

**POETIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INDIGENOUS WOMAN IN
CONJUROS Y EBRIEDADES: REVIVING TRADITION TO RENEGOTIATE
THE FUTURE**

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Romance Languages (Spanish / American).

Chapel Hill
2007

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ABSTRACT

TIFFANY DAWN CREEGAN MILLER: Poetic Representations of the Indigenous Woman in Conjuros y ebriedades: Reviving Tradition to Renegotiate the Future
(Under the direction of Juan Carlos González-Espitia)

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the way in which Tzotzil women, as featured in the book of poems Conjuros y ebriedades, are renegotiating Mayan tradition to position themselves in the future in accord with the feminist ideals of the EZLN at the global, communal, and household levels. The focus of the global aspect is on the way in which the poets are appropriating the exotic rendition of the “ethnic” from the Western perspective to attract international attention. The chapter addressing the fact that these women are appealing to traditions within their community specifically discusses their identification with the land and social conventions regarding the institution of marriage. At the household level, the following chapter then continues with this presiding notion of matrimony and addresses the prevalence of domestic violence and its effects within the family.

To Brian, you're my blue sky

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To complete a task of this magnitude requires a network of support, and I am indebted to many people for their help in bringing this project to fruition. The Nation Building and Popular Culture Working Group of the Consortium of Latin American and Caribbean Studies provided an outlet to discuss my research in its formative stages. Each of the readers of my thesis committee also offered insightful perspective: Sharon Mújica, Rosa Perelmuter, and María Salgado. Mostly though, I would like to acknowledge Juan Carlos González-Espitia, my trusted director and mentor, who has helped me in innumerable ways. Thank you for your gentle guidance and unfaltering courage.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Zapatista Women Negotiating the Revolution Before the Revolution

Poem in Two Beats and a Subversive Ending

FIRST BEAT

I
slid
down
the smile
of
word,
drilled.
That is my origin...
But,
I
don't remember
if
I
was expelled
or
if
I took my things
and
slid
down
thinking...

SECOND BEAT

It was
words
that
created
us.

They
shaped us,
and spread
their lines
to control

us.

A SUBVERSIVE ENDING

But
I
know
that
a few men
gather
inside caverns
in SILENCE

Never again will the Zapatistas be
alone....

-Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

The political situation in Mexico has recently received attention in the international sphere as the Zapatista Insurrection continues to demand “trabajo, tierra, techo, alimentación, salud, educación, independencia, libertad, democracia, justicia y paz” (Editorial) for the country’s indigenous population. Laura Carlsen cites Adelfo Regino in “Las mujeres indígenas en el movimiento social” to elaborate on Zapatista goals from the indigenous perspective:

Por primera vez en la historia, los pueblos indígenas de México nos planteábamos una seria articulación de nuestras demandas y aspiraciones. Un actor, incómodo para muchos, emergía en el escenario nacional y proponía una nueva relación entre los pueblos indígenas, la sociedad en general y el gobierno, basada fundamentalmente en el reconocimiento de derechos colectivos para la reconstitución de la vida indígena. (21)

Not only have Zapatistas organized in order to better the situation of the multitude of indigenous communities throughout Mexico, but along with their mestizo “leader” Subcomandante Marcos, they have also aligned themselves with women as a means of promoting feminism.¹ As Christine Eber and Christine Kovic point out in Women of

¹ Many scholars argue that Marcos would not identify as the leader of the Zapatistas, as implied by the prefix “Sub” of his title “Subcomandante.”

Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope, “it is important to bear in mind that women’s organizing did not begin with the Zapatista uprising. From the colonial period to the present day, women have played important roles in rebellions and nonviolent protests against Spanish and mestizo domination” (193). In the “Colofón” found directly after the poems in Conjuros y ebriedades Ámbar Past also acknowledges the key role that women have historically played in indigenous uprisings such as the revolt in Chamula of 1524, the Mayan rebellions of Chiapas in 1712 and 1869, and the indigenous movement of 1911 (160).² Significantly, the incorporation of women in Zapatista propaganda was not something that developed along the way as was the case in “earlier Latin American guerrilla movements like the Sandinistas of Nicaragua and the FMLN of El Salvador” (Kampwirth 112). On the contrary, “the inclusion of issues important to women and the transformation of traditional gender roles were a part of the overall Zapatista strategy before the uprising” (Forbis 238). The discrepancy between earlier Latin American revolutions and the contemporary Zapatista struggle concerning gender can be attributed to the fact that “the EZLN began life in a different world than that of earlier movements” (Kampwirth 114).³ On the one hand, these previous

² Originally from North Carolina, Ámbar Past is a self-declared hippy who moved to the Highlands of Chiapas to live with the indigenous people and escape from a sour marriage. She arrived in 1974, and has since then resided in San Cristóbal de las Casas. She is both a poet and founder of the publishing cooperative, Taller Leñateros. Conjuros y ebriedades is a collection of Mayan incantations traditionally pertaining to the oral tradition of the Highlands of Chiapas, which Ámbar Past compiled and translated from the original Tzotzil. Taller Leñateros published two bilingual editions of the collection featuring the original Tzotzil and Spanish in 1997 and later with English and Tzotzil in 2005. Significantly, the anthology is said to be the first written account of the poetic tradition of the region in over 500 years, since before the arrival of the Spanish. Scholars have reported on the Spanish reaction to indigenous texts during the Conquest in that many documents were burned. Simply because the European invaders did not understand the tradition from which the books were produced, they regarded them as evil and against the true faith of Catholicism.

³ EZLN is an acronym that refers to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

revolutions shaped institutions such as the Church and the creation of new organizations for both men and women. On the other, the EZLN took a worldwide presence after the Cold War had already shaped international politics whereas previous revolutions either occurred before or during that period in history (Kampwirth 114).

A primary result of the collaboration between the women's movement and the EZLN was the negotiation of the Revolutionary Women's Law, accepted internationally in 1993 and made public on January 1, 1994" (Forbis 238), the same day as the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A Tzotzil woman by the name of Susanna played an instrumental role in the drafting of the women's laws; she along with the other women who took part in the "First Uprising" in March of 1993 "traveled throughout communities in the forest talking to other women in order to extract and formulate from their thoughts a Law for Women" (Hernández Castillo 67). This statute addresses women's right to participate in the revolution, work and receive a just salary, decide their reproductive future, receive proper medical attention and education, freely choose their partner, be free from physical or sexual abuse, and occupy positions of leadership--Subcomandante Marcos has referred to this as the "revolution before the revolution" (Forbis 238). Significantly, those involved in the creation of the Revolutionary Women's Law were predominantly women; there is little evidence of male participation. When indigenous women originally presented this set of feminist platforms that were unanimously approved by the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI), Subcomandante Marcos describes in "The First Zapatista Uprising" that the reaction of the men in attendance differed from that of the women: "[t]he women leaders were singing, and the guys were scratching their heads" (69).

When indigenous women originally attempted to negotiate their situation, they were unsuccessful in that the Revolutionary Women's Law was not the result of a mutual agreement. Consequently in the years to follow, the reality women would experience sharply contrasted to the laws that were supposedly implemented.

As Teresa Ortiz acknowledges, women in Chiapas have found various outlets to promote their feminist agenda by becoming camaristas, teatristas, and tejedoras among other options. In their study dedicated to the way in which indigenous women work toward social change, Christine Eber and Christine Kovic comment:

Women's organizational efforts take place in the context of multiple and overlapping levels and forms of oppression. Their efforts to resist highlight the need to examine the ways that oppression operates at various levels. On the local level, women experience constraints within their families and communities. On the regional, state, and national level broader political and economic forces oppress them. (194)

Both Eber and Kovic in effect maintain that such endeavors occur in a context defined by the intersectionality of different means of oppression.

As indicated by Ortiz in addition to Eber and Kovic, women are clearly organizing in Chiapas in order to influence the politics of their situation, and their "activism takes various forms" (193). Many indigenous women have joined the ranks of the Zapatistas; there are a number of examples of women who have climbed the hierarchical chain of command of the EZLN. The international arena has grown accustomed to Zapatista communications delivered by Insurgentas Esther and Ramona.⁴ As leaders of the Insurgency, they are responsible for communicating to the world on behalf of the EZLN by means of public presentations as well as online publications. In

⁴ In order for women to participate in the armed struggle, it is obligatory that they refrain from having children during times of war. Although the EZLN claims to hold men and women to the same standards, there is either scarce or nonexistent evidence of the Insurrection requiring the same of its men. In this sense, there is still more that needs to be done to achieve equality.

addition to their role as a presiding officer over the ranks of the indigenous donning pasamontañas in the Lancandon Jungle, Esther and Ramona are also utilizing the word as a weapon to renegotiate their situation.

To define “renegotiation,” the term is essentially the combination of the prefix “re,” which means to do again, and the verb “negotiate.” Thus, the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term “renegotiation” as “a second or further negotiation.” The idea that a prior negotiation took place is intrinsic to the idea of negotiating again. The very fact that there is a need to renegotiate indicates that the previous arrangement was not adequate, thus begging the question of what was insufficient about the original to warrant restructuring. From this definition, an understanding of the word “negotiation” is necessary; Oxford then defines it as such: “to communicate or confer (with another or others) for the purpose of arranging some matter by mutual agreement; to discuss a matter with a view to some compromise or settlement” (emphasis in text). Implicit is the idea that more than one person work together in order to achieve a common goal; however, this was clearly not the case with the original Revolutionary Women’s Law.

With its establishment, the EZLN laid the foundation for a revision of patriarchal ideals. However, it is idealistic at best to assume that the changes occurred overnight. While it is a meritorious advance, the laws have not successfully resulted in a society completely characterized by equality. For example, the third pillar of the law states that “Las mujeres tienen derecho a decidir el número de hijos que pueden tener y cuidar.” This is clearly problematic when contraceptives are scarce; according to Monique J.

Lemaître approximately 80% of indigenous women have access to them.⁵ As a result of the discrepancy that exists between the Women's Revolutionary Law and the daily reality experienced by indigenous women, many feminists have critiqued the EZLN, as Rosa Rojas does in the first volume of Chiapas ¿y las mujeres qué?. As little more than discursive propaganda, she finds EZLN gender politics to be inadequate; she forcefully states:

No basta añadirle las demandas de “género” a las grandes líneas discursivas ... como lo hace el EZLN. La Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres no es garantía de subversión del orden patriarcal que impera en las comunidades del territorio zapatista, en Chiapas y en el resto del país, ni será algo más que una parcial declaración de buenas intenciones siguen [sic] siendo humanas de segunda clase impedidas por el autoritarismo-- que también las mujeres ayudamos a reproducir. (xi)

As Rojas recognizes, the Women's Revolutionary Law was innovative in that it marked the commencement of change. Nevertheless, it is imprudent to claim that with this decree the EZLN realized all necessary transformations. The indigenous women contributing to the collection Conjuros y ebriedades are also sentient of the point of dissension between the rhetoric of the law versus reality. Because the original negotiation that resulted in the Women's Revolutionary Law has not yielded a utopian society structured on the premise of egalitarianism, these women must continue to negotiate their situation. They must persist with their struggle until their demands become reality.

Although some women successfully defy the rules imposed upon them by society, such resistance is difficult given the fact that indigenous women have historically been

⁵ Lemaître recognizes, however, that this is rapidly changing in Chiapas.

told that they have absolutely no rights. A representative of Yajalón⁶ affirms the difficulty for women to engage in activities geared toward female liberation, including but not limited to the celebration of the “Día Internacional de la Mujer”: “No es tan fácil para la mujer indígena. Tienen problemas porque siempre les han dicho que no tienen ningún derecho. No las dejan salir, aparte de que no tienen dinero para salir y seguir luchando” (Apreza). Although there are few people seeking reform by way of literary production, those that do employ a wide variety of genres such as theatre, short stories, novels, essays, and poetry. While each of the aforementioned genres merits investigation, the present analysis will focus on poetry.

Subcomandante Marcos refers to the use of the “word” as a weapon in “Poem in Two Beats and a Subversive Ending,” which he includes in his book, Our Word is Our Weapon (2001).⁷ The rhetoric incorporating the word as a weapon is particularly significant given the tradition of the word in Mayan communities: “El arte más apreciado entre los tzotziles es el arte de la palabra. Las mujeres llaman escritura a las figuras que tejen en sus huipiles. Se usa el mismo verbo para decir escribir que para decir dibujar” (Past 150, emphasis in text). In this sense, both men and women have access to the word as a means of resistance. Although women have conventionally included words into their huipiles and have also served as their keepers via oral tradition, they have not “written” in the Western sense. From this perspective “un número importante de los miembros de sus comunidades son analfabetas” (Máynez 50) and do not know how to read (Past 149). Many women simply do not have the option to express their resistance with the word as defined by the Western alphabet. As a result of this perception of indigenous

⁶ Yajalón is a city located in the northeast of Chiapas, Mexico.

⁷ This poem is included as the epigraph to this chapter.

communities as illiterate, Antonio López Hernández emphasizes the importance of oral tradition: “Estos pueblos desde tiempo prehispánico han conservado su literatura a través de la tradición oral de los relatos, cuentos, fábulas, historias y rezos, guardados en la memoria de los abuelos” (1). Specifically in the collection of Mayan incantations entitled Conjuros y ebriedades, which is the main source for the present study, the poets also follow in the oral tradition of guarding the poems that their ancestors have passed down to them. The indigenous women contributing to the anthology are utilizing the word, as it is written by Past, to produce a written account of conjures, which have traditionally been kept alive via oral tradition by women within the community. In this regard, the women contributing to Conjuros y ebriedades are renegotiating the spoken and woven formats of the word that they have traditionally used in order to opt for its Western counterpart. The fact that they have decided to create a written record of poems that have historically existed via oral tradition accentuates their present renegotiation of convention. In this way, they are clearly broadening their audience to include readers pertaining to the Western tradition.

