

## 2 Observations On 'Self' and 'Knowing'

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Cowlitz is a consciousness of people, place, and cosmos that embraces the notion of eternal changeability. Cowlitz is a mixture of many parts that evolved from generations of contact with neighbors and visitors from distant places. It is a single consciousness born of countless generations of interaction among individuals, their extended families (which includes other animals, plants, water sources, stones, mountains, the Moon, the Sun, the stars, and prairies), and revered ancestors.

Shaped like the head of a deer (*mowich*) Cowlitz territory begins at the mouth of the Cowlitz River in the south, where the Spltlanmlix live, then goes north, following the river's path, and then heads east, up the river to the mountains where the Taidnapum live; the left cheek of *mowich* is Mount St. Helens and on the right cheek are the Black Hills. The southern base of Tahoma, or what is now called Mt. Rainier, forms the crown of *mowich*, and Cowlitz Prairie forms the flat space on the snout. All of this is Cowlitz territory. The Cowlitz people - the Taidnapum of the northern upper head of *mowich* and the Spltlanmlix of its southern mouth - are a smoke-house people bounded by the river. We Cowlitz remain in the place that was first peopled by our ancestors.

The great river flowing from the mountains defines, nourishes, and sustains the people; it informs them and holds the promise of bounty or the threat of disaster for their future. Living is made up of good and not-so-good choices taken by the people. While virtually all things change and recycle, certainty in the people's mind comes from experiencing daily differences and repeated reminders of what has already occurred.

Individual personality is only distinguishable from the collective self by virtue of its physical separateness - and that is only illusion itself. The personal self is to the collective self as the upstream waters are to the full rivers below.

No part of the river is truly indistinguishable from any other part. One cup of river water is the same as the water passing by. The distinguishing quality of the cup of river water is the 'cup.' The water takes the form of the cup, an elastic attribute that permits adjustment to change. The Cowlitz who lives rightly knows that the superficial differences among the people give meaning only to relational concepts. No significant meaning can be attached to a fractional quantity of water except that it is a part of the whole. It is the totality of water that has meaning.

I use the river's water as a metaphor for the collective self and the fractional quantity of water as a representation for the 'personal self.' It is the relationship, the interdependence, and the simultaneous capacity for independence of the self that must be emphasized. These seemingly contradictory capacities are the source of knowing. Without this simultaneity, life could not exist. It is, therefore, essential that one recognize the relationship between 'self' and 'knowing.' This observation has greatest significance for comprehending 'knowing' as a consequence of relationships discerned by the self.

### **Fluid Simultaneity and the Sense of Singleness**

When one is standing in the middle of a prairie, a person may experience a sense of being alone, vulnerable, and disconnected. Yet, when one is surrounded by trees and other people, like *mowich*, the bear, and flying things, there is a sense of being a part of or joined with all other things. This can be quite the opposite experience if one is born in a place that is open, like the rolling lands of western Yupic territory (Alaska) – there one can be alone and vulnerable in the forest. The point remains the same. Yet it is equally possible to be in the open prairie and 'lose oneself' in the immensity of things. What accounts for both the singular sense and the sense of unified submersion? It can be an illusion or some other trick of the mind, or it can be the spirit seeing the instance of singleness when there is a separation. Humans are not the only people who sense this singleness and contrast it with the unified submersion. *Mowich* always travel collectively, even when they can't see each other. They can look like trees and bushes. They can even pretend to be a stone. In these ways *mowich* is at once itself and also all other things. Still, owing to a trick, *mowich* can be single, a distinct self – vulnerable, at risk. At such times, when making a trick *mowich* can give itself to a good hunter whose hunger is surpassed only by a wish to ask *mowich* for its life.

*Mowich* chooses a time when it will give up its life – exposing its single self. However, when it remains a part of the whole, *mowich* is not exposed. No harm can come to it. Like other people, *mowich* exists simultaneously within the 'collective self' even as it exposes the single self. When choosing to express the personal self, *mowich* is exposed and can offer itself.

The natural condition of things is for people to experience simultaneity; and it is a trick or exercise of will to choose singleness. As a part of the collective self, one is not aware of singleness or its possibility. There is only an awareness of the tensions and inclinations that give rise to change. This awareness is shared among all people. It is a common knowing – a common consciousness. *Mowich* experiences a calm serenity and demonstrates this when its tail is not nervous – its ears do not turn every which way, and it feeds quietly on grass or blackberry leaves.

