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Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs: an Explanation from the Structures of Thought

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Abstract

Human sacrifice among the Aztecs had an internal logic. This logic is the result of the extension and application of structures whose development began in the early stages of human ontogenesis. We can understand it by reconstructing this logic. The sacrifice ritual of men and women is linked to that structure by which every human being in his early biography established a relationship with the outside world: the structure of action. The category of causality that is formed in the ontogeny of any individual with the structure of the action remains closely tied to the interpretations of individual and collective reality.

The sacrifice among the Aztecs can be understood if, four key moments derived from the logic of thought are analyzed: 1) Understanding the nature cycles, especially those where the sun ends its journey through the heavens or the fertility of the land must be renewed. 2) The perception of the qualities of the objects and the "magic" causality. 3) The specific way of understanding life and death in the strength of the origin and the opportunity to influence generative phenomena through death. 4) The difficulty in separating symbols from their meaning.

Keywords: structures of thought, cycles, origin as explication, life and death, magic, causality.

1. Introduction

In the religion of the Aztecs, human sacrifice played a major role, it was the ultimate sacrifice that could be offered to the Gods, the necessary action to ensure the continuity of the cosmos, for the sun to continue its journey through the heavens, for earth to yield its fruits, for rain to fall regularly, and for humans, plants and animals to reproduce. There were many other occasions that required human sacrifice as hunting, war and battles, and mismatches of the cosmic order, as eclipses, droughts, famines and floods. Most sacrifices were made in the festivities every month of the solar calendar (18 months of 20 days each) were held and were dedicated to certain deities. Among the acts that preceded the ritual sacrifice, worship participants practiced abstinence, which consisted stop eating or having sex. At other times, these participants would take baths or offer some forms of self-sacrifice in which they would include self-inflicted cutting by using obsidian knives or *maguety* thorns on their bodies to make them bleed (Gonzalez 2006, p. 112).

The act of sweeping, offering incense, offerings of plants, the sacrifice of quail or other animals like butterflies or deer, or participation in processions were also some of the ways in which the Aztecs sought to connect with the sacred. In the ceremonies, music, dance and song were very important and intervention depended on the type of ritual.

In the most common form of sacrifice, four priests placed the victim on his back on a stone which measured about a meter and was rounded at the top. The victim's arms and legs would be tied firmly while an obsidian-made knife was buried into the chest and then the heart of the victim was torn out of the body (Sahagún 1558-1585, fol. 255r).

In the festivity *Cuahuitlehua* (it used to be held from February 26 to March 10. Some authors do not recognize these dates, then argue that the Aztecs did not make an adjustment to calendar of 365 days, that is not intercalated leap year every four years, so the holidays, eventually showing a gap with the years in the Mesoamerican calendar is assumed), some children between six months and six years old were bought from their mothers and then they were thrown into the water in *Pantitlan*, the swirl or sink of the lagoon, where they were drowned to honor the God of Rain, *Tlaloc*. In *Etzalcualiztli* month, a time in which the rains had already started (this festival used to be held from 5 to 24 June), a boy and a girl were chosen for immolation and then put into a canoe for their bodies to sink into the water (Motolinía 1971: 66-67). The beheading sacrifice was reserved for women representing terrestrial goddesses. For example, in the eleventh month, *Ochpaniztli*, a party was held in honor of the Earth Goddess *Toci* or *Teteo Innan*. In this sacrifice, a young woman representing the Goddess was offered at midnight after four days of rituals that involved skirmishes. And on the feast dedicated to *Xilonen*, the Goddess of young Cob, a young woman was beheaded with "a golden knife" while being held to the back of a priest (Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain, Book II, Chapter XXVII, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 97-98). On the feast of *Teotleco* living men, previously smeared with resin, were thrown into the fire in front of an altar. Also at the festivity *Tlacaxipeualiztli*, at the foot of the Temple of *Xipe Totec*, a gladiatorial sacrifice was carried out. In there a prisoner of war, tied with a rope to a huge stone disc that allowed freedom of movement, had to fight against four Aztec warriors, two dressed as jaguars and the other two as eagles. The prisoner was given different weapons: a sledgehammer covered on derisory bird feathers instead of obsidian blades and four pine cones that served him as projectiles. If the prisoner offered resistance for a long time, his life could be spared. However, in most cases, after a short fight, the prisoner would pass out after being badly injured and later would be killed when a priest opened the chest with an obsidian knife. Other forms of sacrifice were made by shooting arrows, starvation in confined caves or by precipitation from the top of a pole.

