

## The importance of circle. The information and communication technologies in the conformation of the women's clan

### La importancia del círculo. Las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación en la conformación del clan de las mujeres

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#### ABSTRACT

Faced with the dynamics of today's life, which encourages competition instead of empathy and collaboration, as well as the patriarchal tendency that has historically underestimated female support and knowledge circles, groups have emerged that promote the conformation of new circles inspired by a mythical ancestral past, where the clan of women can become an agent of cultural change. This paper analyzes the reflectivity of the coordinators of these groups and how information and communication technologies are integrated into their projects and practices, which play the role of medium and mediator in this contemporary redefinition of women's circles. Also, an audit mechanism to detect ballot stuffing or any other manipulation on votes is presented.

#### Keywords

Ecosocial communities; reflexivity; agents of change; internet; digital social network

#### RESUMEN

*Ante la dinámica de la vida actual, que alienta la competencia en lugar de la empatía y la colaboración, así como la tendencia patriarcal que históricamente ha desestimado las asociaciones de apoyo y conocimiento femenino, han surgido grupos que promueven la conformación de nuevos círculos inspirados en un pasado mítico ancestral, donde el clan de las mujeres pueda constituirse como agente de cambio cultural. Este texto analiza la reflexividad de las coordinadoras de estos grupos y la manera en que las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación se integran a sus proyectos y prácticas, en los que juegan el papel de medio y de mediador para la resignificación contemporánea de los círculos de mujeres.*

#### Palabras clave

Comunidades ecosociales; reflexividad; agentes de cambio; internet; redes sociales

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## Introduction

The first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been marked by the presence of digital social networks as tools of communication at all levels. This paper aims at analyzing the way in which the reflexivity of group coordinators such as Women Circles and Red Tents with the use of communication channels such as social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram) and web pages. Their presence on these platforms has enhanced their networking with other similar groups at a global level, more specifically in Latin America and Spain, while organizing and developing practices carried out in person.

The combination of different cultural, social, ideological, psychological and even literary legacies, has had as a result the formation of women circles in which the participants gather around a bonfire to share life experiences, chants, learnings or to carry out ritual activities such as the *temazcal* (steam lodge)<sup>1</sup> and red tents which main issue is to reassign the meaning to what it means to be a menstruating woman, i.e., a cyclic being. To designate these two types of projects that have similar practices and discourses even though they differ from each other in some of their proposals, we propose using the expression: *women eco-social communities*.

The word “*community*” expresses on the one hand, the form in which the coordinators of both types of projects call their own groups. They base themselves on non-hierarchical principles of sharing with the others and creating together new narratives. On the other hand, it also reflects a denomination that appears on Facebook, where, by creating a group profile, one of the possible categories is precisely that of the community and more recently, that of the community organization.

The *eco-social* concept goes back to Valdés (2014, p. 333). For this author, the participants in those communities (she specifies the Women Circles, however, we add here the Red Tents) are “agents of eco-social change, women with body awareness, gender awareness and ecological awareness”. They construct a discourse for women on menses, body, their bonds with the sacred and the ancestral wisdom. They express their objective to help change the perceptions people have regarding the social and cultural environment. This, from the standpoint of these groups, will contribute to women reclaiming decision-making power over their body, as well as having the opportunity to take care of mother earth with whom they claim sharing a creative female essence.

This paper, which is based on our research,<sup>2</sup> analyzed the reflexivity understood in terms of Archer (2007), and the role as agents of change (Bolen, 2012 y 2014; Giddens, 2011; Touraine, 2007) of ten coordinators of women eco-social communities. Through a qualitative research design, we first identified the existence of women circles and red tents in social networks and the Internet. As field exploration, we carried out a follow-up of some of the communities’ activities and digital publications. Through digital

means, we got in touch with the coordinators. We conducted the field work by using the participant observation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) and focused qualitative interviews (Sierra, 1998) during the period comprised between 2015 and 2016.

We discovered that their fundamental concerns revolves around the need to recover the circle, the ancestral memory, their own voice and the connection with their bodies; all of these were lost because of patriarchy to which they impute the historical responsibility of having promoted wars, the conquest of women's bodies and will, besides having relegated or belittled them, persecuted and silenced those that possessed knowledge such as using medicinal plants, for example.

The clan is based on the ideal of a pre-patriarchal happy past where the primal circle was valued and had its spaces so people could gather and help each other, but at the same time, they strive for the utopia of a happy world of healthy women (without subjective or historical wounds), united in a self-aware and empowered or connected, and self-sovereign sisterhood.