After organizing in San Cristóbal to enact the Women’s Revolutionary Law, the women became aware of the fact that they needed to appeal to the international sphere in order to enact change at the local level. Cognizant of the importance of their global visibility as an effective way to morph their immediate situation, the women who have collaborated to create Conjuros y ebriedades are appealing to a worldwide audience. They hope to produce a text capable of capturing its foreign reader’s attention, resulting in the exertion of external pressure on the status quo. They are aware that their demands posited in the Women’s Revolutionary Law from within the community were

unsuccessfully implemented. In the pursuit of foreign influence on the Mexican government from the outside and perhaps more specifically the “comandancia” of the EZLN, they appeal to an audience abroad.

With this added element to influence and ultimately enact a revision of gender norms, these indigenous women work within the dominant ideology already in place to renegotiate their present reality in accordance with their feminist goals. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, traditionally within the community many women are shamans that cure and heal the sick with their conjures. By utilizing the established tradition of the incantation that has traditionally survived through oral tradition, the women who have given birth to Conjuros y ebriedades have strategically employed the dominant ideology already in place to renegotiate their present situation in the tumultuous atmosphere of the southeast of Mexico. Essentially, they are appropriating the subaltern strategy of utilizing a role that has been traditionally assigned to them in order to follow the path of least resistance, subversively bringing forth their own agenda of liberation. If they at least appear to conform to social standards to a certain degree, they will encounter less opposition.

The poets featured in Conjuros y ebriedades export a collection of incantations from the female perspective in order to reposition themselves in the global, communal, and household contexts as well as to promote the “Women’s Revolutionary Law.” Additionally, they adapt tradition in order to capture the foreign reader’s attention and enlist their political support and influence. Thus, these women work within the dominant ideology already established to renegotiate their present reality in accordance with their feminist goals.

In this thesis, the second chapter will address the ways in which Mayan women are strategically renegotiating “authenticity” and “ethnicity” by working within the constraints of the dominant ideology, appealing to the international sphere in order to incite change at the local level. The third chapter focuses on the global context and addresses how the women are renegotiating their situation at the communal level. By rewriting tradition, the poets featured in Conjuros y ebriedades convey the way in which the indigenous identify with the Earth and religious deities in addition to convention surrounding the organization of marriages within the community. Finally, chapter four will focus on the presiding institution of marriage within the book of poems. Specifically, the poems discuss the general notion of equality that should exist between men and women before addressing the implications of domestic violence within a given household. By renegotiating Mayan women’s position in the global, communal, and household realm, the present study details the way in which they participate in the collaborative to strategically situate themselves in the modern world.

CHAPTER II

Global Politics of Ethnicity and Autochthonous Production

We are happy, sacred paper,
sacred book,
sacred words,
sacred paintings.

You've come out in another language
called English,
the tongue of the white folks
who have blond hair.

Don't scold us, book,
be of one heart,
sing and dance
because you are going to travel far away
to another land.

-Petra Ernánides Jiménez (translated by Ámbar Past)
February 16, 2005
San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

The Zapatistas and the Mayan women who wrote Conjuros y ebriedades recognize the importance of their reception in the global market as an effective means to change their situation. They have strategically made it more available to the public with the idea that with international recognition they will be able to change the daily reality they experience. Moreover, they have also presented their work in such a way that it entices the mind from the Western perspective. By appropriating the stereotype of what it means to be ethnic, they have presented the text in such a way that it captivates the Western imagination.

The production of the text itself is connected with the exportation of what the Western World perceives to be “indigenous;” the women are clearly appealing to gain attention in the world. Ultimately, they hope to spark international interest in their cause to build external pressure on the government to renegotiate the indigenous situation in Mexico.

These women, like the Zapatistas, have long known that in order to change their immediate situation, they need to attract international attention. This is why the majority of the EZLN’s publications can be obtained online at ezln.org.⁸ It is important to have electronic copies of the texts readily available on the Internet so that readers will print and disperse copies of these materials, promoting their overall visibility. The more accessible their publications, the more likely they are to attract desired attention at the global level. To promote their collection to a larger audience, the women who coauthor Conjuros y ebriedades have also utilized technology much like the Zapatista Insurrection has done. For example, in the electronic version of the collection, there are only certain poems that are available online.⁹ The goal is that these selected poems will spur enough interest to cause the reader to seek out the rest of the collection. If drawn to selections from the larger work, the reader would logically feel the urge to read the entire anthology.

⁸ The Zapatistas have effectively utilized modern technologies such as the Internet to further promote their cause. The many images in circulation of Subcomandante Marcos talking on his cellular phone and their active communication via their dynamic website indicates that the Zapatistas are embracing technological advances; they do so in order to determine their position in a constantly evolving global market.

⁹ The url address for the website containing the electronic version of selections of Conjuros y ebriedades is <http://cuwww.upr.clu.edu/exegesis/35/portada.html>, as of April 10, 2006. However, only the poems that have been translated into Spanish appear in this electronic edition.

To make the text more accessible, not only have these indigenous women utilized modern technology and the Internet, but versions are also available in both Spanish and English. For example, the fact that the prayer included in this chapter by Petra Ern ndes is written in English is telling of the intended audience; it is unmistakably directed at a reader from the non-Spanish speaking Western world. Although the native tongue of the majority of the women participating in the collaborative production is Tzotzil, they have opted to offer editions of the book in English and Spanish to make it more available to a larger readership.¹⁰ Undoubtedly there are more people that speak Spanish and English than there are of Tzotzil. Even if an individual speaks a Mayan language, the odds that he or she would speak Tzotzil are very slim due to the large number of indigenous languages in Mesoamerica.¹¹ For precisely this reason, and also because many of them are not literate in any language, let alone Spanish or English, these women are using a translator. The purpose of the present analysis is not to investigate the way in which the translator influences the reading of the collection. Nevertheless, the degree to which that role impacts the overall reading of the text is an issue that warrants analysis; in future research, I intend to undertake this endeavor for my dissertation at the Doctoral level.

In an article entitled “She of Great Writing, She of the Glyphs,”  mbar Past elaborates on her function as translator:

¹⁰ Tzotzil is an indigenous language spoken by the Tzotzil Maya people in Chiapas, Mexico; Tzotzil in addition to Tzeltal and Ch’ol are the most predominantly spoken languages of the region. Tzeltal is the language most closely related to Tzotzil, and together the two form the Tzeltalan sub-branch of the Mayan language family.

¹¹ Scholars consider Mesoamerican languages to include all autochthonous languages of the Mesoamerican cultural area. The region includes southern Mexico, parts of Honduras and El Salvador, and all of Guatemala and Belize; linguistically it contains several hundred different languages pertaining to seven different language families. For the purposes of this study, it is also pertinent to note that speakers of the languages of Mesoamerica were among the first to develop traditions of writing.

My goal as translator was to recreate—in another language—poetry as beautiful and fresh as the original. Both the Spanish and the English versions of the texts were translated directly from the Tzotzil. Some concepts—Kajval, Pukuj, Kaxail, wayhel, Potzlom—and plant names—tukum, xjuj, konkon—for which I could find no equivalent, were left untranslated. The Mayan metaphors were respected; the syntax, metric, and titles are my own. These are not line by line translations, but renderings of the magic. Echos [sic] from the eye of the universe call to the bird of our heart. From the womb of song the seers come to life. (50, emphasis in original text)

To further complicate the issue, Past conveys that others also merit recognition as co-translators in the “Notas sobre los colaboradores” in Conjuros y ebriedades: “El sabor y la frescura del habla de Xun Okotz y Petra Ernándes se aprecia en el lenguaje que empleamos en las traducciones” (181). Although Past states that Okotz should have been included in the collection as a co-translator, his name does not formally appear in the credits. She explains that Okotz himself asked that he be removed. In a letter addressed to Past, Okotz justifies his decision in the following manner:

[N]o quiero que pongas mi nombre en tu libro, porque no todo es mi trabajo; allí está el trabajo de Petra, el trabajo de la mamá de Petra, el trabajo de María Tzu, de Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’. Entonces no me siento contento, y además los textos están bien feos; casi como brujería. Fue muy fiero lo que me leíste aquella vez; dijiste: que una termita gigante coma su pene, que una culebra muerda su panza, que una avispa pique su culo, que un lombriz devore su corazón, dijiste. Entonces, cuando dijiste que me ibas a poner como cotraductor, pues ¡puta! me espanté, porque si mis compañeros me ven ahí, me van a matar de una vez. (181)

As a result of the obvious consequences in corroborating to facilitate the production of Conjuros y ebriedades conveyed by Okotz, the issue of who exactly translated the poems and to what extent presents complications. Nonetheless, the participation of both a linguistic and cultural translator undeniably serves to direct the work toward a larger audience.

In order to communicate their message with as many people as possible, the poets, much like the Zapatistas, are strategically incorporating alien elements into their discourse. Originally from the United States, Ámbar Past can be interpreted as foreign herself. In “Maya Zapatistas Move to the Ancient Future” Gary H. Gossen comments on the fact that many pan-indigenous movements strategically enlist the services of a non-indigenous leadership to promote their visibility:

Mayas have always constructed ethnicity, cosmology, historical reckoning, and political legitimacy by drawing freely from symbolic and ideological forms of other ethnic and political entities—particularly those perceived to be stronger than themselves—in order to situate and center themselves in the present. (535)

A North Carolina native and a University-educated mestizo respectively, Ámbar Past and Subcomandante Marcos are clearly examples of this trend. In essence, both the EZLN and the women forming part of the collaborative are examples of organizations employing this strategic tactic.

In addition, these Mayan women produce various copies of the text to further the accessibility of the anthology and thus promote a larger readership. According to Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), there are several negative consequences that result from the reproduction of a work of art.

According to the German theorist, the authenticity of a particular work of art is compromised. Benjamin explicitly claims that authenticity is irreproducible in that it is fundamentally linked to an object’s origin; he defines “authenticity” in the following manner:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when

substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object (1169).

However, the copies of Conjuros y ebriedades present a unique situation. The fact that the collection pertains to an oral tradition is fundamental from the indigenous perspective. Precisely for this reason, the “aura,” or “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction” (Benjamin 1169) resides in this notion of orality.

Significantly, the poems are a written record of “cantos [que] les fueron entregados por sus antepasados, los Primeros Padresmadres, quienes conservan el Gran Libro donde guardan los conjuros” (Past 149), traditional poems said to have been whispered into their ears while dreaming. The source of the poems is the Gran Libro, a sacred text of the Padresmadres with which only a select few within the community have contact; the poets share these poems with the others via song. Among the indigenous, not everyone is able to access the poems featured in Conjuros y ebriedades; even at the communal level there exists a layer of detachment from the source.

Moreover, the fact that the collection is a written account of oral poetry illustrates a further removal from tradition; the women that sing the incantations to the community communicate them in a way that differs from the presentation of a written text when read aloud. As a compromise forming part of their overall strategy, the Mayan poets featured in this collection concede a certain degree of what they deem “authentic” about the poems. They renegotiate what is deemed authentically indigenous as a subaltern strategy to gain leverage in the world and promote the visibility of their text, ultimately rendering multiple levels of detachment from tradition.

Notwithstanding such removal from indigenous customs, the poets project the image of the collection in accordance to what the Western audience perceives to be “authentically” indigenous. As opposed to reproduction solely by machinery as Benjamin depicts, from the Western stance each reproduction of the anthology is authentic and still preserves its aura precisely because the process of constructing each text is connected to traditional Mayan practices. According to the German theorist, however, the mechanical reproduction of a work of art “detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition” (1169). Clearly the fact that the copies of the text are the product of a traditional process is at odds with Benjamin’s conception of tradition.

In this regard, the actual poetry collection is a very unique object; it is not created like most books. The members of the cooperative produced the paper themselves using the long-established papermaking techniques of the indigenous. The copies of the text are distinctive because each one was handmade by way of a process characteristic of traditional Mayan papermaking. Every book is a work of art in itself, although they are all modeled after the same template. In a review of the collection featured in La Jornada in 1998, Gloria Hernández describes the work as “un libro-objeto-máscara cocinado con el sudor de las mujeres, con la presencia natural de la región de donde provienen estas poetas.” Significantly, she refers to the text as having been “cooked,” which is precisely what takes place. Raquel Peguero reports on the procedure resulting in the physical construction of each book in another review of the collection which appeared on September 27, 1998:

Estas artistas, remojaban cajas de cartón, cepa de plátano y pelos de elote, para después amasarlo todo y molerlo con flores y café. Con ello, una por una, fueron formando las carátulas en molde y dejadas a secar al sol. El papel para las guardas del libro fue realizado en una región de Tierra

Caliente por un grupo de mujeres mame. Ese papel fue llevado, hoja por hoja, a San Cristóbal, donde se tiñó de negro y se prensó en un tórculo. Otro equipo formateó los textos, hizo los negativos, cortó el papel para los interiores y aprendió el manejo de una máquina offset, para su impresión. Después, encuadernadores mayas cosieron y pegaron a mano cada tomo, y abrieron los ojos de la máscara, que aparece como portada del libro, con un fierro que inventaron.

The process by which each text is created not only underscores Mayan tradition regarding books and the written word, but also functions to illustrate the intimate connection between the indigenous and the Earth. However, these women are not strictly limiting themselves to “natural” materials historically used by their ancestors, as conveyed by the use of “cartón.” In addition to cardboard, they have also incorporated the use of coffee in their bookmaking.¹² According to Ámbar Past in a posting to an online forum entitled Book_Arts-L, she describes the production of the mask of the goddess of the Earth’s face, which functions as the cover to the collection:¹³ “Starting in 1996, painter Roselia Montoya from Huixtán directed the making of 4444 masks for the cover of the book, using old cardboard boxes, corn silk, rabbit skin glue, tar, camphor leaves, and instant coffee.” Clearly, there is nothing natural in any form or fashion about instant coffee, which Past specifies as “Nescafé” in the “Notas sobre los colaboradores” (184) of the anthology. While the women utilized the convention of using elements from the land to create the book, they innovated tradition in an organic, not necessarily conscious fashion, by appropriating materials that are not autochthonous.

