

The Gringa Studies Machismo

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Coming of age in Berkeley in the height of 1970s feminism, the men who became my boyfriends very consciously distanced themselves from the iconography associated with male chauvinism. These men cultivated an androgynous meekness to match the “I’ll take-care-of-my-own-orgasm-feminists.” There was a part of me that wanted the sensation of swooning to a dominant self-assured man. I wanted access to the fire that Clark Gable kindled in *Scarlet O’Hara*. Berkeley seemed devoid of such men and such encounters, so I went to Mexico. Quite counter to the androgynous world produced by American feminism, Mexican culture featured a fiery gender dance between *machismo* and *marianismo*. Macho men were direct in their sexuality—sexuality with women was not negotiated it was confidently imposed. *Marianismo*, deriving from the Virgin Mary, positions women as vulnerable, compliant, docile and morally superior to men. Thus a grand cat and mouse game occurs with testosteroneated men attempting to corrupt compelling, yet pure women.

Having just graduated from Cal, I wanted to test drive my freshly minted BA in anthropology by doing participant observation research in a Mexican village.

Ultimately, I *studied* two very distinct aspects of Mexican culture. In the villages (I lived in several), I was the innocent *senorita* who playfully engaged questions from my hosts

centered around, *Por que no casas?* (Why don't you getting married?) My Berkeley feminist world had been all about self-actualization...the thought of marrying seemed like a total sell out to becoming an independent professional woman. As a young anthropologist, I did my best to incorporate the Mexican villagers' reality into how I presented myself. I told them about "Peter," an American guy I'd connected with earlier on in my trip—about how when I returned to California he would become my *novio* (sweetheart). The story (which calmed me a bit as well) did much to generate an acceptable persona for 1970s Mexican *pueblo* life. When I wasn't being a virginal *senorita* in a remote village, I was an exploratory *gringa*. Feminism had not yet hit Mexico and male chauvinism via *machismo* was king. And I was super-curious. Having sex with Mexican men became my research strategy for understanding the Latin psyche.

One of the first guys I met was Marcos. We met while I was sipping an iced tea at a café in Guadalajara. At the time I was staying with Minerva, a longtime friend, and her traditional Mexican family. While Minerva wasn't allowed to go out on unescorted dates, being an independent *gringa*, her parents couldn't stop me. Suddenly I found myself flung into the arms of an exciting, super-seductive and confident Latin man. I felt as if I'd been hurled 180 degrees from the strident world of Berkeley feminism. Marcos first plied me with alcohol at an exclusive night club where the women wore skimpy dresses and the dance floor reeked of the promise of full on sex. Then suddenly he gathered me up and drove me to a lovers' perch that overlooked all of Guadalajara. He thrust his tongue in my mouth and as best as I could, I tried to match his energy and

passion. I felt as if my brain had split off from my body. Upstairs I was this anthropological researcher who was on a mission to understand the erotic world of the Mexican male, while downstairs, my body was a mix of numb and compliant. I was being just compliant enough to learn what the scholar needed to know, while deep inside I was one numb and terrified *gringa*. I was an unescorted young woman who had never been on such a date before...and had no idea how or where it would end.

The following week (having survived the date with Marcos), I made my way to the sleepy fishing village of San Blas and within a day I'd met Rafael who invited me to stay with him in his *casita*. His *casita* was next door to the home of his parents who quietly acknowledged my existence, but never invited me into their proper home. I was simply the *gringa* girl of the week. Clearly it was a post that had been filled many times before. Rafael sported a huge collection of pornography; moreover, he claimed to be a sexual expert. I was curious what a Mexican sexual expert might know and so again I complied. Every night and every morning we fucked for hours—his love of fucking fascinated me...and in the end, I mostly congratulated myself for being able to play along with his libido despite our different worlds and perspectives.

Several weeks later I made my way down to the barely-discovered coastal town of Zihuatenejo. Upon arrival at the coolest the beach yet, I met Guillermo who told me he was a *National Geographic* photographer. He invited me to share his beach *palapa* and tantalized me with stories of his escapades photographing peyote ceremonies amongst the Huichol Indians. He assessed that their intoxicated world might be a bit much for me, but

that I should consider spending some time in Mani, a traditional Mayan village in the Yucatan. (His suggestion proved to be a good one and ultimately, Mani became one of my second homes.) And as to be expected, Guillermo became a lover as well. Despite that I believed he'd be in touch with me forever, being an ultimately committed married man, following our sweet time together, I never heard from him again. Since the advent of the Internet, I have been able to track his career achievements from afar...