No aspect of Mexica culture has sparked such reactions of horror and condemnation as the immolation of men, insomuch that its existence has been questioned; the written sources that describe it – is argued – that they were the result of the attempt to discredit the degree of civilization attained by the peoples of the central plateau and thus justify colonization. Narratives (say these critics) were overheard tales, reproducing only what the conquerors recounted or what the natives wanted to inform them. Among one of the efforts to explain the practice of human sacrifice, is that of Marvin Harris (2011, p. 139), who argues that human sacrifice and the practice of ritual cannibalism attached to it, were derived from the low-protein diet in the Mesoamerican region and an effort to use human flesh in the absence of cheaper options (should be mentioned that the Aztecs were not able to meet the necessary amounts of protein in the daily diet). Sherbourne F. Cook (1973, pp. 279-298) believes that the sacrifice reduced the increase in population and helped maintain the proper balance between the number of inhabitants and natural resources. Many authors see human sacrifice as a demonstration of state power, as a central part of an ideology of domination justifying regular military expeditions out of *Tenochtitlan* in order to submit more people (look at Matos Moctezuma, "Der Templo Mayor", published in Eggebrecht 1986, pp. 105-119). The religious idea that the sacrifice was a way to feed the Gods and war as a mechanism to ensure the necessary victims was only a pretext to expand and consolidate the empire. In addition, through the sacrifice a message was transmitted: the powerful Aztecs and their Gods were those in power and the subject peoples should recognize their domain.

However, these interpretations neglect the fundamental aspect that explains the practice of human sacrifice: it is a consequence of the way how prehispanic people constructed and explained their world. It is not the expression of an instinct of destruction or a desire to cause an evil to the sacrificed man or woman, nor an act of cruelty or meanness, but the conviction that the sacrifice is needed to influence the causes that trigger phenomena of the world, essential to ensure human life.

In order to avoid approaches that hold value judgments or poorly founded perspectives, the study desists from secondary literature and seeks to consider sources exclusively, that is, pre-

Hispanic codices (which usually are copies of pre-Columbian texts) as well as indigenous stories recorded by the friars who arrived in New Spain in the sixteenth century in the immediate years after the conquest of central Mexico.

Among the latter, the work of Bernadino de Sahagún has a special place, since the Franciscan friar researched and edited his work with the help of scholars and priests who wrote their beliefs, myths and rituals using the Latin alphabet. The original Nahuatl is known as the Florentine codex, while the translation into Spanish by the friar himself was published under the title *General History of the Things of New Spain* (*Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*). Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson translated the Codex from Nahuatl to English, in a project that took 30 years to complete and comprehends 12 Volumes in 13 Books.

2. Discussion

Sacrifice and Structures of thought

Sacrifice follows a logic which, if one looks at the genesis of thought, it is possible to reconstruct. Their schemes are none other than the structures through which every thought makes reality a temporal, spatial and causally ordered world. But before explaining these structures let's look more closely to one of the ceremonial festivities in which the sacrifice was practiced: *Ochpaniztli*. It was done in September when the maize sprouted and matured in the Valley of Mexico. Sahagún's informant reports:

"The eleventh feast day was the one known as *Ochpaniztli*. Befote the very time, the very day, had come, for five days nothing more was done; only silence still prevailed. But when the five days has passed, then began the hand-waving dance. At that time it was fifteen [days] to *Ochpaniztli*. This was done for eighth days... And when eight days had passed, then began the mock battle [of the women physicians]. For four days this was done there befote the house of song and dance...

And when this was done they took [the likeness of] *Toci*, where she was guarded. This was four days that they did the skirmishing. And when the four days of skirmishing had ended, then, upon the morrow, toward sundown, she tramped over her market place. As she came forth, the [women] physicians came encircling her. And as she came along, then the *Chicome coatl* (priests) received her here...

And when she had gone tramping over it, then they took her where she was guarded in her temple. Much did the [women] physicians console her. They said unto her: "My dear daughter, now at last the ruler Moctezuma will sleep withe thee. Be happy." They did not tell her of her death; it was as if she died unaware. Then they adorned her, they arrayed her. And when midnight came, then they took her [to the temple]. No one at all spoke, none talked, nor did anyone cough; it was as if the earth lay dead. And everyone gathered round in the darkness.

And when they had taken her to where she was to die, then they seized her. They stretched her out on the back of one [of them]. Then they quickly cut off her head" (Florentine Codex, Book II, Chapter XXX, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 118-124).

If we want to understand why Aztecs performed these ritual forms, we need to stand on their position and from there take the perspective in which they used to interpret their world. This perspective is determined by cognitive structures within every member of the human species at the beginning of his life makes itself accessible to the world and it is the foundation of every idea and every belief. The driving force behind the development of these structures is not unknown to us: due to the inability of the human organism to survive on its own after birth, every human being begins a process in which mental and practical skills are developed and that will contribute later to ensure its autonomous survival. At the center of this process is the construction of schemes that enable the action itself is successfully integrated into the world. Among the elementary structures with which the subject manages to build an external reality to which it can link its action, are the categories of object, space, time and causality, as all human action is based on a causal, spatial and temporal structure. In the interaction with the adult in charge of taking care of the early stages of ontogenesis, each human being begins to organize his own action so that there is coordination between him and the person who cares for him. The action on his part is structured by submitting his motor skills to a spatial and temporal order and properly articulating causal linkages in such a way that he can interact with the outside world.

Any member of the species in the early years must learn to coordinate his motor skills and to articulate the causal relationships between each of the segments of the action so that his intentions can successfully become actions. The consequence of this way of organizing action is decisive in the formation process of thought and its categories: structures undergoing construction in action, i.e. action schemes, remain operative in the conceptual system. The structure of thought in its early stages and the development of the structure of action are both path of a single process. Since the child, in its early stage, experiences reality through its actions, reality is comprehended through a scheme that remains attached to the action. When the structure of the action is applied to make the world comprehensible, we are speaking of the logic or the scheme of the action.

