

ALTERNATIVE AND AMBIGUOUS GENDER IDENTITIES IN POSTCLASSIC CENTRAL MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

Between the clearly defined male and female gender identities recorded for pre-Conquest Mexico, there existed a range of intermediate identities. Some, such as hunchbacks and dwarfs, were considered gender ambiguous; others (e.g., homosexuals and harlots) were sexually "deviant", diverging from normative male or female identities. This paper explores some of the alternative identities documented in the ethno-historic sources, with special attention to the participation of these groups in social and ideological structures.

As recorded in a 16th century account:

[T]he chewing of *chicle* [a gum made of bitumen and *axin*] (is) the preference, the privilege of the little girls, the young women, ... and all the women who (are) unmarried chew *chicle* in public.

One's wife also chews *chicle*, but not in public. Also the widowed and the old women do not, in public. But the bad women, those they call harlots, (show) no fine feelings; quite publicly they go about chewing *chicle* along the roads, in the market place, clacking like castanets. ...

The men also chew *chicle* to cause their saliva to flow and to clean the teeth, but this very secretly -- never in public.

The chewing of *chicle* (is) the real privilege of the addicts termed "effeminates." ... And the men who publicly chew *chicle* achieve the status of sodomites; they equal the effeminates. [Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:89-90]

Ethno-historic documents from early Colonial central Mexico recorded explicit descriptions of male and female gender identities. These accounts have been used in a feminist critique of pre-Columbian society to add a female dimension to what have generally been

androcentric cultural reconstructions (Arvey 1988; Brown 1983; Brumfiel 1991, 2001; Hellbom 1967; Joyce 2001; Kellogg 1988; Nash 1978, 1980; McCafferty and McCafferty 1988, 1991, 1999; Rodriguez-Shadow 1989, 1990). While interpretations vary as to specific qualities of gender relations, a common aspect of all of these analyses has been a basic contrast between male and female identities, with little consideration of possible alternatives.

The premise of this paper is that between the normative male and female gender identities there existed a range of ambiguous and alternative identities that have received little attention, but that were nevertheless important within the social and ideological structures of Postclassic central Mexico. One such class consisted of dwarfs, hunchbacks, and others with physical deformities, who were considered ambiguous, and gender-neutral in much the same way as children. Others, such as homosexuals or harlots, were considered sexually "deviant", at least by the Spanish chroniclers, diverging from the culturally prescribed norms of sexual behaviour. The present synthesis is therefore a patchwork of disparate information collected from various sources, that will hopefully inspire (or provoke) further investigation.

GENDER STEREOTYPES

Evidence for Mesoamerican gender identities can be found in the ethno-historic sources from the pre-Columbian and early Colonial periods, and this information is often supplemented with analogies from later historic and ethnographic cases. Biases of the original chroniclers, who were usually Catholic clergy, as

well as those of later interpreters of the documents, have resulted in a skewed perspective on gender relations (Arvey 1988; Brown 1983; McCafferty and McCafferty 1988, 1999). Thus, alternatives to the stereotypical identities were often ignored, minimized, or derided. This strategy of mystification has been cited for the under-representation of women in Aztec society, and it is even more acute for consideration of alternative identities.

One of the best sources for definitions of male and female gender identities is Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *General History of the Things of New Spain* (1950-1982), also known as the *Florentine Codex*, written in the early decades following the Spanish conquest. In Book 10, Sahagún described the Aztec people, including both "good" and "bad" women and men, subdivided into groupings based on status, age, and occupation.

In general, the "good" woman exemplified the ideal wife and mother, staying near the home while working steadfastly raising children, cooking, spinning and weaving (Figure 1). She was a competent and efficient household manager who maintained family honour through diligence and virtuous behaviour. The good noble woman was a woman ruler who governed, provided, and administered. She also punished those who broke rules.

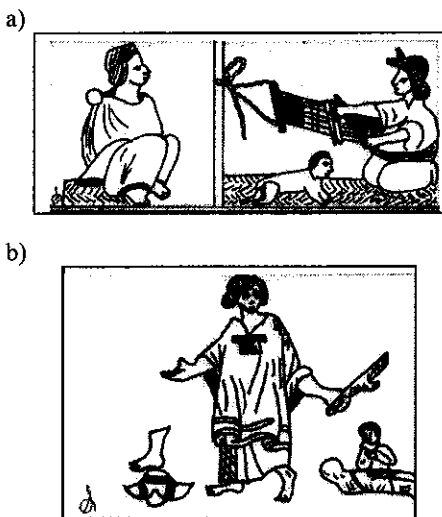


Figure 1. a) "Good" woman as weaver and mother (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 21 a, b). b) "Good" noblewoman shown punishing wrong-doing (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 98).

