

G e n d e r /
B o d i e s /
R e l i g i o n s

Edited by Sylvia Marcos
Foreword by Ursula King



Gender / Bodies / Religions

Edited by Sylvia Marcos

This book offers a wide range of perspectives from many cultures on the social construction of the body. The essayists, who include anthropologists, feminist theoreticians, and historians of religions, explore how culture and religion shape our perceptions of the body. These essays contribute to the ongoing debate on the body and exemplify the provocative alliance between feminist inquiries and religious studies as they move the discussion on embodiment and corporeality toward new understandings. General readers as well as students of religious studies, feminist theology, and gender and cultural studies will gain valuable insights on these fields.

"A collection of stimulating papers"

Gender/Bodies/Religions offers "numerous new insights about the intricate relationship between the body, religion, and gender... a newly envisioned and truly embodied spirituality"

The authors are wo/men "scholars in religion from around the world, whose pioneering research on gender in diverse religious cultures, practices, rituals, and texts—here focused on the perceptions and experiences of gendered bodies within the wider religious contexts—produced a rich harvest"

Ursula King, Director of the Centre for Comparative Studies in Religion and Gender, University of Bristol, England

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Eva Neumaier-Dargyay
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Milagros C. Guerrero
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Harold Coward
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Ana Mariella Bacigalupo
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Silvia Ortiz**

**Adjunct Proceedings of
the XVIIth Congress for
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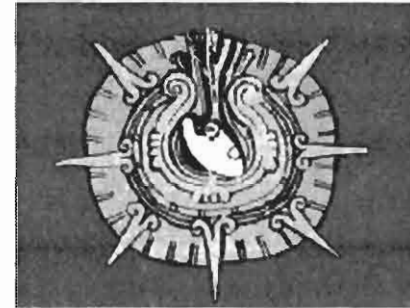
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Foreword

Bodies are all around us. They are so self-evident, so omnipresent, that for much of human history they were simply taken for granted without being critically reflected upon. We know of many religious, philosophical and scientific pronouncements on the body from the past, but it is only in relatively recent times that bodies have become a fervently contested object of intellectual investigation and debate. Much of this is due to the general interest in the body raised by postmodernism, but even more so by the specific questions created through the intensive attention feminist writers have given to the human body as gendered.

Much could be said about the materiality and physicality of this body, about corporeality and its profound ambivalence, but there is simply no body as such in a 'natural', unshaped state. Experienced as individual, alive, and gendered, the body is always shaped by inner and outer forces which inscribe into the body a particular identity and religio-cultural expectations of bodily discipline, behaviour, health and beauty. Far from being a *tabula rasa*, our bodies are sites of cultural construction. The particular way in which these have been prescribed, arranged and controlled, deeply influences the way we live with our bodies, project body images and experience bodily transformations. Nowhere is this more true than with the female body, and much has been written in recent years about women's bodies and their colonization and control by patriarchal powers and androcentric forms of thought.

The body is an ambiguous entity which is both positively and negatively valued. This is particularly true from a religious perspective, and it is therefore of considerable significance to examine the multiple meanings of gendered bodies within the large context of different religious traditions, whether universal, regional or local, as is done in the papers of this volume. From particular in-depth studies focused on specific religious cultures

and set within very time-specific contexts, whether ancient or contemporary, we can see how female bodies have been inscribed, manipulated and functioned, whether in sacred texts and rituals, cultural histories and the symbolic order, or within the social context of human relationships and sexual reproduction.

Human bodies are part of personhood; they are the sites of selfhood as well as vehicles for transcendence. Thus the body itself can be experienced religiously as a conduit for ecstasy and trance, for 'out-of-body' experiences as well as a potential locus of sacred power, a divine vessel for human transformation and healing. In some religions, specific organs of the human body are charged with spiritual forces, and the correlation which is established between the microcosm of the human body and the macrocosm of the universe, sometimes understood as divine body, is of particular interest here because it carries strong connotations of gender. The universal power of women to bring forth new life is linked to the cosmic generation of all life, so that femaleness has greater significance in relating body/earth/cosmos, symbolically and ritually expressed through the celebration of the 'Great Mother', especially in ancient, archaic and tribal religions.

But we must not forget the negative experiences and prohibitions associated with the body. There is so much human suffering and pain, disease and death, all of which have their gendered structures. Much in sacrificial religions - different from those associated with the joys of fecundity and the fertility of the earth - has to do with the partial dismemberment and sometimes even the destruction of bodies, whether it is through ritual, war, surrender or wifely submission, female obedience and prohibitive gender restrictions. When blood sacrifices become transmuted into symbolic offerings through substituting other gifts for human or animal bodies, this change is frequently accompanied by a rise in ascetic practices which regiment and harm the body and idealise 'disembodied' thought. In a severely dualistic turn, such thought can turn rigorously against the body and, being largely a male prerogative, become severely misogynist and anti-women. Many religious texts and rituals can be cited as examples of such ascetic orientations which have

fostered an anti-body attitude coupled with a rejection of the world for the sake of an idealised and disembodied transcendence. Religions that are more centered on immanence value both the body and the earth more positively, and are therefore much more women-friendly.

The numerous new insights about the intricate relationship between the body, religion, and gender provide valuable resources for contemporary women and men for their self-understanding, their personal identity and experience of embodiment, for the mutual relationship between different persons and bodies, but also for a newly envisioned and truly embodied spirituality.

The widespread interest in the body within contemporary culture, whether expressed in the body theories of recent feminist writings or seen through the lenses of cultural studies or postmodernism, presents fresh opportunities for gender studies in religion which have been pioneered by contemporary women scholars in many parts of the world. The *International Association for the History of Religions* (IAHR), with its long tradition of international conferences going back to 1900, first began to give attention to gender perspectives at its Congresses in Winnipeg (1980) and Sydney (1985), but the first panel explicitly devoted to 'Religion and Gender' was organised at the Rome Congress (1990) which eventually also led to a separate, distinct publication on *Religion and Gender* (ed. U. King, Oxford/UK and Cambridge/USA, Blackwell, 1995). Given the importance and growth of this challenging and fruitful perspective of investigation, it was gratifying to see that the IAHR Congress in Mexico (1995) brought together so many different women scholars in religion from around the world whose pioneering research on gender in diverse religious cultures, practices, rituals and texts, as well as in the study of religion itself— here focused on the perceptions and experiences of gendered bodies within wider religious contexts—produced such a rich harvest. Special thanks are due to Sylvia Marcos from Mexico for all her efforts in bringing together the international group of women scholars in the first place, and now for editing and publishing these stimulating papers in the present book. I hope that many other scholars, both women

and men, will draw upon on the challenging research results and insights of this volume for their own work and thereby help to enlarge this rich field of intellectual endeavor even more in the future.

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Presentation

The articles that make up this book were selected from the presentations of the Gender and Religion Panels offered at the *XVIIth International Congress of the History of Religions*. They are mainly the presentations from the three panels that I coordinated under the title 'Gender and Corporeality: Perspectives from Diverse Religious Traditions.'

I have included additional articles by scholars which I felt would deepen and develop the discussion of embodiment and corporeality, especially by placing it within a wider range of cultures.

The panels on Women and Religious Innovation at the congress were coordinated by Rosalind Hackett. We edited the presentations from these panels as an issue of *RELIGION* (Vol. 28, No. 4, Oct 1998).

As with most of the feminist/women's studies scholarship, the presentations at the congress and the additional articles, are re-readings of both texts and cultures. They elaborate new conceptualizations of religious traditions. They cast doubt (a 'hermeneutics of suspicion') on previous assumptions about the role and prestige of women within religious traditions. Archaeological findings and oral traditions contribute to bear witness to this rereading of texts and cultures. In these articles, the authors are 'looking for women' as they reshape the parameters by which to look for them. Their work is a corrective to androcentrism. Linking the articles and presentations is a deconstructive and reconstructive task that makes this collection a distinctive and valuable contribution to the rapidly expanding field of gender studies in religions.

S.M.

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As an early supporter of this editorial project, and an inspiring co-cordinator of the nine panels on Gender and Religions at the Congress, Rosalind Hackett deserves special mention. Finally, I want to thank Berenice Juárez for her commitment to the project, her fine computer skills, and for her contribution to the graphic design of this book, as well as Jacqueline Mosio, whose correction of the last version of the manuscript was a great help.

As always, the ideas expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the editor's viewpoints.

Sylvia Marcos
Cuernavaca, Mexico
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I Some Methodological Concerns on
the Study of Gender and Religion

Beyond a God's Eyeview: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Religion

Morny Joy

In 'The Future of Religious Studies,' the concluding chapter of his book, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, Walter Capps observes:

When speculating about the future of religious studies, one encounters considerations whose long term influence is difficult to calculate.... Charles Long's views about the ways in which a prevailing colonial, social, political, and cultural structure bestows privileges on selected religious perspectives, and positions is ... [a] significant example in point. Similarly, if taken seriously, Luce Irigaray's analyses of differences between men's and women's discourse, together with her suggestions about seemingly impartial rules of gender and grammar being deeply rooted in phallocratic assumptions about the world, carry a thoroughly reformative (although still under-recognized and articulated) conceptual capacity. And the same powers lie inherent in Renato Rosaldo's plea that astute reflection on culture cannot be properly achieved by detached, 'objective' observers who mistakenly believe it virtuous to avoid dealing with subjectivity ... It goes without saying that, at this writing, the field is only partially cognizant of the authority of some of these intellectual events, but will be influenced accordingly as they become better known.¹

In this paper, I wish to address certain aspects of these emergent areas of scholarship, for it seems to me that recent books published on the topic of Religious Studies² as a discipline do not take these issues into account. Much of the recent reflection is a result of the challenges posed by men and women of colour, by indigenous peoples and marginal groups, particularly those who reside in countries that were colonized by European powers. Religious Studies, however, continue to debate on an abstract level the varieties of religious methodologies and their rigour (or lack of it) in ways that pay little heed to the vast

changes that are taking place in these other disciplines where the 'Eurocentric mindset' and its philosophic and methodological presuppositions are being submitted to critical examination. There are various terms under which this challenge has been registered—Orientalism and postcolonialism, to name the most obvious.³ These terms are not synonymous, nor do their adherents have exactly similar views, but what they all focus on, from diverse perspectives, is the tendency obvious in Western thinking and cultural attitudes to a dualist division between the unified subject, who is the scholarly enquirer, traveller, colonizer, and the object/other (be it a person or society) that is the recipient of imposed categories of difference—be they idealized projections or simplified reductions to a predetermined system of classification.

My aim here is to examine the repercussions for Religious Studies if these charges are taken seriously. For it is one thing to modify the inadequacies of the phenomenological, structural and scientific methods in the study of religion, but another to try and articulate what a constructive alternative approach might be. I believe that Religious Studies need to begin to address such issues, if they do not wish to remain stagnant, held in thrall by incestuous debates and outmoded attitudes that are a legacy of Nineteenth Century scholarship. As a specific test case to illustrate my point, I will confine my study largely to India (though not exclusively) and the tradition that has been termed 'Hinduism,' as that is the area with which I am most familiar. Within this area, the central focus will be the analyses of their positions by women, for it is here that much of the innovative scholarship can be found, as women strive to articulate new insights of their place in the scheme of things. For, as many women authors have indicated, the process of 'othering' that has been inflicted by dominant Western values on other cultures, is similar to the way women (in both Western and many other societies) have been judged and found wanting according to the prevailing standards of masculinity and/or rationality (Visweswaran, 1988). By way of example, with reference to religion, a quotation from Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki is appropriate:

Absolutizing one religion [culture, method] such that it becomes normative for all others, is a dynamic with clear parallels to sexism, whereby one gender is established as the norm for human existence. Therefore, the critique of gender can be extended as a critique of religious imperialism.⁴

Though Suchocki makes this remark in the context of religious pluralism, I feel that her observation is particularly pertinent, for it helps to bring into focus another phenomenon that, for want of a better term, I would call a double disadvantage. This describes the fact that until recently, women of other cultures have been studied mainly by male scholars whose methods reflect their own cultural biases. This was perhaps first brought to the attention of women scholars in Comparative Religion by Rita Gross.⁵ As anthropologist Diane Bell has illustrated in her book *Daughters of the Dreaming* (particularly with reference to Durkheim's categories of sacred and profane), non-Western women have suffered from the limitations of many Western men's circumscribed view of the women of their own society, e.g., Bell's work shows how Australian aboriginal women were judged profane, lacking the necessary qualities for sacred rituals and myths, and therefore not even worth being studied.⁶ Alternatively, they have been 'elevated', according to certain western males' unfettered fantasies, as paragons of sexual pleasure, beyond the boundaries of bourgeois conformity.

This latter tendency is graphically illustrated by Rana Kabbani, in *Europe's Myths of the Orient*, where Flaubert's description of the Queen of Sheba in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* presents such a figment of the imagination:

She is the pastiche of Oriental female prototypes; she dances like Salome, she tells stories like Sheherazade, is regal and ridiculous at once like traditional portrayals of Cleopatra.⁷

In such a scenario

...the onlooker is admitted into the Orient by visual seduction; he encounters the woman in a state of undress, emerging from the intimacy of the bath—in a state of pleasing vulnerability. *He* is not vulnerable: he is male,

presumably in full dress, European, rational ... and armed with language—he narrates the encounter in a reflective, post facto narrative; *he* creates the Orient.”⁸

In this context, it is also salient to observe that even Edward Said, the initial and prolific denunciator of Orientalism, has been distinctly silent on the roles of women—whether distorted or ignored by male scholars.⁹ When it comes to studies in religion, as distinct from literature, (although voyeurism has not been absent), there has been a distinct emphasis on what Bell has described as the official cult—regulated and maintained by men. A cogent example is cited by Frédérique Apffel Marglin in ‘Feminist Orientalism and Development,’ concerning Hinduism, where prevails “...the emphasis on Brahmanical, scriptural, traditional (a transplantation of the Western idea of canon) that was largely a product of British colonial interference.”¹⁰

What is noticeable as a result of this perception by women is a change in the range and variety of the topics studied—where not only women, but other aspects of the religion, previously judged unorthodox, are being reappropriated. An excellent example of this trend in Hinduism can be found in the work of Kathleen Erndl who, in commenting on her work on the Hindu Goddess of Northwest India, in her book *Victory to the Mother*, describes it as a contribution to the appreciation of Hinduism in its full religious diversity:

Building on the studies of earlier generations of scholars who regarded Sanskrit texts, philosophical schools such as *Vedanta*, and the renunciant tradition as normative, the present generation of scholars has expanded its understanding of Hinduism to include theistic, popular, folk, non-Sanskritic, and regional traditions.¹¹

Now, while such a development is certainly breaking new ground, and breaking down old stereotypes, there still remains a further problem that needs to be articulated and faced squarely. And this has to do with first-world feminists studying women from other cultures. Are they, albeit in different ways, still perpetrating sins similar to those of the fathers? In an article, entitled ‘Under Western Eyes,’ Chandra Talpade Mohanty states the issue quite succinctly:

[F]eminist scholarship, like most other kinds of scholarship, is not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject. It is a directly political and discursive *practice* in that it is purposeful and ideological. It is best seen as a mode of intervention into particularly hegemonic discourses (for example, traditional anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, religious studies etc.); it is a political praxis which counters and resists the totalizing imperative of age-old ‘legitimate’ and ‘scientific’ bodies of knowledge. Thus, feminist scholarly practices (whether reading, writing, critical or textual) are inscribed in relations of power—relations which they counter, resist, or even implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship.¹²

So far, so good. But Mohanty is particularly concerned about much writing undertaken by first world women on those of the third world. ‘[The] representation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation on correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures.’¹³ Mohanty then proceeds to analyze specific writings of women that

...discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular ‘third world woman’—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.¹⁴

What Mohanty is particularly concerned about are issues that have also been grounds of contention in Western feminism—issues such as ‘essentialism’ in the definition of ‘woman’ and methodological universalisms. In North America, African-American,¹⁵ Latina,¹⁶ East-Asian¹⁷ indigenous¹⁸ and lesbian¹⁹ women, for example, have all argued that they do not recognize themselves in the descriptions of women that reflect the interests of white, middle-class, educated, straight women (among whose often uncritical and self-referent ranks I place myself). But instead of indulging in self-recrimination, I would like to pursue this problem of a generic ‘third world woman’ raised by Mohanty, and how it has been contested by Indian scholars such as

KumKum Sangari, Kalpana Ram, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, and Radha Kumar in an effort to appreciate the type of delicate and respectful negotiation that now needs to be observed when western feminists encounter women scholars who are speaking eloquently in their own voices.²¹

For in whose voice and on whose behalf do women from Europe and North America speak when undertaking projects in History of Religions? Obviously, such questions raise the topics not just of agency — both for the investigator and those who are the objects of study, but also of the nature of the discipline itself under the aegis of which the investigation is being conducted. The questions involved thus have both ontological and methodological references. This becomes immediately apparent when I refer to the agent who undertakes a study by the term 'subject,' and refer to the object of investigation as a 'subject' too (with neither term implying subjection). The issue involved is obviously one concerning the definition and role of subjectivity. How can there be an approach that allows for the diversity and complexity involved in the interaction of two autonomous human beings, when one cannot take for granted that her specific interpretation of the world, reinforced by the demands of her culture and the particular discipline she employs, is all-inclusive, universalizable? Recent developments, fostered mainly by postmodernism, bring into sharp focus the constructed nature of not only what I refer to as 'identity' or 'subjectivity,' but also of 'culture' and 'discipline' (in the sense of area of study). But how can one entertain the subtle (and not so subtle) demaskings of deconstructive strategies, without succumbing either to the often-invoked and much feared spectre of relativism or to a disillusioned silence?

It is to the debate surrounding these controversial terms and their employment in the discourse of History of Religions by a few male scholars as well as feminists that I would now like to turn. Now, there is no doubt that History of Religions, and the discrete religious traditions that have composed its domain, is the construct of a particular period, i.e., the early Nineteenth Century, which endorsed a particular approach that reflected its

penchant for classifying/containing things non-Western (though things European were also not exempt from such categorization). As Philip Almond describes it:

The later part of the Eighteenth and the early part of the Nineteenth Centuries saw the 'discovery' of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Prior to this time, Hinduism and Buddhism had merely been inchoate and unclassified aspects of that which was not Judaic, or Christian, or Muslim, unidentified facets of the polyglot worlds of 'Heathenism' or 'Paganism'.²¹

As such, as a discipline, it had its own preferred and biased methodology:

The major world religions have primarily been constructed in the West as textual traditions and the major mode of understanding them has been through critical analysis of their texts. And the dominance of the text in Western culture generally has led us in the study of religion to see the written text as the key element in the understanding of religious life, and to construct Eastern religions on the model of predominantly text-based Western religions.²²

The strictly historical and textual approach involved in this enterprise has undergone some realignment in the past few decades, much of it due to the incorporation of the methods of structuralism (anthropology) and of phenomenology (philosophy)—though the implementation of such methods has often been idiosyncratic.²³ But by and large, the status of the investigator and his/her preconceptions were not ever subjected to serious scrutiny. History of Religions remained, for the most part, unabashedly modern in its self-understanding and definition. Even Ninian Smart, in one of his few references to colonialism and its effects on extraneous religious traditions states:

Most traditional cultures have undergone the colonial impact of the West, which has also been the agent of the introduction of, among other things, modern science and technical methods. Though these in principle have no motherland, they can seem like alien forces when they arrive: but forces too that can have immense attraction, partly because of the riches they promise, but mainly

because of the prestige that plays around them... The forces in question are: modern science and technological know-how, colonial oppression but at the same time the ideals of national liberation, democracy, socialism and capitalism.²⁴

With a brief nod in the direction of cultural diversity, and the need for some self-analysis—along the lines of Habermas' ideological critique—there is very little acknowledgement by Smart that any radical restructuring of the discipline might be needed, apart from his recommendation to broaden and deepen people's attitudes, by reading 'the sages of the world as well as the iconoclasts'—of whom Karl Popper appears to be the paradigm.²⁵

But who are the iconoclasts in History of Religions? And what has been their impact on the discipline? Apart from the searing indictment issued by Charles Long, particularly in his essays dealing with the graphic realities of being black in a North American landscape, that has tended to colour religion, God and all things connected with its study in the colour white, there seems to be no concession by male scholars to the type of radical questions that postmodernism has raised.²⁶ Most debates regarding the 'correct' methodology seem merely to be rearranging just one more time the theoretical furniture that has been there since the beginning. Except, that is, for the refractory and insistent interrogations undertaken by feminists.²⁷ And it is to their challenges regarding both method and agency that I would now like to turn—from two perspectives: that of first world women writers who study third world and third world women as respondents/subjects in their own right.

That these questionable terms are set within a particular Western framework has been brought to our attention by Chandra Talpade Mohanty:

Without the overdetermined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular and privileged) first world. Without 'third world women,' the particular self-presentation of Western women mentioned above would be problematical. I am suggesting that one enables and sustains the other.²⁸

Yet in her essay (which was originally published in 1984), Mohanty does not offer any explicit solution, but is content to draw attention to the binaries inherent in the Western approach that are responsible for the situation.

[I]t is only insofar as 'Woman/Women' and 'the East' are defined as Others, or as peripheral, that Western Man/Humanism can represent himself as center. It is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundlessness determines the center. Just as feminists such as Kristeva and Cixous deconstruct the latent anthropomorphism in Western discourse, I have suggested a parallel strategy in this essay in uncovering a latent ethnocentrism in particular feminist writings on women in the third world.²⁹

Mohanty's appeal for change, ultimately, however, is to those Western thinkers—Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, Said, Irigaray and Cixous (associated mainly with postmodernism)—who through their writings have drawn attention to the implicit hierarchization in Western dualist logic as well as the political apparatus that is automatically involved to reduce, subsume and colonize, both theoretically and practically, whatever is deemed different.

But is this theoretical intervention sufficient to change things?³⁰ Since Mohanty's essay was published, deconstructive tactics and their subversion of Western claims to unity, essence, presence, selfhood, that are the trademark of those mainly French/Western thinkers mentioned above, have met a mixed reaction — particularly concerning the resultant definition and implementation of forms of subjectivity. For instance, KumKum Sangari in an article in *Cultural Critique* in 1987, entitled 'The Politics of the Possible,' designates the occurrence of postmodernism as a crisis in Western epistemological structures only, and worries that the accompanying move of the 'self-conscious dissolution of the bourgeois subject' is not necessarily an appropriate one to be adopted by former colonized peoples. She worries that in fact it 'may well turn out to be in some respects, another internationalization of the West.'³¹

Other feminists, however, are even more adamant in their opposition to such any wholesale adoption of the postmodern posture, for they feel that by buying into such an elaborate, if not convoluted theoretical model, they would be depriving themselves of a much-needed identification as agent and access to subjectivity. Kalpana Ram, an Indian anthropologist now working in Australia, concurs with the women of the Stree Shakti Sanghata group, who write in their introduction to their book *Life Stories of the Women in the Telengana People's Struggles*:

Ours is an attempt to analyze and understand the ideological framework in which women struggled, the experiential dimensions of that struggle, by recovering the subjective experience of women to capture women's voices from the past and to present issues as they were perceived by women.³²

Kalpana Ram thus refuses to allow postmodernism's displacements and deferrals to be assimilated into what she understands as the postcolonial project. And in so doing, she strives to keep distinct Indian women's struggle to forge a subjectivity distinct from former Western metaphysical claims as much as from their suspect postmodern dismantling. Ram is also vehemently expressing her opposition to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak whose work, regarding postcolonialism, is most known for her essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'³³ Ram believes that Spivak too easily conflates the negative/nihilistic reading of postmodernism with postcolonialism, and thereby silences the voices of the colonized. And though Spivak has allowed in other contexts the fact of strategic essentialism and political alliances,³⁴ Ram would assert that, though women have been oppressed, even marginalized, they have not been completely silenced, nor have they been totally deprived of agency.³⁵

There is no warrant here for us to read the peasant women produced by this text as unified subjects of Western metaphysics... But neither have we any warrant here to incorporate this project into Western poststructuralism's valorization of the decentred subject, since this would involve setting aside the express agenda of the Indian feminist group. That agenda affirms the process of learning

to listen as a part of their movement towards subjecthood, just as they view the rural women's learning to tell stories as their movement towards *their* claiming agency.³⁶

Though this assertion is followed by an admission that many issues still need 'to be adequately conceptualized... regarding such muddled terms as subjecthood, agency, autonomy, voice, recovery of voice,' Ram is adamant that the issue of articulation interests her far more than the 'death of the female [Western] subject.'³⁷ In her opposition to the merger of poststructuralism [postmodernism] and postcolonialism, Ram wishes to demarcate a territory that is both activist and political, that prevents what she considers as both the muting of voices and political mutation that occur in a program such as Gayatri Spivak's. "By the end of Spivak's account, it is no longer only the subaltern who does not speak. The entire subcontinent of India, and all those on it, not only the marginalized ... have fallen strangely silent... The only voice that speaks with authority is Spivak herself."³⁸

Asha Varadharajan is also critical of Spivak on this account.

Moreover, the space she [Spivak] grants the 'wholly other' becomes the hazardous groundlessness of theory which must seek, fruitlessly, its ground. This contention unwittingly clarifies the theory's insubstantial object. In the name of a respect for thresholds and limits, the subaltern is once again silenced. By the end of her essay, 'theory' contains the dialectic of friend and foe as it does the web of desire and power. The 'native' represents the ineffable, ontological residue of the failure of representation, the impossibility of theory, the sign of the inadequacy of self-reflection, and the occasion for, one imagines, further musings on that inadequacy.³⁹

But is there not a middle ground that does not totally reject postmodernism (of a nihilist variety) and makes room for a type of radical questioning that does not automatically render any response equivocal? Rey Chow, a Chinese-American who has carefully scrutinized the situation, has remarked that: "The 'postmodern' cultural situation in which non-Western feminists now find themselves is [even] a difficult and cynical one." As she

reads it, a non-Western feminist is implicated in an intricate set of relations, both with regard to her own culture, as well as to the interferences from the West.

For the Third World feminist, the question is never that of asserting power as a woman alone, but of showing how the concern for women is inseparable from other types of cultural oppression and negotiation. In a more pronounced, because more technologized/automatized manner, her status as postmodern automaton is both subject and object of her critical operation.⁴¹

Chow acknowledges the inevitability of the encroachments of Western technology, but she wants to avoid not just its mechanization, but a predetermined reaction on the part of non-Westerners with a type of knee-jerk rejection of Western modes of redressing the balance (i.e. postmodernism). She seems to endorse a critical operation that is highly sensitive to cultural importations of any variety, while admitting their inescapable influences.

The task that faces Third World feminists is thus not simply that of 'animating' the oppressed women of their cultures, but of making the automatized and animated condition of their own voices the conscious point of departure of their own intervention it also means that they speak with the awareness of 'cross-cultural' speech as a limit, and that their very own use of the victimhood of women and Third World cultures is both symptomatic of and inevitably complicitous with the First World.⁴²

This exchange is reminiscent of the arguments that have taken place in North America and Europe between politically-inclined activists and those of a more theoretical persuasion. While I do not wish to undertake a rehash of this Western interchange, it does seem appropriate to note that Western feminists are only too cognizant of the dilemma of Western subjectivity and its drawbacks for third world feminists.⁴³ But this is not the central concern of this paper. Instead, what I would like to investigate is how certain Indian women have begun to resolve this problem and the creative implications it has for

Comparative Religion — although here, of course, I have myself to be all-too aware of another Western predisposition — the facile misappropriation of another's voice as one's own.

In a book named *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (1993), Rajeswari Sundar Rajan discusses how she has come to understand and designate her own brand of subjectivity in a way that respects the intricacies of her position.⁴⁴

Thus as a postcolonialist feminist academic in India I undeniably have an institutional status that affiliates me with the academy in the west; at the same time that I do not have a share in all the privileges of that 'other' place - especially, and above all, that of the distance that provides the critical perspective of 'exile'.⁴⁵

What I find particularly important here is Rajan's distinction between 'native' figures, such as herself and 'diasporic' ones such as Spivak. In thus defining and asserting herself, she refuses to be accorded the place of the mute subaltern that Spivak has described or be reduced to a slavish imitator of Western intellectual fads. She then continues, "My intention is not to claim for myself 'marginality'— it is a dubious privilege in any case—but to show that location is fixed not (only) in the relative terms of centre and periphery, but in the positive (positivistic?) terms of an actual and geographical location."⁴⁶

What Rajan is doing, is applying the interrogative mode of a postmodern approach, rather than an all-encompassing nihilistic mode (which as a reaction to Western linear logic, still deals—for all its seeming wily evasions—in reverse exclusions and suppressions). Rajan does not intend, by her own statement, to recommend this awareness of her own situatedness as paradigmatic for all fellow third world women/postcolonial writers. It is symptomatic only of her own present location. As a corollary, however, she would insist on the multiple possibilities of perspectives and divergent interests—be they political, social, geographical, economic, religious or methodological—that inform any position. Thus, she is insistent on an acute sensitivity that witnesses the effects that are brought to bear by her particular

circumstances. In this guise, Rajan acknowledges the articulation of a form of subjectivity that is not absolute, that is qualified by change and diversity, but can nonetheless be articulated:

The heterogeneity of postcolonial intellectual identities therefore needs to be acknowledged, as a matter of more than simple 'influences'. It has seemed to me worthwhile to insist upon the specificity of the configurations of the contemporary Indian social and political situation in describing the postcolonial intellectuals' predicament.⁴⁷

For Rajan, who is basically a theorist, every thinker's affiliations are "multiple, contingent and frequently contradictory."⁴⁸ This can be compared to Mohanty who, as an activist, expresses a similar sentiment. "It is only by understanding the *contradictions* inherent in women's location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised."⁴⁹ Here both the theorist's and the activist's programme coincide in their acknowledgment of the kaleidoscopic forces at work in any situation—and I believe that this is the crucial point in recent feminist work in many areas. This position could not necessarily be characterized as a separatist feminist epistemology as such (for there are male theorists who have arrived at similar conclusions⁵⁰) — but it has a uniquely feminist flavor in that such an awareness results from intense debate concerning the sex/gender clarification, the theory/practice arguments, as well as the critique of any essentialist definitions. This has also led to an appreciation that whether in theory or practice, every act of knowledge is a political one—in which the tentacles of power inevitably insinuate themselves. But it also acknowledges that every context in which it occurs is necessarily compromised and circumscribed. There is no ideal position; there is no innocent impulse. Such an awareness of these inherent ambiguities, if not contradictions, marks the strategic awareness of a feminist approach — critical both of any process and of its outcome, whether received or reached by self-reflexive critique. Such rapprochement between theorists and activists on this issue will not mean that feminists will become ubiquitously eloquent or utterly overwhelmed by data, but that they need to be extraordinarily sensitive to the many-facted, even paradoxical aspects of the contexts of women's lives.

In this paradigm, no-one can presume ever to speak for the other, but there can be respect for divergence, at the same time there is re-cognition of strategic needs to forge alliances—be they personal, social or political. Such coalitions go beyond naive reciprocity, where power all too often lays in the hands of the instigator of the interchange, usually a Western agent. These new affiliations can effect the transformation of personal orientations and methodological strategems of both partners. Exchange is no longer a one-way street—its alternative procedures can disrupt complacency, shatter preconceptions, and realign relations in fundamental ways.

This obviously means that each person needs to take account of continually shifting allegiances and boundaries. It is at once a recognition of a contingent subjectivity where our ideas are constantly being revised and recast, as are the mobile conditions of our own society and culture. It also respects the ferment in cultures that Western categories have presumptively deemed static. The admission of this ceaseless state of fluctuations is not an abandonment of standards or of coherency, but rather an acknowledgement that the secure patterns of the old subject/object dichotomy are no longer adequate. At the same time, the notions of neutral objectivity and predetermined criteria of evaluation become apparent as the synthetic and limited measures that they were—though human hubris presumed them accurate or 'true'.

This admission has had some interesting implications for the area of studies known as History of Religions. For instance, take as an example the old *homo hierarchicus* of Hinduism. As a simplistic generalization of a culture, it can no longer suffice. Its rigid demarcations restricted any cultural or religious analysis to a classification dictated by one focal term that determined all other points of reference. What is needed, instead of such universalized analytic categories (which all too easily become mistaken for material realities) are "careful, historically specific generalizations responsive to complex realities."⁵¹

In this context, Kalpana Ram's assessment of Dumont's work is particularly pertinent:

Most criticism of Dumont as focused on the logical fallacy of allowing the part (a Brahmanical view of caste, or the motif of caste itself) to stand for the whole (caste in its entirety, or Indian society in general)... What theoretical status should be given to a line of reasoning in which India and the Indian subject are named (as 'hierarchy' and 'collective man') primarily for the purposes of a critique made *by Western man, of Western man?*⁵²

She then gets to the heart of the matter.

If the speaking subjects of comparative sociology [religion] are Western individuals in search of greater self-knowledge, then what is the Indian subjects' stake in this sociology [comparative religion]?⁵³

Ram's question is crucial as an indicator of just how much Western studies of other religions have been undertaken with the dubious (even if unconscious) intention of providing either verification or insight for the instigator of the research, according to preconceived notions which do not allow the person/tradition being studied in his/her/its own voice. Thus, at this time, when 'third world women' are claiming the right to their own mode of self-representation, as well as being scrupulously self-aware of the conditions that produce their statements, is it not time for Westerners to begin to acknowledge their own situatedness, their own awareness of the confluence of influences that motivate them when they undertake any comparative study of religion both with reference to their position of subjectivity and method [radically suspicious hermeneutics]?

Kathleen Erndl's work, *Victory to the Mother*, mentioned earlier in this essay, is one example of this form of approach. Without engaging in theoretically correct terminology, she is open about the self-reflective process involved:

I wanted to view the Goddess from the perspective of the lived experience of her devotees. This is far easier said than done, and at various points in my fieldwork, I wondered if it was not at best naive and at worst arrogant to believe such a thing was possible.⁵⁴

Her remarks are evidence of a changed approach, indicative of a realization that allows for the complexity, for contrary and even ambivalent impulses, that the Indian women scholars discussed have identified and admitted. Such a disposition of chastened rationality reflects the caution that is advocated by the Vietnamese scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha with regard to readers and students of other cultures. Trinh counsels such a person "to assert her difference (not individualizing her perception) by setting into relief the type of individualization that links her (whether centrally or marginally) as an individual to the systems of dominant values."⁵⁵ In this connection Erndl states:

Why did I choose to study this topic, and why have I gone about it in the way I have? These are questions I have asked myself and that other Americans have also asked me.⁵⁶

The approach adopted by Erndl need not mean that contemporary women scholars assume the white man's burden in a new guise, but that they be critically conscious of the presumptions they bear and the incongruities they will thus encounter. It also leaves open the space for a reevaluation of their own unquestioned practices or cherished assumptions.

There are other works by Western scholars (not all by feminists) that also witness to this somewhat less imperious mode of scholarship and subjectivity. I mention William Sax's *Mountain Goddess*,⁵⁷ and Penny Magee's article 'Sex and Secularism: Indian Women and the Politics of Religious Discourse'.⁵⁸ These changes of reflexive consciousness and methodological versatility are occurring in Western scholarship at the same time as, for example, Indian women scholars, e.g., Romila Thapar, Uma Chakravarti, Sudesh Vaid, Lani Mati, Amrita Chhachhi are charting new courses with regards to the role of women in Hinduism in ways that contest the colonial assignation of female roles that reinforced the Brahmanical monopoly and the ideology of Sanskritization.⁵⁹

These changing perspectives reflect one of the main contributions of feminism to scholarship, that is the interrogation of not only what is being said, but by who, and in whose interests. For too long, History of Religions, within a context of colonialism or Orientalism, has preferred to obliterate the indigenous or local

population's point of view, i.e., their specific subjectivity (particularly that of women) in deference to their own more refined, systematic or conceptually sophisticated models. These assumptions are now being called into question by articulate feminist scholars in many fields, but History of Religions as a discipline seems reluctant to revise its presuppositions in both method and theory. This is disappointing, not just because its failure to do so amounts to a rejection of feminist and postcolonial scholarship, but because it is depriving itself of the type of revitalization that comes from a thorough reexamination of the complacency that underlies the Western intellectual enterprise which, though it proclaimed the values of humanism, was actually an exercise of 'homogenization,' in all senses of the word.⁶⁰

Notes

1. Walter Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, pp. 338-9.
2. The term *Religionswissenschaft* is a definitional minefield. It has been translated into English in various ways, and there remains an ongoing conflict as to how to define the term and the scope of the discipline or field in English. For purposes of this paper, I am referring to it in the guise of that aspect of Religious Studies that incorporates Comparative Religion. No recent books on method (at the time of writing, 1995, with the exception of Capps) have referred to the recent work of postcolonial thinkers.
3. The term 'Orientalism' refers to a Western or Eurocentric projection of fears and fantasies onto countries, societies and religions that are deemed exotic. As a phenomenon, it is not confined to the 'Orient', i.e., Near Eastern Islamic cultures, but can be applied to similar attitudes to Asia, Africa, Central and South America. Postcolonialism, as an offshoot of this awareness, in turn puts into question the imposition of cultural absolutes/ideals on a country or peoples who have been subjected to the influence of European imperialism. Without resorting to universal definitions of the terms, which are problematic, both these repudiations reject a pattern of identification according to a dominant principle that is in the service of a Eurocentric ideal: be it 'truth' in the context of knowledge, or 'civilization', in connection with cultural mores. For recent publications see: Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1989. Talal Asad and J. Dixon, 'Translating Europe's Others', in F. Barker et al. (eds), *Europe and its Others*, Vol. 1, Colchester, Essex University Press; Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, New York, Routledge, 1990.
4. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, 'In Search of Justice', in J. Hick and P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Maryknoll in Orbis Press, 1989, p. 150.
5. Rita Gross, 'Androcentrism and Androgyny in the Methodology of History of Religions', in *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*, Missoula, Montana, Scholars Press, 1977, pp. 7-21
6. Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 236, 242-248.

7. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of the Orient*, London, Macmillan, 1986, p. 72.
8. Kabbani, p. 73.
9. In a study of Turkish women, entitled *A World of Difference*, Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 40, Julie Marcus states: "In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said documents the European obsession with women and oriental sexuality, but he does so incidentally, as part of the process by which the Oriental was constructed as an objectified other, unable to speak as an individual and known only through the European writer The important role of women and sexuality in the structuring of Western discourse on the East is a matter he doesn't dwell upon and, thus obscures the centrality of women and sexuality to the totality of orientalist knowledge."
10. Certain contemporary Indian women scholars are also trenchant in their criticism of this importation, and are rewriting the history of their tradition, with special attention to the exclusion or misrepresentation of women. See Romila Thapur, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for Hindu Identity,' in *Modern Asian Studies* 23/2 (1989), pp. 209-231. Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script From the Past,' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989, pp. 27-87.
11. Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, Symbol*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 7-8.
12. Chandra Talpede Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes,' in Chandra Talpede Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 33.
13. Mohanty, loc. cit. p. 33.
14. Mohanty, loc. cit. p. 33.
15. bell hooks, 'Black women: Shaping Feminist Theory,' in *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, Boston, South End Books, 1983, pp. 1-15; Mary Childers and bell hooks, 'A Conversation about Race and Class,' in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (eds), *Conflicts in Feminism*, Routledge, New York, 1990, pp. 60-81.
16. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987; Yvonne Yabro-Bejarano,

- 'Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La frontera*, Cultural Studies, "Difference," and the Non-Unitary Subject,' in *Cultural Critique*, (Fall 1994), pp. 5-27.
17. Rey Chow, 'It's you, and not me: Dominations and "Othering" in Theorizing the "Third World",' in Elizabeth Weed (ed.), *Coming to Terms*, New York, Routledge, 1989, pp. 152-161.
 18. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1986, pp. 262-268.
 19. Claudia Card, *Lesbian Choices*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995. Claudia Card, Katie King, 'Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture: Gay/Straight Remappings in Contemporary Feminism,' in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (eds), *Conflict in Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 82-101.
 20. I am using Indian women thinkers as my representative thinkers in this instance, as I am most familiar with their work. I would like to acknowledge the prolific work of women from African, Asian, Latin, Meso-American backgrounds in this area.
 21. Philip C. Almond, 'The End of "Religious Pluralism,"' in N. Habel (ed.), *Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia*, Adelaide, Australian Associates for the Study of Religion, 1992, pp. 49-50.
 22. Almond, op.cit., p. 52.
 23. Here, the work of Mircea Eliade and his controversial interpretation of phenomenology in the study of religion is pertinent. See the various essays in *The Quest*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969.
 24. Ninian Smart, 'Intellectual Implications of Religious Studies,' in *Religion and the Western Mind*, Albany, SUNY, 1987, p. 512.
 25. Smart, op.cit., p. 65.
 26. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in The Interpretation of Religion*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986.
 27. See the book edited by Ursula King, where many of the included papers were given at the 1990 Rome congress of the I.A.H.R. The article by Ursula King herself is of particular pertinence: 'A Question of Identity: Women Scholars and the Study of Religion,' *Gender and Religion*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, pp. 219-244.
 28. Mohanty, *Third World Women*, p. 74.
 29. Mohanty, op.cit., p. 74

30. As I was revising this paper for inclusion in this book, I came across a further revision of Mohanty's paper in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, London, Arnold, 1996. Her revisions are not that substantial, but she gives more stress to the work of the French women, Hélène Cixous, Sarah Kofman, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray as deconstructing the Western humanist model. But her basic charge regarding the need for a similar deconstruction of Western women's studies of "third world" women remains the same. However, in a final footnote, she refers to the work of Marnia Lazreg, 'Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria', in *Feminist Studies*, 14/1 (1988), pp. 81-107, who advocates "positive directions for a self-conscious crosscultural analysis" along lines somewhat similar to those I have suggested.
31. KumKum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', in *Cultural Critique*, (Fall 1987), p. 185.
32. Stree Shakti Sanghtana, 'We Were Making History, ... Telengana People's Struggle,' in *Kali for Women*, New Delhi, 1989, quoted in Kalpana Ram, 'Too Traditional Once Again: Some Poststructuralists on the Aspirations of the Immigrant / Third World Female Subject,' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17 (1993), p. 9.
33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.
34. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York, Methuen, 1987, p. 205.
35. See also Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, London, Verso, 1993.
36. Kalpana Ram, 'Too "Traditional" Once Again,' op.cit., p. 10.
37. Ram, op.cit., p. 10.
38. Ram, op.cit., p. 19.
39. Asha Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said and Spivak*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 94.
40. Rey Chow, 'Postmodern Automaton,' in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington,

- Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 67. In another essay in the same volume, Chow is not quite so hard on Spivak as her Indian critics. As she observes: 'Spivak argues the impossibility of the subaltern's constitution in life. The subaltern cannot speak, not because there are not activities in which we can locate a subaltern mode of life/culture/subjectivity, but because, as is indicated by the critique of thought and articulation given to us by Western intellectuals such as Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva, and Derrida (Spivak's most important reference), "speaking" itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination.' As she says in an interview: "If the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern any more." 'Where Have All the Natives Gone?', pp. 35-36. The ultimate question in this debate seems to be, who is defining what it is to I speak, and who, and from what position, is stating the terms of reference?
41. Chow, op.cit., p. 111.
 42. Chow, "Postmodern Automaton," op.cit., p. 112.
 43. Judith Butler comments on the critique of Western subjectivity with particular reference to Anzaldúa's and other postcolonialist critiques of the subject as an instrument of Western imperialism: "Do women want to become subjects on the model which requires and produces an anterior region of abjection, or must feminism become a process which is self-critical about the processes that produce and destabilize identity categories? To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject; to deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term 'the subject' refers, and that we consider the linguistic function it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority". See Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations', in Joan Scott and Judith Butler (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p.15.
 44. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonization*, New York, Routledge, 1993.
 45. Rajan, op.cit., pp. 8-9.
 46. Rajan, op.cit., p. 9.
 47. Rajan, op.cit., p. 9. To this end, Rajan has distinguished between 'native' and 'diasporic' (i.e. resident and non-resident) Indian intellectuals "who, while sharing a common identity, do not inhabit the same historic space." p. 9.

48. Rajan, op.cit., p. 8.
49. Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes,' op.cit., p. 66.
50. See Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
51. Smith, op.cit., p. 69.
52. Kalpana Ram, 'Modernist Anthropology and the Construction of Indian Identity,' in *Meanjin*, 51/3 (1992), p. 596. An excellent study that also critiques Dumont's univocal vision can be found in Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison and the Gift: Ritual, Prestation, and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.
53. Ram, op.cit., p. 596.
54. Ram, op.cit., p. 15.
55. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 113.
56. Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, op.cit., p. 11.
57. William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991. See especially p. 5. "In concentrating on the mutual entailment of meanings, I find myself siding with those for whom anthropology is not natural science in search of fixed, universal laws but an interpretative one in search of local logics, particular processes and fluid systems of meaning."
58. Penny Magee, 'Sex and Secularism: Indian Women and the Politics of Religious Discourse,' in M. Joy and P. Magee (eds), *Claiming our Rites*, Adelaide, The Australian Association for Religious Studies, 1994, pp. 159-185.
59. Lana Mati, 'Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception,' in *Feminist Review*, 35 (1990), pp. 24-41; Amrita Chhachhi, *Identity Politics*, in Kamia Bhasin, Rita Menon and Nighat Said Khan (eds), *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1994, pp. 1-13.
60. Here I indulge shamelessly in a play on the word homo, Greek for 'same', Latin for 'man' (generic variety), and the French homme.

Gender and the Contest over the Indian Past

Nancy A. Falk

Nearly four decades ago, while an undergraduate student in my first History of Religions course, I absorbed a representation of Indian cultural and religious history that will be familiar to many who read this paper. According to this paradigm, Indian civilization as we know it began with the arrival on Indian soil from somewhere in central Asia of a people known as Aryas, related by race and language to my own European ancestors. During a span of eight or more centuries, Aryas extended their sway throughout India while their priests, known as brahmins, developed their religion from a simple nature-worship to a profound and mystical monistic vision. The collection of texts known as Veda recorded these developments. Rival groups such as Buddhists and Jains eventually challenged brahmin hegemony, while brahmins themselves compromised their teachings by trying to reconcile them with assumptions and practice of India's native peoples. Indian belief reverted to polytheistic superstition and its practice to idolatry, rule-bound ritualism, and dark Tantric magic—with occasional overlays, borrowings from and reactions to the experience of the period of Muslim conquest. Reform movements of the nineteenth century eventually rescued their proud Vedic heritage from the ensuing tangle. Such movements had resulted from Indian encounters with the enlightened West — which themselves were a by-product of British colonial rule.

Stripped of its more conspicuously value-laden language, this portrayal has persisted as the underlying framework for much Western writing about India's religious history, especially in introductory textbooks.¹ Nonetheless, during the past decade, scholars in India have increasingly contested it. Among the most persistent of these are several feminist² women historians, most notably New Delhi-based scholars Uma Chakravarti and Romila Thapar.³ These have charged that this classic portrayal exaggerates and distorts the Vedic age, that it privileges the

viewpoint of a single group—caste Hindus, especially brahmins, and that it is as much a product of political rhetoric as of scholarship.⁴

I do not have time to describe their critique in full detail here. Rather I wish to ask what is at stake in their challenge, and why feminists are so concerned to bring about the paradigm's unravelling. I shall argue that women's fate has been very closely bound to this version of India's history. On the one hand, it served as an important ideological rationale for the so-called 'Women's Emancipation Movement' of the 19th and early 20th centuries. On the other, it has generated barriers for today's feminists in India, past which they must proceed if freedoms won for women in the past are to continue.

To understand why and how the Arya-centered paradigm has become so important to Indian women, it is necessary to sketch how it came into being. It is not indigenous to India, whose nearest approximations to historiography in pre-colonial times were the legends of royal dynasties preserved in epics and Puranas. Instead it is a product of British colonial rule and the tradition of Orientalist inquiry explored so well by Western historians P.J. Marshall and David Kopf.⁵ Like the greater Orientalist movement of which it was a part, Indian Orientalism was suffused with Renaissance notions of great Golden Ages of the past which could regenerate the present by bringing to it lost reserves of creativity and wisdom. Such ideas were transplanted to India when those in charge of consolidating colonial power searched for past models and precedents on which they could build an administrative structure tolerable to Indians. An important part of this new administrative structure was the codification of native Indian laws; hence one goal of the colonial search for the Indian past was to recover authoritative legal texts. This is why the *Laws of Manu* and *dharmashastra* figured so prominently in early Orientalist explorations. But the search for scripture was likewise essential, inasmuch as scripture is a source of absolute norms.

Very early in their quest, the Indian Orientalists got wind of a class of teachings known as 'Veda,' said to be extremely ancient and authoritative. They went to great effort to secure these

teachings' substance, an effort delightfully documented in P.J. Marshall's *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*.⁶ Vedic knowledge was hard to come by because only brahmins were considered pure enough to study Vedic materials, because Veda was transmitted via memorization rather than via written text, because Vedic Sanskrit was exceedingly difficult, and—most notably—because many Indians and even many brahmins were less than certain about exactly what 'Veda' might be.⁷ Having finally secured a series of works that could be called 'Veda' with some confidence — a task fairly well accomplished by the late 1800's — Orientalist scholars went on to reconstruct from these a portrayal of a 'Vedic Age.' Next, as David Kopf has shown, they began to fill in the historical gap between this ancient era and the late medieval period with which their own explorers and Indian Muslim historians had some acquaintance. They found evidence of the period of the great heterodox sects and Ashokan empires; next, the classical Hindu empires; and then, gradually, they reconstructed regional histories and the great *bhakti* movements.

Now I take the time to describe this process to show that, from the very beginning, this version of Indian history was unilineal. A single point of Indian origins was selected and all else was derived from and thus set in relationship to that point. The paradigm was swiftly made also devolutionary: the entire timespan from founding age to colonial era came to be regarded as a kind of fall. In her important article 'Whatever happened to the Vedic *Dasis*?', Uma Chakravarti has shown how works of Max Muller, British popular writers, and Indian nationalist novelists, politicians, and scholars bit by bit set up the devolutionary scenario. Feeding off one another, they wove glamour into the Vedic age, making its social system egalitarian and its people pure, creative, spiritual and heroic. They were driven by differing motives: for the British, racism became a significant factor, after the Aryas were discovered to be distant cousins of their European conquerors; nationalists were moved more by the need to establish an admirable ancestry and identity. Nonetheless, divergent interests produced a remarkably convergent picture.

How do women fit into this picture? Again we must turn to Chakravarti for instruction, this time with aid from a group of

scholars who have studied the discourse that justified British colonial rule; especially important here is the work of Lata Mani.⁸ These scholars point to another, less favorable, set of assertions about India that were circulating in Britain at about the same time that the Orientalists were constructing their portrait of India's past. The work less of scholars than of officials, missionaries, and casual travellers, these cited barbarian practices were said to show that India was much in need of Britain's civilizing presence. Caste and oppression of women headed the list of abuses; chief among the latter were *sati*, or widow burning, prohibition of widow remarriage, child marriage, seclusion, and female illiteracy. Because Hindu religious texts justified certain of these customs, such as *sati*, Hinduism became a special target for excoriation. We now know that most of the practices cited in these complaints were limited to certain regions and to higher caste groups. Both the critics and those Indians who responded to them nonetheless discussed them as if they applied to all Indian women—or at least to all Hindus.

Indians did come forward to respond to these challenges—most of them upper-caste, Anglicized, Hindu males who had been trained in British-curriculum schools for roles in the colonial civil service. They had complex motives: a mixture of personal antipathy for the customs cited, and a wish to defend their own culture from distorted and threatening external attack. As the nineteenth century progressed, these young men founded a series of organizations devoted to reform both of the offending social practice and of the religion that sanctioned such practice. The so-called "women's question" drew most of the attention—apparently because it was the easier problem to address. At one time or another, every major new Hindu-derived group familiar to South Asianists in this audience was engaged in some kind of "women's uplift" effort: the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal Province, especially under Keshab Chander Sen and, later, Sivanath Sastri; the Prarthana Samaj of Maharashtra, under M.G. Ranade and G.K. Gokhale; the Arya Samaj of the Punjab under Swami Dayananda, and even to some extent Swami Vivekananda's Ramakrishna Mission; there were also a number of less familiar secular organizations.

It was not a gentle or an easy process. Young men who took their wives out in public or who helped to sponsor widow remarriages sometimes found themselves banished from their homes or cut off from inheritances.⁹ The opposition was vociferous and was itself becoming organized; one feature of nineteenth century Hindu history that is often missed in Western accounts was the formation of societies to defend Hindu *dharma* and to resist winds of change. With all the fuss that was thereby raised, it is scarcely surprising that women's status began to win special attention in the parallel project of recovering India's glorious ancient past.

This project proved a bonanza for would-be reformers. Anyone finding evidence that some problematic practice was either different or non-existent in the past could thereby argue that his work for change was merely an instance of restoration, not innovation, which was far more threatening to orthodox communities. The strategy of looking to the past to set precedents for one's initiative was especially important to the so-called "revivalist" movements that called for resistance to any change that was mere imitation of the West. But it was by no means limited to revivalists; it began with the first nineteenth century reformers.¹⁰ One young campaigner of the late 1830s and early 40s explained the approach to a like-minded audience as follows:

Your course becomes still easier when you consider that in the prosecution of your views as respects civil and social reform, you shall not necessarily be called upon to trespass the dictates of the Shasters—and as your combat will principally be against customs and practices which the corruptions of time have invented, you shall be unassailable even upon the enemies' own ground.¹¹

Piece by piece, throughout the century, these would-be reformers and revivalists projected an inverted image of their own troubled present into the unfolding past. Anything perceived to be wrong during the nineteenth century was happily discovered to have been right in ancient times. Rammohan Roy, writing before ancient chronology was fully stratified, argued that *sati* was absent from Manu, which prescribed an ascetic discipline for widows.¹² Citing the Yajnavalkya/Maitreyi discourse of *Brihad-*

Aranyakopanishad, he argued that women had engaged in spiritual pursuits during the time of ancient greatness and that Maitreyi herself had even won divine knowledge.¹³ Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar, drawing on his impressive command of Sanskrit, found support for widow remarriage in *dharmashastra*, *Mahabharata*, and Veda.¹⁴ Swami Dayananda argued that Vedic men and women had both been performers of Vedic ritual.¹⁵ He was likewise to claim that girls of the Vedic Age were educated,¹⁶ received initiation with the sacred thread,¹⁷ married as adults with mutual consent of both partners,¹⁸ and enjoyed full participation in public affairs.¹⁹ He did not agree that Vedic widows had remarried; he did, however, point out that the practice of *niyoga* had given them access both to childbearing and to sexual pleasure.²⁰ Vivekananda would add to this listing of Vedic women's advantages the precedents for a *math*, or monastic order of women *sannyasinis*, religious renouncers. He did not quite dare to claim that there actually had been women's *maths* in the Hindu past—although he did know about the Buddhist *sangha* for women—but he could and did claim that preconditions had been established for such a *math*, thereby establishing important sanctions for all who later established women's orders.²¹

There was indeed some evidence to support these arguments. Often cited were a variety of reasonably clear passages showing that women had been an active participant in the Vedic sacrificial rituals. However, for the most part, evidence was both sparse and obscure; therefore certain passages and scenarios turned up again and again. Favorites in arguments for women's education were two dialogues from *Brhadaranyakopanishad*: the Yajnavalkya/Maitreyi conversation, cited above, and Yajnavalkya's disputation with Princess Gargi at the court of King Janaka. Enthusiasts for the past were not beyond exaggeration; Vivekananda, for example, turned a handful of references to learned women and to girls at *ashrams* into great "forest universities" where men and women studied together. At times the whole issue of supporting evidence was finessed; Dayananda, usually careful to cite all his sources, often simply makes assertions when he comes to Vedic women.

Would-be reformers were likewise less consistent in their explanations for the discrepancy between past and present than in their insistence that such a discrepancy existed. Roy blamed "infatuated pandits" for alterations in practice.²² Dayananda blamed the chaos caused by the *Mahabharata* war.²³ Vivekananda in one place blamed corrupt priests and in another, the spread of Buddhism.²⁴ Other sources mentioned the spread of the Krishna sects. Most, however, were to agree that, whatever had started the deterioration in women's status, the Muslim invasion had brought it to its lowest point. Muslims were blamed especially for the practice of *pardah*, seclusion of women.²⁵

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the emerging nationalist movement was to come into increasing conflict with the drive for reform of women's status. By this point, defending India's spiritual heritage seemed far more important an enterprise than altering institutions that had been derived from it. Or rather, to be more precise, this seemed far more important to Indian men—for by now, women had formed their own reform organizations, which would quietly take up the challenge that their men were abandoning.²⁶

Nationalist abandonment of the reform movement did not, moreover, imply any loss of interest in the devolutionary paradigm. With some new additions, this was taken up to support nationalist aspirations. Nationalist writers, now stressing the "vigour and manliness"²⁷ of Vedic males who subdued India's aborigines, converted Vedic women into happy helpmates of men who were undisputed patriarchs. According to Chakravarti, one nationalist historian of special influence was Romesh Chunder Dutt. Let us see how he envisions the Aryan woman's role:

Every father of a family was his own priest, and his home was his temple...The sacred fire was lighted in the house of every householder, and he chanted the beautiful and simple hymns which we now find collected in the Rig Veda. We have a pleasing picture of women who assisted at these sacrifices, who ordered the necessary things, prepared them with pestle and mortar, extracted the Soma-juice, stirred it with their figures [sic], and strained it through a woollen [sic] strainer.²⁸

Dutt was quick to stipulate that women's "assistance" was not equivalent to subordination:

There were no unhealthy restrictions against women in those days, no attempt to keep them secluded or uneducated or debarred from their legitimate place in society...On the contrary, we meet them everywhere in their legitimate spheres of action, taking a share in sacrifices, and exercising their influence on society.²⁹

Women had even been *rishis*, composers of Vedic hymns—although not, we might note, as women independent of family relationships:

We cherish the picture of the cultured lady Visvavara, which has been handed down to us through thousands of years,—a pious lady who composed hymns, performed sacrifices, and with true fervency invoked the god Agni to regulate and keep within virtuous bounds the mutual relations of married couples.³⁰

By the turn of the twentieth century, the full paradigm was in place: the Aryas, heroic patriarchs and founders of a great people, had wives who were loyal, free, learned, and respected partners, with a record of pious and spiritual accomplishments which should be the envy of their distant cousins in the West. But something had happened: through the times of the epics, the rival *shramanas*, the *shastra* literature, the *puranas*, and Muslim incursions, women's religious roles, claims to education, and finally personal freedom had all been lost; it was now time to reclaim them.

With some hedging as new materials become available, the Arya-centered paradigm has remained in place as the basic framework for historical study of Hindu women's status, surfacing, for example, in nationalist historian A.S. Altekar's 1938 work, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*,³¹ still treated as a definitive work both in India and in the West.³² Its strong influence can be seen in a series of works on which I myself cut my teeth, trying to build a foundation of knowledge for my own research in women's studies: Shakuntala Rao Shastri's *Women in the Vedic Age* and *Women in the Sacred Laws*,³³ Ram Mohan

Das's *Women in Manu and His Seven Commentators*,³⁴ Shakambari Jayal's *The Status of Women in the Epics*,³⁵ and Ratnamayidevi Dikshit's *Women in Sanskrit Dramas*.³⁶ Needless to say, I had no idea of their political ramifications.

Moreover, the Arya-centered paradigm has brought numerous benefits to Hindu women. It has aided in the passage of statutory reforms such as the precedent-setting abolition of *sati* in Bengal Presidency in 1828, the Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act of 1856, the Age of Consent Bill of 1891—and, doubtless, the Revised Hindu Code of 1955-56, which relied for its deliberations on works such as Dwarkanath Mitter's *The Position of Women in Hindu Law*, strongly steeped in the paradigm.³⁷ The paradigm was vital to the drive for women's education, having provided essential justification for developing a system of indigenous girl's schools. Here the various *samaj* groups were especially important, each assuming the lead in its own region.³⁸ The image of the proud and learned Aryan woman not only helped to garner support for the creation of a women's education system; it encouraged Hindus to break with longstanding tradition and send daughters and sisters to school. By the end of the nineteenth century, even orthodox groups were starting to found their own schools and educate their daughters.³⁹

One partial by-product of the paradigm seems to have been unintended. This was the expansion of women's access to Sanskrit education and the assignment to women of leadership roles in the Vedic system that had once been entirely performed by males. Arya Samaj schools launched this trend early in the twentieth century, training women to read Sanskrit, to recite Vedic *mantrams*, and to perform the fire offerings known as *havans*.⁴⁰ During the late 1930's, Guru Upansani Baba spread women's priestly roles to Maharashtra, when he began training women of his *ashram* to conduct Vedic sacrifices.⁴¹ Women of the Ramakrishna Mission finally realized Vivekananda's dream of a *math* for women *sannyasinis* devoted to service in 1957, founding the Sarada Math and Mission. As of 1991, when I last counted, Sarada Mission had 19 branches in India, plus one in Australia. Although smaller in size, it enjoys a prestige equal to its brother organization, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Moreover, its

sannyasinis also conduct *havans* and recite Vedic *mantrams*. The Sri Sri Anandmayi Ma organization has likewise consecrated *sannyasinis*, as well as *brahmacarinis* vowed to perpetual discipleship. In fact, even the Shankaracaryas who serve as a living final authority for the orthodox Hindu community seem increasingly willing to accept women *sannyasinis*,⁴² while at least two women leaders of the so-called 'Hindu Party,' the B.J.P., have likewise taken up *sannyasini* robes.⁴³

If the paradigm has accomplished so much for women, then why should some of them now attempt to disown it? There appear to be at least four important reasons:

1) It is divisive. Even the brief description given in this paper will have shown how clearly it is a Hindu paradigm, and not one that reflects the full experience of India's several communities. Its portrayal of Muslims is almost entirely negative. Besides, it slights and peripheralizes contributions to Indian culture by India's heterodox communities of Jains and Buddhists. Moreover, even within the Hindu community alone, it privileges a single perspective—that of the so-called twice-born caste groups. This is the point of the question that Uma Chakravarti has raised in her principal article on the paradigm 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasī*?' The figure of the *dasī*, or "slave woman," signifies the peoples whom the Aryas conquered, whose voice and perspective is totally ignored in this representation of history. The *dasī* recalls the tribal groups who were absorbed—or not absorbed—into the brahmanic system, the low-caste or no-caste groups who have been taught for centuries that they cannot even think that anything Vedic might belong to them. Like Muslims, Buddhists, and Jains, the *dasī* is at best a peripheralized and negative entity in the Arya-centered paradigm.

One great strength of the Women's Movement in India today has been its ability to form bonds across the lines that divide communities. It may be the only place in India today where high-caste and low-caste Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians can discuss common problems amicably and work together for common causes. The survival of the Arya-centered paradigm is both an embarrassment and a threat to that fragile unity.

