberal que es interpelado por ambos tipos de derechos de las mujeres: los colectivos y los individuales. Aplicando la teoría de las *intersecciones,* también podría comprenderse mejor cómo se vive adentro de las luchas zapatistas, en los Caracoles y en sus comunidades de apoyo, esta fusión entre derechos colectivos y derechos individuales.

Parity women / men

La paridad con el varón

Es importante revisar el impacto del concepto de dualidades fluidas sobre la "lucha de género". Como es bien sabido, la lucha de las mujeres indígenas busca incorporar a los varones. No se puede concebir como una lucha de mujeres *contra* o *al margen de* los hombres. Aunque se expresa como un reclamo y una rebeldía contra situaciones de dominación y sujeción de las mujeres, esa lucha existe *a la par*, es decir, que está subsumida *en*, y encapsulada *por*, la certeza cosmológica y filosófica de la complementariedad y conjunción con el varón, con la comunidad, con el pueblo. Estas características relacionales formadas a través de interacciones sociales exigen que los varones participen también en la "liberación" de las mujeres. Así, como ellas participan en la liberación de ellos en el colectivo. No existe un imaginario posible sin ellos al lado. Son una en dos y dos en el todo de la interconexión con los seres de la naturaleza y del cosmos.

El concepto mesoamericano de la relación mujer/varón tenía y tiene poderes generadores y protectores (Klein, 2001:188). Era y es a la vez un concepto inestable, mutable y fluido. "La cuestión entonces, para la filosofía feminista", dice Teresa de Lauretis, "es como repensar la diferencia sexual

dentro de la concepción dual del ser" y añade, "un dual absoluto" en el cual ambos, ser mujer y ser hombre, serían primarios como "estando ahí desde el principio" (1990:4). No hay anulación del uno por el otro, ni tampoco pretensión de homogeneidad entre ambos y mucho menos una priorización de uno sobre la otra. Parecería que este objetivo y esta búsqueda, esta "complementariedad", forman parte de las referencias cosmológicas ancestrales de los pueblos originarios de las Américas. ¿Cómo inspirar propuestas en la elaboración de una teoría feminista que, sin olvidar los reclamos justos de las mujeres, incorpore estas referencias?

Equilibrium as Equity

El equilibrio como equidad

Frecuentemente, las mujeres indígenas organizadas hablan del equilibro y de la armonía como el ideal de la relación entre varones y mujeres. El concepto de equilibrio está presente en sus declaraciones y, en los *Documentos de la Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América*, aparece explícitamente elaborado. Propone "…a todos los pueblos indígenas y movimientos de mujeres indígenas una revisión de patrones culturales con capacidad de autocrítica, con el fin de propiciar unas relaciones de género basadas en el equilibrio." (*Memoria* 2003:37). Las búsquedas de igualdad que proponen algunos movimientos feministas son interpretadas aquí en términos de búsqueda de equilibrio. "Se entiende así la práctica del enfoque de género como una relación respetuosa…de balance, de equilibrio; lo que en Occidente seria equidad". (Doc. Género, 2002:6) "Los extremos", señala la historiadora mesoamericanista Louise Burkhart, "aunque no tenían que ser evitados completamente, si debían de ser balanceados uno contra el otro" (Burkhart 1989:130). La fusión-tensión de contrarios en el universo cósmico era la

medida y el medio para lograr el equilibrio. Un equilibro "homeoreico", fluido, concebido en desplazamiento continuo y que dista mucho del concepto de 'justo medio' estático de la filosofía clásica. (Marcos, 2006, 1995)

Esta referencia epistémica tan presente en toda el área mesoamericana como ideal de bienestar en todos los ámbitos, inspira formas diversas de vivir la justicia de género en las relaciones entre mujeres y varones.

Openings for a Dialogic (Dia topic) Encounter

En las raigambres filosóficas brevemente examinadas aquí, se perfila toda otra forma de concebir la "igualdad" social económica y política entre varones y mujeres y otra forma de concebir la justicia de género. Las propuestas desde las mujeres zapatistas muestran tanto aspiraciones igualitaristas cuanto reclamos a la diferencia. "Somos iguales porque somos diferentes", se ha afirmado reiteradamente. Sin embargo las comandancias, autoridades, y cargos en la autonomía están cada vez mas repartidas con igualad numérica entre varones y mujeres.

Su feminismo, si pudiera llamarse asi, es a la vez comunitario, comunal, pero construyéndose respetando las singularidades de cada una. No es proscriptivo ni prescriptivo de ninguna opcion vital (sexual)

Las referencias cosmologicas revisadas en este documento (libro) parecen develar, explicar y afianzar las aparentes paradojas de sus demandas y luchas como mujeres.

Por esto las prácticas que emergen desde las mujeres indígenas se apartan frecuentemente de las conceptualizaciones teóricas feministas del Norte geopolítico, y/o de las elites en el Sur, para avanzar y anclarse en las tradiciones y pervivencias filosóficas complejas que nutren sus propuestas desde "abajo y a la izquierda"

Esperamos que la lectura de las páginas en este documento logre iluminar y abonar al entendimiento profundo de propuestas para los derechos de las mujeres desde esta locacion (local site) propia en el “Sur”.

Aquello que se ha revisado y analizado aquí, principalmente apelando a las propias expresiones discursivas de las mujeres indígenas y desde sus prácticas y raigambres filosóficas parece presentar un posible camino descolonizado de pensamientos y acciones para la autonomía y emancipación de las mujeres. Autonomía y emancipación de las mujeres que se construye a la par que ese “otro” mundo.. Ellas funden los opuestos, en fluidez, encarnan sus pensamientos y reconstruyen mundos diversos de justicia, paz y armonía no solo entre los géneros sino en conjunción con los seres todos de este planeta tierra.

Sylvia Marcos

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