In contrast, the "bad" woman was lazy, vain, unchaste, a drunkard, disrespectful, and

proud (Figure 2). The bad noblewoman mistreated and terrorized people, drank to excess, squandered goods and incited riots. She was vain, gaudy, brazen, stupid, an eater of mushrooms (*monanacauitnemi*), and a pervert, literally a "flower-woman" (*suchicioatl, ilamiccacioatl*) (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:46, 48-50).

The "good" man was strong and powerful, directing his energy to his work. He was honoured as a disciplinarian, counsellor, and sage. He lived an exemplary life in his role as noble, warrior, craftsman, or commoner. The "bad" man was a thief, a liar, a drunk, lazy and irresponsible (Figure 3). He went about causing trouble, ceaselessly talking and bragging. He was a coward in war, a careless craftsman, an evil sorcerer, lewd and perverse.



Figure 2. "Bad" noblewoman shown as perverse 'bird' (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 103).

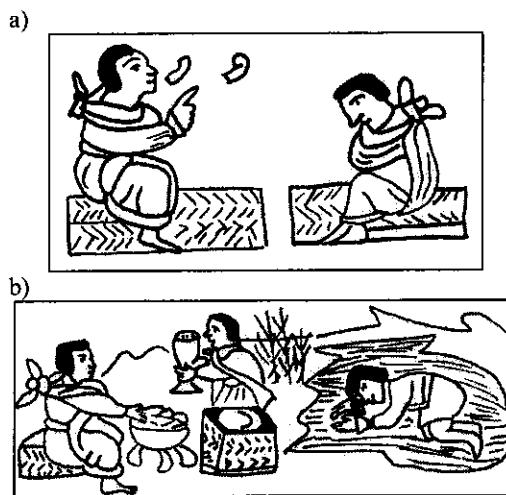


Figure 3. a) "Good" men and b) "Bad" men drinking to excess and passed out (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 29).

In summary, these characteristics appeared as a set of prescriptions for ideal behaviour and condemnations against "anti-social", non-productive behaviour, at least as perceived by the Spanish priesthood. In practical

terms, however, they also illustrate a set of alternative social roles that were outside of the culturally defined gender identities. The arenas of contrast included such aspects as sexuality, drunkenness, and work ethic; arenas for which there was often a close correspondence between the ideals of the indigenous nobility and Western tradition as presented by the chroniclers. In practice, however, we suggest that the alternative identities were more socially accepted within the context of pre-Columbian society than portrayed in the chronicles, and some were, in fact, sanctioned by religious rituals (McCafferty and McCafferty 1999).

DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

Women who deviated from the norm of a "good" woman were said to be sexually perverse, and included harlots (*ahuianime*) and hermaphrodites (*pallache*). The harlot (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:55-56) was "an evil woman who finds pleasure in her body ... [A] dissolute woman of debauched life". She was brazen, rude, and covetous; a drunk and an eater of mushrooms (*tenanacauiani*). Her teeth were darkened with cochineal (a red/purple dye made from crushed insects)¹⁷ and her hair was arranged so that half of her hair was wound about her head and half hung loose. She was "full of affliction ... of itching buttocks," perhaps in reference to a high incidence of venereal disease among these women. In contrast, Sahagún also described the harlot as fastidiously groomed, living like a bathed slave and becoming wealthy (Figure 4). She was proud and haughty, preening in the mirror and arranging her hair in two horns, which ironically was the typical hairstyle of Aztec noble women and was related to the diagnostic headdress of the goddess Xochiquetzal (McCafferty and McCafferty 1999).

