

Good To Think: Animals and Power

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Introduction

In *Totemism* (1962a) and *The Savage Mind* (1962b) Lévi-Strauss claimed that there was no intrinsic connection between kinship-linked naming systems and food taboos, but it was rather an illustration of a special way of thinking, what he called the “savage” science of concrete ([1962b] 1964b:29). Animal species, with their many observable differences and habits offered a way of naturalising social classifications and distinctions, answering the “primitive” demand for order ([1962b] 1964b:23), where different animals represented different human groups. Hence, natural categories, and animals in particular, are to be considered as metaphorical statements of the relationships between humans (*ibidem*:245, 249). Animal species are chosen not because “they are good to eat”, as a number of anthropologists, such as Boas, Radcliffe-Brown, Firth and Fortes, believed (Shanklin 1985:377, Mullin 1997:208), but because “they are good to think” (Lévi-Strauss [1962a] 1964a:126). Besides, as Lévi-Strauss clarifies, we are dealing with a formal correlation between two systems of differences, that of natural species and that of social groups, but with a particularity: only some traits are chosen ([1962a] 1964a:27-28, [1962b] 1964b:249), in order to give the animal (but also plant or natural phenomenon) a meaningful function within a system: for example, the agriculturalist Pueblo Indians of the U.S. Southwest see the raven as a thief of corn, whereas Northwest Coast hunters and fishers see the same bird as a carrion-and-excrement eater (Lévi-Strauss [1962b] 1964b:69) as well as a very important trickster as Raven.

Lévi-Strauss, when he claimed that animal species offer a conceptual support for social differentiation, particularly referred to marriage rules and descent. Anthropologists of a more materialist stance, however, broadened his very famous phrase about animals as “good to think”, to include animals as source of

power, wealth and inequality (see Shanklin 1985, Mullin 1999, 2002). Consequently, animals not only are food for thought, but they are also “good at eating and be eaten”, albeit metaphorically. As Sahlins (1972:215) pointed out, food dealings are a delicate barometer of social relations; Knight (2005:232), in turn, has remarked that food exchanges tend to have a special character because of the important symbolic value of the giving and receiving of food. In particular, food-giving creates obligations and demarcates social boundaries.

Here I am going to deal with two very different societies, the Nootkan peoples of the Northwest Coast of North America, once fishers and gatherers organized into petty chiefdoms, and the Tzotzil Maya of the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, once subsistence agriculturalists and heirs of the Classic Maya “kingdoms”. Albeit their economic systems underwent substantial changes, entering the capitalist market and globalization, their elites still cling remarkably to animal imagery, connected with food distribution and agricultural fertility, to state as well as legitimize their power.

Case 1. The Chief and the Whale or the Nootkan Body Politic

The whaling culture of the Nootkan peoples¹ on both shores of the Strait of Juan de Fuca in the pre-contact period was of central importance: not only it served subsistence and economic purposes, but it also fulfilled important social, spiritual and ritual functions (Drucker 1951, Colson 1953, Arima 1983). The aboriginal populations of the Northwest Coast were divided into a three class system: the ruling elite, the commoners, and the slaves. Status was ascribed by birth and validated by potlatching (Drucker 1951) and, as MacLeod (1929:95) put it, «the private ownership of the means of production, capital and land, made for the differentiation of labor classes within the community.» Chiefs were owners of all resources, included beaches, fishing

grounds and beached whales and commoners’ exploitation of resources, such as salmon streams, was always at the chief’s pleasure. Territories were bounded with markers and defended from intruders. An early observer, Spanish scientist Moziño, in 1792 (in Ruyle 1973:616), stressed the fact that «the chief of the nation carries out the duties of the father of the families, of king, and of high priest at the same time. These three offices are so closely intertwined that they mutually sustain each other, and all together support the sovereign authority of the *tsaisis* [chiefs].» As Moziño remarks further, the privileged relationship of the ruling elite with the supernatural continued in the afterlife. The hereditary chiefs were called *Hawiih* [pron. *huwuhithl*] in the north and *chaachabat* [pron. *cha-cha-butuh*] in the south. According to Densmore (1939:7) the chief used to hold meetings of councils in his house with the leading lineage headmen, and they were very careful to keep secret both meetings and decisions, until it was time to implement them.

The introduction of a European cash economy during the heyday of the sea otter fur trade, and the later advent of commercial whaling and sealing, created a shift in emphasis away from whaling and associated social mechanisms (Arima 1983, Arima and Dewhirst 1990, Renker and Gunther 1990). At the same time the 1855 treaty of the Makah, epidemics and reservation schools had the same effects on the Nootkan peoples as the French Revolution had on the French Ancient Regime.

During the 1960s and 1970s a pan-Nootkan or “independence” movement developed, whose basic goals were the establishment of a positive Nootkan identity, socio-economic improvement, and a complete control by the Nootkans of their own affairs (Arima and Dewhirst 1990). The discovery of pre-contact Ozette and the opening of the Makah Cultural and Research Center (MCRC) at Neah Bay, as well as other archaeologi-

cal projects on Vancouver Island, helped support the articulating of a neo-whaling ideology. The most sophisticated theoretician in public probably is Huu-ay-aht traditional chief Tom Mexsis Happynook (no date, 2001, 2004), Founding Chairman of the World Council of Whalers, Brentwood Bay, British Columbia, Canada, whose name means Gray Whale Hunter, but its apotheosis may be considered the exhibition *Huupukwanum-Tupaat. Out of the Mist. Treasures of the Nuu-Chah-nulth Chiefs* (Black 1999) held at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, BC in 1999. I contend that this neo-whaling ideology is a hegemonic theoretical tool in order to restore a social organization, which I call neo-aristocratic, by arguing that a return to the "authentic" core of Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth traditions, that is whaling, once practised only by the aristocratic heads of the households, is indispensable for the healing of the social problems of the reservations.

