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THE FLOWER MOUNTAIN
(*NAMANDÍ*)
IN THE FLOREROS RITUAL
LANDSCAPE

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— Abstract—

During the Winter Solstice, the *floreros* travel from Chiapa de Corzo to highland Chiapas in order to collect *niluyarilo* flowers, a kind of bromeliads, for the building of a nativity scene for *Niño Florero*, a Baby Jesus representation. In *Navenchauc*, Zinacantan, the Flower Mountain is used as a meeting point for the initiated floreros. It is a study about the relevance of memorial and ritual landscape for the understanding of one of the sacred places of this ritual, as it is mountain, with prominent anthropological, historical and social implications.

Keywords

ritual landscape, memorial, floreros, mountain.

Altepetl comes from the Nahuatl language and referred to a community organized and settled in a territory. The Spaniards translated it as 'pueblo' (town), because the term indigenous denoted the set of their houses and buildings as well as the population. But these translations reduced their meaning, for although it is a term that describes a political, socioeconomic and family organization, it is also a term that speaks of a ritual landscape, of very important symbolic aspects. The *atl-tepetl* roots come from this same term, they made up this word and its meaning: water-mountain. In fact, the glyph that represents it is precisely a stylized hill which at its base opens a cave through which gives access directly to the water..

The representations of Mesoamerican spaces in times before the arrival of the Spanish are very dynamic narratives in which you can read the origin of the inhabitants, the foundation date of the *altepetl* ritual, the name and lineage of its leaders. It can also be read features of the environment, such as its important hills, caves, underground streams and other sites that were considered sacred and, consequently, many of these elements refer to myths and not necessarily topographical points. To the Spaniards, these types of graphic and oral narratives were not intelligible to them and, considering them to be contrary to their faith, demonized and destroyed them.

In this sense, they had to trust those who knew the history, the environment, the toponymy and the signs to represent the landscape. It was these painters who often received the instruction to represent the territory as it was, but in reality what they did was to represent the *altepetl* as they understood it after the Spanish conquest. In a synthesized production, they created certain maps on European paper, with the skill of an indigenous artist. We are talking about a sacred geography that reminds us that every hill, in the pre-Hispanic vision, is a water container. Following this idea, we know that the Christian churches in the colonial era came to be considered the new centers of sacredness and in representations are the new glyphs of their places of power. Let us not forget that many times the Christian buildings were installed by the evangelizers on their ritual spaces, only super imposed culturally. It was an arena where the mixture of definitions was carried out and where the European concept of landscape and the indigenous one of *altepetl* began to negotiate. In the eighteenth century there was practically no one able to represent them. Thus, knowledge was extinguished that we can now only study by tying strands from various disciplines of thought.

In this way the establishment of towns was the result of a careful selection of the site, after a deep observation of environmental behavior, which implied ensuring the stability of slopes and water sources. Mesoamerican

physiography consisted of a kind of horseshoe formed by hills, on whose skirts the settlements were located, giving the idea of a protective pot, which recalled Mother Earth's uterus (Urquijo, 2014: 91). In this sense, we are interested in understanding the different ways, forms or modes in which individuals in their cultural and historical diversity have interacted with their immediate nature. In the present case, ideas about the cult of mountains or hills, is a current practice.

In the selection of the foundation site, the indigenous groups were environmental scholars, so the name of each locality often described some feature of the landscape, be it flora, fauna, hydrography or orography. In this way, the assigned aesthetic and functional values were recorded largely in the toponymy. In other regions we find terms equivalent to that of *altepetl*, which indicates a conception of the environment of aesthetic, geographical, historical and symbolic similarity, such as the *yucundu mixteco*, the *chuchutsipi totonaco* or the an *dehe nttoehe otomí*, whose literal translation in the three cases is 'water-hill'.

Image 1. Glyph representing *Teochiapan*.



In the study region, there is a glyph representing the way Chiapa was recognized by the Aztecs in ancient times, who called it Teochiapan¹, and shows the image of the *apantli* apantli or river, the land on which the *chia* is sown, and on these symbols a solar representation. This element seems to indicate the

1 It is infer that *Teo* alludes to a sacred place, and *chiapan* to red macaws.

most relevant of a cultural group like the chiapanecas, with images of the water, the earth and the sun, as vital sources and, therefore, present in their rituals.