One Nahuatl word for 'perverted woman' was *suchiciuatl* ("flower woman") *tlacamicqui*, which may also be related to Xochiquetzal since she is depicted in the *Codex Borgia* with flowers in her hair, in front of her mouth, and on her cheeks (Figure 5). Concubines bedecked with

¹⁷ It should be noted that cochineal was used to clean the teeth and breath and was recommended for tartar control (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:147) so Sahagún's condemnation of teeth darkened with cochineal merely indicates the cleanliness of the harlot's teeth. *Chicle*, described in the opening quote, was also used as a breath freshener.

flowers and women who frequented the flower house or sweatbath for romanitic liaisons may be considered as 'flower women,' "like Xochiquetzal" (*mosuchquetza*) (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:55). The other terms for perverted women derive from *tlacamicqui* (*tlacatl* = human + *micqui*=dead) (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:46, 48-50), and may refer to perversion with the dead or a role in preparing the dead for burial.

During the Feast of Flowers the concubines of the great nobles came out of their homes and places of seclusion and were allowed to walk about the streets bedecked with flowers on their way to the pleasure gardens (Durán 1971:435). Similar ritualized public displays are noted ethnographically from Tlaxcala and Mitla (Parsons 1937). During the *Ochpaniztli* festival, a mock battle was staged between priestesses, female physicians, and harlots (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 2:118-119).



Figure 4. Harlot shown on water and avoiding productive work (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 108).

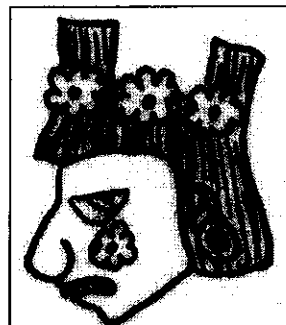


Figure 5. Xochiquetzal with flowers in hair and on cheek (after Codex Borgia 1963: Plate 59).

The ritual presence of harlots in ceremonies for the earth/fertility goddess cult is indicative of an association that was not developed by Sahagún, but that was more fully explored by other chroniclers (e.g., Durán 1971).

The *ahuianime* were portrayed in numerous scenes in the *Codex Borgia* (1963), an important pre-Columbian religious manuscript. In Seler's commentary (1963), the *ahuianime* were associated with the temple of the female priesthood, where they served as the companions of young warriors in the *telpochcalli* compounds associated with the temple of Huitzilopochtli, and they joined the young warriors in special ceremonies (Durán 1971:83-88; Figure 6).

Sahagún does give many examples of the participation of "pleasure girls" during various dances and ceremonies but makes little reference to their affiliation with temples. During the festival for the month of Panquetzaliztli the *ahuianime* or pleasure girls went between pairs of men, singing and dancing daily for twenty days (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:141), and during the month of Tlazochimaco at the Temple of Uitzilopochtli the courtesans (*mahaujtianj*) and pleasure girls (*avianjme*) danced with the "great brave warriors". They went between pairs of these men, grasped in their hands and around their waist. They danced around a circular altar, "like a spindle whorl". "And those who embraced the women were only the great, brave warriors" not the masters of the youths (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:109-110).

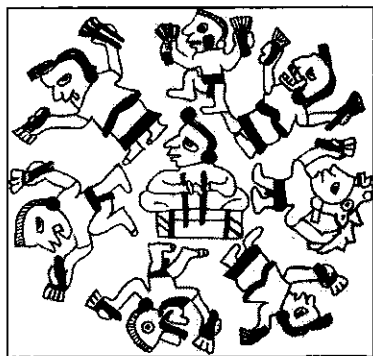


Figure 6. Ahuianime in dance (Codex Selden 3135 [A.2]).

In the description of the ritual dances for the month called *Uey tecuilhuiltl*, Great Feast of the Lords, Sahagún provides the best clue to the elevated status of the *ahuianime*. "Between each pair [of men] came the women, the courtesans, the pleasure girls, the best ones, the chosen ones, those set apart" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 2:98-99). The adornment of these honoured women was elaborate in design and weave, and included borders and fringes, "they were indeed carefully bedight". Their bodies were not feathered or

painted and their hair was unbound with braids worn across their foreheads. After the dancing the women were assembled and then led away as a group, with much care being taken "lest one might go somewhere, lest one be forced to accompany someone, lest some perverse youth might take one away." The noblemen requested that some of the women be released and it appears that gifts to the matrons or mistresses of the women (*tlauhtiloia*) as well as to the girls were required to achieve their release. The masters of the youth who were worthy of honours "asked for the women only in secret". The women came to the men at night, and for only the one night. If this privilege was abused the youth was severely punished and then dismissed. The woman was expelled and the matrons forbade her to sing, dance, and hold others by the hand. It was expected that the man and woman would then marry (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 2:102-103). Sahagún's description provides the best example of temple priestesses as ritual prostitutes.