According to chief Happynook, (2004:no page), many animals were "good to think": «Animals play an important role in Nuu chah nulth society because they express life in many ways. Wolves are considered to be our professors and pathfinders. Eagles express love, honor, peace and friendship. Otters teach us balance; not to be too serious; to have some fun. Mink express arrogance and self-importance. Bears express solitude, loneliness and strength. The octopus exhibits shyness, timidness but yet has great strength in its own environment. And in the case of the whale, they are considered to be the keeper's of the record. (¼) Whaling within Nuu chah nulth society was the foundation of our economic structure. It provided valuable products to sell, trade and barter. In essence it was our national bank. Whaling strengthened, maintained and preserved our cultural practices, unwritten tribal laws, ceremonies, principles and teachings. All of these elements were practiced throughout the preparations, the hunt and the following celebrations. Whaling strengthened and preserved our spirituality and is clearly illustrated through the discipline that the Nuu chah nulth hereditary whaling chiefs exemplified in their months of bathing, praying and fasting in preparation for the hunt. The whale strengthened our relationships with other nations and communities.»

Hence, Happynook argues that Nuu-chah-nulth type of liberal democracy

should be «based on the premise that the hereditary system is a responsibility bestowed upon the hereditary chiefs by the creator. [...] Understanding where you fit within the universe, the web of life, the environment, the ecosystems, the society and the community creates different forms of democracy which has been given by our creator and administered through the people by the hereditary chiefs» (Happynook, 2001:no page, 2004:no page).

The highest ranking Makah male was the chief of an extended family: he owned all of his family wealth, both tangible and non-tangible: family crests, songs, dances, rites and costumes, as well as big houses, shellfish grounds, salmon and halibut fishing grounds, berry tracts, grass and shrub patches, beaches, harbours, caves as well as timbered areas. Ruling class control, as Ruyle points out, was economic, political, and ideological, although far from complete and not always effective (1973:617).

The commoners were more or less distant relatives of a chief, not in the direct line of descent; the descendants of younger sons, however, formed a sort of middle class (Drucker 1951:245), a group of low rank chiefs whose rank was never stable and where shifts constantly occurred. The commoners were not «the owners of the fruit of their labour, except in a very small part» (Wike 1958a:226). In fact, according to the Journal of the fur trader Alexander McKenzie (1801:374-75), no one could fish without the chief's permission, carry home more than one half or less of what he or she had caught (deer, shellfish, berries, etc.) nor build a house. Artisans were outside this obligation and were supported directly by the chief; a shaman's career, on the other hand, was one of the few means by which a commoner could acquire some prestige and wealth (Drucker 1951).

Slaves were mostly prisoners of war and their children, although debt slavery also existed. Slaves primarily performed drudge tasks, went to war for their masters, paddled their whaling canoes, and punished reluctant or riotous commoners for them. Chiefs and their elite families did not engage in drudge labour, but only in more prestigious activities, such as whaling, although some lesser chiefs engaged also in sealing. Only the inferior class of people or the slaves were occupied in fishing, while the more noble occupation of killing the whale and hunting the sea otter was performed by the

chiefs and the warriors. Also fishing was ranked: according to Gibbs (1877, in Nieboer [1910] 1971), only the upper portion of them attained the dignity of whalers, a second class devoted themselves to halibut, and a third to salmon and inferior fish.

Complex environment, specialization and competition, as well as population growth provided «the basis for the development of "big men" and competition between them, and status differences between social groups.» (Ames 1981:799-800). "Ritual promotion", that is the «process by which a potential elite may use ritual symbols, and thereby raise itself into an actual elite» (Ames 1981:800), elevated particular lineages to a higher segmentary position within the genealogical structure by the demonstration of important ties to the supernatural. Winter ceremonies and most secret societies were a prerogative of the aristocracy. Feasts, initiations and potlatches were the occasions which offered a chief frequent opportunities to perform important songs and dances in front of a large audience validating his privileges and power.

According to Harkin (1998:1), «whaling success was a sign of chiefly legitimacy as it indicated moral and ritual purity.» In Nootkan thought the whale is the symbol of the body politic: whales represented both fabulous resources and fatal adversaries. Death was also connected to whales in that slaves were occasionally sacrificed in whaling magic, corpses manipulation was involved in the secret rituals, and men were sometimes lost at sea during the hunt. A whale's death-bringing powers, as well as its life-giving substance, were analogous to those of a chief.

The analogy of the body politic is the perception and elaboration of correspondences between society or the state and the individual human body. In its simplest form, a "natural" society is one which functions in a manner similar to the human body (Hale 2003). The idea of cooperation within the body politic also emerges in the distribution of whale meat, which is iconic of social organization. Nootkan chiefs distributed food and each portion was a function of the traditional rights of its recipient, in a manner similar to the feudal titles and rights in Medieval Europe. The whale feast defined the organic community, the Nootkan body politic, which was always local, because as whale meat was limited, so an alliance of villages was always provisional.