Certainly, in its interpretative application of the understanding of the world, this logic registers a reversal of the direction shown by the action. The schematic of the actions parts from the start and it's aimed for the finish/goal line, which once reached, means the end of the action. In explanatory interpretations, thought parts from a object or phenomenon that lies before it, follows its development in reverse direction till it finds the explanatory instant of the origin in subjectivity. A phenomenon is understood then as explained to the extent that thought travels the path that from the phenomenon to the origin and then makes it rises from there. This way, a world explained through the scheme of action finds its own explanation in a subject or subjectivity found within or behind phenomena and defines them.

This schematic of the action, formed in early ontogenesis to guarantee men access to reality, found application in the construction of the pre-Hispanic world view: How could a thought that did not have any other scheme to understand the world implement other logical interpretations of the world? If we consider that the conception of the Aztecs world is based on the schema of the action it is possible to understand the particular way in which they interpreted the phenomena and practices that sought to ensure their preservation.

In *Ochpaniztli*, like in many other festivities, human sacrifice was practiced at the beginning of a cycle. Therefore, to understand this we must first consider how the Aztecs perceived this. For them, as for us, the cycles of nature are changes that happen regularly; however, for a thought governed by the logic of action, like the one of the Aztecs, cyclical phenomena had a character that is not really part of their natural dynamics (Dux 1989, p. 223). Precisely due to the fact that they are perceived by the schema of the action, the end of the cycle means a return to structural boot time. Every action is brought to an end, which leaves room for a new beginning; the end of the action means the reestablishment of the initial calm. A phenomenon that is interpreted by this logic is a phenomenon whose dynamics, at the end of a cycle, return to the initial state of tranquility. Within this logic there is no assurance that the strength of the source at the end of a cycle is put back in motion again to trigger the phenomenon. The fertility of spring comes to an end, the sun ends its route and returns to the starting point, the rainy season ends, nothing ensures that the boot will get moving and natural phenomena occur again. For the Aztecs, the end of the 52-year cycle actually brought with it the end of the world (Florentine Codex, Book VII, Chapter XI, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 25-26). In this situation, one must necessarily resort to the subjective forces, which are considered as the origin of the phenomena, and get that the phenomena to appear again.

Since communication with the creator gods does not pass through normal channels of human communication, it is necessary to find other ways to influence them. The Aztecs could not leave phenomena that are essential to life to occur randomly; they had to worry about natural phenomena, which at the end of their cycle were threatened by the lack of movement, start again. Herein lays the fundamental reason for the ceremonial sacrifices. The most important return happens when the journey of the sun, identified with the force that kept the cosmos with life, would come to an end. The survival of the world as a whole was at stake. However, the fundamental and almost daily concern of the Aztec people revolved around rain and agricultural fertility, as it can change food production (in 7 out of the 18 months the gods related to water, land and food are worshiped, and in almost half of the historical chronicles it is mentioned they asked them for water (González 2006, p. 115)). Hence the most important and popular festivals were *Tlacaxipeualiztli* and *Ochpaniztli*, the planting and harvesting. In *Ochpaniztli*, the obsession to achieve harvest led to sacrifice from not only the representative of *Toci*, but also to other goddesses, as the representative of *Chicomecoatl*, the Goddess of corn, and *Atlan Tonna*, the Goddess of water (After adore the goddess Chicomecoatl, her representative, a maiden of 12 or 13 years old, was slain in his

temple above a lot of seeds. Then, there were distributed among the people, consecrated seeds by the blood of the goddess. Thus the coming corn crop is assured).

Through the immolation of the representative of *Toci* and other goddesses they seek to set in motion the force responsible for the fertility of the land, which generated the corn plant; for the power that stimulated this phenomenon in the previous cycle has returned to its initial resting point. The same cognitive schema finds application in other rituals that are tied to the cycles of nature; through sacrifice, the forces responsible for giving life and warmth to the world, for causing the rains, for helping the plants' growth, for provoking the journey of the sun through the heavens, etc., should be put in motion. But why resort to human sacrifice?

To answer this question, we must first review the ways in which the Aztecs understood the relationship between objects and phenomena. All objects have qualities, the specifics of these qualities is that they really constitute the object; although perceived through the scheme of action, the qualities of the object are seen as if they were linked to a center, a nucleus. This can also be our idea of the object if we understand the invariant qualities as a substantial core, but the way this center is related to peripheral qualities in pre-Hispanic thought is determined by the logic of thought, that is, by the logic of action. Hence the relationship between the center and the periphery, that is the qualities, is similar to the relationship between subjectivity and its manifestations. Accordingly, thought, taking the subjectivity as a model, perceives qualities as if they emanated from a center that is behind them, in which they have their origin and to which they remain linked. Just as the action is the result of the invisible subjectivity, with which it remains linked to at all times, qualities -color, shape, size- are understood as emanations from a source with which they stay connected. The consequence is that the qualities become present the core that integrates and determines them, in the real world. Thus, objects are seen as signs of a force that is behind them. This way of perceiving qualities contributes very significantly to the Aztecs understanding of the world as the manifestation of a reality that is behind of and determines Objects and phenomena are perceived as the visible form of invisible entities or essences; they originate in them and to them they remain linked.it.