2) The paradigm furthermore attracts the wrong bedfellows. The image of the glorious Aryan past is still being pushed in India by a group from whom most thinking feminists strongly prefer to dissociate themselves. This is the right-wing Hindu party, the B.J.P. (Bharatiya Janata Party), with its two affiliates the R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and the V.H.P. (Vishva Hindu Parishad). The political agenda of the B.J.P. is "India for the Hindus." Its leaders would like to overturn the present secular constitution of India, with its built-in protections for minority communities, and replace this with a government derived from Hindu values and models. The B.J.P. has a fairly inclusive definition of Hinduism, or "Hindutva," calling it culture that has developed on Indian soil—including at least in theory Buddhist and Jain practice and abjuring caste discrimination. Moreover, it itself has one major quarrel with the descent from the Aryas paradigm; it has been trying to disprove the extra-Indian origins of the Aryas and to withdraw references to this theory from textbooks in Indian schools. Nonetheless the paradigm is important to its strategy, for—even while denying caste—it still upholds the claim of "Arya-descended" upper-caste groups to prestige and power.⁴⁴

Indian feminists have many reasons to fear such an enterprise. Despite protestations to the contrary, it is inherently regressive, reiterating a deeply patriarchal set of ideologies and images. Like the paradigm itself, it is divisive, pitting Hindu women against those of other groups, especially Muslims. It has increasingly immersed women in violence, and in the defense of practices that entail violence against them, such as the *sati* revival in Rajasthan. Moreover, it threatens a constitution that—frail and faulty as it may be—nonetheless gives more real power to women than any institution of the Hindu past.⁴⁵

3) Even for Hindu women, the Arya-centered paradigm's implications are no longer liberating. It was always a limited vessel, crafted to fill expectations of the males of its time. The "emancipation" that it sought to effect was more an effort to relocate control of women than to grant them any substantial measure of power and self-determination. It was a campaign by brothers and husbands to win sisters and wives as allies and to remove them from the dominance of older joint-family women.⁴⁶

Not only did it reinforce the patriarchal structures of upper-caste Hindu India; its celebration of Aryan ideals has helped implant these where they had not existed before.⁴⁷ Furthermore, despite its protestations about the education and independence of true Aryan women, it held out a very limited view of women's potential. Aryan women, it claimed, were better wives, housekeepers, and mothers. It is significant that Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati, the one independent woman reformer of the nineteenth century—and one of the few reformers who could actually read Sanskrit—rousingly rejected the "Aryan Golden Age" scenario.⁴⁸

In addition, even while the paradigm expanded women's roles within the system of Vedic religion, it belittled and disparaged the culture and religion which had been women's own creation. Women's and men's lives had been so separate in some regions of India that women had in effect lived in their own cultural worlds. Religious components of women's worlds were *bhakti*, devotion, mostly linked to image worship, and the calendrical rites variously known as *vrats* or *nonpus*—all derived from the Puranic complex of religion that the devolutionary model so disparaged. Moreover, women of some regions had a popular culture of bawdy songs and stories that valued quite positively women's bodies and sexuality. Even today in rural India there remain traces of an ideology of auspiciousness surrounding mature female bodies that is in tension with brahmanic teachings about women's impurity.⁴⁹ All of this was, and still could be, empowering for women. Yet all too often the effort to 'emancipate' Indian women was simultaneously an effort to separate them from this heritage. Sumanta Banerjee has described this process of reculturalization in her article 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal.'⁵⁰

4) There is one last, obvious, reason why feminist historians of India are objecting to the Aryan paradigm. It is simply bad scholarship. Moreover, so long as it dominates historical study of India, it will preempt opportunities for scholarship that could be much more fruitful—that is, for scholarship that truly explores the facts, history and dynamics of Indian gender relationships. Indian feminists, like all who work to bring about constructive

change in the world, rely on good scholarship; one must know where one is to make solid judgments about where and how far one should go.⁵¹

One question remains to us. Why bother calling this critique housed in another discipline to the attention of historians of religion? I began this paper by pointing out that the old Aryan-centered paradigm still persists unquestioned in many texts that introduce students to the history of Indian religion. If Indian scholars are pointing to this many holes in the paradigm and this much ideological determination, then we too should reexamine it with very deep suspicion. I believe, as a matter of fact, that we need a replacement—one that will honor more explicitly the multiple origins of Indian religion, and that will examine far more closely those components that are non-Aryan and non-Brahmanic. Such a replacement will have to pay far more attention to archaeological discoveries, to regional religious movements, and to the growing body of field research findings on India's oral tradition. It might also try to look more closely at the last two centuries that have produced not only India's images of the past but also her very fascinating religious present. One benefit promised to feminist scholars by such an undertaking is a far better understanding of women's contributions to the shaping of Indian religion. Fascination with the Veda has in fact drawn religionists' greatest attention to that portion of the Indian tradition where women have had the least prominent roles. We have simply not been looking where women are. The time has come to do so.

Notes

1. See my 'Hinduism in Text and Context,' unpublished manuscript, presented at the 1994 meeting of the *North American Association for the Study of Religion*.
2. I have used the term 'feminist' throughout this article only to designate those who have shown strong support for women's issues, and not to indicate affiliation with Western feminist movements.
3. For Chakravarti's critiques, see 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Das*? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989; also 'Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History,' in *Social Scientist* 16:8 (August 1988), pp. 44-52; and 'The Myth of the Golden Age of Equality—Women Slaves in Ancient India,' in *Manushi*, No. 18 (October-November 1983), pp. 8-12, 15. For Thapar's, see especially 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity,' in *Modern Asian Studies* 23:2 (1989), pp. 210-29; and 'Syndicated Moksha?', in *Seminar* 313 (September 1985), pp. 14-22.
4. See also Suvira Jaiswal, 'Women in Early India: Problems and Perspectives,' in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Both Gaya, University of Magadha, 1981, pp. 54-60. More recently, male scholars have extended this critique. See for instance Mukesh Srivatsava, 'Mosaic of Narrative Manipulations: Power and Production of Subjectivity in (Post) Colonial India,' in *Economic and Political Weekly* 27:4 (January 25, 1992), Political Economy Supplement pp. 47-57; and Christophe Jaffreolot, 'Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building,' in *Economic and Political Weekly* 28: 12-13 (March 20-27, 1993), pp. 517-524.
5. See P.J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970; and David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Note that the oldest descriptions of 'Veda' in the Marshall collection seem rather to reflect the contents of the *Bhagavatapurana*.
8. Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: the Debate on Sati in Colonial India', *Recasting Women*, pp. 88-126; see also 'Production of an Official Discourse on *Sati* in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly* 21:7 (April 26, 1986), *Women's Studies Supplement*, pp. 32-40; Veena Das, 'Gender Studies, Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Colonial Organization of Knowledge', *Berkshire Review* 21 (1986), pp. 58-75.
9. The great Brahma Samaj leader Keshab Chander Sen was one such who found himself denied entry to his family's home, after he outraged his uncle by taking his wife along to his ordination as Brahma Samaj *acharya*.
10. Mukesh Srivastava has suggested that it began even before the reformers—that the British originated the strategy to justify their own program of changes. See 'Mosaic of Narrative Manipulations', *op. cit.*, PE 54.
11. Discourse by Krishna Mohana Banerjea on 'Reform, Civil and Social', presented to the *Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge*, reproduced in Goutam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Awakening in Bengal in Early Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, Progressive Publishers, 1965, pp. 196-97.
12. Mulk Raj Anand (ed.), *Sati: a Writeup of Raja Ram Mohan Roy about Burning of Widows Alive*, Delhi, B.R. Publishing Company, 1989, pp. 22, 38, and 59.
13. *Ibid.*, 55; also cited in Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened?' *op. cit.*, 33.
14. K.P. Bagchi, *Marriage of Hindu Widows*, Calcutta, 1855, reprinted, Calcutta, 1976. He likewise demolished claims by opponents that they had found opposition to widow remarriage in the same works.
15. Dayanand Saraswati, *Light of Truth, an English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 2nd. ed., trans. Durga Prasad, New Delhi, Jan Gyan Prakashan, 1970, p. 73.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-74; see also p. 52.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 83 and pp. 79-82.
19. Scattered throughout his writings, but see *ibid.*, p. 74.
20. See sections on *niyoga* in *Introduction to the Commentary on the Vedas*, tr. Ghasi Ram, New Delhi, Jan Gyan Prakashan, n.d., pp. 126-28 and in *Light of Truth*, *op. cit.*, 109-115. Cited in Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened?', *op. cit.*, 55-60.

21. His dream of a women's order and its defence are found in his interview, 'Education of Our Women,' republished in *Our Women*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashram, 1961, especially pp. 26-37.
22. Roy, *Sati*, op. cit., p. 51.
23. *Light of Truth*, op. cit., p. 278 (Preface to Part II).
24. The first is found in his 'Education of Our Women' and the second in 'Position and Prospects of Our Women'; see *Our Women*, op. cit., pp. 28 and 52-54.
25. This practice of blaming the Muslims for *purdah*, or for the low status of women in general, had started even before the full paradigm had developed. See, for example, the discourse on 'The Condition of the Hindoo Woman' presented by Mahesh Chandra Deb to the Calcutta *Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge* in January, 1839, reproduced in Chattopadhyay, *Awakening in Bengal*, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
26. See Maitrayee Chaudhuri, *Indian Women's Movement: Reform and Revival*, New Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1993; also Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: a History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-1990*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1990.
27. Romesh Chunder Dutt, *A History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1893, p. 7.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
31. *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, 3rd ed., Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1962.
32. See, for example, Klaus Klostermaier's new chapter on women in the second edition of his massive text *A Survey of Hinduism*. He has based this extensively on Altekar.
33. Vols. 10 and 13 of Bhavan's Book University, Chaupatty, Bharatiya Bhavan, 1952 and 1953.
34. Varanasi, Kanchana Publications, 1962.
35. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.
36. Delhi, Meher Chand Lachman Das, 1964.
37. First printing New Delhi, M.C. Mittal, Inter-India Publications, 1913.

38. For early work of the Brahma Samaj, see Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Women's Education in Eastern India, the First Phase*, Calcutta, the World Press, 1956; also Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984; for early work of the Prarthana Samaj, see Ramabai Ranade's account of her life with her husband, Prarthana Samaj founder M.G. Ranade: *Himself: the Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, tr. Katherine van Akin Gates, New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1938; for the Arya Samaj, see Madhu Kishwar, 'Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar', in *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, No. 17 (April 26, 1986), Women's Studies Supplement, pp. 9-24.
39. Millicent Borthwick describes the popular Mahakali Pathsala of Bengal in her *Changing Role of Women*, op. cit., pp. 100-101; this group of 24 schools taught Sanskrit, Bengali, arithmetic, women's *dharma*, *puja* performance and various housekeeping skills; it preserved its students' adherence to *purdah* by transporting them in covered carriages.
40. See Kishwar, 'Arya Samaj and Women's Education,' op. cit., *ibid.*
41. This is the group known as Kanya Kumaris. For an account of their founding, see B.V. Narasimha Swami and S. Subbarao, *Sage of Sakuri (Life Story of Shree Upasani Maharaj)*, Ahmednagar, Shri Upasani Kanya Kumari Sthan, 1966, pp. 163-73.
42. In an interview conducted in 1979, Guru Jnanananda of Madras City claimed to have received initiation from the Sankaracarya of Kanchipuram, see Charles S.J. White, 'Mother Guru: Jnanananda of Madras, India', in Nancy A. Falk and Rita M. Gross (eds), *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*, 2nd rev. ed., Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989, p. 17.
43. For a more complete analysis of factors supporting the emergence of these new women's roles, see my article 'Shakti Ascending: Hindu Women, Politics, and Religious Leadership during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Robert Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 3rd. rev. ed., New Delhi, Manohar, 1995.
44. See Jaffreolot, 'Hindu Nationalism,' op. cit., pp. 521-522.
45. For responses to this movement among women scholars, see especially Veena Poonacha, 'Hindutva's Hidden Agenda: Why Women Fear Religious Fundamentalism', in *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:11 (March 13, 1993), pp. 438-39; Ratna Kapur and Brenda

Cossmann, 'Communalising Gender/Engendering Community: Women, Legal Discourse and Saffron Agenda', in *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:17 (April 24, 1993), Women's Studies Supplement 35-44; and Tanika Sarkar, 'The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly* 26:35 (August 31, 1991), pp. 2057-62.

46. I have discussed this problem in 'Shakti Ascending,' op. cit. See also my 'Women, Reform, and Keshub Chunder Sen's 'Science of Religion', in *Facing East, Facing West: North America and the Asia/Pacific Region in the 1990's*, Kalamazoo, MI, Western Michigan University Division of Continuing Education, 1990, pp. 297-304.
47. See, for example, the writings of M.N. Srinivas on the process called 'Sanskrit-ization' among tribal groups in southern India.
48. See Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened,' op. cit., p. 68.
49. To date, this has been researched more by Western scholars than by their Indian counterparts. See especially the important work of Frédérique Apffel Marglin on auspiciousness: 'Types of Oppositions in Hindu Culture', in John Carman and Frédérique Apffel Marglin (eds), *Purity and Auspiciousness, Journal of Developing Societies* 1 (1985), pp. 65-83; also her *Wives of the God-King: the Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985; also note the descriptions of women's rituals in Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys: the Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, as well as the Himalayan women's myth of the creatress Nandadevi in William Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*, New York, Oxford University Press.
50. This is yet another pathbreaking article in the important collection by Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, op. cit.
51. For attempts to begin the process of reconstructing analysis of ancient gender roles, see Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State', in *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:14, April 3, 1993, pp. 579-85.

Hunger in Bloom: Women's Symbolic Satiation in Lakota Linguistic and Huaroni Ritual Epistemologies¹

Catherine McHale

The Huaroni people of the Ecuadorian cloud forest have a song they sing when a girl is born to celebrate her birth. I have a tape of the song. A woman Uba sings it. I remember how she was so shy to sing into my tape recorder. I remember the light. I remember how she closed her eyes and began to sing. Her voice sailed out over the canopy of the jungle. She told me, through a translator, that this was the song her mother sang when she and her sisters were born and this was the song she sang for her six daughters when they were born. When I asked her what the song meant, the translator looked puzzled and impatiently said, "it is a song full of joy and happiness, one which hopes the daughter will live long, have many daughters and that all is good with her." The word to express all of this is "Waponi". The word means simply "remember good". In the context of Huaroni, one says "Waponi" as a greeting for hello, good-bye, this tastes good, it is beautiful here. But I wanted to know what the song *meant*. The translator repeated that this is the song one sings to celebrate the birth of a baby girl. No other translation. That is the meaning of the song. That is the song. That is the translation.

This work seeks to illumine the relationship between linguistic construction and spiritual horizons in women's experience in two indigenous cultures: the Lakota and the Huaroni.² Dr. Catherine Peeke, a linguist and missionary, whose personal contact with the Huaroni began some forty years ago, has written me a letter regarding their songs saying, "I am afraid I have had as little success as you have had in extracting a satisfactory account of the words. Their poetic language is apparently archaic and does not respond to *ordinary* linguistic analysis." (emphasis mine). She goes on to say that the "*meaning* they offer can seldom be derived directly from the words, for it is highly symbolic."³

The problem here is a significant one. It has been articulated by many scholars, both Native and Non-Native, particularly in the field of anthropology. Janet Finn has written in her essay on the lives and works of Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove (two Native women ethnologists and writers) that there is an "epistemological chasm" which problematizes any attempt to decipher meaning when describing Native culture. She asserts that the difference between the epistemologies of the Native person versus the Non-Native person is the "difference between connected and separate knowing."⁴

Dr. Catherine Peeke had said that the songs of the Huaroni did not respond to "ordinary linguistic analysis." She went on to say that "in the few cases where I have been given an idea of the wording, it does not match at all with what I think I hear when I listen to the tape." The song celebrates the birth of a girl child. It is a celebration of an occurrence which illustrates a ritual understanding, one that is inherent in the life of the Huaroni people.

A problem arises when languages, rituals or songs are interpreted through a transformational model of linguistics which prohibits the interpretation of language on anything but a literal level. In terms of many indigenous speech patterns, the transformational model concludes that these languages are "grammatically ill-formed and reflect defects in knowledge of proper usage."⁵ Translation necessitates making an equivalence between two languages. In the case of translating sexual difference present in ritual speech and songs or "everyday" language, I question not whether it is possible, but whether linguists are willing to have their own notion of rational meaning contested.

For several years, philosophers and literary critics have debated the limitations inherent in Western discourse when women describe themselves in a language which is androcentric and yet masquerades as gender neutral. Linguistically, women are restricted in Western discourse, bound up by linguistic representations of themselves which are not of their own making. In Huaroni and Lakota cultures, which do not conform to the binarist oppositions of European/Euroamerican languages (and conceptions of the sacred), women are not excluded from the

Symbolic Order.⁶ Traditionally, Lakota and Huaroni women are in fact seen and see themselves embedded in both "Nature" and the "Social." The symbolic "homelessness" of women (as described by many Western European feminists) is not found in many indigenous languages and religious lives. In indigenous traditions women have a language of their own, rituals of their own where they are reflected in the sacred cosmology. A woman's power lies in her experience as a woman, as does her sacredness.

Her religion was not apart from other aspects of life. It permeated every act—in planting seed, in making love, in conceiving, in bearing children, in teaching and healing and training her sons and daughters, in molding and decorating a pottery bowl— even preparing for death.⁷

Alienation and voicelessness are not only problems for Western European women. Paula Gunn Allen suggests that "the inability to speak is the prime symbol of powerlessness in the work of American Indian poets and novelists."⁸ This alienation and tonguelessness has a different cast with native women who suffer from "societal conflicts caused by having to identify with two hopelessly opposed cultural definitions of women." (Gunn Allen, p.49)

Western European feminists, for the most part, no longer assume that the truth of their experience must be the truth of all women's lives. Much feminist discourse has expounded at length about women refusing and resisting notions of "Woman", i.e., the "Other" of masculinist discourse, which is related to their exile from language and the sacred. Many scholars have pointed out that "for centuries, 'Woman' has been figured by male philosophers and social theorists as disorder, chaos, unreason, savagery, as the excluded 'Other' by which the structure of the Symbolic Order constitutes itself."⁹ Native women, then, by being both female and indigenous are doubly alienated by a Western European Symbolic Order which is unwilling (unable) to acknowledge their presence.

I agree with Luce Irigaray that in the Western European model, which also affects the lives of Native women, "women's goals have always been proposed to them by others: they should want a man, a child, the good of the polis. Women have never loved

and wanted themselves. That project can only be Divine."¹⁰ I also sense with Irigaray that Western "women are afraid that asserting womankind will turn to their disadvantage, and put them back into all the old traps, and this is bound to happen unless for women there is an ideal or essence as a horizon."¹¹

I disagree, however, with the notion that there is a singular horizon or essence to aim for. A singular horizon of difference is a repetition of binarist universalizing which places all women in a singular body. A body which is inevitably constituted as 'white', Western European or Euroamerican, and always facing the same set of challenges when confronting sexual and gender difference in culture and language. The problem becomes: How can women hear each other when language itself functions to prohibit their subjectivity?

Many people have argued that the reason why "ground and language slip out from under women," as H el ene Cixous writes, is that, when we use the "I", it is neither abstract nor universal but inherently masculine.¹² This is related to the assertion that knowing itself is gendered in the Western European philosophical tradition. Beginning with the Greeks "the very nature of knowledge was implicitly associated with the exclusion of what was symbolically associated with the feminine."¹³

This split in the Western Symbolic Order allocates "the material, corporeal, sensible, 'natural', the body and the profane to the feminine, and the spiritual, ideal, intelligible, transcendental to the masculine." (Whitford, p.150). But the split is internecine, that is, it is mutually destructive to both men and women. Both constructions of the masculine and feminine prohibit any real "exchange" between men and women. "The content of femininity, as we have it, no less than its subordinate status, has been formed within an intellectual tradition. What has happened has been not a simple exclusion of women, but a constitution of femininity through that exclusion." (Lloyd, p.106). (I would like to suggest that the constitution of primitivism/savagism has also been constituted in this same way.)

How difficult it becomes then for persons trained in the Western European tradition to believe that they may have something to learn from indigenous philosophies whose Symbolic Orders are informed by gender difference based upon reciprocity

rather than opposition. While the limitations of women speaking and being heard are inherent in Western European languages and discourse, we might question the theoretical universalizing which occurs in the work of Irigaray and others such as Cixous. How do we speak "nearby or together rather than for or about?"¹⁴ "Speaking nearby or together" is a multifaceted project which involves setting up ethnicity and womanhood together. With Cixous and Irigaray it is as if "races of color annul sex, as if a woman can never be ethnic." (Trinh, p.101) The problem here is not limited to the issue of gender difference, but also extends to racial, ethnic and cultural differences. Irigaray's assertion of sexual difference collapses into sameness all women's experience with the Symbolic Order and language. She calls for an "operation of grammar" in order to assert difference but only within European languages.

Irigaray does acknowledge that there are "traces of women standing centered in their own axis, grounding them in the earth and connecting them to the heavens" which are left "by traditions in which women are visible." (Whitford, p.164). There are more than traces. The Lakota people, through their gendered linguistic structure, give us an alternative reference within which we can locate women's subjectivity. We find far more than a trace of visibility; instead, women speak and are heard in this language. They are also fully present in the Symbolic (and social) Order. They are seen as divine and very powerful.

Lakota language counters the prevailing sentiment that women do not have a voice or that they are always transgressing when speaking. Lakota is a beautiful and expressive language which affords much play and variation. One finds in the Lakota linguistic structure more than a place where women's subjectivity is visible, they are in fact seen as "Keepers of the Power of Words."¹⁵ Like so many of the ceremonies in the Lakota tradition, which are openly acknowledged as either being introduced by women (human, divine, or a combination of the two) or an imitation of women, language too is seen as a gift given by older women to their daughters, sons, and husbands. Instead of the Eurocentric model where women are transgressing when they speak, in Lakota, the origins of speech derive from their own grandmothers or "Grandmother".

Women's power is reflected in the way in which the Lakota *speaks* their language also. Women have their own grammar. The manner of speaking is dependent upon whether or not the speaker is female. Gilbert Walking Bull tells the story of how strange it was for him to hear women speaking English and to realize that they did not have their own way of talking. When asked what his impression of this was, he said, "Oh, that is easy. They disappear" (interview). When asked to describe some of the differences between Lakota and English, he mentioned a certain command which men never say; only older women are allowed to use such strong language.¹⁶ To illustrate just how critical this usage is, Joseph Karal describes his experience in learning Lakota from a woman and the embarrassment he suffered as a result of being unaware of the "female speech" he was using:

I remember, still with chagrin, when I, a male speaker used the feminine grammar in asking a question. I had learned the grammar from an old Sioux lady and had not yet learned that males and females do not use the same grammar. At the time, the obvious amusement of the receptionist I was addressing stung me.¹⁷

Given the absence of implicit, spoken gender difference in Western European language systems, how can one translate women's speech in Lakota if there is no equivalent for the female "I"? The difficulty resembles my insistence on a translation for the Huaroni song celebrating the birth of a baby girl.

These alternative language structures point to another way in which the problems of alienation and voicelessness can be framed. Lakota is not an "impregnable language" as Hélène Cixous advocates inventing. Instead, it is pregnant, as every language is, with a whole cosmology. There is always a connection between language and the sacred. Irigaray and Cixous hearken back to Greek mythologies in order to invoke images of women as divine. My argument here is that there is an intellectual and ethical obligation not to presume that an "ethics of sexual difference" will ever be invented by the Western European tradition. An "ethics of sexual difference" exists and is struggling

to survive in many indigenous traditions and cultures. I hope that we can, in our common ground of resistance, learn from these traditions.

By insisting that a value be placed upon indigenous epistemologies, I realize that on a certain level I am challenging the legitimacy of the modernist project with its accompanying myth of progress brought by European colonial expansion. Yet, in order to be justified, this notion of progress demands not only the construction of "Woman" but also, implicitly, of the "Savage". I agree with Paula Gunn Allen that "the view of the Indians as bloodthirsty savages" is the view which is "most deeply embedded in the American unconscious where it forms the basis for much of the social oppression of peoples of color and of women." (Gunn Allen, p.5).

However, if we begin to educate ourselves about the construction of sexual and gender differentiation present in many Native American epistemologies and philosophies, we expose ourselves to "intellectual styles which are not content with static dualism that is implicit in Western European philosophy, religion, and languages."¹⁸ "There has been a kind of rationality, everyone will assent, most self-consciously formalized and systematized in the West, and the comparative question relates to the grounds and contexts in which the social and religious phenomena to which this conception of rationality can be used as a universal yardstick."¹⁹ I believe that the "universal yardstick" (of meaning) needs to be left behind in favor of an exchange model. This exchange of epistemologies would forge new possibilities of representation of all kinds (of women, Natives, land, etc.).

The image of women having their own language and their own songs is an image much like the one articulated by French feminists, particularly Irigaray. It is an image wherein women themselves are sacred. I believe, like Irigaray, that the "divine in the feminine stands for the place where women can meet—a place in the Symbolic Order" (Whitford, p.141). What I would like to propose is that there are multiple Symbolic Orders, some of which already allow space for women's subjectivity and divinity. I believe that the Lakota language and the Huaroni song celebrating the birth of a girl child evoke strong possibilities for

Western European and Euroamerican women as well as for other women of color. I believe that these alternative epistemologies illustrate the living presence of other Symbolic Orders and invite reflection upon the vivid contrasts next to Western European women's constrained relationship to language, discourse, philosophy, and religion. Perhaps these other Symbolic Orders are what Irigaray would view as reflective of a feminine subjectivity, inherent and intrinsic to the language. In terms of the larger feminist project of women's relationship to language and the divine, these languages and the differences they reflect must be preserved for future generations. I believe that we, Native, Non-Native, mixed-blood, all have a responsibility to commit ourselves to an exchange of epistemologies so that future women might come to know each other and themselves as "Keepers of the Power of Words."

One time I went into the jungle with a group of girls. We were looking for fresh leaves to feed the baby monkeys. I wondered if the girls had heard the song celebrating their birth. As we stepped under the canopy, the young girls started picking fruits and flowers stuffing them into my mouth, into their mouths. They kept insisting on seeing my tongue. To see what colors it would turn after each flower had passed through my lips. Those lovely Huaroni girls only cared to see my tongue. Its importance not lost to them. So meanwhile there are songs being sung celebrating our births, and I hope my words come like flowers into your mouth, feeding you.

Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge the many people who have informed my thinking up to and since the writing of this article. Specifically Chris Rials-Seitz, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Alice Jardine, James McBride, Maggie Brenner, my sister Marie, and most of all my mother, Nancy Ruth Martin.
2. I went to the Ecuadorian cloud forest as a member of a documentary film crew. The project was about the conflict between the Huaroni and oil companies, domestic and foreign, over land. Going into the jungle and meeting the Huaroni, I was unprepared for my reaction to their song(s) and their struggles. It is very much like the culture I grew up with in this hemisphere. Same problems, different government, different Natives, and different time since outside "contact". The Huaroni, like most indigenous people, I believe, want the benefits of contact with the dominant culture(s). But, like most indigenous people, they would like contact on their terms. In other words, they would like to have a say and a share in the profits of oil extraction, education of their young, and sustainable treatment of their land. This comes into conflict with the plans of oil companies, missionaries, and environmental groups. There is an all-too-common infantilization of a group of people who are called by the majority of Ecuadorians "Huau" which means "savage" in the neighboring Quiche language. Despite popular accounts which insist the Huaroni were "undiscovered" until the 1950s, the Huaroni have had contact for hundreds of years, only no one had lived to tell of the encounter. The Huaroni captured the attention of the world in 1956, when they murdered five missionaries on the banks of the Curaray river, solidifying their reputation as bloodthirsty savages. Since that time, they have become a people grappling with the increasing encroachment of missionaries, anthropologists, petroleum companies, environmentalists, farmers and film crews. The Lakota people historically also have "enjoyed" a reputation as "bloodthirsty". They were and still are fighting for control of land deeded to them by the United States Federal Government by treaty. They are also people facing some of the most extreme economic impoverishment within United States borders. I have been exposed to the Lakota language for many years through involvement with Native politics and religious ceremonies. I became interested in the different ways that men and women speak after being laughed at for saying what little I could say in a way that only a man would speak. It was then that I undertook interviews with several Lakota speakers to find out what the differences are between men's and women's speech.

3. Catherine Peeke to Catherine McHale, April 24, 1994 (emphasis mine).
4. Janet Finn, 'Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing Against the Grain', in *Critique of Anthropology* Vol. 13, No. 4, Dec. 1993, p. 341.
5. Keith Basso, *Portraits of the "Whiteman": Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols Among the Western Apache*, London, Cambridge U.K., 1979, p. 114.
6. The "Symbolic Order" consists of the signifiers which acquire value only in mutual relations and is the determining order of the subject which is an effect of speech.
7. John Upton Terrell and Donna M. Terrel, *Indian Women of the Western Morning*, New York, The Dial Press, 1974, p. 25
8. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1986, p. 138.
9. Barbara A. Babcock, 'Feminisms/Pretexts: Fragments, Questions, and Reflections', in *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol.66, No. 2, April, 1993, p. 60.
10. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987, p. 80.
11. Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in The Feminine*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 143.
12. Hélène Cixous, and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 92.
13. Genvieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*, Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 4.
14. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Bloomington, U. of Indiana Press, 1989, p. 101.
15. Gilbert Walking Bull, personal interview, 28 September, 1991.
16. When asked to illustrate these differences, Gilbert Walking Bull generously shared the following:
 - When one says "It is I who speaks,"
Women say: "Le mee yea yea."
Men say: "Le mee yea ye-lo."
 - When one says: "All of My Relations,"
Women say: "Mitaku ye oya-sin,"
Men say: "Ho-Mitaku ye oya-sin."

- When one says: "Yes, indeed" or "It is so,"
Women say: "Han,"
Men say: "Hau."
 - Whenever one asks a question:
Women end the question always with "He,"
Men end the question with "Hwo."
 - When one says: "Go no further, stop right there!"
Women say: "He chu sni ye!"
Men never, ever say this, it is exclusive of women to use this strong of a command.
17. Joseph Karal (ed.), *Everyday Lakota: An English-Sioux Dictionary for Beginners*, St. Francis, The Rosebud Educational Society, 1971, p. ix.
 18. Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*, Ann Arbor, U. of Michigan Press, 1977, p. 202.
 19. Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja, *Magic, Science, Religion and The Scope of Rationality*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. Press, 1990, p. 115.

The Pre-patriarchal Hypothesis: An Assessment

Rita M. Gross

The pre-patriarchal hypothesis is both a popular sacred history—the sacred history of the feminist spirituality movement¹—and a scholarly hypothesis which argues that “the creation of patriarchy”² is a historical event occurring in the relatively recent past due to certain causes and conditions. Many scholars and popularizers also speculate about what religion and society were like in the pre-patriarchal world, frequently portraying it as a “feminist utopia”.

Located at the interstices of several disciplines, including prehistory, archeology, anthropology, mythology, history, and the comparative study of religions, as well as being of considerable importance to feminist discourse, the pre-patriarchal hypothesis has generated a great deal of controversy not only with non-feminists, but also *within* the ranks of feminist thought and scholarship. Because the scholarship on which this hypothesis is based is quite technical and difficult, and because of the passion with which feminists argue for and against this hypothesis, one can feel as if one is walking through a mine field when attempting to survey these materials.

What is at stake in the validity of this hypothesis? Why does it raise so much passion and controversy among feminists? In so far as communities constitute themselves on the basis of their remembered past, many feminists think that a great deal is at stake in determining that patriarchy is a relatively recent historical development. It would be easier to claim the seeming inevitability of patriarchy and the futility of feminist efforts if one could demonstrate with reasonable certainty that “it’s always been that way.” If patriarchy extends infinitely back into the human past, it is easier to argue that male dominance is somehow written in human genetic material rather than produced as a result of certain historical causes and conditions. It is no accident that new forms of biological determinism, such as sociobiology, became popular soon after the current wave of feminist thinking became

established. Nor is it accidental that extreme claims for an evolutionary and genetic basis for male dominance, such as Lionel Tiger's *Men in Groups*³ or diatribes about the biological dangers of egalitarian social arrangements, such as George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide*,⁴ became popular at the same time. Arguments based on biology or nature often seem stronger than claims about the cultural nature of patriarchy and claims that the future is open-ended, not determined by the past. Therefore, both feminists and anti-feminists rely heavily on arguments about the nature of the first human societies.

Finding an accurate passage between advocates and critics of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis is not simple. As guidelines, I first suggest that we emphasize the conclusions of prehistorians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians who are both informed by feminist values and conversant with relevant scholarly literature. The most vehement advocates and attackers of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis often treat this material lightly in their writings. Additionally, some detractors of this hypothesis tend to argue as if casting doubt on a single aspect of the hypothesis invalidates the entire hypothesis, a conclusion that is not warranted. Another tactic taken by some detractors is to argue against popular, rather than scholarly versions of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis. Obviously the cogency of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis should not be argued on the basis of the popular literature that fills the women's spirituality sections of some feminist bookstores. Finally, and most importantly, the most adequate negotiation through these questions, I suggest, will involve evaluating the various components of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis separately, rather than trying to reject or justify the whole complex. I suggest analyzing separately three components of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis. First, is it reasonable to conclude that patriarchy arose relatively recently in human history, due to certain causes and conditions? Second, does the thesis of a pre-patriarchal "golden age" for women hold up? Finally, what are the most cogent explanations for the emergence of patriarchy in human history?

Is Patriarchy Original?

The question of a pre-patriarchal hypothesis is greatly simplified and clarified by placing equal emphasis on both words. The word "hypothesis" concedes that this account of early society is a probable reconstruction from limited information, rather than an incontrovertible fact. Like all hypotheses, it is subject to continual revision and possible replacement if a more cogent explanation is developed. More importantly, the modest term "pre-patriarchal" simply indicates that it is extremely unlikely that patriarchy prevailed in the earliest human societies. Patriarchy requires the kind of social stratification and social complexity that develop with high population density and urbanization—not the conditions of early human societies.

However, beyond suggesting that patriarchy could not have been the earliest form of human society, this phrasing does not attempt to describe in any detail what the earliest forms of human society were like. Specifically, the pre-patriarchal hypothesis, at least in any form that has scholarly reputability, does not assert or assume a prior *matriarchy*. As Eisler notes, people stuck in dualistic, either-or thinking often assume that "if it isn't patriarchy, it must be matriarchy,"⁵ an assumption made by Bachofen as well as by many recent popular writers. Why a feminist would want to claim this misnomer is somewhat unclear, since little is to be gained by reversing patriarchy into a matriarchy, whether past or future. One can be sympathetic with the impatience of some scholars who don't want to devote further serious attention to a thesis which is sometimes so badly stated by some of its most adamant defenders.

By far the most skeptical critics of any version of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis are those trained in the history of religions and the study of classical civilizations. Because the societies studied by these scholars have been patriarchal for so long and because these societies have become so dominant over so much of the globe, classicists and historians of religion often find the hypothesis of non-patriarchal social organization unbelievable. For example, Kinsley's major reason for rejecting the pre-patriarchal hypothesis is "...the few examples we have of cultures

in which men do not dominate women. The tendency toward male dominance is strong in both historical cultures and in nonliterate cultures..."⁶

But both anthropologists and archaeologists trying to reconstruct the earliest foraging and horticultural societies simply do not agree with the conclusion of universal male dominance any longer. As Sanday says in her major study of the origins of male dominance,

[m]ale dominance is not an inherent quality of human sex-role plans. In fact, the argument suggests that male dominance is a response to pressures that are most likely to have been present relatively late in human history.⁷

If one thinks about the requirements for human survival guided by the androgynous, rather than the androcentric model of humanity, it is difficult to imagine that humanity could have survived if early humans had insisted on wasting female productivity and intelligence in the way that patriarchal societies have always done. It is no longer supposed that earliest human foragers could have depended solely on men for their food supply, or that men alone were responsible for the discovery of tools, the development of language, or other crucial advances made by early humans. All cogent reconstructions of early foraging life posit an interdependence and complementarity between women and men, rather than male dominance and patriarchy. Nothing in the material conditions of early human life would suggest that male dominance would have been adaptive or likely.

Furthermore, even though sex roles are often strong in contemporary foraging societies, male dominance is rare. The sexes are seen as complementary and of equal importance.⁸ While everyone recognizes that the ethnographic present cannot establish an archeological past, and that reconstructions of prehistory will probably always remain *hypothetical*, the notion of a strongly male dominant, patriarchal foraging past seems to be an especially unlikely hypothesis. Of course, the unlikelihood of patriarchy in the paleolithic does not establish the existence of either female dominance or equality either.⁹ But only extremists leap from the unlikelihood of paleolithic patriarchy to certainty about a paleolithic feminist utopia.

Much the same "middle path" reconstruction of early neolithic societies, which were horticultural (using the hoe) rather than agricultural (using the plow), is suggested by many anthropologists and archaeologists. In early settled, food-growing communities, women and men remained interdependent and complementary. Again there is nothing to suggest that male dominance was practical or adaptive. And, again, contemporary or recent horticultural societies do not always exhibit strong male dominance and patriarchy, though some do. But some of the more recent societies most noted because women have considerable autonomy and power, such as the Iroquois and the West African kingdoms,¹⁰ are horticultural. In fact, even many non-feminist scholars have seen neolithic horticulture as a period in which women enjoyed higher status and more autonomy than they typically did later. What changes in feminist commentaries on the neolithic is to regard this situation as an ideal rather than an aberration.

Therefore, without inventing a fanciful past, it is reasonable to conclude that an accurately reconstructed early history of humanity is empowering and useful. "It hasn't always been that way." It is reasonable to conclude that foraging and early horticultural societies were not patriarchal. As we shall see, we may not be able to establish any adequate models for the post-patriarchal future in the pre-patriarchal past. Nevertheless, it alters our perceptions and assumptions greatly to realize that it makes no sense to claim that male dominance stretches as far back into the past as we can see. At the conclusion of her book *Women in Prehistory*, which no one could fault for lack of caution in its interpretations, Ehrenberg states the case well:

...although the social status of women has long been inferior to that of men, it must also be remembered that the foraging societies of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic spanned an immense period, many hundred times longer than the mere 12,000 years or so from the Neolithic to the present, and that many of the world's people continued to be foragers long after farming had been discovered in the Near East. So, throughout human history, the great majority of women who have ever lived had far more status than recently, and probably had equality with men.¹¹

Interpreting Pre-patriarchal Evidence

The weak link in many versions of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis is, in my view, their attempted reconstruction of pre-patriarchal religion and society. That patriarchy arose in history, due to certain causes and conditions, seems to me to be as incontrovertible as any historical hypothesis ever can be. Nevertheless, there is no easy passage, and probably no passage at all, from establishing the cogency of the thesis that patriarchy is a late development to establishing the kind of pre-patriarchal feminist utopia claimed by the most ardent advocates of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis.

Societies that are especially interesting to advocates of the pre-patriarchal "golden age" include paleolithic foraging societies, Çatal Hüyük, Old Europe, ancient Megalithic cultures, and Crete, perhaps their favorite society. These feminists usually invoke the numerous and powerful goddesses of antiquity as models for contemporary women, reconstructing a detailed and elaborate myth and ritual complex surrounding these goddesses. They posit an era of peace, prosperity, stability, and egalitarian social arrangements that prevailed far and wide for a long period of time before being destroyed violently and relatively quickly by patriarchal and pastoral nomads, including the precursors of both the Indo-Aryans and the Semites. In this pre-patriarchal world, women enjoyed autonomy, power, and respect under the aegis of the Goddess, who was universally revered by all members of society and was the embodiment and source of life, death, and renewal. Gradually, as societies became more male dominant, both women and the Goddess lost their power, autonomy, and dignity, a process that culminated in the eclipse of the Goddess represented by the Hebrew Bible and the thinking of classical Greece.

Such a hypothesis has always enjoyed some currency, going back at least to the theories of J.J. Bachofen.¹² Early in the current women's movement, the thesis was again taken up by feminists, who, unfortunately, had little scholarly training in any of the disciplines at the nexus of this complex hypothesis. The most notable and influential of these writers were Elizabeth Gould Davis¹³ and Merlin Stone.¹⁴ More recently, Anne Barstow

contributed an influential, and extremely balanced article on the prehistoric society of Çatal Hüyük, one of the most famous neolithic sites cited in contemporary discussions.¹⁵ Even more recently, the well established archeologist Marija Gimbutas, whose interpretations of the culture of Old Europe pioneered a new chapter in prehistory, has taken up this reconstruction with passion and conviction.¹⁶ Elinor Gadon¹⁷ and the team of Anne Baring and Jules Cashford¹⁸ have written engaging and complete histories of the various ancient Goddesses, from the paleolithic to medieval veneration of the Virgin Mary. Relying on the archeological work done by Gimbutas and others, Carol Christ has made the pre-patriarchal hypothesis central to her Goddess thea-logy.¹⁹ The most visionary and poetic reconstruction, which connects the pre-patriarchal past with an unfinished, but absolutely essential evolutionary transformation still awaiting completion, is Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*.²⁰ Pulling together a great deal of information from prehistory through classical Biblical and Greek materials as well as a discussion of what is needed in the present to allow the survival of the species, she contrasts the values of the chalice with those of the blade. The chalice represents a "gylanic" peaceful and egalitarian value system prevalent in the pre-patriarchal world, while the blade represents the androcratic values of the "dominator" societies that overthrew and partially, but never completely, destroyed the gylanic values of pre-patriarchal societies of empowered women, peaceful men, and strong goddesses. Clearly, remembering such a past could be empowering and useful in today's world.

Why then would some *feminists*, not merely anti-feminists, be extremely skeptical of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis? The answer is twofold. Some feminists object that such "spiritual" issues are largely irrelevant to contemporary women, citing the oft-quoted truism that goddesses frequently co-exist with male dominance and cannot be correlated with high status or autonomy for women. Many such feminists feel that economic, political, and social issues are of far higher priority, and that antiquity holds few models in this regard. They also feel that Goddess worship in the *present* does little to alleviate women's real problems. Other feminists are not especially opposed to goddess

worship for contemporary women and agree that the ancient world included many powerful and impressive goddesses. But these feminists are skeptical of the scholarship that has reconstructed a *utopian* or a *female dominated past*, based on the existence of these goddesses. Many argue that extreme caution is required when interpreting material artifacts and that one cannot easily deduce ideology or social structure from them. The ease with which Gimbutas, Gadon, or Baring and Cashford, for example, deduce extremely detailed myths and rituals from limited and opaque material artifacts is the weak link, in my view, for such reconstructions are easily subject to projection and wishful thinking.

Such disclaimers about the pre-patriarchal hypothesis seem to be especially numerous among academically trained scholars of religion who are otherwise interested in or sympathetic to feminism, such as Kinsley,²¹ Young,²² and Townsend.²³ In recent articles or books all three of them have voiced sharply worded critiques of these reconstructions of the pre-patriarchal period. Young and Townsend express the opinion that the feminist reconstruction of the pre-patriarchal past

...puts forth as *historical fact* the myth of a golden age of the past to give ego reinforcement, to weld a bond among women in order to create a unified force, and to provide women with historical precedent for their aspirations.²⁴

In other words, that remembered past, however *useful* it might be is not *accurate*, and is therefore unacceptable.

Rosemary Ruether has also been a longtime critic of this hypothesis. Her argument, most fully developed in her recent book *God and Gaia*, seems to be that she finds the claims for the innocence or goodness of pre-patriarchal societies untenable because such claims link failure and greed with patriarchy and men, instead of with human beings, both female and male.²⁵

What is at issue in these debates? What are the weak links and which links hold? That many female forms are found in the archeological record of pre-historic and proto-historical societies is uncontested. It is equally uncontested that early mythological literature tells of many important and powerful goddesses. However, this fact does not prove that women were equal, in

the modern sense of the term, which seems quite unlikely, or that they lived lives with which modern women could be satisfied, or that the numerous female figures that have been discovered can easily be interpreted as Mother Goddesses. When interpreting these numerous female forms, it is much safer to note their presence and to hypothesize that they indicate appreciation of female sacredness, rather than to speculate in great detail about their theology or to try to determine whether they are goddesses or priestesses. One can have sympathy with critics who weary of the certainty with which Eisler and Gimbutas sometimes retell the myths and restage the rituals of pre-patriarchal societies. However, skepticism about some of the details of some interpretations and reconstructions should not lead one to dismiss the thesis that patriarchy arose relatively late in human history.

Though it may not be possible to demonstrate what pre-patriarchal societies were like in detail, or to interpret their symbol and myth systems with the certainty that some believers in the pre-patriarchal hypothesis would advocate, nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude, simply because patriarchy had not yet evolved, that women were less dominated than in later societies, and that female sacredness was more commonly venerated than in later societies. It would seem quite likely that women's relationships with men were more satisfactory, by feminist standards of assessment, than they became in male dominated societies. And it seems extremely likely that female sacrality, whether human or divine, was a commonplace of religious ideology for both women and men. These modest, and to my mind, relatively certain conclusions, are both accurate and useful. One does not need the extremes of either those who reconstruct details of a pre-patriarchal feminist utopia or those who reject the pre-patriarchal hypothesis entirely.

Several other theses central to many standard feminist reconstruction of pre-patriarchal societies and religions deserve individual commentary. Feminists often argue that these pre-patriarchal societies were both egalitarian and peaceful. They link these desirable (by feminist standards) conditions with the respect accorded to women and to the appreciation of females, whether divine or human, as sacred.

Predictably, the critics attack both these conclusions. Townsend argues that many bodies buried in supposedly peaceful Çatal Hüyük had evidence of severe blows to the head²⁶ and Young argues that private property, which undercuts egalitarianism, could have begun in the neolithic.²⁷ But the descriptions of the town plans, the houses themselves, and the art of neolithic Europe, which occur in source after source, support the conclusion that these societies were relatively peaceful and egalitarian, *especially when compared with later societies*. To say that these societies were peaceful is to say that they did not expend major resources, human or material, on organized, large-scale warfare. It does not mean that individual feuds, resulting in severe head wounds, would never occur. It is important to recognize that feuding and private fights, which seem impossible to avoid in human society, are completely different from diverting major resources and human energy into defensive or offensive warfare. This is a critical distinction, since it is naive to attribute the human tendency to aggressive behavior to patriarchal social arrangements. Patriarchy may encourage such tendencies, but it does not create them. On the other hand, the non-military pre-patriarchal societies give evidence to something that is critically important. *Human beings can live together and deal with their aggressions without resorting to large scale, organized warfare as a major preoccupation and use of resources*. Even a non-feminist historian, Thornkild Jacobsen, locates the beginning of warfare, *as a major threat*, in the third millennium, BCE,²⁸ but not earlier, when, in his view, famine was a much more severe threat. And early private property was not sufficient to result in the great inequities of wealth or poverty characteristic of later societies, as is clear from descriptions of town plans and houses.

However, it may not be possible to establish that this peaceful, egalitarian lifestyle was *caused* by the relatively high status of women combined with veneration of female sacrality, as is so often claimed by feminist advocates of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis. On the one hand, material conditions of life do argue for the likelihood of relative peace and egalitarianism and against large scale warfare and significant hierarchy in early foraging and horticultural societies. It can also be argued that women

had relatively higher status in these societies than in later patriarchal societies. But, on the other hand, *once large scale warfare and significant social hierarchies become part of human society, women and goddesses readily support and patronize both*. This embarrassing fact argues against the conclusion that earlier societies were relatively peaceful *because* women insist upon peace. Women's preferences for or against hierarchy or warfare do not seem to be the driving causal link in the whole sequence of developments. It seems, rather, that certain technological complexities, once unleashed, are hard to restrain from bringing hierarchy and violence in their wake, a topic to which we must now turn our attention.

The Creation of Patriarchy

With the transition from horticulture to intensive agriculture, which began somewhere in the fertile crescent after 5,000 B.C., male dominance first becomes clear-cut and obvious, both in the archeological record and in contemporary societies studied by anthropologists. This transition is explained quite differently by the most strident advocates of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis and by less ideological scholars. Somewhat caricaturing the most ideological feminist explanations for the demise of peaceful neolithic societies, it is claimed that men, seemingly by nature more prone to violence and less moral than women, took over by force of their superior physical strength and began their reign of terror and dominance. While invasion from nomadic warriors is one factor in the decline of some pre-patriarchal societies, this explanation begs the obvious questions. *Where did these men come from and why did they turn to warfare, violence, and domination?* Furthermore, this explanation depends on an essentialist understanding of male and female natures as static, unaffected by varying cultural and material circumstances. Ultimately, this explanation is quite discouraging regarding the possibilities for post-patriarchal society. Locating the cause of the transition from pre-patriarchy to patriarchy in morality, rather than in material and technological changes, strikes me as counter-productive—a hypothesis of last resort if one wishes to work for the demise of patriarchy. This explanation pits women against

men morally and seems to conclude that men have no choice but to be violent and immoral. If this is so, then it will probably be impossible to eradicate patriarchy.

If, on the other hand, patriarchy is the result of certain causes and conditions, then, when those causes and conditions are removed, patriarchy can die a natural death. Therefore, it is important to look behind the immediate cause of the decline of many pre-patriarchal societies—conquest by patriarchal outsiders—to the more basic causes that led to the development of warrior, male-dominated societies in the first place. At the other end of a spectrum of explanations for the rise of patriarchy is an explanation that looks at changing technologies rather than morality.

Patriarchy emerged because, for the first time, the *material conditions* of life promoted male dominance. Newer technologies, involving the plow and draft animals, complex irrigation systems, and a new emphasis on labor intensive grain crops favored men as the primary producers, while women were reduced to the role of processing agricultural produce. Labor intensive agriculture increased reproductive demands at the same time as an increased food supply permitted higher rates of fertility. Women began to have more babies and populations increased greatly. Specialization and social stratification became possible. Resources became scarcer and competition for them increased, making organized, communal violence (warfare) attractive and seemingly advantageous. Specialization also made increasing amounts of private property possible at the same time as there was increased competition for scarcer resources, thereby also increasing the attraction of warfare. All these factors are essential in the transition from a kin-based society to the process of early state formation. And, to some extent at least, these processes seem to be replicated in other parts of the world that went through the same transitions.

Thus a complex web of technological, social, and material changes, rather than a change in morality or religious symbols, made dominance and hierarchy, including male dominance over women, possible for the first time relatively late in human history. The highly respected historian Gerda Lerner arrives at this conclusion, as do many anthropologists and archaeologists.²⁹

Thus, we have established the first claim about patriarchy again, on different grounds. The part of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis which claims that patriarchy, as we have experienced patriarchy in most or all societies since the Bronze Age, is the product of historical causes and conditions rather than a timeless human condition or the result of male moral depravity seems as incontrovertible as any historical hypothesis ever can be.

When asking about the creation of patriarchy, it is also important to discuss how relevant warfare and invasion were in the demise of pre-patriarchal societies. While evidence seems quite clear that Old Europe and the Mediterranean regions were, in fact, overrun by patriarchal outsiders who violently and quickly destroyed peaceful, matrifocal neolithic villages, it seems equally clear that in the Ancient Near East, in Mesopotamia, among others, *internal* developments toward social hierarchy, including male dominance, preceded large scale warfare as major threat and preoccupation.³⁰ Thus, ultimately warfare is an *effect*, rather than the *cause* of the end of pre-patriarchal society, though some individual pre-patriarchal societies were destroyed by outsiders who had already become patriarchal warriors. We should probably look to increased population pressures and competition for scarce resources as the *causes* that made warfare an attractive option in the first place—a lesson that is certainly important in contemporary times as well.

Finally, we can return to the link between symbols of sacred females and the emerging patriarchal order. It seems quite unlikely that the new emphasis on warfare and male dominance occurred because patriarchal ideology or symbolism replaced symbolism and ideology that emphasize women and feminine sacrality. If anything, the reverse occurred. With growing male dominance brought about by technological and cultural changes, religious symbolism gradually became more male dominant—the next phase of the story to be discussed. Material or technological changes and changes in symbolism or religious and social ideology are always closely bound up with each other. In this case, it does not seem cogent to give religious symbols the role of causal agent in these massive changes.

However, given the link between religious symbols and social form, the feminist advocates of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis are also right when they claim that the patriarchal ideologies, symbol systems, and social systems that now rule the planet could never produce a return to peace and egalitarianism. The technological possibility or necessity of peace and egalitarianism will require post-patriarchal symbols and ideologies as well. And post-patriarchal symbols and ideologies will resemble pre-patriarchal symbols of female sacrality and egalitarian gender relationships more than they will resemble patriarchal symbols and gender relationships.

Some Concluding Comments on the Pre-patriarchal Hypothesis

Several weaknesses are endemic to the pre-patriarchal hypothesis as usually presented in feminist literature. One is its obvious Eurocentric bias, and the other is its unilinear model of cultural evolution. The pre-patriarchal hypothesis explains *Western* patriarchy, not other forms of male dominance. And it seems to assume that patriarchy emerged *once*, in Western antiquity. Both of these omissions need to be addressed.

Very little research has been done concerning the cultural and religious development from pre-patriarchy into patriarchy in other parts of the world. Though the case has not been made very thoroughly for India, well known and easily accessible archeological and historical data would appear to warrant extending the hypothesis to include India. However, even though Indian male dominance could possibly be explained through the same waves of cultural contact and invasions that explain Western patriarchy, East Asia does not participate in those historical processes. East Asian patriarchy requires a separate explanation, which has not been made to any great extent. In a noteworthy exception, Robert Ellwood has argued that "...in early Japan we have a narrative which, taken at face value, seems to show patriarchal revolution in full spate."³¹ Probably Asia has been overlooked simply because so few feminists and feminist scholars are well trained in cross-cultural studies. This limitation is not as serious as one might at first suspect because it is difficult to

imagine that foraging or horticultural societies were vastly different in other parts of the world than they were in Europe and the Middle East. While the locus chosen to argue out this hypothesis reflects an obvious and unfortunate Euro-centric bias, this bias does not invalidate the hypothesis.

The unilinear model of evolution into patriarchy is a more serious problem, for it assumes that all societies go, lock-step, through the same historical processes. This was a popular hypothesis in nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology, but it has not been taken seriously for many years. The work of Peggy Reeves Sanday in *Female Power and Male Dominance* offers a major corrective concerning theories of the origins of male dominance. Rather than isolating single, or even multiple chains of cause and effect leading to male dominance, she locates patterns of cultural forms that tend to be found with male dominance and with female power. Chief among her findings is that it is possible to talk of female power and male-female equality when women have economic and political decision-making powers, which they do in about 32% of societies studied. Only 28% of the societies in her large sample are clearly male dominated. The remaining 40% are neither clearly egalitarian nor male dominated, but fall between those opposites.³²

She studies many factors that play into the level of male dominance in a society. If the environment is beneficent, then women and men tend to work together, men spend time with young children, and people develop what she calls an "inner orientation," including a symbol system that features female creative beings. Such societies are not usually male dominant. By contrast, if the environment is harsher and providing basic necessities produces stress, or if livelihood centers around large animals or migration, people develop an "outer orientation," in which the creative powers are male. Male dominance is likely in these societies, in part because men and women do not work together and men spend little time with children. But these lines of explanation are not neat and unilinear. Though, in some cases, one can "...establish a causal relationship between depleting resources, cultural disruption, migration, and the oppression of women," male domination of women, when it occurs, "...is a complex question, for which no one answer suffices."³³ In the

long run, her less than neat, non-linear discussion of female power and male dominance is more satisfying than even the refinements of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis that do no more than explain the emergence of patriarchy in Western antiquity. Her findings are recommended not only to historians who want to explain the rise of patriarchy, but also to ethicists and theologians seeking the post-patriarchal future of religion.

Finally, we must return to the question of pre-patriarchal religion and society as an accurate and usable past. That it is accurate to speak of pre-patriarchal pasts is, by now, as well established as is possible. But what is the contemporary usability of these pasts? I would suggest that pre-patriarchal pasts provide proof of the possibility of a post-patriarchal future, but are not a model for it. We need to recognize, with Barstow,³⁴ the limitations of the usefulness of the pre-patriarchal past. While it is useful to know that patriarchy has not always been women's lot, modern women should find the forms and symbols of ancient religion only of limited utility in constructing post-patriarchal religion.

Most interpreters of these female forms and symbols stress their fertility and maternity, by no means a sufficient meaning for female sacrality in today's religious universe. While valorizing motherhood is an important issue in contemporary feminist religious reconstruction, not privileging that symbol is absolutely vital, even mandatory, for human survival. Considering that increased maternity, resulting in increased population density and competition for scarce resources is probably one of the causes of patriarchy, feminists should be loathe to enshrine physical reproduction as the primary symbol of female sacredness. Since human population growth threatens to stress the environment immeasurably in the very near future, if not already, and since environmental stress is one of the root causes of male domination, feminism needs to sanctify models of female impact on the world that reverse and undercut excessive physiological reproduction. Such models are not in abundance in the pre-patriarchal world, at least as interpreted by many of its advocates.

It is futile to look for the birth of human aggression, or whatever else we may see as the genesis of human misery, in the birth of patriarchy. Patriarchy adds its own special and unnecessary dimensions to human misery, to grasping and the

resultant suffering, but it is naive and unhelpful to locate the origins of grasping and aggression, tendencies basic to being human, in the origins of patriarchy. They will continue to challenge us even in post-patriarchal forms of religion and society. To regard "the fall" as a historical, preventable event rather than an a-historical mythic event, which is what happens when the origins of patriarchy are equated with the origin of evil and suffering, is an uncritical appropriation of one of patriarchal religions' most destructive tenets. Furthermore, this version of "the fall" turns on an essentialist theory of male and female natures, of moral women and immoral men, that gives little hope for a post-patriarchal future.

Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize the profound usefulness of this material. "It hasn't always been that way." Men have not always dominated women. Additionally, while recognizing the contemporary limitations of images specific to the paleolithic and neolithic, it is important to recognize that the *example* of images of female sacredness is useful and empowering to Western women, so long denied this simple and almost universal affirmation.

Notes

1. Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America*, New York, Crossroad, 1993, pp. 150-184.
2. The phrase is taken from the book title of Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986.
3. Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups*, New York, Random House, 1969.
4. George Gilder, *Sexual Suicide*, New York, Quadrangle, 1973.
5. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987, pp. 24-28.
6. David Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine Feminine*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. xviii.
7. Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 4.
8. M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies, *Female of the Species*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1975, p. 190.
9. For a fuller discussion of this and other issues, see Margaret Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory*, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1989, pp. 38-76.
10. For example, see Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance*, pp. 113-20, 135-43.
11. Ehrenberg, op. cit., p. 173.
12. Ralph Mannheim, (trans. and ed.), *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967.
13. Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex*, Baltimore, MD, Penguin Books, 1973.
14. Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, and Javanovich, 1978.
15. Anne Barstow, 'The Prehistoric Goddess', in Carl Olson (ed.), *The Book of the Goddess: Past and Present*, New York, Crossroads, 1983, pp. 7-28.
16. Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1989; and *The Civilization of the Goddess*, San Francisco, 1991.
17. Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1989.
18. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, New York, Penguin, 1991.
19. Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987.
20. Eisler, op. cit., p. 24.
21. David Kinsley, op. cit., pp. xi-xix.
22. Katherine Young, 'Goddesses, Feminists, and Scholars', in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, Albany, SUNY, 1991, pp. 105-79.
23. Joan B. Townsend, 'The Goddess: Fact, Fallacy, and Revitalization Movement', in Larry W. Hurtado (ed.), *Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate*, Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1990, pp. 180-203.
24. Townsend, op. cit., p. 197.
25. Rosemary Ruether, *God and Gaia*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1993, pp. 143-65.
26. Townsend, op. cit., p. 194.
27. Young, op. cit., p. 146.
28. Thornkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 77-84.
29. Lerner, op. cit., pp. 15-53, Ehrenberg, op. cit., pp. 99-107.
30. Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East: 9,000 - 2,000 B.C.*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, gives an overview of the process of urbanization and population density leading to heightened warfare, rather than the other way around.
31. Robert Ellwood, 'Patriarchal Revolution in Ancient Japan: Episodes from the *Nihonshoki*/Sujun Chronicle', in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, II:2 (Fall, 1986), pp. 23-37.
32. Sanday, op. cit., p. 165.
33. Sanday, op. cit., p. 8.
34. Barstow, op. cit., p. 14.

Embodied Religious Thought: Gender Categories in Mesoamerica

Sylvia Marcos

Soon Huemac found out [that] his daughter was sick.
He then asked the women who were taking care of her
"What did she do? [...] How did this heat enter my
daughter?"

And the women who took care of her answered,
"It's the Tohuenyo, he who's selling chili: he has put
fire in her, he's made her restless.

That's how it began, that's how it is that she fell sick."

-Codice Matritense del Real Palacio

Body perceptions are embedded both in gender and culture. Mesoamerican sources are particularly revealing of that relationship. Concepts like equilibrium and fluidity are fundamental to grasp perception-constructions of bodies in ancient Mexico. A review of primary sources for the history of ancient Mexico manifests a conception of corporality that could be denominated "embodied thought." Equilibrium, fluidity and gender define the way the body is conceptualized.

Never before has the body played such a central role in critical theory as it does today in feminist theory. Recent scholarship and the discourse concerning the body support positions that frequently question scientific rationalism and at times historicize anatomy and biology.¹ Within the framework of these critical revisions, biology, and particularly *sex* understood as the biological counterpart of culturally constructed *gender*, can no longer be regarded as "axiomatic" categories uninfluenced by history. Gender theory often contributes to a rethinking of corporeality. Contemporary theorists have begun to explore alternatives to cognitive systems centered in the mind. The role of the body in knowledge is being studied with an emphasis on its importance in the reproduction and transformation of culture.²

Women's body, previously considered the *locus* of all our oppression, has a privileged place in current theory as a source

of inspiration and reconceptualization. To continue elaborating disembodied theories would be to continue "the old masculine philosophical habit".³ Feminist theory may be abstract, but it is in search of bodily perspectives. It is embedded in the flesh, in our female flesh with its desires and pleasures, with its potential for pregnancy and maternity, with its blood, its fluids and its juices.⁴

Because of its ability to historicize inherited conceptual categories, contemporary critical theory offers possibilities for new understandings of concepts of the body in Mesoamerican thought. The body is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which are written the rules, hierarchies and even more, the metaphysical obligations of a culture.⁵

Yet, despite the differences between the "scientific" presentation of the body and its representation in gender theory, both are quite distinct from Mesoamerican concepts of the body. However, the immediacy of the body, inherent to both Mesoamerican thought and critical gender theory, allows for rapprochement.

By Mesoamerican thought, I am referring to the highly developed complex of ideas and beliefs that constituted the dominant epistemological framework among the Nahuas, Mayas and other peoples of Mesoamerica.⁶

The main sources for the present study are Books III and VI of the *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España (Código Florentino)*. Researchers have pointed out their depth and richness, especially of Book VI, and their value in bringing us closer to the moral vision and thought of the ancient Nahuas. The contributions of Lopez Austin and León-Portilla to the understanding of the Mesoamerican philosophical world are of great importance for the interpretation of these primary sources. Excerpts from the *Código Matritense del Real Palacio* and especially León-Portilla's recent translation of it were also examined.⁷

Modern scientific certainties are not universals but are themselves historical constructions.⁸ This understanding permits a less confined way of looking at the Mesoamerican world. From this perspective, the biology (sex)/culture (gender) divide proves

inadequate for approaching this universe. The concepts of duality, equilibrium, and fluidity are integral components of the Mesoamerican universe and essential to an understanding of corporeality.