Moreover, by providing a body shared by the villagers according to their rank, the whale provided also a template of social and political organization, that is, its functionally related parts mapped the relations of classes in Nootkan society. Jerry Jack, a Mowachaht-Muchalaht chief recently drown in an accident, once said: «Our people didn't just go down the beach and cut a piece of meat off. There was a certain cut for each chief» (*The Daily News* (Halifax) 1/11/98: no page). Huu-ay-aht Willie Sport (Black 1999:34) explains: «We want you to understand what the whale represents to us. When the whale was cut, it represented every inch of our chief's territory, every cut had to be precise. You could not cut into another chief's portion, because that meant part of his *Hauutli* [hohoothly, territory] was being cut off.» Nootkan polities had a first-ranking chief and a number of lesser ranking chiefs, whose seats and territories were hereditary. Thus the whale represented not only the community, but also an organization chart of the elite, whose respective ranks have become murky, and a subject of incessant gossip (Colson 1953, Tweedie 2002). Harkin argues that the chief is, symbolically, always a whale, because he is a giant among men as the whale is a giant on the seas. Nevertheless, the chief actually reincarnates in a killer whale, which gives a good idea of the place of the chief in the metaphorical food-chain, and casts a gloomy shadow on the chief's relationship with his community. Chiefs are similar to the cetacean killers of whales, which are wolves transformed into sea predators; according to Nootkan myths and rituals, such as the very important Wolf Dance they are sea wolves: this notion was revived in 2004 when a young killer whale, Luna or Tsux'lit, was recognized by chief Mike Maquinna as the reincarnated hereditary chief of the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nation, his father Ambrose Maquinna, who had died three days before Luna's arrival in Gold River (Meissner 2004:no page). Wike (1958:223) remarks that, alongside the figure of the beneficent chief who was priest and good provider of food for his people, there was also the chief of the secret societies, the terrible wolf of the Tlukwana (Wolf Ritual), whose impressive imagery was violent and thanatotic, a cannibal devourer who was not a priest but a dreaded shaman, who held potentially coercive power through chattel slaves and bullies who supported him.

One diagnostic quality of the chief is his territorial and resource prerogatives, and obtaining whales is one dimension of this. The association between the whaling medicine (magic) and the establishment of a chiefly lineage is strong, to the point that, as Harkin (1998: 319) asserts, successful whaling can be read as equivalent to the existence of a chiefly polity: as a matter of fact, the words *hauutli* (territory, pron. *huhoothli*) and *hawilh* (chief, pr. *huvwuheeh*) are etymologically related.

Natural resource ownership and management are currently the paramount issues both in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where the Nuu-chah-nulth live, and in Washington State, where the Makah reside. The Declaration by the *Hawiih* [pr. *huvwuheeh*] of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations (in Black 1999:143) gives no room to misunderstandings: the chiefs, not the people, are the rightful owners of their territory and they claim full control of all lands, waters and resources. They claim that their authority has not been extinguished by any treaty or superseded by any law, and in the negotiations with the governments of Canada and British Columbia they want «to reach agreements and/or treaties which will recognize and reaffirm our ownership and governing authorities over our respective *Hauutli* (pron. *huhoothli*).» By doing this Canadian authorities would give up to a common law tradition developed from the Magna Charta onward.

The highest ranking Nootkan male was the chief of an extended family: he owned all of his family wealth, both tangible and non-tangible. The commoners were not the owners of the fruit of their labour, except in a very small part. In fact, no one could fish without the chief's permission, carry home more than one half or less of what he or she had caught (deer, shellfish, berries, etc.) nor build a house. As Drucker (1939:55-56) points out, the absence of a clear-cut division between chiefs and commoners was asserted by emphasizing the chief's complete control over the surplus wealth produced by his group: this control was the foundation and the expression of fundamental differences in the socio-economic status of chief and commoners, I wonder whether those who are supporting a return to a non-denaturated form of "traditional" government, that is a post-traditional chiefdom, realize what they are

doing. Most of them would jeopardize their property rights and their civil rights.

Douglas (1994:33) argues that «the animal categories come up in the same patterns of relations as those of humans because the said humans understand the animal kinds to be acting according to the same principles as they themselves ¼ The principles of seniority, marriage exchange, territory, and political hegemony that they use for explaining their own behaviour they also use for predictions about animal behaviour.» In sum, Douglas (1994:36) concludes, animals «are brought into human social categories by a simple extension to them of the principles that serve for ordering human relationships.» Hence, human sociality is represented through animal embodiment and animals function as disguised humans (Forrest et al. 2005:143), or, as Lévi-Strauss put it ([1962a] 1964a:115), the animal world is thought of in terms of social world.

Case 2. Tzotzil Animal "Doubles" and the Classic Maya Legacy.

The Pre-Columbian Maya and the Jaguar

The ancient Maya had more jaguar deities than any other Mesoamerican people: God GIII of the Palenque Triad represents the sun in its various aspects as the younger brother of the Hero Twins (Schele and Miller 1986:50-52)², it was the daytime sun as well as the Underworld's Sun (Miller and Taube 1993:104). The daytime sun, Ahau-Kin or Kinich Ahau (Lord Sun) was the patron of number four and could be represented with jaguar features, but in his most dangerous aspect as the Jaguar Sun of the Underworld, that is the night-time sun with "lunar" traits (Milbrath 1999:124-129), patron of war, fire and of number seven, he might also appear as a full-bodied jaguar. Other jaguar gods included the Waterlily Jaguar, an Underworld denizen associated with royalty as well as a war deity, the Jaguar Baby, always set in opposition with Chac, the rain god, in scenes of dance and sacrifice and also associated with the Sun and with God GIII of the Palenque Triad identified as the younger brother of the Hero Twins Yax Balam (Schele and Miller 1986:50-52, Miller and Taube 1993:104, Scheler and Freidel 1990:406). One of the pair of the old Paddler gods, the Jaguar

Paddler, represents the night and, together with his twin, the Stingray Paddler (the day) appears especially in references to period-ending rites (Schele and Freidel 1990:413).