The idea of an emanative relationship between the origin and the characteristics raises a relationship of identity. In the origin is already located what is visible in the exterior, that is, in the qualities. The particular structure of the action is clearly visible here: because in the source is located what will emerge from here, there exists a relationship of identity between the origin and what exists. From the identity between thought and action derives a scheme that forces to perceive the center in which the qualities originate as (partially) identical to these. This way of perceiving the qualities leads to the thought to make assumption that behind those similar qualities there is the same agent, which leads to introduce a particular form of relationship between objects. In an interpretation of the world influenced by the implementation of the scheme of action, objects that show common qualities are included in a set that makes them appear as a group, as a unit. The center of all these objects is thought of as a subjective force or as a substance, and this, according to the model of subjectivity, as a network that integrates deeply. Therefore, the presence of objects in different qualities produces, on the basis of the logic of the action, an unavoidable consequence: the same features in different objects are allocated to the same subject / substance. Therefore, all objects that share common features are integrated into a substantial unity. Precisely because the relationship between the subject / substance and the quality is designed as an identity, through qualities is established an identity between different objects. A good example of this in the Aztec worldview was the idea that all phenomena had a dual nature, as the twins, foot corn that has two reeds, maguey having two bodies, etc. stemmed from the god *Xolotl* (*Florentine Codex, Book VII, Chapter II, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 434*).

The perception and understanding of the world through the logic of action had a major impact on the ideas of causality. The Aztecs perceived phenomena and objects with common characteristics the presence of the same origin, the same subject or substance. The qualities constitute the periphery of a common origin which they remained subject. Thanks to this union, peripheral qualities participated in its strength. And if the object takes part of the strength of the origin, its manipulation should be put in movement, due to the identity of the origin and qualities, the strength of the source (Günter Dux notes the consequence of the conception of reality in the concept of causality, calling it "mythical causality." See Dux 1982, p. 132). Hence, it is inevitable to consider each of the objects that exhibited common qualities as having the same effective strength.

Frazer affirmed it with a concluding sentence: "Things that look alike were probably permeated by the same power" (Underhill 1965, p. 34). With manipulation or supply of the items that show certain qualities, the subject or substance as the source is moved to unleash the creative power of similar phenomenon.

Worship among the Aztecs strictly followed this logic. Only when we consider the nature of the origin, and the qualities of the different objects emanating from it, clearly appears the dynamics of the ritual, which is immanent to it. Participants in the worshipping made offerings with cult objects whose characteristics perceived the presence of the deity who also considered the origin of the desired phenomenon: In the festival dedicated to the God of Rain, *Tlaloc*, the skin of snakes shells, corals, marine animals, green beads, etc. were offered hoping to get through it in abundant rainfall. At the *Uei Tozoztli* festivity, grains of all kinds of corn and beans, and corn cobs that had not yet matured, were offered to the goddess *Chicomecoatl*, who embodied the power to invigorate vegetation. They used to say about this goddess:

"They said: "Yea, verily, this one is our sustance"; that is to say, indeed truly she is our flash, our livelihood; through her we live; she is our strength. If she were not, we should indeed die of hunger... And, it was said, it was indeed this Chicome coatl who made all our food..." (Florentine Codex, Book II, cap.XXIII, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 64).

When there was an eclipse, the Aztecs rushed to sacrifice albinos since it was thought their white appearance helped to strengthen the sun, whose existence at that time, they believed, was threatened (Ibíd., Book VII, Chapter I, p. 2). The God of Hunting, *Mixcoatl*, was offered slaves who had their hands and feet tied, "And as they tool them up, it was said: "Thus they slay them as deer; they serve as the deer who thus die" (Ibíd., Book II, Chapter XXXIII, p. 139). Through this sacrifice, huntsmen expected *Mixcoatl* to ensure success in hunting. In the *Ochpaniztli* festivity, prisoners were tossed from a very high platform, then crashed to the ground; with this form of sacrifice it was intended to encourage the falling of the ripe fruits of trees and shrubs (Durán 1984, pp. 416-417). The most valuable victims for the sacrifice to the God of Rain were children with two swirls in their skull, since they perceived in this attribute the presence of a deity that to them was as much the origin of whirlpools as of rain. The tears of the children prior to their sacrifice were interpreted as a positive omen, for the priests were sure then that rains would pour down in abundance. The act of crying, for its functional similarities with the processes involved in a waterfall, was attributed the power to boost the force that causes the rain (Florentine Codex, Book II, Chapter I, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 42-43).

The assumption that the offering had to be partially identical to the form of the origin of the phenomenon, that is, the divinity responsible for it, can be confirmed clearly in the way the Aztecs used to dress and adorn the sacrifice victims. These ornaments and garments used to represent the attributes of the divinity being worshipped. The *Ixiptla* were actually constituted in vivid images of the gods, through a process that could last several days or months, and included a bathing ritual. Thus, the objects or people that, due to their characteristics were related to a particular subject and/or substance, were considered causally effective to produce, through sacrifice or offering, the phenomena that were essential for life and that kept similarities with the objects presented as offerings.