These local renovations of tradition are organic in that they are changes taking place at the same time as changes occurring at the international level, which ultimately

¹² Originally, Europeans imported coffee to the Americas from Africa as a crop equivalent to modernity. It was not originally indigenous and thus was not used in the traditional papermaking techniques of the ancient Maya.

¹³ The goddess of the Earth is Kajval.

affect local circumstances. As another instance of renegotiating their position, these women both react and confront changes they experience. Much like the prevalent use of the Internet in Zapatista strategy, the combination between traditional and contemporary papermaking techniques speaks to the fact that indigenous agency is not frozen in a bucolic past; rather, it is constantly changing and evolving to adapt to reality.

Directly relating the text to tradition, it is incensed with copal while Petra Ern ndes prays over it upon completion of each copy.¹⁴ Thus, the production of Conjuros y ebriedades does not confirm what Benjamin describes as the “shattering of tradition” (1170) with the reproduction of a work of art. Moreover, the creation of these texts required the corroboration of “150 personas, mujeres tzotziles, ya enumeradas” (Peguero); thus each copy is the product of the communal effort of these women.

Precisely due to its oral nature, the fact that the collection is the creation of a community contributes to the preservation of the aura that Benjamin associates with the authentic piece of art. Significantly, communal artistic production in indigenous cultures substantially differs from that of the Western world, in which, as depicted by Benjamin, a work of art is the product of the individual. This point of contention ultimately renders Conjuros y ebriedades an exception to the Western view of reproduction as equivalent to the loss of aura. In Western cultures, access to the work of art symbolically functions as a way to establish contact with the artist, a figure which is inextricably connected to the historical inception of the piece. As Benjamin accurately affirms, upon the loss of the origin, or the death of the author, there no longer exists the possibility of producing a similar item, thus causing the aura and market value of the work to increase. When the

¹⁴ The prayer featured at the beginning of this chapter is recited by Petra Ern ndes upon completion of each English version of the collection.

work of art is produced by a community, however, the aura of authenticity hinges upon the continued existence of the group, as opposed to the individual. With the group's survival, the aura persists unaltered. In this sense, the poets are yet again enacting a renegotiation of tradition, in this case regarding their definition of art. Appropriating the individuality characteristic of the Western author, *Ámbar Past* includes the names of the different poets below their corresponding texts. Nonetheless, the accredited authors do not represent the incipency of the poems. Notwithstanding the fact that *Past* may be formally recognized as the author of the translation, the authors of the poems themselves are the community, comprised specifically of a community of women giving voice to their predecessors with whom they are intimately linked.

Émile Durkheim would also underscore the significance of the community in *Conjueros y ebriedades*, maintaining that the prayer performed by Petra Ernánides distinguishes the text as a product of a ritual, or a work of art. According to Durkheim, the ritual is an attempt to change the world or at least believed to yield a certain result; the power of ritual stems from faith, which derives itself from the community as a whole. As everything is derived from society, ritual also affirms social identity. In the grand design of ritual activity, the object serving as a symbol moves from the profane to sacred through rigid structuring of the ritual. Durkheim elaborates on this notion of sacred versus profane:

Sacred beings are, by definition, separate beings. They are characterized by a discontinuity between them and profane beings. Normally, the sacred and the profane are outside each other. A whole set of rights exists to bring about his crucial state of separation. (221)

Simply because everyone holds these same beliefs that deem the object as sacred, the importance of the collective unity as opposed to the individual is yet again emphasized.

Essentially, society is perhaps the most significant aspect of religion and identity according to Durkheim. Benjamin agrees that the ritual plays a key role regarding authenticity. In fact, the earliest works of art originated in the service of ritual; Benjamin describes the relationship between a piece of art and the ritual: “the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value” (1171). Essentially, it is impossible to separate a work of art from its aura and its ritual function, that which renders art authentic.

Because of the traditional process of papermaking in addition to the ritual that occurs after each copy of the text is produced, the women present the collection as a collective symbol of what is “indigenous.” Although the indigenous composition of the EZLN is diverse, Gossen discusses the strategy of highlighting aspects with which everyone in the movement identifies: “What is Maya about the Zapatista movement must therefore be sought not in particular variants of Maya or other Indian cultural identity but rather in general principles of values and conduct that all might share, be they Tzotzils, Tzeltals, Tojolabals, Chols, or Zoques” (536). They have recognized that organizing to incite change is not fruitful if they focus on their individual differences. The women contributing to Conjuros y ebriedades engage in the same practice in order to export a text reflecting the commonalities behind all of their identities, in the meantime appealing to institutionalized stereotypes in order to satisfy Western expectations of them.

Coincidentally, the association of the text with natural elements from the environment and with a ritualistic process upon its completion is precisely what a reader from the Western perspective expects from a collection created by a group of indigenous women. In other words, there is a stereotype that the typical Western reader anticipates

to be upheld. He or she associates autochthonous people with traditional practices and rituals in addition to nature. In this sense, as Rey Chow has explained in The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism, it is possible for “a fascination with mimeticism as an older—indeed, anthropologically primitive—mode of representation, wherein a magical, immanent resemblance between sign and thing can somehow still be fantasized, imagined, and posited” (102). This nostalgia for what we perceive to be exotic leads to a delicate balance between the indigenous culture and that of the dominant society. In other words, an ethnic person always struggles to maintain equilibrium between factors exerting an influence on the representation of the cross-ethnic in the postcolonial world.

As the Mother country, Spain left Latin America with a legacy characterized by two dominant cultures struggling for dominancy. In this sense, both shape the lives of the people experiencing the cultural clash. Because the citizens of these nations are the products of both cultural manifestations, they are cross-ethnic. However, the representation of the cross-ethnic is never indicative of an equal balance; Chow affirms this stance:

In cross-cultural representation, if conditions are not entirely equal—and they are, of course, never entirely equal—the problematic of stereotyping, which is also the problematic of privileged, prejudiced, out-of-focus viewing ... will increasingly emerge. (100)

Cross-ethnic individuals have to reconcile scrutiny from both sides of the equation insofar as they are never fully able to recognize themselves in either of the two cultures contributing to their identity. Ultimately, the impossibility of an equally balanced representation of the cross-ethnic causes stereotyping and marginalization, even as a cross-ethnic person appears as him or herself. He or she is an amalgamation of influences from the two ethnicities who suffers mistreatment from components of both

cultures contributing to their identity. Even if a person who is the result of such a blend does indeed exhibit features and qualities from both cultures, they are never able to identify enough with either ethnicity, causing them to suffer alienation from both cultural spheres.

According to Rey Chow, there are essentially three levels of mimeticism that play a role in the formation of cross-ethnic identity.¹⁵ The third level of mimeticism is the most significant for the purposes of the present phenomenon in which Tzotzil poets are appropriating what is anticipated to be indigenous from the Western perspective. Chow describes this aspect of mimeticism as “the level at which the ethnic person is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic” (107) and accentuates the importance of this last level of mimeticism in that “the original that is supposed to be replicated is no longer the white man or his culture but rather an image, a stereotyped view of the ethnic” (107). Essentially, those pertaining to the category of “ethnic” do not only strive to imitate the standards of the dominant, white culture, but they are also expected to own and exhibit the ethnic component of their identity. In order to fully own the Western “self” according to James Clifford, two elements must be present: ownership in addition to exhibition of what is owned.¹⁶ Chow accurately summarizes Clifford’s stance in that “it is objecthood, rather than subjecthood, that defines the self” (111). For all intents and

¹⁵ Chow maintains that the first level of mimeticism corresponds to the way in which “the white colonizer, his language, and his culture stand as the model against which the colonized is judged; the latter is expected to imitate, to become like his master” (104). Despite the attempts on behalf of the colonized, he or she will always remain inferior, an “improper copy.” The second level of mimeticism is a complication of the first in that “the existential efforts made by the colonized, rather than being dismissed as inadequate, begin to assume a certain complexity [as indicated by] the ambivalent wishes and resentments embedded in her identitarian plight” (104).

¹⁶ The notion of ownership is largely a contributing factor to the revival of the Zapatista Revolution in recent history. Despite the fact that many indigenous people do not own deeds to the land, they still feel that they should be allowed to farm a portion of it.

purposes, ethnic people have to own their indigenous identity in order to be really considered “indigenous” from the Western perspective. As such, these Mayan women have identified with their roots in the production of the text in order to advance a work of art that represents what Durkheim would describe as the collective unconscious of what is “indigenous.” Exporting a text representative of the “ethnic” in accord with preconceived Western expectations, the poets of Conjueros y ebriedades are effectively attracting a large readership. The tactic is that the unique nature of the book itself will attract readers’ attention worldwide.

By appealing to the “exotic” associated with tradition—the source of the poems themselves as well as the creation of each book—the goal is to draw a large audience because of nostalgia to get close to what is posited as exotic. The poets are cognizant of the fact that interest is sparked in more people at the international level by creating the text to be a collective symbol of the “ethnic” and aligning it with Mayan tradition. The women have used the innovative and organic strategies of a translator, making the Spanish and English editions possible, as well as technology in general to promote the text’s visibility. Those participating in the collaborative did not simply produce this collection for their immediate surroundings; instead, they have worked to position the book at the international level by strategically renegotiating authenticity and the “ethnic.” Most importantly, the Tzotzil poets featured in Conjueros y ebriedades have strategically used the text to position themselves in the global context.

CHAPTER III

Rewriting Communal Tradition in the Highlands of Chiapas

¿Quién es su madre?
Glifos de los cielos.
Glifos de las nubes.

¿Quién es su madre?
Y se dice,
Ix Hun Tah Dzib, La de la Gran Escritura,
Ix Hun Uooh, La de los Glifos.

Los glifos correspondientes,
que iban juntos,
se separaron,
de ahí adquirió el conjuro que sale de la saliva.

-Ritual de los Bacabes

Significantly, women are not only renegotiating their position in the international sphere, but they are also doing the same at the communal level by rewriting tradition via the poetry of Conjuros y ebriedades. Merriam Webster offers a number of different definitions for the term “tradition,” each reflecting the social reality of a given culture. First, a tradition may be explained as “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom).” This cultural manifestation of a particular group is generally continued because of “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction” (“Tradition”). The key phrasing of this plausible definition of tradition resides in the oral component of maintaining tradition, which can also be interpreted as the “cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and

institutions.” From all of the aforementioned readings of the term “tradition,” it is inherent that tradition is directly contingent upon the presence of a community.

Utilizing Durkheim’s notion of the community as developed in the second chapter, the obvious emphasis is on the collective as opposed to the individual. Essentially, Durkheimian identity is socially constructed as opposed to individually created. According to Durkheim, religion and society are parallel. Preceding the translation by Carol Cosman of Durkheim’s The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Mark S. Cladis summarizes the social anthropologist’s thesis concerning religion:

[R]eligion emerges from the cauldron of collective effervescence and that religion is a symbol of the group’s collective life ... Religion, then, is a set of beliefs and practices by which society represents itself to itself. It is the way society experiences itself as itself. (xx)

In order for a faith to be deemed a religion, there must be a network of individuals that together hold the system of beliefs, or the religion, to be true. Society, then, is the basis of religion, or consciousness, which is essentially the basis of society. Consequently, society is a congregation of a multitude of individuals sharing the common belief, emphasizing the collective as opposed to the individual. Religion exists as a result of the collective unconsciousness which is objectified by symbols, social facts held to be true by many. Basically, identity is fundamentally influenced by society, which is reinforced by the collective.

For years, anthropologists have been interested in the Tzotzil community, and the number of studies scholars have conducted speaks to this fact. Although it is but one example, the Harvard Chiapas Project led by anthropologist Evon Z. Vogt took place between 1957 and 1980. The objectives of the project are described by Vogt himself in a

copy of the proposal, which is featured in Fieldwork among the Maya: Reflections on the Harvard Chiapas Project.¹⁷

The aims of the project are to describe the changes currently occurring in the cultures of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal Indians in Chiapas, Mexico, as a result of the action program of the National Indian Institute of the Mexican government; and to utilize these data for an analysis of the determinants and processes of cultural change (82).¹⁸

A number of dissertations and senior theses resulted from this research, in addition to various publications from Vogt himself. Despite all that was learned about the accepted cultural practices of indigenous communities in Chiapas at the time, in “Ancient Maya and Contemporary Tzotzil Cosmology: A Comment on Some Methodological Problems,” Vogt questions whether it is possible to speak of Tzotzil cosmological concepts and social structure. He refers to evidence collected by contemporary investigators of the time, which indicated that “there is not only significant variation from one Tzotzil municipio to the next, but that municipios themselves manifest important internal variations” (193, emphasis in text). Despite the apparent impossibility to define such components of Tzotzil tradition, scholars agree that it is based upon the indigenous notion of what it is that constitutes a community. Moreover, they recognize that “tradition” is not a stagnant entity. Rather, it is constantly changing to evolve with the inevitable shifts in society: “all of our empirical evidence on languages and cultures indicates that these systems are in a constant state of change, even though the rate of change may be very slow” (Vogt 192). Because it is unfeasible to focus on all aspects of Tzotzil tradition, the

¹⁷ Vogt submitted the proposal for review to the National Institute of Mental Health on March 22, 1957 and to the National Science Foundation on July 15, 1957.

¹⁸ The use of the term “Indian” is clearly indicative of the fact that this research was conducted by “white” scholars. Although this must be taken into account, their findings are valuable in that they do illustrate many fundamental cultural concepts of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal indigenous people featured in the study.

purpose of this present investigation is to expose how the Tzotzil women that are participating in Conjuros y ebriedades are utilizing the poetic tradition that has historically been assigned to women as a subaltern strategy to comment on their position within society. Working within a permitted medium of expression, the poets write to depict conventional practices within the community. After foregrounding the dominant tradition in a poem, the very next text depicts implications of such social norms regarding their position in society.