The Maya world was made up of three layered domains: the starry Heaven, the stony Middleworld of earth, made to flower and bear fruit by the “blood of kings” (Schele and Freidel 1990:66, Schele and Miller 1986), and the watery Underworld, sometimes called Xibalba or place of fright. Like the middle earth, Xibalba had inhabitants and a landscape with both natural and constructed features and at sundown it rotated above the earth to become the night sky (Schele and Freidel 1990:66). In Classic Maya theology the younger semi-god of the Hero Twins, Yax-Balam (Great Jaguar) symbolized the sun, he is the god of number nine and has jaguar spots on his lower face and patches of jaguar pelt on his arms, legs and back; his older brother Hun-Ahau (One Lord) represented Venus, he is one of the gods of the Morning Star in the Dresden Codex and has a single black spot on his cheeks and single black spots on his body, like a corpse (Schele and Miller 1986:51). Schele and Freidel (1990:465) remark that the variant portrait glyph of number nine, a jaguar head, is also used in many of the toponymic forms of the Tikal Emblem Glyph, hence the very famous city of Tikal, Guatemala, was apparently called Yax Bal or Yax Balam as the special place of this god.

The ancestral Hero Twins Hun-Ahau and Yax Balam, blowgunners and ballplayers, who are known in the *Popol Vuh*³ of the 16th century-Maya Quiché (Guatemala) as Hunahpu (One Lord, the Hunter) and Xbalanque (the Jaguar) are the prototypes of kinship and considered to be ancestral to all Maya kings (Schele and Freidel 1990:115). According to the *Popol Vuh*, Hunahpu and Xbalanque at the end of their victorious ordeal in the Underworld resurrect their father, the Maize God, and rise to heaven as, respectively the Sun and the Moon (Coe [1966] 2001 :202) or Venus and the Sun (Schele and Miller 1986:51). As a matter of fact, Yax Balam could be associated both with the sun and the moon by Classic Maya (actually, the full moon, Tedlock 1985:46): such multiple natures are not exclusive and unchanging, but inclusive and dynamic (Schele and Freidel 1990:346, note 27). Schele and Freidel, in fact, point out that the quintessential

predator in royal warfare, the Waterlily Jaguar, was associated with both the sun as it manifests the Sun God, and with Venus in the Venus-timed war rituals. In addition, the glyph of number nine, Balam (whose god is Yax Balam, modern Maya B'olon), is a jaguar head, but the name and the glyph of the fourteenth day of the Maya *Tzolk'in* calendar of 260 days is Ix, which means (female) jaguar. In fact, Ix is the prefix for “woman” (Montgomery 2002:42, 102-103), and it accounts for the “female”, “lunar” aspects of the jaguar⁴.

By means of the vision quest, obtained through the ritual of bloodletting, the Maya rulers gave birth to the god or ancestor, enabling it to take physical form in this plane of existence (Schele and Freidel 1990:89). When the king stood upon the stairway landing of the pyramid, he represented both the cosmic cycle of the day and the lineage cycle of the Hero Twins as his founding ancestors (Schele and Freidel 1990:116). The ancient Maya believed that there had been several worlds before the present one, and that each had been destroyed by a deluge. Modern Maya usually believe that there have been three worlds before this one, the fourth (Sharer 1994:520).

The public monuments erected by the Classic Maya emphasize both the role of the king as family patriarch, the “father-mother” of the city-state, whose genealogical legitimacy was of the utmost importance, and the shamanistic nature of Maya kingship (Schele and Freidel 1990:86-87, Saunders 1994:110-112). As Bassie-Sweet (1996:177) puts it, the ruling elites were actually recognized as living members of the senior ancestral group, who resided in the ruling clan's ancestral cave (ibidem:170). This cave was the mouth of a sacred mountain (*witz* in Classic Maya, Tzotzil *vits*), leading to Xibalba- the Underworld, and was represented on this plane of existence by pyramids and temples, whose doors were also the cave leading into the metaphorical “heart of the mountain”, that is the temple interior. Within the cave the Tree of the World grew, marking its centre (and the city-state as the centre of the world, Schele and Freidel 1990:71-72). The same metaphors are also used by Maya shamans and leaders in the humbler setting of their villages. The origin of the connection between rain, rulers and jaguars was perhaps originated in the Pre-ceramic phase of Mesoamerica and was possibly elaborated by the Olmecs

(Markman and Markman 1989:17, 22). Vogt ([1976]1979:19), for example, discovered that the Maya Tzotzil-speaking Zinacantecos still believe that lightening comes out of caves and get up into the sky. Maya, and in general Mesoamerican cave symbolism is to be understood as a dominant symbol (Turner 1967), connected with the notions of “house”, “hole”, “transformation”, a source of fertility and material wealth, water and maize, as well as the dwelling of witches and the ghouls of the Underworld. In Mesoamerica caves, and their spatial analogues in the forest, are often associated with the number seven, whose glyph in ancient Maya is a personified jaguar deity, the Jaguar God of the Underworld, and jaguars, as these archetypal beasts of the forest are linked with caves (Stone1995:43). Both Gossen (1974) and Vogt ([1976] 1979) stress the importance of the spatial as well as spiritual dichotomy of the *kaah* versus *k'aax*, that is the community versus the wilderness, the *te'tik* (“trees”), the forest as an undomesticated domain populated by wild animals, and especially represented by jaguars and demons. The *te'tik* is the place where the animal soul companion dwells, that is the disordered, untamed side of the *Ch'Ulel*, one of the Tzotzil's souls (Vogt [1976] 1979:39).

The transformational nature of jaguar gods and of jaguars as important shamanic creatures had been present in Mesoamerica at least from Olmec times onward: the Maya glyph *way* (read *uai* like why), meaning “dreamer” as well as “soul companion” and “hole, portal”, is an *ahau* (lord, king) glyph, half covered with a jaguar pelt (Miller and Taube 1993:102) connecting it to the Hero Twin Yax Balam. According to Freidel et al. (1995:52) the Classic word *way* refers to kings, ritual performers and gods in their magical alternative forms as animals, stars and fantastic beasts: these *wayob* (*ob*, plural suffix) were powerful, terrifying conduits of supernatural power, but for today's Yucatec Maya the *wayob* are witches, who can shift shape, turning into animals to torment or attack their neighbours' souls (Freidel et al.:ibidem). In modern Mayan languages, however, *way* also means dreaming or sleeping, and it may refer to the soul or spirit companion's travels in dream while one is asleep (Miller and Taube 1993:176). While anthropological literature (see, for example, Brinton 1894, Foster 1944, Vogt 1969) as well as New Agers use the cover

name of *nagual* (actually form-changer) from the Nahuatl⁵, the Maya term *way* corresponds to the Nahuatl word *tonalli* (which has connotations of solar heat, day, day name, destiny and soul), and to today's term *tonal*, "spirit familiar or soul" (Miller and Taube 1993:172).