The implementation of the scheme of action as interpretive paradigm had a great influence in the construction of causal relationships. Almost all forms of worship were based on the idea that behind the features there was a center of action, a subject, in which the objects and phenomena with similar qualities originated. By manipulating the qualities, due to the identity between the source and attributes, the force of the origin is set in motion. But not only the different forms of offerings are based on this logic; numerous ideas and practices also emerge from it.

For instance, weasel tails were dried, ground and later scattered to help a pregnant woman about to give birth hasten the delivery of the baby. It was believed this would help the woman since the weasel carries its babies in a pouch that offered them the freedom to jump out from the mother (Florentine Codex, Book XI, Chapter I, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 159). With substantially the same origin, the object has the ability to affect another phenomenon that is similar. Among the superstitions documented by Sahagún, there was the belief that if while cooking *tamales* (a dish made of maize dough) the dough got stuck to the walls to the pot, it would be an unfavorable omen. If the tamales were eaten after this sign, it was

interpreted as that baby in the mother's womb would get stuck and the mother would die in childbirth and as for the warriors, their arrows would get stuck to their bows and could never be shot during combat (Florentine Codex, Book V, Appendix, Chapter VIII, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 159). In the *Uei tecuilhuitl* festivity, which was held in honor of the Goddess of Corn, *Xilonen*, girls danced with their hair free in the air as this stimulated hair growth in cobs and their maturation process (These "threads" growing between the cob and leaves sticking out the tip; they indicate, as reported Torquemada 1986, p. 389). Women who had menstruation difficulties made offerings to get rid of their sufferings the day dedicated to the moon; this relationship was due to the similarity of the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle (Códice Telleriano Remensis, fol. XVII, 29). After explaining the logic of identity that emerges from the logic of action it is not difficult to understand the sacrifice ritual.

In human life, the Aztecs saw the presence of a source that is identical to the origin of all forms of generation, development or growth. It has been observed that the schematic of pre-Hispanic thought considers similar objects or phenomena as parts of a kind of unit; they converged in a mythical origin where they had their cause. Human life and plants' growth – like all generative process – are elements of one of these units. Behind them is the original force from which they've emerged and to which they remain linked. And since those elements forming a unit keep a relationship of identity between each other – for they are manifestations of a common source – they gain the power to influence one another.

Although, at first glance, it may seem to us that there is hardly any similarity between human life and the forces of nature, such as the determinant of the fertility of the earth and the birth of corn, Aztec thought shows great sensitivity to the recording of analogies. For the early thought, the "living" phenomena was not limited to the plant and animal world, also the phenomena recorded movement, development or growth, as the case of fire, rain, etc., and even the buildings had life. It must be stressed that the possibility of human life affecting other phenomena was not the result of a mere analogy. It is the logic in which thinking was based that determined magical causality. This structure, as explained before, ascribes to the phenomena that present similar qualities to a common substantial origin which they remained linked to. Thus, in the pre-Hispanic world, generative processes or those that showed development or growth, were related, since they shared the same origin, treated as subject and/or substance. All phenomena that shared common characteristics and remained attached to their source could share its strength. All generative processes, or simply considered as such, by sharing the ultimate and absolute origin of the universe possess a cosmic dimension, or better said, they are part of the cosmic process of creation. However, if an object participated from the strength of the origin, its manipulation or delivery should be put in motion, thanks to the identity of the origin and qualities, the strength of origin of any other phenomenon. Under this logic, the offering of human life becomes into an act capable of influencing almost all other generative phenomena. Due to the source shared with other living phenomena, human life, and substantially the blood and hearts of men, have the power to set the forces of the origin of phenomena like rain, crops, growth humans, etc in motion. "Life produces life" would be the concise formula of sacrifice, which summarizes the logic of identity established from common origin attributed to a group of events with similar characteristics. This is the cognitive schema in which human sacrifice practices were based on. But that's not all.

In a world that finds its organization in the structure of the action, the origin of life is simultaneously the origin of death. An action passes and only lasts as long as the source, the subjectivity, so determines. Its origin is determining, but it puts an end to it as well. When this scheme is applied in the level of worldviews, thought unites life and death in the power of the origin, the life lasts until the subjective agent, it creates, decides. The identity of all acts of generation and creation just mentioned, regains importance here: death, which belongs to the origin of life, thereby becomes a means to set the origin of other generative processes in motion. Human death, which has the power of the beginning, thus becomes capable of unleashing phenomena such as plant and children growth, soil fertility, plant maturity, rain, solar motion, etc. Undoubtedly, human sacrifice practiced by the ancient Mexicans was an act of cruelty, but, considering how the Aztecs built and interpreted their world, it is possible to understand the motivations for this practice which did not rest on an irrational desire for destruction nor was it a front to inflict evil upon those destined to be sacrificed. Death was seen by the Aztecs as a powerful cause that triggered all the phenomena that were indispensable for their life. The sacrifice was a

way to put the force of the origin in motion; and if for the source of life death is also proper, then sacrifice is the formula to revive the event or phenomenon wanted.

