
1 Imagining Cihuacoatl: Masculine Rituals, Nahua Goddesses and the Texts of the Tlacuilos

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Cihuacoatl: The savage serpent woman, ill-omened and dreadful, brought men misery. For it was said: 'She gives men the hoe and the tumpline. Thus she forces men [to work]'.

This description, written in Nahuatl in a late sixteenth-century text, the *Florentine Codex*, authored by a Franciscan friar and his indigenous aides, speaks of an important Nahua goddess, conceptualised in the pre-conquest Nahua universe alternately and concurrently as a feared deity, a defeated woman and a cross-dressed man.¹ Here, in her post-conquest iteration, she becomes only the feared goddess, the one forcing men to work (elsewhere the same text describes sacrifices performed to satisfy her voracious appetite for human hearts). Indeed, pre-conquest images of Cihuacoatl suggest that Nahuas, the indigenous peoples of central Mexico, greatly feared her. Cihuacoatl, the dreaded serpent woman, presented Nahua men with a challenge: she forced them into a life of drudgery. She also could take their lives away; she could present them with certain death as she feasted upon their hearts, for 'she had a huge, open mouth and ferocious teeth. The hair on her head was long and bulky'. Thus she devoured men. But still 'she was clad in womanly garb – skirt, blouse and mantle – all white'.²

In Nahua gender ideology, Cihuacoatl's nature as a feared individual who could kill upon a whim and who forced individuals to work signified a powerful masculine individual. Yet her attire signified femininity. Cihuacoatl's aesthetics seem to us, as they seemed to the Catholic priests and friars who noted her appearance, confusing: a jumble of the masculine and the feminine – coming from a society that we believe rigorously separated masculine from feminine roles.³ We will see that the relationship between sixteenth-century Nahua notions of gender and sexuality allowed, and even required, Cihuacoatl and other Nahua goddesses to manifest themselves as bundles of attributes that in daily life could never connect to an individual woman, no matter how powerful that woman may be. These goddesses thus transgress our imagined boundaries, not just between gender and sexuality but also between human and divine.

Need we know if Cihuacoatl and the other fertility goddesses discussed in this chapter are *goddesses* rather than *gods*? Is it important to recall that the term *teotl* ('god') had no gender, or that Nahuatl does not contain gendered pronouns? This

certainly begs an answer to a different question: how did the Nahuas understand gender and sexuality?⁴ I argue here that Nahuas related sexuality to fertility, a binary division between moderation and excess, and a concept of ritual that suspended daily rules on sexual activity. One wonders too if, while in everyday affairs a strict gender division was usually imposed, in ritual life this may not have been true. The gods and goddesses, who appear as a result of and within ritual, would never have to follow those rules, so the fertility goddesses did not follow the strict gender divisions often applied in daily life. Nahuas viewed Cihuacoatl as a warrior deity, but one who would be likely to play a major role in particular rituals and in childbirth; and they imagined another fertility goddess, Tlazolteotl (the *teotl* of *tlazolli*, ‘trash’), as a highly sexual deity who also consistently engaged in battle with her enemies.⁵ This connection between gender and sexuality, in which the god(des)se(s), beings that exceed our grammatical markers, do not adhere to quotidian principles, speaks to the problem of accepting Gayle Rubin’s battle call for separating gender from sexuality as a given. Instead, in this chapter I argue for using Rubin’s formulation as a starting point for reconsidering the ways in which we understand concepts of gender and sexuality as organising principles.

The imagining and reimagining of Cihuacoatl relates to religiosity, colonialism, gender and sexuality in the early colonial period in Mexico. Cihuacoatl complicates the modern notions in which we separate human from god, man from woman and religious from secular. In this chapter, I will discuss the importance of Cihuacoatl and other related god(des)se(s) to the maintenance of Nahua politics and culture both before and after the Spanish conquest. In order to understand the roles that these god(des)se(s) played in Nahua society, we need to develop theoretical and methodological tools that go beyond Rubin’s call for a theory of sexuality.

Separating gender from sexuality: the Nahua case

Gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has had gender-specific manifestations. But although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice . . . It is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence.⁶

Gayle Rubin

The call sent out for chapters for the current volume intrigued me as it harkened back to an article I had first read as an undergraduate, cited repeatedly as a graduate student, and that I now assign to my undergraduates. In ‘Thinking Sex’, Gayle Rubin provocatively argues that we must delineate gender from sexuality, and in particular that we must not assume that the theoretical tools feminism uses to analyse gender will be sufficient for the task of analysing sexuality. Such a critique at the time I read it seemed to me fair enough, and since Rubin’s article came out twenty-seven years ago, many theorists, particularly those involved in queer theory, have answered her call.⁷

Still, when I began my research into indigenous concepts of sexuality from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, I became troubled by part of Rubin’s assertion. While sex and gender are not identical, and the Nahuas would not have conflated the analytical terrain that these two concepts represent, the boundaries between the two, in this pre-modern, non-western culture, need significantly more analysis than Rubin’s argument allows.⁸ How can the Nahua situation speak to Rubin’s theorising

of a separation between gender and sexuality? I suggest that Rubin's formulation can only be a provocative starting point, full of contradictions, when applied to the Nahuas. Cihuacoatl presents one example: was she a god or a goddess? Was she human or divine? Was she chaste or sexual? As we will see, neither Cihuacoatl nor any of the other Nahua god(desse)s can be defined easily based on these binary divisions.

As many scholars have shown, Nahua notions of gender at the time of the conquest incorporated both 'gender complementarity' and 'gender hierarchy'. In the complementary realm, we find symbolic equivalences (women who died in childbirth were equated the same high status as men who died in battle), quotidian senses of purpose (consent of both husband and wife generally was required to make all major household decisions) and material realities (networks of commoner families teamed together to make sure all could survive economically, with men generally engaging in farming activities and women generally controlling the markets to sell the produce from the land). Regarding gender hierarchy, we find that men controlled the bulk of the political system, the highest levels of religious office and the esteemed title of 'warrior'. The gender system of course changed after the Spanish conquest but, as many recent commentators have noted, these changes were not nearly as radical as earlier scholars had presumed.⁹

Nahuas connected these concepts of gender with related notions of sexuality, even if they did not term these things 'sexuality'. Nahua nobles and commoners before the Spanish conquest related their sexual lives with rituals of fertility and warfare. Still, Nahuas did not have a discreet category they called 'sex'. Instead, they constituted a variety of relations as 'categories of the intimate' in which the human couple engaged in bodily activities related to fertility. These activities included categories that we would invest with sexual meaning: vaginal and anal intercourse, manual and oral stimulation of male and female genitals, imaginary conditions designed to allude to these activities and stimulate a genital response, and the use of non-bodily objects in these actions.¹⁰ The Nahuas also had concepts of 'good' and 'bad' sex and rape and other forms of sexual violence. Yet these things that I have called 'categories of the intimate' also included activities that we would not consider sexual: the ritual killing of humans and animals, burning of maize, incense and other items, letting of blood and sweeping houses, streets and other areas. Nahua categories linked all of these activities together and suggested that they formed a part of the matrix of sacrifice. Much Nahua thought at the time of the Spanish conquest envisioned sexual relations as elements of a larger set of ritual practices designed to promote fertility: of gods, humans, animals and the earth.¹¹ A cultural history of these rituals also shows that Nahuas closely linked the maintenance and expansion of the political system and the structures of governance with fertility rites.¹²

Two main principles organised Nahua thoughts about the sexual. First, sexual behaviour related directly to the fertility rituals, ceremonies large and small, in the many realms described above, promoting the notion that everything and everybody must exude fertility in order for the community to survive. Second, an individual's sexual possibilities divided between those acts determined moderate and those deemed excessive. Nahua thought considered moderation in sexual activity to be a virtue, excess a vice.¹³ Ceremonial performances from those of the household to the grand state rites, as well as ritual and quotidian discourse, marked both the encouragement of fertility and the distinction between moderation and excess.

Representatives of the Catholic Church who encountered the Nahuas deemed their views of sexual behaviour problematic, and they debated how to change those views and behaviours. The result of that debate was the attempt to link sex with sin, often using particular indigenous concepts (dirt, dust, damage and excess being the most common) as signifiers of sinful behaviour. The means for such a linkage was the discourse of confession, whether through the actual confessional or through advancing such an analysis in the broader social field.¹⁴ The attempt at a sexual conquest through the confessional largely failed, instead eventually producing a hybrid sexual system that still survives today in many indigenous Mesoamerican societies.¹⁵

The *Tlacuilo's* text

Before the Spanish conquest, the Nahuas produced an extensive array of writings, though few have survived to this day. Here I focus on using pictorial manuscripts, produced both before and after the conquest, to analyse the relationship between gender, sexuality and the Nahua fertility god(esse)s. In conjunction with alphabetic texts, these pictorial manuscripts tell us stories about the ways in which our writer/painters, called in Nahuatl *tlacuilos*, conceptualised particular approaches to sexual topics: those linked to religion, ritual and fertility. The authors of the pictorial manuscripts focused much of their attention on the gods and rituals that I relate to sexuality, but they paid less attention to the daily lives of the people.