The Animal Soul Companions of the Tzotzil Maya

The home of the Tzotzil Maya lies in the highland region of central Chiapas in southeastern Mexico. The Tzotzil language, like Tzeltal and Ch'ol, is descended from the proto-Ch'ol spoken in the late classic period at sites such as Palenque and Yaxchilan. The habitat of the Tzotzil is highland, with mountains, volcanic outcroppings, and valley lowlands. The climate at high altitudes is cool to cold, and summers are very wet. Today, the largest Tzotzil municipalities, San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan, are "vacant towns" where only the main officials live, because they are actually the ceremonial centres, with their church-and-plaza complexes, of the sparse, patrilocally organized, hamlets where the Tzotzil usually dwell. The ceremonial centres of San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan are also the communities' points of articulation with Mexican governmental agencies and the Catholic Church (Gossen 1975:448, see also Vogt 1969).

The word *tzotzil* means "people of wool" (*tzotz* = wool in the Tzotzil language), because they make their clothing primarily out of wool. However, according to ancient Maya language, *tzotzil* could also be translated as "bat people", given the association of their culture with this animal in the view of the Maya. Bats were associated with the forces of death and bloody sacrifice, because vampires make an incision and then lap the blood of their victim, while bats snatching fruits from the trees may have contributed to the widespread identification of bats with decapitation: in the *Popol Vuh* the Underworld god Camazotz or Death Bat decapitates the elder Twin Hunahpu (Miller and Taube 1993:44). Tzotzil communities perceive themselves as the navel (*Mixik' Balamil*, navel of the land) of the square earth-island and share cosmological beliefs similar to those of the ancient Maya, albeit with some differences in the details, concerning the layered domains of the Upper, Middle and Under worlds (Lamb 1995:1). Hence, the ceremonial centres, with their church-

and-plaza complexes, reproduce the ancient Maya polities' ethnocentric, isolationist stance.

The Tzotzil disposition of the church seats shows Maya preoccupation for order and hierarchy inside the churches, which stand for the ancient Maya temples. According to their rank, the political-religious officials sit from right to left, that is the highest ranking officials are closer to the rising Sun (right) and the lesser ones closer to the setting sun (left) (Vogt [1976]1979:15-18), following the opposition between "senior" and "junior" aspects involving everything, from people to animal souls to Child Jesus (there are two of him, the *hermano mayor* and the *hermano menor Ninios*, Vogt [1976] 1979:23). Consequently, the Tzotzil explain much of individual fate as well as personality differences in terms of a system of classification of animal soul companions or co-essences, ranging from the jaguar for the rich and powerful, such as shamans and religious-political leaders, to skunks and squirrels for the poor (Gossen 1975:448).

I am not going to deal in detail with the very intricate religious beliefs of the Tzotzil: suffice to say that their universe is very similar to that of the Classic Maya, with a smattering of Catholic doctrine. According to Sharer (1994:515-520), in the Maya area shamanism was probably well developed before the Preclassic, by which period, as society increased in size and complexity, full-time priesthood began to establish itself. By the time of the Classic period Maya priests had developed a substantial body of esoteric knowledge and, when Christianity was imposed, sometimes forcibly, sometimes peacefully, after the Conquest, the most profound change was the disappearance of the esoteric knowledge, as the most visible aspect of "paganism". In the isolated highland Maya communities the native ideological system has been in the hands of the native shamans, who assumed the control of Christian public ceremonies held in the churches, as well as divining and curing ceremonies, still using the sacred 260-day almanac to determine birthday names and the proper days for rituals. Christian angels and saints became gods, the cross is worshipped as a deity and Kalvario is a mountain seat of the ancestors. Here I am going to focus on Chamula, with some details from Zinacantan.

In Chamula there are six principal *san-*

tos, three senior saints and three junior saints: San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist) is the patron of the Chamula; while Jesucristo is the sun. San Juan is the god of water, lightning and earth (God GII of the palenque Triad), he is the Chamula cultural hero and master of sheep, who lives in the sacred mountain of rain (Lupieri 2001:98,103-104). In Chamula and Zinacantan the sun, *Hch'Ul Totik*, Our Saint Father, at noon is conceived as San Salvador, but its most important aspect is that of the rising sun, Jesucristo, announced by *Muk'Ta K'anal* (Venus or Big Star, Vogt [1976] 1979:33-34). The Sun/Christ is the first principle and overseer of order, helped by his mother, the Moon/Virgin Mary (*Hch'Ul Me'tik* or Our Saint Mother), and several saints and supernaturals (Gossen 1975:450). Many mountains and hills around the ceremonial centre are inhabited by the ancestral gods, who check the villagers' behaviour and punish the deviants, and of whom in Zinacantan the most important is the Lord of the Land, *Yahwal Balamil* (always represented as a rich, fat Ladino), patron of wells and the rain, with his various manifestations associated with caves, warm springs or natural wells (Vogt [1976] 1979:34). Indeed, the Chamula as well as the other Tzotzil also have another rain god and lord of the earth, called '*Anhel* (Angel), who is a rich Ladino in serpentine form, who owns a lot of money and weapons (Lupieri 2001:98). It looks like all these saints-gods are manifestations of the same god-entity, who can have shiftings of religious devotions after modifications in the power structure of the villages (see, for example, Lupieri 2001:88). Others can be independent *santos*, such as San Entierro (Christ dead and buried before Easter) and Santo Cristo, who are perceived as different from Jesucristo (ibidem). At Chamula, the Sun/Christ gave to St. Jerome/Our Father Jaguar or *Totik bolom*, the responsibility for human individual destiny: his senior aspect sits with Sun/Christ on the third (highest) sky, and in his junior aspect he lives as the lord of the earth within a sacred mountain, Tzontevitz⁶ (Gossen 1975:450). St. Jerome/Father Jaguar, who acquired easily his role because of the lion lying at his feet in Spanish Catholic images, oversees human fate through three types of souls associated with each human being: the *?ora* ("time", "fate" or "destiny") represented by a multicoloured candle placed by St.