Duality in the Mesoamerican Universe

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 Omēteotl, the supreme creator whose name means "double god" or dual divinity.⁹ Dwelling beyond the thirteen heavens, Omēteotl was thought of as a feminine-masculine pair. Born of this supreme pair, other dual deities, in their turn, incarnated natural phenomena. Thompson, for example, speaks of Itzam Na and his partner Ix Chebel Yax in the Mayan region. Las Casas mentions the pair, Izona and his wife; and Diego de Landa refers to Itzam Na and Ixchel as the god and goddess of medicine. For the inhabitants of the Michoacan area, the creator pair was Curicuaert and Cuerauahperi.¹⁰

Omecihuatl and Ometecutli are the feminine and masculine halves of the divine duality Omēteotl. 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 Mexicanists 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 another aspect 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.¹¹ Likewise, during the ritual bathing of

newborns, feminine and masculine waters are invoked.¹² 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 calendars: 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.¹³

Both Frances Karttunen and Gary Gossen describe Mesoamerican duality as dynamic.¹⁴ To the polar ordering of opposites, other authors add a complementarity that gives duality a certain "reversibility" of terms or movement to the concept.¹⁵ 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 seems to be the unfolding of dualities. This elaboration of dualities manifests itself on all levels of heaven, earth and below the earth as well as the four corners of the universe.¹⁶ 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.

Within this fluidity of metaphorical dualities, divine and corporeal, the only essential configuration was the mutual necessity to interconnect and interrelate. In the Mesoamerican universe, above and below did not imply superior and inferior.¹⁷

Not even in good and evil, nor between the divine and earthly, nor in death 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.¹⁸

Whether regarded as "dynamism" by some authors and "complementarity" by others (Lopez Austin), this quality determines a dual ordering specific to Mesoamerican thought from which mutually exclusive, closed categories are absent.¹⁹

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 role, shifting between aggressor and benefactor: "[F]rom the four pillars of the cosmos at the four corners came the heavenly waters and the beneficial and destructive winds".²⁰

Mesoamerican cosmology implied a concept of duality that was not fixed or static but constantly changing. An essential ingredient in Nahuatl thought, this motility gave its impulse to everything. Divinities, people, objects, time, and space with its five directions, had gender: they were feminine or masculine in proportions which were continually modified. Gender permeating all areas of nature was itself the movement that engendered and transformed all identity.

According to Jacques Soustelle, "The law of this world is the alternation of distinct qualities, radically separated, which dominate, disappear and reappear eternally..."²¹ 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. It is reflected in the plasticity and dynamism that characterize its poles and that keep them "pulsating" as it were.²²

Duality and the Idea of Equilibrium

Equilibrium determined and modified the concept of duality and was the condition for the preservation of the cosmos.²³ This equilibrium is not, however, the static repose of two equal weights or masses. Rather, it is a force that constantly modifies the relation between dual and/or opposite pairs. Like duality itself, equilibrium or balance not only permeated relations between men and women, but also relations among deities, 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 was as fundamental as duality itself.

Thus, Mesoamerican duality cannot be a binary ordering of "static" poles. 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 that permeate all of Mesoamerican thought. It endows duality with flexibility or plasticity and makes it flow, impeding stratification. An equilibrium that is always reestablishing its own balance — inherent in the Mesoamerican concept of a universe in movement — also kept all other points of balance equally in constant motion. In a similar way, the categories of feminine and masculine were open and changing, as Lopez Austin seems to suggest: "...there was not a being exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine but rather different nuances of combinations."²⁴

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. The imperceptible "charge" or "load" that all beings have, whether rocks, animals or people, was feminine or masculine and, frequently, both simultaneously in different gradations that perpetually changed and shifted.²⁵

Balancing the Cosmos

The Mesoamerican concept of equilibrium had implications for living life correctly. Gingerich writes 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."²⁶

To stray from the middle way posed a danger to the structure and survival of the entire cosmos in Mesoamerica. Among those who have noted this sense of radical urgency that characterizes the Nahuatl collective responsibility for achieving a vital, fluid and mobile equilibrium is Burkhart: "The Nahuas had a sense of collective responsibility ... and they believed that human actions could provoke a final cataclysm."²⁷ The Nahuatl "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.

Equilibrium thus required that each individual in every circumstance had to constantly seek the central hub of the cosmos and coordinate him or herself in relation to it. To maintain this balance is to combine and recombine opposites. This implies not negating the opposite but rather advancing toward it, embracing it in the attempt to find the fluctuating balance. 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."²⁸ This fluid position made up the equilibrium of the cosmos.

Bodily and Cosmic Stability

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 discourses by the elders, the *huehuetlatolli* and *ilamatlatolli*.²⁹ As mentioned above, many Mexicanists regard Book VI of the *Codice Florentino Codex* of Sahagún as a sort of

summa of Nahuatl thought. It is the work which probes most deeply into the beliefs and rules of this society. The *ilamatlatolli* (discourses of women elders) contained in Book VI of the *Códice Florentino* 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.
 . . . (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 . . .
 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.³⁰

In the *huehuetlatolli* we can appreciate balance as a constant of Nahuatl thought as it is incarnated in daily life, in relations between the genders, and in bodily attitudes.

The body's immersion in the cosmos, and the insertion of the cosmos in the body do not allow even the possibility of a body/mind split. As we will see further on in the analysis of the concepts of corporeality, the symbolic realm was considered as tangible as any other. Lopez Austin points out that in all his research he has never found anything that would lead him to think that the Nahuas made a distinction between the realm of the material and the immaterial.³¹ The tangible and the intangible were intrinsically blended.

The order in this concept of duality of opposites comes from the balance achieved through constant motion, *ollin* in Nahuatl. Following, we will see how the Nahua body is the expression of this vital movement.

The Mesoamerican Body or Permeable Corporeality

In dominant traditions, the very concept of body has been formed in opposition to mind. It is defined as the place of biological data, of the material, of the immanent. It has also been conceptualized since the seventeenth century as that which marks the boundaries between the interior self and the external world.³²

In the Mesoamerican tradition, on the other hand, the body has characteristics that are very different from those of the anatomical or biological body. Most notably, exterior and interior are not separated by the hermetic barrier of the skin. Between the outside and the inside, a permanent and continuous exchange occurs. Material and immaterial, external and internal are in permanent interaction while the skin is constantly crossed by all kinds of entities. Everything leads toward a concept of corporeality in which the body is open to all dimensions of the cosmos: a body, both single and dual, incorporates solids and fluids in permanent flux, generally immaterial "airs" or volatile emanations as well as "juices" and solid matter. The Mesoamerican body can be imagined as a vortex generated by the dynamic confluence of multiple entities, both material and immaterial and often contradictory, that combine and recombine in endless play.

Bodies — feminine and masculine — echoed each other and, united, they mirrored the universe: their duality reflected cosmic duality. In turn this cosmic duality reflected the duality of the masculine and feminine imbricated in each other and both incorporated in the universe. Body and cosmos reflected each other and were complementary. The head corresponded to the heavens, the heart as the vital center corresponded to the earth, and the liver to the underworld. These correspondences and interrelations were themselves immersed in a permanent reciprocal movement: the ebb and flow between the universe and the body, and between cosmic duality and the bodies of women and men poured back again as a current from the feminine to the masculine body and from this duality to the cosmos.

Plurality of Entities

In addition to the visible body, the Mesoamerican body is made up of "animic entities" as Lopez Austin calls them.³³ Taken together, they most closely resemble what is meant by the Christian soul. There are three preeminent entities: the *tonalli*, the *teyolia* and the *ihiyotl*. Each has its privileged — but not unique — location within the physical body. The *tonalli*, whose principal residence is the head, travels at night during sleep. The *teyolia* resides in the heart and was regarded as the center of memory, knowledge and intelligence. When the *teyolia* leaves the body, death occurs. The *ihiyotl* (breath or "soplo") which is associated with the liver, can produce emanations that harm others.³⁴ The *ihiyotl* was the vital center of passion and feeling.

It is as part of this play of multiple emanations and inclusions that the body is conceptualized in Mesoamerican thought.³⁵ Emanations include all the material and nonmaterial entities that can leave the body. "Inclusions" refer to those external entities — at times regarded as material — which enter the body from other domains of nature, from the spirit world, and at times from the realm of the sacred. Frequently sickness was conceptualized as an intrusion into the body of harmful elements that, when expelled, could take the form of animals and material objects.³⁶ Health and well-being for the Mesoamericans were defined by a balance between the opposing forces and elements whose totality gave the individual his or her characteristics.³⁷

The animic centers and their flow of vital forces hardly exhaust the totality of what made up an individual. The body, teeming with activity in the greater and lesser centers that emanate and receive forces and entities, reflects, of course, the multiplicity of the cosmos it was connected with. There were many forces that could move from the outside in, merge with internal forces and then leave the body as emanations. The joints were regarded as centers of dense life force. It was at the joints that supernatural beings (of a cold nature) could attack and thus impede bodily movement.³⁸ All these entities were discernible to the Mesoamericans and were as evident to them as their own faces, hands, legs, and genitals.

The Nahua Mode of Being in the World

The world, for the Nahuas, 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 complement of a permeable corporeality. 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.

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 . . ." ³⁹

Metaphors for the Flesh

Metaphors make up the very fabric of Mesoamerican thought. Abundant and richly complex, metaphoric language was used in all aspects of life. Metaphors for the feminine and masculine body are found in the *ilamatlatolli* and *huehuetlatolli* from Book VI of the *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España*. These discourses, vividly illustrate specific cultural attitudes towards the bodies of women and men. As several researchers have pointed out, the discourses, recited publicly when children became adolescents, contain metaphors that give expression to fundamental components of Mesoamerican thought and morals as in the following examples:⁴⁰

. . . (F)rom the time of the lord of Tetzcuco, named Netzahualcoyotzin, . . . who asked them [two older women], saying: "Grandmothers, tell me, is it true that you have desire for fleshly pleasure . . . old as you are?"

The old women replied with a long explanation ending in a metaphor:

" . . . (Y)ou men when you become old no longer desire carnal delights . . . but we women never tire of these doings nor do we get enough of them because our bodies are like a deep abyss, a chasm that never fills up; it receives everything . . . desiring more and asking for more . . ."

In Book XVIII, there is the following advice for daughters:

". . . Look now, don't choose from among the men the one that seems the best to you like those who shop for mantas in the market. . . and don't carry on like people do when the new corn is just fresh, looking for the best and tastiest cobs . . ."41

Such metaphors about the bodies of women and men reveal aspects of the culture and were selectively eliminated by the first chroniclers and missionaries because they clashed with their own moral values. However, the metaphors surviving in everyday language probably seemed innocent enough and passed for mere poetic adornment of language. Sahagún would qualify them as "very delicate and exact and adequate."

Metaphor carries the imprint of the value system. For example, socially accepted desire for the body of another is evident in the use of the metaphor "the best and tastiest cobs." It is evident likewise in the image of women's bodies as "a deep abyss, a chasm that never fills up."

These metaphors, along with the Tohuenyo narrative analyzed below, give us an idea of the bodily pleasures accepted in the Mesoamerican world. *Tlalticpacayotl*, translated as carnality or sex, literally means "that which pertains to the surface of the earth".42 As with all that pertains to the earth's surface, erotic pleasure is earthly identity. Not only is it accepted, but it defines the inhabitants of Mesoamerica as dwellers of the four intermediate levels of earth's surface. This abode of women and men is the place of the flesh, its joys and concerns. The earth would be inconceivable without the corporeal dimension.43 To speak cosmically of eroticism is to speak of the dimensions belonging to "the surface of the earth" and its central position in the Nahua cosmos.

Narrative and Metaphor: Nahua Corporeality in the Florentine Codex

The narrative of the Tohuenyo or the Foreigner is a choice example for understanding body and gender in Nahua thought. Found in Book III of the *Códice Florentino*, it forms part of the wealth of documentation in Nahuatl about sixteenth century Mexican culture. The story was collected from indigenous informants by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in Tepepulco (Tezcoco region), Tlatelolco and Mexico beginning in 1547. The "normative discourses" of the *huehuetlatolli* can not be understood without narratives such as this in which the cosmic meaning of pleasure manifests itself. The story, part of epic narratives concerning divinities, is surprising for its bodily images and metaphors, as well as for the prominent place given to desire and carnality as expressed by a young girl. León-Portilla comments:

It has been said at times concerning our indigenous culture that there is a lack of erotic themes (. . .) But, contrary to those who think this way, there are some old texts in Nahuatl, collected from native lips at the time of the conquest.44

This text was probably one of "those old Nahuatl 'texts' with a certain rhythm and measure that was learned by heart in the Calmecac or other Nahua centers of superior education . . ."45 Nahua youth in these centers received intellectual training as they listened to the *tlamatinime* (the wise men, or philosophers) express the highest values of their culture. It was also a place of training for the priesthood. . . . [T]here is no doubt that the teachings directed at the most select of Nahua youth included the highest thinking, often contained in the songs and discourses learned by memory.46

The story of the Tohuenyo concerns the erotic ardor that, without hyperbole, overcame a Toltec princess.47 Here then, in León-Portilla's recent translation, is an excerpt from the story of the Tohuenyo.48

The Story of Tohuenyo

(. . .)

He went about naked, his thing just hanging,
he began selling chillies,
setting up his stand in the market, in front of the palace.

(. . .)

So then that daughter of Huemac
looked toward the market
and saw the Tohuenyo: there with his thing hanging.
As soon as she saw him,
she went into the palace.
Then, because of this, the daughter of Huemac fell sick.
She became filled with tension, she entered into great
heat, feeling herself deprived of the Tohuenyo's bird —
his manly part.

(. . .)

Soon Huemac found out: his daughter was sick.
He then asked the women who were taking care of her
"What did she do? What's she doing?
How did this heat enter my daughter?"
And the women who took care of her answered,
"It's the Tohuenyo, he who's selling chili: he has put fire in
her, he's made her restless.
That's how it began, that's how it is that she fell sick."

(. . .)

And the lord Huemac, seeing this, gave orders and said,
"Toltecs, look for the chili vendor, find the Tohuenyo."
And immediately they went about looking for him
everywhere.

(. . .)

They turned all Tula upside down and even though they
made every effort, they didn't see him anywhere.
So they came to tell the lord that they hadn't seen Tohuenyo
anywhere.
But a little later Tohuenyo appeared on his own.

(. . .)

Then the lord said to him:
"You have awakened that yearning in my daughter,
You will cure her."

(. . .)

And right away they cut his hair, they bathed him and after
this they rubbed him with oils, put a loincloth on him and
tied on a cloak.

And when Tohuenyo went to see her, he immediately stayed
with her and with this she got well that moment.

Tohuenyo later won the recognition of the Toltecs and led
them to victory in many battles. The story of his extraordinary
war deeds becomes part of an epic myth about the adventures
of supernatural beings of whom Tohuenyo is one. In the middle
of these heroic deeds comes this "remarkable story of the
Tohuenyo" as León-Portilla calls it.⁴⁹ It still surprises us that,
despite the moral scrutiny and expurgation that the vestiges of
erotic Nahua art suffered at the hands of the clerical chroniclers,
this has survived.⁵⁰

To find a text with an explicitly carnal content leads us to
another level of understanding about the role of the body and
desire in Nahuatl thought and culture. These expressions are
very far from any sort of fear of the power of feminine desire, or
from the fear of inexhaustible sexuality as found in Europe in
the *Malleus Maleficarum*.⁵¹

Generally historians emphasize the disciplined and to a certain
degree repressive (as we would say) character of Aztec culture.
Without a doubt, there were norms with respect to sex. At the
same time, we cannot simplistically declare that no space existed
for eroticism. In a culture and thought produced by duality, by
the alternating presence of opposites in motion, the demands of
discipline were enriched by the possibility of and esteem for
carnality. The one-sided emphasis on rigor and discipline is more
a product of the values of the missionary historians than a true
reflection of the data and realities of that ancient world. What
Sahagún recorded in Chapter VII, Book VI of the *Historia General
de las cosas de Nueva España* balances the picture:

" . . . They worshipped Tlazulteotl, the deity of lust, the
Mexicas did, especially the Mixtecs and Olmecs . . . and the
Cueztecs worshipped and honored Tlazulteotl, and didn't
accuse themselves of lust before him, because for them
lust was not a sin."⁵²

Some fragments that here and there escaped the inquisitorial filter along with the study of metaphors and narratives they contain can reveal to us aspects of this culture — such as corporeality and carnality — that were censored in the majority of sources.

Conclusion

The emphasis here has been to view concepts of the body, its metaphors, bodily constraints and eroticism in Mesoamerican thought. It is appropriate to emphasize that in these Mesoamerican concepts, women's bodies are not only recognized and venerated for their reproductive capacity, but they also appear as "subjects of desire."⁵³ We have seen the case of one woman — the young daughter of Huemac — whose desire provoked concern and action and affected the mythic and political history of her time.

The body, abode and axis of delights and pleasures, the dual body of women and men, fluid and permeable corporeality, the body as the principle of being on earth, fusion with the immediate surroundings and also with the origin of the cosmos, this feminine and masculine body manifests itself in remnants of epic poetry, songs, narratives and metaphors. Finding even vestiges of it can begin to reveal incarnate universes that escape the master narrative of spirit over flesh.

Notes

*Jacqueline Mosio assisted in the preparation of the English version and the bibliography.

1. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1990; Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991; Rosalind Petchesky, 'Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction', in *Feminist Studies* 13, 1987.
2. See especially the following: Genevieve Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Susan Bordo and A. Jaggar (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1989; Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986; Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988; Laqueur, op. cit.
3. Teresa de Lauretis, 'The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy', (Introduction) in The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference, A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990.
4. Gallop, op. cit.
5. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, New York, Pantheon, 1982.
6. The Aztecs were one of the Nahua groups. Despite linguistic differences among them, the peoples of ancient Mesoamerica (Central America) formed a world as different from the indigenous groups of the North as from the Andean empire of the South. Mesoamericans were united by cosmology, mythical and ritual legacy, by cultural centers, and by a similar concept of time and space. For other points of commonality, see Alfredo Lopez Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1993, and Paul Kirchhoff, 'Mesoamerica: Its Geographic Limits, Ethnic Composition and Cultural Characteristics', in Sol Tax (ed.), *Heritage of Conquest: The Ethnology of Middle America*, New York, Cooper Square Publishers, 1968 (Reprint. Originally published by Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois).
7. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España (Primera versión íntegra del texto castellano del manuscrito conocido como Códice Florentino)*, Alfredo López Austin and Josefina

- García Quintana (eds), México, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and Alianza Editorial Mexicana 1989; 2 vols., *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio*, as cited in Miguel León-Portilla, *Toltecatoyotl, Aspectos de la cultura Nahuatl*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980. For a discussion of the origin of Sahagun's work and the complexity of dealing with the sources, see Sylvia Marcos, 'Gender and Moral Precepts in Ancient Mexico: Sahagun's Texts', *Concilium*, No. 6, 1991. Excerpts from primary sources are the author's translation.
8. Duden, op. cit., Petchesky, op. cit., Barbara Katz-Rothman, personal communication, Graduate Center, CUNY, New York, 1994.
 9. Andres de Olmos, 'Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas', in Angel M. Garibay (ed.), *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos. Tres opúsculos del siglo XVI*, México, Porrúa 1973; Sahagún, *Historia General*, op. cit..
 10. Eric Thompson, *Historia y Religión de los Mayas*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica 1975; Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, introduction by Angel Garibay, México, Ediciones Porrúa 1966; Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologetica Historia*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas), 1967.
 11. Félix Baez-Jorge, *Los oficios de las diosas*, Xalapa, Universidad Veracruzana, 1988.
 12. Sahagún, *Historia General*, Books I and II.
 13. Peter T. Furst, 'Human Biology and the Origin of the 260-Day Sacred Almanac: The Contribution of Leonhard Schultze Jena (1872-1955)' in Gary H. Gossen (ed.), *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community: Essays in Mesoamerican Ideas*, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, Albany, State University of New York, 1986. Also, in Andres de Olmos: "(T)hey counted by twenty days from the first day, which was their month; they counted up one year then left five days, thus a year only had three hundred and sixty days. . . ."
 14. Frances Karttunen, 'In Their Own Voice: Mesoamerican Indigenous Women Then and Now', Austin, Linguistics Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1986; Gary H. Gossen, 'Mesoamerican Ideas as a Foundation for Regional Synthesis', in Gossen, *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community*, op. cit.

15. This complementarity means that every pole is the other's referent: masculinity, for instance, is only defined in relation to femininity and vice versa. The same holds true for the secondary dualities such as hot/cold, right/left, day/night. Hence the mutual distance between the poles determines the distinctness of their opposition with a growing distance allowing for diminishing contrast, for ambiguity and even the reversibility of one (e.g., "hot") into the other ("cold").
16. Yolotl González Torres, *Diccionario de Mitología y Religión de Mesoamérica*, México, Larousse, 1991: ". . . 4 [symbolized] the four directions of the universe, 5 [symbolized] the four directions plus the center, 9 was associated with the underworld and 13 with the levels of heaven. . . ."
17. Nohemi Quezada, personal communication, DEAS Conference, January 1990. See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metáforas de la Vida Cotidiana*, Madrid, Catedra 1986, p. 50 and following. To transpose these values to the Mesoamerican universe would be a serious error. 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 in the heavens.
18. Alfredo López Austin, 'Cosmovisión y Salud entre los Mexicanos' in A. López Austin and C. Viesca, (eds), *Historia de la Medicina en México*, Book I, México, UNAM, Facultad de Medicina, 1984, p. 103.
19. 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 Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne*, Paris, Seuil 1983, p. 245: ". . . [A]s 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 translation)

20. López Austin, *Historia de la Medicina*, op. cit..
21. Jacques Soustelle, *La Pensée Cosmologique des Anciens Mexicains*, Paris, Herman et Cie 1955.
22. For a discussion of Greek thought in relation to Nahua modes of thought, see Sylvia Marcos, 'Categorías de género y pensamiento mesoamericano: un reto epistemológico', in *La Palabra y el Hombre*, Jalapa, Veracruz, Universidad Veracruzana, Oct. 1995.
23. López Austin, *Historia de la Medicina*; op. cit.. Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth. Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1989.
24. López Austin.
25. Ibid.
26. Willard Gingerich, 'Cipahuacanemiliztli, the Purified Life in the Discourses of Book VI, Florentine Codex', in J. Kathryn Josserand and K. Dakin (eds), *Smoke and Mist: Mesoamerican Studies in Memory of Thelma Sullivan*, BAR International Series 402, 1988, p. 522.
27. Burkhart, p. 79.
28. Ibid., pp. 130-131.
29. For an extensive treatment of the *huehuetlatolli* and *ilamatlatolli* in relation to gender in Mesoamerica, see Sylvia Marcos, 'Gender and Moral Precepts in Ancient Mexico: Sahagun's texts', *Concilium*, No. 6, Dec. (1991).
30. Sahagún, *Historia General*, Book VI.
31. López Austin, personal communication, Mexico City, 1989.
32. Bordo, op. cit., Duden, op. cit.
33. López Austin, *Historia de la Medicina*, op. cit.
34. Rémi Siméon, *Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana*, Mexico, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1988 [1977]. (First edition in French, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Nahuatl ou Mexicaine*, 1885.)
35. Silvia Ortiz, 'El Cuerpo y el Trance entre los Espiritualistas Trinitarios Marianos', Presentation at the Symposium on Symbol and Performance in Healing: The Contributions of Indigenous Medical Thought (Symposium organized by Sylvia Marcos), PreCongreso CICA, July 1993.

36. Carlos Viesca, 'Prevención y Terapéuticas Mexicas', in López Austin and Viesca, *Historia de la Medicina*, op. cit., Book I.
37. For a more extended presentation of these topics, see Sylvia Marcos, 'Cognitive Structures and Medicine: The Challenge of Mexican Popular Medicine', in *Curare*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1988.
38. López Austin, *Historia de la Medicina*, op. cit.
39. Jorge Klor de Alva, 'Contar Vidas: La Autobiografía Confesional y la Reconstrucción del ser Nahua', in: *Arbor* (No. 515-16), Madrid, 1988 pp. 49-78.
40. See Thelma Sullivan, 'A Scattering of Jades: The Words of the Aztec Elders' in: G.H. Gossen, *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community*, op. cit.
41. Sahagún, *Historia General*, op. cit.
42. López Austin, op. cit.
43. Perhaps this was the reason why ancient Mesoamericans regarded the negation of carnal activities as abnormal since without them, one didn't belong to the earth.
44. Miguel León-Portilla, *Toltecatoytl, Aspectos de la cultura Nahuatl*, op. cit.
45. Ibid.
46. Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, Norman and London, University of Oklahoma, Press, 1990 [1963]. (Translation of *La Filosofía Nahuatl*, México, UNAM 1983. First edition 1956).
47. Angel M. Garibay, *Historia de la Literatura Nahuatl*, México, Porrúa 1953.
48. The original Nahuatl narrative as transcribed by Sahagún is in Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio*, Vol. VII, phototype by Hauser y Menet, Madrid, 1906. The translation into Spanish by León-Portilla is from his *Toltecatoytl, Aspectos de la Cultura Nahuatl*, op. cit.
49. León-Portilla, op. cit.
50. Sahagún's translation of the Nahuatl into Spanish (in 1577) is from Book III of his *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España*. In his translation, which is a summary of the narrative, adjectives and metaphors are toned down, even altered. With the help of a questionnaire that Sahagún elaborated to obtain information about the Nahuatl world, his assistants collected material in Nahuatl

(*Códice Matritense*) and this is the source León-Portilla used for his Spanish translation. Noting the changes this poetic story underwent at the hands of Sahagún allows us to suppose that other texts with bodily and erotic implications underwent similar alterations by other missionary chroniclers. Yet Sahagún was much more respectful than some in preserving, albeit modified, the teachings and discourses that did not agree with his moral values. The changes made by Sahagún and other chroniclers were subject to the evangelizing purpose of their writings, the pressure exerted by the Inquisition, and the shame or reserve the monks could have experienced when faced with certain Mesoamerican expressions of eroticism.

51. *Malleus Maleficarum*, in Latin, by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, both Dominicans, appeared in 1484 (or 1486 according to other authors). From this sadly renowned document, written to help hunt "witches" and later condemn them to the Inquisition's fire, comes the idea of women envious of masculine genitals, insatiable, and thus dangerous for men. The work almost seems to imply that all men are near saints and that only the evil influence of women keeps them from dedicating their lives to the service of God or to the elevated (bodiless) activities of the mind. The document is an unrestrained harangue against the body and its activities.
52. Sahagún, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
53. Laqueur, *op. cit.*

II Bodies in Religions

The Body of the Feminine in Buddhist Texts and Rituals

Eva Neumaier-Dargyay

The question underlying the present examination is how Buddhism, primarily in its Tibetan tradition, constructs the feminine, either as symbolic body, or as a spiritual potency. In this context, the feminine symbolic body is, as I shall show, a field in which the male desire operates; it finds its seat within the feminine, may it be elevated to the state of divinity or maligned as something of a demonic character. To contextualize this discussion within a theoretical framework I will first engage in a somewhat summary discussion of the concept of desire as conducted in the contemporary intellectual discourse. Consequently, I am using the term desire not in the sense of Skr. *kama* as usually employed in Buddhist texts, and commonly translated as "desire", "attachment" but as it evolves from this contemporary discourse. The findings of these theoretical deliberations I shall apply to a clustering of symbols found in Tibetan myths that describe the earth as a female demon and that are evidenced through field observations I had conducted in the Western Himalayas (Zanskar). Subsequently, I shall bring this contemporary understanding of desire into discourse with Buddhist tantric texts to see whether there may emerge a language of desire. I shall wrap up my contribution with the hypothesis that Buddhist traditions as manifest in various texts and contexts offer an understanding of desire for the feminine "body" that illuminates the concept of "gender."

The Hegelian concept of desire, as interpreted by Kojève, recognizes the other to rediscover oneself.¹ Lacan further developed the concept and introduced the element of fantasy and imagination as intimately linked with desire. In his view, desire creates the Other, although unknowable, as the source for recognizing one's own desire.² Kristeva elaborates an understanding of desire that emphasizes its locale in the unknowable. "Joy is but another form of the 'unnamable' — the other side of reality as such — which, together with Being and

death, drives thought beyond itself, beyond its own limits, putting it in touch with infinity, particularly in the sense that the part becomes equal to the whole.³ This joy is synonymous with *jouissance* for Kristeva. Desire as interpreted by these thinkers is intricately connected with a field where desire becomes active and where it seeks satisfaction. This field is the body—imaginary or physical, and we shall see what kind of promise it holds for the understanding of those symbolic structures of Tibetan Buddhism I will discuss here. I like to exemplify this briefly by considering tantric Buddhism where it is common that an allegoric form of Buddha is united with his corresponding “wisdom,” that is, the Buddha portrayed as masculine is shown in intimate embrace with a feminine figure which represents the wisdom from which the Buddha arises. The sexual imagery employed and the texts describing it place the Buddha in *bhâga*, a Sanskrit term which means, “pleasure” and signifies the vagina as locus of pleasure. The Buddha resides in this “pleasure” which we may understand as Kristevian *jouissance* because it embodies a wisdom without words; the desire for this wisdom establishes him, then, in buddhahood. Buddha and the *bhâga* or *jouissance* of the unnamable wisdom are interdependent. None can be without the other while they are neither coexistent nor independent.

I The Land as Signifying the Feminine Body

In ancient Tibetan myths, the earth itself is a primordial demon of female nature who lies flat on her back, nailed down so that she can not rise and create havoc among the people. As long as this force is not tamed through rituals, the power of sacred men (no source mentions women in this context), and through offerings, it poses a severe threat to human existence. This force, which is initially destructive, is sensed when people expose themselves to the dangers of the wilderness where blizzards blind them with snow, where hailstones destroy a summer’s hard work, where torrents wash away houses and livestock, where mud slides and avalanches erase villages from the surface of the earth. But the same force, when disciplined and controlled, sustains life, gives plenty of grain, and lush pastures with frolicking calves and lambs.⁴

This myth is connected with the erection of temples or shrines “to discipline the borders” of the Tibetan empire. According to Aris’ studies of Bhutanese temples, this scheme of the female Earth Demon held down with temples erected upon certain points of her body may go back to the time of the Tibetan monarchy (7-9th cent. C.E.) although it is documented only in literary works of later times.⁵

The earth as a demonic Mother symbolically represents the entirety of the Tibetan land, but is also considered present in each valley and district. Thus, the one Earth Goddess exists in endless diversity, time and again embodied in a different locale. In each case, certain landmarks are identified with the limbs of her body. Like in the narrative of Indra’s Web where every node carries in itself a picture of the whole web symbolically representing the universe, so is in this myth the whole earth the body of the Earth Goddess and so is each individual region. For instance, in Zanskar where this myth is recorded in the local chronicle and other writings,⁶ people believe that the Mother’s heart is located in Pipiting and her knees at the huge bend of the Zanskar River near Tsha-zar. The land itself, seen as her mysterious body, is fragile, composed of massive banks of unstable gravel and sand, and steep scree slopes. It is poised to spill disaster over human settlements. Consequently, the Mother must be “pinned down” with symbolic “pegs” in the form of shrines. The Zanskar chronicle credits Padmasambhava, a tantric master of the 7th century who is said to have adapted Buddhism to Tibetan preference, with taming this female demon:

When Padmasambhava had come from Udyâna he fettered all demons with a promise [to protect in future the Buddha teaching.] He also oppressed all evil portents. The demon Earth he threw on her back and erected [the shrine] of Sani Kanika upon her head, [the temple of] the Nya-nam Guru at Pipiting upon her heart, and the Maitreya temple of Nya-nam Guru [at Tsha-zar] upon her legs.

The symbolic context of this account is one of violent submission: Padmasambhava, the tantric magician and sorcerer, throws the Earth, seen here as a demon, on her back with her legs spread apart. The shrines and temples erected on her body

are "pegs" to nail her down. The desire to master the untamed demonic Earth results in the phallic act of penetrating her and arresting her in immobility. It is an enactment of the Freudian understanding of desire as connected with drive. The texts do not hint at any trace of joy or *jouissance* here. But the Earth demon has an uncanny character: in another myth, related but not incorporated with the above one, she, who is in reality a rock demoness, presents herself in the shape of a beautiful woman. In this form she intends, then, to become the mother of the Tibetan race. She is of a ferocious and cannibalistic nature threatening to open the gates of the underworld of chaos (which we may understand as the unnamable, commonly labeled as the unconscious) to flood the benign world of Buddhist compassion.⁷ In the first myth, the locus of desire is the masculine (represented in the tantric master Padmasambhava) and its object is the unnamable feminine (the Earth Demon). By subduing the demoness, the master actualizes his Hegelian and Freudian desire in a narcissistic context where the feminine needs to be subjugated into slavery so not to threaten the realm of ethics and discipline. But I would like to push the Freudian interpretation even further: Padmasambhava is born from a Lotus flower, "without father and mother" as the tradition claims; in other words, the earth is his mother as the lotus raises from the mud and opens itself above the surface of the water. In the subjugation of the Earth Goddess by pinning her down with the phallus, he consummates the oedipal dream—the wedding of the mother. This interpretation seems legitimate in the light of the language and imagery engaged by the texts although no phallic symbols are noticeable in these shrines at present.⁸ Some sources make it explicit by saying the Earth Goddess lies there like a woman while having intercourse. This mythic perception of the Earth in Tibetan tradition is an aggressive submission of nature perceived as feminine deity. At the same time, the Earth, although perceived as demonic, "needs" taming (*'dul ba*). Whatever needs to be tamed is desired not in its present state but in its Otherness. A wild horse that the master desires to be a riding horse needs to be tamed. Thus, Padmasambhava wants the Earth but not in its present state of demonic nature but in its subdued state, and that desire necessitates the taming.

In Zanskar, the demonic yet desired Earth became manifest not only in the land generally, but also in some of its concrete formations. Two cases will be discussed here. The first is the waterfall of Shila resembling the shape of the *yonī*, the female reproductive organ; the second is a formation of stalactite worshipped as the Mother with the One Eye, Ekadzati.

The first case where the demonic female power is seen as present in a waterfall should be examined within the context of *yul lha*, the gods of the village, who in most cases are of a female nature and reside not only in shrines (*lha tho*) near the village but also in rocks and boulders of the mountain faces. These female gods are earth-bound and earth-born; they impersonate the forces of life and fertility so crucial to the survival of peasant societies. In some cases these gods and their cults originated from disastrous events affecting women. One may say that the harmony of life jeopardized by such traumatic events as suicide and premature death was restored by neutralizing these destructive forces through the healing power of sacrifice and worship.

bSod-nams dbang-phyug, a learned aristocrat of Zanskar, gave me the following account of customs still prevalent at Shila, a place on the northern shore of the Tsarab Lingti River, midway between Padum and Bardan monastery. On the occasion of the New Year celebration, the villagers make little figurines of dough, which they offer to the female *yul lha* residing near a torrential waterfall, which separates the village into halves. However, according to my informant, in previous times babies were sacrificed to pacify "the mother".

On June 8th, 1979, I had the opportunity to look at the village from the opposite shore: the waterfall had shaped the rock so that it resembled a *yonī*, the female generative organ. The water was cascading over smoothly polished rocks wedged between cliffs to both sides. Because of its ominous geological formation, the place could easily provoke early peoples' fantasy and imagination. The ambivalence of the female power, embodied in the fertilizing effect of the water and the destructive force of the waterfall, was neutralized by giving what is the dearest symbol of life: a newly born child. Sacrificing the child was not his or her

annihilation, but a transformation into the goddess' child, eternal symbol of life. Although no observation of a human sacrifice in this area is recorded in our time, A. H. Francke described at least traces of human sacrifices in the Western Himalayas.⁹

In the second case, the Mother became Ekadzati, the Mother with the One Eye who cared for her devotees "like a mother for her single child" (local informant). She is worshipped in the form of some stalactites found in a cave near Shilatse, a hermitage nestled into the steep mountain face skirting the southern shore of the Zanskar River. The hermitage of Shilatse belongs to the rDzong-khul monastery. In the past, such local celebrities as Ngag-dbang tshé-ring spent some time there. Past and recent evidence suggests that nuns of the bKa'-brgyud order who were associated with rDzong-khul preferred to stay at Shilatse. In the seventies, most of the ancient buildings were destroyed during an earthquake. Local informants told me that some of the now-destroyed buildings had been decorated by bZhad-pa rdo-rje (1759/60-1831) with wall paintings. This famous artist and yogi of rDzong-khul created many of the 18th century murals in Zanskar and Ladakh.

When I visited the place in 1978, the buildings were all new. The main shrine housed a stupa so large that only a narrow pathway remained between the stupa and the walls of the shrine-room. From there, a maze of hallways led into a system of natural caves. Some of them were separated from the outside world by such a thin wall of natural rock that openings were carved into these walls letting the daylight enter the otherwise dark world of these caves. My way through these galleries of caves was eventually blocked by a wall of adobe bricks filling a narrow opening in the natural walls of the cave. I was told that behind this wall lay the actual sanctuary: a cave of approximately 5m length and 3m width with a ceiling not higher than 2m. From this natural ceiling three roundish rock formations hung down which resembled the crude image of a female body whereby the three formations represented the face, one breast and the abdomen. In the centre of the face-like formation was a white stone embedded in the rock: the sole eye of the "Mother with the One Eye, Ekadzati", as my informant told me in a whisper.

No woman was allowed to see the crude image, my guide told me. My desire to see the sanctuary was heatedly debated before it was unanimously agreed that this restriction applied to native women only, and I gained entrance to the cave. Usually, only men who exhibit known "religious" qualities were admitted to the cave. Lamps were ignited in the cave to honour and appease Ekadzati but, I was told, no other ritual was ever performed. A layer of soot blackened the rock dome forming the ceiling but no other sign of ritual activities were visible.

Both cases related here are rooted in local beliefs but are also incorporated in the Buddhist practice of that particular area. They are ritual approximations of the myth establishing the Earth as demonic mother who is to be transformed into a support for the Buddhist teaching through the desire of the Buddhist master Padmasambhava. Each of the two cults celebrates the Earth in her ambiguous and unpredictable character: the waterfalls provide the village with a much needed generous supply of water but, at the same time, "devours" the villagers' children while Ekadzati is so powerful that only men of distinct spiritual reputation can approach her. In both cases, the religiously articulated desire transforms the perilous Earth into a force that sustains the socio-religious order of the community. The nature of Earth, perceived as arbitrary and chaotic, i.e., "demonic", is transformed through a masculine desire into a power that will, eventually, support the organization of the community. The tension and friction between the feminine body and the masculine desire produces the transformation of earth as epitomizing the forces of nature into a religious symbol of converting the demonic into the nurturing and sustaining.

The ethnographic data would more commonly lend themselves to a categorization into "Buddhist" and "folk-Buddhist" phenomena. However, a distinction between "folk-Buddhist" vs. "Buddhist" religious phenomena is a scholarly and academic construct with little value for understanding the live fabric of religion. As I have shown elsewhere, for the believer, religion is a coherent web of values that receives its authentication through enactment in life.¹⁰ The fact that some of the religious phenomena which form part of today's Zanskari Buddhism were supposedly present in a similar form before the time of Buddhism's

introduction to the Tibetan world is irrelevant for the Zanskari. The similarity or identity of religious phenomena of different origin would only be seen as reinforcing the universal truth of Buddhism. Therefore, I think that an interpretation of these phenomena along the line of the Buddhist vs. folk-Buddhist conflict reveals nothing that we have not already known for some time.

While on one hand Buddhism considers this world as full of misery, the local and timeless belief of the Zanskari conversely experiences the procreative forces of nature as embodied in the land, animals, and humans in a fragile state constantly threatened by nature itself. Much of the timeless belief is devoted to strengthening the forces of life, to maintaining this delicate balance of nature. The earthly goddesses are in charge of these ambivalent forces of nature; they reside in caves and in the soil itself. The nature of these goddesses reveals itself in the cave as *the* symbol of the motherly womb. Its darkness provides shelter from the dangers of the outside world; the womb nourishes the fetus. By the same token, however, the womb is a dark place filled with waste, and the fetus has no chance to escape from this prison-like place much like the people of Zanskar cannot escape the whims of nature when their valley becomes snow-bound during the long winter. As much as the valley of Zanskar provides a home for its people so it is a prison which separates the people forever from the outside world. The ambivalent character of the relationship "civilized" humanity entertains with nature is well encapsulated in the symbolism of these Zanskari cults.

The symbolic syntax of the narrative spells out three levels of "doubles": the goddess' womb is doubled as a cave, as the valley of Zanskar (and as the land of Tibet), and as samsara; the people (mainly the men of the valley) are doubled in the child figurines sacrificed, and in all sentient beings who are "entrapped" in samsara. The feminine locus *per se*, the womb, functions in these narratives as a place of awe and therefore of worship but at the same time as a prison. To gain control over this centre of power and procreation, the cultural hero, Padmasambhava, has to subjugate the epitome of women, i.e. the oedipal mother, by subjugating the Earth goddess (as given here).

None of the gods and goddesses of tantric Buddhism are associated with the land in this way. This indicates that the earthly goddesses are of an indigenous nature pertinent to the time when the first people began to occupy the land and work the ground. In contrast, the Buddhist gods belong to a literary religion that made inroads in the Tibetan world much later. Thus, they have nothing to do with the land as such.

By seeing the lay of the land as the body of the Earth Goddess, by entering and penetrating her body through orifices of great sacredness, the people experience the potency of the symbols of fertility and motherhood in a physical way. Earth and human interact and connect in an essential way, which encompasses the totality of their individual being. In other words, it is an erotic experience, made possible through the transformative activity of desire, in which the Earth is perceived as embodying religious symbols of fertility.

II The Feminine in Tantric Text

The Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism, far more complex than any other one, harbors some of the most sublime thoughts but also some of the most crude and archaic ritual practices. Thus, Vajrayana was seen either as the climax of Buddhist mysticism or as a distortion of its original character. The latest fashion in interpreting Vajrayana is to see it as a prototype of quantum physics or process thinking. As only a very few tantric texts have been subject to scholarly studies, the basis for any objective understanding of this system is fairly slim. Regardless of the sometimes heated debate as to what constitutes the nature of Vajrayana teaching, one obvious characteristic is its abundant use of symbols.

In Vajrayana rituals, numerous individual symbols are used; many of them form clusters which adopt new connotations, which in themselves stimulated the development of other symbolic contexts. For instance, bell and diamond scepter (*vajra*) are used independently with the meaning of wisdom and the feminine in the case of the bell, and unalterable skill-in-means and the masculine in the case of the *vajra*. When used together, they symbolize the union of skill-in-means and wisdom, but they also

connote a level of secondary symbolic significance. The bell symbolizes not only wisdom but also the feminine *per se* as clearly indicated by the womb-like shape of the bell. In the ritual engagement of both *vajra* and bell, the union of maleness and femaleness is articulated. Besides the use of symbols, the use of signs proliferated as well: different gestures carry certain meaning which one cannot intuitively sense but which one has to learn.

In the literature of tantric Buddhism, the situation is even more complex. Literary allegations abound, sometimes pointing beyond Buddhist literature. Frequently, symbols are used as signs to point at certain aspects of the teaching while their intrinsic symbolic character engages the individual in experiencing their spiritual meaning on a deeper level. To date, no one has dared to present a comprehensive study of tantric symbolism. The following elaboration intends only to highlight certain individual traits of symbolic significance.

The Kâlacakra Tantra:

At the centre of tantric symbolism that underlies the Kâlacakra Tantra is the concept of *yab*, father, and *yum*, mother. As a terminological pair, these terms are widely used to identify a variety of things. One reads about *yab / yum* bronzes; "father" tantras vs. "mother" tantras, etc. Here I am going to examine a part of the *Kâlacakra* ritual employing explicitly erotic images of great power and archaic nature. To assist the reader's full appreciation of the nature of the passage, I am going to discuss here, I shall summarize the structure of the ritual as given in the text.

First, however, I shall turn to Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290-1364), who in the West is mainly known as the person responsible for the final editing of the first edition of the Tibetan canon, but who was also an expert in tantric matters.¹¹ Among his voluminous collected works we find many lengthy tractates dealing with certain aspects of tantric literature or tantric practice. The cycle of *Kâlacakra*, which he discussed in several separate works, received special attention. One of them is the *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i dkyil chog yon tan kun 'byung*, ie. The Mandala Ritual of the Noble Kâlacakra, which is the Fountainhead of all

Good Qualities.¹² mKhas-grub-rje wrote a commentary on the *Kâlacakra* tantra by using to some extent Bu-ston's above-mentioned work (*dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i dkyil chog dgongs pa rab gsa*). In this text, mKhas-grub-rje arranged his subject matter under six headings: qualifications of the lama who bestows the initiation; the student's predisposition and qualities; the various types of mandala used during the initiation; the various initiations to be given; the right time for carrying out the ritual; the actual empowerment.¹³ The last topic is broken down into two sub-topics: the disciple's part in the actual empowerment and the lama's guidance. The first of them is further divided into six aspects, the first of which is the generation of the appropriate motivation and the granting of the empowerment, which brings the disciple's mind to the state of maturity by making him or her enter the divinity's (*lha*) body resulting in spiritual rebirth. The esoteric character of this event requires a fuller discussion of its context.

The following description is based upon Bu-ston's *The Mandala Ritual of the Noble Kâlacakra, which is a Fountainhead of All Good Qualities*. Bu-ston interspersed his own words with quotes from the tantra, which will be disregarded here. The paragraph has the subtitle "establishing the disciple in his or her primary existence" (*slob ma lhag gnas*), that is, the disciple will undergo a transformation from an ephemeral existence into primary being symbolized as the divinity of Kâlacakra.¹⁴ Bu-ston described the scene where the initiation is about to happen: the disciples were positioned so that they were unable to look at the ritual objects and sacred images, which were hidden behind a curtain. The master then admonished the disciples to have the right mental attitude, to renounce, for instance, pride and other defiling attitudes. Confidence in the guru and the Vajrayana were further vital requirements. The disciples took the vows and pledges on the basis of this confidence. Whether one was beautiful and well built and of a good family or the opposite should not have mattered for granting the initiation. The disciples performed the ablutions and offered a mandala to their master (no woman is recorded as officiating in this capacity). Then, holding a flower in their hands, they knelt in front of the master. They sought to be initiated for "the good of this world," "for the good of what is

beyond this world," and "for achieving buddhahood" or "for perceiving what is beyond this world." But if they longed for these results, they would not achieve them. Only by not craving for them will they be effortlessly won. Bu-ston continues as follows:

While generating such thoughts [the master contemplates that the disciple] is led to enter [his (i.e. the master's) body passing] from his mouth through his diamond path (i.e. sex organ) to be established in the lotus of wisdom (i.e., the vagina of the "mother").

Then [the master visualizes that] light will radiate from a seed syllable [located] upon his heart [*cakra*]. [This light makes] the *tathâgata* to enter his (i.e. the master's) [body] from his mouth [down to the "diamond path"] as father and mother. That the melting of "the mind of liberating insight" (*bodhicitta*) bestows the initiation, and that it transforms [the disciple] into the primary [being as] divinity (*gtso bo*), such [the master] contemplates.¹⁵

The condensed style of Tibetan scholastic writing asks for further interpretation. The entire initiation happens in the meditation of the master, who in all regularity is a man. In front of him, he visualizes Kâlacakra embracing his *yum*, "mother", i.e., the female symbol of pristine insight or *gnosis*. However, the master also sees himself in the same posture as Kâlacakra embracing the "mother of pristine insight." Thus, master and deity are seen as mirror images of identical appearance and meaning, and both as masculine. The disciple is then absorbed into the master's body by entering through the mouth and passing through the central pathway (*avadhuti*) into the sex organ of the master who is seen as Kâlacakra who is intimately united with his consort. Through this way, the disciple finds himself or herself placed in the womb of "the mother of pristine insight." The actual initiation or rebirth happens when Kâlacakra's *bodhicitta*, signified by "semen", enters the vagina of *gnosis*. The disciple's rebirth is the result of the union of *bodhicitta* and *gnosis*, of enlightened mind and wisdom.

Interpretation:

Many religions have developed some kind of ritual form to enact spiritual rebirth. One may refer to the consecration of monks as practiced in the Benedictine order, or to similar practices of some of the mystery cults of Hellenism. The aim of these practices is to let the disciple experience a spiritual renewal, to live through the death of the "old person" and the subsequent rebirth of the "new person". In pertinent religious literature, this experience is interpreted as union of the practitioner with the divine, whatever form it may adopt in the different religions. For example, Christian mystics call this process *deificatio* ("becoming like God") meaning the union of the human soul with the divine.¹⁶

In most cases, spiritual rebirth is experienced within a ritual context whereby the "birth" is signified through a series of symbols. For instance, in the Benedictine tradition the novices lie, face down, flat on the floor in front of the altar; their bodies covered with a black cloth signifying that they have died "to the world". While the congregation is chanting a hymn celebrating the novices' resurrection in Christ, the black cloth is removed from them and they rise. To mark their new birth, they receive their monastic robes and new names. Thus, the ritual identifying spiritual rebirth is modeled upon the sacrament of baptism. The Benedictine ritual does not recall any part associated with birth as a biological event. The spiritual rebirth is enacted through a set of social and customary symbols: lying on the ground like a corpse, black cloth, funeral hymn, etc.

In the *Kâlacakra* ritual, the rebirth happens on a verbal and imaginative level, both enacting essential phases of sexual interaction, conception and birth. The master is uttering the words describing this process while the disciple remains kneeling before him. The disciple concentrates on the master's words and translates them into mental images of vivid symbolic character. The disciple sees the master as Kâlacakra united with his *gnosis*, mirroring the original vision of Kâlacakra positioned in front of the master. The disciple will then feel himself or herself being drawn into the mouth of the master, passing through the *avadhuti*, the central "pathway" into the generative organ and being ejaculated into the womb of *gnosis*. The motivation for this

"spiritual and meditative sex" can only lie in the disciple's desire to become Kâlacakra. What the text does not explicitly say is that there is a homoerotic desire for the masculine persona of Kâlacakra/guru. The disciple enters the body of Kâlacakra/guru via the mouth, thus, alluding to oral sex and signifying swallowing as sex. In his visualization, the disciple fuses with Kâlacakra/guru. Would this be possible without an erotic desire? How could an individual yearn for becoming the divine Other if not because of desiring this Other? United in a homoerotic desire with Kâlacakra/guru, the disciple then experiences a heterosexual desire for the "mother", i.e., primordial wisdom. As semen, the disciple is ejected into the womb of wisdom. There the actual rebirth as an enlightened being occurs when the disciple is showered with the seminal mind of enlightenment. This is the moment of awakening to the liberating insight where all suffering ends. Buddhist Tibetan medicine knows of male semen and female semen; their fusion results in conception. Consequently, the seminal mind of enlightenment consists of the male and female semen. The spiritual rebirth happens in an environment acknowledging the bi-sexual nature of the symbolic process. Therefore, Bu-ston continues after the lines I have given here in translation by saying that the basic forms of suffering, i.e., birth, old age, death, and sickness, are now overcome. The mystical transformation is complete.

The Tibetan text engages two layers of "symbolic syntax." One is the divinity Kâlacakra together with his consort. They are envisioned as a princely couple. However, they signify pristine awareness or *gnosis* as the female and skill-in-means (*upaya*) as the male. In a secondary symbolic syntax, the anatomy of these two divine entities is referred to by words taken from yoga. The esoteric meaning is the result of this symbolic syntax: *Gnosis*, the pristine awareness, is signified through the word *yum*, "mother;" her vagina is called "lotus," and Kâlacakra's sex organ is named "diamond path," while the seed of enlightenment is said "to melt," a verb usually associated with the discharge of semen. In other words, the signified meaning is not described with the ordinary words but with metaphors to indicate that it is not a biological conception occurring but a mystical transformation which can be appreciated best if considered as similar to the

process of conception. The desire that fuels this erotic/spiritual transformation is, first, of a homoerotic and, in its final phase, heterosexual nature. The locale of primary desire is the persona of Kâlacakra; only in order to experience "rebirth" the male desire of the disciple enters the feminine body of wisdom.

The All Creating Sovereign Mind-Mother of the Buddha

The second case I want to examine is drawn from the rDzogs-chen tradition of early Tibetan Buddhism. Most contemporary scholars consider the rDzogs-chen tradition to be similar to, yet different from, early Ch'an Buddhism. The early (i.e., prior to the 10th century C.E.) rDzogs-chen literature is not well preserved; this hampers its study. One section of this literature is known as *sems sde* ("section mind"). Therein several texts occur which present the ultimate in form of a personification of a universal intelligent *gnosis*, called *kun byed rgyal po byang chub sems* (All Creating Sovereign Mind).

Although this text belongs to the tantric section, it rejects all erotic rituals, like the one discussed here, as erroneous. The text then refers in an allegoric manner to the Sovereign Mind as being "father" and "mother" of the entire existing universe. This is well expressed in a passage of chapter 41:

I am the core of all the Buddhas of the three times. I am father and mother to all sentient beings of the three-fold world. Also, I am the cause for all that exists as animated and inanimated. Not one thing is that does not emanate from Me.¹⁷

The All Creating Sovereign is not a male god presiding as judge over the world but is its sustaining life force, which is beyond any gender-related distinction. The Sovereign Mind is the intelligent ground of the universe. It is only in an allegoric fashion that this ground talks like a person. This allegoric person is male as well as female; it transcends the masculine and the feminine. In the root-text, the Sovereign Mind is seen as "father" and "mother" of all that exists. In the second appendix of the

text, the issue of gender equality is taken one step further. In a chapter dealing with the different names given to the Sovereign Mind it is said:

Because all the Buddhas of the three times (past, present and future) emerge from Me, I am called the Buddha-Mother.¹⁸

Other rDzogs chen texts support this position. The *rDo la gser zhun* states that if the nature of All Good (the Sanskrit name Samantabhadri clearly indicating the feminine gender) is not grasped in its femininity, the bliss of truth cannot be appreciated.¹⁹ Thus, within the context of the rDzogs chen literature, it is accurate to render the ultimate as of feminine gender with a tendency to be bi-sexual. To sum up, the erotic language in this literature is elevated to a sublime level where gender bias is transcended. Deviating from traditional Buddhist conventions, this literature invites us to understand the term "buddha" as feminine and bi-sexual.

III Summary Remarks

This survey of various forms of erotic symbolism constructed within a field of bi-sexual and heterosexual desires shows that eroticism was an integral part of the religious thinking of the people of the Tibetan world. The erotic context may be imprinted on the land and its formation. That is, the land functions like a text offering its physical formation as a blank sheet of paper to receive a message encoded in formations of symbolic meaning. In this context, the physical reality of the land is transformed into a symbolic syntax to be "read" by the illiterate as well as the literate. The symbolic formation is explicit in its message so the "reader" may easily intuit the ambivalent potency of fertility, birth, death, and nature. The "reader" will perceive this "text" as being written by nature herself in primordial times. Thus, the religious meaning becomes grounded in the primordial itself, a fact that gives authority to the encoded message far beyond that of any "real" text. The symbolic meaning is fused with the land, the home of the people, making this form of "text" and its message an integral part of the people's cultural and religious identity.

These circumstances may explain why such forms of religious belief survive for so long a period that they seem to be almost beyond the reach of time.

In the case of the Kâlacakra, the symbolic syntax is preserved in a highly technical text accessible only to those who have years of training and studies in this area. Thus, the recognition of the symbolic syntax is limited to a group of specialists. In the first case, we saw a phenomenon of symbolism that inclusively addressed the entire population, while in the latter case the majority of the people are excluded from its understanding. The symbolic syntax is given in metaphors and words, which lead to the fabrication of mental images of symbolic meaning. But no physical reality backs up the imagined symbolic images. Thus, the physical component of the symbol is present only in the mind of the participant. The language of the text invokes certain images in the mind, and these images are understood as representative of true experiences. Consequently, the participant in the ritual acquires the impression that he is truly going through an act of spiritual rebirth. Despite its exclusive and artificial character, the imagery contained in the text is of archaic, almost archetypal nature. Among the tribal people of Australia, it was customary for men to imitate women's rituals marking menstruation and birth. The description of these practices exhibit a remarkable resemblance with the Kâlacakra rituals discussed here. At the same time, it ought to be acknowledged that the desire toward the Earth is strictly heterosexual while the symbolic content of the Kâlacakra rite is ambiguously vacillating between homoeroticism and bi-sexuality.

In the early rDzogs-chen tradition, the erotic symbolism adopts a subdued subtlety suggesting the irrelevance of erotic symbolism in the context of the ultimate, and, if one still wants to condense it into erotic images, they ought to be of a bi-sexual nature. But the mere fact that the text's narrator feels compelled to state that the ultimate is present in both genders illuminates the importance of erotic symbols in the human struggle to come to a more profound understanding of the ultimate. Regardless of how the rDzogs-chen texts were interpreted in the past, they constitute a part of our own contextual situation and wait for appropriation through our own hermeneutic tools.

All three symbolic contexts, i.e. land, meditation, and written text of mystical content, are impacted by the gender roles as defined within the Tibetan Buddhist civilization. Buddhism has frequently been described as a more egalitarian religion with a less strict gender role prescript. Such opinion is substantiated if we focus on, let's say, rDzogs-chen texts, but a different opinion needs to be articulated if we consider the other two contexts. In the case of the Earth Goddess, a gender role prescript of patriarchal nature clearly informs the myth. If we accept that in the symbolic realm the land, the Earth Goddess, and woman constitute one cohesive pattern, then it becomes evident that the Earth Goddess' submission also signifies the submission of woman. Earth and woman are appropriated by the patriarchal society. Both are considered as "evil" by their nature, and therefore in need of "disciplining." The fact that the sanctuary of the Mother with the One Eye is not accessible to women speaks loudly to this effect. The case of the Kâlacakra meditation is inscribed by the domination of a homoerotic male desire. That Kâlacakra as a male deity is present in the guru who bestows the initiation almost precludes the possibility of a woman guru. Otherwise, the woman guru ought to visualize herself as a male deity who not only symbolically swallows the disciple but also passes him or her through an imagined penis only to ejaculate them into the womb of Kâlacakra's consort! If such meditation is prescribed for women, it not only forces them to negate their own sexual and erotic identity but also denigrates feminine sexuality and eroticism as a valuable vehicle for tantric experience.

The cases discussed here suggest that Buddhism, at least in its Tibetan version, does recognize the transfigurative power of desire and the erotic. The myths and rituals focusing on the Earth enact a desire of heterosexual inclination whereby the feminine is portrayed as a precarious and unpredictable force in need of "discipline" provided by the male powers of authority. The tantric texts, accessible to only a few literate experts, project a symbolic context of male homoeroticism whereby the feminine is of primordial potency but in terms of the economy of desire, of secondary experiential order. The mystical texts of the rDzogs-chen tradition propose a symbolic context with a tendency toward bi-sexuality and dominance of the feminine.

Notes

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3. John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 22.
4. The *Bar do thos grol*, known in the West as The Tibetan Book of the Dead, mentions these images as haunting the mind just before entering a new form of life.
5. Aris, 1979, p. 19-33; Tensin Gyatso, *the Dalai Lama*, 1987, p. 36.
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13. Tensin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, *The Kalachakra Tantra, Rite of Initiation*, ed. by J. Hopkins, London, Wisdom Publications, 1985, p. 131f.
14. Bu-ston, op. cit., p. 184.1.
15. Bu-ston, op. cit., p. 184.7-5.1.

16. Joseph Bernhart, *Die philosophische Mystik des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980, p. 59.
17. *Kun byed rgyal po* in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, ed. by Jamyang Khyentse, Thimphu, Bhutan, 1973, vol.1, p. 119.4-5.
18. *Kun byed rgyal po*, op. cit., p. 218.6.
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The Hellenistic Understanding of the Body and its Legacy for Christian Social Ethics

Anthony Battaglia

Recent historical research has made us much better informed about the ways in which the body was understood in the late Roman Empire and how this understanding influenced sexual mores, both inside and outside of Christianity. Because this era was formative for all sorts of Christian doctrines, its influence on Christian sexual morality is not surprising. During this period a Christian consensus formed about attitudes toward the body and a morality suitable for them, attitudes and morality which have remained normative even into our own times. This paper examines the results of this historical research as a setting for traditions of Christian sexual ethics which began then and continue to influence us, more than a millennium and a half later. The primary focus of this examination is the Catholic tradition, but the essential features of this sexual ethic are found in Orthodox and Protestant traditions as well. To set the stage for this discussion of the body in Christianity, I will describe briefly the visual models, statues and holy images that were part of my own quite ordinary Catholic upbringing in the Eastern United States in the forties and fifties. The absence in these images of a model of healthy sexuality raises historical questions of how such an omission came to be so widely accepted and leads to the more pressing further question whether this omission can be changed. In the main section of this paper I return to the understanding of the body in the formative days of Christianity, the Hellenistic world at the end of the Roman Empire on the one hand, and the late middle ages on the other. I shall describe the roots of these understandings of the body and their consequences for Christian morality. Finally, I shall look at elements in our present situation, including the modern understanding of the body. These pose challenges to the received view, challenges I do not think can be withstood. Instead, I believe, these elements

in our present situation will force major modifications of the understanding of the body for all Christians, perhaps especially for Catholics.¹

I

The interior of Catholic churches typically contains a number of images of male and female bodies—or at least they did, almost universally, until quite recently. To enter a Catholic church is to enter a world in which visible images of the human body are held up to the inspiration of the faithful. To speak in an autobiographical way for a moment, I will use a concrete example. In the Catholic church of my childhood, forty plus years ago, near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the USA, there were several images of human bodies visible. If nothing else, such images were simply there, the taken-for-granted backdrop for worship. But they were more than this; they were objects of honor and examples of what good persons were like. These images would tell important lore about the human body, especially that it was destined to suffer and that the ideal human being was one in whom sexuality has been denied and even effectively eradicated. The primary image in Catholic churches, then as now, is that of Jesus, the God who suffers for us, and the representation of his suffering body on the cross is a familiar symbol of what it means to have a human body. What incarnation, or embodiment, meant for Jesus as God was that he suffered physical pain and the agonies of death. Suffering is the first, most obvious fact about the body of Jesus that is represented, but we will have to leave it for another discussion. A second element of Jesus's body, less visible but often explicated, was his virginity.

The chief other statues in my boyhood church represented Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and St. Joseph, her husband. This pattern was the dominant one in churches of that time and place in U.S. Catholic history. The striking feature of these two images, as of the veneration they inspired, is that the pair, although the mother and putative father of Jesus, were both being honored as virgins. To a person not prepared for such models of the meaning of the human body, it surely must be striking that so much prominence is given to virginity and so little attention—in

this example, quite characteristically, none—is paid to the ordinary sexual nature of human beings. It is the background of this attitude toward sexuality that this paper examines.