Our methods for reading such images cannot be facile, and we must engage in as much criticism of the images as we do of the alphabetic texts.¹⁶ Thus, we must note that the Nahuas before the conquest did not intend their texts to be read as transparent assertions of a witnessed reality. Nor did they produce texts that we can read as complete narratives. Nahua society had an oral culture, so the *tlacuilos* produced texts in interaction with other people, and they, along with various other textual experts, 'read' these documents out loud in public and private ceremonies by expanding on the images presented on the page. Thus, for us to read these images, we need some of the 'back story', provided by the contexts we find in archaeological and ethnohistorical studies.¹⁷

Further, we must know something about the *tlacuilos*, who played such an important role in pre-conquest Nahua society. Before the Spaniards arrived, Nahuas wrote texts in the form of various types of painted images, either on paper made from the bark of a tree or on stone edifices. The person who engaged in such writing was called a *tlacuilo*, a word that translates roughly as 'writer' or 'painter'. The Nahuas viewed this *tlacuilo* as a reflective artist, not as one who wrote down precisely what he saw. At the time of the Spanish conquest, the practices of the *tlacuilos* changed, as many became *escribanos*, who would write either Nahuatl or Spanish texts in the Roman alphabet. These scribes became intermediaries in the colonial project, and they overwhelmingly produced documents designed in some manner for the Spanish legal system. Moreover, the *tlacuilos* who continued to paint their images were influenced by European artistic conventions. Still, early *tlacuilos* were trained not only by friars but also by painters knowledgeable in pre-conquest aesthetics. And the evidence from idolatry investigations, criminal trials and Inquisition cases shows that these artists continued to get their works into the hands of a wide variety of indigenous people.¹⁸ Too much current historical writing either ignores the role of the scribe or considers

his work to be a window onto Nahua reality. I argue that the window is the wrong metaphor; his writings instead signify a prism.

The images themselves require substantial interpretation based on a method for reading Nahua iconography, a method based on comparative studies within particular genres. So, for example, art historians have studied extensively the Borgia group, from which we receive all of the indisputably pre-conquest images I discuss here (from the *Codex Borgia* and the *Codex Laud*); we have found that the artists did not attempt to provide realistic portrayals of the human body – they tended to provide images in profile – and they had specific icons designed to signify such things as movement through space, the progress of time and, more to the point for our purposes, the position of fertility.¹⁹ The Borgia group also comes from outside the basin of Mexico (probably from near Tlaxcala or from Nahua-influenced areas of southern Mexico) and, as the foremost experts on these codices have noted, these texts represent the dominant religious views of the priestly class throughout the region.²⁰

The post-conquest manuscripts that I will analyse became hybrid texts, at least in format, with influence from both European and Nahua styles. The first set of texts (the *Codex Borbonicus* and the *Tonalamatl of Aubin*), probably produced soon after the Spanish conquest in the basin of Mexico, appear to have little Spanish influence, though some aesthetic changes and/or Spanish glosses appear.²¹ The second set of texts, the Magliabechiano group, betrays the influence of its Franciscan sponsors. Though produced largely in traditional Nahua style, the texts are primarily Spanish alphabetic documents, with images illustrating the narrative.²² The final text, the twelve-volume *Florentine Codex* written and illustrated by Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún and his indigenous aides, is an extensive ethnographic study, based on interviews with old Nahua nobles from three different communities, produced in Hispanic style and with an agenda of promoting Christian thought, but with an interest in providing great detail – in the Nahuatl language, even if in the Roman alphabet – about Nahua religious practice.²³

These texts together tell us a story: one in which war, fertility and sacrifice relate to emerging and always changing concepts of gender and sexuality. As we will see, these concepts not only exceeded the Spanish conceptualisation that equated sex with sin, but also exceed a theory of sexuality that maintains a division between sex and gender.

The god(dess) Cihuacoatl

In the *Codex Borbonicus*, authored in the basin of Mexico at around the time of the Spanish conquest, we witness Cihuacoatl in a description of the Toxcatl ceremony, a festival to celebrate the warriors of the city-state of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the ruling empire immediately before the Spanish conquest (see Figure 1). This early sixteenth-century pictorial codex, written in traditional Nahua style (though with some Spanish glosses), focuses on an individual called the *cihuacoatl*, the second-highest ranking person in a Nahua city-state.²⁴ We see few figures in Nahua pictorial manuscripts that we know are cross-dressed individuals, but the *cihuacoatl* is one, and he runs the Toxcatl ceremony, a festival designed to promote masculine valour in warfare. His image in the centre of the ceremony shows him wearing a blouse and a skirt, both decorated in the manner of the god(dess), and carrying a well-decorated shield,



Figure 1: Cihuacoatl. Reprinted from *Codex Borbonicus* (facsimile) (Madrid, Vienna, Mexico City: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), p. 34.

a symbol of masculinity, and a weaving batten, a symbol of femininity. Why did this cross-dressing individual play such a powerful role in an important Nahua ceremony (and in wider Nahua politics)? Did Cihuacoatl, ostensibly a mother god(dess), come to symbolise warfare?

Dominican friar Diego Durán describes fearsome sacrifices dedicated to Cihuacoatl, and he says that the Nahuas killed more for her than for any other deity.²⁵ Indeed, Cihuacoatl was a powerful warrior god(dess) often associated with the Mexica.²⁶

Much of the *Codex Borbonicus* focuses on her as a central god(dess), largely because this codex is dedicated to warrior rituals. Yet the *Borbonicus* focuses not simply on the god(dess), but rather on her priest: a male priest dressed in her garb.²⁷ In addition to his shield and his weaving batten, *he*, if we can call him that, wears a dress decorated with skulls at the bottom, and he has all of the standard markings of the god(dess). He also stands upon a platform decorated with a skull. This individual is the *cihuacoatl* of Tenochtitlan, a person, seemingly always male, the second-in-command of the community after the *tlatoani*. This powerful position for a cross-dressing individual belies the fact that Nahua society strongly ingrained a highly masculine image in young men in which they avoided all activity, including dress, associated with women's roles.²⁸ Yet, Nahua leaders viewed the *cihuacoatl* as necessary for the effective functioning of society and, in the *Toxcatl* ceremony, for effective leadership in ritual warfare.

Importantly, such cross-dressing in no way challenged the masculinity of the priest. He stands in the image across from and alongside well-decorated priests and warriors. In another image, he stands directly below Huitzilopochtli, the god of war.²⁹ Just as the priest of Cihuacoatl wears the attire of the god(dess) (her figurative skin), the warriors wear the skins of animals and the priest of Huitzilopochtli wears the accoutrements of the god he signifies. In each case, the act of placing upon one's body the skin of another transforms the self. Huitzilopochtli's priest *becomes* the powerful warrior god – no longer simply human, he enters a space in which he remains the priest but also becomes the divine. The warriors *become* the powerful animals (coyotes,

jaguars and so on) whose skins they wear. These animals allow them to go to war not only with the protection (armour) of the skin, but also with the martial skills of the animals, combined with the cunning of the human warrior: betwixt and between, through ritual (the Toxcatl ceremony), the self-identities of the warriors have become transformed.

A similar process takes place in the case of the priest wearing Cihuacoatl's (female?) skin. He places upon his body the skirt and the blouse, and he holds the weaving batten because his self has been transformed into that of the god(dess)/priest. No longer just human, he becomes a figure straddling the human and the divine, harnessing all the powers of the deity to attend to the success of the warriors in warfare. In doing so, this priest crosses boundaries not just between the human and the divine, as had Huitzilopochtli's priest, but also between male and female.

In these warrior rituals, why did the presence of Huitzilopochtli and other warrior gods not suffice? Why did our *tlacuilo* find it necessary to paint the image of Cihuacoatl? After all, Inga Clendinnen and Cecelia Klein, amongst others, have both carefully and correctly shown us that warfare was a male sphere, in many ways the ultimate portrayal of the masculine being in the Nahua universe.³⁰

The answers to these questions, though, comes from Cihuacoatl's particular place in the Nahua pantheon, a place signified by her shield, and representing her as a warrior god(dess). While, as we will see, many of the fertility god(desse)s played a role in warfare, Cihuacoatl's role was unique. Cihuacoatl, while a central god(dess) to the apparatus of the Aztec empire, signified defeat. She was most strongly worshipped in the southern cities of Cuitlahuac and Xochimilco, and 'it is noteworthy that both cities were famed for their female sorcerers. Cuitlahuac is described repeatedly in the chronicles as the "City of Sorcerers" . . . while Xochimilco, which was regarded as a veritable hotbed of sorcery, is thought to house black art practitioners to this day'.³¹ Further, these southern cities were key to the survival of Tenochtitlan as leader of the empire, for, once conquered, they contributed substantial tribute.

