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Women and Religion

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Virgin Mary in Latin America

- Female religious figures as means of empowerment for women?
- Marianismo
- Cult of the Virgin Mary
 - Example Bolivia

Female supernatural entities – empowerment for women?



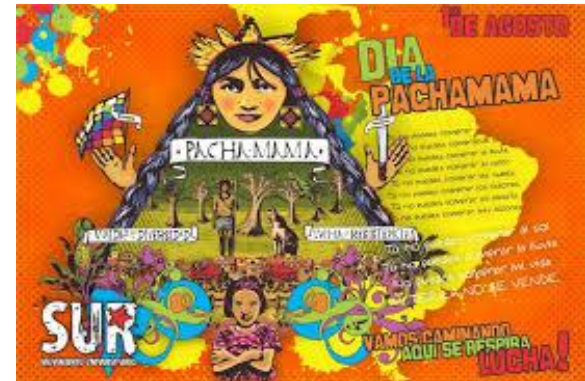
Part 1: Pachamama



- = Mother Earth
- provides nourishment and sustains society
 - => embodies the generative forces of the earth

nothing can exist without its opposite

- Pachamama needs the procreative powers of a male celestial counterpart
- => often paired with Illapa, the god of thunder and lightning, who provides the necessary rain



Andean Cosmology

- After death transformation into mallqui (feminine) and huaca (masculine)
- individuals reflect a part of an unified whole but gender distinct
- Andean couples = warmi-qhari (woman-man)
- => couples represent a unified whole

Religious “cargo” carried by couples



- Cargo = elective offices
- Couple is charge with overseeing religious (or civil) activities such as the organisation of a religious festival

Ecuador



Andean parallelism and complementarity

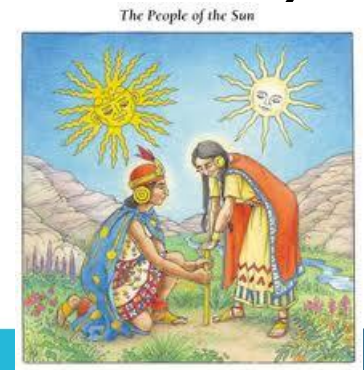
- Pachamama is also linked with Pachatira, associated with masculinity
- => Pachamama and Pachatira represent different aspects of the pacha's nature
- => distinct manifestations of Mother Earth
- They are not completely separate but distinct manifestations of a gendered Mother

Dual character of Mother Earth

- Susan Fitzpatrick Behrens writes that Pachamama and Pachatira do not only represent the pacha's nature as a nurturing figure but also as a potentially angry force "that may punish people and requires their worship and sacrifice in exchange for sustaining them." (p. 3416)

Incan cosmology

- Throughout their Empire (covering local deities) the Incas established a masculine Sun deity and a feminine Moon deity
- Inca kings = sons of the Sun and Inca queens = daughters of the complementary feminine Moon



Sun-Moon Ceremony



Spanish Conquest

- “the gender specificity of religious belief, practices, and rituals in pre-Colombian South America defied the logic of the Spanish”
- “Spanish Mediterranean monotheistic religion in which a supreme male deity dominated supported a patriarchal model of the society in which men presided over the family and society.” (Behrens, p. 3415)