These same ways can be observed in the salmon as well. Throughout its life, salmon exhibits a thorough serenity as it travels from its birth place, down the river, finally to the ocean. For most of its life, salmon lives in the ocean – a part of the fluid great self – satisfied. Not until it returns to its mother river to gather in cool dimples in the river bottom, and then to rush upstream to its birthplace, does salmon finally expose its singleness. Each individual salmon must challenge the swift stream by jumping and swimming against the down flowing water. Only those with the courage, strength, and power of *tamorowich* will meet the great challenge. Reaching the place of their birth, each salmon then spawns new life – giving up its body and rejoining its spirit with the great consciousness.

Singleness of consciousness is always temporary and fleeting while the collective consciousness is the permanent and perpetual condition of things. All the beings, all the people experience these things just the same.

### **Braided Rivers to Knowing**

Time, space, and place animate the great consciousness filling the universe. At different periods in the brief history of human beings at least five different, but related, modes of thought have led to knowing, achieving the ultimate expression of consciousness: apprehending the living universe. To comprehend the great consciousness one might reflect on these modes of thinking that characterize different kinds of human attempts at knowing. While contemporary thinkers consider most of these different modes of thought as expressions of 'more primitive ways of thinking,' I suggest that they are all coincident with each other. They are merely streams originating at different places – all leading to a common river fed by the same rain. They are different strands eventually braided into a single cord. Certain strands in the braid are more significant at some times and less significant at other times.

Consider, if you will, the different streams of thought that flow, not necessarily comfortably, into a single river of thought that offers ways of knowing. These are Cyclicism (typically a synthesis of Persian, Greek, Nubian, and other influences rooted in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa), Charto Spiralism (rooted in the Americas), Fatalism (rooted in Asia), Providentialism (transformed from the eastern Mediterranean and Africa into Europe), and

Progressivism (formed in Europe as a synthesis of influences resulting from the modern interaction among Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands). A brief discussion of each stream reflects the diversity of human cultures over time, and their similarities too, thus presenting a range of ways of knowing.

### Cyclicism

The Greek/Persian/Nubian reality of three thousand years ago comprehended a past and a present formed in a great circle. At any time before the present there is a point of the circle that is the past – usually the remembered past. As time proceeds around the circle, one encounters the past and repeats the transactions and events as the present. This mode of thought provided a closed, reassuring, and satisfying existence. One could predict the future merely by remembering the past. This cyclical reality proved quite adequate for the social, economic, and political life that grew and flourished across the Mediterranean and throughout Africa.

Aristotle reflected the *cyclical reality* in his thinking when he engaged in observations that served as the basis for his scientific, ethical, and political commentaries. It was with the certainty of a well-practiced marksman that Aristotle asserted in his *Politics* that some people are born slaves while others are born to rule and direct slaves. Those who were born slaves, Aristotle reasoned, will always be slaves and will produce new slaves because they had always been slaves before. While Aristotle's claim was propounded as an absolute certainty, and his assertion remained a key element in Christian liturgy throughout the ages, his claim is clearly wrong – even though many people still believe what is a patently absurd idea. Still, Aristotle's idea of 'born slave survives as an example of cyclical reality despite its absurdity.

Limiting as cyclical thinking is, it remains a potent part of the human intellectual tool – set for comprehending and engaging consciousness. Though not a dominant influence in contemporary thought, cyclicism remains a fundamental stream feeding the contemporary river of thought.

So powerful was cyclical thinking and so weak were those competing ways of thinking three thousand years ago, it continued to dominate and shape the thinking of all peoples within the reach of eastern Mediterranean influence through to the eighteenth century of the common era.

In the fifth century of the common era the Roman Catholic Church began to build its fortunes upon the intellectual foundations of the Greeks and their successors, the Romans. Though the Persians and Nubians had a profound influence on the development of Greek intellectualism, the Church's historical bias in favor of 'classical Greek superiority' ensured a dominant role for Greek ideas in Christian Church liturgy. As the emerging successor to the collapsed Roman Empire and the primary political body with administrative capabilities throughout Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, and northern Africa the

Roman Catholic Church proceeded to define a conceptual era that still echoes in Providentialism.