The idea of union, sisterhood or to be connected, responds to the fundamental concern of the women's circles and the red tents to change the state of things of the cultural system, based on the certainty that the more women are aware of themselves and assume the role of creators together with the others, as co-creators, then the world may change.

### **Women as Reflexive Agents**

According to Giddens' explanation (2011), the theory of explanation is interested in the active-reflexive character of human behavior, the language and the understanding of meaning as well as their respective connections. The human action and the social structures form an interdependent duality where agents perform as scholars of their actions and are, at the same time, actors and transformers.

Giddens (2011) defines the set of rules and resources intervening in the reproduction of social systems not as rigid structures that determine the actions of the agents but rather as existing as traces, product of a history registered as memory in space and time and situated as "the organic basis of human knowledgeability" (p. 396). Moreover, it is updated with the action of the agents not as independent of them but rather set in a dual relationship of agent-structure. In assuming this perspective, women eco-social communities can be considered as agents, bearers of structure, capable of acting to change it. This coincides with other authors that have named women that belong to the feminist movement or to the women's circle, agents (Bolen, 2012; Ramírez, 2014; Touraine, 2007; Valdés, 2014).

According to Giddens (2011), there are some factors that influence the reproduction conditions or the systemic change linked to the agents' action, among them are the means

of access the actors have to knowledgeability, the way in which they articulate it, as well as the validity of beliefs and the media-related factors available to agents. This highlights the relevance of the means of communication that have given societies the possibility to store, analyze and retrieve information. This was made possible first by the printing press and subsequently by electronic means of mass communication.<sup>3</sup> It is also related to the elements that mediate between the agent's body and their environment.

Archer (2007) argues that the actions of the agents respond to their most basic concerns from which their projects and practices arise, and through them, they make their way into the world. The cultural change is one of the main topics of the theory of morphogenetic approximation where the author upholds that the agency and structure must be studied as separated entities, even if they are related.

Archer defines the term *reflexivity* as a strong reflexive process, deliberations on primary and necessarily social issues: "Reflexivity is the regular exercise of mental ability shared by all normal individuals in order for said individuals to consider themselves in relation with their (social) contexts and vice-versa"<sup>4</sup> (Archer, 2007, p. 4). Through reflexivity, agents become actors that develop and define their basic concerns or interests. These two factors are the ones that matter the most to them and that confers them their uniqueness as individuals. Projects based on objectives that arise from basic concerns are those that mark the course of action, and practices are designed and carried out in order to achieve these projects.

The explanation of the agents' actions in terms of the sequence we have analyzed previously, identified and separated the coordinators of the women eco-social communities' main concerns around which their projects (women circles, red tents) arise and the practices they carry out to reach their objectives.

The primary concerns and the action of the women eco-social communities are enunciated in eco-feminist terms even though they are not limited only to those. Their agency has to do with cyberspace and information and communication technologies, among many other aspects such as the elements present in the practices that respond to their projects. i.e., for their capacity of use and appropriation of ICTs to convene and generate online spaces and manage, from and through them, face-to-face encounters.

### **Feminism: Diverse and in Crisis**

The term *feminism* is currently undergoing a complicated situation: social networks have disseminated the struggles and views on different causes, from legal abortion to the use of the menstrual cup. The concept is at a time of crisis, since with digital communication, it has been used to vilify individuals and views, mostly from total ignorance, by associating it with views that have been wrongly understood, i.e., taken out of their context, as hatred of males. Nevertheless, feminism has served to condense and

designate an entire historical process of thoughts and struggles in favor of different causes raised by women; at the same time, it has forged a new identity for women that call themselves or are called feminists.

Thinkers, activists and feminist theorists throughout history have set out to give the world another vision to interpret reality. As an example of the different styles of academic feminism, Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1993), made a classification of the diversity of theories: those of the difference, those of inequality and those of oppression. These offer different responses to the following questions: What about women? and Why is the situation as it is?

Women eco-social communities are understood within a context of thought by highlighting among its main views, biological differences between men and women, in which Castells (2001) typifies as essentialist feminism that combines the eco-feminist approach with the spiritualist. This current “links femininity with history and culture and claims the myth of a matriarchal golden era in which the values of women and the cult to the goddess ensured social harmony” (Castells, 2001, p. 224). Their strength lies within the union of biology, history, nature and culture, besides “in the affirmation of a new era built upon the values of women and their fusion with nature” (p.224).

