Mirande (1997) Chapter 2: Genesis of Mexican Masculinity

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In this chapter, Mirande focuses on the origins of masculinity in Mexico. He offers three possible explanations to understand the reasoning behind the exaggerated notions of masculinity that persist in Mexico today. However, he stresses the improbability of a coming to a definite conclusion.

The first is that hypermasculinity developed to mask Mexican men's feelings of helplessness that emerged during the Conquest, which he notes is a pathological and negative view (Mirande 1997: 34). Mirande explains the myth behind the metaphoric mother of Mexico. La Chingada, the Great Whore (often represented by La Malinche), is a representation of the many native women who were raped and violated by the conquistadores. Her binary opposite is Gran Chingon, a powerful aggressive macho who is "wounding and penetrating," (of potentially both women and other men) while she is "passive and inert" (Mirande 1997: 36). Mirande states that Mexican men may have utilized machismo to compensate for feeling powerless, and significantly, for their inability to protect women in the Spanish-Indian conflict.

Mirande notes a transition in machismo's meaning throughout history from a sexually charged symbol during colonial times to one that denoted political power in the revolutionary period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Another possibility Mirande refers to is cultural assimilation. The Aztecs may have been forced to adopt the Spanish culture's emphasis on masculinity and patriarchy. He suggests that conquistadors can be considered the first machos, whose cruelty and aggressiveness established them as fearless warriors (Mirande 1997: 48).

Finally, a third explanation maintains that excessive masculine displays were already entrenched in Aztec society, supported by gender differentiation of work. Mirande cites Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, a preacher from Spain, as an important ethnographer who recorded the Aztecs' complex social organization (Mirande 1997: 45). Although class and racial bias are apparent in his writings, Sahagun reveals the existence of gender duality. The Aztec men were known to be fiercely militaristic, and essentially dominated the public spheres. War and violence had a ritualistic and symbolic aspect in the Aztec empire. Women assumed largely domestic roles.

Mirande compares and contrasts images of Spanish and Indian men. Although both lived in patriarchal societies, the Aztecs view of masculinity was "one that stressed modesty, virtue, responsibility, caring for children, wisdom, and judiciousness" (Mirande 1997: 57). In contrast, the Spaniards exemplified the negative macho and were "daring, arrogant, dominant, and lustful men of action" (Mirande 1997: 57).

Mirande concludes by highlighting alternative perspectives of the Conquest. He refers to Mexican anthropologist Leon-Portilla's views on Indian resistance to conversion: nepantla and ecosis. The latter means to adapt and change for the well-being of a community by utilizing the environment, and civilization persevered and is seen today amongst Christian and Western influence.