These remembrances from my boyhood are merely impressionistic, and are not intended to take the place of more systematic comments by an art historian or other specialist. My goal is modest. In concrete images, these statues raise questions about the meaning of the body in Catholicism, and they do so in a way that reminds us that we are not simply talking about the abstractions of theologians, but about beliefs that ordinary Catholics find reinforced every time they enter a church. These reinforced messages seem both positive and negative. On the one hand, the body is so essential to our essential dignity that even God has taken on one. In this, as in almost all respects, the pattern of Christian understanding of the body is the body of Jesus Christ. That body was a real, material one, according to the Christian understanding, and on that basis the first message about the body that these church images communicate is a very positive one. The body is not to be despised; it is worthy of divinity. Nevertheless, the virginity of Jesus and the saints tells us that some parts of embodiment—sexuality, an essential part of what we mean by having a body—must be renounced if one is to be a really good human being.

The tension between the universal, positive Christian witness that Jesus was a real human being with a real body, and the negative way in which sexuality is treated in the tradition is a notable one. Trying to understand it better leads us to examine the historical past. Certainly, the ideas about what the body was which dominated the formative years of early Christianity must account for some of this tension. The meaning of embodiment, especially as a divinely realized ideal, will never be obvious to us, and our images of it will always reflect specific cultures and histories. From our present perspective we would expect a different, much more accepting, understanding of the body than the one we find in much Christian history. To learn more about the background of these beliefs about the body we have inherited, we turn to a more historical perspective.

Christianity arose in the encounter of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. This useful cliché leads us to expect that Christianity bears traces of both sides of its origins. In this case, it adopted much of its understanding of the body from the prevailing assumptions of the interrelations of soul and body common in the Hellenistic world. This heritage shows itself in the Christian understanding of the body as the arena of struggle between our higher and our lower natures. These cultural assumptions took a sophisticated and a popular form. The former can be summarized as neo-Platonism, which took the body to be the raw material the soul has to struggle with in order to make a good life; in general, the body is the lesser partner in the often unhappy union of soul and body. The popular form, unsystematic but ubiquitous, was Gnosticism, which exaggerated the division of soul and body even more. Often we find the insistence that the body is the prison of the soul and its enemy, a view that routinely took the position that the body was ultimately unreal and therefore of no import.²

In the philosophical world of the late Roman Empire, it seemed easy to identify the soul alone as the authentic human being and the body with whatever held us from enlightenment. Both mainstream neo-Platonism and Gnosticism separated the soul and body and both found the body to be much the lesser of the two principles. Christianity was intertwined with both these schools of thought and drew something from both. The epigram which asserts that Christianity was simply "Platonism for the masses" has enough truth in it to explain how Christianity could flourish in a world in which separation of soul and body seemed only common sense. What the epigram misses is the distinctive higher aim of Christianity, equally at odds with the mainstream and with the negative force of Gnosticism. Unlike the philosophical culture of the time, Christians sought to transform the body, to recreate its original state, in Eden, before The Fall, and to make of it something new, a fit dwelling place for the soul. This was the imitation of the Word, which had entered flesh and made of the material world the exceptional being that was Jesus. The importance of this "transformationist" motive for Christian asceticism is one of the places that needs further research.³

II

Without in any way diminishing the importance of this lofty aspiration, however, we should note that it took root in a culture broadly convinced of the spiritual danger of the body. Although a fuller treatment of both neo-Platonism and Gnosticism could show sides of them more sympathetic than they are receiving here, there is no doubt that they helped cast a deep shadow on the Christian perception of the place of the body in human life.

In the Hellenistic period, Peter Brown tells us, the medical picture of the body was something "totally unlike" the understanding common today. In a passage that quotes Galen, the Hellenistic medical writer, but can also serve as a summary of a much broader consensus of popular medical opinion in late Roman antiquity, Brown gives us a vivid picture of this unfamiliar biology:

Here were little fiery universes, through whose heart, brain, and veins there pulsed the same heat and vital spirit as glowed in the stars. To make love was to bring one's blood to the boil, as the fiery vital spirit swept through the veins, turning the blood into the whitened foam of semen. It was a process in which the body as a whole—the brain cavity, the marrow of the backbone, the kidneys and the lower bowel region—was brought into play, as in a mighty choir . . .⁴

The soul and the body both participate in this choir, but at the expense of spirit. Brown adds the following quote, from "the somber but well read Christian, Tertullian":

In a single impact of both parts [i.e., soul and body], the whole frame is shaken and foams with semen, as the damp humour of the body is joined to the hot substance of the spirit. And then . . . in that last breaking wave of delight, do we not feel something of our very soul go out from us?

Tertullian's final comment is very characteristic of the time, and is heavy with meaning for the understanding of sex and the body that would prevail for centuries. The idea that sexual release diminishes the soul of a human being and that the opposite, abstinence, strengthens it, lies behind a great deal of the

understanding of sexual morality that the Christian church inherited, altered to fit its own purposes and then transmitted from the late Roman world into the very recent past.

Several aspects of this picture are worth noting: the creation of semen by the agitation of the body was generally thought to include women. In this theory, women produced semen but a great deal less of it than men did, a visible sign, should one be needed, of their lesser degree of spirit. In some versions even this diminished participation in conception was denied to women, and by the later middle ages the common analogy was that only men provided the seed, while women were the passive ground in which it grew. In other words, the contribution of women to progeny diminished in popular understanding. This androcentric point is not the most important one, however.

Instead we should notice the forcefulness with which the biological understanding postulated that spirit was diminished by sexual excitement. For all of the great pleasure of sex, the price we pay for it, in this Hellenistic view, is that you become a less and less spiritual being, less noble, less virtuous. It is no wonder that those who wished to maximize the presence of spirit in their lives would try to minimize the presence of sexual stimulation. Even among non-Christians, this understanding of the body led to a greater restraint than modern popular imagination usually allows. Brown repeatedly describes the "puritanical rectitude" of the Romans as "closer to that subscribed to by men in a modern fundamentalist Muslim country than to our modern, romantic fantasies of a 'decadent' Roman Empire."⁵ It is no wonder that Christians in Hellenistic society went even further than the society at large. Led by an emphasis on a new creation and/or a return to the innocence of Eden, they had even less respect for the ordinary rhythms of the body, and so moved even further in the direction of "puritanical rectitude" to create the sexual ethic with which we are familiar.

This understanding of sexuality encouraged almost two thousand years of Christian emphasis on the value of denying sexuality: such denial, such force of will, was an affirmation of the soul over the body. It made sense in a world in which medical/biological knowledge asserted the necessity of making a choice

between one or the other. It went even further. Denying the demands of the body was understood to be more difficult after the experience of sex, and therefore virginity came to be highly prized as a lifelong state, especially for women.⁶ Eventually, a two-tier system of dividing Christians developed, with the better Christians being those who were able and willing to exert such soul-strength, while the rest of us, lesser beings, could only be expected to control the body to the minimum extent necessary to avoid serious sin.⁷ The variations on this set of beliefs and conclusions were many, and very great names could be quoted here: Origen, Saint Jerome, Saint Ambrose. The master theorist of this position was St. Augustine, who saw the necessity of sex and our inability to control it as the paradigm of the effect of original sin on the human body.

The medical understanding of sex led to the conclusion that sexual release was physically debilitating, a threat to health, as well as spiritually perilous. In other words, a sensible person, Christian or not, would have to have a serious reason to engage in such dangerous activity, and would limit sex to the minimum that made sense. It is no surprise, then, that Christians like St. Augustine were so insistent on the necessity for strict justification for sex. The surrender to the body that sex brings meant for Augustine the Christian bishop that it was inherently wrong, but his theological explanation was entirely consistent with medicine and biology as they were then understood. Sex could be justified, and had a part in the divine plan for Augustine, but nevertheless, it was always dangerous and needed to be dealt with cautiously and with suspicion. The dangers of the body could only be overcome by divine grace, in the sacrament of marriage, but even there only partially. Only the divine purpose of procreation could justify the darkening of reason that sexuality brought; sex as we experience it is a consequence of sin and not of the original divine intention. Therefore only in the context of procreation was sexual intercourse licit. Needless to say, any other kind of sexual expression, alone or with anyone not our spouse, was so great a turning away from the spirit as to be what later came to be called "mortally" sinful. Even between spouses, sexual pleasure was dangerous and could only be fully justified—could only be without any sin at all—when procreation was the sole aim of

intercourse. Such singleness of purpose not being possible for fallen mortals, some sinfulness would creep into even the most chaste marriage beds. It was this sinfulness which explained the fact that all of us are born into the world marked by sin.⁸ Given this understanding, both secular and Christian, it is no surprise that self-denial became such a common ideal. Augustine was far from alone and was only the most influential, among those who suggested abstention from otherwise licit sex on Sundays and feast days, in Lent and in the preparation for baptism.

This story is well known; what is new for us is the knowledge that this common understanding of sex is a part of a general understanding of the human body that was supported by the medicine and common practice of the late Roman empire. It was not only the Christians and their theology which developed this negative understanding of sexuality of the body. What may surprise us is that this medical/physical understanding of the body has remained with us for so long.

Much later, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas summarized much of the tradition before him, and he transmitted the sexual ethic of the past into his own time. Indeed, he made it in some ways more severe. He used a famous euphemism, from a Spanish saint of the intervening time, Isidore of Seville. To describe the naturalness of sexuality, sex was called "what nature teaches all animals"—the euphemism alone tells us a great deal about the ways in which sexuality and the body were understood. St. Thomas's interpretation of this "naturalness" was a study in the ways in which ideas are influenced by their cultural setting and the biases of those who understand them. In other contexts there is much to defend in St. Thomas's usual insistence that the paths of nature, reason and grace are all complementary routes to the same end, but here he stumbles, and he does so in a way that has had an enormous impact on Catholicism, passing on and reinforcing the Hellenistic influence even into the present. The understanding of the body that uncritically enters his thinking through the portal of Isidore's euphemism is one which observes and judges nature through the lens of twelve hundred years of elaboration, most of it by virgins and celibates, on the diminution of the spirit which is the consequence of sex.

Through St. Thomas and his peers, the Hellenistic world of Augustine and his peers has been transmitted to the present. The sexual ethic has been enunciated differently in different eras, but much of the biological understanding has remained the same until very recent times. This biology has had components such as these:

1. In general: Sexual pleasure by its nature weakens us spiritually. There is also a material enervation or derangement which makes it physically dangerous. As a result, it is the path of virtue to train the body to need as little sexuality as possible.⁹ Celibacy, abstinence, virginity are all superior to sexuality and can be achieved by force of will.

2. Woman: The body of a woman is inferior to that of a man, and intended by nature to be subject to men. This inferiority was first of all physical, for clearly women lacked the parts that make men men. In a society disposed to read it this way, the visible body of woman was sufficient proof of her biological incompleteness. Indeed, theories of conception abounded which aimed to show that nature intended all conceptions to be of males, but sometimes things like the weather interfered with nature's plan. Men are also superior to women for other reasons, because of their superior contribution to conception, for example. "Women," summarizes Christine Gudorf, were thought of "as lacking reason and only possessing the image of God through connection to men."¹⁰ Being less rational, women have a harder time resisting sexual pleasure.

3. Procreation: Above all, the act of sex needs religious and even medical justification, even within (and in addition to the ordinary goals associated with) marriage. Such justification came to be centered around procreation, although other secondary, less physical, justifications are possible in addition to it.

The understanding of the body developed and transmitted from the Hellenistic world is the common heritage of all Christianity, not simply the version of it we call Catholic today. Although even in early centuries there is a difference to be seen between the Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking worlds in these matters, a disparity still to be seen today, the heritage of this early era is common to both Catholics and Orthodox. For

Protestants, it seems to be largely through the influence of St. Augustine, whose understanding of sexuality and the body was an integral part of his understanding of original sin, that the Hellenistic understanding of the body passed into Reformation and post-Reformation theologies. All three traditions are the heirs of centuries of lived tradition. If there is a moment when we can see emerging the theoretical formulation of a specifically Catholic understanding of the body, it is not one from the Hellenistic period, but one already mentioned. It is the moment almost a thousand years later, when the certainties of the Middle Ages were beginning to give way. The late medieval doctrine of natural law came into use and eventually became a tag phrase to explain medieval sexual ethics. It is under the banner of being "natural" that Catholic understandings of the body and of sexuality have been understood since then. In all three cases, the practice of Christianity that emerged from the Hellenistic world has continued to be the normative one. What is said below of the Catholic tradition seems to be true, with appropriate changes, of the other Christian traditions as well.

The whole perception of the body that was the dominant one in much of the early, precedent-setting days of the Christian tradition has remained the norm in official Catholicism, even though it has been modified in small ways that have not, so far, altered its basic structure. Even such small alterations have been made extremely slowly and begrudgingly. Although some of the grosser elements of the tradition have been altered over the centuries—for example, the present status of birth control methods—the sexual code that is still taught is the one that made sense when sex was believed to drain from the body some of the stuff of stars.

The official Catholic image of the body remains rooted in a prescientific biology that is virtually beyond our understanding, let alone our defense. Practically speaking, this understanding of the body lies at the base of the traditional sex ethics, the one popularly associated with natural law. But body images are not the only kind of influence that shapes sex ethics. Ideas of the body must first be filtered through a great deal of obvious and acknowledged theorizing before emerging in the form of practical

advice and behavior. In addition to such theorizing there is also a great deal of unconscious and sometimes anxiously disavowed influence from social and historical conditions and the prejudgments of ordinary human beings. Although the record indicates that the basic understanding of the body and of the spiritually exhausting power of sex remained constant in Christian society for almost two thousand years, many other factors contributed along the way to the ethics of sex. A prominent example of these influences, much noticed in recent literature, has been the surprising ups and downs of popular Catholic attitudes toward homosexual behavior. These attitudes have varied over two thousand years of history, according to historian John Boswell, much more than recent practice would suggest¹¹.

Unofficial understandings of the body, with a more positive attitude toward sexuality, have sometimes arisen in popular forums. It is not for nothing that Catholic countries sometimes have the reputation of sunny sensuality and everybody does it—*così fanno tutti*. Such attitudes have often existed side by side with theories with which they ought to be at war. If their conflict was invisible, it was presumably because the two-tiered division of sexual virtue, mentioned above, took some of the pressure off ordinary people. Moreover, especially in recent years, in places where modern medicine, new information and democratic choices have been available to people, a more positive attitude toward the body has been developing. Nevertheless, the underlying constant of official policy has been the Hellenistic understanding of the body. The attitudes derived from the older understanding of the body continue to underlie official teaching. Most important of all, that older tradition remains the only clearly articulated version of what embodiment means; newer movements have yet to find a comprehensive rationale. In spite of official insistence to the contrary, tension has been increasing between official Catholic attitudes and the real values of many Catholics. It is no wonder that Christian writers very sympathetic to the tradition, such as Christine Gudorf, call for a complete rethinking of the matter.¹²

III

Developments in the natural sciences, especially biology, and in social sciences like psychology have made much of what passed for wisdom over the past centuries bewildering to us. We know, for example, that procreation is only possible for a few days in a woman's month. The notion that sex could only be justified then would seem more than strange to us. The relationship between such knowledge, the Rhythm Method of birth control, and the official traditional aim of marriage is confusing, to say the least. The recognition that our new knowledge seems to be pushing us inexorably toward new ways of thinking about sexuality is widespread, even though it seems impossible for the voices of official Catholicism to admit it. Information about biology, psychology and the like seem so widespread and so forceful, that I will take them for granted here and go on to mention three other factors that are propelling change in the Catholic understanding of reproductive ethics.

The first of these is the insistence of women that their rights be taken seriously and not dismissed as they were in the old paradigm. To take but one example, the issue of violence and sexuality has received far less attention in the past than we hope it will in the future. Limiting attention to the naturalness or unnaturalness of the sex acts involved, narrowly defined, has meant that less concern was spared for matters of force, especially within marriage. A redirection of attention here is long overdue, and it is the efforts of women that are the main reason it is finally happening. Many other changes in perspective and evaluation follow from the recognition of women's point of view here. Overall, there are encouraging signs that the voices of official Catholicism are beginning to see the importance of women's rights. A papal encyclical issued in July 1995 states that the Catholic Church acknowledges the equality of women with men. The long term effect of this encyclical, which took many Vatican-watchers by surprise, has yet to be seen, but its very existence will have an impact on Catholic understandings of women.

The second new factor forcing the rethinking of Catholic sexual ethics is the changes in world population which make a frank reappraisal of the place of procreation in sexuality necessary. That is, the path of prudence seems clearly to be a policy of reducing the rate of birth of the world's peoples. This will be a dramatic, almost unimaginable change in the Catholic understanding of sexual morality. To imagine that it can occur is to envision the possibility of profound regeneration on the part of Catholic sex ethics. Such regeneration will not be easy, and it may be optimistic to imagine it. But whatever its difficulties, it is necessary. As is well known, it has proven all but impossible to break the link in the high tradition of Catholic theology between procreation and sexuality, the link that was, Augustine thought, the only barrier between sexual pleasure and depravity. The accusation has often been made that built deep in the official Catholic ethos is a fear of sex, an exaggeration of its indubitable power, its ability to control human life—and such accusations are at least partly true. Insistence that contraception is evil has arisen partly from the belief that only the possibility of dire consequences, namely pregnancy, can keep sexuality within bounds. Such were the arguments of the minority of those on the papal commission to study contraception, and their arguments carried the day. As a result, contraception remains an important stumbling block in the ability of the Catholic Church to come to grips with world population.

But difficult as it is to imagine, such change must come: world population demands not simply that family planning be allowed to Catholic couples in an emergency or after much examination of conscience. It demands that family planning, the spacing of children, reduction in number of children, be preached as a responsible sexual ethic for Catholics. Needless to say, such a transformation will not be easy to make. It involves a rethinking of the nature of the human body and the relation of soul and body that is not beyond the capabilities of the tradition, but which is challenging to say the least. We can see this enterprise already begun in the work of some Catholic women theologians, such as Christine Gudorf, Patricia Beattie Jung and Rosemary Radford Ruether, and in that of many men also, such as Daniel Maguire, Charles Curran and Lutheran James Nelson.

Modern biology and medicine, the question of the status of women, the need to curb the rate of population growth—all these are pressing change upon the official understandings of the body. But there is also a fourth way in which reality is forcing a change in the understanding of the place of reproduction in Catholic ethics. In some ways it is more dramatic; it is certainly harder to overlook. In industrialized societies a trend is occurring which has already had enormous impact and will continue to have more. It is a change arising from changes in the developmental cycle of human maturation. On the one hand, the age of puberty is dropping, with young people thus becoming able to have sex—and children—much younger than their grandparents. On the other hand, the age at which economic independence is possible recedes farther and farther into adulthood. Often a young man or woman is capable of social and economic independence only a dozen years after reaching puberty. This new development in human life has earned a new name, adolescence, a word that does not exist, at least in this current meaning, in many of the world's languages. The use of this new word created a problem for translators at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development—at the same time that the reality the word stands for creates a problem far greater than coming to grips with a new word.

Adolescence is a period in which a young person is sexually mature, but not economically or socially an adult yet. Although it has analogies in earlier societies, it is coming into existence today as a new possibility for the human body, the sexually capable person still not socially adult. The period of adolescence is thus a thorough challenge to the traditional understanding of the body and of sexuality. According to the Augustinian scheme it is procreation that keeps sexual intercourse from sinfulness; though other "ends" of marriage were enunciated by Augustine, Thomas and others, the presence of a procreative intention (or, until not so long ago, the absence of an intention to frustrate procreation) was a necessary condition for sex that would be in accord with the true nature of the body and the best interests of the persons involved. Adolescence, by separating the possibility of engendering children from the likelihood of raising them well, puts the young person into a long period in which the old

understanding of the body seems to insist on heroic abstinence from sex. For many years, as many as twelve, the youngest and least responsible of sexually mature persons should, according to the old theory, act with a heroism that escapes most of their elders. They are enjoined to give up sexual expression, even though the means exist for effectively preventing pregnancy. In this way adolescence makes concrete and pressing all of the other changes in the body that recent medicine and cultural shifts have brought about.

The necessity of limiting the rate of population growth, the possibility of using modern medicine and technology to have sex without the likelihood of pregnancy, the changes in understanding human psychology which make earlier insistence on abstention from sex seem hypocritical, impossibly demanding or something that can only be had at the cost of a systematic psychological repression for which too high a price must be paid—all these come together to raise compelling questions about the ancient understanding of the body. That understanding led to the elevation of virginity to such a high place and filled the church of my childhood with images of persons who had lives without sex. Family planning has already become an accepted part of Catholic life, even though, officially, the clergy have had a hard time accepting this fact. The equality of women already seems obvious to an important section of the Catholic population. The image of the body which we inherited from the neo-Platonists and the Gnostics, and which tradition has modified and transmitted in its own way, is already in the process of enormous changes, although these developments continue to cause strife within the community that still describes itself as a body.

The community as a body? Yes, there is another sense of the body within the Catholic tradition that is made visible in the images which adorn ordinary parish churches. There are features of the Catholic understanding of the body that are only partially represented by the images from my boyhood church. They are present implicitly in the historical references of some of the figures mentioned above, the concern for the historical setting of Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph, but especially other saints, Lucy, Francis, etc., whose statues were present in that setting. The saints fill the centuries between us and Christ in a way that reminds us

that time, too, is a part of the Catholic vision. In a dim way we can see the historical and social dimensions of the Catholic body. In the Catholic version of Christianity, the body has a mystical, communal dimension, an extension into space and time that is real, though not visible. This larger context provides some of the most unusual and interesting elements of the Christian body. The church to which Catholics belong is regularly referred to as the body of Christ, and at other times as his bride. This understanding of the community as a mystical body should not be as strange to us as it is, for it has modern analogies in the extension of persons into national or tribal communities in more secular contexts. It is used in St. Paul to explain why different individuals have different talents and abilities: they are like different parts of the same body—mouth, ear, hand—each with a different contribution to make to the good of the whole.

This communal, historical dimension of the body deserves more attention than I can give it here. Bodies exist in time and space and adapt to their environment without becoming different bodies. Such a real sense of the positive importance of history and culture is greatly needed in our time to help us navigate the very changes history and culture themselves demand. But for all its real interest the sense of being a bodily community is for many people today the least understandable element of the body in Catholicism. In the USA, the form of Christianity, indeed of most religion, is increasingly individualistic, and community becomes more and more an empty or even meaningless ideal. Unity with others in the community of faith, even though it is a frequent theme of the new testament, seems difficult to imagine even in the nominally communitarian Catholic tradition. In the modern world, religious communities seem less and less important and a widespread individualism makes membership in such a community seem optional, merely a matter of taste. In this setting, a sense of the communal body that stretches through time and space seems specially precious. The need to find new ways to embody such a vision makes struggle over the physical, visible, fleshy body meaningful and ultimately important.

Notes

1. Howard Happ first called my attention to the significance of suffering and virginity in these images.
2. PHEME PERKINS, 'Creation of the Body in Gnosticism,' in Jane Marie LAW (ed.), *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 21-35.
3. This is a major theme of Joan CULIANU, 'The Body Reexamined,' in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, pp. 1-18; see also Peter BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 144.
4. This and the following quote are from BROWN, op. cit., p. 17.
5. BROWN, op. cit., p. 23; compare Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 3, *The Care of the Self*, New York, Random House, 1988, pp. 39, 143.
6. Aline ROUSSELLE, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, New York, Basil Blackwell, 1988, pp. 128- 40.
7. Wayne MEEKS, *Origins of Christian Morality: The First two Centuries*, New Haven Yale University Press, pp. 147-9.
8. Margaret FARLEY, 'Sexual Ethics,' in James B. NELSON and Sandra P. LONGFELLOW (eds), *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, Louisville, Westminster, 1994, pp. 60-61.
9. In this connection, note the following: "The ascetics of late antiquity tended to view the human body as an 'autarkic' system. In ideal conditions, it was thought capable of running on its own 'heat'; it would need only enough nourishment to keep that heat alive. In its 'natural' state — a state which the ascetics tended to identify with the bodies of Adam and Eve — the body had acted like a finely tuned engine, capable of 'idling' indefinitely. It was only the twisted will of fallen men that had crammed the body with unnecessary food, thereby generating in it the dire surplus of energy that showed itself in physical appetite, in anger, and in the sexual urge." (BROWN, op. cit., p. 233.)
10. Christine GUDORF, *Body, Sex and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics*, Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1994, p. 3.
11. John BOSWELL, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980.
12. Gudorf, op. cit., pp. 1-7.

Body Narratives, Metaphors, and Concepts in Philippine Indigenous Religion

A. *Babaylan* in Dance Ritual at Spanish
Contact: Sacral Vessel of Spirituality and
Power

Fe B. Mangahas

Introduction

Our paper for this Congress is pioneering and exploratory in nature. As a collaborative effort by three women from different academic concerns (Mangahas from Women's Studies, Guerrero from Philippine history, and Alaras from her study of indigenous spirituality groups), our attempt to put our thoughts on a common theme such as gender and religion has not been easy. First of all, the subject matter is new and this requires more research than was possible given our deadline. Secondly, as co-authors, we have to grapple with current theories and methodologies of social science, particularly history, that are predominantly western and male in perspective. Last but not least, given the theme and scope of our paper, feminism has to be contextualized within the Philippine *babaylan* tradition, where only preliminary data and analysis exist.

My part in this composite paper proceeds from the hypothesis that women's power in the Philippines is rooted and traceable to the *babaylan* (native priestess in the Philippines at Spanish contact); and this power can be located in the *babaylan's* body in dance rituals, as it occupied interpenetrating levels of space: cultural, social, and spiritual.

To date, there has been very little study done on the gendered character of pre-colonial Philippine society. And the *babaylan* (which could be male or homosexual but was predominantly female)¹ has certainly not been the focus of disciplined inquiries.

What I have done, in this preliminary paper, was to select a few texts that recorded the *babaylan* at point of Spanish contact to get as close an image of her as possible and from there proceed to analyze the *babaylan's* power through indigenous perspective and women's eyes. I believe such a re-reading could yield evidences supportive of my hypothesis that, indeed, the *babaylan* as woman was a center of power or a key player in the exercise of power and its maintenance in precolonial times, whose very presence obstructed the early Christianization and colonization of the Philippines. In the course of time, the *babaylan* aroused the combined hatred and later violence of the Spanish colonizers and missionaries to the point of physically eliminating her from that space, a fact that Philippine mainstream as well as revisionist history fail to account.

Babaylan in Dance Ritual as Text

Perhaps, Antonio Pigafetta's (Magellan's official chronicler) account could be considered the earliest narrative on the *babaylan* and her dance ritual. Reporting to Lord Philip of Villiers, Pigafetta observed, and in fact called the *babaylan* dance ritual "worship of idols."² In any case, no one can fault Pigafetta for his statement. From the cultural tradition to which he was belonging (16th Century Europe, just out of the burning times of the witch hunt), certain elements and symbols in the ritual evoked a pagan rite: the blessing of the pig, the offerings of rice cakes, cooked millet in rolled leaves, and roast fish.

Moreover, the prominent presence of two "old women" who stepped on a cambay cloth, paid homage to the sun, sounded the reed trumpets, did a lot of dancing throughout the ceremony, as they recited prayers and drank wine from a cup, one of them finally killing the pig with a lance and marking the participants' foreheads with pig's blood— all that must not only have struck Pigafetta with great curiosity but with shock. From where he came, it was unthinkable for women to lead such rites or any ritual for that matter and if they did and they were "old", they must have been "witches." Of course, he did not call them "witches", but neither did he call them by their name—*babaylan*.

And the phrase "old women" by which he repeatedly called them, later influenced other writers with the same cultural perspective to refer to them as *brujas* or witches.

Thanks to deconstruction, we can see "cracks in the parchment."³ Within the same narrative, Pigafetta recorded observations which contradict his earlier statements, and from which we can draw out images of the *babaylan* as a person of great physical strength: "during the ceremony a torch is always burning, and the old woman who pierced the pig takes and puts it out of her mouth."

In the next passage, Pigafetta noted: "the other old woman dips the end of her trumpet in the pig's blood, and with it marks with blood the forehead of her husband and of her companion, and then of the rest of the people. But they did not come and do this to us." From this, we also gather that one of them was married, that she could touch blood and touch others with consecrated blood. The fact that the *babaylan* did not do this to the Spaniards who were witnessing the ceremony is significant. Only those who share the same belief and practice must be touched with blood. Thus, with that gesture, the *babaylan* marked off the space between them and the newcomers. Great wisdom and discernment, one could say from hindsight!

Finally, at the end of his narrative, Pigafetta gave away a vital information about the *babaylan's* singular power and authority, nay, woman's tremendous responsibility within her community. Pigafetta wrote: "That done, the old women took off their robes, and ate what was in the two dishes, inviting only the women to join them... *Only old women* are able to consecrate the boar in this manner, and this animal is never eaten unless it is killed in this manner."⁴

Sixty years later, Miguel de Loarca (another Spanish chronicler, who was Legazpi's comrade-in-arms) added more startling details about the *babaylan* and her dance ritual. This time, she is called by her name *babaylana*. Unfortunately, the name is redefined and appropriated from Loarca's lens, as woman "possessed by the demons," because, according to him, and viewed from his European/Christian/male perspective, a woman "dressed very gaily, with garlands on her head resplendent with gold" who

performed rituals to the gods, chanting and dancing until "her body hurled her to the ground, foaming at the mouth" can only be invoking the demon who "possessed her." And yet, within the same narrative, Loarca attributed to this state her power to heal the sick, foretell the future and save the dead from hell.⁵

Fortunately, a narrative of 1688 by Fray Ignacio Alzina described the function of the *babaylan* in more concrete terms. According to him, among the Bisayans, the *babaylan*, called *daetan*, was the mediator between the people and the gods. *Daetan* comes from the word *dait* which means "friendship and peace." To become a *daetan*, one must be called by the spirits and be initiated through a life-and-death experience making her physically attuned.⁶ But such information would not suffice if one were to get a more concrete picture of the *daetan's* role as *babaylan*. Even Alzina's account begs for further deconstruction. But, just like Pigafetta's and Loarca's narratives, Alzina's requires other documents and disciplines to allow a deeper analysis. The three accounts, as briefly demonstrated, are basically flawed by a perspective that was Western, Christian, and male to begin with.

Contextualizing the *Babaylan*

The efforts of Filipino social scientists who continue to search for what is indigenous in their respective disciplines have been very helpful in this regard. Today, the task of filling in the gaps in Loarca's and other chronicler's narrative is less formidable. There now exists a basis for grounding the *babaylan* dance ritual. For instance, Philippine myths and lores, although in fragments, can still help the historians discern an indigenous worldview in which the *babaylan* and her dance ritual can be located. One concept, also found in other ethnic groups, is the *Ivatan* view of the world as being divided into two distinct but "compenetrant worlds of the visible and invisible."⁷ This is not the same as the Christian and Western notion of supernatural and natural. In fact, the word supernatural is absent in Tagalog or any of the indigenous languages. Filipino-English dictionaries have no entry for the word. The Tagalog term *sobrenatural* is clearly a borrowing from Spanish.

Within this view of "compenetrant worlds," the visibles are the things that can be perceived by the senses. The invisibles are those that can not be seen or perceived by the ordinary senses. Hence, the deities, *Bathala* (one Supreme Being) as well as the entities belonging to the underworld are part of the invisible realm. Humans are from the visible realm. But the upperworld, the middleworld of the humans, and the underworld are not separate from each other. Thus, the inhabitants of each level can communicate with each other depending on how sensitive the visibles are to the invisibles. On the other hand, the invisibles can make themselves visible and enter the world of humans. Humans, for their part, know that dead relatives are just there and at times just here, quite near. *Bathala* and the lesser deities could be contacted by humans and, in some myths, be brought down to earth by human supplications.

Another indigenous notion within the concept of "compenetrant worlds" is that of the *kaluluwa* (soul). From the root word *dua*, meaning two, the Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Ilongos, Bukidnons, Bagobos and many others continue to believe that human soul has two modalities of existence — one physical when it is connected to the human body, the other spiritual, when it exists apart from the body. The distinction between body (*baggi*) and soul (*karrurwa*) is not same as in the western sense. In western philosophy, the body is the matter and the soul is the substance. As long as the body and the soul are together, one is alive. Death is the separation of the soul from the body and is final. In the Philippine belief system, the body cannot stay alive without the soul. But the soul can leave the body and stay alive. Among the Visayans, *dungan*, the soul may voluntarily leave its body, as when a person is asleep. Thus, among Filipinos, one would wake up a sleeping person gently, to give the soul a chance to return to its body. Upon death, the soul goes out through the nose, eyes, ears and other orifices of the body. It eventually joins the air or the wind toward the upper regions. There, it waits until it can find another body.⁸

Philippine myths can also help explain the relatively high status of the *babaylan* in 16th Century Philippine society at the point of Spanish contact. Our myths basically conceive of the creation of the first man and first woman as coming from a bamboo pole or

hatched at the same time from two separate eggs.⁹ This implies that man and woman come from the same source and are co-equal in substance and origin. The word *bathala*, itself, provides other clues. The first syllable *ba* comes from the female word *babae* and the third syllable *la* from the male term *lalake*. Together with *tha* which means light/life, their union signifies cooperation of equals to produce life/light. Thus, between man and woman, there is mutual union, not subordination.¹⁰ This is so opposed to the western notion of Adam and Eve, where woman, as a rib of Adam draws her identity from Adam and is the cause of original sin/suffering/death/evil in this world.

Female deities also abound in Philippine mythological world. As *Bathala's* assistants, they are co-creators and principal nurturers of the material world. Among these female deities were: *Indianale* (deity of labor and good deeds), *Djamangan* (deity of good harvest), *Amankabli* (deity of the sea), and *Ikapati* (deity of land and agriculture). Caretaker of heavenly bodies were also women deities: *Maayar* who was the most beautiful divinity of the sky, was caretaker of the moon. She had two sisters: *Hana* (deity of the morning) and *Tala* (deity of stars).

And now, more recent studies on contemporary *babaylan* refer to the "fit" or trance as an altered state of consciousness, called ecstasy or *sapi* (one possessed), but not as a possession by the devil, as Loarca had inferred. "Ecstasy" or trance is here a possession of the *babaylan's* body by positive "transcendental power", to bring some benefits to the community she serves.¹² This differentiates the *babaylan's* dance ritual with trance from those who perform similar rituals for evil intentions and effects, such as the *manggagaway* or *mangkukulam*. But myths can be deceptive. Sometimes or oftentimes, they do not necessarily guarantee that what they symbolize actually exists, in the society's real power relations. Nevertheless, myths can help us intuit what probably existed before, since many of these beliefs and practices persist among Filipinos to this day.

Pilipinolohiya, a method of analyzing sources from a sustained indigenous paradigm, has come out with evidences of a holistic view of a human person as a vessel. Like a jar, the person, to the Filipino, has a *labas*, a *loob*, and an *ilalim* (outside, inside,

and depth) as that of a jar. The use of metaphors to describe the three-dimensional picture of the person through close congruent pairing certainly helps one understand the Filipino as human being.¹³ One Filipino scholar applying this framework to his study of *babaylanism* in contemporary setting, came out with a clearer view of the *babaylan*. He wrote:

The *babaylan* was the recognized leader of every community — as moral educator, healer and priestess, she was perceived to be the repository of goodness, proven by her words and deeds. In religious ceremonies the *babaylan* was often 'possessed' and used by benevolent spirits who were the sources of healing and other forms of blessings. In this ritual of *sapi*, we see the ideal characteristic trait of a person in her *labas*, *loob*, and *ilalim* at play. In *sapi* (trance) the *sinasapian* (medium) is the appropriate or worthy container/vessel in whose clean and open *loob* the spirit may dwell for a time and accomplish its purpose. The body becomes the proper *tahanan* (home) of the spirit.¹⁴

Here, the *babaylan's* dance ritual assumes a radically new meaning when viewed within the indigenous cultural anthropological assumptions. The state of *sapi* (trance) as an element of the ritual is now a religious event, a rite akin to a liturgical drama where:

the people, through a worthy medium, encounter in the medium's *labas* the sacred inside her *loob*. The *loob* of the medium as inhabited by the spirit makes the medium's *labas* the immediate representation of the divine. This then is the indigenous ideal characteristic way of touching the divine and the ideal characteristic way of the divine touching people: immediate and sensuous. *Sapi* is a sensuous contact with the otherwise unreachable and spiritual deities themselves as being visited and touched by the sacred; such a touch is experienced as healing and making whole of broken lives. Their lives being transformed, their illnesses being taken away as the spirit through the medium breathes life into them or soothes away their sufferings.¹⁵

This scholar, Ferdinand D. Dagmang, calls it "a sensual encounter with the sacred." Matthew Fox, the ex-Dominican

advocate for new spirituality calls it "experiencing the sacredness of the body." I call it "sensual spirituality", where sensuality and spirituality merge as power balancing each other as in the cosmos, as in the beginning.

This brings me to the last point I would like to bring up about the *babaylan* in dance ritual. In both narratives by Pigafetta and Loarca, mention is made of the cambay cloth. A precise understanding of what it was and what power it symbolized within the context of the dance ritual has not been attempted to this day. I feel that if well-researched and studied, the cloth and its symbolism in relation to the dance could yield more insights about the function and power of the *babaylan*. Listening to a talk on "The Subconscious as Seen from the Indigenous Weaves",¹⁶ some time ago, I learned that women weavers of the Philippines then and now, but specially those at the point of Spanish encounter, also performed a role akin to that of the female *babaylan*.

From the speaker's explanation, I gathered that the technique that these women used was fantastic even by the present high-tech and computer-age standards. It used interlocking patterns beyond our present manual ability, with mathematical precision that imply symmetry and geometry. These patterns, never thought of in isolation of the whole, were produced by weaving threads tied to the woman's body as in birthing, with designs dreamed in a trance. These designs challenge the limitations of the technique used by weavers who were all women. From this information, I tend to conclude that these women could only weave with such precision and beauty if they were in a spiritual state of mind and sensual state of spirituality akin to that of the *babaylan* in her dance ritual. One remembers and can connect now the presence of that cloth upon which the *babaylan* stepped on before performing that sensuous and exhilarating dance leading to the *sapi*/trance. Hence, the title of this essay: "*Babaylan* in Dance Ritual— Sacral Vessel of Spirituality and Power."

Some Observations and Conclusions

Certainly, the indigenous woman, as *babaylan*, was a beneficent power center in pre-colonial Philippines. According to the study by Dr. Zeus Salazar, the leading Filipino historian using Filipino culture as the basis of his historical viewpoint, the *babaylan* was the central personality in ancient Philippine society because of her prominent role in the fields of culture, religion, and medicine. Thus, she was the community's authority on mythology and cultural heritage, the priestess knowledgeable of all kinds of rituals and healing, a proto-scientist expert in astronomy and its relation to agriculture. Together with the *datu* (political and economic leader), and the *panday* (the expert in technology), the *babaylan* was a powerful and influential figure in the community.

The Spanish missionaries (who were themselves spiritual leaders) rightly perceived a formidable rival in her. They elaborated strategies and acted towards her elimination from the space that they needed to occupy and Christianize. Apparently, the *babaylan's* space intersected with both the spiritual, and the public spheres. While the *babaylan's* dance rituals of drama and power was allowed to be performed, how could the new religion and political order even take root? The next part of this composite paper examines in detail this "battle" to displace the *babaylan* and desecrate that body.

It must have been this thought of an impending danger to the *babaylan's* lives and functions that crossed the perceptive mind of the "old women" in Pigafetta's narrative, and stopped them from anointing the foreheads of white strangers who watched their dance ritual from the side. A *babaylan* from the island of Bohol was more forthright. She warned her people, in no uncertain terms, what the coming of the West signaled. So impressive were her words that the Jesuits found them worth recording. And so for the first time, we come across a narrative in which woman/*babaylan* actually spoke. This *babaylan* named Cariaga in a *dalit* (lament), a form familiar to her people, chanted as she danced:

Maga caliualiura ang banua
 Maga capucane ang cubayon;
 Mabual agra qui ring lunson
 Mabuen cagra quing cubayon.

This land will be changed, or other people will possess it,
 with another culture, other practices
 This town is to be utterly destroyed,
 This province with the rest of the islands are to be
 subjugated.¹⁷

She might as well have added: "This body will be possessed
 and desecrated and with it comes the fragmentation of her/
 people's freedom and sense of fullness/wholeness."

Notes

1. Zeus Salazar, 'Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas' is the first significant article on the subject of pre-colonial priestesses in the Philippines. It is found in *'Women's Role in Philippine History'*, University of the Philippines, Center for Women's Studies, 1989, mimeographed. See also J. Neil C. Garcia. 'Philippine Gay Culture History and Early Writers', University of the Philippines, MA Thesis, 1994.
2. Antonio Pigafetta as cited in Lord Stanley's translation of *The First Voyage Round the World by Magellan*, New York, Hakluyt Society, 1874, pp. 97-98.
3. This phrase was first used by William Henry Scott, in his re-reading of prehispanic Philippine materials.
4. Pigafetta, as cited in Lord Stanley's translation. Emphasis mine.
5. Miguel de Loarca. *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* in translation found in Gregorio F. Zaide, *Documentary of Philippine History*, No. 76, Manila 1994.
6. Pablo Fernandez and Cantius Koback, O.P., 'Chapter 13 of Francisco Alzina's Historia de Las Islas Visayas' (1608) in English translation, 'Concerning Their Priests and Priestesses and How They Acquired This Dignity, etc.' in *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. XX, No. 59, May - August 1985, p. 238. Also cited in Francisco R. Demetrio, S.J., *Myths and Symbols, Philippines*, Manila National Bookstore, Inc., 1978, revised edition, p. 147.
7. Florentino H. Hornedo, 'The World, the Sacred, and the Traditional Filipino Societies', in *UNITAS*, Vol. 64, no. 4, 357.
8. Francisco R. Demetrio, S.J., Gilda Cordero Fernando and Eduardo N. Zialcita, *The Soul Book*, Quezon City, GFC Books, 1991, p. 97, based on the doctoral study of Alicia Magos.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
10. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, 'Filipino Women: Before and After Spanish Conquest of the Philippines, Essay on Women,' Manila Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, revised edition, 1989, p. 17.
11. F. Landa Jocano, *Philippine Prehistory*, University of the Philippines Center for Advanced Studies, 1975.
12. Francisco R. Demetrio, S.J., *Myths and Symbols*, Philippines, Manila National Bookstore, Inc. revised edition, p. 146.
13. This subject of the Filipino personhood likened to a jar is attributed to Dr. Prospero Covar of the University of the Philippines, Department of Anthropology.

14. Ferdinand D. Dagmang, *Babaylanism Reconsidered*, in Series on Filipino Spiritual Culture, Manila, National Commission on Culture and the Arts, 1995, pp. 14-15, 18.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
16. Marian Rocas Pastor's lecture at the Ateneo de Manila University, July, 1995.
17. Quoted and cited by Carolyn Brewer in her paper 'Re-Searching the Fragments,' read at the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, 20 July 1995, p. 1.

Body Narratives, Metaphors, and Concepts in Philippine Indigenous Religion

B. The Babaylan In Colonial Times: Bodies Desecrated

Milagros C. Guerrero

The Spaniards encountered their most formidable enemy in the *babaylan* (priestesses or *sacerdotizas*) of the prehispanic indigenous religion. It is not known how much political authority they shared with the chiefs, but from their functions in the spiritual realm, it can be said that they exercised considerable power and influence and enjoyed immense prestige. They were counsel to ruler and ruled, propitiators to the gods and spirits, atoners of people's sins, interpreters and diviners of Nature's demands upon the community and healers of soul and body. Earlier historians, unable to have access to documents in the Spanish archives, and traditionally dependent upon the translations into English of the original sources in Spanish have ignored these important roles. Happily, a return to the primary sources provides us more information and clearer insights into the proper place of the *babaylan* in Philippine history.

Why did the Spanish priests consider the *catalonas* and *babaylan* their arch-enemies? Father Diego de Aduarte, in discussing the state of religion in the Philippine colony, points out that the greater enemy were the female priestesses rather than the priests¹. In 1685, when the Dominicans apprehended known and suspected *babaylan* in the town of Bolinao, in the province of Zambales and confiscated their instruments as tools of worship of the "devil", thirty-five were women and only eleven were men. While nearly all the married women engaged in the worship of an *anito* (or ancestor), it was the old women (*viejas*) who functioned as teachers to the other *aniteras*.²

According to Fray Agustin Maria de Castro, O. S. A., the office of the female priestesses was a noble one, and was usually inherited by first-born women.

Usaban más de sacerdotizas o aniteras que de sacerdotes, aunque estos también tenían algunos, gente vil y con mucha razón, desestimada, por vivir feísimamente. En estas aniteras o hechiceras entraba el demonio y daba por ellas sus respuestas, y por medio de estas y de aquellos hacían sus supersticiones y sacrificios para aplacar a sus anitos.³ (Merino, 1954, p. 211)

But "si algún hombre hacía este oficio (por ser de mucho interés) se vestía de vestidos y efectos de muger."⁴ It is evident from these remarks that the male priests could have access to the spiritual world and play a role in the realm of ritual only by first becoming women. Small wonder that a complaint was received at the Office of the Inquisition that some of the suspected witches were laughing at the priests, for in their cassocks, these looked very much like women.

The *babaylan* mediated between the deities and the spirit world, and the community. They not only took care of the idols but also "talked to the devil," said the Spanish priests. They interpreted in behalf of the community "wars, illnesses, deaths and other events." They determined village and individual activities in accordance with the seasons. They possessed knowledge not only about religion, agriculture and commerce but also esoteric knowledge about the cosmos. The central activity of the community, the preparation of the fields and the planting of the crops required the presence of the priestesses. Since there were two kinds of *anitos*, good and evil, they propitiated the good ones and, by diverse instruments and an amazing variety of concoctions or herbs and perfumes, appeased the malevolent spirits, preventing them from inflicting harm upon the people.

The case of Bolinao, in Zambales, illustrates this vital link between the *babaylan* and the people. More than a century after the arrival of the Spaniards, the town's people still believed in their pre-colonial spirit world and continued to worship *Apo Laqui* (the highest deity) and other spirits. Each of these had his or

her particular powers. Only *Apo Laqui* could cause sickness in the entire body. *Ganciam*, another deity, could stir the waters. Since Bolinao was a coastal town and subject to the rise and fall of the sea, a *babaylan* had to calm the waters when it became turbulent. Another *anito*, much venerated and feared by the people, was called *Po-on* (meaning "root", "main principle", "raiz"); wherever there was land, it had power to cause drought or flood. Although there were many *babaylan* in the town—at the time of the writing of our source—only the ones who were at least eighty years old knew enough about *Po-on* and could thus propitiate it. They went about the rice fields praying to the spirit for abundant water and a good harvest.⁵

The *babaylan* did not fear the Spaniards and, at times, killed them. Many went about their villages warning the people that the missionaries were telling lies. Indeed, they were the ones who persuaded the people not to obey the "barbarians with white teeth" (*barbaros de dientes blancos*), who called upon the indigenous people to give them food, water, kindling and other provisions. According to the Augustinian priest Agustin Maria de Castro (1780), the early missionaries fought many battles with the "witches" and "goblins" (*brujas y duendes*) that were so numerous in the Philippines that, indeed, many friars were killed. Little wonder that during the first century of Spanish rule, many Spaniards, including priests, were anxious to be transferred to Mexico. The Philippines was an "arduous mission," a hardship post: the land was barren and many of the people were indifferent, if not altogether hostile.

The *babaylan* was a major stumbling block in the establishment of a rapport between the friars and the *indios*. This is what can be deduced from the friars' chronicles. For example, in 1599, the Moros under the famous Silongan, reacting defensively to the establishment of Spanish coastal settlements in Cebu, Negros and Panay, burned these villages and captured many *indios*. The task of the priests in that area was to persuade the frightened residents who had fled to the mountains to return to the lowlands. But these refused to do so, indicating to the friars that the Spaniards could not defend them. Their restiveness was caused by the "sinister" influence of an Indian woman called Dupungay, who was the most celebrated *babaylan* of the area,

sagacious and cunning in her witchcraft and sacrifices to the "devil."⁶ Dupungay had persuaded the *indios* that the Moro attacks had been due to the relations between the Moros and the Spaniards and that the villages would not be safe from the Muslim threats for as long as the Spaniards were around.

The province of Pangasinan, according to Fr. Aduarte, was a problem mission because of the lukewarm attitude of the people who had been persuaded by the "devil" to resist the proselytization of the friars. The "devil" resented very much the establishment of the chapels in the villages, according to Aduarte. Oftentimes, this resentment was expressed through the frightening howls of the priestesses.⁷ Might we not read in Aduarte's remarks that the priestesses were the most vocal in demonstrations opposing the chapel constructions?

Aduarte suggests that it was not enough to secure the cooperation of the *datus* or political leaders who were male. He provides us an example the "bellicose and aggressive" people of the town of Nalfotan, Nueva Segovia. Here, in 1607, the Dominicans had built a church and the leading *principal*, a rich and noble man by the name of Pagulayan, had pledged loyalty and peace to the Spaniards, amidst the "barbarous", the "idolatrous", and the "devils" who were his vassals. He led the townspeople, men, women and children in a great congregation to receive the new religion. But a "witch" and priestess (*una hechicera sacerdotiza*), an "evil woman" (*mala mujer... diabolica aquella anitera maldita*) called Caguenga, who did not care about cooperation with the Spaniards, began to "provoke" the people into open rebellion. So persuasive was she that the villages moved to kill their own chickens and fattened animals, demolish their houses and uproot their coconuts which were their main agricultural crop. Perhaps this action was to prevent their being taken over by the missionary and the encomendero. Calling to arms their neighbours in the name of "liberty," they evacuated to the mountains and joined with those who had already fled there.⁷

We do not know what exactly happened to Caguenga. The uprising, however, owing to her "mischief," spread to Simbuey, Malagueg and other towns in Nueva Segovia (now Cagayan province), where the people, persevering in their "idolatry" and "service to the devil," destroyed their Christian icons and

demolished the chapels they themselves had built. The uprising continued well into the late 1630s and required a large military expedition organized by the governor-general to quell it⁸.

In 1615, the campaign against the *viejas aniteras* or *hechiceras* caused much disquiet in the towns of Batavag, Bolo, Pilitan and Abuatan of Cagayan. These old women got wind of a secret project on the part of the missionaries to prepare a list of "witches," perhaps preparatory to seizing and incarcerating them. The tumult began in the town of Batavag where, according to Aduarte, the "witches" proceeded to "frighten" and provoke the people to rebellion (*alboroto*) in order to escape the punishment due only to them. The Dominican missionaries in Cagayan had sought to separate those whom they had baptized and had begun to instruct in the Catholic religion from the unconverted ones in small Christian villages (*pueblillos pequeños*). There was reason for the priestesses' restiveness, for Batavag was a mission town since about seven years. The priestesses would not allow the missionary plan to mature: they moved about these villages, "provoking the new converts to restiveness and great fear" until they apostatized and abandoned their new abodes to return to their old upland villages where they could follow their ancient laws as they pleased.⁹

The turbulence in Batavag spread to the town of Abuatan where the people sacked the church and mutilated the statues of the Virgin and saints, shouting, "let us see if they will bleed!" With much mockery and laughter, they hung women's skirts on the altar and made headscarves of the altar and corporal cloths. Some rebels dressed themselves in the habits of the priests.¹⁰

Unable to accept that the *babaylan*—mere women in Spanish eyes—provided the leadership and inspiration to such resistance, the Spaniards (particularly the friars) attributed to diabolic possession the priestesses' ideas, unusual strength and aggressiveness. The *babaylan* were lewd, unchaste and sensual and yet, at the same time, they were virile. The *babaylan's* realm was that of the devil, her body was inhabited by Satan. Without diabolic authority, the priestesses could not be expected to exhibit confidence, discernment or any intellectual faculty. At no point in the sources was there any reference to the innate strength of the women or their leadership qualities—despite the fact that

they were not *datus* or chieftains—that enabled them to gain considerable following in the rebellions that developed as the result of their anti-friar activities.

The *babaylan*, being "*endemoniadas*" were slaves of the devil and the "bad seed" of the indigenous society. Missionary work was thus of the highest order because the friars were fighting not mere women but the devil within the women. Their identity as leaders was placed in the space of the irrational realm, in the subconscious part of their being presumed to be so easily influenced by extraneous forces. And treating the *babaylan* as powerful only because they were possessed by the devil, allowed to kill and destroy them without hesitation, with little guilt or remorse.

While the archives yield their treasures ever so slowly on the subject, we are now in a position to draw some conclusions from the data that have been collected so far. By dehumanizing the priestesses, the friars transformed them into objects or creatures with non-human sentiments. When the *babaylan's* influence in the community declined, the priestesses were degraded and despised before the people whom they served and who expected such service.

In this connection, three factors may be considered. First, the friars were aided in the struggle against the *babaylan* by the *indios* themselves. This assistance to the friars was motivated by divisions in the native society as was the ardor accompanying the conversion to the Christian faith. Thus, in Bolinao, the greatest and most efficient *anitera* of the town had a brother, also a *babaylan*, who had switched over to the new religion and provided the friars information and insights into the native worship.³ The ultimate victim of this report was his own sister. The Dominicans were able to confiscate and collect the instruments of the *babaylan* with the assistance of *cabezas de barangay* (village headmen) and other citizens of the town.

On the other hand, the Dominicans were aided by recent converts in discovering the sites of ancient worship in caves in the hills surrounding the towns of Sto. Tomas, Tiaong, Lobo, Batangas and Tanaguan, the provinces of Laguna and Batangas. Indeed, the *babaylan* of Batangas were betrayed through the confessional by a recent woman convert who was bothered by

the continuing influence of the priestesses in the province. One male *babaylan* in the same province was denounced by his own son-in-law. In the Dominican missionary's sorties in the cave complexes of Laguna and Batangas, he was accompanied by various members of the *principalia*, native society's nobility class.¹¹

These social divisions need to be examined closely in light of the new political, economic and cultural structures that the Spaniards had brought to the Philippines which might have served to weaken vital bonds between the principal citizens of the indigenous society and the priestly class.

Second, the friars penetrated the aesthetic world of the people. In early and traditional Southeast Asia, as in many pre-colonial communities in the Philippines, the performance of religious functions by spiritual leaders such as the *babaylan* may be seen as part of what can be regarded as theater performance invested with much spirituality. The *babaylan* in trance entrances and draws into her sphere of mystery a sympathetic and empathetic audience. The friars in Tayabas, for example, discovered that it was not enough to deliver *platicas* (homilies) to a skeptical if not unbelieving audience. The Dominican provincial, Fr. Juan de Garrovillas, engaged in a spectacle that might correspond to a *babaylan* dancing while in trance:

The preacher (Fr. Miguel de Talavera) was not through with his sermon, when the door of the church suddenly opened and the provincial, with his companions, Fr. Diego de Sta. Maria and Fr. Diego del Villar, came in half-naked, covered with ashes, lashing their backs with cords, bathed with their own blood in penance for the transgressions committed by the town. After what the preacher said in his sermon, and the scene that was displayed before their very eyes, the whole multitude in the church started to shed abundant tears, and one of the *catalonas* moved by God, stood in a bench and shed abundant tears, confessed publicly her sins and the fraud of the evils that he had been doing, and offered the gold she had on her to the priests to decide what to do with it... The effect was so great that when the news spread to the whole island, the bad seed was eradicated completely. In the whole Tagalog region, there was no longer any trace of the *catalonan*.¹²

The last remark, made in 1596, was, of course, quite presumptuous, for the *babaylan* tradition continued to the end of the Spanish period and beyond it. Unwittingly, however, by the performance of their own functions, the friars also engaged in a theater performance and thus seem to have persuaded not only the *babaylan* but also helped convert the *indios* to Christianity. The friars, perhaps unconsciously, made their bodies as a vehicle for worship and therefore, offered these as alternative to the bodies of the priestesses.

The prayers to the Virgin Mary and the saying of the Mass, when seen in light of the Catholic ritual structure, was an interesting and attractive substitute for the ceremonies supervised by the *babaylan*. Indeed, the Spaniards adopted the policy to merge the ancient ideas ("superstitions") with Catholic ideas to hasten the conversion of the *indios* to Christianity.

Accompanying their sermons were self-flagellations in full view of the *indios*, by which bathed in their own blood in atonement for the sins of their unconverted parishioners and the *babaylan*, they appeared to have convinced the *indios* that their work was more noble and more effective than those of the *babaylan*. Even these were "moved" and gave up the "evils" they had been doing.

Third, by pursuing and challenging the *babaylan* in their own spiritual realm in the mountains and the hinterland and through their own daring and courage, the friars further eroded the power and influence of the priestesses.

Fr. Juan Ybañez might not have known what he had actually accomplished when, in a series of "visitations" upon the cave systems in the hills surrounding the towns of San Pablo and Sto. Tomas in the province of Bay (now Laguna) and the towns of Tiaong, Batangas, Lobo, Galvan and Sala in the province of Batangas, the intrepid Dominican priest managed to destroy the sites of adoration of the most powerful priestesses among the Tagalogs.¹³ This was the Mount Banahaw complex which, even at present, with the ravines and gorges that form it, continues to be the redoubt of enduring spiritual organizations known as *kapatiran* (brotherhood/sisterhood) as shown in the paper of Dr. Alaras.

Ybañez ranged through the caves, accompanied by *personas principales*. When he found the tools and instruments of the priestesses, he broke and destroyed them for everyone to see. His companions quaked with fear as he entered the main place of worship, the *pinacasimbahan*, for it was the abode of the great snake that the *indios* worshipped. There, in the presence of the leading priestess, Ybañez broke her most important equipment, two idols, many pieces of cloth and clumps of human hair, a treasure chest full of precious stones and an ancient bowl that contained the offering of the priestess. Then he said mass, in the presence of the *babaylan*. The witnesses waited for him to burn alive for such was the punishment of unwelcome visitors. When nothing happened, the priestess herself vowed to abandon the old religion and the witnesses of his deed became the friar's followers from that time on.¹⁴

Ironically, as a way of accommodating new religious ideas from the Spaniards and as the resistance by the *babaylan* diminished in the late seventeenth century, the very women accused of diabolic possession behaved in a way that may be regarded as an adaptation to the symbology of the new Catholic religion.

In 1646, many *indios* rose in rebellion against the encomendero Rodrigo de Mesa in Gapan, Nueva Ecija. Their redoubt was the deepest part of the mountains where they were led by an Indio called Cavadi, who carried the title, *Padre Aeterno*, as well as other leaders with titles such as *Dios Hijo* and *Dios Espiritu Santo*. Assisting them was an Indian woman, Yga, who carried the title *Santa Maria*. While the "error" persisted, the hills surrounding Gapan remained restive. Governor Diego Fajardo ordered its suppression. At the head of a contingent of Pampango soldiers, Fray Juan de Abarca, prior of Gapan and Dr. Diego de Tamayo, penetrated the mountains and reduced the uprising "by blood and fire," killing many rebels. The death of Cavadi and Yga immediately led to the pacification of the people.¹⁵

In 1663, an uprising in Oton, Iloilo, was in fact an attempt to establish a new syncretic religion. The *babaylan* Tapar, who had earlier converted to Christianity and had entered into a blood compact with the Spaniards, was now advocating rebellion. In the eyes of the Spaniards, he had made a pact with the "devil."

"Shamelessly garbed in a woman's dress," Tapar went about the villages, appropriating the symbology of the new Catholic religion and granting the leading "witches" (*mayores hechiceros*) the titles of "Eternal Father," the "Holy Trinity," pope and bishops. A number of *sacerdotizas* was also involved, one of whom was described by the Spaniards as "lewd and obscene" and carried the title of "Virgin Mary." When the Spaniards finally caught up with them in their mountain headquarters in 1664, the slain male leaders were brought down to the Jalaur River and were thrown to the crocodiles. To serve as a warning to the townspeople, the *Santissima* was first impaled on a bamboo pole at the mouth of the river for crocodile feed.¹⁶

The conflict between the priestesses and the missionaries was not confined to the battleground in the settlements and the hinterland. As the Christian ideas continued to pervade the indigenous cosmology, a re-working of the *babaylan* ideas took place. Thus, the friars in Bolinao lamented that many people who had embraced Christianity, attended mass and other rituals during Sundays and feast days of the Church, nonetheless obstinately adhered, in their daily lives, to the "errors" of the past and subscribed to the ideas of their mothers and ancestors, thus continuing their support of the *babaylan* and her instruments or tools of power.¹⁷ These ideas had to be purged out of the consciousness of the new Christians.

The syncretism developing among the converts is suggested by the case of Sor Juana de San Antonio, a sixty-eight year old native of the Order of St. Claire, whose ideas about God and divine and human natures became the subject of an investigation by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. A lay nun (*monja lega*), Sor Juana was an *india pampanga* from Batan. In 1671, Sor Juana was believed to have been propagating her ideas among the young nuns of the order for two years already. Her teachings were supposed to have been contained in notebooks which, at the time of the investigation, could not be located. The Holy Office of the Inquisition received reports that Sor Juana had propounded the idea that Mary, the blessed Virgin, was of divine origin because the Holy Trinity had placed small pieces of the Trinity in a beautiful and transparent mass (*masa*) in the womb of St. Anne. Through this mass, God created Mary.¹⁸

Besides, Sor Juana perceived herself to be the full vessel of all of the blood of Jesus Christ, in a manner of a sponge that continually soaks and absorbs the Divine Blood. Such a description left no doubt, even to the more undiscerning priest, that this meant that Sor Juana was even superior to the Blessed Virgin. Only a woman of the *babaylan* tradition could have nurtured such assertive and daring ideas. These ideas might not have been considered more than mildly heretical, had it not been for the fact that Sor Juana was contemplating the idea of opening a new mission of her own in Pampanga, the most populous province in the colony at the time.¹⁹

For these ideas, revealed in dreams and visions, recorded in notebooks and taught to the other religious in the nunnery, Sor Juana was arrested and imprisoned. However, the Inquisition authorities in Manila were unable to decide on her case. They were on the verge of sending her to Mexico for a proper investigation, when she suffered a severe hemorrhage, due allegedly to a liver ailment. The investigation ceased abruptly when she was found dead. The officials concerned gave instructions to the nunnery that she be buried in an inaccessible place and her tomb placed under a heavy weight of thick wooden planks. They asserted that she died of natural death, which in turn put an end to the investigation. But the thick report which recorded her case for posterity gives us an insight into the continuing Spanish concern about the pervasive *babaylan* tradition.²⁰

At what point were the women leaders "tamed," "domesticated," or "pacified"? It is clear from the preceding various evidences in this paper that by the use of brute force, aided by the *indios* themselves or, by showing themselves more capable of "superhuman" powers, the Spaniards, particularly the missionaries, succeeded in weakening the priestesses' hold upon the people. The latter strategy was perhaps much more effective. The priests dared enter sacred groves, dared touch the idols and smashed or burned them in full view of the *indios*. As the friars threw the ashes and the idols' remains into the river or into the wind, the shocked *indios* expected the idols to manifest themselves, the earth to shake and the friars to be burned alive as lightning struck them. But "the strangers with white teeth"

remained alive and unscathed. Such a spectacle contributed to dissuade the people and their women ministers. Afterwards, these became good Christian converts themselves. If they continued with their functions and their rituals, they did so "underground."