It thus seems little coincidence that immediately after the Mexica conquest of Xochimilco in 1430, we find evidence that the cult of Cihuacoatl flourished in the capital city.³² Her presence signified both the power of the feminine in her cults in the southern cities, and her defeat, ritualistically, at the hands of Huitzilopochtli. This god(dess), always powerful and always dangerous, must also remain always defeated, or else the Aztec empire could end. Thus the performance of the *cihuacoatl* priest, always second-in-command, signified the continuing re-enactment of defeat.³³

Returning to the ceremonial performance of the *cihuacoatl*, though, we may ask why, if she, as Klein maintains, signified such defeat, she would perform an active role in the ritual. Why would she not simply sit at the feet of Huitzilopochtli or even of the warriors? We may answer partly, based on Klein's description, that Cihuacoatl's presence signified the position of a powerful god(dess) coming from a region in which female magic predominated, but we may go much further than this as we analyse the power of femininity and feminine sexuality in the Nahua god(desse)s of war.

In her image in the above text, we can see Cihuacoatl's ferocious look. She holds a batten as a weapon to signify her feminine role as a weaver (she also clearly wears a skirt). Her ferocious face, open mouth, long hair, well-decorated warrior garb and ornate shield frightened her enemies. The skull below her, upon which she stands, suggests that she makes her platform from the heads of enemy warriors.

But why would the Mexica use a female warrior in such imagery, when almost all of their warriors were men? One could not defeat the enemy with just the masculine, so the rituals needed to provide feminine power. In another ritual, titled Ochpaniztli ('The Sweeping'), in order for the ritual to succeed, a male priest needed to wear the skin of a woman slain as a fertility god(dess). In doing so, he harnessed the power of the fertility god(dess) and spread maize throughout the earth. As he accomplished this act, he was called by the name of the fertility god(dess).³⁴ As the Nahuas viewed the feminine as absolutely necessary for fertility, they also saw femininity as vital for the promotion of warfare, in which they believed that they made the empire fertile. In the Ochpaniztli ritual, another priest, as he went into battle, wore the flayed thigh skin of the slain god(dess), only to bury that thigh skin in enemy territory, just as he would plant maize.³⁵

One should also note that, as the Mexica defeated and/or formed alliances with other city-states, they asserted feminine sexuality to do so. After the war was over, they would work to expand their influence over others by marrying high-level Mexica women to the rulers of the defeated city-state. While it would work the other way as well (leading maidens from the other city-state would marry the Mexica leader), the control over the outside, the other city-state, most often was ceded to the young Mexica women who married the leaders of those states.³⁶ Thus state power was asserted through feminine sexuality, and Cihuacoatl signified that institution. Cihuacoatl promoted both the Nahua concept of the masculine, leading men into battle, and the feminine, promoting feminine sexuality and weaving, considered women's work.

This seems most appropriate to Cihuacoatl's position as the second-in-command of society. The most famous Cihuacoatl, Tlacaoel, was renowned for leading Mexica war parties. Cihuacoatl thus signified what the other god(desse)s did: a jumble of attributes, skins that could be taken off or placed on at will. She was the masculine warrior, the feminine weaver, the sorceress and the one given to the powerful Mexica leader as a sexual favour when he defeated the city from which Cihuacoatl emanated.

One can sense in this description the problem with Rubin's formulation: if we separate our theoretical tools for analysing sexuality from the feminist tools developed to analyse gender, do we lose the cross-pollination between what we would consider gender and what we would consider sexuality? Nahua ritual structures did not neatly separate the two, at least not in the case of Cihuacoatl. Still, as noted in the beginning, Nahua quotidian notions of gender and sexuality formed particular roles for women and men that did not apply to the deities. Would Rubin's formulation in 'Thinking Sex' allow for the parentheses in god(desse)s, or would it limit our grammatical abilities? I will argue below for a return both to Lacan and to 'The Traffic in Women'.

The god(dess) Coyolxauhqui

Other Nahua god(desse)s signified the position of the defeated warrior. The mythology of the birth of the Mexica war god, Huitzilopochtli, involving him, his sister Coyolxauhqui and his mother Coatlicue, suggests a complex gendered and sexualised relationship linked closely with war and fertility. The mother, Coatlicue, became pregnant with Huitzilopochtli while she swept. She found a ball of feathers, which she placed in her bosom. That ball of feathers then disappeared, and Coatlicue was pregnant. Coyolxauhqui, Coatlicue's eldest daughter, led her brothers into battle, attempting



Figure 2: Statue of Coatlicue. Photograph by Pete Sigal (Museo de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City).

to kill her mother before Huitzilopochtli was born. She did this because she believed that Huitzilopochtli would bring about destruction. Yet her stated reasons, according to the *Florentine Codex*, appear to critique Coatlicue's suspect sexuality. Thus she said, 'My elder brothers, she has affronted us; we must kill our mother, the angry one who is already with child. Who is the cause of that which is in her womb?'³⁷ Coyolxauhqui then led her brothers to attack their mother, but Huitzilopochtli, still in his mother's womb, heard Coyolxauhqui's plans, and he burst out of her, already with weapons. He beheaded Coyolxauhqui and ripped her body into pieces. He then killed his brothers.³⁸

The narrative asserts a battle on at least two levels related to the control over feminine sexuality and the female body. Coatlicue became sexually suspect, but Huitzilopochtli, through his expertise as a warrior, defended his mother's reputation. Coyolxauhqui's destroyed body then descended to the earth, propagating the fertile land of the basin of Mexico. The struggle between Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui also symbolically marked the movement of the Mexica from a subordinate group to a dominant one.³⁹

Coatlicue, the mother, remains an obscure figure in the Nahua pantheon. As Huitzilopochtli's lone parent, she suggests his 'illegitimacy' in the Nahua framework, a symbol for the illegitimacy of Mexica rule. In her own image, as we find in her statue (Figure 2), she has become a phallic figure: two serpents emerge from her severed head.⁴⁰ Serpents also come out from her skirt (Coatlicue translates as 'serpent skirt'), signifying both her fertility and the association between her fertile nature and death – through the warfare of Huitzilopochtli.⁴¹ This fierce deity promoted the position of the phallic god(dess) in the Nahua pantheon.

Huitzilopochtli, as the key warrior god of the Mexica, defeated Coyolxauhqui in such a way as to establish male domination over the female body, just as the masculine Mexica established control over the feminine land.⁴² The main narrative promoted Huitzilopochtli as the leader of society, while Coyolxauhqui's shattered body, as memorialised on the main Mexica temple (Figure 3), became a key figure in the empire: both an element of resistance to male domination in Mexica society, and the disempowerment of the female body. The body's pieces signified both Coyolxauhqui's excessively sexual nature (through her nude body and exposed breasts) and her phallic



Figure 3: Coyolxauhqui, from the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. Photograph by Pete Sigal.

empowerment (through her snakes – presented as phallic in Nahua iconography – and the presence of the loincloth, an ubiquitous sign of men).⁴³

Yet, in the image, we witness her extraordinary phallic divestiture. As her body was destroyed, torn apart in every conceivable manner, she became divested of any power and thus became a symbol asserting the dominance of Huitzilopochtli. Thus, as Huitzilopochtli became a sign of Mexica dominance, Coyolxauhqui became a sign for any city-states that would attempt to challenge that dominance. In such a metaphorical story, those other city-states were feminised. All the serpents were killed along with Coyolxauhqui; she was beheaded and her body parts did not form a whole that could challenge Huitzilopochtli in any manner.

Huitzilopochtli thus became in this story a warrior who would defend his mother – even if she had become sexually suspect – while asserting sexual control over his sister. The sexual control that Huitzilopochtli exerted over both his mother and sister may resemble to us a kind of patriarchal sexual control, and indeed much Nahua ritual points to male dominance. This may lead us to believe, however, that Nahua society had a similar system of sexual honour and virtue that many historians have argued comprised Spanish patriarchal discourse.⁴⁴ But, as scholars studying Nahua gender have shown more fully, Nahua society at the time of the Spanish conquest was much more complex than this.⁴⁵

In this narrative, we must recall the position of the land. The Mexica would not have been able to settle in Tenochtitlan, or to plant maize without the fertilising presence of the parts of Coyolxauhqui's body. In many senses, this recalls Rubin's point in 'The Traffic in Women', that women's bodies fertilise social relationships between men, who engage in gift exchange over the bodies of women.⁴⁶ Thus, symbolically Coyolxauhqui's shattered body became the key to this exchange, just as women's bodies (as the women were married off to leaders of other city-states) would become similarly key to such an exchange in the social field.

The symbolic presence of Coyolxauhqui's phallus, through her loincloth, signifies not the imaginary presence of a penis, but rather a fear that Mexica leaders had regarding the potential of their subordinates to rise up. This feminine phallic power, also asserted through the presence of snakes, phallic figures connected with the earth, and thus also with femininity in the case of Coyolxauhqui, needed to be controlled in the



Figure 4: Chalchiuhtlicue. Reprinted from *Tonalamatl of Aubin* (facsimile), Eduard Seler, ed. (Berlin, London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, 1900-01), p. 5.