The fact that several poems in which the poets address similar themes are juxtaposed within the collection is significant in order to interpret Conjuros y ebriedades as a social act according to the commentary of Hugo Achugar in “The Book of Poems...” from Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. In this essay he asserts that poems must be read in the order in which they appear to capture the meaning of the book as a whole:

The book of poems is a unity whose motive is individually articulated with social processes. It has a syntax that draws together poems, epigraph, dedications, and so on, overdetermining and sometime romanticizing them. Thus it proposes a particular reading of the whole, and the isolated poem should be read in such a way that its integration into the whole of the book changes its meaning. This syntax, violated each time we read the book at random, disregarding the proposed organization, is a formalization of voice. This basic speaker’s voice is shaped for this syntax and is informed by an aesthetic-ideological perspective. (653, emphasis in text)

Achugar continues with this rationale to declare that by inserting a book of poems into what he describes as an “ideological cultural system,” it becomes a social act. Conjuros y ebriedades exemplifies Achugar’s commentary, as the poems in the collection build upon one another to voice a politically charged message of the community.

Specifically in “Para sembrar la tierra” (37), Jwana te la Krus Posol posits the traditional relationship connecting the Tzotzil to the Earth. In the poem directly

following it, “Encanto para no tener que ir al otro lado” (39), Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ appropriates the traditional way in which the Tzotzil have historically identified with the Earth to appeal to Kajval so that the speaker of the poem does not have to migrate to the United States. In “Para que no venga el ejército” (103) Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ makes implicit reference to the current Zapatista struggle by utilizing the tradition already present of invoking religious deities to prevent harm as portrayed in “Para que las lagartijas no coman el frijol” (97) and “Para que el maíz no se acabe tan luego” (101) by María Tzu. Finally, Petra Ernánides López establishes the customary procedure for organizing a marriage in “Encantamiento para atraer a un hombre” (31) in order to reflect the disparity between the reality of society versus social norms concerning romantic relations and marriage in “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” (33). In each of the aforementioned examples from Conjuros y ebriedades, the poets take advantage of the poetic tradition associated with women, and they appropriate the institutionalized, accepted ideology of the community to comment on modern-day issues influencing the reality specific to their situation.

In the community where the Tzotzil reside, the women live a life that is very separate from the men. Ámbar Past describes this division in the “Colofón” of the collection:

[L]as mujeres viven muy apartadas de los hombres. Con excepción de las parejas casadas, hombres y mujeres no hablan entre sí; hablar también quiere decir tener relaciones sexuales. Cuando una mujer tiene que platicar con un hombre que no es su marido, lo hace sin mirarle a la cara. Debido a esta separación las mujeres han ideado una mitología femenina que los hombres desconocen. (165, emphasis in text)

Even though both women and men incorporate poetry, women invoke deities of which the men simply are unaware. There is a definite division in society between men and

women, and the faction is further illustrated by an interview with Xun Okotz, who Ámbar Past describes as “uno de los hombres que más sabe de la cultura tzotzil” (166) in the “Colofón” to the collection. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ámbar Past claims that Xun Okotz should be accredited as a co-translator; she informs readers in the English edition of Conjuros y ebriedades that Okotz worked with anthropologists affiliated with Harvard and the University of Chicago nearly fifty years ago.¹⁹ However, his answers clearly reflect that if he is indeed a knowledgeable scholar in the field, then he may only claim expertise regarding male tzotzil culture:

Madre de la Noche, no lo sé.
Madre del Mes, tampoco.
Madre del Viento, no conozco.
Madre del Granizo, más o menos.
Madre del Máiiz, no sé.
Madre Seno, no sé.
Madre de la Niebla, no sé.
Piedra de la Mujer, no sé.
Madre de la Tierra, no sé.
Madre del Agua, no sé.
Madre del Fogón, no sé.
No sé nada de estas cosas,
mi padre está muerto y nunca
me contó nada de esto. (Past 166)

Interestingly enough, when asked about deities associated with the “Madre,” or mother, Xun Okotz repeatedly affirms that he does not know about these feminine figures by stating, “no sé.” To excuse his lack of knowledge, he claims that his father has passed away and that he never informed him of such religious entities. As opposed to receiving the information from his mother, he justifies that his father never explained their significance to him. Undoubtedly the division that exists between the genders in poetic expression creates what could be interpreted as two acceptable systems of production in

¹⁹ It is important to take into account that the presentation of the Tzotzil people in studies such as these are influenced by the way “white” scholars convey the texts.

which poetry is socially permitted insofar as there are two different sets of norms, corresponding to the male and female. Having established that it is impossible to speak of “Tzotzil poetry” in general due to the obvious discrepancy between male and female traditions, it becomes pertinent to question whether or not these women are functioning in accordance to the dictates of their female situation or if they are subversively working against the status quo.

Based upon the introductory poem to the collection and this chapter, the poets align themselves with the feminine tradition of the “Gran Escritura” and the “madre.” In his investigations exploring the frontiers of psychoanalytic theory of the subconscious, Carl Gustav Jung analyzed the archetype of the mother in depth in Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype. He described the mother archetype as connected to “any woman with whom a relationship exists” and “often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness” (345). In autochthonous religions all over the globe, the Earth is traditionally connected with the mother archetype precisely as a result of its association with fertility. Significantly at the onset of Conjuros y ebriedades, it is established that the collection conforms to the tradition of the word as mother:

¿Quién es su madre?
Glifos de los cielos.
Glifos de las nubes.
¿Quién es su madre?
y se dice,
Ix Hun Tah Dzib, La de la Gran Escritura,
Ix Hun Uooh, La de los Grifos. (6)

To further establish the book of poems as following in the historic tradition of Mayan incantations, this selection is attributed to the Ritual de los Bacabes, a text whose original codex in Nunkiní dates to the end of the sixteenth century (Arzápalo 10). Ramón

Arzápalo Marín elaborates on the content of the ritual: “Los 68 textos que componen la obra son en su gran mayoría conjuros para la curación de enfermedades, producto de una armoniosa combinación de conocimientos médicos, botánicos, mágicos y religiosos, presentados en un lenguaje literario y esotérico” (10). The use of the expressions, “Glifos de los cielos” and “Glifos de las nubes” specifically functions as a direct reference to folio 51 (51.131 - 51.132) of the Ritual de los Bacabes.²⁰ Moreover, both texts are written in the same style of prose insofar as they are both examples of Mayan, ritualistic literature, which was traditionally written “en versos pares; pares de versos que quieren decir lo mismo, o que dicen lo contrario uno del otro” (Past 172). Ramón Arzápalo Marín comments on the same literary technique in his analysis of the Ritual de los Bacabes in that sometimes analogies are juxtaposed “por la ‘igualdad’ relajada de los sinónimos” (14). As is the case with Conjuros y ebriedades, Marín is cognizant of the presence of paradoxical concepts presented alongside one another. However, he does not interpret such allusions in the literal sense, but rather in the metaphoric: “La paradoja considerada como metalogismo, merece aquí una reflexión más profunda, ya que al entrar al campo de la lógica no podemos descartar la posibilidad de que “la lógica maya” esté culturalmente condicionada” (18). As an example, he states that the expression, “Yo soy tu madre, yo soy tu padre” could perhaps be better interpreted as a metaphor to mean “Yo soy tu progenitor / de mi dependes, soy el origen” (18). Given the aforementioned examples, Conjuros y ebriedades shares some of the same literary techniques present in the Ritual de los Bacabes. They are also both written in the same style of syntax, which

²⁰ In folio 51 of Ramón Arzápalo Marín’s translation, the verses are as follows:
 [uoh ti can] < Uooh tii caan> (Glifos de los cielos),
 Ix [uoh ti] < uooh tii>> munyal (Glifos de las nubes). (304)

is not characteristic of the language used for daily interactions: “la sintaxis con la que nos enfrentamos aquí no es naturalmente la del lenguaje coloquial ni tampoco la del estilo narrativo” (Arzápalo 16). Ámbar Past agrees that the syntax generally associated with sacred rituals differs from that which is employed in ordinary conversation.²¹

Most importantly, by establishing the collection within the tradition of the Ritual de los Bacabes, the poets who contribute to Conjuros y ebriedades are also able to foreground their work as a collection of poetic incantations. Both collections include poems intended to cure the sick: “Una conjuradora soba al paciente con su canto. Las palabras se vuelven de fuego para ganarle al hechizo del enemigo; la ilol²² puede apoderarse de las palabras de un brujo y volver en su contra el mal que conjuró para otro” (Past 151, emphasis in text). In fact, Past realized that the women were the keepers of such poetry as a direct result of an outbreak of an epidemic that plagued Magdalenas village. According to Past, she went to San Cristóbal for help, but no doctors came, resulting in the deaths of many children. Past was aware of the incorporation of foreign influences into the Highlands of Chiapas upon her first interaction with the poems. In an article entitled “The Poetic Hearts of Mayan Women Writ Large” which appeared in the New York Times on May 11, 2005, Dinitia Smith describes Ámbar Past’s account of her first experience with the women’s poetry in 1975: “In the cemetery, she said, she saw a woman carrying her dead baby lying on a board and wrapped in a shawl for burial. The

²¹ In the “Colofón” of Conjuros y ebriedades Past describes her experience with the poetry of the Tzotzil women contributing to the collection:

Los tzotziles dicen su poesía todos los días, pero el lenguaje de sus poemas no es coloquial ni cotidiano. Para entender el tzotzil ritual, tuvimos que consultar los diccionarios bilingües que hicieron los frailes coloniales, contemporáneos de Góngora y Cervantes. El vocabulario de los conjuros es muy antiguo. Ya no lo entendemos del todo ya, pero forma parte de nuestra carne y a diario lo soñamos. (170)

²² The word “ilol” in Tzotzil means “seer,” a person who cures the sick with prayer and ritual.

mother offered her dead child a last sip of Coca-Cola and uttered a prayer.” According to Smith, Ámbar Past is still able to recall the prayer from memory:

Take this sweet dew from the earth,
Take this honey.
It will help you on your way.
It will give you strength on your path.

According to the very lyrics of the prayer, the speaker is giving the deceased honey to ease the difficulty of his or her journey after death. However, according to Past, the woman reciting this prayer opted not to offer the traditional honey, but instead gave the dead child another sweet, liquid substance that is neither part of tradition or naturally found in the region. From Past’s immediate introduction to the poetic tradition among the women, it is evident that the Maya are adapting to foreign influences, as represented by Coca-Cola, a symbol of the capitalistic imperialism of the United States. In the twenty-first century of global politics and Neoliberalism, it simply is not possible to speak of the Tzotzil as being isolated from external forces as was commonplace in the past.²³

Notwithstanding their acceptance of the infiltration of alien elements, these indigenous women make it very clear that they are not willing to leave their land. In essence, they tolerate foreign influences provided that they come to Chiapas. Historically, the indigenous have strongly identified with the land and their religion is centered on the Earth and deities from nature. Anthropologist Calixta Guiteras Holmes presents the cosmic vision of Manuel Arias Sojom, a Tzotzil leader of San Pedro Chenalhó of the 1940s and 1950s:

²³ There is always an exchange between indigenous communities and the outside world, causing both ideologies to influence one another.

The deities that personify man's habitat are the Earth and the 'Anhel. They are ageless and everlasting.

The Earth is the mother of universal life. She is the most compelling power in the universe. She is the supreme power. All others seem to form part of her or have proceeded from her depths. She is goddess of the wilderness and mistress of the forest. Her wrath is easily roused and she bestows her gifts only when she is pleased.

She brings forth and fosters all creatures, but is simultaneously their common grave. She relentlessly swallows back, as a monster, the beings that she produces. All that live on her surface come from her interior and return there. She is all-producing, all-maintaining, all-devouring.

The cosmic forces—fire, wind, rain, the eclipse, the earthquake—are manipulated by the earth. Disease and famine are manifestations of her wrathful moods. The forces of evil can be traced to the earth. Evil and good in man are related to his wayhel, the animal soul that makes him one with the earth.

She grudgingly tolerates man's living on her surface, and allows him to prey on her creatures. She takes advantage of any opportunity to drag man's ch'ulel into her recesses. When she is offended by the stench of human excrement, she will sicken man and prevent his recovery. She resents procreation. (289)

Manuel underscores the connection between human beings and the Earth when he mentions the companion animal of the soul, the wayhel. William R. Holland elaborates on the Mesoamerican notion of the wayhel:

The Tzotzil believe that when a person comes into the world, a companion animal (wayijel) is born in the sacred mountain of his patrilineage at exactly the same time. From birth until death, the person's destiny is intimately bound to that of his companion animal because the two share the same spirit. If either should be injured or become ill, the other has the same experience at precisely the same moment. The two are assumed to share many of the same character traits. Just as there are great individual differences among people, there is a wide variety of possible companion animals. Some are timid and reserved; others are aggressive and domineering. A large, strong, and intelligent person is presumed to have been born with an equally superior companion animal. The most desired companion animals are the jaguar, ocelot, puma, and coyote, while those generally considered less powerful are the lynx, wildcat, fox, raccoon, and weasel. (303, emphasis in text)²⁴

²⁴ The wayhel and wayijel are linguistic variations of the nagual, which is the traditional animal companion to the soul in other parts of Mesoamerica.