The next man I met crushed my innocence and nearly drowned my spirit. I choose not to remember his name. After leaving Zihuatenejo, I travelled up the coast to Acapulco which even in the mid-1970s was a bustling place. Its mega hotels dotted the edges of an impressive aquamarine bay. I'd rented a cheap little room and wandered out to the beach with about 20 dollars' worth of pesos in my pocket. A heavy set man driving a small motor boat approached me. He offered me a ride out to explore the bay. I told him I had very little money and clearly would be unable to afford his services. He then must have looked me over and offered to take me out for no charge. In that I'd had a great time with Guillermo and had survived Marcos and Rafael, I must have felt quite invincible.

I boarded the boat and chatted politely. Soon we were out in the middle of the bay and he told me he'd take me to a special beach that very few people know. The next thing I knew we'd docked on a rocky cove with absolutely no one and nothing in sight. He told me to get off of the boat and then began to ply me with rum and coke. I kept my drink weak, sensing that I'd best stay on full alert. He then announced that we were at a nude

beach and that I'd have to take off my bikini. I did my best to refuse until he began grabbing at the strings of my bra top. I complied, hoping that we could then get back in the boat and return to my humble end of the bay. Viewing the removal of my top as compliance, he then pounced on me. My very worst fears exploded. An ugly overweight boar of a man was attempting to penetrate me. I screeched that I was a virgin and that he had to stop. Unable to achieve much penetration he ejaculated nonetheless. Satisfied, he told me I could put my swimsuit back on and that he would take me back. I tried not to let on how very upset I was in that I absolutely needed his help to get me back across the bay. Being before the days of cell phones, there was no way I could risk staying behind presuming I could call for help. I had to consort with my rapist.

Then in the middle of the bay, he told me he needed cash to pay for the gas he'd expended on our little adventure. I offered him the pesos in my purse; he snatched them from my trembling hands and then sped across the bay, dumping me in water shallow enough to wade to the shore. Disheveled, I was greeted by a poor fisherman who was completely astounded by my tale. He walked me back to my hotel; the manager fed me some soup and assured me that we'd catch the scoundrel in the morning and that I'd be okay. The next morning I had no interest in catching scoundrels—I just wanted to get as far away from the Acapulco as I could. I purchased a bus ticket to the pretty inland town of Guanajuato. There I went to a medical clinic to find out if I was okay. The doctor examined me and prescribed some penicillin. No lab tests were performed...I presume he felt it could kill whatever it was (if there was anything) that I had caught. The doctor,

having had a good look at my vulva, seemed relatively unconcerned about my state of health in that immediately after writing my prescription, he asked me out on a date! I shrieked; the relentless of Mexico's machismo in those days was beyond belief. I found a long distance phone center and called my parents. My mother told me to come right home. I considered it, but the thought of returning home with my tail between my legs seemed so defeated. I figured I could resurrect myself and my trip and be just a little more careful.

While visiting Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, I took a touristic boat ride through Xochimilco as part of my healing. There I paid the oarsman in advance, and safely enjoyed pretty flowers as we punted past other sweet safe boats. I found my way to Mani, the Yucatan town Guillermo had suggested I visit and nested there for several months. I decided it was best that I keep what had happened in Acapulco a secret. I focused on the ins and outs of local textile production, learning how to make hammocks and to embroider *huipiles* (smock-like dresses).

After my first month in Mani, the tedium of day-in-day-out Mayan pueblo life began to get to me and I decided to visit the Caribbean coast. I stayed with relatives of my friends in Mani in Isla Mujeres and the beginnings of Cancun, which was then known as Playa del Carmen. These families watched over me—staying with them was very much an extension of my life in Mani. One day I decided to go down to Tulum, a gorgeous archaeological site on the coast of Quintana Roo. Having no Manilenos to stay with, I found a cheap hotel. It was the first time in over a month that I could stretch out on a

clean bed; while in Mani as well as amongst the Manilenos, I'd been sleeping in hammocks. I took a shower and then spread myself out on the bed to masturbate. I thought about Betty Dodson's suggestions in *Liberating Masturbation* and took some time to appreciate my still beautiful body and to focus on my breathing. As my breathing intensified and I began to quietly moan, I heard a man excitedly hissing. I looked up and suddenly noticed that the walls to my very cheap room did not extend to the ceiling and that a janitor was looking down at me. I shrieked. He then began banging at my door. I screamed super loud. I then ran down the hall to the reception desk (this was not a hotel with private phones) and reported that the janitor was peering into my room while I was dressing. The receptionist would not refund my money for a very odd sounding incident in that I felt mortified to admit that the janitor had witnessed me masturbating and had attempted to dive in. While Betty Dodson and all of the feminists of America might have argued that I had a God-given right to masturbate in privacy, back in Tulum in 1976 there was no court room in which to duke it out between my weird culture and Mexico's then endemic machismo. Out of fear for my safety I packed up my rucksack and rented a room in the town's other hotel that did happen to have guest rooms with floor to ceiling walls and somehow made it through that night.