Mary as Pachamama



Marianismo

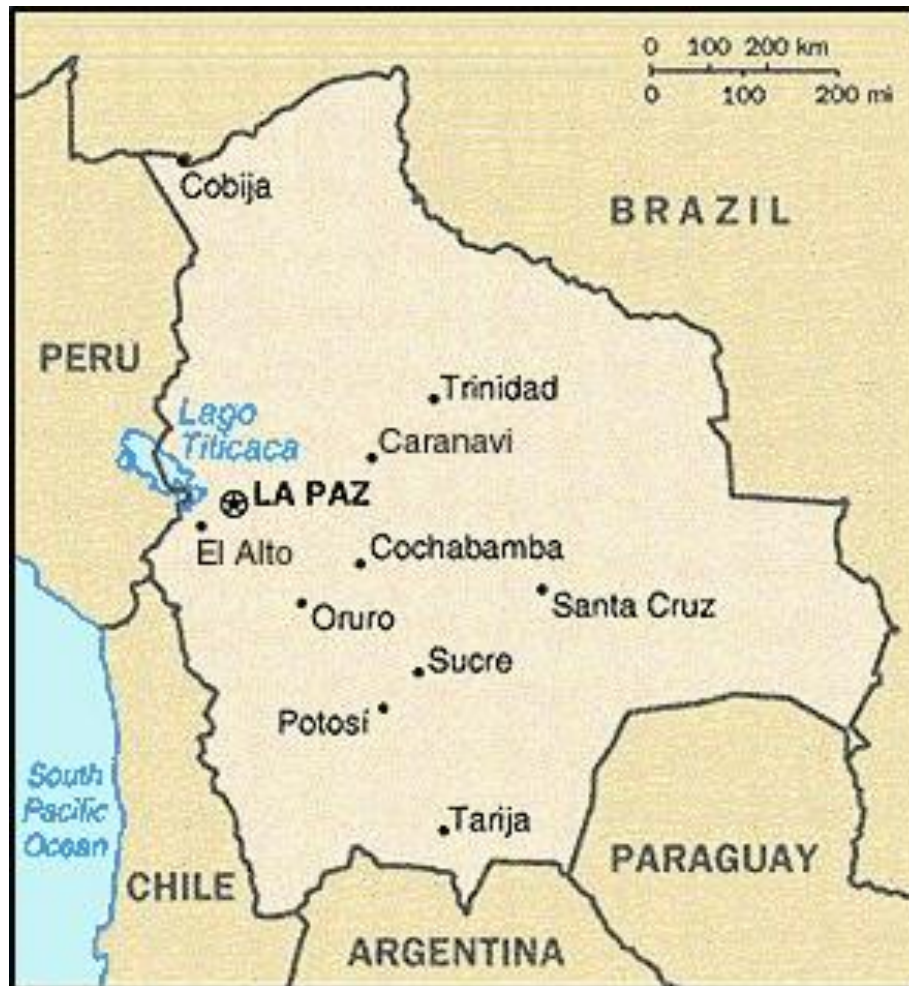
- 'the cult of feminine spiritual superiority, which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men' (Stevens 1973, 91).
- => Stevens characterises Latin American women with an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice , derived from the values attributed to the Virgin Mary.

Association of Pachamama with the Virgin Mary

- => Virgin became also associated with a dual character
- => perception of the Virgin as unifying good and bad
- derived from the cosmology of the Andes

Virgin of Urkupiña, Bolivia





Bolivia

- “According to the pilgrims, the Virgin Mary of Urkupina can not only act in ‘a good way’, as the Roman Catholic Church assumes Mary to, but also apply ‘evil’ powers.” (Derks/Heessels, p. 305)

Sanne Derks and Meike Heessels

- argue that “women do not accept their situation in a marianistic way. Rather, rage is a central concept in their religious experiences. As their economical, social and physical means are limited, women draw on spiritual powers, among which is the Virgin of Urkupina. The Virgin of Urkupina is not only venerated for her capacity to endure suffering, but also as a powerful goddess of vengeance.” (p. 303).

Story of Margarita

- “This *rabia* sits inside and swallows you up. I could not go anywhere. After all, where can you go with seven children? On one occasion I have expressed my *rabia* and fought with him. He came home drunk and couldn’t find his key. Then he tried to break the window with a stone and forced the door. I already knew what would happen. I despised him. At that moment the *rabia* took possession of me. I took a stick and smashed him on his knee. Normally, he is very quick, and when he hits me I fall down quickly. Usually he starts punching my face, next my belly, and afterwards I don’t know because I cannot remember. This time I attacked him before he could do anything. Only one time I did this and I have had to pay dearly for it Now I know that it is better to keep my *rabia* within me.” (Derks/Heessels, p. 309)

fighting back spiritually

- *Rabia* (rage) manifests itself in form of illness, with symptoms such as diarrhoea, headaches, lethargy and stomach aches
- Visiting a curandero (=local healer) makes the problem visible for community
- => men become morally accountable for violent behaviour

Derks and Heessels

- “As women have difficulties in changing their relationships, because social, economic and legal sources are limited, magic provides them with a powerful tool that operates in a different kind of logic. It gives them the power to interfere in their relationships on a spiritual level. Besides, it makes the female pilgrims feel strong in another way, not by using physical violence, but by using their wit and magic they try to establish an act of revenge.”

Mary as revengeful

- Principal of Reciprocity:
- The pilgrims assume that they cannot receive anything without giving something in return.
- Otherwise the Virgin Mary will take revenge

Mary as independent

- Not a mediator between God and humans but independent
- Mary has the power to evaluate the situation and decide independently if intervention is needed.



- Not a static statue but a woman of flesh and blood
- a powerful and authoritarian lady
- Jealous and strong

- Virgin of Urkupiña breaks up dichotomy of machismo and marianismo
- => she has become a feminine deity that incorporates machistic behaviour
- The Virgin of Urkupina “transgresses female gender stereotypes of herself” (Derks and Heessels, p. 312)



Readings

- Derks, Sanne and Meike Heessels. 'Battered women venerating a vicious Virgin: Reconsidering Marianismo at a Bolivian pilgrimage shrine'. *Culture and Religion* 12: 3 (2011): pp. 303-316.
- Olson, Carl (ed.), *The Book of the Goddess, past and present: an introduction to her religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
 - in particular chapters 7 (on the Virgin Mary)