Interestingly enough, not even the wayhel has been safe from the penetration of foreign influences. Ámbar Past describes that their accommodations in the sacred mountains along with the Padresmadres feature technological amenities: “Allí tienen todo tipo de cosas: radios, rocolas y hasta computadoras y videocaseteras” (151).²⁵ Despite the infiltration of modern concepts to their traditional way of life, the Tzotzil have continued to identify with the Earth. In keeping with tradition, many of the poems featured in Conjuros y ebriedades directly speak to this connection with nature. For example, in “Para sembrar la tierra,” Juana te la Cruz Posol manifests a poetic voice speaking in the first person who is traditionally invoking the “Tierra Sagrada.” To the Maya, the Earth was a religious entity because it controlled so much of their destiny. As Manuel Arias Sojom conveyed in his interviews with Calixta Guiteras Holmes, a natural disaster could easily threaten a harvest, which would in turn threaten a community’s food supply. The Maya depend upon the Earth, and “Para sembrar la tierra” functions as a supplication to the “Tierra Sagrada” to ensure that a good harvest results from the seeds that the poetic

²⁵ In “Contemporary Tzotzil Cosmological Concepts as a Basis for Interpreting Prehistoric Maya Civilization,” William R. Holland’s also comments on the function of sacred mountains and their relation to the Tzotzil view of the Earth. In this article, he conveys that the “sacred mountains play a very important role in the ceremonial life of the Tzotzil” (304), and Vogt attributes Holland with discovering evidence that “particular sacred mountains are related to particular patrilineages which trace their origins mythologically to these mountains” (194). Holland further connects the ideological significance of the sacred mountains of the Larraínzar and the patrilineal system:

Conceptually then, these sacred mountains may suggest the family tree and mythological places of origin of their respective patrilineages. The companion animals of members of the same patrilineage occupy the same sacred mountain. This spirit world has a social organization which is directly comparable to that of the kinship and residence group to which it corresponds. The sacred mountains, like the heavens of the Maya, have 13 horizontal levels. For the Tzotzil, the sacred mountains symbolize the sky, and to ascend one is tantamount to rising into the heavens. Each level is presided over by the distinct ancestor gods. The strata of the sky are presumed connected by the sacred cottonwood trees, while those of the sacred mountains are imagined as linked from bottom to top by a huge stairway, in many ways suggesting the ancient Maya pyramids. Each level has a certain number of companion animals which correspond to specific individuals of the patrilineage. (303)

Significantly, Vogt has confirmed such findings in his research concerning ancestor worship and sacred mountains in Zinacantán.

voice intends to sew. As Manuel Arias Sojom states, the Earth is the most powerful entity and any good fortune that falls upon the people is her creation: “She is the cause of all harm that may befall the entire group. Only by obtaining her permission may man occupy her with his home and his fields. Any change of residence, any enlargement of the milpa must be her gift” (290). The Maya rely on food from the land in order to sustain themselves, so they pray to the Earth, asking her to provide a good harvest:

Quiero que llenes mi jícara, Tierra Sagrada.
Quiero que llenes mi olla. (19)

Because the Maya are completely at the mercy of the Earth, they feel very connected to her and invoke the “Tierra Sagrada” often in their prayers.

Due to the strong connection between the indigenous and the Earth, it is very clear that they are unwilling to leave their land and migrate to work in foreign territories. This is particularly manifest in the poem that directly follows “Para sembrar la tierra” in the collection, “Encanto para no tener que ir al otro lado.” From the very title of the poem, Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ is creating a dichotomy implicit in the term “lado.” On the one hand, there is the side from which the speaker is presenting the poem, and there is the other side with which the poetic voice does not identify. The reader ultimately realizes in the last stanza from the resistance indicative of the anaphora “No quiero” that the other “lado” corresponds to what the speaker does not want:

No quiero trabajar en ninguna finca.
No quiero ir a otra casa.
No quiero ningún trabajo lejos.
No quiero ir a Los Ángeles.
No quiero ir a La Florida. (39)

From this stanza, we can observe that the other side is geographic. Specifically, the speaker refuses to separate herself from the land that she knows in Chiapas to migrate to

the other side. From the geographic allusions to “ninguna finca,” “otra casa,” and “ningún trabajo lejos,” ambiguous spaces that potentially could be in close proximity to Chiapas, it is understood that the poetic voice does not want to go anywhere else, not even within Mexico. In the “Colofón” following the collection, Ámbar Past illustrates the danger of traveling to foreign territories by offering the example of María Tzu and her fear for her granddaughter’s soul when they were in Mexico City, a metropolitan city in stark contrast to the natural landscape of Chiapas:

Los niños corren mucho riesgo de perder sus almas en lugares que no se conoce. Hace veinte años, cuando María Tzu y su nena, Xunka’, fueron a la Ciudad de México, ella a cada momento llamaba y pastoreaba al espíritu de su criatura para que no se perdiera en el hormiguero del Metro. (151)²⁶

Not only does the speaker resist migration to another region in Mexico, but it is explicit that she does not want to abandon her homeland to migrate north either from the direct reference to “Los Ángeles” and “La Florida,” two places with a significant demographic of migration from South and Central America. In other words, from this last stanza, the poetic voice is taking a dissident position with regards to migrating to not only the United States but even within Mexico. The speaker is essentially resisting migrating from Chiapas to any other region.

Despite the fact that “Para sembrar la tierra” is about the traditional sense of the dependency of man upon the land and “Encanto para no tener que ir al otro lado” speaks

²⁶ The prayer that María Tzu repeatedly said during her journey to Mexico City was:

Xunka’, Zuuuunka’, vente a tu casa.
Vente a tu cuerpo.
Regresa, Xunka’, con tu madre.
Ya vuelve ya a tu ropa.
Ya retorna ya a tu pañal.
No tengas miedo de los caminos.
No te asustes con los carros.
Que no se quede enredada tu alma allí
en la mano del Anjel Diablo. (Past 151, emphasis in text)

to the economic situation of indigenous peasants and migration, both poems are centered on the traditional identification of the indigenous with the land, the “Tierra Sagrada.” Jwana te la Krus Posol foregrounds this longstanding tradition so that the reader understands the significance for the people to stay near their ancestral lands as he or she proceeds to read “Encanto para no tener que ir al otro lado” by Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’. In this manner, Utz’utz’ Ni’ is utilizing the tradition which is already in place connecting the land to the people who have to appeal to the gods for everything. By doing so, she is able to incorporate a speaker who ambiguously asks that Kajval “give” much like the speaker of “Para sembrar la tierra” traditionally asks that the gods “give” her a good harvest to fill her gourd and pot with food. In her poem, Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ employs this tradition of asking the gods to provide for the people in order to ask that Kajval give so that the speaker does not have to abandon the land to which she is intimately connected. The poet is renegotiating the tradition already in place concerning the land and the relationship between the indigenous and their gods to comment on the economic situation of disparity that essentially causes people to migrate to the United States.

Because the fate of the Maya is determined by the will of the gods, “Para sembrar la tierra” and “Encanto para no tener que ir al otro lado” are but a few examples of poems from the collection in which the speaker supplicates a sacred entity on behalf of her general well-being. Like the aforementioned poems, “Para que las lagartijas no coman el frijol” (97) and “Para que el maíz no se acabe tan luego” (101) by María Tzu also speak to the fact that the Maya depend upon the Earth for food. In essence, they are praying that nothing jeopardizes the harvest insofar as both of the scenarios illustrated in these poems present a particular hardship involving food. In “Para que las lagartijas no coman

el frijol,” Kajval’s lizard is charged with eating the poetic voice’s food, causing her hunger, as she conveys by stating, “Pero mi hambre no se acaba” (97). The poetic voice is much like that of the shamans addressing the four Bacabs as gods in the Ritual de los Bacabes who give the gods “peremptory orders, often in harsh language. At times he seems to threaten them or even curse them for responsibility” (Roys xi). María Tzu incorporates a speaker that outright places the guilt of the lack of beans and corn on Kajval for having created the lizard:

Es por tu culpa, Kajval,
que anda ese animal aquí en la Tierra.
Tómame en cuenta, Kajval,
dentro de tus planes. (97, emphasis in text)

Traditionally, this sort of religious invocation to a deity was done with the purpose of avoiding natural disasters or anything else that could cause harm. After María Tzu plants this tradition, the reader continues to the next poem, “Para que no venga el ejército” by Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ reading “el ejército” comparable in its destructive power to the lizard vermin, which have the potential to harm the poetic voice. Whereas María Tzu makes reference to only one religious entity in each of the previously mentioned poems, there are a number of deities present in the final stanza of “Para que no venga el ejército:”

Gran Florido San Juan, Gran Florido Patrón,
Santo Dueño de la Tierra, Sagrado Guardián del Cielo,
Padre del Cerro Huitepec, Madre del Cerro Huitepec,
Padre de la Cueva Blanca, Madre de la Cueva Blanca,
Padre del Cerro San Cristóbal, Madre del Cerro San Cristóbal:
Que no entren en tus tierras, Gran Patrón.
Que se enfríen sus rifles, que se enfríen sus pistolas.
Kajval, acepta este ramillete de flores.
Acepta esta ofrenda de hojas, acepta esta ofrenda de humo,
Sagrado Padre de Chaklajún, Sagrada Madre de Chaklajún. (103)

As in “Para que las lagartijas no coman el frijol” and “Para que el maíz no se acabe tan luego” by María Tzu, “Para que no venga el ejército” is also directed to Kajval, as evident by the eighth verse of this last stanza. By aligning herself with the long-established tradition of asking the gods to prevent anything that would harm the people, Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ is able to subtly make reference to the ideology of the Zapatistas as well as current events transpiring within the Revolution. Much of the rhetoric of the EZLN focuses on the metaphor of a sleeping society destined to be awakened by Zapatista demands, as portrayed by the following verses of “Para que no venga el ejército:”

Venimos a despertar tu conciencia.
Venimos a despertar tu corazón. (103)

Many scholars have also referred to the day in which the Zapatistas took up arms on January 1, 1994 as the “Awakening,” or “El Despertar.”²⁷ Not only does this date mark the implementation of NAFTA, but Tom Hayden elaborates in The Zapatista Reader that on that day, “3,000 members of the EZLN occupy six large towns and hundreds of ranches in an armed uprising” (11). As a result, the National Army came to “restore order” in Chiapas, sexually assaulting women all over the region. For precisely this reason, “Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’ suplica a la Madre Cerro que defienda al pueblo de los ejércitos que lo amenazan desde hace cientos de años” (Past 161); she prays:

Que no nos lleguen a pegar.
Que no nos lleguen a torturar.
Que no nos lleguen a violar
en nuestras casas, en nuestros hogares. (103)

²⁷ On the first of January in 1994 the EZLN began to disperse pamphlets called The Mexican Awakening (El despertador mexicano).

Antagonism has long formed part of the history of Chiapas due to the hostile acts committed by the Spanish during the Conquest as well as the tradition of domestic violence. Xunka' Utz'utz' Ni' utilizes the poetic formula traditionally employed to invoke the gods and spare people harm in order to implicitly make reference to the revolutionary ideology of Zapatismo. The poet is therefore able to renegotiate the function of the incantation by appropriating the already established tradition of exhorting religious entities. Because of the infiltration of foreign elements into their surroundings, these women are not only rewriting the religious tradition of the community, but they are also renegotiating the cultural references and materials informing these incantations. Ámbar Past attributes this phenomenon to the effects of Neoliberalism: “Claro está que el Nuevo Liberalismo ha hecho sus mañoserías con el habla moderna, y no queda de otra que rezar para la pexi cola o aludir a Los Ángeles o La Florida en las oraciones” (170, emphasis in text). As opposed to limiting themselves to that which is naturally available in the region, these women are appropriating sources from the Western perspective, as exemplified by the Pepsi Cola and U.S. cities mentioned by Past in addition to the Coca-Cola offered to the deceased baby by its grieving mother.

As conveyed in “Para que no venga el ejército” by Xunka Utz'utz' Ni', unfortunately many Tzotzil women claim that their first sexual interaction is characterized by violation. In the “Colofón,” Ámbar Past describes this trend:

La gran mayoría de las mujeres mayas confiesa que sus padres las casaron o, como dicen ellas, las vendieron a hombres que jamás habían visto antes y que su primera experiencia sexual, llamada en tzotzil la mordida del murciélago, fue en efecto una violación, aunque algunas, andando el tiempo, llegaron a querer a sus maridos. (164, emphasis in text)

Traditionally, Tzotzil marriages are arranged by the families of those to be married. The future bride and groom generally do not exchange so much as a word before they marry. Although tradition dictates that “los novios nunca hablan antes de la pedida” (Past 164), Petra Ernánides López presents a spell that a woman casts to attract the suitor of her choice, “Encantamiento para atraer a un hombre” (31). In this poem, the female poetic voice is usurping a certain degree of agency despite the fact that traditionally her parents would not have consulted her to discuss her nuptial future. By casting this spell, she hopes to make the man of her dreams return her affections and ultimately seek her hand in marriage:

Que llegue con flores en su corazón el hombre.
Que llegue con todo su corazón.
Que hable con mi carne.
Que le duela su sangre por mí
cuando me ve en el camino al mercado.
Que nos visite con su madre,
la cabeza agachada
y un garrafón de trago para mi papá. (31)

This poem is a testimony of traditional customs surrounding the contract of a Tzotzil marriage. Specifically, during the young man’s visit with his mother to the family of his future fiancée, it is customary to bring gifts to the young girl’s father: “El novio llega a pedirla ofreciendo aguardiente, pan, carne, cigarros y, por supuesto, dinero, para poder contraer nupcias” (Past 164). The initial response of the girl’s family is to affirm that they do not have any children. Insulting their offspring, however, her parents eventually admit that they do have a daughter “que es muy haragana: lo único que sabe hacer es comer chilacayote en dulce” (164, emphasis in text) in the hopes that depicting her as unintelligent would cause her pursuer to reconsider such a match. As is often the case, traditions are susceptible to change in order to adapt to evolving times. Although Petra

Ernánides López addresses the accepted practice in which young men and women who do not communicate with one another before marriage, she implies that this is not always the case in her poem, “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” (33), which directly follows “Encantamiento para atraer a un hombre” in the book of poems. Essentially, the poetic voice of this poem invokes Kajval so that the family dog will not bark at her boyfriend, alerting her father and the rest of the family of his presence. Many Tzotzils have dogs to protect and warn them of any oncoming danger.²⁸ Another Tzotzil man, for example, has dogs for this very reason:

