

TWENTY

Amazonian Windows to the Past: Recovering Women's Histories from the Ecuadorean Upper Amazon

Blanca M. Muratorio

After a critical reassessment of Claude Lévi-Strauss's distinction between "cold" and "hot" societies, some Amazonian scholars have turned their attention to the creativity shown by Amazonian indigenous peoples in incorporating their particular experiences of colonial contact into their mythical narratives (Hill 1988; Hugh-Jones 1988), recognizing that myth and history are complementary modes of historical consciousness (Turner 1988). Without overlooking the importance of mythic narratives in Amazonian societies, I have chosen to examine the issue of historical consciousness in a group of Amazonian women through the narrative genre of daily conversation. This topic raises the problem of the relationship between gender ideologies, culture, and consciousness in an ethnographic area where this theoretical concern remains relatively unexplored.

In Latin American and Mediterranean Catholic societies, "Marianismo," as an ideology of female spiritual superiority modeled on the ideal figure of the Virgin Mary, has been used to explain important aspects of the dynamics of gender relations. Evelyn P. Stevens (1973), who introduced the concept in the North American literature on Latin American women, claimed that Marianismo as a form of female power was able to counterbalance the exacerbated virility and mastery of men over women commonly known as "machismo." Since the 1970s, further research on gender ideologies has questioned, directly or indirectly, the ahistorical character of this version of Marianismo and has explored its changing meanings in relation to considerations of class, ethnicity, and historical change (e.g., for the Mediterranean, see Collier 1986; for Latin America, Harris 1978, 1980; Martin 1990; Silverblatt 1980, 1987). I am unable to discuss at length here all the theoretical implications of this literature. In the case of the Amazonian indigenous women whom I am examining, however, one small clarification about the applicability of this concept of Marianismo to different culture areas is in order.