In the young men's houses, *telpuchcali*, it is recorded that "those already indeed men, who were already wise in the ways of the flesh, each slept there with their paramours (*mecaoo*, *mecatl*)" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 3:57). Simeón (1983) translates *mecatl* as *amante* or concubine. The male youths had 2-3 paramours "perchance one was in her own house, perhaps several lay scattered. And when they said youth was laid down, he paid his debt. In order to leave, the youth left large cotton capes, perhaps ten, perhaps twenty if he was rich" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 3:59). Sahagún also related that "the manner of life of the youths was not very good because they were given to women, to vicious life; because they took up mocking, vain talk; they talked coarsely, grossly, uncouthly." (1950-1982, Book 3:60). Sahagún's view of this custom is obviously negative and yet we see that it was an accepted practice by the indigenous people.

During the time of *Izcalli tlami* an impersonator of the god *Ixcoçauhqui* was cared for and eventually sacrificed. His guardian was a pleasure girl or *avianj*. She was to amuse him, gratify him, care for his person, and generally make him as happy as possible. At the time of his sacrifice she was allowed to take all the belongings that had been given to him. "She rolled up, she bundled up all the bathed one's belongings, each of what [the bather] had clothed him in, had placed on him when he had sent him as a messenger; [the things] with which he had

lived in pretense..." (Sahagún 1950-82, Book 10:169).

The *Codex Borgia* (1963:plates 47-48; Seler 1963:63-83) included representations of the *cihuateteo*, deified women who died in first childbirth (Figure 7), as well as the *ahuiateo*. *Ahuiateotl* was identified as the god of sensuality (*voluptuosidad*), and as such was the male counterpart of *Tlazolteotl*. Was this a reference to male prostitutes?

The goddess *Xochiquetzal*, patroness of harlots as well as of sexuality and fertility (Figure 8), was considered the primordial battle victim (Berlo 1983), and was revered as patroness of warriors. The "structural equivalence" linking battle and childbirth has been well established (Kellogg 1988; McCafferty and McCafferty 1988). Although poorly documented, there exists the further possibility that the *ahuianime* acted as female counterparts to the male warriors. It was recorded that women goaded warriors into battle through taunts. "For verily thus the women could torment [young men] into war; thus they moved them; thus the women could prod them into battle" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 2:64). Durán described a celebration where harlots entered the warriors' quarters after battle (1971:298). Torquemada even described women warriors (*soldaderas*) that followed the army into battle, where many died (1943, Book 2: 299; in Heyden 1985:107). We suggest that the *ahuianime* may have played a role in the Aztec armies, perhaps in a similar capacity to the Mexican women who accompanied the armies during the Mexican Revolution (McCafferty and McCafferty 2004; Salas 1990).



Figure 7. *Cihuateteo* (after *Codex Borgia* 1963: Plate 47).

In her article on Aztec "women of ill-repute", Margaret Arvey (1988) distinguishes between indigenous harlots (*ahuianime*) and prostitutes (*monomacac*), whom she interprets as a product of Spanish contact (Figure 9). Through a complex symbolic analysis of the attributes associated with the indigenous *ahuianime*, Arvey demonstrates the distinctions between traditional Aztec and Spanish perceptions, with the conclusion that the indigenous harlots manifested characteristics corresponding to female nobility. As an extension of this argument, we suggest that some of the contradiction inherent in Sahagun's descriptions may have been an attempt on his part to equate harlots with concubines as an argument against indigenous polygamy.



Figure 8. Goddess *Xochiquetzal* as both goddess of harlots and patroness of the arts (after *Codex Borgia* 1963: Plate 59).



Figure 9. *Monomacac* prostitute in Spanish style costume, standing at crossroad (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 147).

The procuress (*tezinnamacac*) is described in terms that identify her as educated and not of a low status. She is "gentle of words, adroit of language, skilled of speech, she receives guests"(Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:94). The procuress was an older woman who arranged actual liaisons between young maidens and young

men (Figure 10). It should be noted that the procuress and prostitute are described together with the chalk seller and before the seller of fine tobacco as if they are accepted members of the local economy. Another entry on harlots describes the procuress as if they were synonymous designations (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:56).