### Cuarto Spiralism

Students of Maya literature commonly view the calendar of these ancient people – the 5,125-year 'Great Cycle' – as evidence of a mode of thought fundamental to the original Central American and South American cultures. Associating the Maya mode of thought with cycles, where time and space repeat in infinite circles – as the Maya and Aztec calendars appear to suggest – is so common among scholars that few have stopped to consider how they may actually be projecting their own cultural templates onto the evidence of Maya and other western hemispheric ways of thinking. Though satisfied with a match for their templates, by imposing cyclicism into the context of the western hemisphere Maya scholars conceal the reality of a mode of thought unique in the world.

In an attempt to reveal the underlying character of this distinct mode of thinking, I shift the symbolism slightly from a circle to a spiral. With this change, I believe it is easier to apprehend a mode of thought I have labeled 'Cuarto Spiralism,' or more simply, 'Spiralism.' More than any iconographic image, the *Hunab Ku*, translated as 'One Giver of Movement and Measure' (Argüelles 1987, p. 52), affirms Cuarto Spiralism. This mode of thought takes its name from the infinite repetition of four spiraling arcs, four 'cycles' in the Maya conception of time.

The *Hunab Ku* symbolizes the ideas: 'Movement corresponds to energy, the principle of life and all-pervading consciousness immanent in all phenomena' (*ibid.*). Though similar to the Yin and Yang of the Tao, *Hunab Ku* is much more. As the symbol of Spiralism, the *Hunab Ku* illustrates the interconnectiveness of all life, the four cardinal directions, the four arcs of time, and perpetual movement in all directions through space. The past, the present, and the future are all represented in the spiralist mode of thought. A spiral in space moves outward, inward, forward, and backward, occupying space and not occupying space all at the same time. Life and death are, therefore, two aspects of the same thing. Wholeness and particularity are manifestations of one and the same quality of existence. These are the central attributes of Cuarto Spiralism.

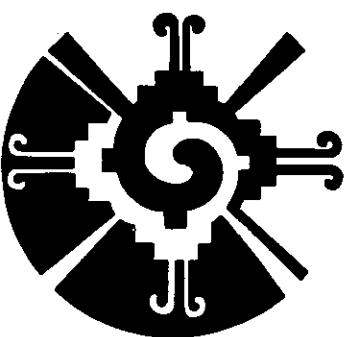


Figure 2.1 Hunab Ku.

Quarto Spiritualism predominates as the underlying mode of thought among the many cultures in the western hemisphere: it is recorded in their literature, stories, songs, dances, and symbols. Peoples as remote from one another as those living in the Arctic North to those living in Patagonia and the Micmac, Cowitz, Hopi, and Kiowa, as well as the Mapuche, Yanomami, Aymara, Sumo, Pipil, and Zapotec all share a common, underlying mode of thought that infuses a wide diversity of cultures.

Quarto Spiritualism permits apprehension of the universe as a whole while giving respect to particularities. Mutuality of respect is the essential glue that both connects and separately identifies all parts of the whole, living universe. It is necessarily the case that all aspects of the universe are alive and possessing of the capacity to choose. It is this capacity of the living universe to choose that leaves the future unpredictable and open to surprise. Describing this concept from the Lakota perspective, Vine Deloria, Jr. writes:

The willingness of entities to allow others to fulfill themselves, and the refusal of any entity to intrude thoughtlessly on another, must be the operative principle of this universe (1996, p. 41).

The discipline demanded of each entity to fulfill the obligations of mutual respect establishes yet another level of unpredictability for the future. Failure to achieve perfect discipline would most surely introduce variability and thus alter the quality of choice and the mutuality of respect. It is just this condition of the living universe that drives each entity to learn, to acquire knowledge, or as Pamela Colorado says, 'to find [a] knowledge system in the west that would be capable of "carrying the weight of God"' (1996, p. 6).