Nahua universe. Such a phallic presence, though, points again to the symbolic import of feminine sexuality, an import that we cannot understand if we do not develop a theoretical framework that deals with the symbols and signifiers of sexuality, even when they become connected with the ‘wrong’ gender.⁴⁷

The fertility god(desse)s

Nahua ritual texts at the time of the conquest closely connected war with fertility, and Cihuacoatl, like most other god(desse)s, signified both of these. Through her position alongside all of the male warriors, she presented the preferred warrior symbol. The men had to go forth into other territories, defeat their enemies and symbolically implant a new society. The only way to keep that new society moving forward was through sexual reproduction that made gods, humans, animals and the earth fertile. In order to accomplish this task, the warriors recognised that they needed both masculine and feminine principles; hence the position of Cihuacoatl as a warrior, particularly one continually re-enacting the defeat of those fighting against the Mexica.⁴⁸ And the presence of the second skin of the priest, the clothing of the god(dess), would also mimic the warriors, who wore their own second skins, those of the animals.

Other god(desse)s present us with further evidence of the power of fertility. In these god(desse)s, we see that for the Nahuas feminine sexuality connects with gender in particular ways that move us beyond Rubin’s formulations. In the *Tonalamatl of Aubin*, we find an extraordinary and obscure image that signifies the roles of two fertility goddesses: Chalchiuhtlicue and Tlazolteotl (Figure 4).⁴⁹ There we see Chalchiuhtlicue with Tlazolteotl’s head emanating from between her legs like an outstretched penis. In Chalchiuhtlicue’s more standard image, like that of the *Codex Borbonicus* (Figure 5), we see her unleashing the floods from beneath her throne, and we witness people caught in the torrents of water.⁵⁰ Her nose ornament serves to present her as a fertility god(dess).⁵¹ And, importantly, one of the images across from her is Tlazolteotl’s headdress. Here the people caught in the stream may be a man and a woman sacrificed to the god(dess), although they may also symbolise men and women born to the cleansing effects of Chalchiuhtlicue’s water.⁵² As a midwife bathed a newborn, she called upon Chalchiuhtlicue. Either way, Chalchiuhtlicue’s flood created and/or destroyed both male and female.



Figure 5: Chalchiuhtlicue. Reprinted from *Codex Borbonicus* (facsimile) (Madrid, Vienna, Mexico City: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), p. 3.

Chalchiuhtlicue controlled the water and bathed the newborn child, ridding her/him of dirt. The important ceremony, bringing the child into the world, was partially controlled by this god(ess) and, by implication, by Tlazolteotl as well. The two were paired, as art historian Eloise Quiñones-Keber maintains, because of the association between dirt and cleanliness. Tlazolteotl's 'dual association with generation and filth is recognised; the latter is part of her name . . . Thus the pairing of Tlazolteotl and Chalchiuhtlicue . . . may have been intended for contrasting purposes, one representing filth, the other the cleansing with water that followed birth'.⁵³ While Quiñones-Keber places too much emphasis on these two as individual god(desse)s rather than complements, I agree on the necessity of both in Nahua thought for the maintenance of fertility.

The two god(desse)s in Figure 4 connect with each other in the cleansing process: one signifying water and the other trash. Chalchiuhtlicue, at least in the birthing process, would serve to clean the trash created by Tlazolteotl.⁵⁴ Perhaps the *tlacuilo* who authored the *Tonalamatl of Aubin* saw Tlazolteotl as a masculine type of figure, relating to Chalchiuhtlicue's femininity. Yet, we may have problems supporting such a binary opposition. Chalchiuhtlicue's name derived from 'precious jade' (*chalchihuitl*) and 'skirt' (*cueitl*), while Tlazolteotl came from 'trash' (*tlazolli*). The skirt signified female identity but trash had no particular gender in Nahua thought. Further, as we will see, Tlazolteotl's gender is far from clear. And Chalchiuhtlicue, while consistently represented as feminine and having a female body, appears here to have had a penis; other images related her to warfare.⁵⁵

The penile image, associating not the symbolism of the phallus (through the loincloth), but rather the physiological male member, seems entirely unique in the Nahua corpus. Perhaps the *tlacuilo* intended Tlazolteotl as penis to signify the fertility of both god(desse)s. In the images in the water in Figures 4 and 5, we witness the male and the female figures, both clothed (the male figure appears to wear only a loincloth).⁵⁶ Chalchiuhtlicue symbolised both the destruction of the flood and the creation of birth. The use of Tlazolteotl could suggest two elements: first, the use of dirt and water in the washing away of the trash of the newborn child; second, the male and female principles involved in creation. But we cannot maintain Tlazolteotl as the masculine

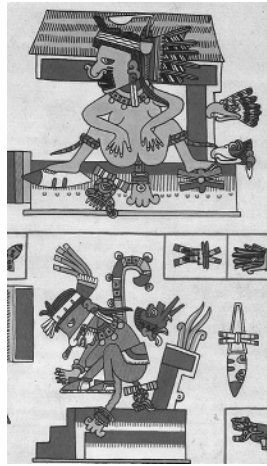


Figure 6: Gods of Excess. Reprinted from *Codex Borgia* (facsimile) (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1976), p. 74.

principle – and certainly not as the penis. Indeed, her headdress in Figure 5 probably signifies offerings to the god(dess) in order to protect children in the birthing process.

A pre-conquest Nahuatl image common to several texts presented Tlazolteotl as an erotic god(dess) partnered with a similarly erotic (male) deity (Figure 6).⁵⁷ Tlazolteotl gives birth to a glyph of a flower, symbolising her as the parent of sexual excess.⁵⁸ Several other elements of this image are noteworthy. First, and most immediately apparent, Tlazolteotl is naked except for her headgear and her necklace. The nudity of women in pre-conquest manuscripts always appears to have signified sexual excess.⁵⁹ Second, Tlazolteotl's headdress and earrings are made of a spindle and unspun cotton, signifying her as the god(dess) of spinning cotton.⁶⁰ Third, her right foot sits on a flint knife, an implement used in blood sacrifice. The (male) deity below her also has a flower emanating from him (could the flower emanate from an umbilical cord?), and he has a cord ending in a skull coming out of his anus. The figures together signify the panoply of sexual excesses committed by the gods. These indeed were deities of sexual excess, and the Nahuatl pantheon required them to engage in activities that standard Nahuatl society would have viewed as excessive for men and women.

In post-conquest times, Tlazolteotl not only continued but, more appropriately, she traversed the entire social field. Thus she became a signifier of sin, but she kept some of her role as a mother god(dess) who committed activities deemed excessive. She maintained her position as one who would pick up the trash, and she continued to provide more trash. She fomented an 'Eve-like' image, just as she also re-presented the holy mother, the Virgin Mary, in a somewhat different and more sexualised guise.

In a 1629 treatise, based on an idolatry investigation in a Nahuatl-speaking community in Guerrero, we find several incantations that invoked Tlazolteotl and closely related god(desse)s. In one, the Nahuatl informant discussed a cure that he called *tetzolaltiloni*, 'bathing someone regarding *tlazolli*'.⁶¹ Of course the washing away of the trash would require water, so the shaman called upon a series of god(desse)s, including Chalchiuhtlicue. These god(desse)s signified fire, water and incense. Then he called upon the Tlazolteteoh, the god(desse)s of *tlazolli*.⁶² These together formed the cure for

an illness caused by *tlazolli* and by what the Nahuas deemed ‘excess’. And one should note here that Tlazolteotl was the guardian of the steam baths, places intended to cure individuals, but ones that Catholic priests argued fomented sexual sin by allowing for secret sexual liaisons.⁶³ Nahuas regarded the steam bath, the *temazcal*, guarded by Tlazolteotl, as a place in which the fire, water and incense came together to help one engage in a cure.⁶⁴ The being that created the disease was specifically coded as female, whereas the disease itself had no specific gendered markers, and the ill person could be either male or female. The curer, either male or female, led the diseased person to the steam bath, which cured him or her. Only through the careful invocation of both Chalchiuhtlicue and Tlazolteotl would the sick individual become cured. Thus, these god(des)es, fundamental god(des)es of fertility, could cure disease and save humanity. But they also could kill.

In the relationship established here between Tlazolteotl and Chalchiuhtlicue, we may see, as did the Catholic priests, a parallel with baptism.⁶⁵ Yet, I would argue that we must instead interpret this cure in the context provided by the pre-conquest pairing of Chalchiuhtlicue with Tlazolteotl. The two did not form moral opposites as in the case of baptism, where the holy water washes away the original sin. In the case of the ritual purification involved in the steam bath, the water did wash away the trash, but only as the trash god(dess) helped the water god(dess). The two together signified *tlazolli*; thus together they worked to move the diseased person ritualistically back into the realm of moderation. Chalchiuhtlicue required Tlazolteotl in order to help, in order to cure, the individual.