Figure 10. Procuress, shown with demonic figure behind her, arranging union (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: Plate 111).

An alternative form of female identity was the hermaphrodite, or *patlache*, described as a woman born with the sexual organs of both male and female, and with a man's build and mannerisms (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:56; Figure 11). She took female companions and sexual partners, but never a husband. Sahagún described the hermaphrodite as "a detestable woman" who "scandalizes". Yet the pre-Columbian peoples of Mexico held a fascination for physical abnormalities. Among contemporary Zapotecs of Oaxaca, witches are described as sexually ambiguous because they combine both male and female characteristics: the body of a man and head of a woman, and two sets of breasts (Whitecotton 1977:269-270). The Huastec goddess Tlazolteotl, who was closely associated with the earth/fertility goddess complex and especially with sexual excess and sorcery, was sometimes portrayed with male insignia, and Torquemada referred to the goddess as both male and female (1943, Book 2:62; in Sullivan 1982:7).

Alternatives to the ideal male identity also highlighted examples of sexual "deviance", including categories such as "the lewd youth" (*telpuchtlaueliloc*), "the old whoremonger" (*veuetalueliloc*), the "pervert" (*suchioa*) and the "sodomite" (*cuiloni*) (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:37-38). Once again the diagnostic attributes include references to drunkenness, shamefulness, and wickedness -- value-laden concepts that

should be viewed as social commentary representing the dominant ideology of the Spanish chroniclers.



Figure 11. Hermaphrodite speaking with seated woman (after Sahagún 1950-82, Book 10: Plate 110).

The so called "bad son-in-law" and "bad brother-in-law" both include descriptions of how they are given to pleasure (*auilnemi*) and live in concubinage (*momoecatia*). The brother-in-law is accused of living in concubinage with his sister-in-law and mother-in-law (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:8), perhaps in reference to polygamy. In the Mixtec *Codex Nuttall* (1975: 30-33), women are shown married to their uncles, cousins, brothers, and brother-in-laws. For example, Lady 11 Alligator married her brother Lord 12 House; Lady 5 Grass married her cousin Lord 8 Deer; and Lady 6 Water married her mother's brother. In each of these cases the women are shown with one bracelet binding both hands, metaphorically binding the dynasty (McCafferty and McCafferty 1994). These close marriage alliances were an accepted practice by the Mixtec nobility but were condemned by the Spanish priests.

The "pervert" was described as either an effeminate male (*chimouhqui*), or as a masculine female that was sexually promiscuous (i.e., with a "friction-loving vulva") (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:37). Interestingly, the description of the female "pervert" is almost identical to that of the "bad female physician" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10:53). Female physicians, including midwives, were closely affiliated with the goddess complex, especially with Toci and Tlazolteotl.

The sodomite was described as an effeminate who "takes the part of a woman" (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 10: 38). Although the chroniclers recorded little specific information concerning this group, it is likely that they had a level of social acceptance, especially in temple contexts. Notably, Sahagún's description mentions that the sodomite was a "taster of filth" who was "full of affliction ... he merits being

committed to flames, burned, consumed by fire" (1950-1982, Book 10:37-38). As a "taster of filth", the sodomite reproduces one of the major ritual functions of the goddess Tlazolteotl, who as Tlaelquani was the "eater of filth", metaphorically cleansing the sins of her male and female subjects (Sullivan 1982:15).

The reference to the sodomite as someone 'full of affliction that should be consumed by fire' is almost a literal account of the death of the god Nanahuatzin, the syphilitic god consumed by fire in order to renew the sun in Aztec mythology. Nanahuatzin was an avatar of Xolotl, the deformed twin of Quetzalcoatl, and in the Mesoamerican cosmos the two often acted as opposing aspects of a structural duality. For example, while Quetzalcoatl was always portrayed as supremely chaste and virtuous, Xolotl was sometimes depicted as an anthropomorphic dog, irresponsibly promiscuous and indiscriminate about the sex of his partners (Hunt 1977: 86; Figure 12). In Sahagún's medical discussion of the treatment of pustules, perhaps the result of syphilis, he describes the ailment as causing twisting of the hands and feet "because the ailment penetrates completely" (1950-1982, Book 10:157; Figure 13). Tertiary syphilis includes a condition known as 'charcot joint,' a crippling bone disease resulting in the decay of load bearing ankle bones, but also associated with blindness, birth defects, and high prenatal and maternal mortality (McCafferty and McCafferty 1999).