Don Cósimo Waskes de Simojovel cuenta que tiene muchos perros, dos para cuidar sus tres lecheras y sus terneros, dos lo acompañan a la milpa para avisarle si vienen los priistas y sus últimos dos son para cuidar las ganas de sus hijas solteras, no vaya ser que se pongan húmedas por un soldado, o se estén noviantando con el señor cura. (Urquidi)

Ámbar Past comments on the sexual nature of this conjure to silence the family dog: “los papás no se dan cuenta que viene el novio porque el perro no ladra; las muchachas rezan para que él pueda llegar sin que sus papás se den cuenta [a pesar de que] es cierto que una muchacha no debe hablar con los jóvenes” (164). Traditionally, not only were women expected to abstain from premarital sexual relations, but they were not permitted to speak of such matters at all despite the fact that Tzotzil folklore acknowledges a woman’s sexual drive. Utilizing the commentary of Robert Laughlin, Past is able to describe the amorous nature of women:

La Madre de la Noche no puede dormir porque las lombrices rojas que viven en su vagina le dan mucha comezón, que sólo se quita haciendo el amor con doce o quince hombres. El antropólogo Roberto Laughlin escribe, en su Gran diccionario tzotzil-maya de San Lorenzo Zinacantán, que las mujeres promiscuas—y eso incluye a las que ríen a carcajadas—son castigadas en el infierno con un alambre calentado al rojo vivo que les

²⁸ “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” is not the only poem in Conjuros y ebriedades that focuses on this image of the dog, but “Al perro negro” (143) by Munda Tostón does as well.

meten en la vagina; pero según lo que se cuenta, todas las mujeres tienen lombricitas del deseo y exigen a sus maridos una buena tarea en la cama. Un hombre puede azadonar cuarenta brazadas de milpa al día y su mujer espera que la monte doce veces por la noche, hasta rendir a las lombricitas. (155, emphasis in text)

Petra Ernánides López underscores the sexual tendencies of women in “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” insofar as she employs a feminine poetic voice who assumes the agency of the situation and willingly invites her boyfriend for a romantic intrigue. She not only assumes control by granting her guest permission to visit, but also by attempting to make such a rendezvous possible by appealing to Kajval. The speaker in this poem does not adhere to social norms mandating that she accept her romantic fate as it is determined by others, but rather she opts to have intimate relations with someone of her choosing. Even Xun Okotz acknowledges that young women are not adhering so strictly to standards imposed upon them concerning marriage. After describing the process in which a young man asks for a family’s daughter for marriage, he admits that many women engage in sexual activity before marriage: “Bueno, así era antes; ahora las muchachas se alocaron. Ellas se van solas a buscar a los muchachos y entregan su carne gratis. Pero anteriormente se pedía y se pagaba” (164). Although Xun Okotz describes the situation as if it were a recent development, the poet of “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” would contend that these subversive practices have long been in place judging by her reaction to Okotz’s commentary.²⁹ It is highly probable that young women engaged in such activities in private, so society did not openly discuss such occurrences even if they did know about them. Although it is plausible that young Tzotzil women have long since broken with unyielding traditions regarding marriage, what remains significant

²⁹ Past describes that upon hearing Xun Obotz’s opinion about her poem, “Petra se ríe con lo que alega Xun” (164).

about “Para que el perro no ladre al novio” by Petra Ernadés López is that it is a written account of the discrepancy between social standards and daily reality.

Opting to communicate via a medium traditionally deemed appropriate for women, the poets strategically employ conventions regarding the incantation as implied by their establishing themselves as part of the tradition of the Ritual de los Bacabes. By operating within a socially permitted realm for Tzotzil women, they encounter less opposition and are able to renegotiate their situation. Specifically in the poems of investigation, these women address pressures to migrate to the United States, political developments of the EZLN, in addition to the romantic reality experienced by young Tzotzil women in direct opposition to the rigid ideals governing the institution of marriage. To answer the question originally presented as to whether the poets involved in Conjuros y ebriedades function in compliance to the mandates of their female role or if they are subversively working against the status quo, they are in effect accomplishing both. They are operating within the confines of the incantation which has been traditionally acceptable for women. In this sense, the women have effectively chosen an astutely strategic path insofar as it is not blatantly at odds with tradition, which allows them to forward their agenda. However, the poets are breaking with convention in that they are utilizing the incantation to make reference to contemporary issues shaping their lives. They are effectively reappropriating traditional notions surrounding the incantation to comment on themes historically absent from the genre.

CHAPTER IV

Reconsidering Marriage: Alcoholism and Domestic Violence

Mother of Corn is the daughter of Lightning. Long[,] long ago a man found a snake which had been hurt. The snake asked her to please take it home and he did. She lived with her father in a cave full of snakes. Her father was so grateful that he offered the man whatever he wanted as a reward for saving his daughter. About this time the snakes turned into women and the man was dazzled by their looks. <<No, I don't need anything,>> he said politely.

<<Do you have a wife?>> asked Lightning. <<I could give you one of my daughters.>>

<<That would be good,>> said the man, and he picked out the prettiest one, who just happened to be the snake he had saved out on the path. He took her for his wife. She was the Mother of Corn and if she harvested just one ear of corn from each corner of the field, it would simply multiply and her net would be filled with corn. She and her husband would have big fights because he thought she was picking all his corn. But she was just magic. One time when her husband hit her, Mother of Corn wiped the blood from her nose with an ear of corn. This is how the first red corn came to be. Where Mother of Corn peed, the first squash vines grew, when she peed again, a chayote came up (sic).

-María Xila³⁰

Ámbar Past concurs with María Xila's account of the Mother of Corn and proceeds to describe her in the following manner in the "Colofón" of Conjuros y ebriedades:

La Madre del Maíz es una mazorca doble; salen una o dos en cada milpa. Se parece al cuerpo de una mujer, con su cabello largo. Cuando la tapiscan, le echan incienso. Una vez que su marido le pegó, la Madre del Maíz se limpió la sangre de la nariz con una mazorca; así nació el maíz rojo. (155)

³⁰ Ámbar Past features María Xila's rendition of this myth in "She of Great Writing, She of the Glyphs" (11).

As discussed in the previous chapter concerning the poems “Para que el maíz no se acabe tan luego” (101) by María Tzu and “Para sembrar la tierra” (37) by Jwana te la Krus Posol, the cultivation of the milpa is a longstanding tradition in the Highlands of Chiapas.³¹ The fact that many of the poems in Conjuros y ebriedades are about corn undeniably speaks to the social significance of the cultivation of maize.

The legend concerning the Mother of Corn as presented by María Xila illustrates not only that the milpa is central to indigenous reality but that domestic violence against women is another component of that tradition. In fact, domestic violence has so woven itself into daily life that it has even influenced traditional folklore. Utilizing their poems as a mode of communication, the women contributing to Conjuros y ebriedades have initiated a renegotiation of their position in relation to this trend of domestic violence and alcohol abuse, which traditionally has characterized indigenous marriages. Specifically in “La Pedida,” “Hechizo para matar al hombre infiel,” and “Canción de cuna” by Markarita Vásques Kómes, Tenik Nibak, and Petra Tzon Te’ Vitz, respectively from Conjuros y ebriedades, the focus of this chapter is on the presiding institution of marriage. These poems plant the general equality between a man and woman that should be present; they address domestic violence and finally allude to its implications in

³¹ Dating the cultivation of maize to 2000 B.C. in the chapter entitled “Transnationalism and the Political Economy of Mesoamerica,” Liliana R. Goldin and Walter E. Little describe the elaborate agricultural process:

The milpa has most often taken the form of swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture. ... In swidden agriculture, the forest and brush are cut at the end of the dry season. The slashed trees and plants are allowed to lie where they fall, whereas fruit-bearing trees and other useful plants are left standing.

Firewood is gathered, and the remaining brush is set on fire. In the ashes, which add nutrients to the soil—and as close to the beginning of the rainy season as possible—the farmers plant their fields. Using a digging stick, they poke holes in the enriched soil and drop in a few seeds of corn. At this time, or later, they will also plant squash and bean seeds. This combination has long formed the tripartite-basis of the Mesoamerican diet and a surplus of food sold in local and sometimes distant markets. (348)

relation to other members of the household. In other words, domestic violence is not just an issue for the battered woman, but it creates instability for all members of the home.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the poem “Encantamiento para atraer a un hombre” (31) by Petra Ern ndes L pes mentions key elements of the traditional exchange between members of each family for a marriage to occur in the community. Many of these same cultural references are also present in “La Pedida” (65). In the hopes of equality within the context of marriage, Markarita V sques K mes’s poem states that a man and woman both depend upon one another:

La madre de la novia:
Porque un hombre no puede vivir solo,
Porque una mujer no puede vivir sola.
Pueden ver con sus ojos de Tierra,
c mo se juntan,
c mo se completan
las cuatro manos, los cuatro pies. (65)

The fact that women and men are traditionally dependent upon one another is also present in the indigenous tradition of the cargo system in the larger community. In the “Colof n” to the collection of the poems,  mbar Past is also cognizant of the significance of the cargo system in its emphasis on the collective:

La costumbre de los cargos es un regalo que se ofrece a las diosas y a los dioses. Es un trabajo noble, de mucho sacrificio, porque se carga durante un tiempo el peso del universo. Los cuidadores de los santos queman copal ante las im genes y acompa an a los santos en sus peregrinaciones. Ganan mucho prestigio ante la comunidad, pero se endeudan por toda la vida con los gastos de la fiesta: los tamales, el aguardiente, la m sica, los cohetes y los toros. (162)

This description conveys that the system of cargos has structured indigenous communities in such a way that they are based on dependency upon the collective.³²

³² In “Autonom a ind gena y usos y costumbres: la innovaci n de la tradici n,” Laura Carlsen explains that the system of social norms held to be true by the collective “ha sido integrado en las

Furthermore, the duties of those responsible for the cargo denote the presence of alcohol in the religious sphere.³³ By incorporating positions which can be occupied by a man and his wife, it also stresses the importance of a complementary relationship between married couples.

After establishing the interdependence between a man and a woman, Kómes then proceeds to address the eighth component of the Revolutionary Women's Law released by the EZLN dedicated to violence against women, which states that "[n]inguna mujer podrá ser golpeada o maltratada físicamente ni por familiares ni por extraños. Los delitos de intento de violación serán castigados severamente." To define the term "violence," psychologist Hussein Bulhan proposes the following in Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression:

Violence is any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group. From this perspective, violence inhibits human growth, negates inherent potential, limits productive living, and causes death. (135)

comunidades indígenas a través de los siglos—un sistema que, como todos, no es infalible pero que ha probado su flexibilidad, coherencia y capacidad de coexistir con el estado moderno.”

³³ It is important to remember that drinking is not associated with a desire to lose control with inebriation, but rather the consumption of alcoholic beverages has traditionally been a key element of religious life in Mesoamerica. Christine Eber elaborates on this notion in Women in Alcohol in a Highland Maya Town: Water of Hope, Water of Sorrow:

From accounts of Aztecs' drinking by Alonzo de Zorita, a judge from 1556-1566, we learn that before the Spanish invasion nobles and priests were free to drink great quantities; sick people, postpartum women, and older men and women of whatever class had the right to drink a lot (Zorita 1971). Chroniclers' accounts suggest that rules, highly prescriptive and rigidly enforced, not availability and desire, set the parameters for drinking in [i]ndigenous societies before the Spanish invasion. Commoners living outside the purview of authorities may have drunk with fewer restrictions than nobles; however, as gifts from the gods, alcoholic beverages and rules about their use were not to be taken lightly. ... Before Spaniards starting imposing their values and practices, [i]ndigenous Mesoamericans maintained a strong sense of responsibility when drunk. (19)

For this reason, indigenous communities did not develop a strong dependency for alcoholic substances.

As Margara Millan indicates in “Chiapas y sus mujeres indigenas. De su diversidad y resistencia,” violence is a common element of the lives of indigenous women: “En Chiapas las mujeres enfrentan tanto la violencia ejercida por el estado como por el esposo” (6).³⁴ The presence of violence exerted by government-associated entities is also present in the poem “Para que no venga el ejercito” (103) by Xunka’ Utz’utz’ Ni’, which was previously analyzed in Chapter 3. The very fact that indigenous women and Zapatistas felt the need to specifically address violence as a separate platform of the Revolutionary Women’s Law underscores the severity of the problem. In her poem, Markarita Vasques Komes also addresses the issue in an explicit manner by stating:

Que no se reganen el uno al otro,
que no se peguen el uno al otro,
en el camino que van a seguir. (65)

Not only does her poetry convey that husbands should not batter their wives, but Komes also implies that women should not abuse their husbands with the use of the grammatical construction of the reciprocal “se.” Moreover, it is important to realize that not only does the poet address physical abuse, but she also declares that they should not verbally attack one another. In “La Pedida,” Markarita Vasques Komes combats domestic violence by first foregrounding the harmonious relationship between husband and wife as characterized by interdependence. After establishing equality, which naturally arises due to the reliance of one upon the other, she then proposes that men and women should not harm one another, either physically as indicated by the verb “pegar,” or emotionally as conveyed by “reganar.” She accentuates the presiding notion of equality by presenting such violence as an issue for both sexes in that neither should harm the other.

³⁴ Significantly, Rosalva Aıda Hernandez Castillo affirms Millan’s position in “Construyendo la utopa. Esperanzas y desafos de las chiapanecas ante el siglo XXI.”

Significantly, it is said that “[w]hen a man and woman are arguing, people assume one or both are drunk” (Eber 136). From Christine Eber’s assertion in Women and Alcohol in a Highland Maya Town: Water of Hope, Water of Sorrow, what is clear from the onset is that Mayan women must not be romanticized as abstaining from the bottle. According to Eber, this is clearly not the case; in reality it is just as common for women to partake in drinking as men. In her study, she presents information concerning the infant mortality rates in this region as morbidly high and describes the effect of this trend on young indigenous mothers:

Since Pedranas³⁵ bear many children, losing one child rarely makes a woman lose her identity as a mother, but women feel the loss of a child deeply. The high child mortality rate in Highland Chiapas means that most women lose at least one child and many women lose several. Rather than getting used to the pain, most women seem to layer one painful loss on top of another. Children’s deaths chip away at a mother’s identity. (140).