While Spanish punitive policy did not altogether destroy the indigenous religion, the vigor and consistency of their campaign eroded the power and authority of the priestesses and contributed to shake them out of their traditional roles and patterns of behavior. They would have achieved their most important objective of political and social hegemony: the establishment of social relations dominated by the Spaniards would have to be preceded by the subordination of women or the strongest among the female sex. Their deliberate assault on the functions of the *babaylan* did have one enduring consequence: the all too real diminution of the status of women in colonial Philippines.

Notes

1. Diego de Aduarte, 'Averiguaciones de instrumentos y materiales de que se valian los Naturales para sacrificar a sus ydolos', Manila, 1 September 1685, *Archivo General de Indias: Filipinas, Legajo 95*. This report discusses the activities of the *babaylan* in the town of Bolinao, Zambales. The town came under the supervision of the Dominicans. Hereinafter cited as the Bolinao report, 1685.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Marcelo de Ribadeneira, O. P., 'Historia de las Archipiélago y Reynos del la Gran China', Barcelona, 1601.
5. 'Report on the [state of babaylanism in Laguna and Batangas], 3 June 1688', *Archivo General de Indias, Filipinas, Legajo 7.4*.
6. Leandro Tormo Sanz, *Lucban, A Town the Franciscans Built*, translated by Antonio Serrano, Philippine Historical Conservation Society, Publication No. 22, Manila, 1971, pp. 77-78.
7. 'Report on the [state of babaylanism in Laguna and Batangas], 3 June 1688', *Archivo General de Indias, Filipinas, Legajo 7*.
8. Ibid.
9. Bolinao Report
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11. 'Report on the [state of babaylanism in Laguna and Batangas], 3 June 1688', op. cit.
12. Leandro Tormo Sanz, op. cit.
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14. Ibid.
15. Gaspar de San Agustin, O. S. A., *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas (1565-1615)*, Madrid 1698, reprinted 1975, p. 660.
16. Ibid., p. 734
17. Bolinao Report
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19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

Body Narratives, Metaphors, and Concepts in Philippine Indigenous Religion

C. Women Spiritual Leaders/Priestesses in Contemporary Times: Bodies Reclaimed, Bodies Enshrined

Consolacion R. Alaras

Ipinagkaloob po ninyo sa amin lahat na
Mabuksan ang tipan ng Mahal na Ina
At doon naroroon ang aming tagumpay
Na ninanasa namin sa haraping araw.

(You have bestowed on all of us
The unfolding of the Covenant of the Great Mother
There lies our triumph
Which we all aspire for in the coming days.)

Such is the prayer nurtured in the womb of various spiritual groups anchored on ancestral and heroic heritage. Found in various configurations of the Philippines - in the hidden mountain wombs, along the open seashores, in the remote countrysides, and even in crowded cities - these spiritual groups are united in the vision and concept of a Covenant with the Great Mother.

The Covenant with the Great Mother unlocks a key to an understanding of the *babayan* tradition which never died, but assumes contemporary forms among the spiritual groups also known as the *Kapatiran* descendants of *Katipunan*. *Kapatiran* is a Filipino non-sexist term for brotherhood and sisterhood. *Katipunan* as the coming together or covenant of the worthy sons and daughters of the Great Motherland is the illustrious name of the 1896 revolutionary movement marked as the first revolution of Asia.

My 19-year fieldwork in the bosom of the *Kapatiran*, partially reported in my book *Pamathalaan: Ang Pagbubukas sa Tipan ng Mahal na Ina* (Prophetic Politics: The Unfolding of the Covenant

of the Great Mother) led me to a deeper understanding of the units of meaning attached to the Covenant of the Great Mother. It is to attest to the mysterious events underlying their belief that I have been called to write a book on their Covenant with the Great Mother.

The Great Mother as *Kapatiran* Ritual Centers of Purification, Enlightenment and Commitment

Most *Kapatiran* groups believe in the unity and equality of powers among the Sacred Family or *Sagrada Familia* - the Father, the Son and the Mother. As a matter of fact, the Mother defines the roles of the Father and the Son. In this light, most *Kapatiran* ritual centers are imaged as the Great Mother's womb for purification, enlightenment and commitment. It is no wonder then that the prominent *Kapatiran* ritual centers are named after a) ancestral mountains associated with a Great Mother (*Mariang Makiling*, *Mariang Banahaw*, and *Mariang Sinukuan*); b) the Holy Trinity as *Sagrada Familia*, *Santisima Trinidad* or *Banal na Angkan* (Holy Family) to emphasize the equal role of the *Mahal na Ina* or the Great Mother; c) some titles of the Blessed Virgin as the Great Mother like *Rosa Mistica* or *Virgen Dolorosa*; and d) women spiritual leaders perceived as Filipino Virgin Mary or Great Mother associated with indigenous power, blessed land (*Maria Victoria Vera Piedad*, *Reyna Casiana*, *Ciudad Mistica de Dios*, *Bagong Herusalem* or New Jerusalem).

Of the three ancestral mountains named after the Great Mother, *Mariang Banahaw* is the most popular since it has been associated with the Philippine Revolution. It is the sacred space which nurtures spiritual brotherhoods/sisterhoods of two types: the ones which maintain ties with the mainstream church and those which take pride in being apart from the mainstream church.

Mount Banahaw named after Mary is also known for a ritual called *pamumuwesto*, a sacrificial pilgrimage or journey from one sacred spot to another for purification, enlightenment and commitment. It is striking to note that this sacred mountain ritual has been imaged as the prototype of the *Katipunan* or the revolutionary initiation rites. The Great Mother as Virgin Mary

embodying the sacred unity agreed upon by the Three Divine Persons or the Holy Trinity is exemplified by the *Kapatiran* prayer song entitled "Birhen Pinagkaisahan" or Virgin Embodying Sacred Unity:

Birhen pinagkaisahan ng
tatlong personang mahal.

Birhen inang santisimang
mahal ina ng awa at sakdalan birhen
birhen lubhang maalam
dinggin mo po ang karaingan.
Birhen pinagkaisahan ng
tatlong personang mahal.

(Virgin embodying sacred unity
agreed upon by the Holy Trinity.)

Virgin Mother Most Holy
Great Mother of Mercy and pure virgin
Virgin most knowing
Hear our pleas.

Virgin embodying sacred unity
agreed upon by the Holy Trinity.)

The titles of the Virgin Mary like the Virgin of Seven Dolors and the Virgin of Assumption have special significance for the *Kapatiran* or ancestral spiritual groups significantly claiming kinship with the *Katipunan* or the revolutionary movement meaning the coming together of the Great Mother and the worthy sons and daughters of the country. The Philippines as the Virgin of Seven Dolors is viewed as the suffering Motherland seeking compassion from her worthy sons and daughters. When *Katipunan* takes place, Philippines will be the crowned and triumphant Virgin Mary ascended into heaven. This then becomes the context of the narrative poem "Ebanghelyo ng Mahal na Birhen," the Gospel of the Blessed Virgin as inherited and cherished by the *Kapatiran* called *Legion de Veteranos*, the group of spiritual which is the revolutionary descendant of the revolution. This 'gospel' depicts the covenant of the Blessed Virgin Mary with her son's disciples as she leaves this world. The 'gospel'

also affirms the covenant of the worthy sons and daughters with each other as they experience the last moments of the Virgin Mary on earth.

Since there is a gospel of the Virgin Mary associated with the gospel of the Motherland Philippines, it is not surprising that there are women spiritual leaders perceived as Filipino Virgin Mary or Great Mother associated with indigenous power, ancestral wisdom, and blessed land. Maria Victoria Vera Piedad is one such holy mother for the *Kapatiran* called *Bromoki* (Brotherhood of Mother's Kids). With chapters all over the Philippines—from Luzon, Visayas to Mindanao—*Bromokis* are envisioned to constitute the body of Maria Victoria Vera Piedad or Mary Victory of True Piety. As the messages of Maria Victoria Vera Piedad prove:

I am the Animasola, General Fatima....that's why people call me Mother the Mother Country. My dear friends, try to love your country. The Philippine flag is your God.... God is here in the Philippines...." (May 10, 1978)

...I have established a brotherhood that was taken lightly marching through ages of sometimes calm sailing, oftenly becoming turbulent. I am the Father, the Son and the Purest of all Spirits in One Triangle. I walk by you in the dark and hold your hand in the light. I crawl if it needs be in your fragile minds and if I find joy then I have saved a destroying false move of an unruly freewill. I climb mountains; I cross oceans to reach you and from where I am, I still give you that gift of love...a basis whereby the universe was created." (June 22, 1979)

Victoria deteriorates with the deterioration of the Brotherhood. Finish up the school at all cost.... Your salvation physical and spiritual, rests there. Put prestige. It will glitter... Everything of *Bromoki* will shatter to register only in a book titled "The Lost Epitaph".

The world had taken all my physical beauty. The same world has drained the physical strength by removal of my merciful juice. I am gripping with pain, but my heart is strong. Have

it bounded by strength of its pounding. So when my spirit stays at the Motherhouse, that refuge serves the consoling gift of all your heart's dedication. I stroll through my lovely children's homes and run along my baby in content specially the times they work in good spiritual harmony. Did you not know that everytime there is *gusot* (discord), I am weak? The energy passes in again as you reconcile, and what a relief. (January 1, 16, 1978).

Another embodiment of Great Mother reminiscent of Maria Victoria Vera Piedad is Reyna or Queen Casiana of the *Bakuran ng Dios Espiritu Santo* or the Ritual Center of God the Holy Spirit. Queen Mother Casiana narrates her own "mystery sa espiritu" or call of the Spirit in her message on February 13, 1982 at Canda Ibaba, Lopez, Quezon. The following is my translation in English of this message written in Tagalog, a Filipino language:

As chosen, as decreed, the power bestowed, in my own understanding; as someone ordinary who does not read the Book of God; in my silence, in my solitude, I can say I am at peace as a Catholic, with faith in God, with faith in a Divine Guidance as my path to God.

In my silence, my inner self in the company of my husband and children, no desire except to give modest comfort and to have unity and peace and purity at home. As a wife with no desire and thought except to fulfill the duty of a mother and wife, to have an ordinary home and to repay God's blessings.

Everyday, as I wake up, all I utter is "God the Father! God the Son! God the Holy Spirit! Thanks for all your blessings everyday and in the coming days and for giving a glorious life". Again at this moment I declare the mystery of God Who Alone Knows.

In a desire we cannot achieve what I have now is a power mysteriously bestowed and gifted from Above. As one chosen, I image and communicate to all environment, nation that what happened to me is hard to fathom. But the mystery which I experienced happened through my

mother who spoke to me and through me—thus changing my voice, and through me, I heard my mother. And in that beginning, I read the Book of God since I had no awareness or faith in trance or mediumship. Then began my enlightenment, and I started proclaiming the Power of God and as I received it, I committed myself to action. From God, the Divine Source overflowed to me—gave me the answer to be light in my own home.

I was told: God the Holy Spirit will descend upon me in bliss. Since then, God said 'God the Holy Spirit be with you.' So the descent of God the Holy Spirit upon me I scattered to the world. And the ground of my mother became known as the Sacred Ground of God. What was communicated was God the Father on earth. So through me God the Holy Spirit descended on earth.

Thus the importance of God the Holy Spirit's descent here first in the sacred ground—which is a beauty which should have been radiant all over the places of the world; and should be received by everyone as a Holy Spirit heard, and embracing everyone's life and nurturing the life of everyone as a concrete image of human life.

Thus in the coming of the Holy Spirit here on earth will be our measured steps, just like those of Jesus Christ. But in God, we will not make a step which in an instant will mean light for us. It will not be knowledge which we will use, but the purity of mind which can understand the other.

So here I am, said to possess power, called by God to be a queen and His throne—for you to receive in your hearts what I now say from Him—to be implanted in hearts, understood and thus bear beauty, that through me something divine and wonderful began! Glory be!

Maria Victoria Vera Piedad and Queen Casiana exemplify two women spiritual leaders and priestesses in contemporary times. They are Great Mother figures who continue to embody the *babayan* tradition earlier discussed by Fe Mangahas and Milagros Guerreo. Since I was not able to meet Maria Victoria Vera Piedad

in person—she left this earth in 1979—my experience of her was through her taped messages, personal accounts of followers, and even mystical experiences of her presence.

Reyna or Queen Casiana is a dramatic figure whom I am fortunate to have known in person. As a matter of fact, when she died, I was one of those given the chance to see her lifeless body on a simple bed; but even in death, her mysterious presence persisted. Her reign as Queen in her sacred ground was full of signs for an unfolding fulfillment in the Philippines and the world. She was able to manifest signs of power anchored in a sacred ancestral heritage.

In truth, Maria Victoria Vera Piedad and Reyna Casiana embody parables of power which subvert the dominant structure of expectation that privileges the oppressive and the exploitative. The utterances and ritual movements of these two great mothers pierce through the veil of hypocrisy, dishonesty and greed to exalt purity of mind and heart.

The Great Mother as the Union of the Pre-Colonial Faith and the Mainstream Religion

The Blessed Virgin Mary is God the Mother, Nature Mother (the Great Mother Sea, the Great Mother Mountain, and the Great Mother Plains) and Motherland to most *Kapatiran* because she embodies sacred life, heroic care and embracing wisdom. This is shown in the text entitled "Amang Makapangyarihan" or *Father Almighty from Tres Persona Solo Dios* of Kinabuhayan, Mount Banahaw. As indicated in my English translation of the original text, Father Almighty speaks more of the Great Mother:

Father Almighty, loving us in truth
May your Divine Wisdom come to help us.

Mother of enlightenment, loving us in truth
May you bestow on us
the power of our nation.

Father Ellustre, loving us in truth,
May you bestow on us
the peace of our nation.

Infinite God, loving us in truth,
 May you bestow on us
 the peace of our nation.
 God the Holy Spirit, loving us in truth
 May you bestow on us
 the peace of our nation.

God Who embraced us, in our death,
 May you open the door,
 Father, what we will pass through.

Mother of the sea, loving us in truth,
 May you open the door
 of your kingdom.

Mother of the plains, loving us in truth,
 May you bestow on us
 the prosperity of our nation.

Mother of the mountain, loving us in truth,
 May you bestow on us
 life without end.
 Father Most Holy, without beginning and end,
 May you help us
 for the peace of our nation.

Rizal of power, loving us in truth,
 May you help us
 for the peace of our nation.

Mother of the Philippines, loving us in truth,
 May you please unfold
 the flag, Mother of peace.

God of our Ancestors, loving us in truth,
 May you bestow on us
 the peace of our nation.

The Great Mother as the Guardian of Sacred/Prophetic Politics

Power that is associated with the Great Mother is meaningful power, not brute force. In the same vein, prophetic politics upholds or exalts an ancestral and heroic heritage: the union of the spiritual and the material; the intuitive and the rational; the individual and the collective; the poetic and the political; the sacred and the heroic; the self and the cosmos; the local and the global; and the prophetic and the pragmatic.

I remember how, right after the publication of my 1988 book on *Pamathalaan* or Prophetic Politics,¹ I would tell local and foreign audiences that one day *Pamathalaan* will be the Filipino contribution to the concept of sacred or prophetic politics. And now, as I read *The Soul of Politics* by Jim Wallis, I cannot but rejoice in the hope that finally the time has come to rediscover the lost tradition of Pamathalaan or prophetic politics in our country.

A new framework, new language, and new visions could emerge from resurrecting our most basic personal and social values. Many of these values derive from the cores of our best religious traditions and are common to people who have long been politically and culturally separated from one another. Central to any new politics will be a new spirituality—indeed, a renewal of some of our oldest spirituality—creating a moral sensitivity that refuses to separate political ideas from their consequences for human beings and for the rest of the creation.

A prophetic politics rooted in moral principles could again spark people's imagination and involvement. We need a personal ethic of moral responsibility, a social vision based on bringing people together, a commitment to justice with the capacity also for reconciliation, an economic approach governed by the ethics of community and sustainability, a restored sense of our covenant with the abandoned poor and the damaged earth, a reminder of shared values that calls forth the very best in us, and a renewal of citizen politics to fashion a new political future. But to shape a new future we must first find the moral foundations and resources for a new social vision.

The Great Mother as the Embodiment of the Weak and the Oppressed

Closely related to the unit of meaning which values the Great Mother as the Guardian of sacred or prophetic politics is the view that the Great Mother embodies the weak and the oppressed. Consider the case of Mother Victoria Vera Piedad who had been known to reveal herself in many instances as an old beggar or a sick person. This thought has alerted her followers to be on guard when they see helplessness and pain in various forms. The thought that someone encountered as dispossessed and deprived can very well be a manifestation of the Virgin Mary in the person of somebody like Mother Piedad invites followers to see God in human flesh; and thus to practice virtues.

To enshrine then the countless dispossessed, displaced, disempowered, and disinherited is the *Kapatiran* dream to build a *Dambana ng Bayan* or Shrine for the Nation—a shrine which transcends structure to become a living shrine to uplift the countless poor and oppressed.

The women spiritual leaders regarded as Filipino Virgin Mary or the sacred Motherland invoke heaven and earth for the radiance and power to transform every possible space into a healing, sacred space. For this reason, the *Kapatiran* is now in the process of uniting all the *Kapatiran* ritual centers dispersed by desecrating colonization, dehumanizing greed, and alienating education. Hopefully, the scattered lights of the misunderstood and marginalized *babaylan* tradition will soon find the center page, rather than the darkened footnote of history.

Notes

1. Consolacion R. Alaras, *Pamathalaan: Ang Pagbubukas sa Tipan ng Mahal na Ina*, Quezon City at Alemanya BAKAS, 1988.
2. Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics*, New York, The New Press and Orbis Book, 1994.

But isn't it sexual? The Freudian Slip Beneath the Ethnographic Gaze

Laurel Kendall

'But isn't it sexual?' This paper owes its genesis to the presentation of another — 'Of Gods and Men: Performance, Possession, and Flirtation in Korean Shaman Ritual' — to the questions it raised, and to my bemusement when more than one respondent, on more than one occasion, insisted that sexuality "explained" the activities of female Korean shamans.¹ This essay attempts to unpack the several assumptions that sexuality elides when it is inscribed upon this body of data as, in Michel Foucault's words, "the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct . . . a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends."²

The Ethnographic Problem: "Ambiguous Sexuality Wafting"

The problem was of my own making. In my earlier ethnography, I had written that "an element of ambiguous sexuality wafts about the *mansin's* (shaman's) performance."³ 'Of Gods and Men' explored the sources of that ambiguity. The presentation began with a disturbing memory from the field of a male spectator pinching the breast of a dancing shaman while he secured a thousand-won bill under her chest band. I used this image to approach a nagging question: why is the Korean shaman profession constructed as both disreputable and a service to the gods? I located my answer in the domain of dance. Dance, a source of pleasure and play, becomes in shaman ritual an amusement for the gods as well as the spectators, all of whom are said "to play" (*nolda*). As a gateway for the release of playful impulses and powerful emotions and as a sign and instrument of healing, dance also carries the danger of emotional abandon and disgrace. In extreme cases, the gods seize the dancing woman and claim her as a shaman.

A colleague wrote to thank me for a copy of my paper on "erotic dance." Erotic dance? What had I said?

I had included dancers' descriptions of a sense of joy, mirth, or excitement rising from the belly to the chest and noted that this rising of spirited feelings (*hung, sinparam*) mapped the same trajectory as that taken by the personal body-governing gods who rise up when clients borrow shamans' costumes to dance, and by choking, potentially fatal emotions of rage and frustration that rise to the chest in "fire sickness" (*hwabyong*) when they have been held too long inside. I had written that in shaman rituals, the dance becomes a gateway for the expression of strong emotion in the idiom of spirits who, when they "play" in the person of a shaman or a client, vent their desires and appetites and attain (temporary) satisfaction. Korean shaman rituals dramatize the obverse of the Buddhist ideal of transcendence and of the Confucian injunction to controlled moderation; they deal with the consequences of worldly craving, using the dance as one idiom of both symptom and cure. I suggested that these associations, and the attendant possibility of being possessed by either spirits or compulsions and consequently disgraced, vested both dancing and the women who dance for a living with an aura of moral ambivalence⁴.

It must be Sexual

One respondent to an oral presentation of my paper insisted that sexual cravings necessarily explained the sensations Koreans described as rising from the belly. In a dialogue that exhausted the question-and-answer period, I was equally stubborn in my insistence that dancing Koreans did not read these experiences as sexual, that sexual desire—expressed most explicitly in the dancing compulsion—was but one of several emotions that Koreans expressed through the dancing, possessed or otherwise. Was lust more profound than the other bundled appetites and cravings that even nominal Korean Buddhists would recognize as obstacles to enlightenment or, in popular religion, as burdens weighing upon the restless dead? Is sexuality the engine that propels the dancer and runs the dance? A classic Freudian reading would have it so. Is the power that shamans claim through their

danced possession by (mostly but not exclusively) male gods the regenerative power of sexuality turned to ritual ends? This is what respondents to my paper seemed to insist upon. One discussant even delicately suggested that I should "not be afraid" to give my ethnography a sexual gloss. Why hadn't I seen it? Was I "hung up?" I was challenged, aware of corroborating examples elsewhere in the world, but I maintained an abiding unease with what seemed to be a reductionistic interpretation of the Korean material.

Women, Bodies, and Sex

In the 1970s, anthropologists concerned with what were then called "sex roles" asked, "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" Sherry Ortner, who phrased the question, argued that while the symbolic relegation of women to a lower order of existence is necessarily a cultural construct, the near universality of such perceptions is grounded in "the body and the natural procreative functions specific to women alone."⁵ Much subsequent anthropological writing echoed this assumption that the specificities of disparate cultures constructed women within the biological "givens" of the female body.⁶ While Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead,⁷ as well as Bryan Turner⁸ all explicitly eschew a simple biological determinism, they nevertheless assume that much of the anxious life of a given society is constructed around women's bodies as instruments of sexuality and reproduction. This is the obverse and conscious rejection of an abiding but more simplistic assumption, sometimes encountered in the literature on women and spirit possession (see below). The notion that sexuality *explains* the social practices of women, *a priori*, may be traced to the historical process Foucault describes as the "hysterization of women's bodies," the creation of a discourse about women's sexuality as innately problematic and of women's problems as innately sexual.⁹

The publication of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* prompted a veritable cottage industry in social and historical writings on the body as a site of power, domination, and control.¹⁰ These efforts have opened the question of gender to complex historical and cultural analyses, but they have also privileged an

embodied agenda for the study of women. A few voices of caution have been raised against the ease with which such endeavors might slide into an older tendency to define "woman" through the body, sex, and reproduction to the exclusion of other dimensions of experience, and to impose an arbitrary fixity upon embodied experiences for both women and men.¹¹

That the forms of women's and men's bodily experience can be considered "concrete, manifold, and changing" is a consequence of Foucaultian liberation from, in Gayle Rubin's words, "the traditional understanding of sexuality as a natural libido yearning to break free of social constraint"¹² to an awareness that sexualities are multiple and both culturally and historically constituted.¹³ Eroticism is thus one dimension of a larger Geertzian question restated by Scheper-Hughes and Lock as, ". . . whether any expression of human emotion and feeling—whether public or private, individual or collective, whether repressed or explosively expressed is ever free of cultural shaping and cultural meaning. The most extreme statement of Geertz's position, shared by many of the newer psychological and medical anthropologists, would be that without culture we would simply not know how to feel."¹⁴

What does this material bring to the question, "But isn't it sexual?" First, recognizing the importance of contemporary studies that regard women, and in particular the sexuality of women, as culturally and historically constituted, one must also identify a deep-rooted impulse in Western social science writing to approach the question of women through sexuality and reproduction, an impulse that may obscure other possible readings.¹⁵ Second, a plea for the recognition of culturally—constituted ideologies of eroticism, or any other expression of human feeling, is a plea for ethnographic precision and imagination and an honest recognition of the profound difficulty of interpreting human motivation in the absence of confident psychobiological "givens."

And now to Korea.

Is Possession Erotic?

The idea that shamanic experience implies a sexual union between the female shaman and her guardian god does seem to lurk in some corners of the Korean popular imagination. In the film version of "Portrait of a Shaman" (*Munyodo*), released in the 1970s, but *not* in Kim Tongni's original novella, the seasoned shaman and her initiate periodically ingest a blood-red concoction of Chinese medicine, whereupon they emit orgasmic shrieks while painted images of brawny gods leer up in front of the camera. In fact, the use of hallucinogens is unknown in Korean shamanic practice. More recently, an initiate who came to the shaman profession after attending graduate school in the United States and reading Eliade, evolved a signature dance style that required her to kneel in front of the altar and bend her torso backward, gestures which Western observers readily interpreted as a sexual reception of the god. Her Korean shaman colleagues found these same movements strange and referred to her performance as the "genital dance" (*poji chum*).¹⁶ Both portrayals suggest the influence of foreign notions of an eroticized shamanism.

Shamans have told me that because *most* (but not all) of the gods are male, or *if* predominantly male gods possess a shaman (rather than female gods or divine couples), a shaman will have a troubled marital history. Some shamans claim that jealous gods prevent them from having marital relations with their husbands, but other *mansin* scoff at this.¹⁷ Songjuk Mansin told me, "Male gods don't like what is between man and woman," a statement that suggested her own agreement. Similarly, Okkyong's Mother, who enjoys the most stable marriage of all of the shamans I know well, affirmed that she sleeps upstairs in her shrine while her husband sleeps on the ground floor. A shaman colleague, describing a similar arrangement, asserted that "men stink" (a literal translation).

Yongsu's Mother complained that her dead husband, installed as a guardian god in her shrine, had prevented her from marrying again after an early widowhood, but she made it clear that the god was no substitute for a flesh and blood husband, that she would have preferred not to live alone. An aged shaman, initiated while still a young woman, wept when she described her many

long years without a mate. In sum, *mansin* may boast of their gods' jealousy as a measure of their gods' power, an attribute of the shaman's own professional success. The gods do not, in most instances, replace absent husbands as sexual partners. If some shamans use the gods as a justification for avoiding sexual contact with their husbands, this seems more an expression of distaste than a divine cure for or sublimation of repressed sexuality. Korean shamans defy what Pat Caplan has dubbed "the so-called 'hydraulic' model of sexuality,"¹⁸ the Freudian assumption that an innate and problematic sexual drive must necessarily find expression or sublimation, if not in men, then in gods. The Korean material contains only the thinnest and most idiosyncratic suggestion that these needs might ever find expression in some Korean shamans' experience of possession.

Among the many scholars who have published on the subject of Korean shamanism, to my knowledge only Jung Young Lee has attempted to make a case for "a fundamental motive in Korean shamanism through a study of sexual repression."¹⁹ Lee's study suffers from an excess of innuendo and inaccuracy—old men encountered in dreams are necessarily objects of sexual attraction, prayers for fertility are ultimately expressions of thwarted sexuality (rather than thwarted desires for sons), and the installation of guardian deities (who need not be male) in the initiate's shrine invariably establishes a sexual relationship between shaman and deity. The first two claims are unsubstantiated, either in the body of Lee's work or elsewhere in the literature on Korean shamanism. The third rests on the testimony of one shaman informant, possessed by a divine general, who "dreamed that she went to bed with the general."²⁰

It is revealing that Lee utterly confuses the term "sexual repression"—the forcing of inexpressible sexual needs and desires into the subconscious mind—with "sexual oppression"—the systematic subjugation of women on the basis of gender.²¹ This is an honest mistake insofar as psychological interpretations of female trance phenomena reveal an almost unconscious tendency to dissolve the social into the sexual. Consider, for example, psychiatrist and medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman's field observation of a Taiwanese possession cult:

Informants described it [possession] to me as one of the most exciting experiences they had ever witnessed or participated in. This must have been especially true for lower-class mothers and grandmothers, ordinarily trapped in the physical confines and daily routines of their homes. Cult members did not merely trance: they danced, jumped around, sang, exhibited glossolalia, gave voice to strong emotions, and sometimes engaged in activities with strong sexual overtones. For example, men and women touched and massaged each other; they jumped around together; women rubbed the inside of their thighs and men exhibited rapid thrusting movements of the pelvis; at times the ecstatic frenzy of the trances resembled orgasmic behavior.²²

In this passage, "orgasmic behavior" and "sexual overtones" are the judgments of a clinical observer who deems the excitement of possession "especially true for lower-class mothers and grandmothers" as a release from "the physical confines and daily routines of their homes." The passage makes a reflex link between social constraints, sexual repression, and ritual release, and again, finds a locus in the problematic bodies of women, although pelvis-thrusting men were also present. Consider also Melford Spiro's well-known description of women in Burmese *nat* cults:

Restricting this discussion to female shamans, it will be recalled that, typically, females are possessed by a *nat* [spirit], and/or decide to marry a *nat* who had previously possessed them, either in adolescence or in or near menopause. These are females, in short, who are either first experiencing the mounting pressures of sexual desire and therefore—especially in Burma, where any physical contact with the opposite sex is prohibited—of sexual frustration, or they are females who, at menopause, are experiencing a heightening of their sex drives combined with the fear of losing their sexual attractiveness. The attendant frustration of the menopausal females is further intensified (in a large percentage of cases) by marriages with socially weak and sexually inadequate husbands. Add to this a previous observation, *viz.*, that the majority of those possessed, being of lower-class origin, are also

suffering from status deprivation, and it then becomes at least plausible that one explanation for the differential effect of *nat* festivals is differential drive-intensity. That is, it is the women with the strongest frustrations (sexual, prestige, etc.) who are most susceptible to possession.²³

By Spiro's logic, Burmese women respond to menarche and menopause with an emotional script that would not be out of place in an American women's magazine. And as in American women's magazines, "sexual attractiveness" is assumed to be at least as important to a woman's esteem as "prestige, etc." The contribution of Burmese culture to these constructions of self is that of a restrictive sluice gate, imposing sexual segregation upon the torrents of spring. The passage assumes a clinical familiarity with the subjects' "sexual frustration," "heightening of their sex drives," and "marriages with socially weak and sexually inadequate husbands," but elsewhere Spiro implies that these deductions must necessarily have been commonsensical:

When interviewed, these shamans describe the onset of possession as a highly pleasurable physical act, accompanied by deep and accelerated breathing, palpitations, and tingling of the flesh. The descriptions sounded very much like the description of sexual orgasm, but I could not pursue this line of inquiry because of *the near impossibility in Burma of discussing sexual matters with females* (emphasis added).²⁴

Spiro, at least, asked the shamans what the sensations of trance felt like. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead made inductive associations in their description of the Balinese trance dancer fallen backward onto the ground "writhing in some sort of orgasmic climax."²⁵ Perhaps possession behavior and erotic experience have so thoroughly bled together within the ethnographic gaze because, as Scheper-Hughes and Lock suggest, "[i]t is sometimes during the experience of sickness, as in moments of deep trance or sexual transport, that mind and body, self and other become one."²⁶ For their part, Scheper-Hughes and Lock maintain a distinction between different kinds of experiences that may "sometimes" be equivalent in their consequences. They urge that such experiences be

studied as part of an ambitious project to understand "the mindful body, as well as the self, social body, and body politic."²⁷ Such challenges are foreclosed when one domain of experience, "deep trance," is subordinated to the explanatory power of another, "sexual transport." The association of possession and sexual experience is compounded when the subject is a woman who dances. The Western tradition has long associated dancing with sexual expression.²⁸ The Korean tradition also views the dancing woman as at least potentially sexually available but in very specific contexts.

To summarize, the question "But isn't it sexual?" seems to have been provoked by strong (Western) associations. In the literature, possession experiences have sometimes been described as "erotic" or equivalent to "orgasm," a particularly tempting association where those possessed are women, socially oppressed, and consequently (it is assumed) sexually repressed. Most Korean shamans are women and most (but not all) of the gods who claim any one shaman are male. Therefore (by the logic of a flawed deduction) shamans experience possession either sexually or as sublimation. The sex question is posed primarily because Korean shamans are women.

This path of association—women, possession, dance, sex—is at least loosely "Freudian"; ultimate causes are situated in the individual subconscious, in drives that find expression, satisfaction, or sublimation through ritual participation, dance, and the experience of possession. But "isn't it sexual?" may also indicate a different and more subtle line of interpretation, one that could be characterized as "Bakhtinian" or even "Foucault-Bakhtinian". Its roots are in Mikhail Bakhtin's characterization of a medieval and renaissance folk culture that "brought the world close to man, gave it a bodily form, and established a link through the body and bodily life" whose regenerating power was celebrated in carnivalistic portrayals of eating, drinking, copulation, and defecation.²⁹ The rediscovery of Bakhtinian body language collides with post-Foucaultian studies' emphasis on the body as a site for social relations of power and domination, offering the promise both of avoiding sexual reductionism and of circumventing Parker's complaint that expressions of sexuality tend to be de-eroticized in social analysis.

Body Language?

The Bakhtinian scheme inverts the premise that all things come from psychobiological drives; rather, it is the body that takes the world into itself, becoming both its metaphor and metonymic filter. In Jean Comaroff's words, "The body mediates all action upon the world and simultaneously constitutes both the self and the universe of social and natural relations of which it is a part."³⁰ Dance, as Hanna notes, "focuses awareness on the body and its associations."³¹ Sexual expressions in ritual dance may be about sex, the emphasis in Hanna's study, but where this is so, they may also "charge" other dimensions of social and economic life with sexual power, as Comaroff's work abundantly demonstrates. Comaroff describes the organizing sexual metaphors of a Tswana dance, performed to welcome male initiates after their return from the bush, as a regenerative replication of the Tswana social world. The different positions assumed by the dancing men and women and the different movements they assumed in the dance, the lateral rolling motions of the women and the vertical, or phallic movement of the upright sticks held by the men "implied not only the complementarity of male-female sexuality but the distinction between agnatic rank and matrilineality. . . . The map of the dance floor also replicated the spatial order of the social world, its organization of center and periphery, its opposed yet complementary relations between male and female."³² Comaroff postulates a widespread use of bodily metaphors in such world-defining dance forms, citing a similar emphasis on male "phallic" leaps and female lateral swaying in a fertility ritual of the Umeda people of the West Sepik District of New Guinea, described by Alfred Gell,³³ and Eric Ten Raa's description of mimed copulation in a ritual performed by the Sandawe of central Tanzania for the purpose of making the country fertile.³⁴ Danced celebrations of sexuality and Bakhtinian "bodily life" were precisely what provoked missionary ire in many parts of the world and, in some instances, resulted in local denials of prior practices³⁵

When an indigenous intelligentsia internalizes Western judgments, the result may be expurgated reinscriptions of custom. Frédérique Apffel Marglin describes the nearly vanished

devadasis of Puri, temple dancers and ritual specialists who celebrate the auspicious dimensions of female sexuality and fertility: "well-being and health or more generally . . . all that creates, promotes, and maintains life."³⁶ The *devadasi's* identity as a sexual being, as reflected in the link between temple dancing and prostitution, is central to Marglin's analysis of the *devadasi's* auspicious associations. To reach this understanding, Marglin first found it necessary to read through a process of historical reinterpretation. Indian reformers had attempted to retrieve Indian dance as an art form distinct from the onus of prostitution. It was claimed that the *devadasi* were originally chaste virgins, meant only for the gods, who were later debased by degenerate rulers and rich and powerful men, or that economic hardship had forced the *devadasis* into prostitution.³⁷

We turn again to the Korean material with an awareness both of the expressive potential of the danced body, and of the likelihood of denials and redefinitions. Indeed, for the last twenty-five years, I have listened with amusement to emphatic denials of the existence of a living, vital, Korean shaman tradition. In less than ten years, I saw elements of Bakhtinian body humor — mimed phallic display, defecation, and the unceremonious tossing away of a soiled baby — disappear from the performance of a rural masked dance tradition as it gained popularity among students and urbanites and was no longer performed as a celebration punctuating the agricultural cycle. Are the auspicious forces engendered by a Korean shaman's *kut* (her major ritual) in any sense generated by a danced and performed expression of positive sexual forces? Here, as elsewhere, the shamanic experience is realized in the performing body of the shaman.³⁸ Drumming and percussion inspire lively dancing and the inspiration to speak "the true words of the spirits." A successful *kut* resolves, in an atmosphere of play, the vexations (*soksanghada*) of the gods and ancestors and satisfies their tremendous appetites (*yoksim*). But are these "vexations" and "appetites," expressed through the dancing, miming, and speaking body of the shaman, innately sexual? Is there any evidence at all that this should be the cause? This passage caused some of my readers to think so:

The *mansin* (shaman) who performs the Official's play (the segment of a shaman ritual that appeases a particularly greedy god) is . . . encouraged to dance her way to the far sidelines and coax the men into accepting an empty wine cup which she fills to the brim. . . . Her gesture is suggestive. To fill a man's cup outside the intimacy of kinship suggests the behavior of a woman paid to serve men's pleasure, the hospitality offered in a wine house . . . [during the Official's play] the *mansin* who distributes the [Official's] . . . wine encourages a spectator of either sex to dance a few bars with her in the enthusiasm of the moment.³⁹

The few bars of dance described here are distinct from the jumps, accompanied by percussive drum beats, that bring on possession.⁴⁰ When shamans dance a few steps while selling the Official's wine, and when they dance a slow and graceful prelude to the jumping dance of possession, they execute the basic steps performed at Korean country celebrations, arms stretched out from the shoulders and bent slightly at the elbows to gesture rhythmically as the dancer takes slow steps with slight bends of the knee. The grace of the dancer is in her arms, her strength and flexibility in her shoulders. Women dance this way with each other, and men with men. Indeed, the women with whom I danced at a village Mother's Day picnic told me that they could not imagine how Americans had any fun at parties where, as I had told them, men and women "played together."

Such dancing, in and of itself, is neither explicitly gendered nor erotically charged. To dance at a *kut* or a country party is to "play" (*nolda*), to amuse oneself in a relatively unrestrained and pleasurable moment. Sexual expression, danced or otherwise, is euphemized as "play," but certainly as a subset and not a generative form.⁴¹ Between women and men, dancing takes on a flirtatious cast (but can we call it "erotic"?) when a woman — a *kisaeng* or a shaman — invites a man to dance and pours him a cup of wine. In the Official's play, the gesture is ambiguous, since the shaman acts in the persona of a masculine god, a "man" dancing with a man.⁴²

In her *Dance, Sex and Gender*, Judith Hanna cites selections from my 1985 ethnography to present the interactions of Korean shamans and male spectators as one among many other

examples of "aphrodisiac dancing . . . which conveys the gender role of sexual object or partner."⁴³ The reader might never realize that this material comes from an ethnography subtitled *Women in Korean Ritual Life*, that it is the men who are marginal at Korean shaman rituals. Taken as a whole, Hanna's ethnographic overview of sexual expression through dance unravels some of the many different contexts, stakes, and consequences of such expression: in courtship, in prostitution, as an expression of union with the sacred, as a means of coping with supernatural forces, as a sex-role script, or as a sublimation. Her interpretation of dance as the gendered body's mediation of an "instinctual sexual drive," however, leads her to appropriate decontextualized data in support of a universal psychobiological "truth." Hanna links "the sexuality of dance and its potential to excite" to her quantifiable, verifiable observation that "[d]ancing can lead to altered states of consciousness (with changed physiological patterns in brain wave frequency, adrenalin, and blood sugar) and hence to altered social action."⁴⁴

My Korean data appear in Hanna's study under the heading "Seduction of Forces and Female Shamans," a section intended to illustrate that dance not only can be "performed to arouse the passion of a human lover, but [that] it has sexual overtones in relationship to overcoming the forces of nature."⁴⁵ The selling of a cup of wine, a mildly nuanced flirtation, becomes, in this appropriation, an act of sexual arousal equivalent to a striptease. A marginal bit of business becomes the central encounter of a complex ritual process. What is assumed to happen between female shamans and male spectators "explains" what must then necessarily happen between shamans and gods.

Some representations in Korean popular culture—and, I suspect, many Korean men—assume that shamans are sexually promiscuous.⁴⁶ Recall that it was a male spectator's tweak of a shaman's breast that caused me to write about "performance, possession, and flirtation" in the first place. The stereotype is a function both of what shamans do—their public performance—and who they are (by virtue of what they do)—women who earn a livelihood outside the constraints and protections of respectable family life and who are simultaneously independent and vulnerable to harassment. Shamans whom I have known seem

anxious to preserve their reputations and genuinely vexed by importunate men.⁴⁷ Is this flirtation/harassment a necessary part of the *kut*? From at least the turn of the century, some *kut* were always performed in shrines away from home, sometimes without the knowledge of the sponsor's husband.⁴⁸ *Kut* were performed within the women's quarters of the palace and,⁴⁹ if we are to believe an old genre painting, in the segregated women's quarters of elite eighteenth-century homes. Thus, while shamans may, on the one hand, exploit the men's presence by selling lucky wine, and on the other, risk the men's harassment, the men's presence with its potential for play is not essential to the successful performance of a Korean shaman ritual. An efficacious, auspicious ritual does not require the energies unleashed by a brief heterosexual danced encounter. Rather it is the gods and ancestors who must play and feast to their satisfaction while spectators, particularly the sponsoring woman, are encouraged to dance to satisfy their own body-governing spirits.

Korean shaman rituals do include some more general representations of Bakhtinian "bodily life," most notably in the final send-off of wandering ghosts (*y Úngsil*) in which the performing shaman mimics the manner of their death, clutching her throat and rolling her eyes for the hanged, pantomiming dysentery, or simulating childbirth by dropping a metal bowl with a clatter from under her skirts.⁵⁰ In this exorcistic sequence, the shaman's play suggests not so much the celebration of a regenerative life force as a comfortingly humorous acknowledgment of the terrors of the mortal body.

Manifestations of sexual appetite are mimed in a small bit of business when a shaman seizes a dried fish, drumstick, or gong mallet, thrusts it out from the vicinity of her well-clothed genitals, and draws it up, usually pointing in the direction of the ritual's female sponsor. Sometimes the phallus (I think we can safely call it a phallus) is manipulated under the shaman's costume to suggest an erection. This is a bit of improvisational business, not a requisite element of the formal structure of the *kut* as recorded by folklorists. (So far as I know, folklorists have not bothered to record it.) The gesture is sharp and quick, always too quick for my camera. However often performed, it is almost invariably met with giggles from the spectators and an exchange

of smirks among the shaman team. When Songjuk Mansin wrapped the dried fish in her costume vest and proceeded to rub it, Yongsu's mother expressed humorously exaggerated disgust, swatting with her drumstick at Songjuk's hands and at the makeshift phallus. At another *kut*, Yongsu's mother complained to Songjuk Mansin that the Spirit Warrior, manifested by a third shaman, was making too many demands of the client. To underscore her point, she improvised a phallus with a length of twisted towel, held out taunted, and muttered "too much of this" as she gave it a thrust and a jerk.

What does this body play signify? The gods who receive a phallus in passing are among the most stereotypically demanding (the Official and the Spirit Warrior), not the highest gods (the Mountain God, the Heavenly King, the House Lord) whose dignified portrayals in *kut* are briefer and far less amusing to the spectators. Gods of middling rank have less shame and are consequently more active in stirring up trouble in client households. When they appear in *kut* they level outrageous and comically executed demands for food, music, and cash, and are met with equally stubborn resistance from the female spectators. The shaman's humorous portrayals make it possible for shamans and clients to engage the gods in a bargaining, bantering process of reconciliation. In caricature, the god's phallus is less an instrument of domination, or object of desire, than one more comic sign of a demanding, overbearing appetite, "too much of this." Could the gesture and the remark just possibly be a shaman's comment upon the masculine gender? When I saw a shaman, in the persona of the Official, playfully tweak a client's breast, I began to wonder.

Conclusion

Is it sexual? If so, then not in predictable ways. It would be difficult to read the phallic play described above as an expression of repressed sexual desire, or view these tumescent gods as idealized alternatives to mortal men. Indeed, they seem very much the opposite. If, as the Foucault-Bakhtinians would have it, expressions of bodily life make statements about other things, then the gods' phallic exhibitionism underscores the general tenor

of their dealings with mortals; they are, like lusty mortal men, bothersome and demanding. This is a measure of their power and of their obvious foibles. The "drag" act, Judith Butler suggests, is the "site of a certain ambivalence" against the order of things that can be both an expression of surrender and of insurrection.⁵¹ Following Rosalind Morris's caution, this playful parody should not be over read as a serious act of resistance.⁵²

Let us not, once again, mistake a part for the whole. That some shamans sometimes improvise phalluses adds a gloss to their portrayal of a particular category of masculine gods and gendered relationships more generally. These comic portrayals no more "explain" the sum of shamanic performance in sexual terms than does the shaman's occasional harassment by men or the selling of cups of wine. Such phenomena might, however, contribute to an analysis of gendered perceptions of a sexual Other. Performance offer a rich and subtle ground for such a project, as the work of Judith Butler, Linda Williams, Jennifer Robertson, and others suggests,⁵³ but this ground is also mined with booby traps. Ritual, myth, and art may, in Geertzian terms, show us "how people feel about things"⁵⁴ but interpretation comes through the reading eye, and there's the rub. The burden is on the anthropologist to provide the best and most valid reading possible, knowing that if it is worth considering, it is also worthy of contestation.

In other places, I have offered my own reading of the Korean shaman's relationship with her gods.⁵⁵ In this essay, I have been concerned with misreading, with how an observer, influenced by psychobiological interpretations of human—and particularly female—behavior could draw commonsensical but ultimately unfounded conclusions about sexual expression in Korean shaman rituals. I have also considered recent studies that regard social phenomena as "embodied," expressed by and through the body and its imagery. Specifically, I explored a possible interpretive link between those ritual dances observed elsewhere in the world that create and regenerate social worlds through their portrayal of heterosexual sexuality, encounters between female Korean shamans and male spectators, and instances of phallic play in shamanic ritual. I found this particular association weak as an over-arching explanation but useful in one restricted case of

performance business. A further consideration of the body and expressions of body life in Korean shaman ritual, in folk dramas, and in jokes and conversations, may offer other kinds of insights into the operation of gender and sexuality in Korean popular culture. But "Korean popular culture" is itself a moving target. The particular shamans who are the subjects of this paper inhabit a very different world of experience from that of media-savvy young Korean women who, in the 1990s, have begun to articulate totally new and unabashedly explicit discourses of sexuality.⁵⁶ The argument is for more, better, and more varied fieldwork.

Notes

This paper originally appeared in French in *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, vol. 22, No.2, 1998, as 'Mais n'est-ce pas "sexuel,"? Le lapsus derrière le regard ethnographique'. It is reprinted here in English with the permission of *Anthropologie et Sociétés*. My observations are drawn from several field trips to Korea, initially supported by the Institute for International Education (Fulbright) and the Social Science Research Council, more recently by the Belo-Tanenbaum Fund of the American Museum of Natural History. I am grateful for the many provocative comments on my earlier work that inspired me to write this paper; those by Jean Comaroff were particularly inspiring. An early version was originally written for the "Workshop on the Construction of Gender and Sexuality in East and Southeast Asia" at the University of California, Los Angeles in December, 1990. The three anonymous readers who reviewed this article for *Anthropologie et Sociétés* were extremely useful in forcing me to clarify my intentions. I, of course, am responsible for the shortcomings of this effort.

1. Laurel Kendall, 'Of Gods and Men: Performance, Possession, and Flirtation in Korean Shaman Ritual', *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, (special issue on Korean Ritual, Alex Guillemoz, ed.), vol. 3, no.2, pp. 185-202.
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction, New York, Vintage Books, 1980, p. 69.
3. Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1985, p. 61.
4. Cho Dongwha, cited in Alan C. Heyman, *Dances of the Three-Thousand-League Land*, Seoul, Dong-A Publishing Co, p.5.
5. Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?' in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Women, Culture, and Society*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 67-87.
6. Judith Hock-Smith and Anita Spring (eds), *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, New York and London, Plenum Press, 1978, p. 3.
7. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (eds), *Sexual Meanings: the Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 3, 19.
8. Ibid.
9. Foucault, op. cit., especially pp. 104, 153. See also Pat Caplan, 'Introduction,' in P. Caplan (ed), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, London and New York, Tavistock, 1987, pp. 1-30.
10. As a bellwether, in 1990 the American Ethnological Society took "the body" as the theme of its annual meeting. In this same year, the journal *History of Religions* devoted a theme issue to "the body." For a critical review of anthropological approaches to the body, see Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, 'The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 1, no.1, 1987, pp. 6-41. For an overview of historical writing on sexuality and of anthropological thinking on this topic see Caplan, op. cit.
11. See in particular Gisela Bock, 'Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an "International Debate",' *Gender and History*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1989, pp. 7-29; and Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol., 12 no. 4, pp. 621-643.
12. Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,' in C. Vance (ed), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Boston, Routledge and Paul, 1984, pp. 287-319.
13. See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York, Routledge, 1993; Caplan, op. cit.; Teresa de Lauretis (ed), *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1986; and Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996.
14. Scheper-Hughes and Locke, op. cit., p. 28.
15. This tendency is not exclusively Western. Earlier generations of Japanese historians and folklorists regarded women as "mothers," a tendency that has lingering influence upon the historical study of Japanese women. See Helen Hardacre, 'Sex and Gender in Women's History in Japan,' paper presented to the *Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies*, Chicago, April 8, 1990.
16. Chungmoo Choi, personal communication.
17. Youngsook Kim Harvey, *Six Korean Women: the Socialization of Shamans*, St. Paul, West Publishing Company, 1979, p. 200.
18. Caplan, op. cit., p. 1.
19. Jung Young Lee, *Korean Shamanistic Rituals*, The Hague, Mouton, 1981.
20. Ibid., p. 174.
21. Ibid., pp. 167-170.
22. Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine,*

- and *Psychiatry*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980. p. 315. "Sexual oppression" has been widely offered as an ultimate, and ultimately circular, explanation for the ethnographic predominance of women in spirit possession. For the most synthesized and intellectually provocative statement of this approach, see I. M. Lewis's, *Ecstatic Religion*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969. The women are assumed to be manipulative, their possession a coercive strategy, although whether this is a conscious or a subconscious motivation is seldom made explicit. For a critique which, like much recent writing on religious activities, argues that possession activities should be understood through the meanings imparted to them by the participants, see Anita Spring, 'Epidemiology of spirit Possession among the Luvala of Zambia,' in J. Hock-Smith and A Spring (eds), *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, New York and London, Plenum Press, pp. 165-190. For a critique specific to the Korean material, see Kendall, 1985, op. cit.
23. Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., p. 223.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
 25. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*, Special Publications of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol. 2, 1942, p. 168.
 26. Scheper-Hughes and Lock, op. cit., p. 29.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Judith Lynne Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 19.
 29. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, H. Isowolsky, trans., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1968 [1965], pp. 38-39.
 30. Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 6-7.
 31. Hanna, 1988, op. cit., p. 13.
 32. Comaroff, op. cit., p. 111.
 33. Alfred Gell, *Metamorphosis of the Cassowaries: Umeda Society, Language, and Ritual*, New Jersey, Humanities Press Inc., 1975, p. 234.
 34. Eric Ten Raa, *The Moon as a Symbol of Life and Fertility in Sandawe Thought*, Africa, vol. 39, 1969, p. 38.
 35. Comaroff, op. cit., p. 151.
 36. Frédérique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-king: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 19.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9. As in India, Korean dance has been recontextualized as an icon of 'Korean tradition,' taught to respectable young women in studios and university dance departments. Following Foucaultian logic, dancing could now be viewed as an instrument of discipline in the construction of Korean or Indian femininity.
38. Amanda Porterfield, 'Shamanism: A Psychosocial Definition,' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1987, pp. 721-739.
39. Kendall, 1991, op. cit.
40. In summoning the gods, the shaman begins a slow and ordinary dance, broken by a sudden leap encouraged by a sudden burst of rapid drumbeats. The dancer continues to jump, rotating on the balls of her feet, pumping her arms up and down. When the dancer is a client who has borrowed the shaman's costume to entertain her personal spirits, this activity is sufficient. The client jumps to exhaustion, save on those rare occasions where her body-governing god chooses to gesture or speak. When the shaman stops jumping, however, she mimes, sings, and speaks in the persona of the god.
41. One can find explicit representations of sexual acts and possible erotic glosses in some more specialized Korean dances. Korean masked dance dramas seem to suggest sexual intercourse when two characters place their arms on each others' shoulders and rock from side to side, provoking humor rather than titillation. The multi-drum dance, performed as the grand finale of nearly every recital of 'traditional Korean dance,' has erotic overtones. The dance is said to express the Buddhist initiate's religious fervor but is also associated with the legend of a famous courtesan who performed it to the distraction of a hypocritically lustful monk, as described by Alan C. Heyman, op. cit. It is almost invariably performed by a woman, but is taught now at dancing schools servicing the middle class and in university dance departments.
42. As the shaman Yongsu's Mother said, after knocking an importunate male customer against the wall, "Oh, that wasn't me, it was the honorable Official [the possessing spirit] who did that." See Kendall, 1985, op. cit., p. 61.
43. Hanna, op. cit., pp. 46, 71-72.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
46. Ch'oe and Chang indicate that men used to gather and amuse themselves at the home of the mansin, Cho Yong-ja, until her son took up residence. The mansin recalls the village chief's proposition as a grievous insult. See Ch'oe Kil-s'ung and Chang Chu-gun, *Ky'unggido chiy'uk musok* (Regional shaman practices of Ky'unggi

- Province), Seoul, Ministry of Culture, 1967, pp. 32-33, 54. In folklore circles I have heard it said that shamans used also to serve as itinerant prostitutes, but I have no corroborating evidence. The novels of Kim Tongni portray the shaman as a woman who casually enters sexual liaisons.
47. See Kendall, 1985, op. cit., pp. 61-62.
 48. See 'Korean Mudang and Pansu,' in *Korea Review*, vol. 3, 1903, p. 147.
 49. For descriptions of shamanic practices in dynastic times, as gleaned from old records, see Yi Nung-hwa, *Chosŏn musok ko* (Reflections on Korean shamanism), translated into modern Korean by Yi Chae-gon, Seoul, Paengnŏk, 1976 [1927]. In historical references to shaman rituals on Cheju Island before the Chosŏn period (1392-1910), men and women together celebrated communal rituals "in the from of gregarious songs and dances." See Chang Chu-gun, *Kankoku no mingan sinko* (Korean Folk Beliefs), Tokyo, Kinkasha, 1973, English summary, p. 12. Chang argues that the gendered dichotomy of Confucian rites for men and folk religious practices for women was a consequence of the Confucian transformation of Korean society during the Chosŏn period. If this local example can be expanded, and if these heterosexual songs and dances can be shown as fundamental to the ritual and not the sideline activities of more recent times, then perhaps one finds the Korean equivalent of a Bakhtinian carnival undermined by the imposition of a new moral hegemony. This would be an intriguing example, innocent of missionary influence and Western-derived values.
 50. Watching one such performance, I realized that the shaman had borrowed some of the lines from the childbirth scene in the Yangju Masked Dance Drama which is still, despite self-censorship, a creditably Bakhtinian celebration of bodily life. In abbreviated contemporary *kut*, the final send-off of wandering ghosts is greeted with sighs of impatience from other members of the shaman team, anxious to finish up and get home.
 51. Butler, op. cit., p. 124.
 52. Rosalind C. Morris, 'ALL MADE UP: Performance Theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender,' in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, 1995, pp. 567-92.
 53. Butler, op. cit.; Williams, op. cit.; and also Jennifer Robertson, 'Doing and Undoing "Female" and "Male" in Japan: The Takarazuka Revue,' in Takie Sugiyama Lebra, ed., *Japanese Social Organization*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1992, pp. 79-107.

54. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 82.
55. Kendall, 1991, op. cit., 1996 a.
56. For the changing sexual discourses of young Korean women, see So-Hee Lee, 'The Concept of Female Sexuality in Korean Popular Culture,' in L. Kendall, ed., *Under Construction: The Gendering of Modernity, Class, and Consumption in the Republic of Korea*, unpublished ms.

III Contemporary Approaches to Reproduction within Religions.

Hindu Views of the Body and Reproductive Health: Ethical Issues

Harold Coward

The British colonization of India brought to the sub-continent modern Western medicine and its assumption of Descartes' dualism which separates mind from body. In this approach, the body is often viewed as the object of a mechanical possession to be exercised, fed and kept in order with drugs, deodorants and the miracles of modern medical technology. By contrast, ancient Indian (along with ancient Western and Chinese) medicine considered the human body as a sacred entity- a microcosm corresponding to the whole cosmological order. Indian medicine is very dependent upon the Hindu context of which it is but a part. Indeed, as Ramanujan has pointed out, the essential characteristic of all Indian thinking is that it is 'context-sensitive' rather than 'context-free.'¹ Consequently, all Hindu thinking about the body and its reproductive activity takes place within the larger context of the divine-human cosmos. As F. Apffel Marglin puts it, "[b]odily experiences [in India] are unified with thought; they are not relegated to a separate realm, of physiology, sensation or nature."²

This is a realization that we are all coming to in the postmodern era. Ariel Glucklich puts it even more clearly in his very recent work *The Sense of Adharma* in which he attempts to understand Indian culture through the body. In opposing the assumption descended from Descartes that our best understanding of any culture is through conceptual data (with the body remaining silent), Glucklich instead maintains that one must study the body along with symbols of the mind as a gestalt. As he puts it, "...every conscious experience has a physical-perceptual component that plays a key role in the way the world and the self are fashioned. The Hindu bather who goes into the river at daybreak does not leave his body in bed."³ Our study must include both the mantras he chants and the purifying experience of his body in the water.

Modern medicine has largely followed the dualism of Descartes and treated the body as a mechanism separate from the mind and one's cultural/religious environment. Thus when the British came to India, the introduction of modern Western medicine was a powerful tool in the colonization process. David Arnold's excellent historical analysis of this process demonstrates how the holistic approaches of traditional Hindu and Muslim medicine were first challenged and then dismissed as unscientific.⁴ The Western mechanistic view of the isolated body was held by British medicine to be the scientific replacement for the sense of the person as a unity of body, mind and environment maintained by Hindu and Muslim traditional medicines. In the attempted superimposition of British ways upon India, the colonization of the body by modern Western medicine was a key strategy adopted. In its attempt to supplant traditional religion (and its medicine), modern Western medicine takes unto itself, as a monopoly, the right to define health, illness and to treat the latter.⁵

A second colonization of the body we will examine in this paper is that of the patriarchal social order that has dominated Hindu India from the seventh century B.C.E. to the present. In the early Hindu texts and social structures, men and women, girls and boys seem to have been given equal status with the transcendent absolute including them both. However, with the ascent of Brahmanical Hinduism, the female body was colonized and dominated by men in a systematic fashion as exemplified in *The Laws of Manu*.⁶ Today, scholars are rereading traditional texts for a decolonized understanding of Hindu women and their bodies.⁷

In this paper, we will examine the impact of these two kinds of colonization in India with reference to the body and ethical issues such as purity, abortion and the new reproductive technologies.

I. Traditional Hindu Views of Body, Self and Nature

While there are several creation stories in Hindu scripture, one of the earliest and most frequently quoted is that of a primeval person self-sacrificing to create the whole cosmos—nature, plants, animals and humans complete with their caste divisions (*Rig Veda* 10:90 c. 1200 B.C.E.). In this myth, there is no privileging of men over women or humans over nature. Even the caste divisions are portrayed as functional rather than hierarchical. What is clear, is that all created differences are simply manifestations of a primordial divine unity out of which everything arises and into which all will subside. A later scripture restates this teaching more specifically in terms of men and women—the divine unity falls apart into two equal pieces, man and woman (*Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.1-6, c. 700 B.C.E.). It is after this period that the creation accounts of the early scriptures are reinterpreted in social law codes such as the *Laws of Manu*, in which women's bodies, minds and salvation are placed under the control of men (in the form of father, husband and son respectively).⁸ However, unity between humans and nature is retained—human and nature are simply seen as different parts of God's body.

The success of the Brahmanical reordering of the power relationship between men and women was never complete. Indeed, Vasudha Narayanan in her reassessment of the evidence from the classical period suggests that to the extent it operated, male control of females mainly obtained in the upper castes—and then probably more in men's minds than in social reality.⁹ As Narayanan puts it, Manu's description of how women were to function was his imagined ideal as to how life should be from a patriarchal male's point of view. She finds epigraphical evidence that upper caste women acted independently of males (for example, a wealthy widow endowed a temple in her name, not her husband's) in ways not allowed by Manu. Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana* (an epic dating from the Brahmanical period), shows herself to be an independent, strong-willed woman who eventually leaves her husband over his failure to be loyal to their love. Lina Gupta finds that the power of women free from control

by men is made explicit in the Hindu goddess manifestations.¹⁰ Kali (who also appears in Durga, Dat, Parvati, etc.) is at once the great mother, the destroyer and the fiercely independent woman. She is not only equal to her husband, the male god Shiva, but more often than not dominates him. Kali's images in Hindu scriptures, such as the *puranas* and *tantras*, embrace creation, preservation and destruction — in short all that is. She symbolizes Brahman, the divine absolute, in such powerful ways as to attract a majority of Hindus as devotees. Says Gupta, Kali is "capable both of placing consciousness and the devotee into bondage — the bondage of illusion and ignorance — and of releasing the devotee into absolute liberation."¹¹ Kali is also intimately associated with nature's creative and destructive powers and, therefore, on all counts, is a wonderfully strong role model for women — a role model in which women's body-mind-nature unity is seen to be at one with the transcendent divine.

In one respect, however, namely, the purity-impurity dimension of Hindu thought, the body — especially the female body and its reproductive functions — has fared poorly. In short, the body, especially its liquid components and secretions, is judged to be polluting. Such bodily pollution is a major component of the bad karma which causes one to be constantly reborn and prevents the attainment of spiritual release. Thus a good deal of both yogic (the ascetic practice of monks and nuns) and householder practice is dedicated to the control and purification of bodily pollution. While this purity concern applies equally to males and females, the problem is greater for females due to the polluting fluids involved in menstruation and childbirth, from which males are spared. This understanding of the body and its fluids as polluting has also meant that medical professions (doctors and nurses) are not seen as desirable by Hindus. This is especially true in Western medicine where surgery and direct care of bodily injuries is involved. In the early days of Western medicine in India, the recruiting of medical professionals was successful mainly among the lowest castes such as the *Doms*. Their status within Indian society in the 1800s is described as follows:

They not only filled the customary role of sweepers and scavengers but also performed such polluting and defiling tasks as removing the carcasses of dead animals and carrying the bodies of the human dead to burning grounds.... *Dom* women worked as *dais*, or midwives, another lowly occupation, which again brought them close to the body in its most polluting states.¹²

In traditional Indian society, the association of the *Doms* with the dead suited them for the dissection involved in the practice of Western medicine.