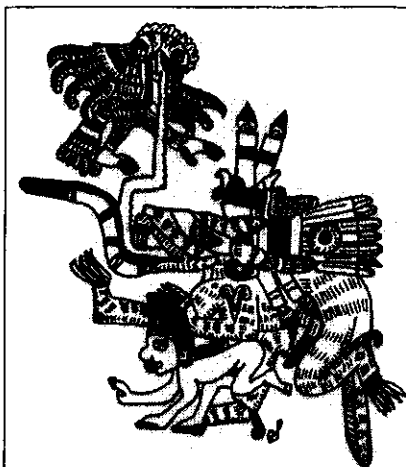


Figure 12. God Xolotl as dog, fornicating with male partner (after Codex Borgia 1963: Plate 10).

BIRTH ANOMALIES

Birth anomalies were regarded as evidence of the divine intervention of the earth/fertility goddess complex, and people with such characteristics were believed to embody elements of supernatural power. As twins, Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl were closely associated with the Mother Goddess cult, particularly with Xochiquetzal, the first to bear twins. They were also associated with all people with deformities and certain skin diseases. Fray Diego Durán (1967:65-66) described a parade in the holy city of Cholula in which cripples and those with eye diseases participated in hopes of receiving a cure from Quetzalcoatl. As part of the migration myth of Quetzalcoatl, he was attended by an army of dwarfs and hunchbacks on his journey to Cholula (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 3:19-20, 35).

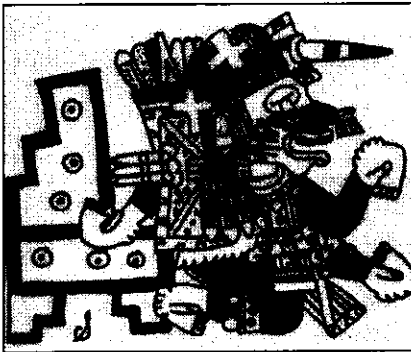
Hunchbacks (*tepotzli*) and dwarfs (*tzapatl*) were groups that were often mentioned, albeit briefly, in the ethno-historic chronicles. It was one of the pleasures of the nobles to be attended by cripples, dwarfs, and hunchbacks, both male and female (Durán 1971:122, 271-272). "They attended and gave solace", played the ground drum and bathed the nobles (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 8:30, 49; Figure 14). It is interesting to note that they were listed in the same paragraph as the animals and birds that brought pleasure to the nobles and rulers. Hunchbacks were kept as jesters in the royal courts of the Aztec and Maya, while albinos were included in the zoological gardens as natural oddities. We suggest that hunchbacks and dwarfs were kept as 'living talismans' relating to their affiliations with the supernatural. Depictions of hunchbacks and dwarfs appear throughout Aztec, Mixtec, and Maya art in a variety of contexts, including roles as wives and merchants.

In death, as well as life, dwarfs, hunchbacks, and albinos played important roles. Dwarfs and hunchbacks were sacrificed at the death of their lord in order to serve him in the afterlife (Durán 1971:122). The *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1979:9) depicts Cortes' massacre of the Cholula nobles which includes a naked hunchback falling down the steps of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl while a turbaned warrior/noble fights on (Figure 15). The Mixtec *Codex Alfonso Caso* (Lamina II) shows a hunchback named 10 Wind who wears black body paint like a priest, and carries a staff and fan while walking in a procession.

Albinos (*tlacaztlamicoa* = "men of fair hair and white faces; Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 7:36) were sacrificed at solar eclipses because it

was said that they had been created at the bidding of the sun and as payment they must return to the sun (Seler 1904:300). This again recalls the myth of Nanahuatzin/Xolotl, who was sacrificed to become the new sun. The association between eclipses and birth defects was recorded in the warning given by midwives to pregnant women not to view solar or lunar eclipses, or else their babies would be deformed, lipless, nose-less, wry mouthed, cross-eyed, or monstrous (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 7:58).

a)



b)



Figure 13. a) Xolotl/Nanahuatzin with gnarled hands and feet, and dangling eye (after Codex Borgia 1963: Plate 10). b) standing figure with gnarled feet from Teotihuacan.