The spiritual discourse of these communities focuses on the concept of the *sacred* around which a narrative has been built and has been associated to woman with a deity dimension. The sacred woman does not have the sense of virtue or rectitude instilled by Judeo-Christian religions but rather a posture of strength, of independence, of metaphysical connection with the rest of the feminine clan and nature. These ideas promote the performance of ritual practices honoring goddesses, i.e., feminine religious symbols adopted by the Women’s Circles and at a lesser extent by the Red Tents.

The foregoing responds to a type of postmodern religiosity pointed out by authors such as Hervieu-Léger (1987, 2004, 2008), Champion (1988) and Beck (2009), who expound that religious beliefs and practices have changed as a result of the enlightened modernity. A more personal religiosity based on the access to different symbolic resources governed less by institutional canons is among the characteristic changes. The rites, meditations chants and symbols used by women eco-social communities gather *New Age* elements and *neo-Mexicanity* as coined by de la Torre and Gutiérrez (2017).

Regarding the current approach toward spiritual issues, Gil (2016) explains that, despite former beliefs, modernity did not mean the end of religious thought but the production of modern forms of religion and sacrality” (p. 613) where the religious becomes plural. The means of communication have played an important role in this transformation in promoting ressignificant discourses on the divine:

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the goddess has freed herself and has partly regained her presence. Thanks to ecology, feminist movements and the holistic vision of the universe, the feminine archetype currently emerges forcefully; the ancient myth resurfaces in modern garb and parades before us, as we will see, through promotional discourses (Gil, 2016, p. 615).

The project of the women eco-social communities combines the eco-feminist thought<sup>5</sup>, the pro-ecology discourse and digital communication of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with eclectic spiritual practices that revisit symbols and rites from distant Oriental, European and currently American cultures. These women gather in circles (in some cases, in *temazcales* [steam lodges]); in those gatherings, altars, prayers and even chants usually focus on feminine deities which Simonis (2012a) called the *goddess culture*. On their social networks, mentioning the goddess and using illustrations or graphic symbols referring to deities or to the spiritual transcendence are common.

Eco-feminism arose from the rapprochement between two types of critical thinking: feminism and ecologism. Its view was not only against the domination of women but also against the domination of nature, both linked to the ideological paradigm that places the male as master and warrior (Puleo, 2010). This feminism seeks a gynecology and an alternative medicine against physicians' invasive treatments and large pharmaceutical laboratories. It is interested in defending indigenous people, victims of the destruction of nature, maternal thinking and care ethics, and to regain control of one's own body, among other issues. Puleo (2010) clarifies that some of the eco-feminism dimensions have resulted in a religiosity of its own that generates a cult to the goddess and the recognition of the sacred character of nature.

Simonis (2012b) takes up what Christ (2012) explains and assert that the return of the idea of Goddess among spirituality feminists, responds to four declarations: the goddess as representation of the feminine power, as positive statement of the woman's body contrary to the patriarchal image, as sign of the feminine will in harmony with the energy of other beings, and as potentiation of the sisterhood bonds existing among women.

### **Women as Agents of Cultural Change on Social Networks**

In this research, we followed up on ten eco-social community coordinators through participant observation and qualitative focused interviews (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Sierra, 1998). A narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) of the registries was carried out and were interpreted with the theoretical framework aforementioned, which considers that the agents, even if they are bearers of structure, they can transform it with their actions which derives from their reflexivity. The results obtained show that their basic concerns translate into two types of similar projects: women circles and red tents, with views that can be understood from the eco-feminist movement.

In the first phase, as field immersion (during the year 2014), we followed up on social networks, blogs, e-mail distribution lists and Internet pages of different women eco-social communities, in Mexico as well as in Latin America. We kept a record of the names and the types of proposals of the communities observed among which we identified groups who refer to themselves as Women Circles and Red Tents. Based on this approach, we established contact with ten coordinators of different states of the Mexican Republic, one from Colombia and one from the United States, with whom a second phase was conducted in person.