Jerome in the third (highest) level of the sky at the time of conception, the *ch'Ulel*, an invisible essence associated with the fetus, divided into thirteen parts and located at the tip of the tongue, also present on the tip of one's animal soul companion, and the *ch'Anul* (deriving from *ch'On*, animal), assigned to the individual at birth by St. Jerome/Father Jaguar and the Sun/Christ as animal soul companions. The *ch'Anul* has junior and senior aspects with thirteen aspects each. The *ch'Anul* junior aspect lives in the sacred mountain, where is tended, in Chamula, by St. Jerome (Gossen 1975:450-51), and by the Grand Alcalde, an aspect of the Lord of the earth who lives within a volcano and is the divine counterpart of the highest ranking member of the village religious hierarchy, in Zinacantan (Vogt [1976] 1979:39).

According to Gossen (1975:451-454), during the day these animal co-essences roam freely around the territory, but they are herded by the twin St. Jeromes into their corrals in the third sky and within the mountain, where they are protected during the night from the attacks of the witches' animal soul companions. All animal soul companions are wild animals whose names have five digits⁷ and are mammals (Gossen 1994:563). They are ranked according to three levels: in the third and highest level there are the senior (*bankilal*) animals, such as the jaguar, associated with the most powerful individuals, that is the shamans and the political-religious leaders of the Tzotzil villages, in the second level there are the coyote, weasel and ocelot, and in the first level, the most junior such as the humble rabbit, opossum and skunk (Gossen 1994:564-565). As long as the *?ora* soul or candle burns in the sky, both the individual and his/her co-essence live, when it it burns out both die, and only a part of the *ch'Ulel* survive as spirit, goes to the Underworld and comes back to "eat" the offers of the living on the Day of the Dead (Gossen 1994:563).

The Tzotzil are reluctant to kill the above animals (and others, on whom, however, there is no agreement among the Tzotzil, see Gossen 1975:454), because they might kill a relative or even themselves, since whatever happens to the animal, disease and death, also occurs to its human counterpart (Gossen 1994:565). The Tzotzil, however, have no trouble in killing "anomalous" animals, such as domestic animals or fowl and wild birds (Gossen 1975:453). In the caption to

Table 1 (1975:453) Gossen also notes the paradox that some animals which are used for ritual sacrifice in curing ceremonies are also the familiars of witches. In fact, witches have both a strong "native" wild animal soul companion and an "aberrant" creature (see, for example, Douglas 1970), which is "different", in this case, for the number and type of digits from "regular" co-essences and is neither wild nor human. Cattle, chickens and turkeys are useful for both social and asocial ends, sheep are never eaten, and pork is eaten only occasionally (Gos As we have seen, since domestic animals do have an anomalous classificatory position, they are important intermediaries both as sacrificial animals (chickens and turkeys in particular), and as witches' soul companions. In fact, witches require a dominant soul companion, possibly a carnivore distant in time and space, that is belonging to the oldest, early creation, living in a distant habitat, nocturnal and infrequently seen, as well as a second familiar, near in time and space. In fact, the latter has been created in the recent (post-conquest) creation, it is diurnal and seen every day, and gives a witch access to house compounds where it is not noticed (Gossen 1975:454) All people may learn the identity of their animal co-essences through dreams, the way, but most are never sure of their identity, especially humble people (ibidem; see also Vogt [1976] 1979:37-40). The classificatory system of animals and animal co-essences show that the Tzotzil believe that individual fate and fortune are almost beyond one's control and not only explain individual differences and different social standing, but are also a powerful factor of social and cultural control and conservatorism (Gossen 1994:566). Vogt ([1976] 1979:39) explicitly maintains that there is a clear relationship between the concepts of animal soul companions, those about the relative "heat" of a soul (the oldest, most powerful males' souls are the hottest, the youngest, powerless females' ones are the coldest) and social control. Gossen (1975:458), on the other hand, stresses the ambivalent position of powerful shamans and politicians as well as human inequality related to deep-lying cosmological principles. Indeed, Gossen (1975:460, note 8) hypothesizes that, after the fall of the Classic Maya and the Conquest, Maya farmers continued to rely on local elites who provided information for everyday life, but as a head-

less astrological system, and a fatalistic view of body and person. Concepts such as that of animal souls, incorporated into the domestic ritual practice, have provided a remarkable cultural insulation and social separateness.

The jaguar as a symbol of the earth and fertility did not die with the Conquest, but continued to "die" every day in the festivals performing the widespread *Danzas del Tigre* (Jaguar Dances), with their complex of blood sacrifice (today usually chickens and mock human sacrifices), cave and human impersonators disguised as jaguars (representing the "native" element vis-à-vis of the other impersonators of more or less Spanish origin, Markman and Markman 1989:168). Significantly, in the oppositions of Maya thought, jaguars are both related to pre-Columbian pyramid/mountain and temple/cave notions and to churchtowers, that is contemporary religious summits (Markman and Markman 1989:171). The Jaguar Dances also involve a degree of violence, foreseen and even welcome not only within the drama, but also among the spectators, because of the large amounts of sugar cane *aguardiente* (rum) consumed (ibidem).