As we've seen, the sacrifice corresponds to a logical thinking. The Aztecs can only lead their life within the structures the world presents them with and in which they are able to understand their existence in it. They did not have the freedom to choose them. Certainly wherever their application is not the same: not all civilizations developed these cruel rituals. But the application of these schemes follows paths that are beyond the good feelings of the individual. And, although it seems that their application involves a fantasy mixed with cruelty, the central determination for sacrifice is constituted by the structural logic of thought, without this is not possible the construction of the world nor the understanding of man's place in it. Therefore we may affirm that logic has a coercive force; its coercive moment becomes the imperative necessity of the ritual.

In addition, we must keep in mind that Aztecs' thinking cannot separate the real world from its symbols. Words, images and ritual performances kept a relationship of identity with the object or phenomena they represented. The scheme of interpretation, which ascribes to all objects that share the same features a common origin, further comprises the relationship between the symbol and its referents: the symbols, which are similar to what they represent, share with it its substance. Thanks to this identity the ritual staging acquires the strength to activate the source by itself.

The ritual in the *Ochpaniztli* festivity is not, therefore, a mere symbolic representation of the birth of corn, it is the real and effective activation of the force that drives the plant's germination. But we still have to consider another application of the logic of thought, if we want to explain the genesis of human sacrifice. In this celebration, the effectiveness of the sacrifice is strengthened by another ceremony, in which a priest, who has dressed himself with the skin of the sacrificed woman, simulates the act of cohabitation with the God of the Sun:

"And when they had cut off her head, thn also they quickly flayed her; they swiftly flayed her. And when they had flayed her, then a man [a priest] quickly put on her skin. He was called *Teccizquacuilli* – a very strong [man], very powerful, and very tall. .. Then she quickly came down... And when (she) had gone arriving at the base, at the foot of [the Temple of] *Uitzilopochtli*, then she raised her arms, she spread her arms at the foot of [the Temple of] *Uitzilopochtli*. She placed herself facing [the god]; then she turned about; she placed herself by her son, *Cinteotl*. Here this one had been waiting. He had with him his (-skin) mask, and he had put on his peaked cap, curved back and serrated." (Florentine Codex, Book II, chap. XXX, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 120-121).

The story collected by Bernardino de Sahagún leaves no doubt that what the priest dressed in the skin of the sacrificed woman staged at the foot of the temple was an act of cohabitation. The sexual nature of the ritual is accented with a dance in which the dancers carry the typical cap of the *Huasteca*, a people whose men were reputed to be very powerful sexually, and impressive false phalluses. In addition, three disguised dancers appear, one as a coyote, another as a *tlacuache* (opossum) and one more as a bat, mating and planting animals. At the end of the ritual, as the text says, *Cinteotl*, the maize God, "is born" the son of the God of Sun, identified here with *Huitzilopochtli*, and *Toci*, die Earth Goddess.

The logic that resides in these ceremonies is the same in which the sacrifice of the representative of the Goddess *Toci* is based on: the act of procreation is not intended as limited to humans; rather it is part of the process of reproduction in its cosmological dimensions. This event shared a common origin with all generative processes which started the universe and kept it alive. Human, wildlife, agricultural and domestic animals reproduction, as well as the course of the stars, and the rains, all is part, for the believer, of a gigantic general process that coincides in an original force. And, since within the frameworks of the logic of action all that exists is identical to its origin, there exists a partial identity between all generative processes (Dux 1982, p. 217, 1989, p. 33). Thanks to this identity, the act of copulation had the power to influence and activate the source that produces the fruits in vegetation. Never mind that in this ritual intercourse is only staged, its imitation has the actual power to affect the generation of corn.

Among the activities that preceded the slaughter in monthly parties it was not uncommon for the intended sacrifice for immolation to be provided with sexual activities. In the fifth and last of the monthly parties, cohabitation stimulated the strength in other generative processes. In the *Toxcatl*

festivity, the representative of the God *Tezcatlipoca* was joined in marriage to four women before his sacrifice. This festivity was intended to revitalize the sun and its journey through the heavens:

“It was only twenty days that he lived lying with the women, that he lived married to them. The four women in whose company he lived had also lived for a year guarded in the steward’s establishment. The name of the first one was *Xochiquetzal*; the second was *Xilonen*; the third was *Atlantonan*; the fourth was *Uixtociuatl*.” (Florentine Codex, Book II, Chapter XXIV, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 70-71).

Something similar was reported to occur in the *Izcalli* party (Florentine Codex, Book II, Chapter XXVII, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 159). Twenty days before the ceremony, the slave destined to be slaughtered, the representative of the God of Fire, is accompanied by a prostitute who lives with him: “And a pleasure girl became his guardian. She constantly amused him; she caressed him; she joke with him; she made him laugh; she gratified him...” (Ibíd). We need to remember that the fire in the pre-Hispanic thought, is responsible for the growth of both children and plants.