As far as toponymy is concerned, we will see that the names of the places involved in this trip over a ritual territory are going to be fundamental for the definition of some categories of understanding about the reasons why the Flower men of Chiapa de Corzo (Image 5) perform a pilgrimage to the mountain (*Namandí*) and the way a flower becomes a motive that encourages them. The toponymy allude to "cosmological conceptions, to the characteristics of the environment or to remarkable events occurring in the place" (Barabas, 2003: 23), despite everything, is a subject that we would have much to say. So it seems that the sacred and the "demonized" seem to tread the same ground. In the town of Chiapa, the imposition of La Pila over an "eye of water" or natural water slope is still explained, to avoid the rituals that its settlers carried out on the site.

On December 21 the sun is projected in the parapet of La Pila. It is a building aligned with the winter solstice. The people of Chiapa used to say that earlier, when the flower men returned with the niluyarilo flowers on December 21, after having washed them with devotion in the Flower River, they would then come to take water from La Pila which was illuminated by the sun. The legends told by the late Domitila Mendoza, said that the sun entered La Pila water, on this date so important for the Chiapanecas.

MARIO AGUILAR PENAGOS. INTERVIEW AUGUST 22, 2012.

The ritual place is inhabited by forces, spiritual and otherness beings (García Zambrano, 2009). For this reason, directional manifestations of religions lead to a conformation of the humans visions of the world and their interrelations: between men themselves, between men and heaven, between men and spiritual forces. The spaces created in this way allow those who share an image of the world, a language, to recognize each other. According to García Zambrano, the ethno-historical sources of the sixteenth century show that these "sites of superstition" and settlement sites had an underlying background and a diversity of cognotivities. In this way of seeing it was preferred to occupy rocky places where springs gushed in the middle of green forest foliage. He maintains these declarations in documents such as the Geographical Relations of the 16th Century and the Geographical Relation of Motines, where it is expressed that although the friars tried to resettle the Indians in an *ad hoc*, way, they persevered in their old habit of remaining extended and in the neighborhood of the birth of rivers. This "*aquerenciamiento*" to the site, as this author refers, responded to the portentous periodic appearance of a serpent that they thought came out

literally from the water eyes of the spring. In turn, it makes a suggestive observation that the reason for the preference exceeded the mere requirement of water supply, as some currents of contemporary anthropology and archeology might well argue.

These categories of understanding must have been as important as they are today to represent ritual spaces. However, the discrediting and demonization of the sacred places or sanctuaries is a process that began from the Colony, in the framework of evangelization, as we have already mentioned. The Christianized peoples continually emphasized the negative character of the Hispanic previous thought and placed it in a substrate no longer dangerous and ambivalent, but malignant, while the Catholic was experienced as the "good." In this same idea, Roger Bastide (2005) makes a detailed analysis of Maurice Halbwachs' work about collective memory. According to Bastide, Halbwachs fails to disengage from the idea of a collective consciousness outside and superior to individuals. What counts is not the group itself, he says, but the organization of the group, because it is only a system of inter-individual relationships. Memories are so caught up in the web of human groupings that they can only be rebuilt or restored to their old bases. We have been struck by Bastide's reflection after questioning a group of black Brazilians who participated in an indigenous popular religion about the reasons that had led them to abandon their own ritual systems to adopt others. The answer to this was unanimous: the spirits of nature they worshiped in Africa were bound up with a certain environment which they had not been able to transport with them in the black ships. It was the spirits of such a mountain, such a river arm or such a sacred forest (its *altepetl*?). They had lost sight of the opening to the transcendental, they were far from it, Eliade would say.

This way, the importance of the place was emphasized, according to Bastide, as the space where the memories are hooked to be able to be kept, but are they simple memories? This is to pass from material space to spiritual space. Collective memory can only exist by recreating in a material way the centers of continuity and social and energy conservation. To understand religious existences it is necessary to move from the topical space to the motor space: sacred geography. Let's touch, then, the skin that surrounds the memory of the ritual landscape of the Flower men. Let us walk on the landscape and dwelling of the spirit. We feel its connection with the sacred places, mainly the Mountain of the Flower, where the ritual is staged, where the myth is recreated.

THE FLOWER MOUNTAIN DURING THE RITUAL PASSAGE

This ritual in search of a mountain flower, locally identified as Flower of *Niluyarilo*,² (Fig 5) sextends in a geographical zone located in the chiapaneca cultural region,³ (Fig. 2) literally in Chiapa de Corzo⁴, Acala, Chiapilla, Totolapa, Saint lucas; besides Guerrero and Flores Magón, both populations of Venustiano Carranza. The trip begins on December 14 and culminates on the 21st of the same month, in an event called *Topada de la Flor*, next to the *nandayasemí* (Flower River). After the return, other activities continue until January 6, when we can say that the ceremony ends.