All masked jaguar impersonators play important roles in fertility-related rituals, but the year-ending rites of the festival of San Sebastian (*Martir Kapitan* for the Tzotzil) at Zinacantan for the yearly change of the *cargo*-holders (that is the religious officials, Vogt [1976] 1979:227-251) are particularly important here. In fact, this new Year's Eve Carnival not only connects Catholic rites with pre-Columbian agricultural ceremonies, but it symbolizes the divine basis for rulership, its connection with the legitimizing ancestors and, after the Carnival disorder and violence, the right the officials have to restore both unequal social order and cosmological "harmony". As we will see later, this right is currently threatened and this is the reason why Tzotzil communities are torn apart by political-religious turmoil. The first episode of the festival of San Sebastian (Vogt [1976] 1979:244-345) in Zinacantan we are interested in, takes place at Jaguar Rock (*Bolom Ton*), a large boulder: two "jaguars" perform rituals which hint at episodes of the *Popol Vuh* about the mythical origin of maize (Bassie 2002:8) as well as slash and burn farming. The jaguars are fire deities and the mock human sacrifice that makes the previously slayed jaguars to "revive"

hints at the destruction and re-creation cycle rooted in the corn cycle, where the wild space, where the jaguars live is destroyed and is transformed into cultivated human space. The second episode takes place at the Jaguar Tree (*Bolom Te?*), where the Jaguars and other impersonators are involved in very explicit sexual humour and lewd joking. Sexuality is also emphasized in the jaguars' climbing and descending from the Jaguar Tree (Vogt [1976] 1979:246): from the top of this *axis mundi* the jaguars spit and throw pieces of food at the crowd. This episode hints at the *Popol Vuh*, when the slayed Maize god's head on a tree impregnates Xibalbian Blood Woman by spitting into her hand. She later gives birth to the second pair of Hero Twins. The spittle is connected with a ceremonial maize drink, which represents semen as well as rain (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:31); in Chamula they have a "San Juan's rain", believed to be "warm", also represented by the maize drink drunk warm by men during the ceremonies, whose Tzotzil name is a cover term for semen (Gossen 1999:228 in Lupieri 2001:89). Lupieri points out (2001:98 note 37, 105 note 85) the general Maya tendency, also evident in Chamula and Zinacantan, to extend Easter terminology to all major *fiestas*: actually in Tzotzil language Christmas and every *fiesta* are called *pasqwa* (Easter), which connects this notion with that of the quadrilateral earth-island of Maya universe, a metaphor for the cornfield, and the maize cycle.

In antiquity, Maya kings interceded with the gods and ancestors on behalf of their cities. Today, in many Maya communities, mayors and healers are one and the same, responsible for their people's physical and spiritual health. Although civil-religious hierarchies as we know them today in highland Chiapas arose during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to regional patterns of economic development and demographic change – and as such contested as "true" bulwarks of traditionalism (Rus and Wassestrom 1980:467), Tzotzil elites have remarkably followed the pattern of power of their Maya ancestors, with "big men" and their lineages, allied families and clients instead of the kings. Furthermore, contrary to anthropological theories (see, for example, the Mexican scholars Aguirre Beltran 1967, Stevenhagen 1969), which supported the idea that the syncretistic cargo-system

was an egalitarian, communal socio-religious device, it is clear that by contrast, as Cancian (1965, in Rus and Wassestrom 1980:466) suggested, it is a mechanism which perpetuates hierarchical inequality. A key aspect of this mechanism is the hotly contested monopoly of the *pox* (pron. *posh*, a home-brewed sugar cane rum), Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola (burping means expulsion of evil spirits) in the hands of the so-called *caciques* or bosses, that is the "big men" and their followers (Kovic 2005:8). As a matter of fact, one of the charges hurled at *El Pepsi*, the sobriquet of the mayor of Chamula and sole agent of that soft drink, by Catholics and Protestant *expulsados*⁸ and Zapatists, is the money he gets from the monopoly of coke. In fact, both *pox* and coke are metaphorically linked with semen and thus, with the fertilizing, nourishing powers of the elite and their lineages, included their ancestors' shrines, which are emphasized during the cyclical syncretistic *fiestas*.

Conclusion

Lévi-Strauss ([1962b]1964b:248-249) wrote that classificatory systems are more or less well constructed codes, but always aim at being meaningful. He ([1962b]1964b:253) also suggested that it exists a sort of antipathy between history and classificatory systems, because the form of the structure may survive, when the structure itself succumbed to the event. In fact, "totemic" classificatory systems classify things and (natural and social) beings by means of finite groups. They subdivide their groups into two series, one original and one derivative: the former is made up of human groups in their cultural aspect, the latter comprises the zoological and botanical species in their supernatural aspect, with an asserted priority of existence in comparison with the former series which has actually generated the latter. According to Lévi-Strauss, the two series exist in the time, but enjoy an atemporal regime and the original series is always ready to be used as a reference mechanism in order to interpret or correct the changes occurring in the derivative series. Thus, he argues, history is subordinated to the classificatory system.