But, one must consider that the logic of the action is a subjective logic. In it, the origin of the phenomena lies in a subjectivity that has the power to trigger them. As a result of this structural moment in the scheme of action, a subjectivist explanation can be given to phenomena, similar to the social world: the birth of maize results from a coupling between the Earth Goddess and the Sun God. This also explains what happened afterwards. *Cinteotl*, personified by a priest wearing a mask made from the thigh skin of the sacrificed woman goes to meet his mother at the foot of the pyramid, and must carry the mask to the hill *Popotl Tetemi*. Accompanied by other warriors, *Cinteotl* struggled on the road against his enemies. These fights represented the threats to the crops in the fields.

Almost without exception, the texts that narrate the human sacrifices of the Aztecs associated the sacrifice on monthly festivities with creation myths. The ritual performed in the temples of *Tenochtitlan* reproduced the cosmogonic process at the beginning of time which gave life to the world. Similarly as the *Teotihuacan* Gods leaped into the divine fire to reappear as the sun and the moon and thus initiated history; human beings were compelled to offer their lives to ensure the continuance of the universe. However, the mere indication of this relationship offers no explanation. For this, we must consider once again the structures of the thought the Aztecs applied in the construction and interpretation of the world. For indigenous thought, each phenomenon is only part of the world order because its beginning goes back to the beginning of the universe. The phenomenon which gave birth to the world, the primary cause, is therefore the ultimate cause of all that exists, even if each phenomenon in the mythical explanation narrates the act of creation in a specific way. It can be said that the Aztec thought, regarding those ideas on which rituals were based, houses in its internal structure a monocausalism. The life and blood that gave life to the world in mythical times constitute something that has the power to create all sorts of phenomena: so it was on the threshold of history and so is repeated on specific phenomena, mythical and present. The life and blood that led the world in mythical times was something that had the power to create all sorts of phenomena and was on the threshold of history. This it is repeated on specific, mythical and present phenomena.

But why it is not enough sacrifice of the representative of the Goddess *Toci* to stimulate crop? Why is it necessary to perform a ceremony in which the priest wears the skin of the sacrificed to continue representing *Toci*, but this time *Toci* dead, revived, reclaimed, and revitalized? The answer lays again in the logic of thought.

The ritual can only be effective if the strength of the beginning is represented just as it actually is, that is, as strong as the power of life and death. To ensure that the fruits of corn sprouted and reached maturity, the power of the source must be played as a creative and destructive power. In *Ochpaniztli*, immediately after the ritual where *Toci*’s representative dies, the ritual of generation begins. The logic is imposed relentlessly: only united, death and the generative act can set in motion the forces of the origin and unleash its creative power. In this formula lies the essence of all rituals, although its semantic content may vary.

As viewed from this perspective, one can understand why in the *Ochpaniztli* festivity the sacrifice of the representative of the divinity was not enough to stimulate the fertility of the vegetation: it is necessary to also represent the creating force. Hence, the ceremony must be

completed with the act that simulates cohabitation and portrays the power of life. From the logical-structural perspective, the cognitive scheme that compels to divide the cult into an act where the death of the deity or its representative dies, and the other one in which it resuscitates, gives life or undertakes anew a creative activity. Life and death become, then, the factors needed to guarantee the effectiveness of the ritual; without them, the man in the pre-Hispanic world is subject to the whims of Gods who have the power to decide ever the phenomena that are essential for survival and of whom cannot be sure if they'll set in, once again, their creating power.

A similar application of the structure of thought can be observed in those festivities in which the Aztecs practiced ritual anthropophagy. At the *Tlacaxipeualiztli* celebration, after the sacrifice, the bodies of the war prisoners were dismembered, cooked and eaten ceremonially. Sahagún's informant tells us how this ceremony was carried out:

“And they were in the hands of the old men, the *quaquacuitli*, the old men of the *calpulli*. They took them there to their *calpulco*, where the taker of the captive had made his undertaking, had said his vow, had made his vow.

From there they removed him in order to take him to the house of [the captor], in order to eat him. There they portioned him out; they cut him to pieces; they distributed him. First of all, they made an offering of one of his thighs to Moctezuma. They set forth to take it to him. And as for the captor, they were applied the down of birds to his head and gave him gifts, And he gathered together his blood relatives; the captor assembled them in order to go to eat at his home. There they made each one an offering of a bowl of stew of dried maize, called, *tlacatlaolli*. They gave it to each one. On each went a piece of the flesh of the captive.” (Florentine Codex, Book II, Chapter XX I, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, p. 48-49).

In almost every attempt made to explain ritual anthropophagy, it is implicitly or explicitly related with barbarism. For psychoanalysis this form of cannibalism is typical of a very primitive stage in the history of humanity, where the border between the animal and the cultural worlds becomes unclear. The ingestion of the body of the father, whom has just been killed, is the action that puts an end to the natural history of the human species and symbolizes the introduction of social rules into the group with which properly begins culture (Freud 2009, p. 191). Thus, from this union between barbarism and cannibalism, there are some who doubt the veracity of the stories that describe this practice in the indigenous world and see it as an attempt by the Spanish conquistadors to belittle and defame the culture they are faced with. However, ritual anthropophagy, far from being a manifestation of barbarism, consequently follows the logic of thought that makes the world appear like a coherent and organized reality. Therefore, if this logic is considered, anthropophagy can be explained.