From the field observation and the narratives obtained through the interviews, we found that the basic concerns of the coordinators of these women eco-social communities were closely linked to their intention of re-signifying the idea of what it is to be a woman today. These can be summarized as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- a) Loss of the circle: women are gregarious and require the group to share knowledge and be strong.
- b) Dispossession of the ancestral memory: forgetting the knowledge of the womanly people has led to be disconnected with the maternal lineage and the interruption of the legacy.
- c) Disconnection with their bodies, processes and cycles: self-knowledge is necessary but from a perspective other than that of the patriarchal medicine.
- d) Silence: the man is who defines the woman. He tells her who she is, what she feels, how to get cured; he defines her processes; he stigmatizes her, and he silences her.
- e) Emotional, physical and unconscious wounds to heal: Historically, women have been vulnerable and have accumulated wounds.
- f) Loss of power: to be free and be her own master, a woman needs to heal, know herself and redefine herself.
- g) Ecological damage to the Earth and to women connected to Her.

The coordinators share the idea that the circle as archetype of organization without hierarchy (oftentimes intended or declared on a more ideal than real plane), where all the women participating would have the same opportunities to speak, listen, learn, support and be supported. In order to change the cultural meanings of being a woman, of menstruation and the sacrality of the feminine, it is necessary to create a community, to reclaim the clan.

A circle represents the notion that none of the individuals that integrate the group is more important than the other. Bolen (2012, p. 21) defines it as “an archetypal shape familiar to women’s psyche since it is personal and equalitarian”. Moreover, he explains that in a circle, the relation is much less hierarchical and the key to this is the support women give and receive through the actions of “listening, being witnessing, representing a model, reacting, delving into, mirroring, laughing, crying, feeling afflicted, being

inspired by experience and sharing the wisdom of the experience” (Bolen, 2012, p. 21).

No one sees it this way:

But what happens when you do it in circle? What happens when ten other women are there, and...in which of them do you suddenly recognize yourself in their experiences? You haven't experienced the same as her, however, something happens inside you. You feel empathy, right? And suddenly, in another experience you recognize things similar to those that have happened to you, and then you know that you're not alone, right? And then, can there be hierarchy in this sharing? Is one's experience more valid than that of another? Or more painful? Or happier? Or perhaps, there isn't! then, from there, we understand that there can be anyone leading, nor anyone superior to the others, nor anyone saying where to (Nadia, personal interview, March 14, 2016).

According to Ramírez (2016, p. 509) “a women circle is built as a space of contention, learning, growth and (self-) knowledge”. Gatherings are held in the circle, as well as the sharing of experiences and opinions, emotions arise, and the commitment is that everything stays within the circle. In cyberspace, this rule translates into a personal commitment. When participating in a chat or a close Facebook group, one can share with others public information that contains general data, messages that all can hear; however, confidences, personal problems or achievements must stay within the circle.

Women eco-social communities are formed in time and space. These communities exist in the time span that includes the activity, from the moment in which the circle is opened by some ritual and the moment in which it closes. Regarding space, these gatherings are held in a place that symbolizes in itself a boundary, e.g., in *temazcales* (women circles) and in red tents. Notwithstanding the space-time characteristics of these groups have other different nuances in cyberspace.

The circle remains open with the possibility of ongoing interaction on networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. In practices such as *webinars*, where the participants have to register and the topic is developed in a specific time, the circle opens and closes, it marks the sense of time, of the beginning and the end.

Therefore, we concur with Scolari (2008, p. 277), who understands cyberspace as a “redefined space where virtual communities settle and distance is measured in clicks”. Moreover, he also states as McLuhan did, that “technologies do not only transform the world, but they also influence the perception individuals have of that world” (Scolari, 2008, p. 273), by resulting in new ways of communicating which fundamental component is creating networks.

Communities promote the idea of a shared identity. Regardless of the differences among participants, they all have something in common: they are made up of women and, therefore, there is a bond that unites them even if they are strangers. This bond is strong because it unites them and it represents a millenary history of forgotten knowledge or safeguarded by other women, of wounds caused by the patriarchal system. The Red



Tents and some women circles reinforce this idea of identity with the argument that all women have menses which marks an identity by having a “red thread” that unites them all worldwide.

When we don't have a positive image of the feminine, we clash with our female boss, our female friends, with all of this. Then, I say: It can't be, if all of us are united on the planet by the same thread, the red thread, this is what we have in common, why are we going to have conflict? (Monica, personal interview, November 8, 2015).

Belonging to a greater community is one of the main arguments at the moment of forming the women's clans. To be part of a large social group brings a sense of power to the actions and proposals women undertake. During the gatherings, they usually sing a song that says: “We are a circle, within a circle, without a beginning or an end”. The idea for them as women is to belong to the group of all the women of the world, to the womanly people and the fact that all are one and the same.