Those with physical deformities, however, were destined to reside in Tlalocan, the paradise of eternal spring (Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 6:115). Together with those people struck by lightning, they would dwell with the *tlaloques*, dwarf-like spirits associated with Tlaloc, god of storms. The *tlaloques* monitored the jars of weather such as rain, lightning, wind, etc. James

Taggart (1983:112-113) found that among contemporary Nahuatl-speakers of the Sierra Norte de Puebla, lightning bolts are depicted as children or dwarfs who reside with a female consort, a myth structure similar to that of the Aztecs.

There is also some evidence that dwarf-like creatures called *aires* confer magical powers to sorcerers (Madsen and Madsen 1969: 56-57). The description of these creatures is suggestive of the *tzitzimime* and/or the *mimixcoa*, demons of the night sky. They may also be comparable to the so-called *Ñuhus*, small figures represented in the Mixtec codices that resemble dwarfs with Tlaloc-masks.

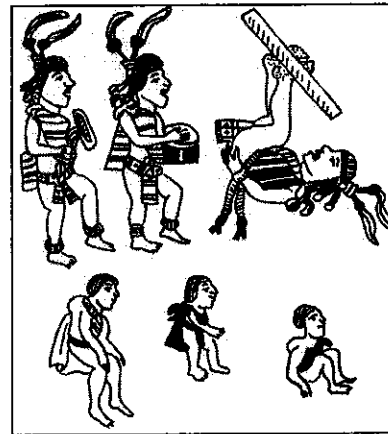


Figure 14. Dwarfs and hunchbacks as entertainers in the Aztec court (after Sahagún 1950-1982, Book 8: Plate 64).

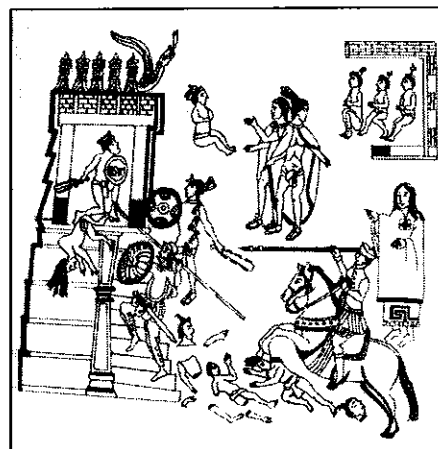


Figure 15. Hunchback shown falling from pyramid during Cholula Massacre (after Lienzo de Tlaxcala 1979: Plate 9).

Although it is never clearly revealed, we suggest that dwarfs, hunchbacks, and others with

physical anomalies were considered to have held a special status within Mesoamerican mythology. Through their ambiguous status as quasi-supernaturals, hunchbacks and dwarfs were seen as intermediaries between the natural and the supernatural. As such they were preferred for sacrifices as messengers to the gods. We suggest that their ambiguity within the Aztec social structure was also indicative of a liminal status, intermediate between both male and female, and child and adult identities.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of gender is concerned with the study of the anthropological 'other', recognizing the diversity of perspectives as a necessary contrast to the idealized norm defined within the dominant ideology. One valuable contribution of gender studies has been the presentation of alternatives to the male point of view, and this was obviously an important theme of this conference and of this volume. We have attempted to broaden the discourse by discussing additional alternatives to the standard view of male/female dichotomy that existed in Postclassic and colonial Mexico.

The descriptions of divergent and ambiguous sexual actors have been based primarily on ethno-historic documentation, and one conclusion of this survey is simply that not much was recorded about these groups. Furthermore, when descriptions were recorded they were superficial, emphasizing the negative aspects in a pointed social commentary that clearly established their position as "others". Thus, the *ahuianime* were derided as whores while ignoring their temple activities and ritual performances (Arvey 1988).

In the complex and often convoluted references to harlots and homosexuals, hunchbacks and dwarfs, a recurring theme that united these groups was their affiliation with the earth/fertility goddess cult and the twins Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl. Through ritualized practice, divergent roles were sanctioned and reified as alternative identities. We believe that the fact that these groups were so consistently ignored or misrepresented indicates action on the part of the dominant society to mask the discordant voices of those who failed to meet the engendered ideals of colonial Mexican society.

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