Eagles and Jaguars

Archetypes and Myths in Gang-Entrenched Latinx Men

Abner Flores

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Warrior, artist unknown

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.
C. G. Jung, *Aion*
(1951/1968, CW 9ii, ¶14)

Figure 1. Family Vacation, year and photographer unknown

We all believed in the American dream. Some of us now approach that dream with caution and a fair amount of hesitation. Racism and marginalization are rife and exemplary of the shadow aspects of the United States (Figure 1). For the most part, negative projections have been historically unleashed on people of color. These projections are, quoting Jung again, as the man who is "fooled by all the illusions that arise when he sees everything that he is not conscious of in himself coming to meet him from outside as projections upon his neighbor" (1945/1968, CW 13 ¶391). Now these projections are openly challenged through movements such as Black Lives Matter, the rise in the number of people of color running for government office, and the advent of cellular technology, which has served as a technological advantage in

providing testimony on the marginalization and oppression of people of color today. In this growing dialogue, what is often overlooked, however, is the topic of mass incarceration.

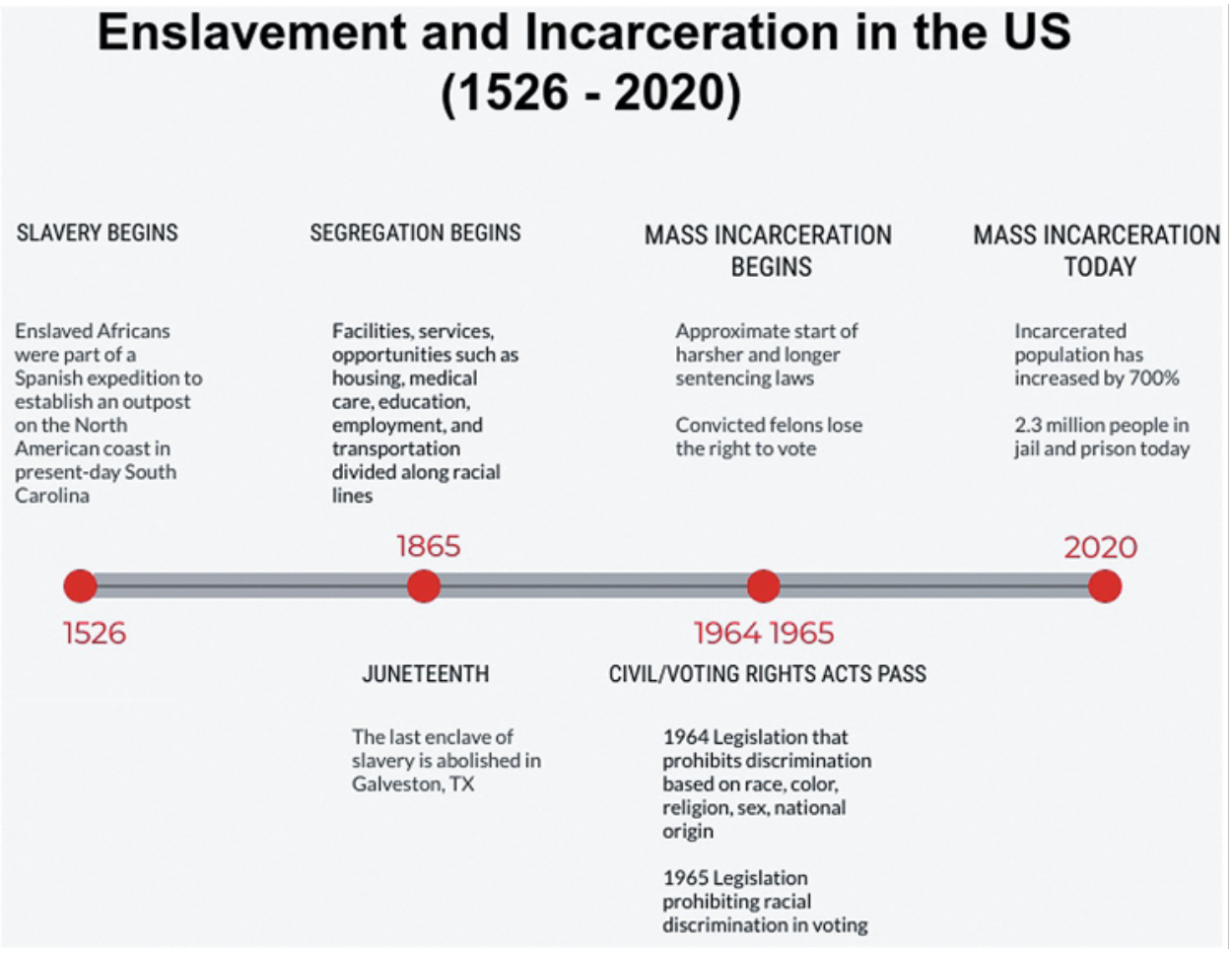

Figure 2. There is an unbroken continuity of "otherness," of marginalization from the beginning of the United States to today. (Author's timeline, 2020)

In order to understand the intersectional issues at play and the archetypes and myths that often come forth among gang-entrenched, incarcerated Latinx youth and men,[1] we need to appreciate the cultural and historical context that gave rise to this population (Figure 2).

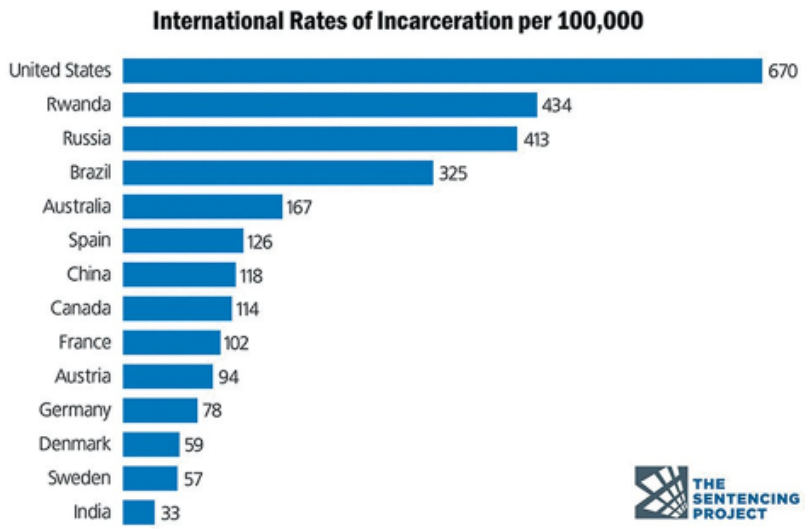

Figure 3. Incarcerations rates by country (The Sentencing Project, 2018)

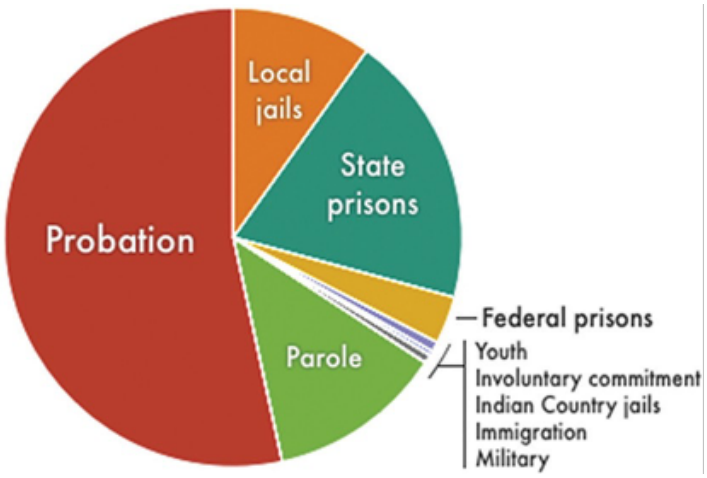

Figure 4. Correctional control
(Prisonpolicy.org, 2018)

In the United States, more people are incarcerated than anywhere else in the world and in the entire history of the world (Figure 3). Our rate of incarceration is significantly higher than that of the next leading countries. Correctional supervision (Figure 4), people who are on probation or parole, are also an enormous piece of the judicial system.