Tlazolteotl remained Chalchiuhtlicue’s phallus even in the 1620s, but here she has become the phallus more in her traditional sense, as in the symbolic register in which Tlazolteotl combined male and female power within the same register. In other words, here the phallus becomes not a physiological manifestation of the male body, but rather a symbolic presentation of the power of gender and sexuality.

The colonial death of the god(dess)

The phallic imagery of the Chalchiuhtlicue/Tlazolteotl relationship remains obscure until we analyse the place of the tongue in the images of the Nahua god(des)es. In an image from the mid-sixteenth-century *Codex Magliabechiano* (Figure 7), a codex written in the Spanish language but preserving some traditional if decontextualised Nahua imagery, we see that Cihuacoatl survived the conquest intact and in some senses became scarier yet.⁶⁶ But, as I have noted, the *Codex Magliabechiano* was primarily a Hispanic text, with the images performing an illustrative role. Still, according to Dominican friar Diego Durán, an astute observer of Nahua gods and rituals, Cihuacoatl’s open mouth and tongue signified her lust for the hearts of men.⁶⁷ At the same time, the tongue in much Nahua discourse signified a lascivious nature.⁶⁸ We see again the relationship between warfare, sacrifice and feminine sexuality. Here the Spanish narrative says that Cihuacoatl celebrates the festival of the dead.⁶⁹

How do we understand the ever-present tongues of the god(des)es? We must turn to the rather ambiguous *tzitzimime*, death figures and underworld gods that art historian Cecelia Klein convincingly argues related closely to Cihuacoatl, their controlling god(dess), and whose flint-knife-like tongues appear prominently in their images.⁷⁰ As we can see in Figure 8, from the *Codex Magliabechiano*, a snake appears to emanate



Figure 7: Cihuacoatl. Reprinted from *Codex Magliabechiano* (facsimile). Published as *The Book of the Life of the Ancient Mexicans*, Zelia Nuttall, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1903), f. 45r.



Figure 8: Tzitzimitl. Reprinted from *Codex Magliabechiano* (facsimile). Published as *The Book of the Life of the Ancient Mexicans*, Zelia Nuttall, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1903), f. 76r.

from beneath the *tzitzimitl*. The cognate image from a related codex, the *Codex Tudela*, which was created from the same prototype as the *Codex Magliabechiano*, contains no snake; instead, blood comes from the *tzitzimitl*'s open mouth, pouring down the front of the image, ending in an arrow-like point between the figure's legs.⁷¹ The blood signified the *tzitzimitl*'s power, which stemmed from the figure's ability to get Nahuas to engage in sacrifice. The blood moving from the open mouth, between the legs, to the ground, replicates the positioning of the tongue, liver and snake on the body of the Magliabechiano *tzitzimitl*.

The Spanish text describing this figure in the *Codex Magliabechiano* says that the *tzitzimitl* is a 'dead man'.⁷² Yet we see that he wears a *huipil*, the top worn by Nahuas women. His *huipil* covers his bony body, but the snake emanates prominently from beneath him to show his phallic power, just as he wears a necklace of hearts (with a liver at the centre) to show his ability to get people to engage in sacrifice for him.

Nahuas called these figures *tzitzimime*, underworld gods most often characterised as male. As we shall see, such a characterisation mistakes a colonialist re-inscription for pre-conquest reality. According to a wide variety of sources, Nahuas feared the *tzitzimime* in a similar manner as they feared the *cihuateteo*, women who became

god(esse)s when they died in childbirth.⁷³ The *tzitzimime* and the *cihuateteo* would come from the underworld and lurk in the forests, waiting to steal hearts. Only sufficient sacrifice could satisfy them.

These fearful (highly masculine?) figures thus signified the draw of the underworld, and they appropriately became recoded as demonic figures in the Nahua world.⁷⁴ Or did they? Klein has shown that these figures in the pre-conquest imaginary appear female. In addition to the *huipil*, the *tzitzimime* wore skirts laced on the bottom with shells. The image from the *Codex Tudela* also has a red back panel laced with shells at the bottom – Nahua women wore both the skirt and the back panel. The lacing of the bottom with shells appears reminiscent of Cihuacoatl's costume. A few early colonial documents describe the *tzitzimime* as female. In fact, Klein shows that texts declaring the *tzitzimime* as male appear to actively and consciously seek to alter the identity of the *tzitzimime* to make them demonic. As the devil is male, likewise the *tzitzimime* became male.⁷⁵

In Nahua cosmology, these *tzitzimime* did not signify as male, or as purely evil. They could help one with cures just as easily as they could kill an individual. But let us explore for a moment the reason that these figures became both male and demonic, at least in the Hispanic mind, during the early colonial period. First, as underworld gods who created mischief for people on earth, in the imaginations of Catholic priests it made great sense to categorise them as types of demons, ignoring the fact that Nahuas did not view them as universally evil. Second, as deities pictured with properties presumed phallic, the Spaniards could easily categorise them as male, ignoring sartorial codes that would problematise such a gender categorisation. These two rationales, though, suggest more of an unconscious process at work than the conscious re-categorisation process promoted in some of the secondary literature: in other words, it was not so much that the priests made an effort to re-categorise these individuals to fit into their agendas. Rather, they witnessed images that they automatically coded in their minds as demonic male figures, and they acted accordingly.

Cihuacoatl closely relates to the *tzitzimime* and the other death figures through her tongue. Figure 7 prominently displays Cihuacoatl's tongue, ready to penetrate the heart for which she waits. Further, as a warrior god(ess), she carried the name of 'woman serpent', a reference to one key phallic figure. We also see in her pre-conquest image the prominent role of her tongue, which in Figure 9, from the Mexica version of the calendar, is simply a flint knife, much like the tongue of the *tzitzimimtl* in the Magliabechiano image. The flint knife, the phallic signifier of sacrifice, becomes equated with Cihuacoatl's tongue in the collective memory produced in this state-sponsored display.

We can also note the relationship of sexuality to the portrayal of the hair of Cihuacoatl and the *tzitzimime*. In another image, Cihuacoatl's hair is made up of centipedes, scorpions and other insects – all signifiers of sexual excess.⁷⁶ Pre-conquest and colonial iconography consistently related such animals of the earth to excess.⁷⁷ These relate to the common theme in Nahua sources: women portrayed as sexually excessive had tousled hair. The knives in the hair of the *tzitzimime* seem likely to portray a similar relation.

The sources prominently displayed the tongues of certain deities, and these tongues meant different things under different circumstances, but in each case the tongue signified a ritual element of excess unmistakably absent from accepted daily



Figure 9: Cihuacoatl, from a Nahua calendar. Photograph by Pete Sigal.

practices. Witness the tongues of the *tzitzimime*. These tongues present the excess related to feasting upon blood and heart. The tongue of Tlazolteotl signified her lascivious nature. In Figure 9, Cihuacoatl's flint-knife tongue signified her importance in sacrifice.

The tongue in each of these images presents us with a narrative related to power. The individual with the exposed tongue has power over others, and that tongue consistently signifies the excesses of ritual, prohibited in daily life. These phallic tongues, related closely with Cihuacoatl and other deities, suggest that god(esse)s have power over people.

While Cihuacoatl was hardly a typical god(ess), she signified what all others did: a coming together of two principles, the feminine (fertility and feminine sexuality) and the masculine (warfare and masculine sexuality). It is this coming together of variously gendered phenomena that may force us to question whether these god(esse)s can be characterised as goddesses at all.

In pre-conquest times we find significant gender ambiguity in the positions of many supernatural figures. In the *Codex Laud*, the presence of the phallus asserted a dynamic power relationship between the phallicised deity and the humans portrayed in the act of childbirth. In two images from this codex, we find related death figures with both loincloths and skirts (see Figures 10 and 11).⁷⁸

In Figure 10, we see that the death figure has his sacrificial knife pointed at the woman who appears to hand over her child. The obvious suggestion that this child will be sacrificed is less important to us than the phallic nature of the death figure. The symbolic role of sacrifice and the power of the sacrificial knife relate back to the loincloth – not necessarily seen as hiding a penis, but certainly as a symbolic registration of the phallic power of the death figure, here containing both male (loincloth) and female (skirt) attributes.

In another case, Figure 11, we see the same death figure, this time without a sacrificial knife, as the child has yet to be born. The death figure points to a naked pregnant woman. We also see a snake's tail pointing toward the woman, and a bird enters her mouth. Again, the death figure, with both skirt and loincloth, relates to the system of sacrifice (as well as the dangers of childbirth).

The images of the gods connect the loincloth closely with the power of the actor. Each deity maintains his or her power through the presence of some sign of the phallus.