It is the walk of a little more than five hundred men, mostly young (Image 3) who acquire the recognition of *Flower men*, in allegory to the objective of this ritual that is the search and transfer of flowers of *Niluyarilo*, and the venerated image that is that of the *Niluyarilo*, and the venerated image that is that of the *Flower Child*. It is a festivity that favors the meeting with

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- 2 The flowers used are bromeliads, mostly epiphytic plants, although there are some terrestrial or rock species. Due to the arched configuration of its leaves, they become real ecosystems, since among its leaves accumulate water and debris that are used by various organisms to live and interact with each other. Especially prodigal in bromeliads epiphytes, are the oaks and pines forests with high humidity and where the wind blows frequently, as it happens in the Altos de Chiapas region. In this case, the "thirds" collected by the Flower Children, are composed of four species of bromeliads, three of them with colorful inflorescences: *Tillandsia imperialis* Morren or "cob", "niluyarilo", "flower of the child"; *Tillandsia guatemalensis* L. B. Smith, "feather", "indiluyarilo", and *Tillandsia eizii* L.B. Smith, or "nulirrosa" (images 8, 9, 10), and finally the fourth species is the well-known "hay" or "pashte", *Tillandsia usneoides* Linneo, with little conspicuous greenish flowers, widely used in Catholic births. The thirds, in addition to tying with ropes, are adorned in the upper part with "garters" or garlands of tejocotes called locally chamomile, of showy red color and that corresponds to the species *Crataegus nelsonii* Eggl. (Rosacea). Others are also made with small crimson yellowish apples (Beutelspacher y Farrera, 2007: 111-112).
 - 3 In the central depression of the state of Chiapas, is located the area that occupied the chiapanecan culture, which included the villages mentioned above, as well as Ostuta and Pochutla, already missing. At the time of the Spanish invasion, there were also settlements of the Chiapanecas in the valleys of the Frailesca, corresponding to the present municipalities of Villacorzo and Villaflores. In addition to Chiapa de Corzo, it is probable that only Suchiapa and Acala were pre-Hispanic settlements; the rest were founded by the Dominican friars, after the conquest (De Vos, 1985: 26). The state of Chiapas derives its name from the two cities that during colonial times were the headwaters of the most prominent ethnic groups that lived then in their territory: the Chiapas and the Spaniards.
 - 4 Chiapa de Corzo, the place where the research is done, is located between the parallels 16 ° 17 'and 16 ° 55' north latitude; meridians 92 ° 48 'and 93 ° 06' west longitude; altitude between 200 and 1 800 m. It borders to the north with the municipalities of Osumacinta, Soyalo and Ixtapa; to the east with the municipalities of Ixtapa, Zinacantán, Acala, and Venustiano Carranza; to the south with the municipalities of Venustiano Carranza and Villa Corzo; to the west with the municipalities of Villa Corzo, Villaflores, Suchiapa, Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Osumacinta. It occupies 11.86% of the state's surface. It has 263 localities and a total population of around 100 thousand inhabitants.

several communities of Tsotsil origin, in the Chiapas Highlands, such a *Multajó* or *Mortajoc*, *Sequentic*, of the municipality of Ixtapa, *Navenchauc*, in Zinacantán, and *Mitzitón*, municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, located in mountainous area at a height of more than 2 thousand meters above sea level. It is important to say that *Navenchauc* is the central point of the encounter between chiapanecas and tsotsiles, in the Santa Cecilia Mountain, recognized by Chiapanecas as *Flower Mountain* (Fig. 4). This route is made by recognized routes of old, intricate roads and sidewalks, sometimes dangerous, when some stretches are currently connected with the modern Tuxtla-San Cristobal de Las Casas highway. The Flower Mountain is the most important place within this scene of rituals. *Namandí* or mountain is the center of the ceremonies and is the house of lightning. It is the origin of *Navenchauc*,⁵ as the following story tells us.