Quarto Spiritualism shapes systems of tribal thought throughout the western hemisphere as a structure that permits aspects of experience that come before to combine with aspects of the present to provide the basis for interpreting the future. Modern Maya Day Keepers demonstrated their reliance on this structure, on the mode of thought, when they stepped from a cave (January 1994) in the highlands of Chiapas to announce the coming of the end of the fourth cycle and the impending arrival of the 'Sixth Sun'.<sup>3</sup> By their interpretation of the sacred texts, the Day Keepers set in motion a series of events that began to transform the Mexican and Guatemalan states and the peoples of the entire western hemisphere and beyond. Such a simple act and the events that followed demonstrate the powerful influence of the spiralist mode of thought.<sup>4</sup>

### *Fatalism*

The overwhelming power of nature and its determinate control over all matters of existence is the central view of fatalism, a mode of thought

predominant among peoples throughout Asia - particularly those who embrace the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Human beings can aspire to and achieve the attribute of 'superior man' and perform acts of piety that conform to the 'will of heaven'. Acting 'rightly' is the goal of fatalism, but it is recognition of the 'order of things' that ensures achievement of the 'superior man'. Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) is commonly considered the primary and most influential exponent of the philosophies that form the underlying structure of fatalism. *Li*, the term used by Confucius when discussing human conduct in relation to nature, suggests the requirement that humans observe true piety and thus make it possible to interpret the 'will of heaven' as acts on earth. By virtue of the preeminent order in heaven, a fatalist is obliged to 'act rightly' to conform to this order, or to discover the path on which to travel to become 'superior man'.

Confucius always encouraged caution and deliberate care in the pursuit of becoming 'superior man'. When surrounded by disorder, Confucius urges a person to 'be still' to take guidance from the orderly nature of things. In his words, quoted by Wilhelm, we can readily see that it is the person who must recognize limitations and await order:

Where disorder develops, words are the first steps. If the prince is not discreet, he loses his servant. If the servant is not discreet, he loses his life. If germinating things are not handled with discretion, the perfecting of them is impeded. Therefore the superior man is careful to maintain silence and does not go forth (Wilhelm 1977, p. 232).

Fatalism gives human beings an active role in choosing a course of action, but the greater powers of the 'will of heaven' ultimately hold sway.

### *Providentialism*

Augustine, the powerful and influential fifth century North African Bishop of Hippo, modified the emphasis of classical Greek cyclical thinking to support the liturgical, economic, and political needs of the Church even as he affirmed 'original sin' and described the place of virtue in the afterlife. Bishop Augustine (354-430 A.D.) bridged what some called the classical era with the beginning of the Christian era and was the father of Christian philosophy and theology. He was also the originator of the idea of Divine Providence.

Through Incarnation, God has given assurance that an elect group will receive salvation. Augustine insists that God is just in condemning the majority for Adam's sin. However, a few men such as Saul (who became Paul) will be saved 'on the road to Damascus'. A small minority will be chosen along

with the good angels for eternal salvation. They will constitute the City of God, and will live forever in heaven in perfect peace and happiness (Bury 1932, p. 46).

As he incorporated Aristotle's cyclical reasoning into his own, Augustine proceeded to affirm the essential element of Providentialism – that salvation would only come at the end of time, which he conceived as being virtually the end of his own life. Creating dichotomy as the basis for his analysis,<sup>5</sup> Augustine advanced the

concepts of self-love and love of God, first to criticize the pagan political order and especially the Roman Empire and, second, to sketch in the broad outlines of a Christian political order. The two cities are commingled on earth, and mankind will not actually be separated into the elect and the unredeemed until the end of time (op. cit., p. 47).

By the twelfth century of the present era, Providentialism claimed center stage of the Christian world, which by then had a wide reach over the world known to Christians. And by the sixteenth century, it could be said, Providentialism claimed predominance. Louis Le Roy, a French translator of Greek classical works, began the process of de-emphasizing cyclicism as he claimed the preeminence of Divine Providence:

If the memory of the past is the instruction of the present and the premonition of the future, it is to be feared that having reached so great excellence, power, wisdom, studies, books, industries will decline, as has happened in the past, and disappear – confusion succeeding to the order and perfection of to-day; rudeness to civilisation, ignorance to knowledge. I already foresee in imagination nations, strange in form, complexion, and costume, overwhelming Europe – like the Goths, Huns, Vandals, Lombards, Saracens of old – destroying our cities and palaces, burning our libraries, devastating all that is beautiful. I foresee in all countries wars, domestic and foreign, factions and heresies which will profane all things human and divine; famines, plagues, and floods; the universe approaching an end, world-wide confusion, and the return of things to their original chaos (quoted in Bury 1932, pp. 46-7).