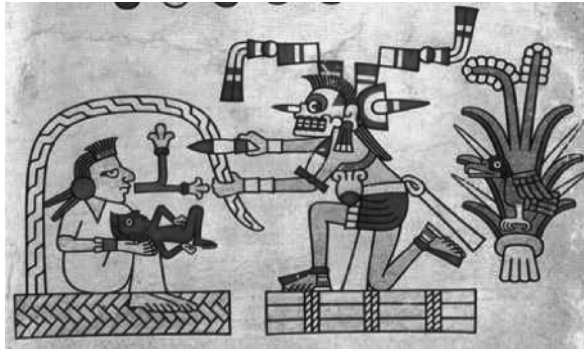


Figure 10: Death figure. Reprinted from *Codex Laud* (facsimile), Ferdinand Anders, ed. (Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), p. 27.

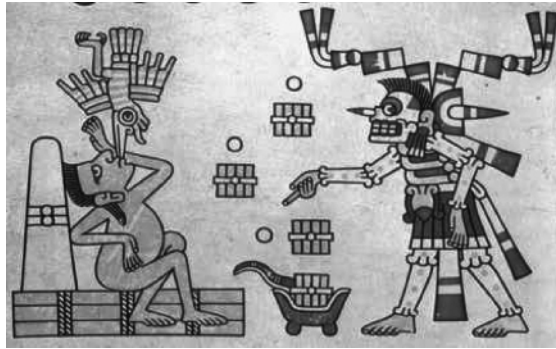


Figure 11: Death figure. Reprinted from *Codex Laud* (facsimile), Ferdinand Anders, ed. (Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), p. 30.

And in each case these phallic signifiers relate closely to sexual excess. I argue that the phallus placed on the body of the god(esse) asserts a type of (feminine) sexual power in the cosmological realm.

We witness these power dynamics further as we explore the relationship between the god(esse)s. As Chalchiuhtlicue had the identity of the ‘precious jade skirt’, and the skirt in Nahua discourse signified female, despite her penis in Figure 4, she appears to remain female.⁷⁹ We must note that we have found few images of Nahua women with loincloths, so the portrayal of god(esse)s with loincloths, snakes and other phallic signifiers appears not to have extended to human women.⁸⁰

Indeed, the Nahuas viewed the bulk of the god(esse)s as combined warriors and fertility figures. The authors of these texts signify the roles of these god(esse)s through the representation of images of fertility (including presenting them as giving birth, but most often simply showing them with elements to spin or weave cotton, or with maize, as Nahuas linked both cotton and maize to fertility) and images of war (most often, as with the case of Cihuacoatl, with shields and bundles of arrows, but also including knives and other implements of sacrifice).



Figure 12: Tlazolteotl. Reprinted from *Codex Laud* (facsimile), Ferdinand Anders, ed. (Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), p. 29.

None of this will surprise those with knowledge of Nahua notions of childbirth. Nahuas provided a woman giving birth to a child the title of ‘warrior’. In the *Florentine Codex*, a midwife exhorted the pregnant woman, about to give birth, to ‘grasp well the little shield. My daughter, my youngest one: be an eagle woman. Face it. Imitate the eagle woman, Cihuacoatl’.⁸¹ The reference to ‘eagle woman’ (*quauhchihuatl*) referred to the eagle designation of an acclaimed warrior.⁸² The shield referred to Cihuacoatl’s shield. Thus Cihuacoatl became the god(esse) who protected women during childbirth. Her warrior personality became the personality of the woman giving birth to the child.

Tlazolteotl also helped women through the process of childbirth, and her image suggests a similar combination of gendered attributes. But, unlike Cihuacoatl, who combined sartorial images of femininity with external accoutrements of masculinity, many other god(esse)s, including Tlazolteotl, ‘played’ with concepts of sexual excess and the human body while also asserting the coming together of genders. Thus we witness, in Figure 12 (from the *Codex Laud*), Tlazolteotl’s exposed breasts signifying the sexed female body, while other elements signify a coming together of two genders and a phallic symbolism.⁸³ We see that Tlazolteotl wears a skirt, a feminine *cueitl*, but even on the skirt we note a problematic notion: the bones signify her role in sacrifice, largely considered a masculine ritual sphere. Still, many sacrifices occur for the god(esse)s, so even though male priests and victims dominate most of the ceremonies from the vantage points of the viewers, the god(esse)s play a major role. Further, the *chuateteo* commonly wore such skirts.⁸⁴ More centrally, emanating from beneath Tlazolteotl’s skirt, we find a loincloth, a seemingly exclusive signifier of the male body, intended to evoke the male member. As we rarely see penises in any Nahua texts, one might suggest that the author intends the loincloth to evoke the penis; to suggest its presence without directly showing it. The loincloth is thus a signifier without a signified.

The signifier (loincloth) is a creative application of the signified (phallus) that does not exist in any place but the symbolic sphere. Thus, while a Nahua individual can imagine the possibility of a penis beneath Tlazolteotl’s loincloth, just as that individual can imagine the possibility of a penis beneath the man’s loincloth, in both cases the Nahua cultural and linguistic frames intend the loincloth not to assert such an

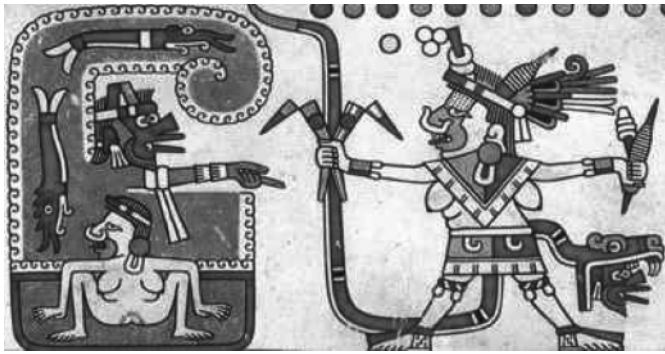


Figure 13: Tlazolteotl. Reprinted from *Codex Laud* (facsimile), Ferdinand Anders, ed. (Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), p. 39.

imaginary, but rather to leave a symbolic imprint that relates to the power and prestige of the individual wearing the loincloth. The *tlacuilo* does not intend to make the Nahuatl commoner believe that Tlazolteotl's loincloth hides her penis. Rather, these authorial voices intend the loincloth to evoke a certain sense of awe at the power (encoded as phallic) of the individual thus portrayed.⁸⁵

But Tlazolteotl cannot be coded as male. She gives birth to children, and she signifies a feminine sexuality that seems at one moment out of control and at another moment not only in control but also leading to the continuation of society. In another image from the *Codex Laud* (Figure 13), we see Tlazolteotl in much of her traditional costume and headdress.⁸⁶ Here she holds cotton-spinning implements in one hand and sacrificial implements in the other. She wears a *cueitl*, but instead of the loincloth we saw above, she here has a serpent coming out from beneath her skirt. The serpent's head encloses the head of a man also seen on the other side of the image. The man wears the mask of Ehecatl, the god of wind. The man's head connects with a body that seems to disappear into a glyph that contains some serpent-like creatures. The man points a (beckoning? accusatory?) finger at Tlazolteotl. All the while, underneath the man, we see an unusual image of a naked woman in a squatting (childbirth?) position, with her pubic hair highlighted. This woman has many of the features of Tlazolteotl, but she lacks the facial paint and the identifying markers associated with spinning cotton. The woman connects with the highly feminine Tlazolteotl, who herself connects with the phallic figure, the god of wind. All together, they signify a coherent, if excessive, unity. Tlazolteotl becomes at once a phallic aggressor (using Ehecatl to have sex with the woman?) and a god(dess) engaged in feminine sexuality (being the woman, having sex with Ehecatl?).

Thus, for Tlazolteotl, her character as a god(dess) stems from her excessive activity, seemingly in both the masculine and feminine sexual spheres. Her phallus, whether as a snake or as a loincloth, never entirely obscures her skirt. Both are necessary for her to engage in her excessive behaviour.

Tlazolteotl's sexual excess, a central part of her character, points to her position as a gender-indeterminate deity. With her secondary sexual characteristics often shown, we must categorise her as a goddess. Yet here I have argued that the more important

categorisation is the grammatically impossible position of the god(dess), one who signified the power of both genders, but primarily through symbolic structures and sexual excesses. If we are to ‘separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence’, we fail to analyse Tlazolteotl, at least as she existed before the Spanish arrived. If instead, we use this theoretical intervention as a point of contention, we may be able to find a ‘traffic in women’ that is loaded with phallic significance – and colonial context.