We were told by the elders of the town that when they named Navenchauc three men came to the hill that was known as Black Land. They were three families who arrived first, but as they wanted a bigger place for more families to live, they went down here to the lords. Here before there were pure ocote trees and oaks, and there was the river where the trees were. But there are no more of these trees, because they were of the very thick trunk, which perhaps were very old. And these gentlemen began to cut them, they said: -we are going to cut the trees because here we are going to live-, but when they were cutting them there was a thunder, like lightning. The hill has something like that, and the owner told them he did not want them to touch their trees, and then he decided to scare them and thundered like a rocket to defend their trees. It happened three times, but the lords did not stop cutting them and that's why they named it Navenchauc, which means House of the Wise Lightning. Then the gentlemen worried and talked and said, "Let's do something, let's dance or bring some candles to talk to

5 According to Becerra (1985), *Nabenchauc* would be the correct spelling for this locality and comes from the roots: *Naj-Been-Chauk*, from *Been*, the wise and divine; of *sotsil najel*, wise; *been*, titular deity of one day of the ancient indigenous month; *chauk*, ray, divinity. It is very interesting the following paragraph of the same author: "In 1926 I visited the hill of *Nabenchauc*, in whose skirt the picturesque rancharía of the same name can be found. It is a familiar height, on whose cusp we find, whoever writes this and my good companion of the expedition Don Ignacio Pérez Angulo, to be certain that *Been* was worshiped there: three Christian crosses that, by what could be noticed were cult subjects assiduous, for there were remnants of candles wax and the foliage of the flowers there carried in an offering; on the ground, with no vegetation; but digging we find tepalcates of ancient pottery, fragments of obsidian, and an idol, which I keep as symbolic figure, which I find to be allusive to *Been*. In the ranch we were informed, by the only family of ladinos that there was, that when the Indians have some seriously ill, they take him to ask for health at the top of the hill " (Beutelspacher y Farrera, 2007: 110).

the owner lightning to let us live on the hill, to give us permission. Then the lords arrived there, on the hill, and they went to put their candles and prayed their prayer and it was that way they did and that was the custom. The three crosses stayed there since that time, but we do not know when exactly when that was. PEDRO PÉREZ SÁNTIZ. INTERVIEW 18/DEC/2013

The lake located within the village, is a reference to locate the stories narrated around this tradition centered on the Flower Child. Pedro says, "We put crosses in the hills and in the caves. One of the hills of the village, say the older ones, also has an owner and that the water from the lagoon came in, but some sticks were locked and the water no longer enters, that's why it becomes a lagoon". The springs are the baths of the elementals of the nearby mountains (Vogt, 1993: 101) such as *Wo Ch'Oh Wo* (five wells), female spring, white water, active and average, where the "goddess of *Sisil Witz*" showers (Santa Cecilia or *Flower Mountain*) (Fig. 4).

The lagoon is enchanted. Long ago the women had to dress in men's clothes, which had to be put upside down, because there came from the big trees some dark shadows that grabbed them and took them. That is why the mothers told their daughters to be careful and when they were there, to put over their clothes the ones of a man. PEDRO PÉREZ SÁNTIZ. INTERVIEW 18/DEC/2013

It is the mountain of healing, where *yahwal balamil*, is called, "lord of the earth", who has a human figure. Only "doctors" or *shamans* make pilgrimages to the mountains. This establishes an interesting relationship with the Voyage of the Flower men, inasmuch as it could be a pilgrimage guided by one of these men and the fact that we still have memories of very few Flower men, it establishes the possibility that they were initiated in this knowledge.

We still get to pray to those mountains, we go all the time, as in the month of May we almost go daily, as we do the feast of Santa Cruz, everything may be a feast. We are going to carry the candles to ask for the rain, so that nothing happens to the people. When we are ill or we have other problems we seek who knows how to cure, but he presses us to know what we have and tells us to go to the hill to leave our candles and pray. But when the disease is serious he climbs to the hill to meditate and takes a dead chicken and puts it in the crosses to know what to do with the sick. This is the custom here, left by the gentlemen, who were the first to arrive, when there was nothing but there were very large trees. There began Navenchauc, on the mountain, and then the town was made here below. Even though we are good, we are always going to pray, to thank and not to get the disease. When

there was anger, the elders gathered people together and put their candles around the mountain to stop the disease and could not enter the village.

People who know how to see, says that inside the mountain is pure hot water because there is a volcano of hot water. That's why those who are Catholics cooperate three times a year to offer: in January we climb with everything we gather and carry candles, we are accompanied by healers to pray and light the candles and we ask that nothing bad happens, that there would be no disease. But non-Catholics do not. In January we go where the crosses are, because where there are crosses we can pray, we can talk to them for help.