Taking into account demographic trends of the region as explicated by Eber, women should be accustomed to the loss of their offspring. However, there are still many women that attribute their incessant dependency upon alcohol to the loss they suffer from the death of their children. Eber describes two young women by the names of Pascuala and Otelia who insist that the emotional loss created by the deaths of their offspring drive them to drink: “Although Pascuala started drinking before her children died, she repeatedly mentions their deaths to explain why she drinks. The deaths of Otelia’s children undoubtedly contribute to her drinking, as well” (140). In the chapter entitled “The Colonial Period in Mesoamerica,” Louise M. Burkhart and Janine Gasco assert that since the arrival of the Spanish to the New World, indigenous people have had access to

³⁵ The Pedranas are the indigenous group of focus in Christine Eber’s analysis, and they are a neighboring community of the women contributing to Conjuros y ebriedades; they also reside in the Highlands of Chiapas.

stronger alcoholic beverages as opposed to the traditional ones that were lower in alcoholic content (216). With the encounter between the two worlds during the fifteenth century, Burkhart and Gasco comment on the introduction of stronger alcoholic substances during a time period historically characterized by violence and repression, leading them to the following claim: “That alcohol provided some solace to the oppressed and some escape from daily hardships may also be assumed” (216). In Conjueros y ebriedades, the fact that women are abusing the bottle to alleviate their personal problems and frustrations is also particularly evident due to the extensive number of poems relating to inebriation induced by alcohol. In addition, the very term “ebriedades” from the title is another indication of the thematic orientation of the work towards alcohol.³⁶ In the “Colofón” to the collection, Ámbar Past describes the involvement of the poets’ communal tradition with alcoholic substances:

Y beben barriles de chichi y garrafones de pox, ron hecho a espaldas de las autoridades. Se considera que tomar aguardiente en una fiesta es uno de los más grandes placeres, y la mayoría de las personas que no son protestantes brindan a diario para cumplir con algún ritual. Para solicitar un favor o un préstamo, se ofrece trago. La aceptación de este bocado es señal de la disposición para satisfacer la voluntad del solicitante. Es tan raro un bebedor solitario como un abstemio. El vino lubrica los engranes [sic] de la sociedad y el alcoholismo es un mal común. (170)

Appealing to the fact that many of the rituals in indigenous communities require alcohol, Paul Kay and Duane Metzger maintain that “[d]rinking sugarcane alcohol (aguardiente) or sugarcane beer (chichi) accompanies all these [ritual] activities” (29). Christine Eber concurs that much alcohol use is associated with religious ceremonies, but she also

³⁶ “Canto de la mujer borracha” (57) by Maruch Méndes Péres, another poem bearing the same title also by the same poet (117), “Para emborrachar a los muertos” (95) by María Álvares Jiménez, Me’ Avrila, as well as “La borrachera de la mujer del Alférez” (145) by Pasakwala Kómes are examples of poems in which the female poets of Conjueros y ebriedades address the predominance of alcohol in contemporary indigenous society.

asserts that it is connected to abuse that occurs on a daily basis: “ritual drinking during the fiesta [is] related to non-ritual drinking then and afterwards” (109). The large representation of incantations concerning alcohol is due to the fact that “[w]ithin traditions, song-prayers seem to be the only acceptable vehicle through which women can publicly verbalize what they feel and think” (Eber 144). Christine Eber also comments on this tradition of the prayer-song with regard to the indigenous men of her study: “Although men often sing while drunk in fiestas, they do not use song as a forum to express their personal views and feelings” (144). By working from within the confines of the long established tradition of the prayer-song and its association with women, the poets are yet again able to appropriate what has conventionally been assigned to the “feminine” to renegotiate the discrepancy that has historically existed between daily reality and idealistic rhetoric conventionally forming part of rituals. This is not to exclude the customary wedding ceremony: “Como en otras culturas, las palabras rituales que se escucha [sic] en las bodas expresan un ideal y no la realidad cotidiana” (Past 164). Much of the flowery expressions traditionally employed in a nuptial ceremony illustrate a model relationship based upon interdependence between a husband and wife, which is simply not the case in reality.

Particularly in “Hechizo para matar al hombre infiel,” Tonik Nibak addresses the general need for equality between a husband and a wife. Despite the fact that society traditionally deemed it acceptable for men to be unfaithful, a woman was expected to be loyal to her spouse. As Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Ray assert in their collaborative essay entitled, “Stereotypes, Contradictions, and Double Standards,” feminists often refer to this gender-rooted inconsistency entailing the “fundamental contradiction between

encouraging men's sexuality and expecting women to be chaste" (144) as the "double standard." In his essay entitled "The Latin Phallus," Ilan Stavans comments on the disparity between social norms concerning men and women:³⁷

The Hispanic family encourages a familiar double-standard. Few societies prize female virginity with the conviction that we do. But while virginity is a prerequisite for a woman's safe arrival at the wedding canopy, men are encouraged to test the waters, to partake of the pleasures of the flesh. (52)

In marriages, this double standard causes less alarm when a man commits adultery than when a woman does exactly the same. Essentially, both instances of extramarital relations should be deemed equally as bad, but convention causes the community to be less forgiving of women. In "Hechizo para matar al hombre infiel," however, Tenik Nibak attempts to hold her mate accountable for his actions. In other words, since both should have an equal role in the relationship, consequently both should be loyal to one another. Historically, all over the globe, a man could kill his wife if he suspected her of adultery or of engaging in any other activity that would stain the reputation of the family. This not-so-uncommon phenomenon is also known as "honor killings." Through Nibak's manifestation of this idea in her poem, which is essentially a spell that a conjurer can cast in order to castigate her unfaithful mate with death, the poet allocates that same power to women in the event that their husbands are unfaithful. Nibak does not present a male speaker retaliating; rather, she opts to break with the status quo by depicting a woman seeking revenge.

As a result of the double standard described by Ilan Stavans, two categories of women emerge to form a dichotomy—"good women" and "bad women." Virtuous

³⁷ Although in "The Latin Phallus" Ilan Stavans focuses on "Latin" culture, his commentary is pertinent to autochthonous societies insofar as they are informed and influenced by such predominant culture.

women are supposed to be passive virgins who not only abstain from the physical act of sex but are also expected to refrain from speaking of sex and the human body as a sexual tool: “Virgins are mujeres buenas: pure, ready to sacrifice their body for the sacred love of a man. Prostitutes, on the other hand, are hedonistic goddesses, mujeres malas, safeguards of the male psyche” (Stavans 52). Perhaps Xun Okotz asked that he be removed from the official credits as co-translator, as discussed in chapter 2, to avoid being associated with female poets who are outwardly discussing sexually charged and socially forbidden issues. With the incorporation of erotic allusions, Nibak does not conform to the social norms in place for “good women.” Instead, she speaks negatively of her husband’s body as part of his punishment:

Dáale chorrillo, sécale su semen.
Hazle chiquita chiquita su verga. (131)

In these two verses of the incantation, Nibak not only demands that her husband be held to the same standards to which she is held regarding fidelity, but the poet also breaks with tradition by explicitly condemning her partner’s sexual member. Stavans would maintain that it is telling that she chooses to condemn his penis in that a number of gender stereotypes of Hispanic society derive from this symbol:

We inhabitants of the Americas live in a nest of complementing stereotypes: on the one side, flamboyant women, provocative, well-built, sensual, lascivious, with indomitable, even bestial nerve and intensity; on the other, macho men. Both seemingly revolve around the phallus, an object of intense adoration, the symbol of absolute power and satisfaction. It is the source of the macho’s self assurance and control, sexual and psychological, and the envy of the Hispanic woman. (51)

The poetic voice of “Hechizo para matar al hombre infiel” is attacking that which Stavans maintains is central to her husband’s social identity. Most importantly, Nibak’s recipe for the chastisement of an unfaithful husband ultimately speaks to the feminist notion of

equality by addressing the need for everyone to be measured against the same expectations, in addition to conveying the communal right to enjoy the same freedoms of speech.

Markarita Vasqués Kómes and Tenik Nibak, in “La Pedida” and “Hechizo para matar al hombre infiel” respectively, are not the only poets of Conjuros y ebriedades that speak to the predominance of abuse resulting from widespread alcohol use. In “Canción de cuna,” Petra Tzon Te’ Vitz also addresses the subject, but she does so in a manner that solely presents the poetic voice’s husband as abusive, whereas Kómes constructs violence in such a way that depicts both men and women as potential victims. According to Ámbar Past in the “Colofón” of the anthology, “[e]l papá borracho que pega a su mujer es el tema universal de las canciones de cuna en tzotzil” (164). This generalization is correct in this “canción de cuna” as well. From the initial verses of the poem, the “tata,” or the father, is described as drunk:

¡Duérmete, pichita, duérmete!
Tu tata está borracho. (79)

Precisely because many husbands have experienced problems with alcohol, which leads to violent outbursts directed at their wives and children, “[b]astantes mujeres tzotziles de la nueva generación han decidido no casarse; trabajan, ganan su dinero y mantienen a sus hijos solas, argumentando: ¿Para qué voy a aguantar a un borracho que me pega?” (Past 164, emphasis in text). The fact that many women do not want to be with a man that beats them is accentuated by the verses of this poem:

Y si me viene a pegar,
me voy a escapar al monte. (79)

In this sense, Te' Vitz alludes to the possibility of an escape for the poetic voice.

Significantly, women have not encountered much resistance when they attempt to flee from an abusive relationship:

Knowing that they have safe places to go where they are usually welcome enables women to act on their feelings and in their best interests. Leaving also communicates clearly to a man to what depths he has fallen, for now there is no one to make his tortillas or beans, to share his life. (Eber 149)

From the perspective of a mother, the poet emphasizes the fact that violence inflicted upon the speaker affects not only her, but the young child as well. Curiously enough, most lullabies follow in the strong tradition of the identification of a woman as a mother. However, from the aforementioned verses of the poem, it is not clear if the speaker of the poem intends to escape with her child or if the mother intends to abandon her offspring in quest of an outlet from such a dire situation.

From the title “Canción de cuna” and conventions deriving from Western tradition associated with the genre, the Western reader expects the thematic orientation of the poem to be tranquil and optimistic in order to be appropriate for a child. However, Te' Vitz initiates the poem with exclamation points and forceful commands, which seem hardly effective to ease a child into slumber. Nevertheless, when parents put a child to bed, they often incorporate negative imagery to frighten their children of the potential consequences of being disobedient. Unfortunately, such images frequently result in nightmares. Time and again, they are marked by the presence of a menacingly frightening figure, such as, for example, that of the Sand-Man from E. T. A. Hoffmann's Nachtstücken, which Sigmund Freud uses as an example in his essay entitled “The ‘Uncanny.’”³⁸ Freud affirms that “the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached

³⁸ For readers unfamiliar with the argument of Nachtstücken, Freud offers a synopsis:

to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (937). The Sand-Man clearly exerts a negative influence on youth particularly because "the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children" (Freud 938). Because many cultures employ figures that invoke sentiments of terror among children, the harsh tone and lack of consoling words cannot be interpreted as evidence that violence represented in the poem is indicative of the fact that it permeates household interactions more so in indigenous societies than in Western tradition. However, what is significant about these verses in "Canción de cuna" is that the speaker equates the drunken father with Pukuj. In the "Colofón" Ámbar Past describes the term Pukuj in the following manner:

El arco iris es un Pukuj, cuyo nombre nos recuerda a Ah Puch, el dios de la muerte de los antiguos mayas. Los Pukuj son naguales fuertes que viven a costa de otros naguales. Son naguales malos que causan enfermedad.³⁹ (156)

This fantastic tale opens with the childhood recollections of the student Nathaniel. In spite of present happiness, he cannot banish the memories associated with the mysterious and terrifying death of his beloved father. On certain evenings his mother used to send the children to bed early, warning that 'the Sand-Man was coming'; and, sure enough, Nathaniel would not fail to hear the heavy tread of a visitor, with whom his father would then be occupied for the evening. When questioned about the Sand-Man, his mother, it is true, denied that such a person existed except as a figure of speech; but his nurse could give him more definite information: 'He's a wicked man who comes when children won't go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he puts the eyes in a sack and carries them off to the half-moon to feed his children. They sit up there in their nest, and their beaks are hooked like owls' beaks, and they use them to peck up naughty boys' and girls' eyes with.'" (935-936)

³⁹ Contrary to Western tradition, Past describes that the rainbow is a negative image in indigenous cosmology:

El arco iris se llama la Madre del Mal, porque tapa las cuevas con su cola. Ella no deja salir a las nubes que traen la lluvia. Los colores son el orín de la Madre del Mal: tápate con el rebozo para que no te provoque dolor de cabeza. Hay que aventarle tres piedras, tres ajos y escupirle tres veces con jugo de tabaco para que el arco iris se asuste. Muéstrale tu pene o tu pucha, pero nunca lo señales con el dedo porque se te pudre el ombligo. (156)

Traditionally, communities have believed that showing their genitalia was an effective defense against an adversary, and Ámbar Past comments on this belief in the "Colofón" of Conjuros y ebriedades:

Las mujeres mayas tienen poderes para protegerse del mal. Una de las formas de magia que usan para domar una fuerza superior se llama Yaluat, y consiste en desnudarse ante el adversario ... El antiguo libro maya, el Popol Vuh, relata que ante la amenaza de una

It is significant to remember that the Maya believe that all sicknesses are a result of any harm experienced by a person's nagual, or wayhel, while sleeping. In essence, the poetic voice of this poem is drawing a parallel between an ominous, fear-provoking figure such as the Sand-Man described by Freud and the Pukuj.