Remembering Cihuacoatl

In 1539 in the Nahuatl town of Culhuacan, the leader of the community led his people in the worship of a series of deities among the most prominent fertility gods, at a place called Xochitlan (‘Flower Land’), probably referring to Tamoanchan, the home of the gods.⁸⁷ Xochitlan related to a cave in Culhuacan in which they performed the ceremonies. The cave, signifying the womb of the earth god(dess), was the place where they worshipped Tezcatlipoca (a warrior god) and Cihuacoatl.⁸⁸ There, several priests dressed in the (unspecified) clothes of the gods began to sacrifice their own blood. Then they performed a heart excision sacrifice of a youth, feeding his heart and his blood to Tezcatlipoca and Cihuacoatl.⁸⁹

As little assimilation would have occurred by 1539, the promotion of such deities is unsurprising. Even in 1629, though, we find that Cihuacoatl survived in the memories and imaginations of some Nahuas. In an idolatry investigation, we find Nahuas worshipping this god(dess). There the god(dess) helped to capture deer and engage in curing rites.⁹⁰

How is it possible that Nahuatl leaders promoted a religion devoted to Cihuacoatl and the others? How is it possible that commoners worshipped her and other fertility god(des)es with such vigour? The seventeenth-century Nahuatl commoners produced a memory of fertility god(des)es not because of the needs of an obscure pre-conquest system that we remember as the Aztec empire, but rather because of their contemporary needs and desires. They needed to make the earth fertile and to produce cures for disease. They desired gods that would aid them in sexual performance. Catholicism could not do this, so Nahuatl commoners used oral and written practice to keep reproducing their fertility god(des)es. The commoners in particular imagined Cihuacoatl as a god(dess) linked closely with both warfare and fertility. And she promoted feminine sexuality.

We fail, though, to understand her position if we promote a strict division between gender and sexuality. Indeed, neither of these categories is adequate to describe and analyse the positions of the god(des)es, their changes through colonialism and their ritual purposes. Rubin’s call to separate gender and sexuality from each other becomes, in the story of the Nahuas, an incomplete project. While we must analyse sexuality as a unit distinct from gender, we cannot do so for non-western peoples unless we develop different theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the positions of Nahuatl deities and people.

Victor Turner argues that the liminal space of ritual is likened to the womb, bisexuality and other elements.⁹¹ ‘Betwixt and between’ and ‘bisexual’ sound like good ways to contextualise Nahuatl beliefs in Cihuacoatl, Tlazolteotl and the others. But Turner himself used this place to analyse not deities, but rather human participants

in ritual performance. Moreover, the deities signify not liminality, but rather large containers, bundles of attributes that had the power to transform all. Through a close analysis of the ritual process, writ large and small, we can determine the ways in which the deities become entities that exceed gender and transform sexuality. Hence, as we re-enter the Nahua world in order to develop a better analysis of sexuality as it presents itself in non-western societies, we necessarily move beyond not only the all-encompassing category of gender, as Rubin advocates, but also the supposedly stable category of sexuality.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term 'Nahua' to refer to the bulk of the indigenous population of central Mexico, those who spoke the language of Nahuatl, at the time of the Spanish conquest. I will refer to the people from Tenochtitlan, the capital of the 'Aztec empire' in power when the Spaniards arrived, by the name that they used at the time, 'Mexica'.
2. Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, ed. and tr. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 210.
3. Many have challenged this concept of a rigorous separation, but the mythology still prevails. For two very different types of challenges, see Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett (eds), *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).
4. While a complete answer to such a question would require a book (and the reader would remain unsatisfied even then), a few notes are warranted here.
5. See Thelma D. Sullivan, 'Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina: The Great Spinner and Weaver', in Elizabeth Hill Boone (ed.), *The Art and Iconography of Late Post-Classic Central Mexico* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982).
6. Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in Carol S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger* (Boston: Routledge, 1984), here p. 308.
7. See especially, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
8. While the Nahuas did not have terms that easily translate as either 'gender' or 'sexuality', they did have concepts that related to these two. See Pete Sigal, 'Latin America and the Challenge of Globalizing the History of Sexuality', *American Historical Review* 114 (2009), pp. 1340–53.
9. On the Nahuas before the conquest, see Cecelia Klein, 'The Shield Women: Resolution of An Aztec Gender Paradox', in Alana Cordy-Collins and Douglas Sharon (eds), *Current Topics in Aztec Studies: Essays in Honor of Dr. H. B. Nicholson* (San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 1993); Cecelia Klein, 'Fighting with Femininity: Gender and War in Aztec Mexico', in Richard C. Trexler (ed.), *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994); Sharisse D. McCafferty and Geoffrey G. McCafferty, 'The Conquered Women of Cacaxtla: Gender Identity or Gender Ideology', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 5 (1994), pp. 159–72; Susan Kellogg, 'The Woman's Room: Some Aspects of Gender Relations in Late Pre-Colonial Tenochtitlan', *Ethnohistory* 42 (1995), pp. 563–76. On post-conquest Nahuas, see esp. the articles in Schroeder, Wood and Haskett, *Indian Women of Early Mexico*. For a view that places a stronger emphasis on gender hierarchy, see Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, & Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
10. See Noemí Quezada, *Amor y magia amorosa entre los Aztecas: Supervivencia en el México colonial* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975).
11. Several scholars have analysed the fertility rituals and the ways in which they allowed the Nahuas to connect different realms of existence. Particularly one can note the methods of these religious rituals in expressing a position for the performers that is in between the different realms described. See Alfredo López Austin, *Hombre-dios: Religión y política en el mundo náhuatl* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1973); Yólotl González Torres, *El sacrificio humano entre los mexicas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985); Silvia Limón Olvera, *Las cuevas y el mito de origen: Los casos inca y mexica* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990); Serge Gruzinski, *Man Gods of the*

- Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: Violence From the Aztec Empire to the Modern Americas* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Clendinnen, *Aztecs*.
12. David Carrasco makes this point in *City of Sacrifice*. While he provides far too much of a functionalist explanation for rituals of violence, his point linking governance with fertility rites seems particularly apt. See also Pete Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion: Ritual and Sexuality in Early Nahua Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
 13. Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).
 14. See Burkhart, *Slippery Earth*, pp. 98–110, 181–3; Gruzinski, ‘Individualization and Acculturation’.
 15. See Hugo G. Nutini and John M. Roberts, *Bloodsucking Witchcraft: An Epistemological Study of Anthropomorphic Supernaturalism in Rural Tlaxcala* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); James M. Taggart, *Nahua Myth and Social Structure* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).
 16. For an example of such a historical reading in a western tradition, see Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio’s Secrets* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1998).
 17. For two excellent examples of such contextual reading, see Gordon Brotherston, *Painted Books from Mexico: Codices in UK Collections and the World They Represent* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).
 18. On the pre-conquest *tlacuilo*, see Eduard Seler, *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology: English Translations of German Papers from Gesammelte Abhandlungen Zur Amerikanischen Sprach- Und Alterthumskunde*, ed. Charles P. Bowditch, 5 vols (1939; Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1990); Karl Anton Nowotny, *Tlacuilolli: Style and Contents of the Mexican Pictorial Manuscripts with a Catalog of the Borgia Group*, ed. and tr. George A. Everett, Jr and Edward B. Sisson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); Donald Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Painting* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959); Brotherston, *Painted Books from Mexico*; Gordon Brotherston, *Feather Crown: The Eighteen Feasts of the Mexica Year* (London: British Museum Press, 2005); Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Patrick Johansson K., ‘La imagen en los códices nahuas’, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 32 (2001), pp. 69–124. On his post-conquest iteration, see Serge Gruzinski, *La colonisation de l’imaginaire: Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
 19. For examples of interpretations from the Borgia group, along with the Mixtec codices, see Elizabeth Hill Boone (ed.), *The Art and Iconography of Late Post-Classic Central Mexico: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks, October 22nd and 23rd, 1977* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982).
 20. See particularly K. A. Nowotny’s commentary, in *Tlacuilolli*, on the *Codex Borgia*.
 21. Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Paintings*; Brotherston, *Feather Crown*.
 22. Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Paintings*.
 23. See Walden Browne, *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Pete Sigal, ‘Queer Nahuatl: Sahagún’s Faggots and Sodomites, Lesbians and Hermaphrodites’, *Ethnohistory* 54 (2007), pp. 9–34.
 24. On the importance of the *tlatoni* and the *cihuacoatl*, see Susan Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).
 25. Durán, *Book of the Gods*, p. 217.
 26. Cecelia Klein, ‘Rethinking Cihuacoatl: Aztec Imagery of the Conquered Woman’, in J. Kathryn Josserand and Karen Dakin (eds), *Smoke and Mist: Mesoamerican Studies in Memory of Thelma D. Sullivan* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1988).
 27. *Codex Borbonicus* (facsimile) (Madrid, Vienna, Mexico City: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), pp. 21, 24, 25, 34. The image is from p. 34.
 28. See Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Clendinnen, *Aztecs*; McCafferty and McCafferty, ‘The Conquered Women of Cacaxtla’; Rosemary Joyce, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).
 29. *Codex Borbonicus*, p. 21.