*We put crosses in the mountains and in the caves. They all have names. We go again in the middle of the year, in the month of July, the oldest doctor joins the people and goes to all the mountains again to leave the candles and the copal; and in the month of December, we do the same, because that is the custom and we cannot forget it. PEDRO PÉREZ SÁNTIZ.
INTERVIEW 20/JUL/2014*

The tops of the hills are liminal spaces; in them are the representations and perceptions that on the territory have those who perform the rites. Rites fill the landscape of life and define the limits of cultural spaces. They are places of refuge where the fundamental role of worship is vindicated. The Mountain of the Flower is where the novices gather (the Flower men that go to the trip for the first time) and dance to the rhythm of the music of drums and reed. It is the place where the child is placed in front of the three crosses while the Flower men light their candles to fulfill their orders or to request their benefits. It is the place where the patron "whips" them as they request and the body is cleaned with sedge or basil. It is the place where the vases and deceased patrons who have gathered their souls in this "force" space are invoked. The eternal present as an infinite circle, has the center in each place. It is "the sacred place". That is what Don Esteban's experience teaches:

Look, little son, my grandfather would tell me, if you're curious, get up at midnight at your inn there in Navenchauc, and you go out and listen and you'll hear the bustle of how the departed Flower men are dismissed. I checked it many years, and some friends also, it was a murmur that made me cry, a song, and they are praying, oh my God, forgiveness and indulgence, forgiveness and mercy, forgiveness and pity! But of course you can hear it! And when you have just prayed you will hear the patron who says, "Long live the Little Flower Boy, boys!" Long live the Flower men, boys! You can hear the hurrahs and everything.

You see, in my devotion, in my faith, I believe that the spirit continues ascending to the mountain when dying. I say this because he prays for six years, now that those who climb are my grandchildren, I went to bump them down to the Cross of the Rabbit, on that road that goes down to Joijel, there is a sidewalk, and that is where I arrived because I heard that the first Flower men were coming, I waited and I saw that my grandson was also coming. When I arrived in Multajó, a boy named Chonito Nunez was crying, and he said to me, "Brother, I'm going to tell you something: I looked at my uncle Betío." "Yes, my brother", I looked at him. "It is that I took two orange sacks and I placed myself in the way where the Flower men passed, I left them giving their orange so that they cool their throats. When I saw the two Flower men that came and turned to look at me, and I saw that it was my Uncle Beto, but they continued without taking the oranges, they went in the row of the Flower men but crouched. Only when passing near me they turned to look and I saw that it was my Uncle Beto, I could not continue to distribute the orange because it gave me a feeling and desire to cry of pure sadness." Chonito kept crying as he told me what he saw.

And I tell you that all this is true, because when you look for the flower on the mountain, you hear the Flower men screaming, Eje, eeeje! Come here, there is enough flower! And if you answer it, they can call you and you can lose it. They are not current Flower men; they are gone Flower men, already dead, that return with their soul to the mountain. ESTEBAN HERNÁNDEZ. INTERVIEW 15/MARCH/2014

According to Johanna Broda (1991) among the people who have shaped the Mesoamerican cultural region, of which the Chiapas culture is part of, the link between man and his natural environment has manifested itself in: 1) his relation to astronomy (observation of the course of the sun, the moon, certain stars and constellations); 2) his relation to climatic phenomena (the rainy season and the dry season), and 3) his relation to agricultural and plant cycles (ecology, agriculture), and I would incorporate one more aspect 4) its meanings derived from his relation with territoriality and its places, inscribed in religious rituals.

In this way, natural phenomena were personified and in their offerings were designed figures or sculptures demonstrating the forces that represented them. In the symbolism of water, these figures are identified with the *tlaloques*, owners, or *charms*, as they are called in this region studied. They are small beings that produce the storm and the rain and, therefore, the mountains and the hills are respected and worthy of cult because in them the clouds are generated and from these comes the rain, so necessary for life.

This would explain, in part, expressed by Becerra in relation to the meaning of the name *Navenchauc* with the presence of *Been*, deity holder of a day on the indigenous calendar, which expresses the wise and divine, in turn linked with *chauk*, lightning; that is, the house of the wise ray. In Suchiapa, a town that is part of this region, I have been described the ray charm as a "little man of short stature, but great in power, very white and without a single hair on his head, which provides rain" (Palacios, 2010). But, in addition, we still find abundant stories, incorporated into their oral tradition, that narrate a world of charms explaining itself in the diversity of its rituals, masked with the images of Catholic saints. *Been*, then, not only seems to be the force of rain and storms, but also of the earth, considering the mountains and caves, on whose summits clouds are generated.