Elsewhere I have documented these deeply-rooted Hindu ideas about purity and the body,¹³ and I will not repeat that analysis here. In summary, while there is no evidence that the body and women are seen as polluting in the earliest Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*, such ideas begin to appear in the *Brahmanas* and the later *Upanisads*. They are given philosophical expression in the Sankhya school and full systematic presentation in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Application of this perspective to everyday household life is given in the *Laws of Manu*. In the *Sankhya-Yoga* formulation, human nature is composed of two parts: *purusa*, the pure self characterized as pure consciousness, and *prakriti*, the matter which makes up one's mind and body. *Prakriti* or the matter side of one's nature is composed of three strands, *tamas* (dullness, inertia), *rajas* (passion, movement) and *sattva* (transparency) which are described in the *Yoga Sutras* as having increasing purity.¹⁴ The purpose of yoga practice, as outlined by Patanjali, is to purify the *tamas* from one's material nature (which includes one's body, mind and their interactions with nature) until one becomes virtually pure *sattva*. In the householder life of lay persons, which is seen as preparatory to yoga, the practices specified in the *Laws of Manu* have a parallel purifying aim. In the Yoga and Manu analyses, saliva and bodily discharges are seen as polluting (*tamasic*), and thus the purified yogi shrinks from contact with such substances — even when they are produced by one's own body.¹⁵ Menstruation is seen as very *tamasic*, very polluting. All of this established a basis for the logical development of a strong negative attitude towards women and towards persons who do not make an effort to practice mental and bodily cleanliness—and are thus seen to be

of lower quality (lower caste). These ideas were given further development by Gorakhnath and his followers, the *Kanphata Yogis*, during the medieval period. They continue to have currency in Hindu society today.

However, an opposing view of the self, body and nature has also been present in Hindu sources from the early texts to the present. In the Tantric tradition, there is no dualism between self and body-nature such as one finds in *Sankhya-Yoga* thought, and the feminine is seen to represent divine power (*Shakti*) rather than pollution. Here, the body and its fluids are positive and even a means to spiritual release. This is symbolized in the Hindu goddess tradition and forms the basis for a feminist revisioning of the Hindu tradition. Lina Gupta, for example, shows how four central Hindu concepts of *shakti*, *prakriti*, *avidya* and *maya* convey a negative message for women, the body, and nature when read by *Sankhya-Yoga Manu* and Brahmanical thought, whereas when seen through Tantric thought, as symbolized by Kali, these same four concepts give a positive view of women, the body and nature — to the point of being equated with the divine.¹⁶ In the first reading, material reality, in its separation from consciousness and rationality, comes to be seen as raw unrestricted power (*Shakti*), unpredictable nature (*prakriti*), ignorance (*avidya*), and deceitfulness (*maya*) — all of which is taken to be the essential quality of the natural world and most fully manifested in the female body. By contrast, the Tantric or feminist reading sees no separation between matter and the divine or between the body and consciousness or rationality. Nature and women are not raw irrational energy to be dominated and controlled by men (as representatives of divine consciousness) but, in themselves, manifest the immanence of the divine in nature. All of nature, the environment, plants, animals, men and women all share in divine power, consciousness and rationality. No longer is it a case of one part (male consciousness) needing to dominate and control the other part (female matter). Nor are the body and its fluids inherently polluting. Reading the Hindu tradition through its 'Tantric eyes' provides a strong basis (at once ancient and modern) for overcoming the current damaging dominance of humans over

the rest of nature, of males over females, and of self or soul over body. It also offers a more productive basis for the needed dialogue between modern Western medicine and Hinduism with its traditional medicine. Let us now examine all of this for its impact upon sexuality and reproduction.

II. Hindu Views of Sexuality and Reproduction

The competing concepts of human nature, outlined above, result in very different views of sexuality and reproduction (including abortion and the New Reproductive Technologies). From the Brahmanical perspective, sexuality is a source of polluting karma and therefore in need of tight individual and social control. Once one's householder obligation of husband and wife having sexual intercourse to produce children (especially sons) is fulfilled, sexual activity should cease. In itself sex, either mental or physical, leaves memory traces (*samskaras*) which seed desire for more sexuality activity in this or future lives. The sexual desires we currently experience are caused by *samskaras* from sexual thoughts or actions we have engaged in in this or previous lives. All such sexual *samskaras* are serious obstacles to the realization of release from rebirth (*moksa*), the ultimate Hindu goal.¹⁷ The stated purpose of Hindu law codes, such as that of Manu, is to control these powerful and ultimately obstructing desires so that societal order (*dharma*) will be maintained in a climate that creates the greatest opportunity for individuals to progress toward *moksa* — if not in this lifetime, then in some future life. However, the *Sankhya-Yoga* dualistic view of human nature, examined above, results in the locus of the needed control of sexuality being placed upon women and their bodies. The highly developed eroticism associated with the Hindu culture (e.g. as in the *Kamasutra*) by and large takes place outside of marriage with courtesans or temple dancers. The contemporary Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, comments from his clinical practice that women experience little sexual pleasure with their husbands.¹⁸ While the Tantric tradition views the body and its experiences, including sex, not as an obstacle or pollution but as a positive manifestation of the divine, tantric practices using sex as a yoga or path to liberation frequently specify a low

caste woman (a *dombi*) rather than one's wife as the sexual partner.¹⁹ However, yogis who engage in such practices warn of the dangers introduced by intimate involvement with a woman.

Regardless of how a woman lived, one pollution was inescapable. Menstruation was regarded as more than a simple physical pollution. Menstrual blood was closely linked with the fluids of conception. In many texts, there are injunctions to the effect that monthly periods must not be misused and that a woman's menstruation must be transformed into a fertile result.²⁰ Some Indian women believe that after ten months of blood is collected, a child is born.²¹ Thus, fathers who do not provide husbands for their postpubertal daughters are held to commit embryo murder at each menstruation. Husbands also have a duty to have intercourse with their wives at the proper time so that the blood will be used in child production and not issue as menstruation.²² On the other hand, some texts reflect the view of many Hindu women that menstruation is a purifying process. One text says, "Women possess an unrivaled means of purification; they never become entirely foul. For month by month their temporary uncleanness removes their sins."²³ Wendy O'Flaherty has noted that, in post-Vedic Hinduism, menstrual blood has an ambiguous character. In some Tantric rituals, menstrual blood is eaten. Sometimes, menstrual blood is seen as non-polluting, as being the female creative power (parallel to the male semen) and, as such, sacred or taboo. In post-Vedic mythology, menstrual blood sometimes appears as a symbol of the passion of women—as their fertile erotic fluid.²⁴ In primitive Indian physiology, menstrual blood, rather than the ovum, was taken to be the female component which combined with the male semen to produce conception. Sometimes, milk is described as being made from menstrual blood—the most polluting of substances becomes the purest of substances.²⁵ However, even in the Tantric tradition, in which females and their bodily fluids are seen at times as positive and powerful, there is still a dominating idea that the fluids within the body are basically a pernicious force which needs to be controlled.²⁶ Of course, this includes sexuality and its associated fluids. The rules set forth in Hindu law codes, such as that of Manu, reflect the mainstream of Hindu thinking on how to keep the bodily fluids flowing (a

necessity for the householder life) in ways that will do the least damage. For those who go beyond the householder life into monastic and yogic practice, techniques are provided to root out sexual *samskaras* completely and to dry up obstructing bodily fluids.

The Constitution of India, which was adopted in 1949, after independence from Britain was achieved, attempts to introduce a new view of human nature and the body. Basing itself on modern Western sources (e.g. the American Constitution and John Stuart Mill), the Constitution introduces a new standardization of Hindu personal law on the basis of equality rather than on the classical view of karmic purity. On the new basis of equality, women are no longer to be seen as inferior to men by virtue of their greater bodily impurity. Indeed, the very idea of ordering society in terms of levels of purity and impurity is ruled out by the new Constitution.²⁷ However, this radically new view of human nature and society is finding the old classical Hindu conceptions to be deeply rooted and very resistant to change.

Abortion and the New Reproductive Technologies (NRTS)

Fundamental to the Hindu worldview is the notion that each person is being continually reborn. This view is shared by Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs. What a person does in each life conditions the circumstances and predispositions that will be experienced in future lives. The importance of this consideration for NRTs is that the rebirth of a fully developed person, who has lived many previous lives, occurs at the moment of conception. From the moment of conception, we are dealing with a human person.

Hinduism, therefore, quite naturally, views abortion as murder and therefore unacceptable except for the purpose of preserving the mother's life.²⁸ The distinction between a human being and a human person made in some Western discussions, with its implication of the permissibility of at least early abortion, does not occur in Hinduism. Personal moral status is granted to the embryo/fetus from the moment of conception and throughout

pregnancy. As well as relating to concepts of karma and rebirth, this approach to abortion is further grounded in the great respect for the principle of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, that is maintained by Hinduism.

If we look to India, a modern secular state in which Hinduism is the majority religion, we find that abortion is permitted by law under certain circumstances, but the topic of the moral status of the unborn and of abortion has been little discussed. In public, the topic is taboo. Yet it is clear that illegal abortion has a long history and continues today.²⁹ While the texts dealing with religious law and ethics are very clear in condemning the willful killing of a fetus, it is also true that these texts have very limited bearing on daily life. Many people are not even aware of them; others quite easily and happily ignore them. The texts simply do not have the compelling authority that scripture may have in some other religious traditions.

Abortions are done fairly regularly in India for a number of reasons, and in recent years the principal ones seem to be related to sex selection or family planning. Since boys are valued more than girls in many communities, sonograms/amniocenteses are performed and female fetuses are aborted. Statistics available from the state of Maharashtra show that in recent years there has been a dramatic drop in the number of live births of girls.³⁰ In the past (about thirty to forty years ago), students in many medical schools in India had the general impression that abortions could only be done in some 'Christian' clinics (the name given to Western-style clinics), but not in government hospitals or by Indian doctors. Now, many hospitals in India carry out these procedures fairly routinely, and most of the clientele is apparently Hindu.

Infertility (or even the lack of a son) has been considered justification for some form of surrogacy practice. Often, this has been accomplished by allowing polygamy. In Hinduism, there has also been the practice in which a man marries the childless widow of his deceased brother. Surrogacy by natural means and under certain circumstances seems to be allowable within the boundaries of the family. The integrity of the extended family is of ultimate importance, since it forms the essential 'self' from which all individual family members receive meaning and identity.

The idea of someone from outside the extended family being involved in some kind of surrogacy practice would seem unlikely to receive acceptance by the cultures involved. From this perspective, the very idea of single motherhood (or for that matter fatherhood) by choice is unlikely. In this extended family context, all discussion of NRTs will be approached not only with respect to the wife involved but also the husband and the family as a whole. The autonomous, individualist approach to moral questions that typifies the modern West is very foreign to members of the Hindu tradition, even after the family has lived abroad for two or three generations.

Perhaps even more important than notions of karma, on the popular level is the great importance placed on biological descent; therefore, artificial insemination with sperm other than the husband's would not be tolerated. In higher castes, there is a notion of keeping the purity of one's caste and clan (*gotra*), and artificial insemination from a sperm bank would be intolerable. (For similar reasons, even adoption of an unknown child would be unacceptable for many Hindus.) A Hindu woman in India carrying a child other than her husband's would be likely to incur family and community ostracism or, at the very least, disapproval. However, if a woman could be artificially inseminated with her husband's sperm and the child carried to term, a childless couple would definitely accept the procedure; there would not be any taboo against unnatural technological intervention. Urban Hindu men and women have generally been accepting of Western medical procedures, and medical help in this regard would be welcomed rather than rejected. Many childless couples from India come to Western countries for advanced tests and help with reproductive technology without prejudice.

The question of in vitro fertilization or IVF is a complicated one when seen from the perspective of Hinduism. Fertility is important — especially the conception and birth of a son. IVF appears attractive to wives and husbands who are having difficulty in conceiving and giving birth to children. Modern India seems to be using IVF enthusiastically. When it is considered by scholars, however, it becomes a very serious issue, since the destruction of any embryo would be considered murder. IVF poses a serious dilemma unless all fertilized embryos are implanted. However, in

practice, abortions are performed regularly, so for many members of the general population the destroying of embryos may not present a great moral dilemma.³¹

In Hinduism, there are certain religious rituals that must be performed by a son if one's afterlife is to be secured, and the dowry practice makes sons a source of wealth for the family and daughters a drain on family fortunes. Thus, any offering of medical services that allow both sex selection and abortion will introduce severe social and moral pressures into these families. The conflict between the desire for sons (and the possibility for ensuring them through the new technologies) and the proscription against abortion will place severe moral strains on some families, especially upon the mothers involved. In Hindu ritual practice, there are rituals designed to aid in giving birth to a son, but these rituals never involved abortion.

The issue of commercialization is also of concern to the family units of the Hindu religion. While the religion would not condone the opportunities for commercialization NRTs might spawn, the family and social structure might well encourage such developments. One has only to look at what has happened in the area of organ transplants (with special flights to India where organs of all kinds can be obtained for money by Westerners) to think of possible NRT parallels. It is not simply that the poor are selling their organs, but that at times even a husband volunteers to sell an organ of his wife. The prospect of earning money from paid surrogacy is surely not far removed, given the presence of the requisite technology.

Conclusion

Classical Hindu views of the body are seen to be superior to those brought to India in the form of modern Western medicine by the British. Whereas modern medicine, following Descartes, saw the body as a mechanism separate from mind and nature, the Hindus saw body, mind, nature and the divine in varying degrees of unity. In the Hindu view, there was not room for seeing the body as an isolated material mechanism of the sort that characterized Western medicine in nineteenth-century colonial India. Within the classical Hindu perspective, however,

another kind of colonialization was found — the colonization of female body by male-dominated Brahmanical religion and society. This negative view of the body and its polluting fluids, especially the bodies of women, included the viewing of sexuality as an impure desire from the sexual activities of previous births and which must be completely removed by yogic practice for spiritual liberation (*moksa*) to be realized. But this negative ascetic, male-dominated view of sexuality and the body was challenged within Hinduism by a second perspective, Tantricism. Hindu Tantricism in its texts and practices sees sexuality and the body, especially in its feminine forms, to both manifest the divine and provide a powerful means of spiritual practice for liberation (*moksa*). Consequently, in Hinduism, there are two radically opposite assessments of the body, sexuality and women.

The application of Hindu views of the person and sexuality to issues of reproductive ethics results in a rejection of abortion and a judgement that the embryo/fetus is a person (carrying forward many *samskaras* or memory traces of previous lives) from the moment of conception. However, in practice, in modern India and among Hindus living abroad, abortions are frequently done with some seeming to be for the purpose of sex selection to produce sons. While not yet discussed by Hindu theologians, the NRTs are showing themselves to be popular among Hindus where a couple is childless or to ensure that a child will be a son, for both religious and economic/social reasons. IVF, although attractive to husbands and wives having difficulties conceiving and giving birth poses a serious dilemma for Hindus unless all fertilized embryos are implanted — to destroy such embryos would be considered murder. Unlike what happens in modern European societies, the very idea of single motherhood (or fatherhood) by choice is rejected by Hindus. In the extended Hindu family context, all discussion of NRT will be approached not only with respect to the wife involved but also the husband and the family as a whole. The autonomous, individualistic approach to the body and reproductive questions that typifies the modern West is foreign to the Hindu tradition. The future will bring a continuing discussion between modern Western medicine and its reproductive technologies and competing views of the body, sexuality and the status of women within Hinduism.

Notes

1. A. K. Ramanujan, 'Is there an Indian Way of Thinking: An informal essay,' in *India through Hindu Categories*, edited by McKim Marriott, New Delhi, Sage, 1990, Chapter 2.
2. Frédérique Apffel Marglin, 'Refining the Body: Transformative Emotion in Ritual Dance,' in O. M. Lynch (ed.), *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, p. 230.
3. Ariel Glucklich, *The Sense of Adharma*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 7.
4. David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993.
5. Katherine K. Young, 'Hinduism,' in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in World Religions*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 59-103.
6. *The Laws of Manu*, trans. by G. Buhler, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1984.
7. See, for example, Lina Gupta, 'Kali, the Saviour,' in P. M. Cooney, W. R. Eakin, J.B. McDaniel, Maryknoll (eds), *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, Orbis Books, 1991, pp. 15-38.
8. *The Laws of Manu*, op. cit., Chapter IX.
9. Vasudha Narayanan, personal communication.
10. 'Kali the Saviour,' op. cit., pp. 20ff.
11. Ibid., p. 23.
12. *Colonizing the Body*, op. cit., p. 4.
13. Harold Coward, 'Purity in Hinduism: With Particular Reference to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras,' in Harold Coward, Julius Ripner, and Katherine Young (eds), *Hindu Ethics: Purity, Abortion and Euthanasia*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 9-39.
14. Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras* 1.2. See translation by J. H. Woods, *The Yoga System of Patanjali*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.
15. *Yoga Sutra* 2.32 on *saucha*.
16. 'Kali, the Saviour,' op. cit. pp. 24-29.
17. The above analysis of sexual *samskaras*, the way they function psychologically and in relation to release is based on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.
18. Personal communication, May 6, 1994.
19. Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962, pp. 153 ff.
20. Jocelyn Krygier, 'Caste and Female Pollution,' in Michael Allen and S. N. Mukherjee (eds), *Women in Nepal and India*, Canberra, Australian National University, 1982, p. 77.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid. The quote is from Baudhayana 11.2.4 as translated by Max Muller.
24. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.40.
25. Ibid., p. 42.
26. Ibid., p. 60.
27. See Donald Eugene Smith, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963.
28. Julius Lipner, 'The Classical Hindu View on Abortion and the Moral Status of the Unborn,' in *Hindu Ethics: Purity, Abortion and Euthanasia*, op. cit., pp. 41-69.
29. Vasudha Narayanan, in personal communication of October 1992, states, "according to both religious texts and popular practice in the Hindu tradition(s), the embryo/fetus has life.... it would therefore be logical and correct to say that killing the embryo is tantamount to murder. Despite this fundamental belief, abortions have been conducted legally and illegally in many places in India, without much apparent guilt on the women's part about the process. My statement here is only based on impressions and conversations with women doctors from India, but I suspect that a full-fledged study may verify them."
30. E. Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India*, New York, Random House, 1990, reports on many clinics specializing in these procedures in Bombay.
31. Vasudha Narayanan comments in personal communication, October 1992, "What we have to recognize is that despite notions of embryonic life, karma, etcetera, decisions on abortions and NRTs are more likely to be based on how badly a child, especially a boy, is wanted by the couple or family or, in the case of abortion, how badly a child is not wanted by the woman."

Woman's Body as Social Battleground in Puerto Rico

Ana María Díaz-Stevens

Looking into my grandmother's compassionate eyes one day, I asked the question any adolescent girl would ask when she begins to notice the new contours her own body is taking. "Abuelita," I said, "what did you look like when you were young?" She thought for a moment and then with that splendid picaresque little smile of hers she answered: "Round, child, as round as *el mundo* and as fertile as *la tierra*." Realizing I was not satisfied with her answer, she continued: "I really can't tell you. I was always pregnant!" "No, Abuela, before that; before you married Abuelo." "Oh before that," she said, "before that I was a child, perhaps two years older than you are now — a child that was taught all she needed to know to be a good wife and mother. After all I came from a very religious family. I do remember men looked for women with wide hips, strong hands, and *deseo de vivir*: 'buenas paridoras y criadoras.' I must have had these *encantos* even at that tender age."

Abuela was only fifteen when she was married; sixteen when she had her first child. In my family there is a joke that goes like this: "Abuela had nineteen kids, and if Abuelo had not died when he did, we would have had another nineteen *tíos*." Having that many children for a woman at the turn of the century in Puerto Rico was common enough; what was not common was being able to keep alive and raise as many as she did in the circumstances in which they lived. Abuela was "*La Gran Madre*;" everyone knew this; first and foremost Abuela herself. This was the reason she had come into this world and she had accepted the role handed to her by society not only with resignation but with a certain amount of joy and pride. Till the day she died, at eighty-three, my Abuela's mind was as clear as our mountain waters and just as refreshing. She remembered the circumstances in which she had met my grandfather, the birth of each and everyone of her children, their wedding dates, the birthday of their first offspring, and so on. The more reason why I could not

understand why she seemed not to remember what she was like before they came to form part of her life. But although her self-image and awareness of her body seems out of place in today's world, it must be remembered that in her world she fit perfectly.

When I asked my mother the same questions I had asked Abuela, my mother had a much better recollection of what she looked liked. But my mother was almost twice my grandmother's age at marriage and it was common knowledge that she imposed upon herself and my father periods of complete abstinence. Even then, they had nine children.

My anecdotal reminiscences of my mother and grandmother are not foreign to the theme in this paper. Such personalized memories are rather a source of knowledge about women in Puerto Rico on subjects often screened from our view by official histories and academic studies. I have found in a growing wave of literature produced by Puerto Rican women writers confirmation that my childhood memories are the stuff from which sociology is made. In this paper, I want to examine literature as sociology by placing creative writing in the context of social and political change in Puerto Rico.

In her 1983 "fictionalized biography", Judith Ortiz Cofer gives a portrait of her own grandmother which brought to mind my conversations with Abuela and Mamá. Ortiz Cofer explains that her grandmother had a fiery temper (as many Puerto Rican women do!) but that in dealing with the grandfather oftentimes, rather than confronting him head on, she would, like my grandmother, engage in an interesting code of signals and activity to communicate a wish or drive home a point. For example, rather than dwell in *antojos*, the privileged pampered position of any Puerto Rican woman who is with child, whenever she had to communicate she was expecting a new baby, she would simply ask her husband to construct a new addition to the house. This was simple enough for him since he was a carpenter, and he obliged willingly.

And so, after my youngest uncle was born, she asked Papá to build a large room at the back of the house. He did so in joyful anticipation. Mamá had asked him special things this

time: shelves on the walls, a private entrance. He thought that she meant this room to be a nursery where several children could sleep. He thought it was a wonderful idea. He painted it his favorite color, sky blue, and made large windows looking out over a green hill and the church spires beyond. But nothing happened. Mamá's belly did not grow, yet she seemed in a frenzy of activity over the house. Finally, an anxious Papá approached his wife to tell her that the new room was finished and ready to be occupied. And Mamá, they say, replied; "Good, it's for *you*."

And so it was that Mamá discovered the only means of birth control available to a Catholic woman of her time: sacrifice. She gave up the comfort of Papá's sexual love for something she deemed greater: the right to own and control her body, so that she might live to meet her grandchildren — me among them — so that she could give more of herself to the ones already there, so that she could be more than a channel for other lives, so that even now that time has robbed her of the elasticity of her body and of her amazing reservoir of energy, she still emanates the kind of joy that can only be achieved by living according to the dictates of one's own heart.¹

The conception of a woman's body is profoundly influenced by religion. This pervading influence can be traced, I think, to our sense of values. Because religion sets a social framework for communicating normative values, it plays an important part in establishing a structure for our view of ourselves and those around us. When the traditional religious values of a particular society are confronted with a different set of values from the outside — be these religious or secular — the shift that may occur has an impact upon the various sectors of society influenced by religion; and this of course, includes the images people have formed of reality.

Others, such as my colleague, Sylvia Marcos, have uncovered for us the conflicting sense of values in Iberian Catholicism and Meso-American religions at the time of the conquest some five hundred years ago. Religious influences stand out in dramatic relief for the observer because in the 16th century each of these societies was dominated by its own particular world view which in turn had been influenced by its religious beliefs and institutions.

It is true that the modern era has eroded the place religion once held. Today, religion plays a much lesser role in shaping the conflicts between different cultures and societies. The 21st century promises to be much like the 20th in offering us a world in which secular institutions exercise functions previously reserved to religion. Economics, education, health care, aesthetic expressions, mass communications, and literature — just to list a few areas — are now oriented around secular values and are administered by public institutions. Each of these now assumes a role in mediating conceptions of femaleness and the woman's body that in the 16th century was dominated by religion.

Religion, however, has not been completely put aside; its influence varies and fluctuates in response to many other factors over time. Furthermore, secular institutions are no less susceptible to manipulation or exploitation than religion. So that even though women's lot has improved in some notable ways over the past 500 years, we cannot pretend that women are in total control of their destiny. To a certain degree, it can be argued that precisely because religious perspectives on the sacred and the holy have been eliminated in much of contemporary public discourse, women have lost some valuable weapons in the defense of their gender roles.²

My views here are presented from a sociological perspective in order to examine the process of social and cultural conflicts in a colonial society. I want to analyze the impact the US invasion of Puerto Rico has had on women and the conception of their bodies, measured against how they viewed themselves while under Spain. What has changed for women as Puerto Rico has gone from colonial status under Catholic Spain to colonial status under the Protestant United States? I will view woman's body and its conceptualization by men and women alike as battleground for the conflicts inherent in a colony.

As an example of how the elites and intelligentsia on the Island viewed the common Puerto Rican during the latter part of the 19th century, I start with the novel, *La charca*, one of four volumes in Manuel Zeno Gandía's, *Crónicas de un mundo enfermo*.³ Zeno Gandía, who was a medical doctor, wrote his tetralogy by viewing the whole society of Puerto Rico as a very

sick child with very little hope of recovery. In the first volume, *La charca*, a greedy grandmother lets her emaciated grandson die while she hoards away the miserable *pesos* than can bring health and life back into his body. But the sick-child, *par excellence* is Silvina, one of the main characters; Silvina, whose name sounds like *selva* and *salvaje*, is an epileptic woman-child born into this life to be exploited by others. Even her mother, a victim herself, victimizes Silvina. She is first obligated to give in to her mother's lover and then is given away in matrimony to the lover's friend, a scoundrel more than twice her age, while the person she truly loves stands by. At the end of the story her convulsive body literally empties itself into the rivers as she falls from the cliff; at the bottom her blood mixes with the water upon the rock that enshrines her body.

Let me suggest that Silvina is not merely a protagonist, not merely a woman, not an innocent lonely victim of the turn of the century, but the author's depiction of the Puerto Rican people, especially the lower classes. This becomes clear when we see the parallelism that is established between this protagonist and the character of the Puerto Rican people. They are portrayed as a feeble, mongrelized body product of *epileptic ardor* of the illicit activity of the virile outsider over the inferior being found in the tropics; and thus, this new physically weakened and spiritually bankrupt half-breed is incapable and unworthy of giving continuity to a nation.

Zeno Gandía expresses his philosophy about Puerto Rico through a literary device of conversations between the village priest, Padre Esteban, representing official Spanish Catholicism and the coffee plantation hacendado, Juan del Salto, symbolizing the voice of progress and science. The hacendado rejects the priest's exhortation for the need of faith and repentance among the mountain dwellers to save their souls. Juan del Salto explains there can be no faith where there are no believers. But why shouldn't there be believers?, asks the priest. Is it because their souls have not been developed? The hacendado's response reveals a deep understanding of the body/soul-health/faith relationship as well as this disturbing view of the common Puerto Rican.

No. Because their bodies have not been developed. Here, superstitions are as dominant as vice, and — in the final analysis — what are superstitions but morbid thoughts? Don't be fooled my dear Padre; the causes of this great disaster date back to distant origins. Imagine for yourself an ethnic group that comes to the colony in the days of the conquest, and struggles to adapt itself to the torrid zone. The fears, the encampments in the open, the influences of the new soil, the harshness of the new climate, the strange foods; they could not have prospered physically. Then came the cross-breedings. So many mixtures! A cross between Caucasians and aborigines determined the population of these woods. The women of the conquerors also raised their newborn children in the new zone; but these were a minority because the European woman was late in coming to the paradise found in the seas. The aborigine woman was the pasture, her savage grace the only genetic choice, the only fecund cloister where the new generation was formed. The mixture was prolific, but at such a price! The sturdy native of the forest yielded physical strength; the sprightly man who set foot upon the soil of the Occident yielded vigor and force. From this lot, the born composite emerged physically inferior, and was abandoned to the flow of the centuries. The aborigine race was unequal to the collision and succumbed, disappearing forever from the face of the earth. The offspring, the half-breed son, was begotten amidst misfortune and suspicion, in the spacious bridal chamber of the forest, under the imposition of the stronger. The woman was a machine. Love — and spiritual harmony — took no part in the impregnation. One being fell under the epileptic ardor of another, amidst the grandeurs of a land filled with splendors, in the lush shadows of the woods, under the galvanism of a fiery sun. And there, from that surrender, rose up a new race whose offspring would populate the Canaan of the fifteenth century, the most beautiful region on earth. Then, time did the rest. New layers of life were produced, each weaker, each less than the original. It was a horrible current, heading fatally to death, a flood of life condemned to extinction by its own ferment! (Zeno Gandía, pp. 72, 73.)

Del Salto, however, offers a solution:

In the life of nations, one century is a minute. Perseverance and time conquer the world. If the problem is ever to be solved, waves of new life must come, torrents of vigor from abroad, abundances of ethnic mixtures, the breath and vitality which are lacking here, the atmosphere of sincere, honorable liberty that is not now enjoyed. The nourishment will come in many ways: compulsory education, health vaccines, enforced hygiene, and other defenses against the forces of nature; military service, which converts weak recruits into robust veterans; the encouragement of hunting, which eliminates softness and rewards agility; clothing to awaken the shame of nudity; the encouragement of alternate crops that allow a healthy, varied diet; stimuli to build cheap, clean and sensible housing; and, above all, there must come the merciful hand that snatches away from the people the poison, the miserable enemy of their health, of their peace, of their redemption . . . alcohol! (Zeno Gandía, pp. 73, 74.)

For some at least, the turn-of-the-century events produced by the Spanish-American War offered an opportunity for that "torrent of new vigor" to be brought in. The subsequent invasion of Puerto Rico by the U.S., which began with military troops in 1898 and has continued into the present day has had at its disposition not only the military and naval bases throughout the main island of Puerto Rico and the island-municipality of Vieques, but myriad other instruments of domination, in all fields such as education, health services, mass communications, business and technological development — and yes, religion. The culture and the values of the 3.5 million Puerto Ricans on the Island and the nearly 2 million migrants to the continental U.S. continue to exhibit strongly persistent characteristics (both positive and negative) of the Island's past. But, despite all the technological advancements brought by a regime bent on freeing Puerto Rico from "obscurantism, illness and ignorance," in the 20th century Puerto Rican women, just as Meso-American women in the time of Hernán Cortéz, face a world that puts at risk their bodies before the idols of "progress" and "civilization."

During the first three decades after the U.S. invasion of 1898 there was a coordinated effort to eliminate from the Island both Catholicism and the Spanish language, as well as to improve health conditions, and take control of all aspects of the economy. The forces of military occupation used the Protestant religion, the public school system, political parties and hospitals to grind home the need to abandon Puerto Rican traditions in favor of Americanization. By the Depression in the 1930s, it had become apparent to the new regime that population growth could undermine their plan of economic development and political control of the Island. Reducing the rates of demographic increase then became imperative. But in order to do this, certain values had to be changed. Views and values related to woman's body, to her role in the family and to society had to be changed. Politicians, educators, business interests, health professionals, all played a part in this process of secularization, modernization and Americanization.

In opposition to this enterprise stood the Catholic church with its particular notions on the sanctity of life, and its views on the human body. But sadly, the Catholic church in Puerto Rico administered to the traditional faith with a clergy and hierarchy imported from the U.S. This meant that although there was protection of Puerto Rican values in the church's message, there was another political agenda of control behind it. In reality, neither the modernizers nor the traditionalists defended the interests of Puerto Rican women, although both loudly proclaimed themselves to be protectors of women's rights. While there were some women on both sides of the conflict, for the most part, this was a battle between secularizing liberal males in the government versus religious conservative bishops and male clergy on the other. Both said that they struggled on behalf of women although with totally divergent conceptions of who women were, what women needed and what was important about women's bodies.

Thus we come to the works of Emilio Belaval, a former judge in Puerto Rico's Supreme Court. His second published work *Cuentos para fomentar el turismo* (1946), includes a story which addresses this issue.⁴ "Monsona Quintana's Purple Child" tells the story of the joy and deep suffering of motherhood in Puerto Rico in the early decades of this century.⁵ The story was aptly

dedicated to a famous Puerto Rican gynecologist, Dr. José S. Belaval (and his wife), who besides bearing the same last name as the author was instrumental in setting up birth control clinics throughout the island under the label of Planned Parenthood.

His depiction of Monsona Quintana's body and spirit is indeed disconcerting. Here is a woman who had neither the health of my grandmother nor the resolve of Ortiz Cofer's grandmother. Monsona's only resolve was to be a channel of life as a mother. But when that channel was no longer operational, when she has no control over the quality of life it produces and that life is doomed to extinction, Monsona cannot accept the loss.

Monsona Quintana is an emaciated countrywoman of my land who has given birth seventeen times; her belly is so stretched that her husband can no longer tell when she is pregnant. Childbearing has devoured the youth of this country girl who once had the color of *camándula* seeds and the breasts of a sleepy turtledove. Now she is only a dreamy mother, exhausted from carrying so much creek water to the house, bare of ribbons other than the tawdry shreds which, in my land, are suspended in a mother's soul. (Belaval, in Wagenheim, p. 5.)

The story comes to a climax with the inevitable death of the purple child and a pathetic funeral accompanied by "ragged angels" and witnessed by the narrator, a government agent in the service of tourism. Besides all the torments she had undergone as a mother of seventeen children, Monsona inflicted upon herself the worse pain of all — that of hoping in a hopeless situation. As an explanation for Monsona's suffering and for all the sacrifices of Puerto Rican mothers the narrator states: "In my land, friend, she who gives birth *rears*, although the scrofulous scrap of a child may be torn from many a mother's arms" (p. 13).

Thus, although they are separated by nearly half a century and take place under two different imperial regimes, the scenes painted by Zeno Gandia and Belaval have much in common. What would cure both the weakness of the body and the debilitation of the soul, according to the fictionalized hacendado del Salto, would be a process requiring not enduring patience

but the infusion of new stock into the gene pool. Such a process could not be attained over night. This is the reason why *La charca's* protagonist's condition endures in that of Monsona Quintana and her purple child more than half a century later. That is why the Puerto Rican, body and spirit, continues to be a spectacle, worthy of disdain, or at best pity. Time, a rigorous socio-economic program and new vigor from the outside are needed to improve the lot. Without these, Puerto Ricans are doomed to feebleness.

In *La charca*, what is at stake is who is fit to be mother and father, that is who should give body to the future generations of Puerto Ricans. Who can produce and mold the raw material upon which *la Patria* is constructed? The arbiters of this most important decision at first seem to be three: the hacendado (business interests), the priest (the church), and the physician (education, science, medicine). A fourth person is introduced in "Monsona Quintana's Purple Child," the agent of tourism representing the government. To them was left the important business of discussing and determining what constitutes a healthy body, be it individual or collective.

The writings I have quoted demonstrate the conception of the body imposed not only upon Puerto Rican women but upon all Puerto Ricans. The image of the female body is seen against the setting of an exotic environment, fertile but not yet tamed. Her offspring is depicted as prolific but devoid of any grace and strength. By inference this literature also reveals the image of the perfect body of the male progenitors (strong, energetic, graceful), and how far contemporary Puerto Ricans are from the target.

Chillingly, what was depicted as fiction at the turn of the century by Zeno Gandía in his *Crónicas* closely resembles the platform upon which policies affecting the future of the Puerto Rican nation are established by the United States' government. The question of too many of the wrong kind of bodies in Puerto Rico was one of the issues addressed in the inaugural address of January 30, 1932. Governor Beverley, a Texas lawyer who had been living in Puerto Rico since 1925, spoke of the need for

Puerto Rico to stress the quality of its population rather than the quantity and indicated that "sooner or later the question of our excessive population must be faced."

I have always believed that some method of restricting the birth rate among the lower and more ignorant elements of the population is the only salvation for the Island. The tragedy of the situation is that the more intelligent classes voluntarily restrict their birth rate, while the most vicious, most ignorant and more helpless and hopeless part of the population multiplies with tremendous rapidity.⁶

Besides suggesting the importation of new biological stock to Puerto Rico, (as Zeno Gandía's fictional Juan del Salto had proposed), Governor Robert H. Gore, successor to Beverley, advocated exporting Puerto Rican families to Florida's agricultural communities and to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean with similar climates such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Brazil (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, pp. 31, 36.) Rexford Tugwell, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration, wrote to the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, in March 16, 1934,

There are a dozen children behind every bush, many of them very indifferently nourished . . . There must be either an increase in our charity or a mass movement outward of population.⁷

But unlike his predecessor Gore, still another U.S. appointed governor, Rexford Guy Tugwell was not eager to have them migrate to the U.S.

I rather dislike to think that our falling fertility must be supplemented by these people . . . Our control of the tropics seems to me certain to increase immigration from here and the next wave of the lowly . . . will be mulatto, Indian, Spanish people from the south of us. They make poor material for social organization but you are going to reckon with them.

Tugwell's appointee as Puerto Rico's Commissioner of Health, Dr. Antonio Fernós Isern, shared the governor's concern on the population issue, though his solutions were somewhat different. Writing for the *New York Times*, Fernós Isern refers to the Puerto Rican problem in medical terms commonly used to speak of a woman's body. Puerto Ricans, as a whole, suffer from "hypertension" and what is needed is a "good emergency 'bloodletting' scientifically carried out." To delay the treatment would mean a "spontaneous hemorrhage," thus planned intervention in the migratory process had to be exercised (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, p.79). Birth control as a eugenic and public health measure was important. But he was also of the opinion that contraceptive methods would have a negligible effect on population growth. While he recommended raising the legal age of sexual consent among women and deplored the practice of concubinage, it was in the autonomous development of the island where he saw the ultimate solution. He characterized the prevailing plantation economy as one which "degrades the human personality . . . by transforming workers into slaves" and urged for "the economic and political decolonization of the island, without which Puerto Rico's economic and industrial development is impossible" (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, pp. 66, 77).

But the U.S. had other designs for Puerto Rico and its people. According to Charles Taussig, Adviser of Caribbean Affairs, none other than President Franklin Delano Roosevelt has been quoted as saying jokingly:

"I guess the only solution is to use the methods which Hitler used effectively." He [Roosevelt] said it is all very simple and painless — "you have people pass through a narrow passage and then there is the brrrrr of an electrical apparatus. They stay there for 20 seconds and from then on they are sterile!" (See Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, note 15, p. 205.)

Efforts to control the population of Puerto Rico went hand in hand with the creation of Puerto Rico as *vitrina del progreso estadounidense*, the famous showcase of U.S. democracy in the Caribbean. Necessarily, then, these efforts responded not so much to that of the Island and its inhabitants as to the needs of the

metropolis. In their book detailing these policies, Ramírez Arellano and Seipp aptly summarize the connection between the birth control issue and federal policies and events in the U.S. and the oftentimes contradictory responses elicited.

When the United States entered the war, the health and productivity of the female population became very important. Since many vital industries required women workers and unwanted pregnancies removed workers from the assembly lines, the provision of birth control services became part of the war effort. As a result, in May 1942 the Public Health Service began actively to promote contraceptive programs (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, p. 68).

The confusing Puerto Rican response to this federal policy had to do more with its colonial position than with anyone's decision on the Island.

Ironically, the same war conditions that transformed birth control into a social necessity and even a patriotic duty made contraceptives increasingly difficult to obtain. The Puerto Rico Health Department's annual report for fiscal year 1942-43 indicated that some 142 clinics had been operating and 6,242 cases had been seen. Yet the report also stated that war conditions had limited the availability of contraceptive materials, and produced a decline in the number of new admissions (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, p. 68).

But if such policies did not always have the desired effect, the war in which the U.S. had involved its Puerto Rican citizens and the Island, itself, through the many military installations, had a significant influence upon Puerto Ricans.

. . . the war increased the frequency and intensity of cultural interchanges between Puerto Rico and the United States. Prior to the war, exposure to the mainland culture had been limited for most of the Puerto Rican population. During the war the two peoples had numerous opportunities for exchange. Thousands of American servicemen were based in Puerto Rico; an even larger number of Puerto Ricans went to the mainland to serve in the armed forces. The

expansion of defense installations on the island meant that Americans and Puerto Ricans worked side by side. In addition, the war had a profound impact on two socioeconomic phenomena — industrialization and migration — that laid the basis for Puerto Rico's postwar development effort. (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, pp. 68, 69).

Members of the Catholic church have continued to call for caution fearing the excesses of a "planned parenthood" where neither the individual family nor the individual woman was of concern. Nor was the well-being of the Puerto Rican people as a people at stake. This was the position, for example, taken by Bishop Antulio Parrilla Bonilla, S.J., a dedicated *independentista*. His book, *Neomalthusianismo en Puerto Rico* (Editorial Juan XXIII, 1974), links the population control issue to ecology and contamination of the environment, the subordinate political status of the island, the preferential distribution of resources, the stratified social class system, the inadequate development and deployment of health and educational services, and overall the imperialist capitalist aspirations of the U.S. on the island. He also linked it to the need for personal freedom, personal fulfillment and vocation, conjugal love, the relationship between love and sexual activity, ethical and religious values, and the relationship between social/economic condition and personal and social responsibility.

Arguments about emotional stability and psychological well-being were also brought in. The fact that the U.S. medical establishment together with business interests (pharmaceuticals) had used Puerto Rican Women's bodies as an open field of experimentation was also in question. Such medical advances as the pill, intrauterine devices, abortion and sterilizations were tested on this population before they were deemed safe for U.S. mainland consumption. Once again Puerto Rican bodies were treated as disposable items. The fears expressed by religious leaders and others regarding genocide and neo-malthusianism were not unfounded.

Nor was birth control and sterilization the only violent assault upon the body. Letters dating from the New Deal in the 1930s show that Puerto Ricans were used for experiments. While he

was working in San Juan's Presbyterian Hospital under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, Cornelius Rhoads wrote to a friend:

The Porto Ricans . . . are beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere . . . What the island needs is not public health work but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population. It might then be livable. I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off eight and transplanting cancer into several more. The latter has not resulted in any fatalities so far . . . The matter of consideration for the patients' welfare plays no role here — in fact, all physicians take delight in the abuse and torture of the unfortunate subjects. (*El Mundo*, January 27, 1932).

Not only did Dr. Rhoads escape retribution for his experiments, he went on to become the director of the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute in New York City to which hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans migrated.

Despite the fact that approximately 35 percent of the Puerto Rican women of child bearing age today have been sterilized and that many others are using all sorts of birth control methods, the current population at 3.5 million (and another 2 million abroad) is still on the rise. This is both bemoaned and used as a political tactic on the Island. Depending on U.S. subsidies it is to the advantage of the politicians to paint as bleak a picture of Puerto Rico as possible, and the number game is an important factor here. On the other hand, it becomes necessary to demonstrate the successes wrought by education, medicine and technology. Thus the picture painted by governmental officials and politicians becomes suspect.

Puerto Rican women today have attacked these abuses in ways that are available to those who do not form part of the decision-making process. They see how in the name of health and progress, their sisters have been abused by a governmental and a professional establishment whose main obligation is to safeguard their well-being. Just as their mothers and grandmothers had witnessed and at times felt the pain of having

too many children, Puerto Rican women today now see the pain of women who had been sterilized without full knowledge and psychologically unprepared for the consequences.

But Puerto Rican women also know that the changes brought on by new technological developments, the move from a rural situation to an urban one, the need to migrate in search for jobs in the metropolis, necessitate new sacrifices and adjustments. Given the advances in hygiene and medicine and the changes in the economic situation of the island, they know seventeen children per family were neither necessary nor advisable. They have taken another look at their bodies and at their inner selves. Even from an economic perspective, the perception had to change. No longer body-making machines to produce hands for agriculture at a time of high infant mortality, women began to experience the need for a more active participation in the labor force, for more control over their lives.

Despite the propaganda from all sides of the birth control issue, many Puerto Rican women learned quickly to make the best out of a bad situation. They treated the political, medical and ecclesiastical establishments as they had learned to treat men in general — in a passive-resistance manner — after all, were not mostly men those who were calling the shots? Women learned to play one faction against the other. They would have as many children as they saw fit; and then with or without their husbands' consent, with or without the sanction of the church, they had the *operación*, but often only after a third or fourth baby had been born to them. After all, sterilization is the surest method of family planning, less hazardous than the Russian roulette strategy of the rhythm method or the relegation of the husband to that extra room in the back of the house. Besides, abortion is available to a devout Catholic for the once in a lifetime sin of sterilization, while the continued use of artificial birth control is not. So sterilized women go to confession, make peace with the church and have their last baby baptized. With a smaller family, they now have more time for themselves and possibly for employment outside of the house which would hopefully bring them an added measure of self-determination

and personal fulfillment. In this confusing maze that ricochets between secularism and traditionalism, a Puerto Rican woman makes sense of her values for her body, her family and her society.

There is much more than can be said of the contemporary feminist literature in Puerto Rico, but that would be the theme of another paper. Still, what is written by educated, professional women today can be understood best in the context of the maze created by the colonial situation. I hope in this presentation that I have shown how contemporary sociology and political analysis illustrates the importance of literature as a social commentary.

Woman's body has been a battleground in Puerto Rico for opposing forces of state and church, of science and religion, of modernization and tradition. Ironically, the political forces that have so influenced the image and treatment of the woman's body have been compared to their own victim. It is increasingly common to see Puerto Rico's political status compared in a metaphor to the woman's body. Political analysts have called Puerto Rico "the U.S. kept-woman of the Caribbean." Having a voice but no vote in Congress, Puerto Ricans can ask their lover to build them an extra room to the house, but, not unlike Ortiz Cofer's grandmother having no legitimacy as wife, the specifications are left to the *dueño y señor*. Nor can Puerto Ricans decide exactly how the room is to be used since official ownership is not theirs.

What interests me is the extent to which the people of Puerto Rico, as a nation, have been cast in the morbid mold of a feeble woman or a pathetic child, an ignorant mass who left to themselves are doomed to failure and self-destruction in much of our literature. The fiction of Zeno Gandía's pessimistic novels and Belaval's bitter-sweet short story are windows upon reality. There is hope, then, as women continue to reshape their image through a vigorous literary output that emphasizes our own values, that the future will imitate this positive fiction, rather than the past. Indeed, if the woman's body is now a contested battleground, it can one day be a victorious bulwark.

Notes

1. Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1990.
2. Not only have these weapons been lost but in their eagerness to rid themselves of values based upon symbols which are deemed detrimental to growth, women sometimes run the risk of negating or misrepresenting those which can be valuable if not for each and every woman, certainly for a segment of the female population. Whether this portion of the population is the majority or the minority in no way invalidates a legitimate claim to these values. Interestingly, among women writers who have had the experience of a Catholic education (at home and/or formally), such as Puerto Rican writers Ana Lydia Vega, Rosario Ferré and others, one finds a very critical view of the church and of certain traditional values. Anti-clerical and even anti-religious sentiments are evident as women seek to find an identity apart from religion and other agents of socialization such as the family. Yet, instead of striking a balance, unchecked these resentments run the risk of excesses just as strident as those that are being combated. In the least offensive cases they may lead to misinterpretations if not misrepresentations. As an example, I would like to give Magali García Ramis's interpretation of a line in the song "Verde Luz," by Puerto Rican musician Antonio Cabán Vale, El Topo. García Ramis feels it is a wonderful patriotic song, except for the one verse that says: "Isla *doncella* quiero tener." Equating *doncella* with infertility, and virginity with *rezagos* or oddities which should be left behind, she writes: "Cuando uno piensa, uno sigue cantando Verde Luz toda la vida, pero anhelando que ese verso no estuviera allí, que la añoranza de un país libre tuviera otra imagen, fecunda en vez de *doncella*, anunciadora de cambios necesarios en vez de mantenedora de *rezagos* que debemos dejar atrás." (See Magalis García Ramis, *La ciudad que me habita*, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, Ediciones Huracán, 1993, pp. 109-114). Her rejection, then, is based on her understanding of virginity as an infertile state, or as the negation of fecundity. This, in turn, translates into an unproductive and fruitless way of being. But history does not bear out this interpretation of virginity; on the contrary, throughout recorded times virgins (males and females) have been productive and highly creative people, and society is very much in their debt. Lack of fecundity is not a determinant of virginity nor vice versa. In my estimation, virginity and motherhood can certainly be viewed as two distinct modes of women's fecund

creativity. One should try to avoid casting doubt upon their worth by the use of flippant language or sloppy reasoning. It is my contention, that while in history only to one Virgin has been attributed the type of "fecundity" that García Ramis seems to attribute to non-virgins, i.e., the power and the actualization of biological reproduction—fruitfulness in a person's life goes beyond the physical conception and issuance of offspring. At any rate, not all non-virgins are in fact fertile or imbued with the values necessary for a "fruitful and an enriching" future for our land and its people. On the other hand, most *doncellas* have the capacity for biological reproduction. That they abstain from it is not a sign of infertility; it may be a temporary situation or a permanent one by choice — a choice that is often linked to deep personal values and/or specific personal vocation. Furthermore, from a literary perspective, it must be recognized that Puerto Rican female and male writers alike have envisioned the island in its smallness, gentility, tenderness, restlessness, courage, docility, generosity, and have portrayed it as a mother, a seductress, a brave *amazona*, a lover, a new bride, and a victim of abuse and rape. In political circles, Puerto Rico has been called "the kept-women of the U.S." If I find García Ramis's objection curious it is because I had expected her not to equate personal and collective self-worth merely with the ability to procreate. I thought she saw women's role in society and their sense of self-worth as encompassing but transcending motherhood. In the birth control and women's right debates, I would expect to find a person like her arguing for the right of women to procreate or abstain from it. Logically, the right and respect for different lifestyles would be expected and from each one legitimate symbols could be drawn.

3. Manuel Zeno Gandía, *La charca*, Maplewood, N.J., Waterfront Press, 1982.
4. Emilio S. Belaval, *Cuentos para fomentar el turismo*, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, Editorial Cultural, 1985.
5. Emilio S. Belaval, "Monsona Quintana's Purple Child," in Kahl Wagenheim (ed.) *Cuentos: An Anthology of Short Stories from Puerto Rico*. New York, Schocken Books, 1978.
6. Annette Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp. *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*, Chapel Hill and London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1983, p.186, note 56.
7. Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*, Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1960, p. 159.

The Conflation of the Female Body and Earth in Indian Religious Traditions: Gendered Representations of Seed, Earth and Grain

Janet Chawla

From ancient times to the present, the female body and the *earth* have been conflated in the Indian mind. Both have been conceptualized and represented as possessing the awesome power of fertility. Women birth babies. The *earth* grows grain, fruit and vegetables which nourish human beings. A Harappan seal explicitly depicts a woman, upside down, in a yogic position—hands on the knees of her open legs—with a plant-like emanation emerging from her *yoni*. A similar schematic representation of a plant form emerging from a triangular yonic symbol is captured in a photograph of a contemporary wall painting on a Rajasthani house. Even Indian government family planning messages include triangular motifs. In a passage from the *Markandeya Purana* the goddess speaks:

Next o ye Gods, I shall support the whole world with the life sustaining vegetables which shall grow out of my own body during a period of heavy rain. I shall gain fame on *earth* then as Sakambari.

Hinduized cultures have celebrated this fecundity in a myriad of forms. But these celebrations and representations are not unproblematic. On one hand, the dominant Indian cultural traditions valorize woman as mother while controlling female sexuality and delimiting her powers in socio-political-economic arenas. On the other, precious women-centered knowledge systems about birth, herbal medicines and holistic approaches to female physiology (which are still in practice in slums and rural areas) are being erased by medicalization and promotion of pharmaceutical 'cures' for normal female physiological processes. Also women's bodies and female fertility are the targets

for ruthless 'family planning' measures. Put simply, the female body is being problematized by western bio-medicine in the name of 'development'. Within this context, it has been difficult to develop feminist theoretical and practical perspectives on fertility and biological motherhood.

In this paper, I juxtapose Leela Dube's exposition on the oppressive socio-legal consequences of the woman-*earth* conflation with my own research on traditional North Indian midwives' ritual use of grain to facilitate childbirth—which draws upon a similar conflation. By exploring the nuanced differences which exist between the two sites of conflation, I hope to contribute to the development of culturally appropriate feminist theory and practice on female corporeality, fertility and biological motherhood.

First I must explore some historiographic and contextual issues. The meaning and significance of female fertility and the birth event have been defined by the Vedic-Brahmanic textual tradition in the dominant androcentric voice. Both historian Uma Chakravarty and Indologist Sukumari Bhattacharji point to the oppressive aspects of these ideological gendered definitions and their enterprise of controlling the sexuality and fertility of the high-caste woman.¹ I would suggest, however, that examinations of ritual, iconographic and 'folk' sources will nuance out other, less 'woman-friendly' paradigms of birth and fertility.²

In the contemporary Indian situation, we encounter the additional problem of the legacy of colonialist constructions of Indian culture and knowledge. Foreign Indologists and their pundit collaborators have foregrounded and utilized the Vedic-Brahmanic texts, particularly the legalistic texts (*Shashtra* and *Smriti*), in the service of British colonial administration. Thus, the normative position of women in many current discussions is influenced by assumptions drawn from these texts.

Within this textual tradition, the blood of childbirth, like that of menstruation, is designated as highly polluting. According to the lawgiver Manu, "when he has touched a Kandala, the menstruating woman, an outcast, a woman in childbed, a corpse, or one who has touched a corpse, he becomes pure by bathing". Both the Vedic warrior-hero Indra and the renunciate Gautama,

the Buddha, are depicted in their respective traditions as born through their mothers' side, achieving a masculine power and sacrality by avoiding birth through the *yonī*. In the Rig Veda, Indra states about the *yonī* that "...these are bad places to go through" (RV, 4.18.2).

Both this pollution ideology and the avoidance of the *yonī* in the birth narratives of heroic and sacred masculine figures serve to devalue the spiritual and experiential dimensions of female corporeality while valorizing patrilineal motherhood. The dominant religio-cultural traditions tend to mask, appropriate, desacralize, and even demonize a primal religious impulse conflating the sign of female fertility, menstruation, with the wet fertile soil, the 'dirt' of the *earth*—attributing power and sacrality to both.³

I have no pretence in this paper of adequately analysing centuries of interrelated religious ideas of corporeality and their gender implications. But contemporary India is informed by these manifold traditions, epochs and representations of female and male corporeality—much to the chagrin of Indian and foreign functionaries. And so woman-centered perspectives on ancient and often competing traditions are certainly relevant to current discourses on population, reproductive health, family planning and female 'fertility'.

Furthermore, much of Indian feminist activism and scholarship, being primarily secular and humanitarian in nature, have focused on the oppression of women: documentation, analyses and development of strategies for action in order to alleviate this oppression. The validity of this enterprise need not be questioned. Other feminist efforts involve a shift from considering women as victims to detecting and articulating women as subjects and agents. Retrospectively, I would locate my work with traditional midwives within these efforts.

Most scholars of South Asian culture, medical anthropologists and sociologists, international funders for 'development', Government of India policy makers and even Western-educated, members of the urban Indian elite view the traditional midwife as dirty, ignorant, superstitious-dangerous.⁴ But a review of the literature available in these fields shows almost no systematic, unbiased documentation of traditional midwives' cosmologies,

ritual interventions, herbal knowledge, indigenous representational understandings of female physiology and energies, not to mention notions of divinities and demons, spirit guides and religio-cultural ideas.

In some circles, however, the Indian midwife, the *dai*, and the ethno-medical knowledge systems she inherits, are beginning to be taken seriously. Non-governmental organizations such as *Shodhini* (a feminist health network researching women's use of herbal medicines), *Lok Swasthya Parampara Samvardhan Samhiti*, (an Ayurvedic group working on the revitalization of indigenous health knowledge) and other field-based NGO's are themselves learning about appropriate and affordable approaches to health as well as ritual handling of female life-cycle events such as birth from the midwives themselves.

Anthropologist Brigitte Jordan has written brilliantly on the alternate epistemologies of midwives. Margaret Stephens, an "experiential guide" who possesses cultural knowledge and cosmological understandings similar to the laboring woman, has done other significant contributions.⁵ But these voices are by far the exceptions in the anthropological, sociological, medical and 'development' literature.

I would suggest that the problem of the colonialist constructions of Indian Culture and knowledge systems privileging Brahmanic voices, mentioned above, is being compounded by current globalization, modernisation and 'development' discourses which further erroneously represent and devalue indigenous ethno-medical and religio-cultural knowledge and practice. It is very fashionable in the West to be 'in to' holistic health, visualisation methods, New Age and goddess spirituality, yoga, meditation and Eastern wisdom traditions. It is ironic that, while these spiritual and healing modalities are being popularized and consumed by the 'developed' countries, global, market-driven forces (international funding agencies, multi-national corporations, bio-medical physicians and pharmaceuticals and the electronic media) are all functioning to replace those modalities within the Indian context.

It is within these meaning contexts, then, that I will explore a potent and pervasive religio-cultural idea: the similitude of

female and *earthly* fecundity. In the representational and belief systems of the Indian traditions, the conflation of woman and *earth*, emphasizing the fertility of both, has functioned to:

- 1) serve as a 'natural' model to legitimize male domination and control of sexuality and fertility
- 2) attribute sacrality and power (*shakti*) to both bodies: *earth* and female.

I will explore the symbolic equivalence of corporeality of woman and *earth* from two perspectives. First, drawing on the work of sociologist Leela Dube, I will present a critique of the patriarchal gender ideology which has been derived from the woman-*earth* similitude. Dube's work reveals an androcentric focus on seed as biological and social metaphor of woman as 'field'. Secondly, I present my own research on Delhi slum women's experiences of childbirth rites which display a woman-centered ritual use of the conflation of woman and *earth*. Within this paradigm, the ritual performance involves the use of grain as symbolic medium. This interview material also demonstrates the centrality of the traditional midwife as ethno-medical practitioner.

Man as seed, Woman as field

Leela Dube in her paper 'Seed and *Earth*: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production',⁶ traces the textual and folk traditions' use of the homology "seed and *earth*" as metaphor for both agricultural production and human reproduction. She quotes the *Narada Smriti*: "Women are created for offspring; a woman is the field and a man is the possessor of the field..." and notes that the Hindu marriage rituals include the *Kshetrasamskara*, the consecration of the field, which is aimed at purifying the bride's womb for receiving the seed.

Dube dwells on the negative consequences on women of the by-belief in the symbolic equivalence of woman and field. Although Dube uses the word '*earth*' interchangeably with the word 'field' in her analysis, I will suggest, in the concluding section of this paper, that we can and should distinguish between these

two nuanced meanings. It is also important to enhance the rituals and voices of a main repository of 'folk' culture: the midwife.

Dube shows how, in the sacred texts, although veneration of the mother is reiterated repeatedly, the child's dependence on the mother has been turned into the strongest moral obligation for the woman. Although the mother is morally obliged, social identity, privilege, and rights in the child belongs to the father. The metaphor of conception, the seed being sown in the soil, results in social constructions of biological symbolization of descent and the relative rights and positions of the male and the female.

According to Dube, the subtle implications of woman's likeness to the *earth* also suggest that "like the *earth*, a woman too has to bear pain. The *earth* is ploughed, furrowed, dug into; a woman too is pierced and ploughed." The analogy of sexual intercourse as ploughing works to render woman socially as passive and inert, whereas man is active, dominating and possessing.

By equating the woman's body with the field or the *earth* and the semen as seed, the process of reproduction is equated with the process of production and rights over the children with the rights over the crop.⁷

As Dube notes, the analogy of seed and field functions to legitimise both male rights over female sexuality and the woman's lack of legal right over her children if the couple separates. The custom is that when a woman leaves her husband, she also has to leave her children because "the crop should belong to him who has sown the seed."

In social systems founded on this biological/agricultural metaphor, women have no rights over either children or property. "The seed flows clearing the way for the flow of property" is how an informant summed up the biological and social significance of the father-son bond. Paternal rights over children are also derived from this analogical thinking.

The 'seed and field' symbolism for human reproduction, with the woman identified as the 'field,' is not a benign, neutral and 'natural' metaphor. Biologically inaccurate, androcentrically

constructed and gender-biased, the analogy has functioned for centuries to disempower women. In legalistic context, the conflation of woman and *earth* has alienated women from the reproductive and sexual power of their bodies and structured social relations which deny women rights to land and progeny.

Grain as Ritual Substance in Birth Rites: A Woman-Centered Enactment of the Female-*Earth* Conflation

Investigation of women's experiences of childbirth rites⁸ reveals that in the hands of the traditional midwife (the *dai*), with dough as a ritual and symbolic substance, the conflation of female body and *earth* operates to empower women as mothers and the *dai* as ethno-medical practitioner. The woman-*earth* metaphor enacted during birth rituals lacks the proprietary relationship implied by 'field' and functions to:

- 1) provide an imaginative linkage which facilitates labor;
- 2) evoke the presence of the goddess;
- 3) attribute power and sacrality to the female body;
- 4) reinforce bonds among women;
- 5) empower the midwife.

Midwives' Accounts of Birth Rites and Invocation of Baimata

Our interviews with traditional midwives (*dais*) included their perceptions of the birth event and its cosmological significance. Each of these interviews mentions birth rituals including separation of one mound of *atta* (dough use to make *chappatis* or unleavened bread) into two and the invocation of a deity, Baimata.

Moti Dai (literally 'fat midwife'), an upper caste midwife, describes her practice:

There is the custom of cutting the *atta* (dough) or rice. When the pains have come and the midwife has arrived, the laboring woman puts both hands full of dough on the plate. The midwife holds the wrist of the mother and she,

with her hand, separates the dough into two parts from the middle. Baimata is worshipped by putting money and raw sugar on top of the dough, offering it to the midwife, and saying "In this way separate the mother and the child — so that the child is born without any difficulty." It is said that, when Ram and Lakshman were born, Baimata herself came and acted as midwife. Now it's the midwife herself, who represents the Shakti of Baimata.

Shakina Dai, a Muslim midwife, states:

Look, sister, at the time of birth, it's only the woman's *shakti*. She who gives birth, at that time, her one foot is in heaven and the other in hell. The woman's shakti is indeed a lot when she gives birth to a child. In the hospital, oh sister, doctors abuse you straight away...and since they are well educated, they have too much pride in their education. And we are uneducated.

Before doing a delivery ...I get all the trunks, doors and so on, of the house opened. I pray to the One Above to open the knot quickly. I take off the sari, open the hair and take off the bangles or any jewellery. I put the dough on a plate and ask the woman to divide it into two equal parts. Also I get rupees in the name of Sayyid kept separately. But mostly, I remember Baimata. Repeatedly, I pray to the Baimata "Oh Mother! Please open the knot quickly."

Asharfi, a *Dalit*⁹ ('untouchable') midwife speaks of her beliefs and performance of the ritual:

Baimata writes the child's destiny. Her name is also taken at the birth. When I come to the house of the birthing woman, the moment I arrive I *pranam* (worship) the threshold, the entry of the house, and then move close to the woman who has the pains. We do a ritual with the dough. A piece of 1.25 rupees is put on a plate and I move it up and down the woman's body, head to toe and back again, seven times and say

Baimata relieve her,
take her boat to the other side
And like we have made this dough into two
So separate the child and the mother.

Baimata is an old wise woman. She may come in a neighbour woman's dream and then that woman would tell the mother that her time is soon to come.