Foreseeing the conceptual trap he created, Le Roy quickly affirmed Divine Providence:

However much these things proceed according to the fatal law of the world, and have their natural causes, yet events depend principally on divine Providence which is superior to nature and alone knows the predetermined times of events (op. cit., p. 47).

While Providentialism accepted repeating history as a mark of truth, and, indeed, claimed for all of Christendom deep roots in classical Greek culture, a slightly different wrinkle was introduced: the purpose of all this human activity is to attain 'grace' and eternal goodness in heaven. The wealthy, the chosen few, were guaranteed a good place in heaven if they led a 'good life.' The poor and the enslaved were guaranteed only that they would always be poor and enslaved, but the privileged need only think good thoughts and occasionally extend a helping hand to those unfortunate to get a seat next to Saint Peter. Like Cyclicism before it (and alongside it, to be more precise), Providentialism has continued to wield a strong influence in the daily lives of people all over the world despite the absurdity of its major thesis. While Providentialism reached its peak in the late nineteenth century, a competing way of knowing was already in full bloom: Progressivism.

### *Progressivism*

The predominant mode of thought in the modern era is Progressivism. Though it cannot be said that Progressivism began on a specific date, scholars agree that French Historian Jean Bodin's (1566) rejection of sixteenth century theory of the degeneration of man and the popular notion of classical Greek virtue and felicity marked a major departure from the views of his contemporaries (cf. Bury, op. cit., p. 37). Commenting on Bodin's departure, and laying out the principle tenets of Progressivism, Bury notes:

For history largely depends on the will of men, which is always changing; every day new laws, new customs, new institutions, both secular and religious, come into being, and new errors.<sup>6</sup> But in this changing scene we can observe a certain regularity; a law of oscillation. Rise is followed by fall, and fall by rise; it is a mistake to think that the human race is always deteriorating. If that were so, we should long ago have reached the lowest stage of vice and iniquity. On the contrary, there has been, through the series of oscillations, a gradual ascent. In the ages which have been foolishly designated as gold and silver men lived like the wild beasts; and from that state they have slowly reached the humanity of manners and the social order which prevail to-day (op. cit., p. 39).

Avoiding Fatalism and pushing aside Providentialism, Bodin attempts to bring human history into close synchrony with the divine universe while affirming the power of man's will over events (cf. Bury op. cit., p. 43). This conceptual view placed the human being in the dominant role as controller of destiny on earth. As progressive thinking matured with popular adoption of its basic premises it became the foundation of what is widely understood to be 'western' thinking due to its association with western Europe – the

successor to the 'western Holy Roman Empire.' Bodin provided the stimulus for Descartes to formulate his nascent Progressivism, which in turn, provided the foundation for Pascal's thinking and the development of the French Jansenist movement (similar to the Puritan movement in England) in the seventeenth century of the common era (op. cit., p. 69). The Cartesian formulation of the supremacy of reason and the invariability of natural law struck directly at the foundations of Providentialism and established the 'supremacy of man' as a major pillar supporting the progressive mode of thought.

With human beings in the seat of power, profound changes became possible in the natural environment, in relations among human beings, and in conceptions of history, intellectual development, and in religion. Bury attributes to Turgot the rather modern understanding of

universal history as the progress of the human race advancing as an immense whole steadily, though slowly, through alternating periods of calm and disturbance towards greater perfection (op. cit., p. 155).

Progressivism launched potent human movements from the eighteenth century to the present that spread from western Europe to touch nearly every corner of the earth, virtually every society. The 'inevitability' of progress became for peoples in the industrial world a proven reality as guns, commerce, politics, and disease overwhelmed non-industrial peoples throughout the world. The preeminent modes of thought that were influential among non-industrial peoples became subordinate to the forces of Progressivism.

### **Weaving the Braided River**

In the short span of six thousand years, human beings conceived of numerous modes of thought that reflected their relationship with their natural environment and their interpretation of the cosmos. I have mentioned just five of these different modes, and noted that each was comprehended as an infallible way of demonstrating consciousness. No doubt each mode of thought contains infallible truths about ultimate consciousness, but it is apparent from even the brief survey given above that there are aspects of absurdity as well.