Becerra also comments on having found an "*idolillo*", of symbolic figure, allusive to *Been*, with the characteristics of figures found in the excavations of the Templo Mayor in central Mexico, according to Broda (1991), inside boxes of offerings of the cult to *Tláloc*, in the *Been* hierarchy. "Small and oval figures, from 10 to 23 centimeters long; whose face and body features are outlined in a highly stylized manner" (466). These figures and what they represent, are invoked in rites that take place on the summits of the most important hills, in request of rain and of fertility for the community (Schultze-Jena *apud* Broda: 468) and that formerly considered themselves protectors of the corn grains, house protectors, lords or beings of the clouds. In ethnographic material collected between the *nahuas* of Huatusco, Córdoba and Zongolica, Veracruz, inside the hills (*tépetl*) live blue color beings called *tipeyolohtli*, "heart of the hill"; which are also called *tlatsinihkeh*, "thrusters", i.e. "rays". Among the *Tlapanecos*, from Guerrero, *aku* is the old lord of the earth, and is one at the same time as many. In his role as the owner of the game animals, he is specifically named *Viejo del Cerro* (Old men from the Hills), related to *Wuigo*, divinity of the thunderbolt, whose voice is thunder and sends rain. The latter is also one and a multiplicity at the same time.

Those who climb the hill to heal are sometimes rays and therefore can heal. To be lightning is the highest level to be a doctor, is the one who sends to others, is an iloletik. They also know how to make storms to annoy people.

PEDRO PÉREZ SÁNTIZ. INTERVIEW 20/JUL/2014

The ancient divinities of the tsotsiles land from Larrainzar in Chiapas are now identified with the Catholic saints (San Miguel, San Antonio, San Juan, among others), as well as Chiapa. These rites are practiced in the mountains, caves and fountains, along with other kinds of beings called "angels", who control the wind and rain. The latter are called *chauk*, a word that probably derives

from *Chac*, the Yucatecan divinity of rain (Holland *apud* Broda: 470). To the tsotsiles of San Pedro Chenalhó (Guiteras *apud* Broda: 470), "*Chauac*" or *Anhel*, is the divinity of rain and water, owner of the ray, lord and owner of the hills, protector of *milpas*..., the one that gives the maize and is intimately related to our sustenance (Thompson *apud* Broda: 471). Let us not forget that the Flower Child is accompanied by the Angel Child, it is possible a connection with such meanings and knowledge of the mountain's elemental forces.

On the other hand, the idea of gender in relation to mountains has also been the subject of anthropology. There are wet nurses in the mountains that look after small children, but what children are they? Of the little ray beings represented in the *tlaloques*, masters, and yearnings figures? Is it the feminine that the Flower Child who travels to the mountain as a novice seeks to be initiated? There is a Zinacanteco tale of six *Xohobetik*, "rays of the Sun", who were able to "see" within the mountains and perceive the Lord of the Earth (here we equate "vision" with knowledge) and those with their specialized powers could defeat the enemies who threatened the people. One could make fog, the second lightning, the third a wind whirl; the fourth could fly like a hawk, the fifth like a butterfly and the sixth like a fly. Fearing reprisals from the defeated enemies, instead of returning to their houses, they asked permission to the Lord of the Earth to inhabit inside the mountains. The "oldest" was to live in *Ox Yoket* (*Bankilal Muk Ta Witz*), while the other five to *Kalvario*, *Zan Kixtowal*, *Lach Chikin*, *Nakleb Ox e Izak Tik*. At the same time their wives settled in six "female" mountains: *Muxul Witz*, *Sisil Witz*, *Ninab Chilo*, *Nio*, *Ya Ahwil* and *Lanza Witz*... Today they live within those mountains, from where they supervise the affairs of their living descendants (Vogt, 1993: 269).

Sisil Witz is the Flower Mountain or of Santa Cecilia (Image 4), and his feminine condition, as this account refers, also goes back to the narrative of Pedro, when he says that it was a woman who descended from the mountain and gave the boy to a man from Chiapas, where this devotion arose. Following this biological distinction it would place the elementals pluvial in the masculine, and the elementals of the different forms of maize or flowers, in the feminine, that in general, the latter are associated with the currents of the water (rivers, springs) or with stagnant waters (lakes, ponds). The feminine is also associated with earth, water, moon, growth, fructification, cold diseases, among others. On the basis of these characteristics, a simplified dualistic system can be established: while male elemental rainfall sponsors the flows (of water or fire) falling from the sky, the female elementals control the flows that go (or stop) on the earth (Iwaniszewski *apud* Broda, 2009: 115-116).

To the Flower Mountain we arrived to pray and many agreements are established in that place. Punishments are given there to all that behaved badly, and I inform them where it will be the Evening of the Flower. There we pray and pray for dead or sick Flower men.