Applying Lévi-Strauss' ([1962b] 1964b:254) division of societies into "hot" and "cold" ones, both the Nuu-chah-nult/Makah and the Tzotzil Maya would be "cold": they would supposedly

try to abate the influence of time, albeit history has profoundly modified them. As Cancian (1991:1) observed, most Zinacantecos (and Chamula) dedicated themselves to the ceremonial life that defines the boundaries of their communities and, for the most part, «they shut out the world around them and concentrated on each other.» Living in a marginal area in the highlands of Chiapas, it was relatively easy for the Tzotzil "shut out the world", and occasionally rise up in arms when the world broke in. As Watanabe (1990:131) writes, however, the «symbolic reassortment of saints with other local images of community, in particular ancestors and "earth lords", shows syncretism to be an essential property of local identity, not simply a quaint or arbitrary survival of the Maya past.» For the Nuu-chah-nulth and the Makah keeping out the world was much more difficult, because since Captain Cook's times they have found themselves immediately involved in the globalized fur trade, and they have reacted only recently to it with neo-traditional ideologies. Since the Nuu-chah-nulth and the Makah have long abandoned their old religion in favour of Protestantism (most are Presbyterians, with some Pentecostals and few members of a local nativist church, the Shakers⁹), they meet greater problems, living at the edge of the great Vancouver-Seattle-Tacoma conurbation, in anchoring ideologically their traditional mechanisms of power transmission and management (Busatta 2004-2005 fieldnotes) and blend them with democratic rhetoric (see, for example, Happynook 2001, 2004) to create post-chieftdom, neo-traditional polities. Nevertheless, what is important to point out here is that in these two cases the same type of animal imagery defines the right of the elites to rule through predator-prey relations. The predator, be it a killer whale or a jaguar, on the one hand legitimizes hierarchical inequality and, on the other hand, by means of their functions of food-givers, they secure the "harmonious" exchange of gifts and counter-gifts between society and deities (Mauss 1925, Weiner 1992), with the elites as intermediaries. They are destroyers as well as life-givers. The dual nature of kingship, the destructive as opposed to the constructive, is sometimes impersonated by two different animals, such as in the case of the Fon (king) of the Kom people of Cameroon, where it can appear as the positive python and the negative leopard.

ard (Shanklin 1994). As Willis (1994:18) comments, ambiguous zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images occur as representations of world-making power in non-Western societies. Willis cites the famous instance of the pangolin, as a humanoid emblem of Lele royalty (Douglas 1966, 1994). He further remarks that where societies are relatively egalitarian and unstratified such power is vested in the mediative figure of the shaman, as healer and master of animals. In hierarchical non-Western societies such as the Aztecs (Saunders 1994), by contrast, this mediative role is focused in the person of the king, as supreme world-maker.

Both the Nuu-cha-nulth/Makah and the Tzotzil Maya belong to much more modernized, hybrid societies, the former in particular. Furthermore, the elites of both peoples not only have been profoundly influenced by the capitalist system, but they have thoroughly changed since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, because the nouveaux riches, favoured both by the market and Western politicians from the centre, accessed to Western-style officialdom, often substituting older lineages. What is remarkable, in my opinion, however, is the resilience of the legitimizing animal imagery both elites keep using, which does not appear as an occasional, haphazard self-serving recovery of symbols from a tribal/ethnic depository, but it seems to conform, at least in not negligible part, to that subordination of history to the survived form of the structure, which Lévi-Strauss believed to be the principal trait of societies using classificatory systems. In sum, the ambiguous metaphors of killer whales and jaguars, as social predators as well as food-givers, have been “good to think” for a very long time.

Notes

1. Captain James Cook who anchored in Nootka Sound on March 31, 1778, referred to the local Mowachaht and Muchalaht people as the ‘Nootka’ people—a name that was used until recently to describe all Nuu-cha-nulth speaking people and their language, the southern Wakashan. The Nootka live on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada and today they are organized into a tribal council consisting of representatives from about twenty local bands, such as the Chickliset, Ahousat, Ucluelet, etc. Some scholars, such as Arima (1983) have suggested three distinct geocultural zones: Northern and Central Nootka and Nitinat. The Makah, once divided into five chiefdoms, live on the northwestern tip of the Olympic Peninsula, Washington State, across the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and are closely related to the Nitinat.

2. Also the god GI of the Palenque Triad is identified as the sun or Venus, according to the versions of various city states as well as the Popol Vuh (Schele and Miller 1986:50-52).
3. The *Popol Vuh* edition I used is the Italian translation (1976) of that edited by the Mexican scholar Adrian Recinos (1953), translated into English by D.Goetz and S.G. Morley. Dennis Tedlock’s (translator and editor, 1985) *Popol Vuh.*, however, with commentary based on the ancient knowledge of the modern Quiché Maya, is the most currently used in the USA.
4. Ix-Chel is the name of the Moon Goddess in the codices and the Yucatec colonial sources, represented in a moon sign holding a rabbit (Schele and Freidel 1990:413).
5. The Nahuatl was the language of the Nahua peoples, of whom the Mexica/Aztecs are the most famous.
6. In Zinacantan it is a volcano called *Bankilal Muk’Ta Witz* or Senior Great Mountain (Vogt [1976]1979:38).
7. The Tzotzil word for man, *vinik*, not only also has five digits, hence establishing the special tie to human people, but «is the same as the word for twenty, indicating that the total of twenty digits is considered to be a striking aspect of human physiology and an important anatomical trait of soul companion animals as well.» (Gossen 1975:452). Both ancient Maya numeration and calendrical reckoning and most modern Maya counting systems are of the twenty-base type (Coe [1966] 2001). Five, moreover, is the sacred number of the quiconce, made of the four directions and the zenith.
8. At least 30,000 Chamulas have been evicted from their houses and lands since the 1970s, because followers of the Catholic Liberation Theology and various Evangelical Churches. Among other things, they refused to buy pox and coke, and did not participated to the rituals of the *costumbristas* (traditionalists), as the syncretistic Catholic Tzotzil call themselves. Evicting non-conformists seems a well-rooted custom, practiced also by the Zapatistas communities (see, for example, Kovic 2005).
9. The Shakers of the Northwest Coast are a nativistic, syncretic religious movement born in the late 19th century and they have nothing to do with the religious sect of British origin which gave birth to a number of utopian communities in the Northeast of the USA in the 18th century.

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