One in thirty-seven citizens is under some form of correctional control (Jones 2018). According to Federal Bureau of Prison statistics (2020), the demographics of these numbers show us that 60 to 70 percent of those incarcerated are people of color, specifically African American and Latinx. Latinx youth are 65 to 73 percent more likely to be arrested or incarcerated than their white peers; African American youth, 500 percent more likely (Carson and Anderson 2016). This data has been tracked beginning with initial contact with an officer or judge. All things being equal, the only factor that elevates risk of incarceration and lengthier sentence is race (OJJDP 2020).

Figure 5. Screen capture of cellphone video showing off-duty police officer drawing his gun on a twelve year old boy (CNN, 2017)

The advent of technology has allowed us to begin to question the glaring discrepancies in official statements and recorded events (Figure 5). Often such statements—"He was threatening me and I feared for my life"—become invocations

to unleash violence on Black and brown bodies. The demonization of men of color has resulted in a society with limited outlets and opportunities. It is in this vortex of ostracism that gang initiation takes place.

All cultures have clearly understood both the impact of the transition from childhood to adulthood and the need for communal assistance for those making that transition. Psychotherapist Richard Frankel described the way in which past cultures initiated their youth into adulthood through ritual (1998, 53–65). In this way, the community was held responsible for creating the space to transition the child into adulthood. The inherently destructive aspects of adolescence and its relationship to the transition to adulthood were described by Jungian analyst Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig in his book *Power in the Helping Professions*.

> In order to develop psychologically, the adult must pass through a phase of denial and destruction…A youth making the transition from childhood to adulthood must make contact with the Devil, with destructiveness. He must also experience the possibility of destroying to fight his way through to freedom. (1971, 107)

Mythologist Joseph Campbell shared a belief similar to Frankel's when he stated in *The Power of Myth* that "all children need to be twice born, to learn to function rationally in the present world, leaving childhood behind" (1988, 8). He went on to describe an aboriginal rite of passage that included circumcision, scarification, and the passing on of the male mythology to the child, thus transitioning the boy into the man (81–82). Campbell believed that the lack of modern rites of passage led to the explosion of gang activity in American youth (8, 82). In other words, where previous cultures would intentionally create initiatory rituals to welcome children into society, now gang initiations serve as incomplete

surrogates that initiate children out of society. Mental-health work both inside and outside of prisons with gang-entrenched youth and men presents unique obstacles and opportunities. The same biases and projections that play out in the general populace can be found in the treatment and diagnoses of incarcerated youth and men of color. The standard diagnoses are in the categories of Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders: "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms and rules are violated" (APA 2013, 461–480). Diagnoses in this range guide treatment and response protocols. They imply unredeemable aspects that are often tied to psychopathy, violence, and lack of empathy (Junewicz and Billick 2020). They also dovetail precisely with the cultural projections mentioned previously. These men and boys have criminal records and stoic attitudes that often become self-fulfilling loops that are then interpreted by clinicians as resistance.

In my work with gang-entrenched youth, court-mandated parolees, and adult males of color with a criminal record, I have found that centralizing their experiences, naming and exploring this distrust, and contextualizing this within the systemic and historical realities of oppression and marginalization are fundamental to the work. People of color have a well- founded distrust of the intentions and motivations of public health services, as seen in the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, in which healthy African American men were injected with syphilis without their knowledge or consent, a study that lasted for forty years (1932–1972).[2] By holding a critical eye to the unique pressures that this population

faces, we allow for honest dialogue and communication to take place. It is in these moments that the inner world of Latinx youth and men can be seen.