What we know of the ancients is that they went to the mountain to be strengthened, because the place where we go says it is a volcano. They went from here to thank God from the volcano, to thank him for his crops, for all the goods he gave them, for the strength to live. That is the relationship that we consider most. Then the flower has a form of fire, and that fire we bring it until the birth of our Flower Child and for the altars of the houses, maybe as a way to bring the strength from there to our people, our altars. This became Catholic by the arrival of the friars, and then we began to have the child, and had to bring a memory. That was how the flower was brought.

TOMÁS NIGENDA SÁNCHEZ. INTERVIEW 10/OCTOBER/2013

Of particular interest in comparative terms are the *tzultacah* of the *kekchí* and other groups of the Guatemalan highlands. *Tzultacah* means Flat-Hill or Valley-Hill and is a poetic term to make a reference to the surface of the earth. Barbara Tedlock (Broda, 1991: 471) reports that at the time of harvest in December, the Quiché of Momostenango, do rites of thanks to *Juyubtak'aj*, "Valley-Hill", also called Mundo. Thus, these deified hills paid tribute to the beginning and end of the rainy season, and were also considered "maintenance hills", not only because they are food suppliers, but also of spiritual strength, finally another kind of sustenance for the humans.

All of the above suggests that mountains are vital places that have a privileged role in the ceremonial calendar, establishing a deliberate link between the geography of the high mountain and the climatic, agricultural and ritual cycles. *Idolillos* were sometimes taken when they were carried in procession "to the mountain, or to the mountain range, or to the cave, where they had their denomination, and there, in that cave or hill, they... offered their... sacrifices, invoking that hill..., or lack of water... or hunger... (Durán *apud* Broda, 1991: 475).

In relation to the offerings, there has been much discussion of the subject of ritual sacrifices. It is, however, an idea that remains in the interstices of doubt and bewilderment, when what is discussed is done from a language that does not correspond to the worldview of those who are supposed to have practiced it. There is an argument that children were sacrificed in the mountains, and that they were chosen because they were special humans

for this purpose. Abundant data of this nature is located, mainly, in the archaeological investigations to the ancient sites, based on what is written by the conquering chroniclers. However, few are the reliable resources that are freed of doubt regarding the problematic, when they have not located bones rest in the mountain places, at least not of children. An interesting example is the case of Pachita, a Mexican healer who gained remarkable fame for her love of neighbor and the help she offered by solving physiological and soul problems through "invisible" operations advised by "spiritual doctors." This is not a new topic in Mexican culture; it is known to continue to be one of the forms of knowledge in the traditional medicine field. Grinberg met this woman and became his collaborator. We bring it as an example because Pachita's surgeries were remarkable portents, in which, with a mountain knife extracted hearts to be cleaned and cured, or other affected organs, without the use of anesthesia or an operating room.⁶

We think, considering this author's proposal, that the "sacred places" or "places with memory" described by Eliade are spaces within an energetic network of total coherence and symmetry that can motivate in some human beings the unity of their consciousness. This would imply the fact that what we see is not necessarily what it is for others.

Of course, these are possible explanations that will remain in the creative capacity of readers to establish more than one relationship with this ritual. However, this is so interesting that it could be a topic for more detailed research, considering them very advanced starting points that would be worth exploring more closely. Continuing in the sense of the

6 From this experience Grinberg wrote, based on his theory, the possible explanation that could provide: The *lattice* concept considers that the fundamental structure of space is an energetic network or matrix of absolute coherence and total symmetry. This net is called *lattice* and it is considered that in its ground state contributes to the same all-embracing space and penetrated everything known. The set of modifications of its structure that result from all brain activity creates a complex alteration of the same. This alteration occurs in all dimensions of space and is called the neural field. The neuronal field of a living brain continually interacts with the *lattice* producing in it energetic confirmations which we call visual images.

The world we know results from the interaction between the neuronal field and the *lattice*. We all see a similar world because the structure of our brains is very similar and therefore, the neural fields that we produce are similar but unrepeatable and unique in each moment. According to the studies of the consciousness that indicate that it has discrete values, giving rise to qualitatively different levels of experience, it is possible to suppose that the interaction between the neuronal field and the *lattice* has a congruence only with certain bands or levels, while that others do not. Thus there are auditory worlds different from the visual or olfactory and particular levels that the Eastern mystical consciousness knows so well (Grinberg, 1982).

mountains, they can also be centers of the world for some people. In a trip shared between Evon Vogt, "Vogtie", as they also recognized him, and David Freidel, Vogtie explained:

Here, on this cross, —he said, pointing to the sanctuary in front of us—, we enter the Zinacantan world. This is the foot of the sacred mountain muxul vitz, in whose top —he pointed upwards, towards a promontory located on the road, where the pines meet with the pale blue sky— is another cross sanctuary. There, —he said, pointing to the east and south—, there is bankilal mukta' witz, the Great Mountain.