30. Clendinnen, *Aztecs*; Klein, 'Fighting with Femininity'.
31. Klein, 'Rethinking Cihuacoatl', p. 239.
32. Klein, 'Rethinking Cihuacoatl'.
33. It is of course a phenomenon of interest in the game of statehood and alliances, as often Mexica princesses married powerful leaders of other states that had been conquered or to whom the Mexica were allied.
34. See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Códice florentino* (facsimile) (Florence and Mexico City: Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and Archivo General de la Nación, 1979), book 2, fol. 68r.
35. Sahagún, *Códice florentino*, book 2, fol. 69v.
36. See Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). See also Kay Read and Jane Rosenthal, 'The Chalcan Woman's Song: Sex as a Political Metaphor in Fifteenth-Century Mexico', *Americas* 62 (2006), pp. 313–48.
37. See Sahagún, *Códice florentino*, book 3, fol. 2r.
38. See Sahagún, *Códice florentino*, book 3, fols 2v–3v.
39. Those who have looked at Coyolxauhqui as a feminist heroine have largely ignored the implicit and explicit critique of feminine sexuality in Coyolxauhqui's presence. While her dismembered body was remembered in the Nahua universe as feminine subordination, and thus may be resurrected in some way to assert feminist agency, one cannot ignore the sexually repressive nature of her role in this battle. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Alicia Arrizón, *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
40. Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan*, tr. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1997), pp. 235–8; Michel Graulich, 'Les grandes statues azteques dites de Coatlicue et de Yollotlicue', in Raquel Thiercelin (ed.), *Andes et Méso-Amérique: Cultures et sociétés* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1991). See also Susan Milbrath, 'Decapitated Lunar Goddesses in Aztec Art, Myth, and Ritual', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 8 (1997), pp. 185–206.
41. See Cecelia Klein, 'A New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue Called Coatlicue, "Snakes-Her-Skirt"', *Ethnohistory* 55 (2008), pp. 229–50. Klein argues persuasively that the decapitated Coatlicue signifies not the woman punished in this battle, but rather the goddess who engages in self-sacrifice to serve humanity.
42. The image comes from the *Templo Mayor*, an excavation of the main temple of Tenochtitlan.
43. See Sigal, *Flower and the Scorpion*.
44. On the Spanish, there is a vast literature. See particularly Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
45. See Schroeder, Wood and Haskett, *Indian Women of Early Mexico*; Susan Kellogg, *Weaving the Past: A History of Latin America's Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
46. Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex', in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), here pp. 173–7.
47. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, tr. Bruce Fink (1966; New York: Norton, 2002).
48. See Klein, 'Rethinking Cihuacoatl'.
49. *Tonalamatl of Aubin* (facsimile), <<http://www.famsi.org/research/loubat/Tonalamatl/thumbs0.html>> (accessed 21 May 2010), p. 5.
50. *Codex Borbonicus*, p. 3.
51. *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* (facsimile), in Eloise Quiñones Keber (ed.), *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 170; Sullivan, 'Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina'.
52. See Sahagún, *Códice florentino*, book 1, fols 5r–6v.
53. *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, p. 171.
54. *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, pp. 170–71.
55. See *Codex Borgia* (facsimile), ed. Gisele Díaz and Alan Rodgers (New York: Dover, 1993), p. 65. See also the parallel image on p. 67, where a masculine god appears in the same position as Chalchiuhtlicue.
56. Chalchiuhtlicue and Tlazolteotl together create a future. Through the figure of the phallic god(dess), we find that Nahua community will survive.
57. *Codex Borgia*, plate 74.
58. The flower signified the fertility of the world, and when connected with Tlazolteotl, related closely to sexual excess. On Tlazolteotl and all of the other goddesses in the *Codex Borgia*, see María de los Angeles Ojeda Díaz, *Las Diosas en los Códices del Grupo Borgia: Arquetipos de las mujeres del postclásico*,

- <<http://www.arts-history.mx/diosas>> (accessed 4 April 2009). On Tlazolteotl's relationship to the birthing process, see Ernesto De La Torre, 'El nacimiento en el mundo prehispánico', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 34 (2003), pp. 369–90.
59. See Cecelia Klein, 'Wild Woman in Colonial Mexico: An Encounter of European and Aztec Concepts of the Other', in Claire Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
 60. See Sullivan, 'Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina'; Patrice Giasson, 'Tlazolteotl, diedad del abono, una propuesta', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 32 (2001), pp. 135–57.
 61. Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to this New Spain, 1629*, ed. J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), p. 136.
 62. Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise on Heathen Superstitions*, p. 136.
 63. See Pete Sigal, 'The *Cuiloni*, The *Patlache*, and the Abominable Sin: Homosexualities in Early Colonial Nahua Society', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85 (2005), pp. 555–94.
 64. *Codex Magliabechiano* (facsimile) (Vienna: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1970), p. 155.
 65. Ruiz de Alarcón, in *Treatise on Heathen Superstitions*, pp. 137–8, states, 'Finally, it occurs to me that in this bath our Enemy has intended to imitate the Holy Sacrament of baptism since (as we Christians believe that by this means we attain the purity of the soul and the remedy against all the harms of faults and their results) this old and astute Enemy seeks that these unfortunate people, blind in their heathen errors, believe and persuade themselves that by these feigned baths they can attain the cleanliness of the body and free themselves of the diseases of temporal pains and harms. May God, through his mercy, disillusion them and bring them to a true knowledge, by inspiring in his ministers new fervors for the teaching of such a blind and barbarous people, in order that everything be converted into His great power and glory. Amen.' Here he repeats a common Catholic formula, often repeated in the Inquisition when Inquisitors pursue witches: the devil works to mimic Christian ritual in order fool people into believing that they are serving God. This is in fact what makes the devil so dangerous. For comments on this type of thought and the way it fits into conceptions of witchcraft, see Laura Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
 66. *Codex Magliabechiano*, p. 91.
 67. Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, p. 210.
 68. See Klein, 'Fighting with Femininity'.
 69. *Codex Magliabechiano*, p. 90.
 70. See Cecelia Klein, 'The Devil and the Skirt: An Iconographic Inquiry into the Prehispanic Nature of the Tzitzimime', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11 (2000), pp. 1–26.
 71. *Codex Tudela* (facsimile) (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1980), fol. 46r; *Codex Magliabechiano*, p. 153.
 72. *Codex Magliabechiano*, p. 152.
 73. See Klein, 'Devil and the Skirt'.
 74. See Lisa Sousa, 'The Devil and Deviance in Native Criminal Narratives from Early Mexico', *Americas* 59 (2002), pp. 161–79; Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
 75. Klein, 'Devil and the Skirt'.
 76. See Klein, 'Devil and the Skirt', p. 14.
 77. Klein, 'Rethinking Cihuacoatl'.
 78. *Codex Laud* (facsimile) (Vienna: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1966), pp. 27, 30.
 79. See Félix Báez-Jorge, *La voces del agua: El simbolismo de las Sirenas y las mitologías americanas* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1992).
 80. In the standard image of a Nahua woman, she is represented by her skirt and often her *huipil*, but not by a loincloth, a prototypical male signifier.
 81. Sahagún, *Códice florentino*, book 6, fol. 142r.
 82. See Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*.
 83. *Codex Laud*, p. 29.
 84. Indeed, Klein ('Devil and the Skirt', p. 10) notes, following Caso, that the skull and crossbones specifically signify the *chuateteo*.
 85. This view of the phallus as a signifier without a signified, or as intended to play a role only in the symbolic sphere – to assert power rather than the penis in the social sphere, relates to Lacan's analysis of a very different society and time period. The phallus in the Nahua world was a key signifier, as we can witness in the variety of phallic images in the pre-conquest texts. While one cannot provide a Lacanian analysis of

texts that do not fit into the society and timeframe of Lacan, I note the important parallels. For example, at one point Lacan argues, while critiquing another analyst's view of a particular woman, that nature and anatomy are irrelevant to analysis: 'Of course . . . [the phallus is] symbolic. It is in so far as the woman is in a symbolic order with an androcentric perspective that the penis takes on this value. Besides, it isn't the penis, but the phallus, that is to say something whose symbolic usage is possible because it can be seen'. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 2: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Sylvana Tomaselli (1978; New York, Norton, 1991), p. 272. Thus the signifier does not necessarily link to a signified anatomy, though one may imagine such a bodily portrayal, but rather must link to the symbolic world through which the signifier derives meaning. The phallus, the place of desire in the androcentric perspective of the western world, becomes for the Nahuas not necessarily the signifier of desire, but instead the central place of fertility in the Nahua cosmological universe. Thus we will see the presence of the phallus as a sign that fertility goes well beyond the signified use of male (or female) anatomy.

86. *Codex Laud*, p. 39.
87. See López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan*.
88. On the symbolism of the cave and the womb, see Félix Báez-Jorge, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Jacques Galinier, *El lugar de la captura: Simbolismo de la vagina telúrica en la cosmovisión mesoamericana* (Miradores del Mar: Editora de Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, 2008); Limón Olvera, *Las cuevas y el mito de origen*.
89. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, *Inquisición* 42, 18; Luis González Obregón, *Procesos de Indios Idólatras y Hechiceros* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1912), pp. 177–84.
90. Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise on Heathen Superstitions*, pp. 98, 205.
91. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 95.