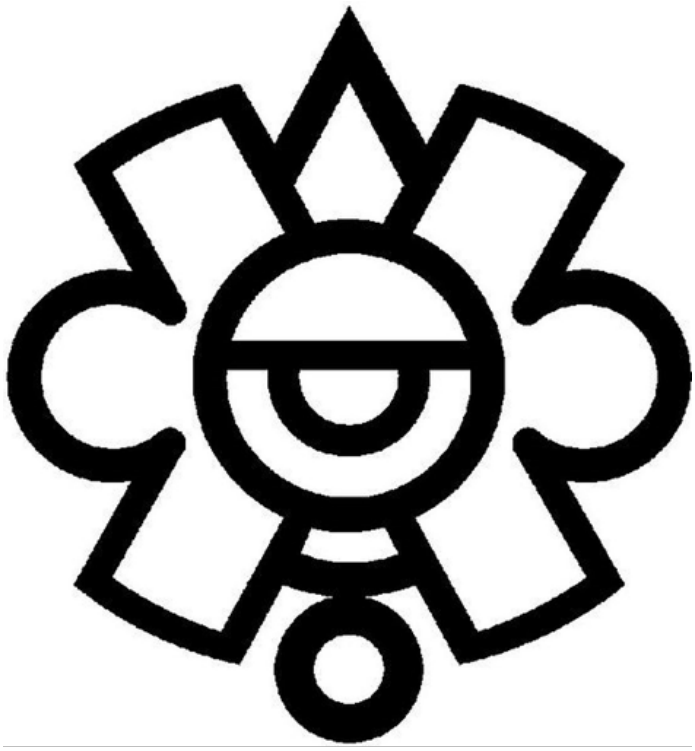

Figure 6. *Ollin*—Aztec symbol and root word representing movement, earthquake, or heart (Marezma, 2010, Public domain)

What are the archetypes and myths found in this population? Particularly in gang-entrenched Latinx youth and men? How are myth, image, and indigenous beliefs determining this population's behaviors? In order to answer these questions, I use James Hillman's poetic basis of mind as a psychology that starts neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor in the analysis of behavior, but in the processes of imagination (Hillman 1975). In my work, I found that these youth and men bring up consistent images (Figure 6) and themes. These archetypal patterns appear again and again in drawings, in poetry, and in personal narratives. The three archetypal patterns I highlight here are the

warrior, the goddess, and the land. If the inner world of incarcerated Latinx is to be heard, we must listen to the Indigenous gods and goddesses that were forgotten and buried by the colonization of the Americas, for they are alive and well, coming through in the imagery and mythology of this population, and demanding their rightful place.

Because my interest is in exploring and cataloging overarching themes, all references to clients, sessions, and dialogues are in the form of amalgamated vignettes, the key being to capture the recurring ideas, desires, and expectations of this population. I have written them for the purpose of describing the dynamics that can transpire between client and therapist and to give some context to the clinical applications of indigenous archetypes and myths that can unconsciously manifest in session. The interactions and details therein are not attributable to any one person or event and have been purposefully changed in order to maintain confidentiality and remove any potential likenesses with any client, person, or event. The events presented in these vignettes should, therefore, be taken as symbolizing a way to connect mythology with history and the present. These vignettes describe the hermeneutic approach that "emphasizes the role of narrative form (versus scientific objectification) in psychoanalytic understanding" (Messer, Sass, and Woolfolk 1988, 9). All of the clients whose stories are in any way represented here are no longer in my care.

Figure 7. Copy of a stylized Aztec Eagle Warrior drawing, artist unknown

The Warrior

Salvador is a thirteen-year-old Latinx male in his second commitment (incarceration) at the juvenile facility for fighting. The first time I saw Salvador he sat

across from me with crossed arms, stared at me intensely, and told me to "fuck off" after I tried making small talk. I was responsible for implementing cognitive behavioral interventions (CBT) that addressed and redirected his triggers toward violence, systematically diminishing the strength of those triggers by replacement or redirection (OJJDP 2013). Salvador enjoyed drawing and once brought in a sketch of an Aztec eagle warrior (Figure 7) that he had been working on. Our breakthrough came when I explained the symbolism of eagle warriors and jaguar warriors (Figure 8), the two warrior and nobility classes within the Aztec culture. His arms uncrossed and he leaned in to listen.