As I gazed upon the imposing volcano rising more than 3,000 meters above sea level, Vogtie explained that the Zinacantecos believe that this volcano houses the corrals in which the fathers-mothers, ancestral spirits who watch over the people, keep more than 11 thousand spirits of wild animal companions of the settlers. Turning his arm south, he pointed to the other mountains and shrines that surround the valley: the sisil witz [Flower Hill], the pyramidal mountain with steep slopes; the kalvario, that great sanctuary located on the road to the peripheral settlement of Nakih; and so on, all around the valley. "Each mountain has its ancestral gods and its cross sanctuaries of entrances where 'seers' or shamans speak to the people".

Vogtie then pointed to the valley beneath us. "There," he said, "is mixik' balamil, the navel of the world" ⁷

— Where? —I asked.

— There, in that hill —he replied (Freidel, 1993: 120-121).

There is no community without a center. A place to recognize themselves. That is why the ancient *nahuas* called *Tlalocan* to the primeval mountain. In their concave part were the germinating deities, represented as serpents; the spirits or hearts of plants and the water from which everything is born. Man directed his prayers to that feminine sphere while depositing the seeds in the womb of the earth; in that inner world that makes possible the growth of all nature. Later, the sun matured the terrestrial gifts, while the fire emanated

⁷ In the neighborhood *Napiniaca* (big town), there is a place recognized by the chiapanecas as *changuti*, which translate as navel. This neighborhood represents the first settlement of Chiapa, as the Spaniards found it upon arrival in this town.

from the stubble burning renewed the clouds, which eventually restored the wet to its place of origin. Deep in caves and caves were the signs of life and death. Just as the sun disappeared every sunset in the jaguar's jaws, along these liminal spaces both the ancient guides and the present guides deciphered and decipher the signs of health and disease and made time and power sacred through rituals (Gorz *apud* Ruz, 2006: 92).

FINAL REFLECTIONS

This comparative material is extremely useful for a more complete and nuanced understanding of this way of seeing the natural world and beyond the natural, whose basic elements constitute a valuable heritage. However, the current man-land relationship is unstable and precarious, and must be reconfirmed over and over again through rituals and practices that ensure balance.

Let's think about Pedro's tale of the origin of *Navenchauc* in the Flower Mountain where the great, enormous oaks existed, in coexistence with the mythological *niluyaril*. The oak to be useful, had to die. They killed him so much that he was exterminated. In some places there is only the name, and the name, as we know, is the last thing that dies. But where there are no oaks, there are no flowers. We then understand that the past of these lands is broader than the way to them. What we have exposed in this document are just the different perspectives from which we analyze the importance of mountains or hills, inscribed in the ritual landscape of a ceremonial such as that of the Flower men of Chiapa de Corzo. This is only a glimpse of the complexity involved in the rite.

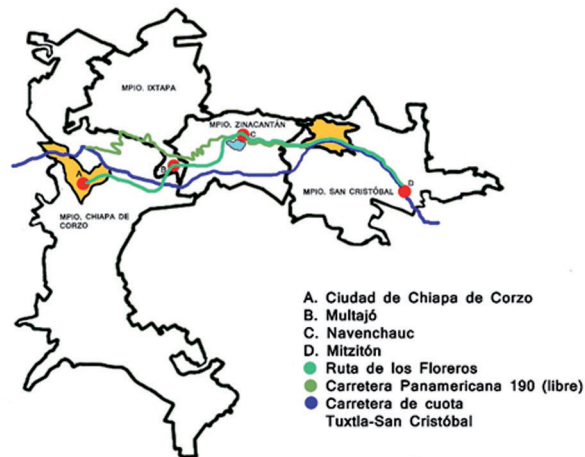
FIGURES

Image 2. Region of worship. Localities of the Chiapas' cultural region involved in the ritual of The Flower men.



Source: Personal file.

Image 3. Flower men route.



Source: Personal file.

Image 4. Flower men in *Navenchauc*.
The Mountain Flower can be seen at the back.



Source: Personal file.

Image 5. The Flower men carrying the *Niluyarilo*,
returning from the ritual trip.



Source: Personal File.

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