Duérmete, pichita, duérmete,
Si llorás va venir el Pukuj. (79)

In his altered state of inebriation, the father is the Pukuj and is just as capable of rousing an equally frightful reaction:

Allí viene ya.
Viene ya tu tata:
tu tata, el Pukuj. (79)

For all intents and purposes, he is just as terrifying as the uncanny feeling incited by the Sand-Man. Utilizing the tradition already established in which parents resort to negative reinforcement to ensure that their children do not disobey them, Te' Vitz expresses her discontent concerning the abuse the poetic voice has suffered at the hands of her spouse by operating within a sphere traditionally delegated to women. This declaration underscores the fact that many women utilize this venue to express their thoughts and feelings by means of a medium which complies with the dominant ideology. Christine Eber states that song-prayers sung by inebriated women display problems within the household experienced by the community as a whole, and the women "seem to appreciate that their drunken songs make public stories of pain and powerlessness which are not theirs alone, but belong to their people" (144). This is a socially acceptable venue

invasión extranjera el rey quiché envió a sus hijas a bañarse en el río, a la vista del ejército enemigo, con instrucciones de detener a soldados con sus encantos. Algo parecido sucedió en Zinacantán un día antes de la conquista de Chamela en 1524. Las jóvenes fueron mandadas al ojo de agua a nadar con el propósito de atajar a las tropas de Bernal Díaz del Castillo. (160)

through which women are able to voice their sorrows and pain, which is often inflicted by abuse they suffer at the hands of their spouses. As a matter of fact, many men lower their heads as if in guilt when their wives begin to sing of the maltreatment they have suffered on account of their husbands: “Pedranas’ song-prayers resonate throughout households and Pedrano consciousness and embarrass everyone but the women singing. While husbands say their wives’ songs are drunken babble, when listening to a woman sing they lower their heads, as if accused” (Eber 144). Although the men claim that the lyrics to the melodies are unfounded, their exhibition of culpability as indicated by the fact that they lower their heads is telling of the legitimacy of the women’s claims. In other words, truth prevails in the state of inebriation. Significantly from the title of the anthology, Conjueros y ebriedades, the presence of the word “ebriedades” functions to denote truth. Alcohol, ironically the very same element that perpetuates the violence, also permits women’s retaliation. The women strategically renegotiate the function of alcohol in order to express their situation as a subaltern strategy to promote awareness.

Ultimately by appealing to the tradition of the incantation already in place as a socially acceptable realm for women to express themselves, Te’ Vitz employs a poetic voice that specifically addresses the widespread issue of domestic violence and its effect on the reality experienced by many indigenous women. Although the poet operates within the strict confines of institutionalized norms, Te’ Vitz is able to significantly plant the seed for a change in the trends of domestic abuse suffered by women in that she implies the possibility for a woman to escape from such a dismal reality.

Specifically in the previously discussed poems by Markarita Váskes Kómes, Tenik Nibak, and Petra Tzon Te’ Vitz from the book of poems Conjueros y ebriedades,

these Tzotzil women collectively address the social construct of marriage and how it has been institutionalized as an oppressor. First, women desire acknowledgement of their equal role described in the rhetoric of marriage ceremonies within such a partnership, which Markarita Váskes Kómes specifically addresses in the poem “La Pedida.” However, as illustrated by the poem “Encantamiento para atraer a un hombre” by Petra Ernánides López, the reality of the situation is that women are simply not perceived as their husbands’ equals. Instead, the vast majority of them experience the trials and tribulations of domestic violence, which not only impacts their own lives but all who share a particular domestic realm.

Once again the women have appropriated the ideology already in place and its dictates concerning what is appropriately associated with the “feminine” in order to renegotiate their own reality, but this time they are doing so at the household level. They utilize the traditional sphere of the song-prayer in order to voice their pain concerning the abuse they experience from their husbands as a direct result of the epidemic nature of alcoholism, which drives men to such extremes. Ultimately, after Markarita Váskes Kómes and Tenik Nibak build upon the social constructs involved in the institution of marriage, Petra Tzon Te’ Vitz proposes a modern and logical solution to the scenario. In her poem “Canción de cuna,” the poet offers the option of fleeing the situation, which is precisely what many indigenous women opt to do. By strategically positing an escape in the context of a conventional incantation traditionally accepted as a form of expression, the poets of discussion in this chapter work together to broaden the spectrum of alternatives for women of abusive relationships.

As conveyed in the myth concerning the Mother of Corn and the poems of discussion, men and women clearly depend upon one another. Although manifest in the traditional rhetoric governing communal relations, this interdependence is often lost in the praxis of such theory. The poets featured in Conjuros y ebriedades are renegotiating tradition to incorporate the notion of equality into their reality so that it is reflected in their daily experience. In the myth of the Mother of Corn, María Xila communicates that the collaboration of a husband and wife is fundamental to sustaining their existence; the interdependence of man and woman is necessary for the daily provision of food. Traditionally, men work the land to plant the crops; however, women are responsible for harvesting the aliment in order to provide sustenance to all members of the home. Without women, men are not only without the support of their spouse, but they are also deprived of the much needed nutrition from the corn, beans, and squash of the milpa.

In essence, the renegotiation that is taking place is not only meant to combat the violence exercised by men against their wives, but to attempt to find a new balance in the exchange between men and women. More specifically, the poets are attempting to establish equal relations in both the institution of marriage as well as the community at large. Both the EZLN and indigenous women have addressed domestic violence in their discourse, thus underscoring the multi-faceted angles of such renegotiation. The fact that the speakers for the cause to the international sphere are indeed women vividly elucidates the beginning of a revision from within the community. The poets of focus occupy positions of leadership at the local level to strategically appeal to the global sphere in order to enact a social transformation from the outside. Although we do not know to

what extent the revision of such social norms has been successful, there is undoubtedly evidence of the initial stages of change.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion: A Feminist Revision of Tradition for the Future

En todo México, las mujeres, los hombres y los niños tienen que seguir participando y luchando juntos

--“Susanna” de Larráinzar

No morirá la flor de la palabra,
podrá morir el rostro oculto de quien la nombra hoy,
pero la palabra que vino desde el fondo de la Historia y la tierra,
ya no podrá ser arrancada por la soberbia del poder.
Nosotros nacimos de la noche,
en ella vivimos, moriremos en ella.
pero la luz será mañana para los más,
para todos aquellos que hoy lloran la noche,
para quienes se niega el día,
para quienes es regalo la muerte,
para quienes está prohibida la vida.
Para todos la luz, para todos todo.
Para todos la alegre rebeldía, para nosotros nada...

--Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Feminism in Mexico has clearly evolved; however, it is safe to say that the struggle is not over insofar as feminists all over the globe are still fighting for equality. As indicated by “Susanna” of Larráinzar, the move for change requires the participation of everyone working together. Because the patriarchy is institutionalized and thus perpetuated by all members of society, Allan G. Johnson emphasizes the importance of the manner people choose to participate in the status quo:

We’re involved in [the] patriarchy and its consequences because we occupy social positions in it, which is all it takes. Since gender oppression is, by definition, a system of inequality organized around gender

categories, we can no more avoid being involved in it than we can avoid being male or female. All men and all women are therefore involved in this oppressive system, and none of us can control whether we participate, only how.... (32, emphasis in text)

Since we are all affected by oppressions stemming from the patriarchy, consequently everyone stands to gain from a feminist revision of the system. Both men and women should be exempt from the rigid ideals of gender norms. As the aforementioned epigraphs indicate, the success of the Revolution is contingent upon the participation of everyone and does not aim to exclude any sector of society from future liberation.

In the “Colofón” to Conjuros y ebriedades, Past explains that men are also expected to conform to the mold traditionally assigned to them by society. She describes the reaction of the community to two men who break with convention and participate in the traditionally female task of weaving:

Solamente se habla de dos hombres que se dedican a tejer. Uno es de Zinacantán y usa enagua. Es brujo y comerciante; va a vender a tierra caliente. Tiene su mujer y los dos andan juntos con sus enaguas.

Los hombres se burlan entre ellos del compañero miedoso, diciendo que tiene las nalgas azules, porque la enagua pintada con añil tiñe de color azul las nalgas de las mujeres. (166, emphasis in text)

If society were premised on the notion of equality for everyone, the appropriation of the feminine role within the community of these two men would not be cause for alarm.

Until people are able to freely break with convention without consequence, feminists must continue to work together to push for progressive reforms.

Feminism, much like tradition, is an entity that is constantly reacting to external stimuli. In the larger context of globalization and NAFTA, the Zapatistas have gained international attention as a result of the EZLN demand for rights for Mexico’s indigenous community. In addition to fighting to improve the situation of the country’s indigenous

population, Zapatistas also unite to combat oppressions institutionalized by the patriarchy in their fight for a feminist revision of social norms.

The present study has addressed how indigenous women are utilizing the text of Conjuros y ebriedades to renegotiate their present situation in compliance with their feminist agenda, responding to their reality as represented in the collection of incantations. To further develop the investigation, a future analysis detailing the complexity of circumstances affecting the lives of the indigenous women featured in the collection is necessary in addition to the present literary examination; such an endeavor would require fieldwork with the women themselves.

For example, “Susanna,” the source of the first epigraph, is a Tzotzil woman from the municipality Larráinzar that took part in the celebration of the “Día Internacional de la Mujer” on March 8, 2003 in San Cristóbal de las Casas. According to a letter that Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos wrote to the journalist Álvaro Cepeda Neri of La Jornada in Mexico City on January 26, 1994, Susanna was accused of being responsible for the first Zapatista uprising on New Year’s Day of 1994.⁴⁰ As featured in Chiapas: Challenging History, Marcos explains that the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI) held her largely accountable because she was in charge of “making the rounds of dozens of communities, speaking with groups of women to pull their ideas together into the ‘Women’s Law’ proposal” (69) and later publicly presented these laws in March of 1993. As Susanna’s involvement in the Women’s Laws and the present analysis of Conjuros y ebriedades illustrate, indigenous women have organized within the Zapatista Revolution to reform a variety of oppressions stemming from the patriarchy, as evidenced by the various platforms of this revolutionary set of laws.

⁴⁰ The letter was published on January 31, 1994 in La Jornada.

In the context of globalization, feminism has already addressed the way in which NAFTA institutionalizes oppression for indigenous women in that it ultimately results in their migration to larger cities. There, these women will attempt to participate in the larger market by “selling” their time as laborers in the culture of capitalism. Feminists have long identified the marginalization of women in the context of maquiladoras in border towns between the United States and Mexico as an institution perpetuating the patriarchy. Significantly, however, studies of this nature explain the scenario only after the women abandon their homeland and sacrifice their intimate relationship with the land. The originality of the present study regarding poems from Conjueros y ebriedades lies in the fact that the collection is a product of indigenous women who have work together to retain their connection with the Earth. The poets contributing to this anthology give voice to their struggle to avoid migration to an alien terrain.

Like the EZLN, these women have not realized their ideal society characterized by “libertad.” Until they achieve their goals, the Revolution will persist. Indigenous communities will continue to resist, utilizing a diverse array of mediums such as textiles, photography, and literary production among other venues in order to promote their demands. While the present poets are not rising up in firearms in the name of a feminist revision of the patriarchal ideals policing gender norms, they are effectively collaborating to renegotiate and employ the word as a form of opposition. In the context of the twenty-first century characterized by globalization and NAFTA, the poets featured in this investigation recognize the pertinence of their international visibility. In effect, they renegotiate communal tradition to export a collection of incantations destined to the hands of a foreign reader. The indigenous women featured in Conjueros y ebriedades are

aware of the external forces beyond their immediate situation, influencing the political milieu of Mexico.

Christine Kovic and Christine Eber enumerate some patriarchal institutions that perpetuate the oppressive nature of the status quo in Mexico; the authors also elaborate on their power to influence policies enacted by the government:

Activists in Chiapas and the U.S. recognize that oppression throughout Mexico is deeply embedded in global capitalism. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund conditioned loans to Mexico on the Mexican government's agreement to implement neoliberal economic policies. (194)

Cognizant of the pressures exerted on the government by the patriarchy on the international level, the indigenous women featured in Conjuros y ebriedades mutually work together to renegotiate their international position. By promoting their visibility in the global context, the poets are working together to renegotiate their presence in the political exchange concerning Mexican political and economic policy. Already sentient of the influential nature of patriarchal institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, indigenous women rise to the occasion to equilibrate the influence of such organizations. They corroborate on the international level to create an external pressure that represents their interests, ultimately renegotiating global discourse and their position within the community.

While the present poets are not rising up in arms in the name of a feminist revision of patriarchal ideals, they are appropriating the word as a form of opposition. They employ the word as a weapon to combat such oppressions in the hope of a future based upon egalitarianism. As the fundamental premise upon which feminism is based, it has sought to revolutionize social norms to establish equality. Ana Lau summarizes this general goal of feminism in "El nuevo movimiento feminista mexicano a fines del

milenio,” in the following manner: “Este movimiento, en última instancia, busca transformar y revolucionar las relaciones entre los sexos, alcanzar una condición igualitaria entre ellos y democratizar a la sociedad” (13). Despite the fact that since the uprising of the EZLN in 1994 gender norms have considerably changed, there is still much to be gained in order for Mexican society to be based upon equality.⁴¹ The task at hand for the women contributing to Conjuros y ebriedades is not complete, and the struggle will continue until their provisions are met. Consequently, Zapatistas and feminists alike will continue to work together for inclusion in the projected vision of the country and demand: “Nunca más un México sin nosotros (los indígenas)” and “Nunca más un México sin nosotras (las mujeres).⁴²

⁴¹ Following the chapter entitled “Gender and Stereotypes in the Social Movements of Chiapas” by Sonia Toledo Tello and Anna María Garza Caligaris of Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas, a caption below the candid portrait of a young indigenous girl on the fourth page of the photo section states that “[g]irls born in Zapatista regions after 1994 grow up in a social context marked by shifting gender norms, though how much roles have changed differs from region to region” (n. pag.).

⁴² Monique J. Lemaître León features this combination of demands in her online publication in the Forum on Zapatista Women entitled, “Mujeres Zapatistas.”

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