Figure 8. Eagle and jaguar warriors, Florentine Codex, circa 1540 and 1585 (The Field Museum Library, public domain)

We excitedly compared the imagery and made associations with severity, sacrifice, fighting, earth and sky, heaven and earth (Figure 9). The image of heaven as represented by the eagle warriors and earth as ex- pressed by the jaguar warriors gave

way to the question: who stands between heaven and earth? He answered: "I do." To sit with a young man and witness his realization of place and structure within the context of his own imaginal work was to be in the presence of the communication between psyche and my young client. This young man was describing the very nature of his irascibility. By making this into a conscious understanding, he literally calmed down, lowered his guard, and exhibited a contentedness that I had not witnessed before. Or to put it in his words: "I knew I had to fight so that I could show them what was in my heart."

Figure 9. Aztec human sacrifice, Codex Magliabechiano, sixteenth century

The Goddess

Most of my clients have the respective names of their mothers clearly and boldly tattooed on their bodies (Figure 10). This large display of a son's love for his mother emblazons entire forearms, chests, and backs. Martha, Maria, and

Guadalupe are all proudly venerated as the *Santa Madre,* the Holy Mother, who has selflessly loved and sacrificed for them and will continue to do so despite their sons' addictions, affiliations, or violence. The young men whom I work with show a pious adulation of their mothers that contrasts starkly with the crimes that they have committed and the way in which they engage the world. Furthering this contrast is the relationship that they have with their girlfriends and with women in general.

Figure 10. Tattoo by Cristian Cordova Tattoo del Mono

The numinous sanctity with which these young men describe their mothers corresponds to the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint and Holy Mother of Mexicans and Latinx (Figure 11). Historically the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to a native Indian just one decade after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the seat of the Aztec empire, and

at the same holy mountain where the goddess Tonantzin Cōātlīcue was worshipped (Figure 12).

Figure 11. *Virgen De Guadalupe*, facsimile of sixteenth-century engraving (Public domain US)

Figure 12. Cōātlīcue, Museo Nacional de Antropologia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Guadalupe in her Christian form represents a narrowing of scope and a limitation of the goddess's power. Tonantzin Cōātlīcue is the mother of the gods, the sun, and the Aztecs, a fertility goddess and a goddess of death that required and demanded sacrifice in order for the cosmos to continue to exist. This split appears to be reflected in the dis- tinction between the sanctity the men ascribe to their respective mothers and the lascivious- ness they associate with other women. When compared to the myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe, it appears that the insatiable mother of death and sacrifice and the abundant harbinger of fertility have both been

negated in Guadalupe. Guadalupe, in the Catholic accounts of her appearance, announces both her perpetual virginity and her place as mother and creator of the people (Basilica of Guadalupe, 2020, “Nican Mopohua,” ¶26).

Integral aspects of the feminine have been buried and transformed into the dichotomy of the virgin and the harlot (Figure 13). The natural feminine that was worshipped by the indigenous people and that embraced the complexities of the feminine has now been fragmented to such a degree that she is unrecognizable and hidden.