“Being a sacred woman, being a conscious female, means having a great dose of love, and also great determination and firmness to be able to awaken the goddess in our hearts”.<sup>7</sup> These words, taken from a Facebook post of a women circle, reflect many aspects of the views of the eco-social communities. Some of them speak of the sacred as a condition of being a woman, but that condition even if it is dormant, was inherited for generations from a mythical past in which the sages were the wise women of the tribes who hosted the council.

Some others speak of being a conscious female which can mean something different for every coordinator: critical consciousness from a feminist ideology, self-knowledge or spiritual feeling of transcendence. A third component is that which puts women, love, determination and firmness in the same sentence; these are controversial attributes since the two first ones refer to the assumption that women and love are inherent, and the next elements because they supposedly entail an act of will, an exercise of freedom.

The Facebook post referred to above was to convene a women's ritual circle in which a fire would be lit to heat up the stones of the *temazcal*, women would enter with long skirts. Being a symbol of contention, one of the principles of these gatherings is what goes on in the circle stays in it.

This is where the energy is generated and connected with other circles in a planetary work (Bolen, 2012). Inside the *temazcal*, before an altar dedicated to feminine deities or symbols, women meditate, speak of their bodies, their emotions, their history. There, they learn among other things about their biological functions and they reconnect with the idea they have about what it is like to be a woman.

“We are a global network and we are here to change the world”, this is what was written on the website of a women’s community proposal called *Red Tent in every Neighborhood*.<sup>8</sup> For women’s circles and Red Tents, the women’s work form a network, a tissue that will have as a result the healing of deep wounds the female gender has internalized; emotional wounds such as the belief that their menses are shameful; or physical such as the ailments of the female reproductive system.

The eco-social communities explain that a woman is a cyclical being and that every month, she goes through different stages of her own being. Depending on the tradition followed by every coordinator, said stages will receive different names but oftentimes, they are equipollent to the lunar phases to the extent that the menses are called the Moon.

The Moon woman, capable of gestating and bleeding, is seen by the eco-social communities as linked to nature, this abstract being also called Mother Earth or Pachamama. They blame the patriarchal culture of having developed policies and economies based on the dominance and exploitations of natural resources. In their discourses, they say that men, hunters and warriors, devastated instead of respecting the creative principle of the planet.

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and even more that of *microblogging* (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007), has been a major topic in popularizing these communities. Social networks and other spaces such as blogs and websites, gather them as communities that go beyond geographic boundaries; they provide them with the means to reintroduce and disseminate discourses that support their premises on the care of nature, the sacred feminine, the goddess and the power of the cyclical woman, where women are the architects of the planetary change and awareness regarding women as creators of a new era. ICTs are, considering all of the above, fundamental mediators and mediatic components.

These practices come about at a specific social time that Castells (2006) calls the *network society*, in which ICTs are the protagonist of the interweaving of relationships and exchange of meanings among social actors. The network society is “that whose social structure is made up of networks potentiated by information and communication technologies based on microelectronics” (Castells, 2006, p. 27). In this definition, the social structure consists of “human organizational agreements regarding the production, consumption, reproduction, experience and power, expressed by means of a meaningful communion codified by culture” (p. 27).

For Castells (2006), networks are not a specific exclusivity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but constitute rather the fundamental structure of all living things. He makes a recount of the history of the birth of the network society to show that the “revolution of the information and communication technologies”<sup>9</sup> (p. 47) takes place together with the existence and expansion of the socio-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as

for feminism and the ecology movement (pp. 45-46), among others. He says that these social movements were oriented “toward a transformation of the values of the society” (p. 46).

The values proposed by these movements and that, according to the author, created a new culture in the world, were freedom, personal autonomy before the institutions of the society and the power, cultural diversity, the affirmation of rights and the value of ecological solidarity or the reunification of the interest of the human species as a common good.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the quest for these values remains valid; in some cases, they have become institutionalized and have been converted into international agendas, as for the case of the UN (2014). However, on the other hand, the actions of other type of agents, such as the women’s eco-social communities, are geared at changing through these social values. Castells proposes three types of identity: legitimizing, resistance and project.

The latter is integrated when the collective social actors “build a new identity that redefines their position within society and, by doing so, seek transforming the entire social structure” (Castells, 2001, p. 30). As an example, he quotes the case of feminists and their fight to change the patriarchal structure. “The analysis of the processes, conditions and results of the transformation of the communal resistance in transforming individuals is the precise ambit for a theory of social change in the age of information” (p. 32).