The structural and logical foundation rituals surge from is already known to us: behind everything that is part of a unit is the same origin, same subject; all the objects or phenomena of the set are in a relationship with it and within it they find their determination. In *Tlacaxipeualiztli*, by dying, the slaughtered become part of the circle in whose center the god *Xipe Totec* is found, to whom this ritual is dedicated. He owns the lifeless bodies. And to the extent that they are directly related to the divinity they share its strength. Although the body of the sacrificed lacks life, in it resides the inexhaustible power of the source. By eating the bodies of the slaughtered, the cult participants are able to seize the origin's power stored within the bodies, thanks to their direct relationship with divinity.

Since *Xipe Totec* is a deity credited with the power to renewal of vegetation during spring, whoever practices the “holy communion” during these festivities appropriates for himself a force with the power to renew life. Keeping this in mind, the existing identity between all generative processes reveals that the Aztecs' motivation to practice ritual anthropophagy is the desire to extend or strengthen one's life by participating of the force seen as the eternal origin of any renewal. Something similar can be said of the ceremony called *Teoqualo*:

Thanks to Sahagún's texts we have knowledge of a ritual that complemented the festivity called *Panquetzaliztli*:

“And when the body of *Uitzilopochtli* was shapen, when they gave it form upon his feast day, when it was *Panquetzaliztli*, they made it of a dough of amaranth seed, a dough of fish amaranth

seed, which is this chicalotl... And when the amaranth seed dough was made, it was like pone [resine], like cooked maguey, like axin. And upon the next day the body of *Uitzilopochtli* died. And he who slew him was [the priest known as] *Quetzalcoatl*; and that with which he slew him was a dart tipped with flint, which was plunged into his heart. He died in the presence of Moctezuma and of the keeper of the god...And when he died, thereupon they broke up his body, the amaranth seed dough. His heart was Moctezuma's portion. And the rest of his members, which were made like his bones, were disseminated among the people; there was a distribution. Two were given the *Tlatilulcans*. ... And as many were given the people of Tenochtitlan... Each year they ate it. .. And of this which they ate, it was said: "The gos is eaten". And of those who ate it, it was said: "They keep the god." (Florentine Codex, Book III, Chapter I, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Sahagún 1950-1974, pp. 5-6).

In pre-Hispanic Mexico man is very aware that every moment, because of the constant wars, disease, floods, or food shortages because of bad harvests, can lose his life. The anthropophagic rests on the idea of appropriating for oneself the strength of those one consumes. For Aztecs, who identify reality with symbols, the dough idol that represents *Huitzilopochtli* is the divinity itself. By ingesting a piece of the figure representing *Huitzilopochtli*, the cult participant appropriates the power of the divinity itself. Since *Huitzilopochtli* is also seen as a creator god, whoever practices the holy communion here, thanks to the identity between the force that made creation possible and the life force, seizes the same power that gives life. Hence, the sense of the ritual is to strengthen and prolong life on Earth.

But in ceremony whose purpose is to ensure life, the source must be presented just as known by the thought: as a force of creation and destruction. Through ritual anthropophagy that part of the origin that generates life is represented, the force of creation. But the source's part that is seen as the destructive force also finds its representation: Before ingesting the body of *Huitzilopochtli* it is necessary to fill him, even though it's just a figure made of dough. The idea that death belongs to the origin and therefore also determines life makes death necessary not only for this ceremony but for virtually all other monthly festivities that, as we've seen, pretend to activate the source of some of the forces of nature. Since both sides, life's and death's force, belong to the origin, both must be ceremonially staged, for the effectiveness of the ritual depends on the activation of the origin just the way men conceive it.

3. Conclusion

Human sacrifices have an internal logic, which results from the application of cognitive structures whose development was initiated in the early stages of ontogenesis. These structures are formed on the interactive relationship with the external world, i.e., in the development of action competence, from which they acquire their schemes. A thought that had no other instrument to perceive and understand the world, had no alternative but to use these schemes to interpret reality.

The Aztecs lived in an extremely uncertain world ruled by unknown powers. Being unable to establish normal communication with these powerful forces, they attempted to influence them by other means. In the rituals, schemes for understanding the cycles of nature as phenomena threatened by eternal rest, find particular implementation. Sacrifice results especially of those schemes that interpret reality's similar phenomena as external manifestations of the same original force. The mythical ideas of causality, grounded on the identity of the origin and characteristics, and the establishment of the mythical units lead to the conclusion that the spilling and offering of blood is an effective instrument to set in motion the source of any generative phenomenon: fertility, the outbreak of the ears of corn, rain, etc.

Historical texts leave no doubt that the pre-Hispanic rituals belong to an alien world, but it must be recognized that it possesses realism and logic. This world, like ours, it was built on the interaction with reality to ensure survival against the complete inability that every member of the species is born with. The only difference is that they only had available one scheme of thought to interpret the world and phenomena in it and therefore determined their worldview. Modern societies, due to historical conditions, have an additional logic that assumes the causality of natural, social and psychic phenomena. In the past there was only a logical explanation. Since the structures in which the Aztec thought are based upon are also part of our cognitive development, we can understand it. Our own ontogenesis has familiarized us with their logic.

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