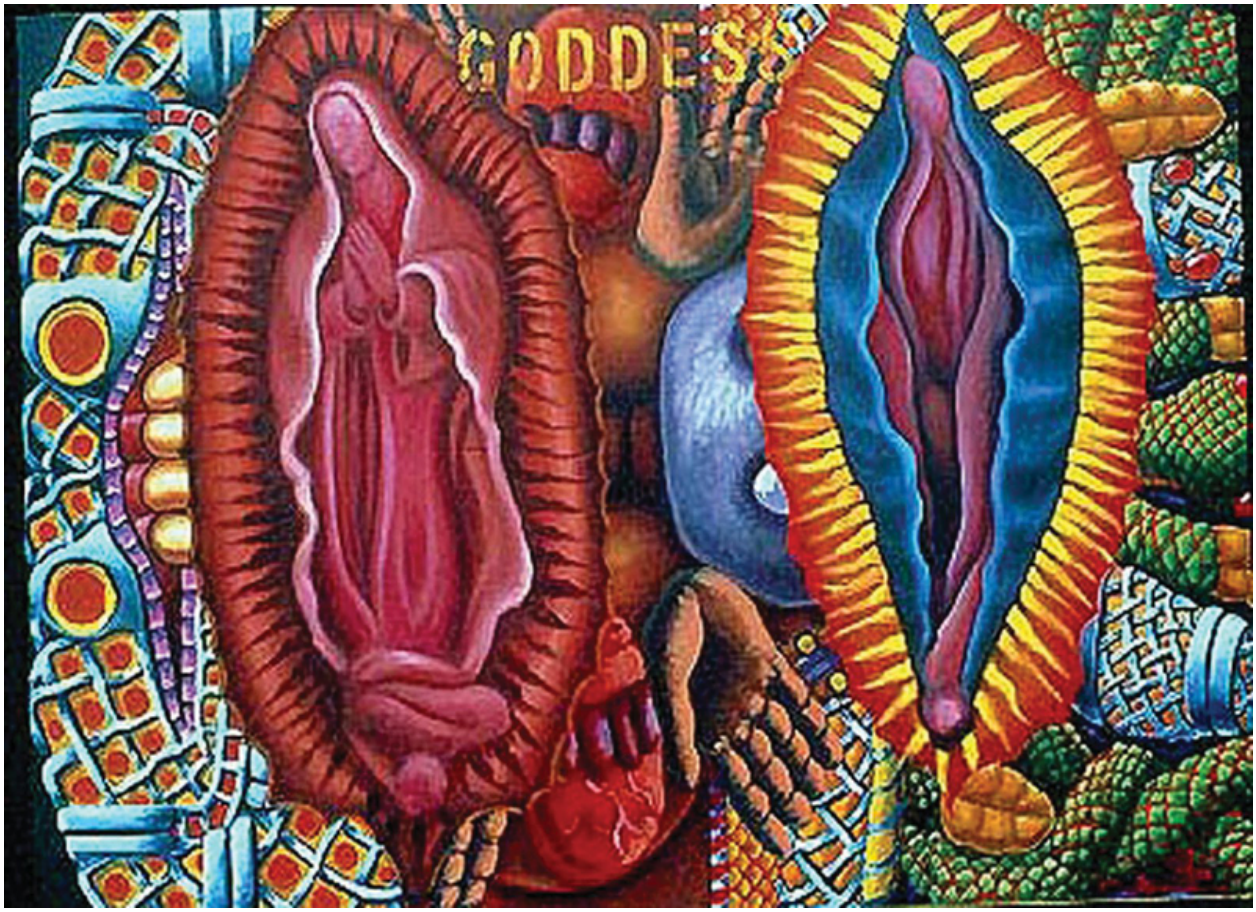

Figure 13. Quiroz, Alfred J. Goddess, 1991

The Land

Another archetypal pattern began to emerge when client after client described a relationship to their neighborhood that carried a mythical quality (Figure 14). Some clients stated that they spent their time looking at maps of their neighborhoods while they were in their cells. They recalled and reminisced about the various events that occurred and relived them in detail. One man described the neighborhood and all of its nuances as if describing a holy site—a temple dedicated to his own lived myth. "I remember every street, every corner. I know where the streets meet up with the alleys, and where the stores are." Joseph Campbell presents a critical distinction between modern society and native beliefs that help clarify the incarcerated Latinx's obsession with his neighborhood. In his retelling of the US government's request to purchase land from the Native Americans, Campbell quoted an eloquent letter by Chief Seattle in which the very notion of ownership and humanity's relationship to the land is challenged.

> The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us…Every part of this earth is sacred to my people…We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins…The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors…We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it…As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. (Campbell 1988, 34–35)

Figure 14. Reconstruction of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztecs—the center of modern Mexico City (Ignacio Marquina, National Museum of Anthropology of Mexico City)