The Atta Ritual

When I first encountered this ritual separation of the *atta* I was struck by the aptness of the analogy: the laboring woman ritually divides one mass of dough into two and then the maternal body physiologically separates into two, in a subtle and elegant ritual, congruent with female biological process. Only later did I come to appreciate the cultural resonance of the ritual substance, '*atta*,' within the meaning context of agricultural peoples whose daily lives are involved with seed-*earth*-plant-grain transformation processes.

Doors, windows, locks, and hair are loosened and opened so that process of opening can be mirrored in the laboring woman's body. Similarly, the *atta* ritual provides symbol and imagery analogues for the newborn's emergence from the mother's body. The cervix and vagina will loosen and open, facilitated by a culturally appropriate 'visualisation' rite. The religio-cultural conflation of female and *earth* in birth rituals is particularised in the use of grain as ritual substance. Imaginative associations of grain with the power (*shakti*) of fertile *earth* is drawn upon to represent and enhance the dynamics of female/embryo corporeality: that process we inelegantly refer to as "labor".

In the introduction to this paper, I stated that Hinduized cultures have celebrated female and *earthly* fertility. The fact that midwives from such distinct religious backgrounds as high-caste Hinduism, Islam and *Dalit* 'outcaste' custom all relate invocation of Baimata and ritual separation of *atta* exemplifies the interwoven, Hinduized cultural patterning of women's traditional handling of childbirth.

Both Moti Dai and Shakina Dai combine references to orthodox religious figures in their accounts. High-caste Moti Dai inserts Baimata into the *Ramayana* narrative as the archetypal midwife who personally appears to assist at the birth of Ram and Lakshman. Muslim Shakina Dai prays to the 'One Above' and

puts money aside "in the name of Sayyid" —both in accord with Islam. "The One Above" refers to Allah; the tombs of the sainted dead—*Sayyids* and *Pirs*—are shrines at which both Hindus and Muslims worshipped. But Asharfi, the *Dalit Dai*, "remembers Baimata" and it is she who seems to possess the power to "open the knot quickly."

Shakina also states the existential predicament of the laboring woman as well as naming her strength. "Look, sister, at the time of birth it's only the woman's *shakti*. She who gives birth at that time— her one foot is in heaven and the other, in hell." I understand this to have nuanced significance: the woman is simultaneously in a state of ritual pollution and yet is performing a profoundly meaningful task for family and community in giving birth; she is in pain and yet may be experiencing anticipation of the fulfilment of her desire for a child. Finally, Shakina Dai acknowledges that the laboring woman exists in the liminal space between life and death, heaven and hell, ancestors and progeny, gods and demons. And Baimata is a powerful deity who can be invoked to move within that space, in a way that masculine figures of Ram, Lakshman, Sayyid and "The One Above" cannot.

While Moti Dai and Shakina combine references to orthodox religious figures, Asharfi does not. When asked about Baimata, Asharfi answers:

Baimata writes the child's destiny. So when she makes a couple, husband and wife, she throws them into the water. One may be ahead and the other, behind, in the water—so one will die before the other. She writes both fortunes and misfortune, the good and the bad. If you're thrown in the water together, she may help you to cross the river together. Her name is also taken at birth.....

Asharfi continues the watery metaphor of life and fate in her invocation of Baimata during labor when she involves Baimata to "take her boat to the other side."

Postpartum Rites

Grain is also an important ritual offering at postpartum rites when the village well or water source is worshipped by an exclusively female entourage. Interestingly, the site of this ritual has been adapted by urban slum women from the well to the community water faucet. One informant stated:

Grain is roasted and shaped into seven mounds, money is put on these mounds and *puja* things are kept in a plate. A respected old lady hands the things to the new mother. With folding hands, the well or water tap is worshipped and songs are sung. This whole ritual involves only women relatives and neighbours.

Ethnographic and anthropological sources suggest that post-birth celebrations involved the distribution of grain to the community and low caste ritual specialists including the midwife. I have also encountered a taboo against the mother's consumption of grain during the period immediately after birth. A tentative interpretation of this taboo would be the following:

- 1) If the mother's body is conflated with the *earth*, then the infant would be analogous to grain during the postpartum period. The mother's eating grain would symbolically be equivalent to devouring the child. (And women whose infants die are sometimes colloquially chastised with the words "you devoured your child".)
- 2) Grain, as the ritual medium and symbolic representation of fertility, must be ritually empowered and respected by not being consumed in a mundane manner by the mother. Finally, it is the goddess herself, during the parturition period, who has the 'right' to her food, the ritual oblation, grain.

Ethnographic and anthropological reports, along with the descriptions offered by the slum women and midwives, all present the rites surrounding childbirth as non-Brahmanic, women-centered ritual spaces with grain as important ritual-symbolic medium. These wholly female rites utilize the woman-*earth* conflation to facilitate and celebrate the power of female corporeality.

Conclusions

I have presented two examples of the symbolic conflation of female body and *earth* in Indian traditions. Leela Dube exposes the socio-legal formulations derived from the seed and *earth*-as-field analogy. (Even today in many states under customary 'Hindu family law', women are legally constrained from holding agricultural land in their names.) Within this patrilineal legalist context, the female body is mainly rendered as *kshetra* or field—although Dube does not make this distinction. The meaning of the word *field* (Sanskrit *kshetra*) differs significantly from that of *earth* — a nuanced difference which lies at the heart of the meaning contexts juxtaposed in this paper. *Field* suggests a human endeavour of proprietary and productive relationship with an demarcated parcel of *earth*. It is obvious that the "seed and field" homology reflects the patriarchal exercise of dominion and control over the fertile resources of *earthly* and female corporeality.

The interview material on midwives' descriptions of childbirth, however, suggests another paradigm of female-*earth* corporeality: a conflation which is focused on the cosmological and imaginal associations of *earth* (*dharti*, *prithvi*, *bhoomi*) and not on the bounded, possessed and humanly-worked meanings of *field*. Within the ritual context of birth, the female-*earth* conflation religio-cultural constructions of fertile corporeality in order to facilitate the birthing woman, invoke the *shakti* of *earth* and Goddess and empower the *Dai*.

These differing paradigms of field and *earth* also demonstrate sexed experiential biases. I would argue that sometimes gendered cultural representations do reflect different male and female corporeal experience of sex and procreation. The androcentric focus on seed privileges male experience of physiological participation in human reproduction. Male contribution to human fertility is limited to possession and release of his seed-semen. Female fertility, however, involves a range of physiological processes: menstruation, intercourse, pregnancy, labor, birth and breastfeeding. My work on birth rites has only cursorily dealt with complex and varied women's ritual-symbolic renderings of female fertility.

Furthermore, as Kamala Ganesh suggests in the title and substance of her article 'Mother Who Is Not a Mother: In search of the Great Indian Goddess,' the Indian Mother Goddesses (such as Baimata) can be interpreted as expressing ideas of the power, autonomy and primacy of female corporeality. These ideas and representations deeply question patriarchal and patrilineal constructions of biological motherhood implicit in the conflation of female body and 'field'. Sensitive scholars need to systematically 'unearth' these empowering iconographic, ritual dimensions of women's religio-cultural rituals, and activists must be careful to not undermine these beliefs and practices in their organizing for legal, economic and social rights.

Relevance to Feminist Theory and Practice

Complicated academic debates exist on the relevance to the Indian situation of Foucaultian and postmodernist critique of the masculine, rational, subject-agent. I am not equipped to join such discussions. I would only suggest that it is important for scholars and activists to regard carefully the cultural texts and voices of slum and village women in order to adequately ground theory in the experience of non-elite Indian women and their religio-cultural constructions of corporeality. It is very fashionable to theorize the body. Harappan seal makers did so in the third millennium BCE. I would hope that scholars and theorists would be as familiar with the textual, iconographic, ritual and 'folk' traditions of India as they are with Foucault, Derrida and Lacan.

Marxist and Gandhian philosophies, which have motivated previous generations of grassroots activists, have not created sufficient space for respectful dialogues and cultural learnings from *Dalit* and tribal peoples—especially women of these communities. Nor have they had the intent, methods or will to grapple with cultural constructions of female corporeality.

Secular feminist approaches to women's health concerns have been based on a bio-medical model which devalues Indian religio-cultural ideas and ethno-medicine. Furthermore, these epistemological and theoretical frameworks simply cannot embrace representations and experiences of female corporeality which are not in accord with their world views.

We based our research with slum women on the presupposition that the midwife possesses certain expertise and that expertise was drawn from both personal experience and traditional knowledge systems. Traditional birth attendants acquire their skills in apprenticeship with other midwives, often their mothers or mothers-in-law. Midwives are now voicing their concerns that younger women are not interested in apprenticing with them—that they are more interested in higher status jobs, not tainted by the 'dirt' of the female body.

Both Frédérique Apffel Marglin¹⁰ and Brigitte Jordan describe the learning situations in which midwives traditionally acquire their skills and knowledge. Throughout the 'developing' world, in localized and particularized culture sites, midwives have acquired their craft by apprenticeship with an experienced midwife. Apffel Marglin writes of craft as immediate and personalized work—as opposed to mechanistic and commodified labor. "Craft skills can only be learnt by directly copying the bodily actions of a skilled person during a period of apprenticeship. The acquiring of a particular craft skill is not mediated by abstract generalizations of the work process, or by a purely intellectual analysis of the way the body must perform in order to achieve the desired result." Jordan states that the apprenticeship mode of acquisition of midwifery skills "involves *the ability to do* rather than the *ability to talk about* something" and posits that in fact it might be difficult to elicit from people operating in this mode what they actually know and do.

Midwifery training programs in use throughout the 'developing' world are attempting to replace this locally appropriate bodily performance and embodied knowledge. Authoritative and didactic, classroom-based teaching utilizes systematic visual, oral and written representations of female corporeality derived from Euro-American culture. Foucault's term 'subjugated knowledges' accurately describes cultural legacies which are insufficiently elaborated—"those naïve knowledges located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." Surely the traditional knowledge system of the Indian Midwife, subjugated by both the Brahmanical priestly and globalized bio-medical systems, needs to be considered in current Indian feminist attempts to theorize the body.

As mentioned above, Eastern religio-cultural traditions like yoga, meditation and Ayurveda are being recognised as offering valuable alternatives to reductionist bio-medical constructions of human corporeality. Why would the knowledge systems surrounding childbirth, with the midwife as ethno-medical practitioner, not also be of value? Because they have been primarily in the hands of the low and outcaste women? Ritual texts and midwives' narratives can give voice to these subjugated knowledges and provide us with empowering representations of female fertility and corporeality.

Notes

1. Uma Chakravarty, 'Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India, Gender Caste, Class and State,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 3, 1993 and Sukumari Bhattacharji, 'Motherhood in Ancient India,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 20-27, 1990.
2. Kamala Ganesh, 'Mother Who Is Not a Mother: In Search of the Great Indian Goddess,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 20-27, 1990. Ganesh relies heavily on iconographic sources in this article. My own work, *Childbearing and Culture, Women Centered Revisioning of the Traditional Midwife: The Dai as a Ritual Practitioner*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1994, presents information and analyses on this topic.
3. See Janet Gyatso, 'Down With the Demons: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet,' Janice Willis (ed.), Ithaca, New York, Snow Lion Publications, 1989, for a consideration of this phenomenon within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Also, of course, both Hindu and Buddhist Tantricism retain and rework a primal valuation of menstrual blood as source of power and use it as a ritual substance. See Miranda Shaw's, *Passionate Enlightenment, Women in Tantric Buddhism*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, for a woman-centered deconstruction of previous Western androcentric scholarship on Buddhist Tantric tradition.
4. Dr. Charles Leslie, Senior Editor of *Social Science and Medicine* and eminent medical anthropologist, told me in a telephone conversation in August 1995 that South Asianists consider the *dai* (midwife) to be 'ignorant and superstitious'. Dr. Jon Rhode, head of UNICEF, New Delhi, in September 1993 said to me that there was no background literature providing theoretical support for their midwife training exercises and that they were generally regarded as sub-standard obstetricians.
5. Brigitte Jordan, 'Cosmopolitical Obstetrics: Some Insights from the Training of Traditional Midwives,' in *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 28, Number 9.
6. See Leela Dube, *Seed and Earth: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production*, in Leela Dube, Eleanor Leacock, Shirley Ardener (eds), *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.
7. Ibid.
8. I collaborated with the non-governmental organisations Ankur and Action India in researching women's and midwives' experiences of menstruation, sex, pregnancy and birth. The interview material upon which this paper is based was gathered by slum residents who were trained as health workers. I personally interviewed Asharfi, the Dalit midwife.
9. I use the word 'Dalit' in deference to the sensibilities of Dalit activists and writers who choose this word to describe themselves—as opposed to Mahatma Gandhi's word 'Harijan' or the more sociological 'outcaste' or 'untouchable'. It is my understanding that dalit, in Marathi, has connotations of 'broken' which reflects the human suffering of traditionally outcaste people.
10. Frédérique Apffel Marglin, 'Women's Blood: Challenging the Discourse of Development' in *The Ecologist Asia*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September/October 1993.

IV Culture, Religion and Gender

Shamanism as Reflexive Discourse: Gender, Sexuality and Power in the Mapuche Religious Experience

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo

This paper draws on critical feminist and "Womanist" approaches to explore Chilean Mapuche concepts of gender and their relationship to the identity and practice of *machis*, powerful healers and religious intermediaries who are predominantly women. Besides male and female genders, the Mapuche conceptualize a spiritual gender reserved for *machis* that combines female and male genders as well as principles of seniority. *Machis* possess two or more of these three genders, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation, and embody them according to social and ritual context. However, women *machis* predominate over male ones and spiritual power is associated with female dress, identity and sexuality. This ethnographic study focuses on how gender is diversely constructed and on the correlations between machihood, female sexual identity, the possession of multiple genders and religious power.

Gender is a heterogenous, culture-bound and often context-specific concept. Feminist ethnography has shed insights on how gender and sexuality are conceptualized in various cultures and the consequences of such cultural conceptualizations. Ortner and Whitehead (1981) see gender and sexuality as cultural (symbolic) constructs that interact most critically with prestige structures of society. Butler (1990) criticizes essentialist fixed gender identities rooted in nature, bodies and heterosexuality and problematizes the universal concept of women. Universal constructions of patriarchy and oppression have been criticized as colonialism, and gender is now seen as bound up with race, class, ethnic and regional modalities and interconnected with global processes unevenly at work. Colored women anthropologists have also participated in the dialogical creation of culture and re-thinking of the discipline from a feminist perspective (Behar and Gordon:1997). However, many native women continue to find

feminist theory and practice misguided and in conflict with their self-determination (Green 1980, 1992; Allen 1986; Hogan 1987; Shanley 1989; Gould 1992).

One of the problems seems to be that studies on Native Americans still tend to focus on anatomical and sexual choice as the basis for determining native gender definitions. This conflicts with many native societies that consider occupational pursuit defined by the spirits as the most important element in gender definition followed by dress/demeanor and lastly sexual choice (Whitehead:1981:97). This paper will try to address this concern by focusing on *machi* practice and notions of gender. I draw on *machi* discourses and local Mapuche constructions of gender embedded in practice (Ortner 1996) and look at how they interact with and re-signify those of Catholic national and mestizo society. The purpose is to allow for a situated and nuanced understanding of Mapuche gender concepts as practiced by *machis* without denying their complexity, ambivalence and contradictions.

Machihood is a multigender practice and a reflexive discourse on the complementary and differential roles that male, female, old and young dimensions play in Mapuche cosmology, society and history. In Mapuche *machihood*, gender categories are not unproblematic categories but ones with considerable complexity. I explore how egalitarian gender ideologies in Mapuche cosmology relate to the gender egalitarianism and gender hierarchy practiced in society, how gender presents itself in history and the *machi* gendered experience and identity.

This ethnographic study focuses on how gender is diversely constructed and on the correlations between machihood, female sexual identity, the possession of multiple genders and religious power. The approach is a phenomenological, experiential one and is based on research conducted with both female and male *machis* in the Araucanian region of Chile between 1987 and 1995, where I participated in both curing and collective *nguillatun* rituals. I use pseudonyms to refer to specific *machis* in order to protect their privacy.

There are four sections in this paper. The first looks at how gender is constructed in Mapuche cosmology. Section two looks at the relationship between power, prestige and gender in

Mapuche society. In section three, I explore the *machis* context-specific gendered identity. The fourth and final section traces the historical relationship between *machihood* and gender and the meaning behind the transition from male *machis* to female *machis* in varying socio-economic and political conditions.

I Cosmology: Creating Gender as Knowledge and Fertility

The Mapuche or "people of the land" from southern Chile are one of South America's largest contemporary native populations. They number a million people, half of whom live in urban areas. The rural Mapuche live in the region of Bio-Bio, Araucanía and Los Lagos regions, a land of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tidal waves that have shaped their cosmology and worldview. The Mapuche have managed to keep a strong sense of identity and maintain their own language, *Mapudungun* despite centuries of colonization and attempts to assimilate them into other societies, first the Inca, then the Spanish and finally the Chilean.

Mapuche cosmology depicts the balanced relationship between male and female, old age and youth in every form of existence. Gender together with age are understood to be the important modes of organization in the relationships between humankind and the natural and the spiritual worlds. Both knowledge (culture) and fertility (nature) result from this relationship. This brief look at the Mapuche creation myth explains how these relationships are created and constituted. The creation myth presented here is a synthesis of three versions: one collected by Sperata de Sauniere in 1975, Armando Marileo's version and *machi* Pamela's version, both told in 1995.

"In the beginning there was only *Füta Newen*, the big power or spirit that controlled everything" (*machi* Pamela:1995). *Füta Newen* is the image of wholeness and possesses all possibilities and meaning within his/her self. *Füta Newen's* only limitation is not being able to express this unity of meaning. Wholeness can only be mimicked or re-created when these partial meanings are assembled by *machis* and re-enacted in ritual performance.

One day, *Füta Newen's* children became angry and rebelled. "The little spirits all wanted to rule, so they spat and kicked and yelled" (*machi* Pamela: 1995). "*Füta Newen* got angry and spat them out into a big pile" (Marileo:1995). "The big spirit hurled fire through his eyes and the spit got hard like stone" (Sperata de Sauniere:1975:2112-213). These quarrelsome spirits were *Füta Newen's* sons who became the first warrior spirits or *pillanes* in the form of thunder, lightning, volcanoes and stones. "The loyal spirits were *Füta Newen's* daughters who became stars that cried because they were now separate from their brothers. Their tears formed lakes and rivers" (Marileo:1995). The earth was created from the mixture of water (daughter's tears) and ash from the volcanoes (brother's anger) and was therefore both male and female.

Füta Newen then became the female moon and the male sun and created humankind. "Woman was created first from a daughter-star and placed on earth as the giver of life. All plants, animals and other forms of life arose from her footsteps. Man, the hunter-warrior, was created from a son-lightning-rod to protect and feed her" (Marileo:1995). "The big spirit wanted to see its children. He (the sun) poked his face through the air. It was big, swollen and hot from working in the fields. He watched, he was wise, and the wheat and potatoes grew. At night, when he wasn't looking, his wife (the moon) poked her head through the hole, carefully so as not to wake him. She looked, she was wise, and they (the young couple) became pregnant. The animals became pregnant, everything became pregnant" (*machi* Pamela:1995). The moon and the sun took turns in looking over their children, thereby creating the balanced relationship between day and night.

These four celestial beings constitute *Ngünechen*, the first sacred family. The sun is an old man or father, the moon is an old woman or mother, the lightning is a young man or son, and the star is a young woman or daughter. The old man and the old woman are husband and wife, while the young man and the young woman can be either husband and wife or brother and sister. Each of these beings has his or her specific characteristics. Both the old man and the old woman possess traditional wisdom, while the young man and the young woman possess the vigor

and fertility of youth. The characteristics of the four beings in this family are thought to be present in every aspect of nature, as well as in herbal remedies, crops, animals, plants, and in cultural manifestations such as textile designs, songs, music and movements.

These four sacred beings constitute the fourfold androgynous deity *Ngünechen*, who engendered the first people. Both genders played an important role in creating culture and nature. The old man (*Fucha wentru*) and the old woman (*Kushe domo*) possessed knowledge of traditional lore that had to be transmitted and followed, while the young man (*Weche wentru*) and the young woman (*Ülcha domo*) possessed vitality and reproduced, engendering the first Mapuche people. The old and the young woman were concerned with the inclusive, integrating, curing and forgiving elements, while old man and young man were concerned with protection, revenge, warfare and hunting strategies.

The Mapuche creation myth is the blueprint for their cultural ideology and establishes the basis for gender relations in all other realms of Mapuche life. As well as being the first Mapuche family and the basis for Mapuche society and culture, *Ngünechen* and its four principals are in every aspect of nature, sexuality and life. The interdependence of these different realms is reinforced by attributing the creation of nature and culture to both male and female genders, by making old age (wisdom) and youth (fertility) crucial for Mapuche survival, and by considering nature as part of the spiritual world. The myth expresses the complementarity of male and female realms and the need to bring together the four principles to obtain spiritual wholeness.

II Prestige and Power in Mapuche Gender Relations

In her article "Gender Hegemonies," Ortnor distinguishes between three separate dimensions in determining relative gender status: 1) *Relative prestige*, evaluation or ranking of the sexes; 2) *Male dominance and female subordination* where men exert control over women; 3) *Female power*, the degree of

subordination in rural areas is created by Chilean male dominant society which assumes that, because men hold political roles, Mapuche society must be male dominant.

In fact, because rural households are loosely associated within patrilineage but there is no centralization of authority, the public domain is not more highly valued than the private domain. Mapuche domestic and public arenas have fuzzy boundaries and overlap. The domestic realm is the context where traditional lore, language, religion, social, economic, political, and family issues are learned, discussed, and decided by both men and women who gather around the hearth. The domestic sphere is highly valued and is by no means associated solely with women.

The interaction with Chilean/Catholic and patriarchal society has strengthened the distinction between men's public social and political positions on the one hand, and women's non-political domestic power and numinous qualities, on the other. The public/domestic distinction appears to divide men and women in urban communities into separate realms. Here men who become political activists, leaders of organizations, spokesmen for the Mapuche and intermediaries between the Chilean government and the Mapuche gain prestige and have power in the Chilean world but do not retain any prestige in traditional rural communities. In urban settings most social and political interactions take place outside the household setting and frequently women are publicly acknowledged as inferior. Urban Mapuche women become increasingly dependent on men if they are to be successful in a male dominant Chilean context. Recently, the Mapuche revitalization movement has begun to legitimize Mapuche internal axes of prestige in urban settings. An increasing number of women artisans and *machis* work here and Mapuche ideology of gender egalitarianism now exists alongside the Chilean patriarchal ideology of gender hierarchy.

III The Machi's Gendered Identity

Machis are intermediaries between the Mapuche and the spiritual world. They are called forth through dreams, chronic illnesses, and visions and enter into altered states of consciousness through drumming in order to help individuals as

well as on behalf of the community. *Machis* have adapted in different degrees to the existence of folk and Western medical systems and Christianity. They perform love and luck rituals, recover the lost souls of ill people, and heal many different illnesses through herbal massages, prayer, and drumming.

Machis re-enact the wholeness of *Ngünechen* using gendered ritual symbols with the purpose of curing, exorcising and petitioning fertility and knowledge for humans, animals and crops.

Because the female and male genders are considered different but complementary in Mapuche cosmology, *machis* must possess qualities of both, as well those of age and youth in order to be considered whole (All gender) and use all four of these principles in their symbols in order to make their rituals effective.

In addition to male and female genders, *machis* have the ability to simultaneously possess, embody and perform the principles of seniority and gender creating a third gender, the All gender. This is not the addition of two genders but a seeing of the world simultaneously from all possible points of view as the fourfold androgynous Mapuche deity *Ngünechen* would.

By being male, *machis* exorcise illness and evil and protect the community. By being female, *machis* heal, integrate and forgive. By being young, they become strong and have the stamina to heal and defeat evil forces. By being old, they become wise and know the cause of illnesses, afflictions, and the solutions to problems. *Machis* embody the wholeness of *Ngünechen* with the purpose of healing, exorcising, gaining knowledge or fertility for humans, animals and crops. When the Mapuche refer to a *machi* as *machi* without the Spanish prefix "el" (masculine) or "la" (feminine) regardless of the *machi's* sex, they are referring to this third gender which is always embodied in ritual and often at other times too.

Following is an excerpt of a prayer performed by *machi* Ana during a healing ritual for *machi* Pamela that exemplifies a *machi's* embodiment of the All gender. Both *machis* belong to the same sisterhood.

Help us, old man on your horse, old woman mounted on your horse, young man mounted on your horse, young woman mounted on your horse. Come to me.... I am not healing of my own accord. I am here on my knees praying because I was destined to heal by the creator of *machis*. You chose my heart, my head.... In your four kingdoms of peace of the skies at the knees of light, you have wheat, money, all types of grains in your barns, You have abundant crops. You four old and young people, you men and women dressed in *chiripas* sitting together with your legs crossed, bring some down. Come to me. You have given me herbal remedies old man creator of *machis*, old woman creator of *machis*, young man creator of *machis*, young woman creator of *machis*. You chose me, you gave me your wisdom, your strength. I am all of you now. You are asking me to be an intermediary with your children. You are sitting me on a bowl of herbal remedies. Help me stretch your children, purify your children... Now with my heart of service with your four big ones in it I will revive her heart.

When *machis* embody male or female genders, they assume the social identity of Mapuche men or women, and I refer to them as women *machis* or men *machis*. When I use the term female or male *machis* I am referring to their sex, not their gender. *Machis* embody the All gender regardless of their sex or sexual preference.

Machis' gendered identity is complex, shifting and varies according to the individual as well as the social and ritual context. *Machis* may shift from one gender to another, or simultaneously embody more than one gender according to context. *Machihood* is a site of both gender differentiation and gender fusing.

Machis usually assume the gender associated with their sex when in town and in dealing with non-Mapuche who assume the natural connection between gender and sex. However, when male *machis* assume the identity of men or female *machis* assume the identity of women they are never subject to the same roles, restrictions and obligations as Mapuche men and women. *Machi* Pamela, Ana and María Angela for example often travel alone to other communities and cities, chide *lonkos*, *caciques* because of

their lack of knowledge of traditional lore, have their sisters and daughters perform their domestic chores and have the last word in community decisions.

In ritual, male *machis* often assume the social identity of women or celibate priests as well as the All gender. They use varying degrees of female dress and assume a female sexuality. All *machis* must be possessed by spirits, and possession is associated with female sexuality. This altered state of consciousness is much more frequent than "magical flight" to other realms associated with male sexuality. *Machi* Marta is a homosexual male *machi* who assumes the social identity, dress and sexuality of a woman and performs all three genders. *Machi* Jorge also embodies all three genders. He assumes the social identity of a man but becomes a woman during rituals and usually uses female ritual dress. He is bisexual and his sexuality is said to change with the moon. Both *machi* Sergio and Jorge assume the social identity of male celibate priests and vary between this and the All gender while using varying degrees of female dress during rituals.

Female *machis* on the other hand, do not cross-dress or assume men's roles. Women *machis* usually embody the All gender as well as the female gender and maintain their social identity as women, use female dress and usually perform some type of women's work. Although some women *machis* are considered "masculine" because they are often absent from their homes and perform domestic chores and weave only when they have time, they are still considered women. I have never seen a women *machi* use any elements of male dress or take on male positions of prestige. Women *machis* do not become *lonkos* (lineage heads), *caciques* (community chiefs) or silversmiths. Although *machis* of both sexes do replace male orators (*nguenpins*) who no longer possess the knowledge and ability to perform, *machis* do not become *nguenpins* nor assume male discourse and knowledge.

The reason women *machis* do not assume male identity and roles is because the anatomical-physiological component of gender is seen as more important in the case of female *machis* than male *machis*, because it is associated with experiential

knowledge about life and death, and is less easily counterbalanced by an occupational or attire component. Female *machis* are mature women with reproductive capacities and are perceived to have knowledge about fertility and abundance. Female menstrual and birth blood are considered powerful and potentially dangerous to society and are often used to perform love magic and sorcery/witchcraft. This is why sexual intercourse during menstruation is considered taboo and men usually leave the household if women are giving birth at home with a midwife. The experience of birthing itself is associated with knowledge about inducing fertility and abundance. Bleeding from the vagina and birthing are not considered just physiological processes but also systems of knowledge necessary for survival. As in many other horticultural bridewealth societies, women are valued as mothers and it is motherhood (either biological or adoptive) and nurturing features, not sexuality, that are associated with womanhood, a point I will return to later.

Women *machis'* sexuality is less important and is always considered secondary to a *machi's* "marriage" to the spirits and her *rewe* or altar. I met women *machis* who were heterosexual and bi-sexual and heard of others who were lesbian and (adoptive) mothers. Homosexuality and bi-sexuality among mestizo and Mapuche women does not have the negative connotation that male homosexuality and bi-sexuality do and only comes up when it interferes with motherhood (biological or fictitious). A woman is a *machi* because she moves beyond ordinary limitations, including those of female or male genders. Women *machis* may perform womanhood and speak for women but they are not women exemplars of the community. As "spiritual mothers", their role is to mediate between the community and greater powers.

The ability to change genders is not related to any particular sexual inclination. *Machis* can be heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual or celibate and still embody all three genders. Unlike De Lauretis (1987), the Mapuche do not see sexual choice and sexual representation as central to the constitution of gendered subjects. There is a clear relationship between *machihood*, cross-genderism, female social identity and religious power. Role and

occupation, not sexual choice are the most important factors in determining Mapuche gender. Gender needs to be understood as an imaginative construct, a point of divergent positioning and a way of viewing the world.

IV *Machis*, Female Sexuality, and Socio-economic Change

Although all *machis* can possess more than one gender, it is female *machis* that predominate and a *machi's* dress and sexual image are more closely associated with female sexuality. Male *machis* are (partly) transvestite and often considered homosexual or unmasculine. They cannot hold men's political positions of power or perform men's activities. Female *machis*, on the other hand, are considered women. They maintain female dress and sexual identity and may perform women's activities. *Machi's* sex is tangential to their spiritual life and power but does have a bearing on how effectively their petitions are transmitted to the ritual community. *Machis* themselves are symbols and must participate in the virtues and powers of the things they represent.

In this section, I will explore the change in *machis'* sex throughout Mapuche history and its association with the community's needs and changing socio-economic and political conditions. I explain why male transvestite *machis* predominated in the past, and why female *machis* do so today.

In the 16th century, the Mapuche were semi-nomadic warriors, hunters, and horticulturalists organized into patrilineal clans who warred against each other and had no central authority. When the Mapuche became cattle herders and mounted warriors in the 17th century, larger groups of *lonkos* became allied under a common *cacique*. They went on raiding parties and conducted guerilla warfare. There was no state system or permanent positions of power.

Because hunting and warfare were a means for survival up until the mid-18th century, most *machis* at this time were male and assumed the role of men who could propitiate the *pülluames* or male ancestral spirits of their own patrilineage to influence and predict the outcome of hunting and warfare. The spirits of

dead warriors, *lonkos*, and ancient *machis* were thought to continue warring in the sky as lightning and thunder-bolts or as volcanic eruptions, helping those who propitiated them through magical means (Rosales:1674:162). However, these *machis* were homosexual, dressed as women and assumed a female sexuality. They performed activities of both women and men. In addition to cooking, weaving, and using medicinal herbs for curing, considered women's work, *machis* were thought to influence and predict the outcome of war and were called on to use their oratory ability at meetings and in negotiating peace (Rosales:1674:135). Male *machis* were considered more adept than female ones at conducting spiritual warfare and propitiating warrior spirits.

During the last half of the eighteenth century, the Mapuche turned to sedentary agriculture. The number of women *machis* increased at this time and male transvestite *machis* gradually began to disappear. This change is related to cessation of warfare and the splitting up of lineages onto different reservations that no longer had male ancestral spirits in common. Propitiation of male ancestral spirits and military fortune-telling performed by male transvestite *machis* became less important as the androgynous Mapuche deity *Ngünechen* came to occupy center stage in Mapuche rituals. Catholic homophobia brought into Mapuche communities by missionaries created an increasing rejection of male transvestite *machis*. In addition, with the switch to an agricultural and cattle herding economy, female powers associated with the moon and fertility became much more important.

Land and fertility became symbols of the Mapuche struggle as they were systematically stripped of their lands, defeated (1882), and finally confined to reservations (1884). As land became increasingly scarce, *machis* were increasingly expected to be nurturing spiritual women and mothers. These "givers of life" obtained their powers from the moon in order to bring fertility to land, animals and people. It is because of their natural or symbolic association with fertility, birth and nurture that Mapuche women became powerful healers and religious intermediaries (Bacigalupo:1995:62- 76, 95-102).

Because *machis* are no longer associated with warfare and hunting, they acquire non-political power independently from male lineages and ancestral spirits. They have begun to specialize and to create sisterhoods of *machis* that practice in a similar manner. *Machis* are now possessed by familiar spirits and depend on their strength and ability rather than dominating different male ancestral spirits and nature spirits as male *machis* did in the past. These familiar spirits are those of deceased *machi* relatives on the woman's side of the family. In contemporary Mapuche society descent, inheritance, and succession continue to be passed down through the male line, but spiritual power and ability are now transmitted through the female line and generally manifests itself in women *machis*. Most young *machis* receive the deceased spirit of a grandmother, great-grandmother, or great-aunt who was a *machi*.

Several reasons explain the predominance of female *machis* today who assume the social identity of women (Bacigalupo:1994:240-241):

1) Women *machis* exercise power derived from their relationship to the spiritual. Their numinous power is different from men's political power and does not conflict with their social and political positions, while that of the male *machis* could (because male *machis* hold ties to the patrilineage and have numinous powers). The complementary relationship between men's political power and women non-political power mirrors the relationship between *caciques* (community heads) and *machis*. *Caciques* hold political power and represent the community to the outside world, while the *machi* holds spiritual power within the community.

2) Women possess the skills and knowledge that *machis* need today whereas men do not, because they are often absent working as wage laborers. Mapuche women have become the custodians of tradition, transmitting knowledge of traditional herbs, ancient lore, and the *Mapudungun* language. They are socialized into using empathy, intuition, and developing their interpersonal skills, all crucial to the *machi* practice. Women who become *machis* maintain continuity with women's gender roles, whereas male *machis* must renounce men's activities and learn female skills and types of knowledge.

3) As a consequence of the growing modernization of the Mapuche, *nguenpins* (men who are orators) do no longer possess the knowledge to perform rituals and are replaced by women *machis* who perform as priestesses in collective *nguillatun* rituals. *Machis* enter into contact with the world of spirits directly through altered states of consciousness and embody them in order to be granted knowledge and spiritual help. This is considered more effective than the formalized ritual prayer used by the *nguenpin*.

4) Female *machis* are replacing male transvestite *machis* because these are deemed unmasculine by the Chilean/Catholic homophobic society and persecuted. The few surviving male *machis* have a feminized image, regardless of the circumstance of being bisexual, homosexual, celibate or married to a woman. Because the Chilean/Catholic society is homophobic, many men who have a *machi* calling choose not to become *machis*. The few male *machis* are partially transvestite and wear female scarves, shawls and jewelry on an everyday basis.

5) Female *machis* and the androgynous pan-Mapuche deity *Ngünechen* are thought to ensure fertility. Because of their natural or symbolic association with fertility, birth and nurture, female *machis* are believed to be able to more effectively propitiate the pan-Mapuche deity *Ngünechen* and to petition *Ngünechen* for land, animal fertility and abundance.

V Conclusions

I have used a critical feminist and Womanist approach in addressing the gender complexities underlying the identity, power and practice of *machis* as the Mapuche interact with Catholicism and Chilean gender ideologies. By exploring the way gender is construed and constituted in Mapuche cosmology and society, as well as in the *machi* practice, we have come to see that these constructions are context specific, complex and sometimes contradictory. Mapuche gender identities are not rooted in nature, bodies and sexual choice, and heterosexual models, but defined by role, occupation and spiritual calling.

The symmetrical relationship between the male, female, old and young, knowledge and fertility found in cosmology is mirrored in the characteristics of *Ngünechen* and the wholeness of the All

gender embodied by *machis*. *Machis* are considered to be both male and female, young and old regardless of their sex. They draw on female powers when integrating and curing, and on male forms of power when exorcising. In addition, knowledge and fertility, culture and nature, young and old age, are created in women, men and *machis*. The relationships between the four principles of *Ngünechen* reiterate this basic pattern. However, the Mapuche egalitarian cultural ideology is not always consistent in practice. In the context of *machis* contemporary social and sexual identity and religious power, women *machis* and the feminine side of *machis* becomes more important.

In the past, male transvestite *machis* performed the roles of both men and women. They practiced warring and curing and were both participants in the patrilineage and religious intermediaries. Today, abundance, fertility and nurturance have become central in Mapuche prayers and associated with femaleness and non-political power. Mapuche notions of spiritual motherhood associated with the moon, *marianismo* and Chilean notions of women in the home have re-enforced this. The few male *machis* that do exist today assume a feminized ritual identity (dress, demeanor, role) and sometimes women's occupations in order to be considered legitimate and effective. They cannot perform men's occupations or take on men's local political specializations and their position in the patrilineage is seen as conflicting with their numinous powers. To avoid Chilean homophobia, some male *machis* present themselves as celibate priests. Female *machis* on the other hand maintain continuity with women's identity, dress, role, lore and skills. As adult females with reproductive capacities and mothering potential, female *machis* are associated with procreational forces and nurturing abilities. Spiritual motherhood becomes an embodied path to spirituality.

Clearly, the growing power and prestige of women as producers of fertility, associated with non-political and numinous power, has tipped the balance towards an increasing feminization of the *machi* role and a devaluation of male qualities in this context. Possession associated with female sexuality is more common than "magical flight" associated with male sexuality and spiritual motherhood overshadows male warrior spirits.

Fertility symbols are becoming increasingly popular and used mostly by women *machis* to heal women's gynecological ailments, solve their problems with lovers, husbands and families and ensure fertility for land, animals and humans.

The fact that numinous and political roles are now seen as conflicting also reflects a new balance between men and women in Mapuche society. Men are losing touch with traditional lore and axes of internal male prestige exemplified in their roles as *lonkos*, *nguenpins* and *caciques*. A few men take on external political positions of power as intermediaries with national society but most are either unskilled and poorly paid urban workers or wage laborers for wealthy farmers. Many Mapuche men have assumed the Chilean ideology of male dominance/female subordination. This ideology conflicts with the power and female *machis* have acquired within the communities as well as the money and goods they bring in as payment for their services. Female *machis* possessing numinous powers are now the custodians of traditional lore and act as healers, priestesses, and religious intermediaries. This conflict remains unresolved but will probably move towards a more egalitarian cultural ideology as female *machis* and women artisans work with an increasing number of Mapuches and Chileans in an urban context.

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Gendered Deities and the Survival of Culture

June Nash

Many years ago, the Lord Sun, Tatik Kak'al, did not walk as now. He was only hanging in the heavens. Our Grandmother the Moon, Me'tik Chich U, bore three sons named God the Father, Tios Tatil, the Elder brother, God the son, Second brother, and a third named K'osh, or last one. The first brother did not turn out bright nor did the second brother. It was the youngest brother, K'osh, who was the brightest. When the elder brother was in heaven, there never was night. He never rested from his work. The crops were burned by the unrelenting fire of the sun. K'osh stepped in and took over the role of bearing the fire, telling his mother, "I am going to where the day meets the heaven." He picked up the burning embers in the fire of his milpa, saying, "My brother does not know how to walk. I am going to walk around and return." Now the day walks in front and the night walks behind. (Nash 1970:198-9).

This story, related to me by a Tzeltal speaking elder when I was doing fieldwork in Amatenango del Valle in Chiapas, captures the gender dialectic of embodied cosmic powers that was a central dynamic in Mesoamerican belief systems. Although mythic expressions of it differ from one region to another,¹ the sense of complementarity between male and female powers and functions that surfaces in contemporary ethnographic accounts captures the dynamic of cosmological forces now being decoded for earlier civilizations preceding the militaristic phase of conquest states.

The Spanish conquest reinforced the gendered division of labor and subordination of women in New Spain that had begun in the conquest states of Middle America. The heritage of conquest for women was the burden and responsibility for providing the basic needs of the conquerors as well as their own families. This ensured the greater survival of elements of women's culture related to domesticity in the supernatural as well as the mundane world. Deities related to corn, the land, sweet water, and the art of weaving often persisted while gods related to war

and death were replaced by Christian saints and deities. These female deities, important in creation myths and the formative periods of civilizations in the Americas, and later suppressed in their public representations during the militaristic phases of rising empires, found a new life in the colonial setting. Some resurfaced in syncretic representations of indigenous and Catholic traditions, notably the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose dusky visage reflects the emergent mestizo nation enshrined at the site where the cult of Tonatzin once thrived.²

Indigenous understandings of the movements of the sun and moon, of time and space, and the replenishment of water and soil fertility drew on primordial beliefs about the powers of fertility, regeneration, and crop life associated with female supernaturals and their human counterparts that were not submerged in the mestizo culture. The balance between the gendered Sun Lord and our Grandmother Moon, which had been devastated by the Aztecs in the mythic war between their tribal god Huitzilopochtli and Coyaxauqui, was kept alive in the periphery of Mesoamerican civilization and throughout the preconquest and is still evident in the mythology of contemporary Mayas.

In this paper I shall assess the contributions of feminist scholarship to the following issues: the projection of sexual hierarchy in the representation of deities in preconquest empires and the interplay of gendered deities in the human division of labor in the emergent colonial and contemporary society. Feminist scholarship in these key problem areas has challenged assumptions about the universal subordination of women and the naturalistic basis for a gendered division of labor. In exploring the dialectical interaction of gender, race, and class we gain a clearer sense of how cultural constructions of male and female bodies are produced and perpetuated in society.

Sexual Hierarchy in Preconquest Empires

In the brief span of history in which the Aztecs rose to ascendancy in Mesoamerica, we can trace the evolution of gender roles from an egalitarian base in which women had equal access to land and the succession of their children to their rights in the *calpulli*, or territorially based kinship group,³ to a male dominant

militaristic hierarchy.⁴ Since Aztecs incorporated supernaturals of both Tula and Teotihuacan city states, merging deities with their own tribal gods, scholars have been able to decode the ideological trends that entered into the pruning and shaping of their theocratic hierarchy.⁵

An egalitarian social system was projected in the supernatural world of the early city states in the central plateau. The creator deities, *Omecihuatl* and *Ometecuhli*, were female and male progenitors, sometimes referred to as Lord of Duality, *Ometeotl*.⁶ Early deities were often depicted as dual or androgynous figures, a condition antithetical to the highly segmented and hierarchical gender system of the Spaniards. *Coatlicue*, the Mother of Gods whom the Spaniards later referred to as the "Lady of the Snaky Skirt", was a powerful embodiment of all the significant dichotomies of life and death, night and day, and light and dark as well as gender.⁷ The figure depicted in the Tepantitla compound of Teotihuacan that was once identified as *Tlaloc*, the rain god, is reinterpreted by Pasztory (1976) as the Great Goddess, linked to an earlier Spider Woman, a female deity identified with earth, water, precious stones, and with shamanic powers related to weaving and warfare.⁸ Female representations of *Chalchihuitlicue*, goddess of sweet water, *Chicumecoatl*, goddess of food, and *Vixtocivatel*, goddess of salt⁹ were worshiped by the common people.

Female deities prevailed in the identification with artisan production. *Milbrath*¹⁰ identifies *Xochiquetzal* as a lunar deity related to artisan skills in "weaving, embroidering, and all forms of decoration" along with creativity itself as patroness of pregnant women. Citing Duran and the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, *Milbrath* reaffirms her connection with craftspeople as the patroness of painters, embroiderers, weavers, silversmiths, and sculptors, revered as the first to spin and weave. The cult of the female deity *Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina*, which infiltrated the Central Plateau from the Huastec region during or before the reign of the Toltec ruler *Huemac*,¹¹ celebrates weaving in her headband of unspun cotton into which two spindles wound with cotton are thrust. Earth and fertility suggested in the nose adornment of a decapitated quail (*Sullivan 1982:11*).

The Aztecs followed the precedence of the Toltec empire builders in many regards except in granting leadership roles to women. The calpulli, or territorially based kinship group, provided the early Aztec settlement with the basis for governance in a council of elders which elected a chief in charge of war and another in charge of civil and religious acts.¹² Corporate ownership of land by the calpulli assured redistribution in accord with the needs of each family in the early years of Aztec rule. At least by rough indices, women had equal rights in the law and in the economy. Men as well as women were punished by death for adultery, according to the Codex Mendocino. Women were active producers as well as vendors. They possessed property and rights within the calpulli organization. They were curers as well as priestesses. Their skills in weaving and pottery provided basic metaphors for talking about creative forces from the cords the creator gods stretched to mark the four compass points and the universe as stretched out on a giant loom.¹³

Sometime between the years 1248 when they entered Chapultepec to 1345 when they moved to Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs transformed themselves from what Frederick A. Peterson¹⁴ calls "belligerent agriculturalists" to an "organization of priest warriors". Structurally, this meant a shift from a tribe based on clans to a kingdom based on ranked lineages. Following their move to Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs fought as mercenaries in the Culhuacan and Tepanec armies, sharing in the rapid growth of the Tepanec domain. The tribal council of the calpulli persisted, but the supreme leaders of the military and bureaucratic hierarchies were chosen from a single dynastic lineage by a council of four military leaders. Even more important from the perspective of noble women was the selection of a successor to kingship from among illegitimate as well as legitimate children of the male leader established when the natural son of Acamapichtli, Itzcoatl, who had already shown courage in war, was chosen to succeed him.¹⁵ The choice reinforced the right of military leaders to choose the king, thereby subverting the council of calpullis and undermining the rights of succession of legitimate offspring of the senior wife of the ruler.

During Itzcoatl's reign from 1429 to 1440, the Aztecs defeated the Tepanecs and emerged as a predatory militaristic state on their own, distributing land to members of the royal lineage and outstanding warriors. The new streams of wealth fed into empire building, competing with agricultural surpluses as the basis for accumulation and expansion and clearly giving priority to male mobility.

Important structural changes came with the defeat of the Tepanecs. Four lords of the royal lineage chose succeeding leaders from among the men of the kin related group. Their titles indicated the glory in blood and battle: Tlacohtcatl, He of the House of Darts; Tlacatecatl, the one of lordly lineage; Ezmahuacatl, He Close to the Blood, and Tlilancaqui, Lord of the House of the Black Place. Each had his own vassals, lands and tribute. This institutionalization of the royal dynasty in titles, lands and tribute labor derived from war marked the final break with the calpulli and the bilateral controls exercised by women as well as men. The control over land shifted to the royal lineage and the parasitic economy of war took priority over the productive economy of the *macehuales*, or commoners. Aztecs acquired lands which they redistributed among the members of the royal lineage, with special allotments to those who had fought in the war. War leaders and chiefs in the bureaucracy received products of the lands tilled for them by prisoners, or *mayeques*, taken in battle.

It was during Itzcoatl's reign that ideologues of the state reorganized the official history, destroying all the painted documents and rewriting a mythology that validated the wars of conquest.¹⁶ In this mythic reconstruction, we can see even more clearly the thrust of the military elite that dominated Aztec society. The "flowery wars" to acquire the hearts of captives to feed the sun and keep it in motion justified the predatory conquest in search of tribute and loot. In the theological doctrines, two trends emerged paralleling the social changes. First there was the emergence of the Culhuacan god of war, Tezcatlipoca, at the apex of a hierarchy of other male gods that included the Aztec trial god Huitzilopochtli, the Toltec god Quetzalcoatl, and Xipe Totec, derived from the Zapotec sacrificial god. Second there was the eclipsing of female deities related to fertility, nourishment and the agricultural complex. These deities did not die out, but

persisted as the central figures in the worship of the submerged macehuals. The new leaders validated their conquests with an ideology proclaiming that Huitzilopochtli chose the Mexica for a great mission to bring together all the nations into the service of the Sun. The myth regarding his birth establishes the sexual antagonism between Huitzilopochtli identified as the sun god and his half sister, Coyolxauhqui, identified with the moon. Conceived by his mother, Coatlicue, in miraculous contact with a bunch of feathers that became the symbol of obligatory war,¹⁷ he was the shame of Coyolxauhqui who tried to end her mother's pregnancy. But Huitzilopochtli was born fully dressed as a warrior and killed his half sister Coyolxauhqui, destroying many of the Southern warriors—the 400 stars of the Pleiades—who came to aid her. An image of the dismembered body of Coyolxauhqui, evoking the avatar of the earth mother, was found lodged at the base of Huitzilopochtli's half of the great temple in Tenochtitlan. Through his conquest over her, he assured the domination of the sun over the moon.¹⁸ This myth parallels the mytho-historical relation of the arrival of the Aztecs in Tula recounted in Duran¹⁹ wherein Huitzilopochtli rejects the leadership of his sister, exercised through her power over animals, asserting that now Aztec men will show by the valor of arms their superior power.²⁰

The contest between the sun and the moon persisted in the imagery of the death of the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui to extoll the power of the solar god Huitzilopochtli.²¹ Yet in this vanquishing of the moon, they foretold their own demise as the power she exercised in bringing water and nourishment to crops and people were similarly undercut in military conquests that eclipsed the agricultural base of the empire.

Clearly related to Central Plateau representations of deities are those of Classic Maya art. Stone²² points out that the Storm God and the Great Goddess, once thought to be different representations of the same deity before Pasztory's pathbreaking work,²³ pertain to distinct Mayan regions, with the Storm God predominating in the Peten Maya and the Great Goddess found in the Highland and Piedmont region. Drawing upon our knowledge of the Aztec succession patterns introduced with the advent of militarism, we may hypothesize that the selective factor defining the priority of the Storm God vis-a-vis the Great Goddess

among the Mayas may relate to the prevalence of expansive empires in the former region compared with subsistence-oriented agricultural production characteristic of the latter. Like the Teotihuacan city envisioned by Pasztory,²⁴ farming people of the Mayan highlands may have prioritized the values embodied in the Great Goddess, emphasizing the nurturing qualities embodied in her effigies. In contrast, the Storm God provided a more fitting model for the predatory expansive empires among the Mayas just as he did for the Aztecs.

The priority of the Storm God was achieved through cooptation of female fertility and procreative powers. By linking sacrifice and fertility, an association that Stone²⁵ found both in Aztec and Maya lore, male deities assumed the powers of fertility formerly located in women. Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent god, shed blood from his penis, thus fertilizing a pile of bones and fulfilling his charge of restoring life to humans (Florentine Codex). As Stone²⁶ points out, this mimics the ritual act practiced among Mayan kings, who let blood from their penises. In this metaphorical menstrual cycle, male dynastic leaders would appear to be taking over female creative powers, as women were systematically excluded from ritual roles.²⁷ Susan Milbrath²⁸ illustrates the assumption of procreative processes by male deities in the birthing of heroes such as I8 Sky, I2 Wind "Smoking Eye" and 3 Flint descending from the celestial womb.

The superordination of men and their male deities over females required not only that they assume the supernatural powers connected with fertility and creation, but also the destructive powers incumbent in female royal leaders and supernatural representations. In Mesoamerica, women participated in endemic warfare during the chaotic years that followed the abandonment of Teotihuacan. Ixtlixochitl's²⁹ narration of the battle of the armies of Topiltzin in 1008 relates how "[a]lmost all the people were killed in this battle. Many Tultec (sic) women fought valiantly helping their husbands, dying, and finally all were killed, old people and servants, women and children." Sometimes women were cast as leaders, not just abettors of their husbands, in these violent struggles. The Selden codex³⁰ tells of the "Princessa Guerrillera" who in 1038 entered into combat for her father's realm.

Militarism under the Aztecs forced a greater division of labor. Again drawing upon the Florentine codex, we are told that at birth, boys were given a shield with four arrows and the midwife prayed that they might be courageous warriors. They were presented four times to the sun and told of the uncertainties of life and the need to go to war. Girls were given spindles and shuttles as symbols of their dedication to the distaff side. Captive women were forced into the brothels servicing warriors, one of the most frequently voiced complaints that Díaz del Castillo³¹ reports from the subject city states.³²

Class distinctions combined with gender distinctions to affect the status of women during the apex of Aztec rule in Tenochtitlan. While the drawings in the Florentine Codex show that women of the macehualli strata retained their importance in the domestic economy as doctors, herbalists, local vendors and traders, the tasks of the cihuapipiltin, or noble women, were increasingly circumscribed. They served in the temples, but their tasks were to prepare meals for priests, to weave cloths for the idols and offer them incense, light the sacred fires and sweep the shrines rather than to enter into public rituals.³³ Furthermore as the role of noble women was increasingly distinguished from that of common women, they were marginalized from active participation in the economy.³⁴

Spinning and weaving were linked with femininity, from the patron goddess to habits of work.³⁵ The demand for woven cloth expanded in the last years of Aztec rule and women produced cotton tribute that was collected by the royal tax collectors and used directly by the administrators or exchanged for luxury goods throughout the empire.³⁶ Noble women produced the sumptuary cloth for the nobility and priesthood, sometimes remaining within the temples where the work was done. Commoners were also forced to work as debt peons outside of their homes and in imperial institutions.

The Aztec imposition of the male gods in Tenochtitlan may have undermined their power in the final days of the empire. The great council of the calpullis, composed of all the chiefs, was presided over by a male chief, curiously referred by the

feminine term *cihuacoatl*, a feminine principle coopted by a male priest of the goddess, and *tlacatecuhtli*, a military chief whose tasks were becoming more general³⁷.

Despite the loss of position in the state and empire iconography, female deities and those associated with crops and rain survived in the domestic and local pantheon of both the Aztec and Inca domains. The three goddesses who supported and in turn were venerated by the Aztec common people were *Chalchihuitlicue*, goddess of sweet or inland water, *Chicumecoatl*, goddess of food and *Uistociuatl*, goddess of salt. *Cihuacoatl*, the partner of the snake god who was associated with *Quetzalcoatl*, remained a powerful figure, venerated as a new aspect of *Ometecuhtli* and *Omecihuatl*.³⁸ Along with them, the rain god *Tlaloc* retained importance in the ceremonials of the agriculturalists. The Florentine codex reveals the importance of female deities along with male deities in charge of craft workers of both sexes.

Documents from both Spanish and preconquest mythopoetic histories reveal a systematic suppression of female powers and cooptation of them by males at supernatural and worldly levels. Women's powers in kin and community affairs prior to the dominance of military regimes is well documented. The effort to denigrate the female principles inscribed in earlier imagery reveals the subversive force of female power even as it is negated by ideological and real material pressures.

Conquest and Colonization

The Spanish and indigenous encounter in the colony of New Spain was the testing ground for imposed acculturation as well as resistance throughout the Americas. The transition was eased by the cooperation of Tlaxcalans and other enemies of the Aztecs who allied themselves with the Spanish invaders to bring about the conquest, and many of these leaders served as caciques in the kingdom of New Spain. It was also abetted by women who, as a subordinated group within the militarized city states, voluntarily aligned themselves in marriage or as concubines with the conqueror. Conversion to Catholicism and the adoption of

the new supernatural powers underwrote the changing gender relationships as Our Mother Tonantzin was metamorphosed into the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Christian Trinity replaced the gods of war and tribal identity.

In the transition from an autochthonous military and theocratic empire such as that of the Aztecs and Incas, to the imposition of colonial rule in New Spain, patriarchal tendencies in both Spanish and indigenous society were reinforced³⁹, but there were important differences between the indigenous and imposed forms. The egalitarian base of indigenous societies had already begun to erode as women of the Aztec, Maya, and Inca upper classes were losing some of their autonomy, but Iberian women of all classes had experienced generations of patriarchal subordination aggravated by the wars of the Reconquista. Female power was still projected in supernatural beings by the indigenous populations while Christianity had reduced females to passive receptacles. Both men and women were taught that the road to heaven was through submission and obedience to Spanish lords and priests, but women were also taught that on route they must submit to their husband's will.

Women were the principal agents of mestizaje and of the culture that developed in the mestizo population they produced. As such, they were the bearers of the emerging traditions that came to dominate the nation. This took shape as women exercised their knowledge of plant cultivation and processing in culinary arts, of craft production in weaving and pottery, of medicinal plants and their application learned in preconquest society. The changed attitudes about mestizos and indigenous people are related to changing power relations among crown, colonists, and the church and to modifications in the interests within each group regarding the control over the labor force.

In spite of their importance in the subsistence economy, indigenous women were subordinated by the laws of state and the customs of society to the will of their husbands. The influence of Muslim traditions on Spanish family life was greater in the colonies than in Spain since many of the first conquerors, recruited from among soldiers demobilized after the success of the wars over the Moors, were recent converts to Catholicism and retained many of their customs including the seclusion of women.⁴⁰

Patriarchal control over women and their children, whether the union was legal or not, prevailed in upper class Spanish society to a greater degree than in mestizo society where the cult of machismo was devoid of the mutual responsibility implied in patriarchal structures.⁴¹ The only solace women of the upper and middle classes had was in the Church, which offered them an outlet in confession and taught them to reinforce self-abnegation.⁴² The cult of Marianismo, or worship of the Virgin stressing self-abnegation and motherhood, flourished in this setting. Yet it was always contradicted by the real involvement of mestizo and indigenous women in productive work in the subsistence or market sector.

In the spiritual conquest of the Americas, the Spaniards permitted a greater range of identification with preconquest spiritual powers within the first half century of conquest and colonization.⁴³ Among the shrines that were of great importance to this continuity were three sites near Mexico City: one in the foothills of the Sierra Grande in Tlaxcala that the ancients called Matlalcueye, was dedicated to the goddess Toci, Our Grandmother; another was Tianquizmanalco, Field of the Market, dedicated to the god Telpuchtli, or Mancebo (Youth); and the most important was a temple located in Tepeyac, a league to the north of Mexico which was dedicated to Tonan, or Tonantzin, Our Mother. Maternal fertility symbolized in the diamond shaped quechquemilt worn by most of the Great Goddess figures is still the basic pattern for the dress of indigenous people in the area of Morelia.

The shrine for Tonantzin attracted Indians from as far as Guatemala, 300 leagues to the south, and by the first decade of the sixteenth century even viceroys made special trips to see it.⁴⁴ On the causeway leading to the shrine were idols of Ixpuchtli, and of the goddess Ilamatecuhtli. Serna⁴⁵ argues that the deities belong to the complex maize-water-earth syndrome, which retained their hold in the Central Plateau long after the conquest. The Virgin of Guadalupe became an important mediator for indigenous men and women of the 'popular' classes.⁴⁶ Once the Bishop accepted the miracle of her appearance in 1931, a church was built at the former site of the shrine for Tonantzin.⁴⁷ The enormous following that this dark-skinned figure commands is,

according to Eric Wolf,⁴⁸ due to the fact that she had become the representation of the longing for nourishment, charity and life that was being consistently denied in the formal religion of the conquerors. For indigenous people, she validates their place in the civil society of the Spanish colony, and, for mestizos, she represents a guarantee of their place in heaven and on earth.

Linked with the Virgin of Guadalupe is Saint Thomas, who in turn is identified with Quetzalcoatl.⁴⁹ The coupling of the Christian Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Thomas invoked the Lord and Lady of Duality who were identified with the submerged macehualtin, or commoners, not with the elites, whose gods were toppled along with their empire.

The vitality of these beliefs can be seen in the ethnographic descriptions of contemporary communities. Villela F.⁵⁰ witnessed a rain-making ceremony in Guerrero involving town officials, their wives and cohorts of young girls who carried the cross to the ceremonial sites in the mountains. In secret ceremonies, the men represented the wind, rainbow, cloud and lightning, rain and corn, while women represented tamales, beans and seeds. At the culminating point, crosses which contained the image were evocative of a feminine pagan idol, according to Villela, and people invoked it as "our sacred cross, our sacred Virgin of whom we eat," or as "our lady of the earth that we sow." Mercedes Olivera⁵¹ recognized the parallel between the huemiltl offering for the goddess of food, Chicumecoatl, in the celebration of the Holy Cross on May 3 in Citala.

Even more pervasive are preconquest understandings of Space and Time which, among contemporary Mayas, surface in ways that reject the priority given to male deities. The notion of an orderly world hangs precariously in the balance between the Lord Sun, Tatik K'ak'al, and our Grandmother the Moon, Hme'tik Chich U. In the contemporary version of creation and survival related in the story with which I began this paper, my informant, an old man who was a descendant of ancestral figures in Amatenango del Valle, linked these primeval forces to Christian deities in an uneasy Trinity. God the Father, he told me, was Elder Brother, God the Son was Second Brother, K'osh the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary was Hme'tikchich U. The reconstituted cosmology still retains the dialectical relation between the Sun

and the Moon, with K'osh mediating the two domains. The task of bearing the sun in its daily cycle is closely tied to the Maya notion of time as a "burden" that the gods bear with man's help.⁵² Yet without the intervention of the moon, the sun could destroy all that lives on earth with its burning rays. One should not have sexual relations with anyone in the milpa, I was told, because the Father Sun gets angry (literally "ends his heart"). "He will not give crops. He gets very hot," I was warned. This was proven to my informant during the time of the Revolution, when there was a great drought destroying the harvest and causing great food scarcity as the armies of the government and the rebels swept over the land, seizing women and raping them and as women themselves were looking for lovers.

In the imagery of the neozapatistas in the Lacandon rainforest, the colonizers coming from many distinct language groups are trying to reconstruct their world, giving legitimacy to the collective life from a mythopoetic past. There in the canyons and mountains of the Lacandon, they experienced, according to Major Ana Maria of the EZLN,⁵³ the betrayal of the government:

All the days and their nights that dragged along, the X-tol wants the powerful to dance on us and repeat their brutal conquest. The kaz-dzul, the "false man" that governs our lands and has great war machines, like the boob, that is part puma and part horse, that spreads pain and death among us. The false government orders the aluxob, the liars who deceive us and cause forgetfulness

Then two forces came together in the mountain, the political military group of the guerrilleros and some heads of indigenous communities. Then she continues her discourse:

The mountain told us to take arms in order to have a voice, it told us to cover our face in order to have a face, it spoke of forgetting our name to be named, it spoke of holding our past in order to have a future. In the mountain lives the dead, our dead. With them live the Votan and the Ik'al, the light and the darkness, the wet and the dry, the earth and the wind the rain and the fire. The mountain is the house of the Halach Uinic, the true man, the high chief. There we learned and there we recorded that we are what we are, the true men.

Based on my understanding of the myths of the Tzeltales, I would interpret that, in the encounter of the ancients with the guerrilla forces in the mountain, they encountered the balance that is the essence of the mesoamerican cosmogony. These spirits, or cosmological forces of the Votan and of Ik'al were translated by Ana Maria as the Light and the Darkness; I recall the concepts of the balance in the world when the Zapatistas seek to rescue the earth and its people from the destruction impending in the neoliberal government.