Among the modes of thought suggested above, it might be noted that a major difference has to do with the perception of what position humans occupy within the broad scheme of things. Where humans are perceived to be the dominant, and therefore primary, determinant of reality, consciousness is presented as a one-dimensional concept - wholly dependent on human beings. Consciousness is apparently conceived as a much more multi-dimensional concept where humans are perceived as a part of a greater reality.

When one takes all five modes of thought together and weaves them into a single braid, the potential for a more thorough comprehension of consciousness in the universe becomes possible.

Tribal diversity reflects the evolved relationship between people, their geography and natural environment, and their interpretations of the cosmos. Considered separately, interpretations seem at odds, and may, indeed, conflict. But when one sets aside the apparent conflicts it appears that humans and other peoples - including plants, minerals, fire, water, winds, and other animals - share a common consciousness within the living universe. Where there are differences in modes of tribal thought one only need recognize 'local influences,' or cultural particularities as the explanation. Such cultural particularities are important and cannot be dismissed, but they must be understood to have their unique importance in the specific context in which they arise. Differing cultural contexts help to ensure opportunities for diverse discovery, a constant source of renewal and replenishment. Yet, it is apparent, all modes of thought recognize the common consciousness in the universe.

### **Relativity of Self and Knowing**

For all peoples, no less for Cowitz, the particular cultural context inspires a sense of existing at the vortex of all consciousness. This is mainly due to the rather limited capacity of humans to comprehend the fullness of the living universe. It is due to the relatively recent arrival of humans on the earthly plane that humans have this limited capacity, and must, as a consequence, learn from other peoples. The eagle has the ability to travel over vast distances and see events from the sky; and so it is that the eagle can teach humans. The mountain is old and has seen many things over vast amounts of time; and so it is that the mountains can teach humans. The sun, the moon, and the stars play a part in the creation of all things; and so it is that the sun, the moon, and the stars can teach humans.

Through the cultural practices of each distinct people, individual human beings come to know their personal identities and learn to know truth through distinct modes of thought. The diversity of human experience serves as a vast library for ways of comprehending and thus serves human beings in their effort to survive. The diversity of human cultures reflects the diversity of other peoples and shows how humans have learned. It is this immense diversity that creates the relativity of self and knowing and the appearance of particularity. Cultural relativity merely demonstrates the wholeness of consciousness, of self and knowing, when taken together - just as a unified mode of thought is conceivable when many modes of thought are entwined into one braid.

## Living as a Part of the Universe

In such a short time given to live, each human being seeks to find a proper place in relation to all things. Achieving such a place ensures balance, alignment, and happiness. When one balances relations with the river, the mountains, the flying people, the four-legged people, and with the cosmos one becomes properly aligned in relation to the living universe. Such alignment produces balance when one gives respect to the nature and character of all things encountered. When one fails to comprehend the nature and character of things, it is necessary to make an effort to learn from other people. Like all people, humans have the capacity to learn, but humans have a greater need to learn owing to their relative youth, inexperience, and lack of knowledge. It is because of this serious limitation that humans have needed a brain that allows them to learn more things.

Other peoples, like the fish, the eagle, and the mountain, have great knowledge that permits them to comprehend the nature of other peoples. They achieve balance in relation to other peoples because of this greater knowledge. Human beings are the 'little brothers and sisters,' and so they must take special measures to learn to live in proper respect and relation to all things. The ultimate goal appears to be that humans will live as a part of the universe as do all living things. Humans will come to comprehend their part in the consciousness of the living universe and its eternal changeability.

## Notes

1. All beings are thought of as people in different forms in the way of thinking among nations in the Pacific Northwest. Each 'people' has a name and an age, and virtually all 'people' are older and more experienced than human beings.
2. This is the word for 'deer people' used here respectfully recognizing the proper name.
3. Maya spiritual leaders commonly refer to 'Day Keepers' (or 'keepers of the days') when they discuss interpretations and interpreters of the Maya calendar.
4. *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other leading papers all gave front page coverage to the mobilization of so-called guerilla activities. The Mexican government moved thousands of troops and military armor into the Southern State of Chiapas, beginning a military confrontation that continues to the present. The Mexican economy collapsed and the entire political system faultered. These events affect the economies of other States as well and raise important questions about the future stability of the Mexican State.

5. The dichotomy often advanced pits 'feminine paganism' against 'masculine' Christianity resulting in an assertion of masculine dominance.
6. Bodin (1566), cap. VII, p. 353.

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