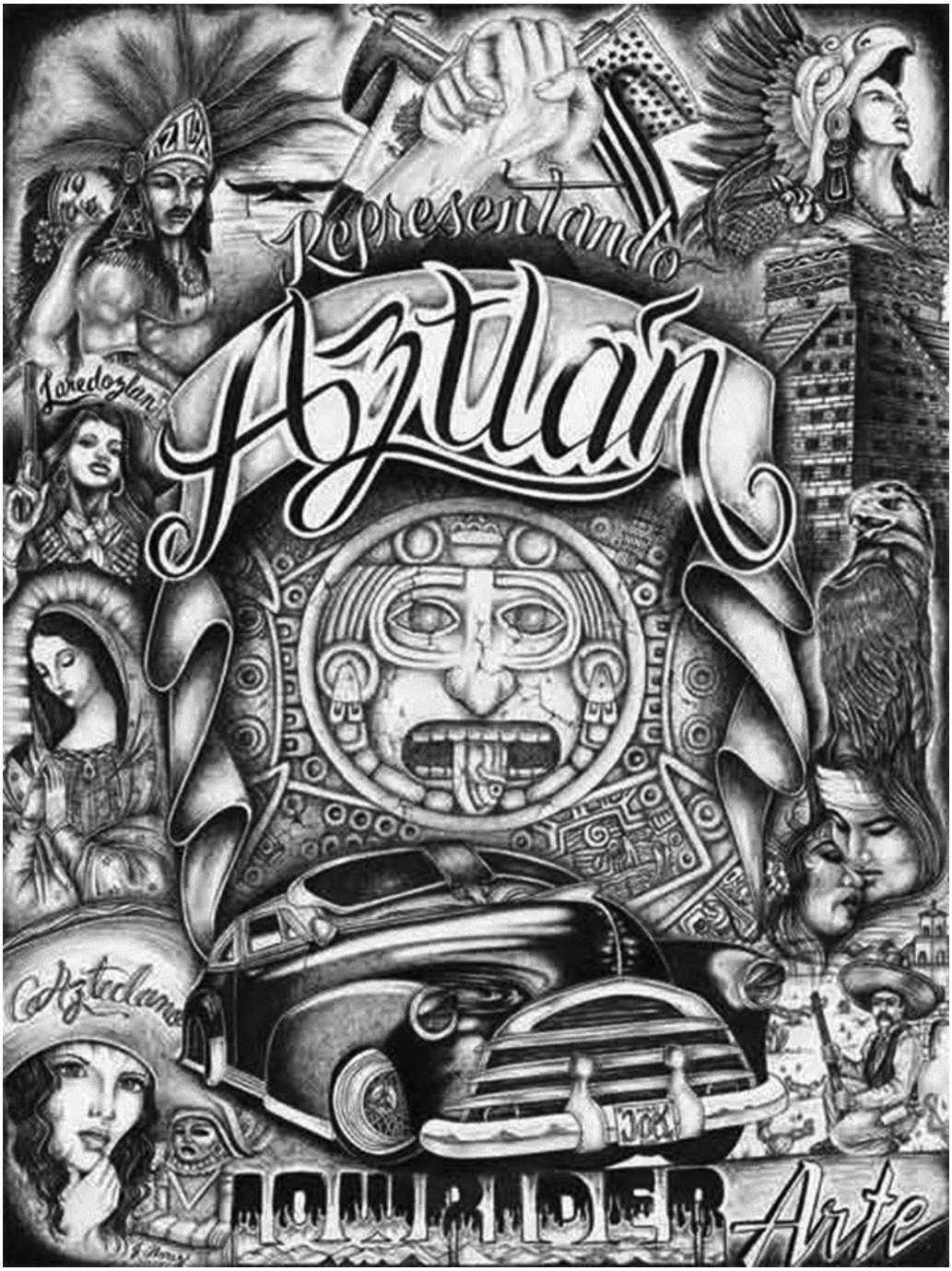

Figure 15. Prison art panuelo, 2008, artist unknown

It is possible to overlap images, replace the word *hood* with the word *land,* and arrive at the same conclusion. These youth and men love the land that is their hood and have a spiritual connection to it. Though the prairies and rolling hills have

been replaced with asphalt and alleyways, within the mythopoetic worldview of the incarcerated Latinx, it is one and the same (Figure 15). It is the land worth fighting and dying for, and to spill one's blood on this land is simply to fulfill the role of warriorship and the demands of Cōātlīcue, the venerable Earth Mother.