Notes

1. Calixta Guiteras Holmes, in her classic monograph based on fieldwork done in the 1950s, *Perils of the Soul*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1961, shows that the Moon is identified as a lake complementing the Sun deity. Evon Vogt indicates that in Zinacantan the Sun is predominant over the Moon in his monograph *Zinacantan*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press. Gary Gossen shows the conflictful relation between the Sun and the Moon in his study of San Juan Chamula, *Chamulas in the World of the Sun*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974. The gendered conflict read into the cosmic world is even more apparent in the work of Brenda Rosenbaum, *With Our Heads Bowed: The dynamics of Gender in a Maya Community*, 1993, based on fieldwork two decades later than Gossen in the same community. In the Central Plateau of Mexico where James M. Taggart did his field study for *Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure* published in 1983 by the University of Texas Press, the identification of men with the sun's heat and women with the cold of the moon indicates the connection with Mayas in the South. Gary Gossen has assessed the connectedness of symbols and meanings within the Mesoamerican orbit in his article, 'Mesoamerican Ideas as a Foundation for Regional Synthesis,' in the book he edited: *Symbol and Meaning beyond the Closed Community: Essays in Mesoamerican Ideas*, Albany, State University of New York, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1986.
2. Eric Wolf published his article 'The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National symbol,' in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1957, pp. 34-39, demonstrating the importance of the Virgin as an icon of *mestizo* culture and society in the colonial period, and in independence. Her importance in contemporary Latino communities of the United States cannot be underestimated as scholars show the ways in which migrants retain their sense of identity away from home.
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6. Miguel León Portilla, *La filosofía nahuatl estudiada en sus fuentes*, Mexico City, 1959, *The Aztec Image of Self and Society: An Introduction to Nahua Culture*, edited with an introduction by J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1992.
 7. Justino Fernández, *Coatlícue: Estética del arte indígena antiguo*. México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México 1986.
 8. Pasztory op. cit. 1976; Karl Taube, 'The Teotihuacán Spider Woman,' *Journal of Latin American Lore* 9,2, 1983, pp. 107-89.
 9. Annabritta Hellbom, *La participación de las mujeres indias y mestizas en el México precortésiano y postrevolucionario*, Stockholm: The Ethnographical Museum, Monograph Series Pbl. 10, 1967, p. 28.
 10. Susan Milbrath, 'Xochiquetzal as a Lunar Deity in the Codex Borgia,' paper presented at the XVIImo. Congreso Internacional de Historia de las Religiones, Mexico City, August 5-12, 1995; and 'Eclipse Imagery in Mexica Sculpture of Central Mexico,' paper presented at the inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, Vatican Observatory, 1994.
 11. Sullivan op. cit. p. 8, 11
 12. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Históricas*, Vol. I, 52, Mexico, D.F., Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1801.
 13. Cecelia F. Klein, 'Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos,' in *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics*, A. Aveni and G. Urton (eds), *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1982, pp. 1-35, see especially 3 and 4.
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 15. Miguel León Portilla, *Aztec Image*, op. cit., p. 35 ff, T. R. Fehrenback, *Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico*, New York, MacMillan, 1963.

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25. Andrea Stone, op. cit., 1988, p. 75.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 76.
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29. Ixilxochitl, op. cit., 1801.
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48. Wolf, 1986, p. 37.
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Magical Healing: its Uses and Limits

Carol Laderman

Here is the story of a sorcerer and her magic, the limits of that magic, and her eventual success as a healer achieved in spite of the suspicion of her neighbors and disdain of her colleagues. When I first met her in 1975, Cik Su, a Malay *bomoh* (healer), was in an equivocal position. She was unusual in many ways, including in the acquisition her of healing powers. Typically, Malays are reluctant to assume such responsibilities until a loved one is afflicted and they must stand by powerless to help. Appalled by their impotence, they may apprentice themselves to a master *bomoh*, and later, if they have shown the proper talent and drive, be inducted into their profession. Although *bomoh* who specialize in seances must have the stamina to deal with denizens of the spirit world until the small hours of the morning, they are not expected to exhibit their spiritual power by a show of physical strength. Cik Su, however, knew she had received supernatural power when her husband's former wife arrived, intending to deliver her usual harangue about husband-stealing. She felt a surge of unusual strength flow through her. The next thing she knew, her rival lay at her feet, knocked unconscious by the blow of Cik Su's fist. After this episode of physical violence, quite unusual in the life of a Malay woman, which Cik Su attributed to an influx of spiritual strength, she went on to treat a variety of conditions, giving advice to people who had trouble walking, or suffered from dizziness, or "internal fevers" and other complaints that hospital personnel didn't recognize. Although she did not specify a fee and accepted whatever was offered, she told me she preferred to treat rich people from the city. Her neighbors, however, rarely called on her for healing help, claiming she harbored a powerful spirit to whom she gave offerings and used against her fellows, particularly those whose happiness she envied. Cik Su often spoke about dangers presented by envious people who "planted" magical objects, or purchased the blood of murder victims to sprinkle on enemies' doorsteps. Although her neighbors spoke about her sinister qualities behind her back,

she claimed to be a pious woman who envied no one. The most lucrative aspect of her profession was her performance of hours-long seances. Some day, she said, she would invite me to attend one.

It was not until a year later, after I had begun to study with other healers, that Cik Su invited me to witness a seance. I had learned that Malays, rather than dividing illnesses into those of "natural" or "supernatural" origin, speak of "usual" and "unusual" ailments, basing the distinction on incidence rather than suspected etiology. The most prevalent "usual" problems are attributed to a humoral imbalance, treated with herbal remedies, dietary adjustments, and thermal treatments. Illnesses can also arise from a lack or overabundance of components of the Self.¹

All human beings possess a variety of Inner Winds (*angin*) at birth which determine individual talents and personality. *Semangat* (the Spirit of Life) permeates the universe. The universe teems with life: the life of a fire is swift and soon burns out; a rock's life is slow, long and dreamlike. As a baby matures, its *semangat* hardens². Illnesses can come from disembodied spirits sent by an enemy, or acting on their own behalf, angry at the trampling of their invisible abodes or the flow of human urine on their invisible heads. Their attacks can range in virulence from merely greeting a victim and startling him; to blowing on his back and upsetting his humoral balance with their airy, fiery elements; to actually striking him, causing him to become seriously ill or even die. Besides dealing with external spirits, *bomoh* heal patients by attending to their inner problems: lack of *semangat* and overabundance of unexpressed Wind. *Bomoh's* performances must follow many twists and turns³

Cik Su's seance was unlike those of other Malay shamans. When I met her at the doorway of her patient's home (a woman in her 6th month of pregnancy who had been bleeding), she whispered to me that the next door neighbor had caused the illness. The patient had already been to the hospital where her condition had improved, but it worsened as soon as she came home, a sure sign that magic was involved. Cik Su was the fourth *bomoh* called in on the case. The preceding three had divined that the sickness was due, in part, to "someone" sending spirits

against the pregnant woman, but declined to say who, following proper Malay etiquette. Cik Su scorned the performance of another divination, usually done with the aid of the Ancient *Bomoh* whose persona is assumed by the divining shaman. She *knew* who had done the deed through her own powers, and didn't hesitate to name names. Before the seance could take place, she had to change into the masculine costume of a master of the martial arts. Then the doors of the house had to be locked. No one would be allowed to enter or leave, no one in the audience would be allowed to speak, no one would be allowed to walk about. None of these activities was prohibited by other shamans. She called up a Dog Spirit who revealed in a growly voice that it had been sent by the next door neighbor to kill the pregnant woman so the neighbor could marry her husband. Ali, Cik Su's husband, took out one of the white cotton squares he had previously prepared, placed it on the floor, and sprinkled it with raw rice and diced turmeric to make it antithetical to the spirits. The raw rice was full of earthy and wet elements, while the spirits are composed of wind and fire; the turmeric's yellow color made it sacred to the sultan, said to be a descendant of King Solomon who ruled the spirits. Still in the persona of the dog spirit, Cik Su lifted the bamboo wand and struck herself on the shoulders to gather the spirit into the wand. She thrust it into the cloth, screaming. Quickly, Ali knotted it and tying it with turmeric-smeared strips. He tossed the packet to one side and recited the Koranic words that guard against the devil. He would bury them under the next door neighbor's house. The next night, Ali told me that the neighbor had moved that day, having been made hot by the devils buried under her house. He said it was useless for me to have come all the way out there that night, since there were no more devils left to catch. Since he hadn't actually asked me to leave, I stayed and witnessed the finale to the proceedings of the first night. This seance was shorter but more violent than the first. A Snake Spirit manifested itself in Cik Su, causing her to fall to the floor, writhing and hissing. Although she tried to exorcize it, it refused to leave, throwing her violently against the spectators and terrifying the children. Finally the spirit was captured by the wand. When she was once more possessed by another male spirit, Cik Su smoked a cigarette,

(typical of Malay men, very rare for Malay women), prepared limes for the water, and gave the patient a cloth smeared with turmeric which she was to tie on her arm. When I played the tapes I had made of this ceremony later, Pak Long, my shaman mentor, commented that Cik Su was certainly clever, but it was not possible that so many problems were caused by people working evil magic. In his experience, most problems were caused by disharmonies within the Self, and not by malevolent people. Where was her treatment of the loss of vital spirit, why didn't she consider the possibility that some illnesses were caused by stifling of Inner Winds rather than by magic alone? Cik Su's performance was a star turn, denying equality to her husband who acted in a highly attenuated role as *minduk*, usually the partner of the shaman rather than merely the assistant; it was a drama of awe and terror that omitted the music, dance, poetry and humor of the traditional healing ceremony. She did not rely upon a divination to tell her the cause of her patient's ills; without the help of the Ancient *Bomoh* who usually conducted the divination while possessing the shaman, she arrived at a diagnosis through her own powers. She did not entertain agreements with the spirits or promise them offerings in return for their withdrawal but, instead, violently captured and imprisoned them.

In her daily life, as well, Cik Su did not fit the usual pattern. Although ideally Malay women should be decorous and retiring, it was obvious that she held the reins in her family. Her husband worked at odd jobs and his household contributions were minimal. Within the seance, she was the leader and he her follower. Her first achievement of supernatural power was heralded by violence, and her seances continued this theme. Other female shamans danced in the manner of princesses in the Malay dance-drama during their performances rather than strutting around like male warriors, as she did. They did not rely upon masculine props to shore up their authority, nor insist on obedience from patients and audiences. The control Cik Su exerted was rare in a culture where flexibility is stressed.

When I left in 1977, Cik Su was able to supplement her husband's income by sporadic treatment of out-of-town patients, but she was far from being a success. When I returned in 1982, I was surprised to find that her house had doubled its size and

was thoroughly renovated. She invited me for dinner and a healing ceremony to take place that night. At dinner, Cik Su introduced me to Yussof from the District Office. He was Cik Su's partner and the husband of four wives. Four at a time is the total number of wives allowed in Islam, but only a handful of men ever have more than one. Keeping women happy in obedience to the Koranic injunction to deal equally with multiple wives is considered a sign of unusual masculine talent, almost certainly supplemented by magic. In our village of over 2,000, only three men had two wives each. Yussof was the only man of my acquaintance to have four.

Three times a week Yussof drove to Cik Su's home to conduct healing performances. After turning off her new electric lights and replacing them with oil lamps, Cik Su excused herself to change into her costume, the black outfit of the hero of olden times. Then she performed an abbreviated version of her seance. She almost exclusively "spoke in tongues," incomprehensible both to me and to the native Malay speakers present. After she finished, the oil lamps were extinguished, and electric lights turned on. Now it was Yussof's turn to treat the patients. They and their relatives sat in a semicircle while Yussof stood before them to explain his method of treatment.

Yussof said: I would like to tell you the facts about my medical treatment before I let you know the cause of your illness. All illness has three possible causes. Many people know this, but let me tell this to those who are not aware of it. When I tell you the cause of your illness, please, don't think your illness is caused by somebody's magic, treachery, or spell. What I mean is that all illness is created by God. I'm trying to make you well, and this also depends upon His mercy and will. Don't take this for granted. Do you think I handle this with any magic or spell? No, I cannot. I'm begging from Him. Don't think I have any hidden magical power. I do not. Yes, we must bear in mind the reasons for illness, the three causes. Let me tell you about them. The first one is *Kifarat*, God's revenge. Please don't say that God is cruel. No, He is not. It is a punishment, the punishment for our carelessness in piety and prayer, in forgetting His name, in neglecting to give thanks. For example, the Koran tells us that the poor can become rich and the rich can become poor. When

a man is poor, he asks God to give him wealth, but when he becomes rich, he forgets the Almighty, never giving Him thanks. Then God curses him, causing all his wealth to disappear. The second is sickness that people cause themselves, like having a contest with God. For example, you may be beautiful and yet want to be prettier, so you go to a *bomoh* and learn how to charm your husband, to prevent him from running away or marrying another woman. This goes against God's decision about which men and women should be matched. The thing we learn will finally destroy us. For example, we study and learn about magic oil, to brighten the face. People who do this will be cursed by God, they will become like the *hantu* (disembodied spirits). The third cause is spells cast by people. If somebody wants to put some magic on us, there must be reasons. Or, sometimes the magic is badly aimed so that it hits a person it isn't meant for and misses its target. It's your bad luck if you get it, but that's the cause.

Yussof's explanation of the causes of illness is an interesting amalgam of traditional and non-traditional etiologies. His denial of personal power and attribution of the ultimate cure to God is typical of Malay healers. His statement that God punishes people for lack of piety by afflicting them with sickness is not. Other healers pointed out to me that both saints and sinners are heirs to illness. He is ambiguous about the power of magic. First he denies that magic is either the cause or cure of illness. As he speaks, however, he warns against the possible consequences of attempting to improve one's life by magical means. Although many Malays have acquired spells to increase attractiveness and luck, there is a strong injunction against thwarting God's will by attempting to escape one's assigned status in life. Behavior inappropriate to one's station has been discouraged by Malay law and custom. It was a punishable offense for commoners to employ royal language when referring to themselves. Aside from legal sanctions against transgressing the prerogatives of royalty, commoners who dared to break the social barrier might fall ill with an incurable skin disease or suffer the curse that befalls those who practice this behavior. Love magic, widely practiced by Malays, is considered unfair to its victims and dangerous to others; for instance, the familiar spirits some women harbor to

increase their attractiveness to men also frighten children. Finally, Yussof admits the possibility of sorcery as a cause of sickness, but claims that "there must be reasons" why someone has fallen victim to magic. Either the victim deserved it, or, due to bad aim, it hit an innocent person. On the whole, his explanations for illness tend to blame the victim; however, in the following dialogues the onus for illness-causing behavior is more often put on the patients' relatives.

PATIENT 1. A middle-aged woman.

Y- Now, what's your problem?

P- My body is very hot. I have *serban*. (pains).

Y- *Serban* of the head?

P- Everywhere.

Y- Some people have *serban* of the head. OK, the cause of this illness...sometimes *serban* is caused by blood, lack of vitamins, but I can't tell you what kind of vitamin you must take. How long have you have this *serban*?

P- A long time already, 14 years or so. First I got it in the knees, now I have it everywhere.

Y- What's your name?

P- Bunga (flower).

Y- (laughs) Oh, she's not a fruit yet. Don't get angry, I'm just joking. In this matter, I'm really concerned. Your illness hasn't any connection with the three causes. No magic... if it has a connection, then only.....

P- *Pakaian*? [This can mean either "clothing," or "spells."]

Y- I don't know yet, I'm not very sure yet. Do you think you have "*pakaian*?"

P- I don't know.

Y- What do you mean you don't have *pakaian*? You have your blouse and sarong, haven't you?

P- Ohhh. That kind of *pakaian* I have.

Y- Talking about *pakaian* - you can study and learn about astrology, but don't go overboard, don't go beyond the limits. For example, if you are beautiful and you want to be still more beautiful, you shouldn't do it; God has decided everything, and we shouldn't go beyond it. But here, in this astrology, shines a clue. Let me ask you, do you live near a river?

P- Yes, very close.

Y- What's the connection between *lesung* (mortar) and *tumbuk padi* (pounding rice to remove the husk)?

P- I've pounded rice in the fields...

Y- If you remember it, good. Do you know the definition of *lesung*? By the way, do you have children? a husband?

P- Yes, my husband made the *lesung*.

Y- What are you saying about your husband? Your *lesung* hides a story. Do you have any other *lesung*?

P- I just got a new one...

Y- I don't mean that kind of *lesung*! Here is a *lesung* (he points to a woman); was there one more? (*Lesung* is slang for woman; *alu*, or pestle, stands for man. The sexual allusion is obvious.)

P- Oh, that sort of *lesung*, yes, there was one more.

Y- So now there are two *lesung*?

P- No, now one only.

Y- It's the same old story: two *lesung* quarrel, the *alu* runs away. I have to study this matter deeply. It's not painful for the leg only. There's also trouble in the heart. But don't worry, it can be cured. Do you have anything to ask? No? Sit down and relax, I'll call you afterwards. This is just an interview; I'll give you the medicine later. (He turns toward the audience.) Do you understand what I'm talking about? I'm talking in Trengganu dialect.

(Yussof had ascribed all illness to three causes, but here he introduces another etiology. This patient's pain was brought on by the suffering to her self-esteem at having to share her husband with a second wife.)

PATIENT 2. An elderly woman

Y- (to the next patient) What is your name?

P- Halimah.

Y- Daughter of?

P- Razak.

Y- What's your mother's name? Where are you from?

P- Fatimah. From Bukit Gading.

Y- What is your problem?

P- Confusion. I'm mixed up in my mind, even when I'm saying my prayers.

Y- How is your appetite?

P- I don't eat much. Nothing tastes right.

Y- You are floating in the River of Sadness. To whom do you owe your sadness?

P- No one.

Y- You have problems, problems that cause you sadness. You have inherited problems. They worry you so much that you get a heart attack. I have no medicine to cure you, only advice. You can't take Malay medicine because I'm afraid you won't take it properly. Have you seen a doctor? No? Are you afraid of injections? Yes? You must see a doctor. Diabetes, kidney trouble, and high blood pressure are very difficult to cure; sometimes there is no hope at all. But your heart weakness, if God so wills, can be cured. I have no medicine now; for the time being I will give you neutralizing water, treated with cooling limes and incantations to counteract noxious influences. Your soul is disturbed and your spirit has fled, so the way to cure you is also by spiritual means. Who brought this patient here? Okay, please tell her children to take good care of her, be nice to her, don't treat her cruelly or she will go out of her mind. Yes, if her children and her relatives want to see her get back to normal, please treat her kindly. Okay, if you aren't satisfied, come and see me again in two weeks.

(Yussof has introduced another etiology for illness, the loss of *semangat*, the vital spirit. The patient's spirit has fled because of shock at her children's unkind treatment. Although Yussof suggests a visit to the doctor, his advice is traditional: the use of "neutralizing water," to cool down her body and make it a pleasant receptacle for her *semangat*. To guard against further spirit loss, he advises her children to be loving towards the old woman.)

PATIENT 3. A middle-aged man.

What's the matter?

P- *Serban*... I can't lift up my hand. It feels very heavy. It will swell up if I lift it.

Y- This case also has no connection with magic. You feel it now but actually this illness has been with you for quite some time already. You didn't suffer because you are still young

and strong. Your blood is good to fight this illness, you have energy. This illness we Malays call *pirai* (pain in the joints, like gout or rheumatism, often attributed to shock and therefore connected with loss of *semangat*.⁴) It's not the work of magic. You'd better go have your shoulders massaged; don't worry about the swelling. Then get the gall of *haruan* (a kind of fish)...I don't mean *beruang* (a bear), that's *haram* (food forbidden to Muslims). (laughs) You must take black pepper and put it in the gall, and allow it to dry in the sun. You cut the gall into eight pieces and put a peppercorn in each slice. When the gall is dried, please eat it. (Yusof has diagnosed this illness as humorally caused and has recommended a humoral cure; massage breaks up the clots of "cold" phlegm in the body, allowing the "hot" blood to flow unobstructed, thus alleviating the pain. The internal medicine prescribed is humorally "very hot.")

PATIENT 4. An elderly woman.

Y- What is your problem?

P- I'm always very tired.

Y- How long has this been going on?

P- For seven months.

Y- Have you seen a doctor?

P- Yes, I did, once, but he told me I was all right. I took the medicine he gave me but it made me feel even worse. Then I went to a *bomoh*. He did incantations, but I got a fever again.

Y- The treatment was not in harmony with your blood. Did you bring limes?

P- No, I didn't.

Y- What's the use of *tiup-jampi* (*bomoh's* act of blowing on a patient's back with magically supercooled breath to counteract the hot breath of spirits), if it makes you go from bad to worse?

P- Last night I asked my granddaughter to massage me. She did it with all her might; my body even turned black and blue but I felt nothing, it didn't hurt me. I couldn't get up strength to say my prayers. I was shivering, my heart was beating very fast.

Y- It's *penyakit angin sesat* (Inner Winds which have gone astray). The trouble is that the Winds have no way to escape, no door to exit.

P- Is it because I'm already old?

Y- You're not old, you've just been around a long time (laughs). The trouble is that the Winds in your body cannot blow freely.

P- This part is swollen, but sometimes it is normal.

Y- Can you take hot medicines like tonic or herbs?

P- I never have.

Y- Do you want to take them or not?

P- Yes, I want to be well.

Y- Write this down: (recites prescription). Pound them together and put the paste into a cloth. Apply the compress to the affected part of your body to lessen the pain. Now, what about your appetite?

P- I don't feel hungry, I can't sleep, it hurts everywhere.

(These are common symptoms of sickness due to accumulated Inner Winds, usually treated in the shaman's seance. Yusof, however, treats the physical symptoms rather than dealing with the root cause. Yusof also introduces a recurrent theme in Malay medicine: no treatment will work unless patient, healer and treatment are in harmony.)

Y- If you don't want to use it as a compress, you can use it as a bandage.

P- How can I have a bandage? Every part of my body hurts.

Y- Okay, apply it as a compress. (Turning to the assembled patients and their relatives) Any questions? Now, here is the treatment: Can you say *Fatihah* (the first chapter of the Koran)? Now, one by one, come to me. Say *Fatihah* three times, give praise to the Almighty. Do it with full concentration. Don't listen to the cars, don't look at other people, meditate. Let's say that our hearts are facing Mecca, in other words, we are at the Kaabah. Our mouths praise God, our hearts are at the Kaabah. Close your eyes. Remember when I call you to come forth: say *Fatihah* three times and praise God over and over again until the end of the treatment. During the treatment you must not speak or ask anything. If you want to say something, please do so now.

The Limits of Magic

The partnership of Cik Su and Yussof was a winning combination. Cik Su's performance, in its unalloyed evocation of terror, awe, and ancient ways, authenticated the night's treatments in the minds of patients and their families, urban Malays who had had little previous acquaintance with shamanistic ceremonies. Played in darkness, spoken in incomprehensible "tongues" punctuated by shrieks, Cik Su's seance prepared the audience to be receptive to Yussof's diagnoses and advice which, by themselves, would not have carried the same force. She was still the star turn of her performance, but now she made no accusations and named no names.

Yussof supplied comic relief, restored calmness, reason, and light to an atmosphere that had been marked by darkness and chaos. He widened the scope of performance of healing by restoring much of the traditional causation theory, including the loss of *semangat*, the accumulation of Inner Winds, and the imbalance of humors, that Cik Su had ignored. Magic no longer reigned supreme; human problems were also due to inappropriate behavior, unkind treatment, loss of self-esteem, and the stifling of personality and creativity. Solutions could be found in applications of herbal remedies and love, rather than in violence towards spirits and revenge against sorcerers.

While Cik Su was becoming a wealthy woman, traditional *bomoh* were performing seances less and less frequently, attacked on one flank by Islamic authorities who disapproved of their evocation of demigods, and on the other by old age and the ills to which mankind is heir.

Cik Su did not cure her patients because she had become a great shaman; in fact, she never overcame her limitations as a ritual performer. As a soloist, she was limited by her lack of training, insistence on control, and reliance upon magical explanations and treatments. The traditional Malay medical system recognizes multiple disease etiologies including disharmonies of the universal elements of earth, air, fire and water in the human microcosm or cosmic macrocosm, and lack or excess of components of the Self, as well as attacks of

disembodied spirits sent by enemies or acting on their own volition. Cik Su's explanation of most illness as caused by malevolent magic did not reflect the view of the universe upon which the medical system is based. Her performance as Yussof's partner, however, was indispensable, convincing patients of the value of the night's treatments in a way that his "commonsense" advice by itself never could. While she conveyed feelings of awe and the presence of unseen powers through her seance, he expanded the limits of her magic by restoring elements of traditional Malay belief that she had discarded, restructuring them into a modern-sounding approach which impressed the patients and their families with its ring of education and urbanity. Yussof's admonitions concerning piety and devotion to Islam protected their healing treatments from the kind of criticism directed at more traditional shamans' seances. This innovative combination of antiquity and modernity, magic and religious orthodoxy succeeded in making Cik Su and Yussof wealthy at a time when traditional Malay shamanism, primarily based in agrarian communities, was on the wane; and the shared resonance of their treatments with the beliefs and expectations of their urbanized clients allowed them to perform cures together that neither could have accomplished without the other.

NOTES

1. Carol Laderman, *Wives and Midwives: Childbirth and Nutrition in Rural Malaysia*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983. Carol Laderman, *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine, and Aesthetics in Malay Shamanistic Performance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.
2. Josiane Massard, 'Doctoring by Go-Between: Aspects of Health Care for Malay Children', in *Social Science & Medicine*, 27:789-798.
3. Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman (eds), *The Performance of Healing*, New York, Routledge, 1996. See also Kirk Endicott, *An Analysis of Malay Magic*, London, Oxford University Press, 1970.
4. John D. Gimlette and H. W. Thompson, *A Dictionary of Malayan Medicine*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1971 [1915].

Veiling in Dispute The Islamic Headscarf as an Issue of Ideological Debate in Turkey

Tuula Sakaranaho

Muslim Women: Mute and Invisible?

In the Western Orientalist discourse on Islam, the veiling of Muslim women has been seen as a visible sign of the oppression Islam inflicts on women. Behind their covers, Muslim women have been hidden from the foreign gaze. However, extravagant stories of 19th century Western male travellers have purported to reveal their secrets. In these travel accounts, Muslim women are approached either with horror and pity when seen as 'beasts of burden' or little more than with exotism and eroticism because, hidden away in the harem, they were imagined to possess excessive sensuality. Nevertheless, these Western male travellers did not, in actual fact, gain access to the private domain of Muslim women. The secrets these men revealed were little more than the fruits of their own daydreaming inspired by the mysterious East. Muslim women behind their veils remained mute and invisible.¹

The descriptions of these Western male travellers have their counterpart in the research conducted on Muslim women by 20th century Western feminists. In the writings of the latter, the oppressive hold Islam has on women has been constructed in a more sophisticated manner than in those of the former and their criticism of veiling is presented in a scholarly fashion. Nevertheless, the basic attitude has remained the same, even though the time and the interpreters have changed. Indeed Muslim women in their veils still remain mute and invisible.

The above-mentioned Western interpretations of veiled Muslim women is echoed in the research of some Muslim writers. In these writings, veiling is opposed on the grounds of modern and secular values pertaining to equality between the sexes. Veiling is therefore seen as a sign of the Islamic past where

women were secluded and confined to the privacy of the home. Consequently, it has been claimed that veiling makes Muslim women mute and invisible.

However, during recent decades, both Western observers and secular Muslims have witnessed the emergence of Islamic women on the political scene. For example, Islamic women demonstrate on the streets and organize sit-ins and hunger strikes in defense of their right to cover themselves as a sign of their religious affiliation. Thus, Islamic women are veiled but not mute and invisible. In other words, they are a contradiction in terms.

Contradictions give rise to disputes and debates and in heated discussion arguments become sharpened. In this paper, I will look at the the new Islamic veiling as an issue of ideological debate in contemporary Turkey. In research literature, this debate has been called the headscarf dispute.

The Headscarf Dispute

Using the headscarf dispute as an example, my aim is to illustrate the complex and manifold ideological field where the woman question is debated in contemporary Turkish society.² I hope to map some of the heated discussion that the rise of Islam and women's visibility in the Islamic movement has aroused in Turkey over the last decade.

As Feride Acar, a Turkish sociologist, points out, "the issue of women has emerged as a major battleground in the struggle between secularists and Islamists in the past, and it promises to persist as such also in the future"³. More precisely, it has been pointed out that the contemporary dispute concerning 'headscarfs' oscillates between two arguments. One of the arguments is put forward in defense of Turkish secularism, 'laicism' (*lâiklik*), a fundamental principle of the Republic, whilst the other involves the demand for religious freedom and the right to display one's religious affiliation in public. The proponents of the former viewpoint argue that altering the existing laws or Atatürk's principles is inconceivable and they see freedom of religion as a matter of individual conscience whereas the proponents of the latter view claim that the question of religious freedom is

misunderstood in Turkey and that by prohibiting the wearing of headscarfs the constitutional rights of Islamic women are being infringed.⁴

Consequently, the 'headscarf dispute' forms a clear ideological battleground where secular and religious values are debated. Moreover, studying the modern debate on 'Islamic veiling' allows one to tease out different interpretations concerning Turkish society in general and to highlight views on the issue of 'women and Islam', in particular. However, I will limit the scope of my paper to looking at interpretations on the headscarf dispute in Turkish sociological research. The question I will pose here is a methodological one: how is such an ideologically laden issue as Islamic veiling interpreted in the research literature? Moreover, what is the implicit understanding of Islam underlying these interpretations, and what is the outcome of different schemes of interpretation? In this paper, I will follow two lines of reasoning and will show how Islamic veiling is invested with different meanings, depending on the basic approach of the research. I will limit my study to two Turkish female sociologists, Feride Acar and Nilüfer Göle. The former adopts a critical approach to Islam in the headscarf dispute whereas the latter opts for a non-evaluative stand. However, before going on to look in more detail at these studies, I will discuss the problematics involved in the conceptual framework of ideology.

Islam Against the Backdrop of Ideology

In order to conceptualize the above-mentioned approaches to Islam, it is enlightening to take a look at the conceptual history of ideology in general. Since Islam is considered to be an ideological matter in Turkish sociological discussion, it is useful to examine the interpretations of Islam against the backdrop of ideology.

Roughly speaking, there are two main lines in the conceptual history of ideology. One line of thought has used ideology as a neutral concept and has been concerned with the function of ideas within social life. The other has given ideology a pejorative meaning and has been preoccupied with ideology as illusion, distortion, and mystification. Right from the start the concept of

ideology has been much disputed with respect to its basic meaning. The term 'ideology' first appeared in post-revolutionary France at the end of the eighteenth century. The French word 'idéologie' was proposed in 1796 by the rationalist philosopher Destutt de Tracy who called the philosophy of mind, ideology. Thus, the word 'ideology' started its career as meaning a 'science of ideas', a concept deeply rooted in the Enlightenment and directed as a criticism against ancient metaphysics. However, Napoléon popularized another meaning of ideology. He turned against the 'revolutionary idealism' that de Tracy and the other ideologues represented for him. In his attacks against 'ideologues' and by using ideology as a term of abuse, Napoléon launched the pejorative meaning of ideology. As a result, ideology 'ceased to refer exclusively to the science of ideas and began to refer also to the ideas themselves, that is, to a body of ideas which are alleged to be erroneous and divorced from the practical realities of political life'.⁵

Both of the above-mentioned usages of 'ideology' have been developed further during the word's conceptual history. The critical and pejorative line of reasoning has been crucial most of all in Marxist thinking,⁶ but ideology as a kind of distortion has been put forward by some non-Marxist thinkers as well.⁷ A more neutral and non-evaluative conception of ideology has been developed for instance in anthropology by Clifford Geertz, who defines ideology as a 'cultural system'. In general, this approach focuses on different kinds of constructions of ideology in various social and historical contexts of interaction.⁸

My main argument is that these two different approaches to ideology are also relevant to the interpretations of Islam. Thus, one can follow two lines of reasoning: one in which Islam is perceived as a distorted or distorting ideology, and another in which it is viewed as a 'cultural system' in neutral and non-evaluative terms. Moreover, the choice of one or other of these two particular lines of reasoning, in its turn, has a bearing on one's approach to the issue of women and Islam in general and the headscarf issue in particular.

The concept of Islam as a kind of distortion can be found in Turkish sociological writing which adheres to the 'modernization thesis'. According to this view, Turkey as a secular state is

increasingly becoming a more modern and secular society whereas Islam is confined to the periphery. Research done from this perspective has opted for a 'secularist' approach which sees Islam as a backward social force hindering change towards modern life. Thus, the 'modernization' perspective entails certain assumptions in which Islam is seen to be incompatible with modern life and fundamentally opposed to the West. However, in recent Turkish sociological research, one can find another approach which is aiming at being more neutral and consciously non-evaluative. In a sense, this approach could be qualified as hermeneutical, where Islam is perceived more from 'inside' through the meanings given it by Muslim activists themselves.⁹

In the following, I will give examples of the above-mentioned two lines of reasoning and show what kind of interpretations of Islamic veiling one can come to by following these approaches. However, before going into these studies in more detail, I will give a short historical account of the developments concerning the issue of women in Turkey in order to situate the present-day dispute in a larger time perspective.

Historical Background

The woman question in Turkey was raised for the first time in late 19th century Ottoman society when innovative movements influenced by ideas received from Europe gained momentum. The innovators were influential in debates concerning the changing nature of Ottoman society and the rising Turkish national identity. In these debates, the issue of women operated as a parameter of the social change believed to be necessary for Ottoman society by the innovators. Slogans such as 'When women are debased, the whole society is degraded' give an idea of how the woman question was expressed in the social thinking of the time. Thus, the *woman question* was first brought to the fore by men who linked the problems of their society with the low status of women. For these men, educating women and raising their status was an important factor of social change, crucial to the progress and development of the nation-state. The activity of these innovative movements eventually culminated in the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, which resulted in

a radical break with the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of its institutions. Thus, Turkey became an exception among Muslim countries as a politically secular state. The first president of the Republic was Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who forged a state ideology known as Kemalism.¹⁰

In the construction of modern Turkey the *woman question* took on a new function. The new state needed a 'new woman' (*yeni kadın*) who would epitomize the ideological change toward a secular nation-state. Hence, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, aided by a small revolutionary elite, imposed reforms designed to emancipate women as part of the process of modernizing the institutions of Turkish society. Besides altering the legal system, these reforms sought to transform modes of dress and social behavior as well. Although veiling as such was not legally banned, a vigorous propaganda campaign led by Atatürk himself encouraged women to adopt modern styles of dressing. According to Atatürk, '*women ought to show their faces to the world, and they ought to look on the world with their own eyes.*'¹¹ Moreover, those spreading counter-propaganda in this matter had restrictions placed on them and, in some cases, were even given short prison sentences. Thus, from the beginning of the Turkish Republic, veiling was seen as a sign of traditional backwardness, whereas discarding the veil and opting for a Western mode of dressing came to be seen as a sign of the modern emancipation of Turkish women. Consequently, for the modernist elite, the emancipation of women became synonymous with the social, cultural, and legal reforms of the Turkish state.¹²

However, during the last decade or so, the official ideology of Kemalism and its notion of women's emancipation has been seriously challenged. Indeed, critical voices have been raised by women themselves who represent different ideological standpoints. In saying this, however, I do not mean to imply that women until recently would only have been passive followers of the reforms imposed on them from above. As a matter of fact, women were very active in the late decades of the Ottoman empire and took part in the construction of the Turkish state. However, one is justified in claiming that the issue of women debated particularly by women representing different ideologies, emerged only in the 1980s.¹³ For example, one can mention

Islamic women who became active in the mid 1980's. They came forth with criticism of the 'forced secularism' of the Turkish state and claimed the right to cover themselves¹⁴ publicly as a sign of their affiliation to Islam.¹⁵

As a reaction to the growing number of women among university students, but also among teachers covering themselves, the Council of Higher Education banned the wearing of the Islamic headscarf (*türban*) on university premises. This led, however, to the so-called *Türban movement* in which women wearing headscarfs protested against the legal prohibition of the veil gradually began to organize sit-ins, hunger strikes, and street demonstrations.¹⁶ Finally, the wearing of the Islamic dress (*tesettür*) was allowed in most universities, and towards the end of the 1980s, women wearing Islamic headscarfs became a common sight at Turkish universities.

Critical Approach

The advent of Islamic movements on the contemporary political scene in Turkey caused concern, consternation and even alarm among secular natives. Consequently, it has generated a need to explain the phenomenon and analyze the ideology of 'Islamic revivalism' on the part of social scientists. The sociological study of Feride Acar is one answer to this need. In her article, one can read the basic attitude of secularists in relation to Islam. Acar claims to cast a 'penetrating view on the world of Islamic movements' and she points out that research is needed on the ideology of the Islamic movements before 'the secular world decides on the compatibility of the movement's discourse with such fundamental values as equality, democracy and human rights'.¹⁷ Thus, by means of her writing, Acar is taking part in an attempt of the 'secular world' to judge the Islamic movement and measure Islamic ideology according to its 'secular values'. It is with this in mind that one should examine the secularists' point of view in general with regard to the head-scarf dispute.

For the secularists, the attraction Islam seems to exert on women is a dilemma. Moreover, in their view, the re-veiling of women seems to involve turning back the clock of development and modernization. In a sense, the rise of Islam and women

covering themselves again means that modernization theories have been proved wrong and inappropriate.¹⁸ According to the modernization perspective, Kemalism has firmly established a secular regime in Turkey and thus the Islamic tradition is to be kept on the periphery or it is hoped that it will disappear gradually with the modernizing impact of the West and such internal processes as urbanization and industrialization. However, the opposite has taken place in Turkey with the advent of Islamic groups on the Turkish political scene over the last decade or so.

For the secularists, the most alarming factor in the emergence of politically active Islamic groups has been the amount of university students and staff among their ranks. In fact, there is presently a group of Islamic academics claiming their place among the Turkish elite, which had been so far exclusively secular and loyal to the Turkish state. Thus, there is emerging a new counter-elite whose members come from fairly modest backgrounds. Most Islamic intellectuals grew up in the small provincial towns of Turkey, from where they moved to big cities with their families. Consequently, they represent the first generation of their social group in big cities such as Ankara and Istanbul. Moreover, although they belong to the lower middle class, university education has given them a chance for social mobility. Hence the incorporation of highly educated Islamic men and women into the ranks of the Turkish elite during the last decade has caused a situation where, for the first time, the secular elite is faced with a counter-elite that does not adhere to the secular values of the Turkish state. Instead, it aims at reintroducing Islam as an alternative ideology.¹⁹

Against this background, one can summarize the views of secularists concerning the rise of Islam and the message it holds for women as represented in the writings of Acar. According to Acar, the attraction Islam holds for people is caused by the structural changes which have taken place in Turkish society and the cultural void created by these changes: from close-knit communities to large-scale society. Thus, the secular reforms in Turkish society have paved the way for the rise of Islam. In other words, Acar gives a structural explanation for the rise of Islam and emphasizes external factors in its success. In the same manner, she claims that Islamic ideology has had to give

importance to women because it has to combat the strong secularist ideology of women's emancipation promoted by the Turkish state.

According to Acar, women in particular have suffered from the contradictory and dissonant messages and practices of the secular reforms, which have caused role conflicts and confusion among women. As a consequence of this, women have been filled with false hopes and thus are vulnerable to an ideology such as Islam which simplifies reality and promises women escape from role conflict and confusion. Nevertheless, Acar admits that Islam is genuinely sensitive to the rights, position, and roles of women. However, she points out that the attributes by which women's rights are defined in Islam are exclusively associated with women's role as wives, mothers and educators of children and as forces that maintain order in society. Re-veiling women is a clear sign that Islamic ideology aims at returning women to the home.

However, there is certain contradiction here. Islamic women are very visible in Islamic movements. In fact, during the last decade, they have marched right in the forefront of such movements in many countries.²⁰ Thus, even though veiled, they are not at home and 'confined' to their roles as wives and mothers. On the contrary, they work actively as speakers and writers and even founders of Islamic centers for women.

Non-evaluative Approach

In the foreword of her work, Göle²¹ clearly states that she is not taking sides in her research. Thus, she is not writing in order to 'verify' any view—whether it be a secularist or an 'Islamist' one. Hence she points out that even though she accepts 'democracy' and 'human rights' as 'normal' values, her study is not an ethical work. On the contrary, Göle aims at understanding the issues of modernism and Islam in Turkish history and society at large. In her study, Göle develops an approach in which her starting point is to investigate how the Islamic actors themselves perceive their faith and movement. Thus, instead of evaluating the status of Muslim women from outside and in terms of structural analysis as Acar does, her aim is to analyze the meaning

system of the Islamic women's movement which is putting forward a new profile for a Muslim woman in social life. The portrait of a Muslim woman that she teases out in this way is dynamic and manifold.

According to Göle, the veil or Islamic dress is a sign of Muslim identity for the women who want to cover themselves. It is a visible protest against the modernist and Western secularists reforms which, in their view, are put forward by the secular elite from above and forced on people who are Muslims. Thus, veiling signifies, in a sense, a return back to the authentic, cultural roots of Turks as Muslims. Moreover, Göle points out that the veiling is a religious obligation for Islamic women and a necessity of their belief. It symbolizes a social order based on the sexual separation of male and female and carries a strong ethical message in which women's beauty is required to be hidden in order to avoid chaos, *fitna*.²² Thus, veiling conveys a message opposite to the Western one by emphasizing that sexuality must not be visible in public and, in a sense, it is a sign of the honour and the integrity of the whole community living according to the ethical rules of Islam.

However, Göle insists that Islamic women make a clear distinction between their mode of living as Muslims and that of traditional Islam. For instance, they distinguish their mode of dressing from scarfs worn by women all over Turkey. According to Islamic activists, Turkish people are not 'real' Muslims in the sense that they are not conscious of their beliefs. They are merely following traditions whereas Islamic activists consciously educate themselves and interpret their religious heritage anew. In the same way, the mode of dressing of Islamic women should not be confused with traditional veiling of Muslim women in general. Covering oneself has been a conscious choice for Islamic women and thus signifies their dedication to Islam. However, Islamic women do not only protest against Western influences in their country or the traditional Islam in their society. They also criticize some of the views put forward by Islamic men. For these women, veiling does not only carry a communal Islamic identity but also signifies the individual aspiration of these women themselves. In relation to these aspirations, Islamic women have come into conflict with Islamic men. As Göle points out, some of the Islamic

women have a strong individual consciousness. For them, the Muslim female identity does not only mean maternal duties or the education of children, but a desire to self-achievement in social life. Thus, they are not happy just to educate themselves and then stay at home educating their children as many of the Islamic men would want them to do. On the contrary, they want to continue their professional careers by working as doctors or engineers. Thus, Islamic men and women seem to think differently on the issue of women mixing in social life.²³

Conclusions with Additional Remarks

I have outlined above two different approaches to Islam and the 'new veiling' of Muslim women. In the first and critical one, Islam is taken as an ideology in its pejorative sense and thus understood as a distortion of social reality. In relation to women, Islam is seen as an ideology which simplifies the social reality of women and promises them escape from the role conflicts and ambiguity caused by modern society. Islam simply takes women 'back home' and confines them in the roles of wives and mothers. The headscarf is seen as a visible sign of this new trend backwards in the development of secularism. Thus, in general, the critical approach is mainly vested in and can be said to characterize the secularist view of Islam. It aims at evaluating Islamic ideology according to its own values, which are 'equality', 'democracy', and 'human rights'. The other and non-evaluative approach acknowledges these same values but does not, however, use them as a yardstick for evaluating the Islamic movement and its ideology with respect to women. Thus, it rather approaches Islam in a neutral way and aims at understanding the inner dynamic of the Islamic movements and how things are debated among the Islamic activists themselves. It therefore ends up with a picture of a movement with many—and at times even contradictory—discourses on Muslim women who nevertheless use the Islamic headscarf as a symbol of their respective adherence to Islam.

In addition, the non-evaluative approach draws attention to the way Islam provides women with a discourse of individual consciousness and strength. Consequently, it allows one to do research which gives 'voice' and 'visibility' to Muslim women. In

a sense, women who take the veil remain 'inside' even if 'outside'. Thus, they carry the social and moral message of Islam in their dress even when mixing in social life. Moreover, in big cities like Istanbul, veiling gives these women freedom of movement. For one thing, they are not harassed by men on the street and are treated with more respect on public transport. Thus, in a sense, veiling works as a *strategy for mixing* which is unavoidable when they move in the social sphere. In other words, veiling makes it possible for these women to move across the boundaries between the private and public spheres without compromising the basic message of Islam concerning sexuality, honour, and social order.

Furthermore, it must be noted that Islamic dress is not only a garment worn by women but rather a moral obligation. This is emphasized in some of the Islamic writings as well where Islamic dress is seen as a principle that concerns both men and women. It is a moral code that should guide men and women whether they are alone or in social company, surrounded by four walls, or in the streets. Thus, the principle involved in veiling is broadened into the social order at large.²⁴

Notes

1. An exception in this Western travel literature was Lady Montague who visited harems and hamams in Istanbul and was actively correcting the Western view on Muslim women in her letters to England.
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Gender Relations in the Spiritualist Ritual of The "Marian Trinitarians"

Silvia Ortiz Echániz

From the standpoint of signification, religion is a secondary modeling system of culture and a key source of symbolism. Gender differentiated participation in religion provides us with an important vantage point for the study of culture .

This kind of analysis allows us to highlight forms of social interaction on the basis of sexual differentiation, expressing power relations as well as the signification of human relationships, based on underlying social structures, ideology and symbolism.

The anthropological study of gender relations seeks to reveal cultural constructs regarding the roles assigned to men and women, as well as how those roles are lived and felt in the various public and private arenas of social interaction.

For marginalized groups, subordination entails relations of class, ethnicity and gender. Sexual inequalities, encountered as part of social reality, are a primary form of expression, within social and cultural structures, of male power relations.¹

The social marginality of the "lower classes" is accentuated among women. This greater vulnerability of women is reinforced within the private arenas of family relations which deny or limit women's access to economic resources and full participation in the public arenas of society.

Gender-based subordination is profoundly rooted in the consciousness of both men and women, and is seen as a natural result of biological differences between the sexes. This consciousness is built and reinforced through socialization, cultural practices, and formal as well as informal education systems which assign women lower status and lesser social representation.²

As women are relegated to unseen and unsung domestic labors and child-rearing, as the only possibilities available given the feminine condition, their efforts and work are considered socially inferior. The family trains men and women for life in a differentiated manner, based on recognition of biological

patriarchy. Domestic labor and child-rearing are viewed not only as women's work but as tasks, that would be degrading for men; if men were to carry out these tasks, that would threaten traditional concepts of virility, seen as a basic condition for maleness. Women in traditional cultures continue to have lower education levels, which stands in the way of their progress in the job market.

Religious observance, traditionally considered to be something women live more intensely than men, is practiced both in public and private. In the Catholic church, religious orthodoxy excludes women from teaching and governing roles within the church, reducing their role and public participation to serving as receptors for the codes and norms imposed by the institutionalized male hierarchy and excluding them from the decision-making bodies of religious institutions.³

In its modern discourse, the Catholic church maintains its traditional position and enters into contradictions regarding the social equalities which modern society demands from it. The church submits women to the fulfillment of the specific role of mother and wife and the sole function of taking care of the home, with a discourse that restricts women's participation in public areas of egalitarian participation as well as a productive economic activities.⁴ In the realm of private participation, it is mainly women who take charge of socialization, imparting religious culture by transmitting the norms, values and forms of conduct put forward by the church to which they belong. Thus, women become the reproducers of their own alienation, imposed on them by their gender-defined forms of religious participation. In grass-roots religious practices, which are often of a heterodox character, women participate in other arenas which allow them to get involved in the organizational and decision-making aspects of worship. In the grass-roots religious practice known as Marian Trinitarian spiritualism, conceptions of gender and its social function are refracted through a recognized spiritual identity and specific cultural expressions. This occurs through the phenomenon of ecstatic possession established during the key moments of the rite—particularly the healing ritual and the ritual teaching of doctrine. The predominance of women is a

feature of possession cults, whose followers generally belong to marginal or subcultural strata of society, in all the world's cultures.⁵

In the Marian Trinitarian cult, women are in the majority both in the religious hierarchy and the parishioners; to outsiders, it looks like a cult organized by women for women. The explanation for this preponderance of women in the spiritualist cult lies in the views of the charismatic leader Roque Rojas Esparza, views which gave rise to the Patriarchal Mexican Church of Elijah, founded in 1866. The direct predecessor of the Marian Trinitarians, this church manifested its autonomy through millenarian beliefs and practices. One of the principal features that counterposed it to Catholic practice was the egalitarian participation of both men and women in administering rites.

Thus, women joined the ecclesiastical structure of this new denomination, with the objective of democratizing a Catholic church characterized by its rigidity, and arguing that both genders are spiritually equal. This egalitarianism in the make-up of the clerical hierarchy was an important element in the subsequent evolution of the cult, which was characterized by its miracle-working claims. In the practice of spiritualism, social identity is reinforced by a subjective identity which is adopted by the faithful as a compensation for the real problems of social marginality. Emphasis on the assumption of this spiritual identity of sacred representation presupposes a segregated and conflict-ridden social identity. The believers' assumption that they symbolically belong to the "spiritual people of Israel, God's chosen people" implies a divine selection as compensation for this objective social reality. They opt for a self-identification which has a transcendent, eternal invariable meaning, which at the same time is a new meaning for downtrodden sectors of the population, who are viewed as the chosen ones because of their class condition: a condition of poverty and suffering that leads to salvation in the apocalypse, while individuals from the dominant classes are excluded from this perspective.

The idea of supernatural and omnipotent selection leads them to consider their beliefs as the "only true" faith, a conception they share with other religious groups. Implicit in this is a sense

of powerlessness to act socially in order to transform the painful and frustrating reality in which they live. This in turn leaves them in a state of constant waiting for divine providence to transform the economic and political structures of society. What they see as most urgent is the need for symbolic restoration of the spiritual assets, a view that shapes their conception of salvation and the means for achieving it. Thus eternal salvation is postponed in order to implement an immediate salvation which will attenuate their hardships. As a constant sign of poverty and exploitation, the issue of sickness makes them feel the need to introduce traditional folk medicine into their rites.⁶

Collective spiritual identity affects the self-perception of the converts, the way they think about themselves and the development of their individuality. Religious ideology, as a symbolic construct, interprets the individual as part of the sacred cosmos, identifying his or her place in the universe and individual nature through reference to two counterposed and qualitatively different things: the physical body and the spiritual body. These have counterposed and complementary attributes and characteristics (solid/delicate, material/non-material, finite/lasting, untranscendental/transcendental.) The way one thinks about him- or herself, and others, depends on the ideological working-out of gender constructs. The physical body is distinguished by biological diversity, whereas the spiritual body is based on distinctive qualities which are recognized for both men and women and are frequently cited and repeated in religious discourse: emotionality/reason, weakness/strength, sensitivity/logic, emotion/intelligence, unpredictability/firmness; these attributes are generally used to characterize, respectively, the feminine and masculine spirits.

Thus social reality is projected into the collective imagination in order to maintain the dominance of one gender. Within the patriarchal discourse characteristic of this religious culture, the constant recommendation is for "submission and obedience" to the Eternal Father, symbolically represented by Jehovah; this is the archetypal model for family life. As a model for women, the Virgin Mary in her Marian representation is considered an intermediary for requests from the faithful for the providence of the Father and the three messiahs accepted in the spiritual

hierarchy. Psychologically, women remain within this filial relation of daughter to father in their relations with the male sex, including with regard to their male children. This relation is very pronounced in family interactions, in which the mother always remains subordinated to the father or the male children. In symbolic terms, the Virgin Mary is the mother of the divine son, never the spouse and companion of man. Male power is symbolically represented in the divine pantheon as the strongest supernatural power, imposing hierarchical functions of higher or lower value which are projected socially. Femininity (that which is feminine) is a conceptual category assigning predominance to emotionality, sensitivity, sweetness, benevolence; while masculinity implies force, power, wisdom, determination, decisiveness, authority. Symbolic schemes thus contribute to shaping a theory of the world as the terrain for contending powers whose social value is differentiated by gender, and a theory of the person as a concentration of gender-specific qualities.⁷

How can femininity gain access to the qualities associated with power? It is through the symbolic processes of religious worship that balancing mechanism, for ongoing social frustrations are worked out. In spiritualism, the modes of communication with the spiritual world (deities and sacred spirits) make up a nucleus of participation involving the transfer of symbolic power through the representation of spiritual possession.

This function, carried out by predominantly female religious hierarchy, allows practitioners, while in a trance state, to take on possession of male spiritual identities without impairing real identity. In complex and stratified societies, where gender roles are more conflict-ridden, possession cults allow for the inversion of imposed roles and the adoption of new behaviors and different bodily expressions. The trance, as a counterculture of cathartic liberation, is domesticated and regulated by the religious culture, fulfilling functions of emotional therapy for oppressed minorities which express their discontent through neurotic symptoms. Thus, spiritualist temples tend to recruit individuals with frequent symptoms of depersonalization, amnesiac psychomotor states—including somnambulism, certain forms of split personality and several forms of epilepsy—as well as hysterical states, which are frequently found among some sectors of the female population.

In the light of advances in ethnography and modern psychology, trance is no longer considered a pathological state. It is presently viewed as a state of altered consciousness, allowing for the emergence of a consciousness different from that of daily life and freeing many inhibitions and frustrations. Since ancient times, corporal techniques for communicating with the sacred have played a role in the development of ecstatic cults, as elements of resistance to change or as a counterculture. Every society has given its own content and meaning to these states, which have a neurophysiological basis and represent responses to conditioning or stimulation. Religious conversion induces these conditioning mechanisms, leading initiates to new ritual behaviors. These behaviors are taken on as a break from the strictures of daily culture, modifying self-perception through feelings of transcendence, of greater intuition and enlightenment.

This state is also a break from daily reality, an exit from historical time and real identity in order to take on symbolic identities with greater prestige.⁸ The male sex is predominant in the pantheon of deities and sacred spirits which manifest themselves through female physical bodies in trance. In this ritual transference, women appropriate those gender-specific qualities considered to be superior, denied them by a society which impedes the development of their abilities and skills. Similarly, one notes the symbolic resolution of unconscious or repressed homosexual tendencies, which are freed during the trance without damaging the subject's self-concept or impairing the personality which is in conflict.⁹

In the trance state, officials of the cult also assume the ethnic identity of the spirits of curanderos (folk healers), to whom they attribute the highest level of medical wisdom for the treatment of illnesses of a magical-religious nature. This provides a channel for their empirical knowledge as well as their frustration at having had little access to education. By means of these symbolic mechanisms, they reduce the internal imbalances caused by their social marginality, as well as the threat of losing their identity, transforming the symptoms of internal disorder into a structure of external communication and thereby fulfilling a therapeutic function.

For women of marginal social status, religious initiation provides an opportunity for gaining recognition for their unconditional devotion to the tasks of the temple. It is also a widely valued public activity which does not call into question their behavior or the way they deal with their sexuality. The attitude of devotion is seen as a prerogative of the female sex, sanctioned as a positive value and socially accepted. Ritual practices afford a diversification of daily tasks, allowing for enjoyment of the role-playing of possession through the dramatization this involves.

In this ethnodrama, the participants' wishes and desires are related to the discourse of supernatural beings, which in turn helps release the cathartic emotions of the faithful who observe the rite. The principal roles, both in the pulpit and in the healing ritual, provide the actors with satisfaction as well as prestige in the religious community.

Through interaction with other women in the temple, bonds of solidarity are forged which help solve common problems stemming from the lack of resources, child-rearing, frustrating conjugal relations, emotional losses, illnesses, infirmity due to old age, physical and mental handicaps, and loneliness. Belonging to a community defined by spiritual links provides them the ways and means for a certain emancipation, allowing them to develop their organizational and leadership skills, offering them the opportunity to carry out autonomous activities which allow for both real and symbolic displacement for the gender roles of daily life. In the popular culture of subordinated classes, the demonstration of male power in the arenas of private interaction is expressed fundamentally around issues of control, manipulation and subjection of female sexuality, by means of prohibition, frustration, violence, rape and exploitation. Men have culturally learned innumerable strategies for maintaining their privileges and domination over their spouses.

From the standpoint of psychoanalytic and cultural studies, neither sexual identity nor sexual behaviors can be reduced to some kind of biological essence. Subjectivity is always complex, and sexual reference points are unreliable when it comes to determining gender-differentiated behaviors.¹⁰

While the term "gender" has traditionally been used to designate psychological, social and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity, gender identity is established through the predominance of masculine or feminine attributes in a person. While represented as a dichotomy, these attributes are not mutually exclusive.

Thus, gender identity cannot be established and developed outside of the context of the symbolic processes of basic personality construction. The framework of religious culture thereby helps shape gender development by means of the symbolic archetypes established and projected socially through religious discourse and ritual practices.

Ethnographic studies of the trance state in different cultures have led researchers to differentiate among the various contents and meanings of the trance. This research has led to the distinction between two counterposed, regularized forms of signification: shamanism and possession. The difference lies in the relationship which is established with the gods, spirits or demons—that is, with the accepted world of the supernatural and divine.

Mircea Eliade notes that the shaman communicates with the various spirits and deities without thereby becoming their instrument. Possession implies the idea that these supernatural beings take complete control of the personality of the possessed. In shamanic functions, the purpose of the trance is to "go out of oneself" and "enter into" the divine sphere through travel by the shaman's soul. In possession, gods and spirits descend and enter the instrument. Belo remarks on this distinction in describing the rituals of Bali: shamanism's "entering into" as distinct from the "being entered" characteristic of possession.¹¹

In the various forms of trance practiced by different religious groups, the ritual functions as a generating mechanism, while having the same physiological basis in the various cases.

The institution of the trance, and its domestication, involve periods of initiation for novices, in which conditioned behaviors are introduced so they may be represented voluntarily according to certain established norms.

In spiritualism, initiated women are consecrated through their participation in, and ability to "enter" into, the trance. The teaching process is considered complete when they are able to see and "give way to" possession by their protector. In most cases (90%), this personal spiritual protector has a male gender representation, as against the 10% in which female spirits are represented. This is in inverse ratio to the gender of the channels through which they appear.

In this cult, women thereby make the passage from their female identity to symbolic possession of the connotations of gender specific power, freeing themselves from the pressures of their basic identity in order to take on that which is socially considered and valued as superior; thus, masculinity, as a projection of the female unconscious, is a compensatory factor.

As a corporal technique for communication with the sacred, the trance involves various forms of conditioning and treatment of the body and its organic functions; the learning process involves access to and increasing knowledge of these methods. Novices, as well as trance specialists within the spiritualist religious hierarchy of powers and authorities, are urged to practice sexual asceticism before ecstatic rites. This goes together with other recommendations regarding diet, relaxation of the body, prayer, etc.

These conditions are valued as the purification of physical and spiritual bodies prior to communication with the sacred and transcendent.

Sexual asceticism entails the voluntary repression of libidinal energy, which is to be channeled and directed into the reproduction of the mystic state conducive to the trance. Those charged with supervising the temples' collective practice of the trance view transgressions of this regulation of sexuality as a loss of the intensity and concentration needed to reproduce this state. The initiate "climbs without falling off"—that is, without reaching a point in which an expansion of consciousness is detonated.

In order to abide by this norm, consecrated women have access to control over their sexuality in a pre-conscious manner, through management and voluntary regulation of their sexual practices, which they then impose on their spouses.

The absence of sexual practices during adulthood, associated with being single, abandoned or widowed, bears a relation to a greater disposition towards domesticating the trance state, in line with Laplantine's definition of the process of conditioning and training to learn this corporal technique as related to a repression of sexuality among women.

The therapeutic and psychoprophylactic actions carried out through this participation are of fundamental importance to female participants in the spiritualist cult. In this cult, women express their desires, wishes and needs, using symbolic ritual processes to make up for social imbalances related to their gender condition, while acquiring a new family and social status through developing their organizational and leadership abilities in the religious groups belonging to the temple.

Within the framework of the same alienation that imposes limits on them through reproduction of patriarchal ideology, women have succeeded in developing a counterculture of the trance state, by means of which they are able to provide a freer outlet for many of their problems and gain access to symbolic power in religious ritual.

Notes

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Laurel Kendall

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Ana Mariella Bacigalupo

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She has written extensively on Mapuche Shamanism and Religion in Southern Chile. Her second book, *La Voz del Kultrun en la Modernidad: Tradición y Cambio en la Terapéutica de Siete Machis* was published by Editorial Abya-Yala. She is now working on a book titled *Shamans of the Cinnamon Tree, Priestesses of the Moon: Gender and Healing Among the Chilean Mapuche*.

June Nash

June Nash graduated in Anthropology at the University of Chicago and taught at Yale University (1963-1968), New York University (1969-1972), and City College and University Center (1972-present).

A recipient of Distinguished Service Award of the *American Anthropological Association* (1995), of the Conrad Arensberg Award of the *Society for the Anthropology of Work* (1992), of the *C. Wright Mills Award* for her work, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, she has authored numerous books:

In the Eyes of the Ancestors: Belief and Behavior in a Maya Community (Yale University Press); *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines* (Columbia University Press); *From Tank Town to High Tech: The Clash of Community and Industrial Cycles* (SUNY Press), and edited several others:

Sex and Class in Latin America, with H. Safa (J.F. Bergin Co.); *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, with M.P. Fernandez Kelly; *Women and Change in Latin America* with H. Safa (J.F. Bergin Press); *Crafts in the Worldmarket, The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans* (SUNY Press); *La Explosión de Comunidades Indígenas en Chiapas* (IWGIA).

Work in progress: *Reenvisioning Mayas: the Zapatista Uprising and Forging of a New Social Contract with the Mexican State*.

Carol Laderman

Carol Laderman is professor of Anthropology at City-College University of New York, where she served as departmental chairperson between 1990 and 1996s. She is a Past Secretary-General of the *International Association for the Study of Traditional Medicine* (1990-1995). She has been the recipient of awards

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She is the author of *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine and Aesthetics in a Malay Shamanistic Performance; Main Peteri: Malay Shamanism*; and *Wives and Midwives: Childbirth and Nutrition in Rural Malaysia*. She is the editor of *Techniques of Healing in Southeast Asia* with Penny Van Esterik; and *The Performance of Healing* with Marina Roseman.

Tuula Sukaranaho

A Senior Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Helsinki, Tuula Sukaranaho is the author of *The Complex Other: A Rhetorical Approach to Women, Islam, and Ideologies* (1998) and of several articles on women and Islam.

Silvia Ortiz Echaniz.

A full-time Research Fellow at Mexico's *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, Silvia Ortiz Echaniz is a specialist of Popular Religiosity and Medical Anthropology. She has been a recipient of the *Premio Bernardino de Sahagún* for the year's best research in Religious Anthropology.

She has authored *Una religiosidad popular: el espiritualismo Mariano en México* (INAH, Colección Científica 1992); *Los filos de la cruz* (1978); *Organización de creencias religiosas e ideología* (1985), as well as several articles in collective books and conferences at congresses.