When looked at through the lens of the dominant American culture, the actions of the gang-entrenched Latinx appear nihilistic at best. This is incorrect. What my clients report is a wholly different worldview within which they operate. They do not see themselves as independent of the land, but as an integral component of it. This is the native worldview reborn. Campbell expressed it as follows:

> But if you will think of ourselves as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, you see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth. And this is the voice of the earth. (1988, 32)

Archetypes Re-imagined

To be in the myth as a lived experience is wholly different than to sit in perplexity at the outwardly incongruous acts of this population. By shifting this point of view, what at first may seem nonsensical now becomes utterly viable and practically inescapable. It is within this understanding that a true dialogue can take place, that the dark voice of the incarcerated can be contextualized, and that the proper place for this type of expression can be found. Psyche has found a way to imbue a marginalized population with purpose and has given them a frame by which to seek some semblance of an honorable life. That honor, though, remains outside of society, in the criminality of gang association. Or as the African proverb states, "The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."

A deeper study of the psychiatric diagnoses that misidentify gang-entrenched Latinx youth and men as *hopeless* reveals caveats that are based in culture-related diagnostic issues:

> Conduct disorder diagnosis may at times be potentially misapplied to individuals in settings where patterns of disruptive behavior are viewed as near-normative (e.g., in very threatening, high-crime areas or war zones). Therefore, the context in which the undesirable behaviors have occurred should be considered. (APA 2013, 474)

When this population runs the risk of losing life or limb on a daily basis, when walking out of one's home implies walking into uncertainty and the possibility of death, then the rule of war- ravaged survival applies. Most of these clients, save a few, are misidentified and underrecognized in therapeutic work.

We have historically asked people of color to carry the burden of otherness in the United States. From the Declaration of Independence's admonition of "merciless Indian savages" (1776), to the myriad examples of separation that have been codified into our laws and culture, we have othered generations of people and men of color whose treatment is now collectively being challenged with a critical and protesting eye. The otherness that points out difference also neglects the very vitality that can breathe new life into any society. Gang-entrenched, incarcerated youth and men are bound, for the most part, to a life that is tied to poverty, strife, and a narrow, limited future. They carry the wound of marginalization. Yet, these archetypes and myths not only reflect trauma, but also can point to transformation. It is at this intersection where the inner world of the marginalized becomes most salient. If gang- entrenched Latinx youth and men have found honor in the warrior, solace in the goddess, and sacrifice in the land, then perhaps they can be welcomed back into society and tasked

with caretaking a societal relationship to the archetypes of healing. These re-imagined and re-enacted archetypal patterns of warriorship, of weeping mothers, of lost lands and sacrifices are not just the stories of the rejected other; they are the stories of all people who need to be welcomed home.

> If you imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw all his projections, then you get an individual who is conscious of a pretty thick shadow. Such a man has saddled himself with new problems and conflicts. He has become a serious problem to himself, as he is now unable to say that they do this or that, they are wrong, and they must be fought against . . . Such a man knows that whatever is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he only learns to deal with his own shadow, he has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in shouldering at least an infinitesimal part of the gigantic, unsolved social problems of our day. (Jung 1937/1969, CW 11, ¶140)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ENDNOTES

1. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Latinx," for more information on the use of gender-neutral neologisms, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latinx.
2. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Tuskegee Syphilis Study," for more information and resources, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuskegee_Syphilis_Study.

NOTE

References to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* are cited in the text as CW, volume number, and paragraph number. *The Collected Works* are published in English by Routledge (UK) and Princeton University Press (USA).

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ABNER FLORES, MA, is a graduate in counseling psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute and a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Pepperdine University. He has provided mental health services in juvenile detention, with wrap-around/at-risk youth programs, and with court-mandated parolees. His dissertation topic is focused on providing a resource manual for working with Latinx parolees. *Correspondence:* flores.abner.e@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

There are direct archetypal relationships between Mesoamerican/pre-Columbian native myths and the beliefs and behaviors of gang-entrenched Latinx youth and men. These include relationships between warrior imagery and sacrifice in gang activity, the Virgin of Guadalupe and male-female relationships, and ancestral connections to the land and the love of the neighborhood. Within psychotherapy, centralizing the beliefs and experiences of gang-entrenched Latinx youth and men allows for an increase in trust and for the roles and goals of treatment to be assessed critically.

KEY WORDS

archetypal psychology, Aztec beliefs, culture, depth psychology, Indigenous beliefs, male

psychology, mass incarceration, psychotherapy