Castells’ theoretical proposal (2006) regarding the network society is that it must be understood as an architecture of self-reconfigurable networks as a result of the interaction between the geometries and geographies of social life, of dominant networks and even of the social forms that are disconnected from the structure of the global network. For the author, the main component of his theory is communication:

The culture of the society of global network is a culture of protocols that allows communication between different cultures based not necessarily on shared values but on sharing the value of communication. This means that the new culture is not based on the content but rather on the process. It is a culture of communication for communication. It is an open network of cultural meanings that not only can coexist but also interact and modify mutually on the basis of this exchange (Castells, 2006, p. 69).

In this context, the information and communication technologies have played a central role in this exchange of meanings and in the reworking of the relationships between the members of the society. ICTs highlight interactive informatic networks that create “new forms and channels of communication, shaping life and, in turn, life shaping them” (Castells, 2002, p. 28). Pérez (2012) adds that the Internet has tools that allows for

the performance of so-called communication acts which have gone from being communication processes that responded to very specific objectives to making group communication processes possible.

Part of this conceptual change, on both technology and communication, possesses the implicit capacity to create and expand communication interaction networks. For Scolari (2008), this capacity is “one of the fundamental components of the new ways of communication” (p. 63), to the extent that the users become part of the content of the interactive media, i.e., as McLuhan points out, “the use is the message” (p.98).

Pérez (2012) and Scolari (2008) attribute this capacity to communicate, the influence of the Internet and of ICTs in today’s communication, to hypertextuality, one of the characteristics of hypermedia which can “present high levels of interactivity, capable of enabling linear and non-linear communicative paths; which as part of their resources of interaction, can incorporate and adept within them other means and expressive resources deriving from them” (Pérez, 2012, p. 251). This hypertextual and interactive character has contributed to creating groups or networks of individuals that communicate one with other, and has enabled the creation of bonds called *virtual communities* by certain authors ((Castells, 2002; Rheingold, 1996; Scolari, 2008).

Thompson (1998) states that the means of communication and their characteristics of production, fixation and reproduction of symbolic messages or forms, have altered the way in which time, place and history are perceived. These changes have reconfigured the sense of belonging to a group or community from which derives a shared history and place, a journey in time, space and distance. This is now mediated by our relation with the mediated symbolic forms; hence “feeling that we belong to groups and communities that have been created, in part, through the media” (Thompson, 1998, pp. 56-57).

Communication as a process that articulates the constitution of networks of social interaction mediated by technologies and within the context of which Castells (2006) calls the network society enables the academic discussion for the analysis of communicative practices of the communities that are formed, adopted and adapted to the current possibilities of cyberspace as of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which hypertextuality (Pérez, 2012) allows, or whenever necessary, restraints the possibilities of exchange of meanings, i.e., the agency in the logic of the network society among women’s communities.

## **Conclusion: The Importance of Thinking of Oneself as a Group**

Under the social and economic conditions dominated by patriarchy, women have been kept away from their primary environments: the family and the childbirth circles, the company and collaboration of other women with whom bonds are created, including their mothers or daughters to integrate themselves in a modern structure; thus, losing the strength their clan gave them. Women, for the coordinators of eco-social communities, are gregarious beings, and as such, making necessary the group in which they collaborate. However, in the patriarchal environment, they have entered the logic of competition and confrontation.

Eco-social communities ensure that women who gather with a clear intention, create a synergy by which they get together with the same intentions as that of all the women worldwide that are also focused on cultural changes. Their argument is based on the fact that approximately 50% of the world population is made up of women and that, according to Bolen's explanation (2012) of the millionth circle, this co-creative consciousness will soon or later awaken in many more women, which will increase the possibility of change.

In a clan, women recognize themselves in others; this becomes more evident when what they say resonates directly when they are heard as known experiences. The stories of others about menarche or menstruation may be similar to theirs; what is being narrated resembles their daily lives. Self-knowledge when occurring together with the clanmates, becomes a protected, jubilant or sad encounter, but always contained and sustained, supported by the others that listen and understand what is happening. From this perspective, the strength of the circle would be in the group that forms it.

The circle is where women acquire their identity: the family circle, support networks, even women of the everyday environment with whom they have disagreements and conflicts. For women's eco-social communities, the circle is the ideal organization archetype: without hierarchy, of support of one another, contention, catharsis, growth and thrust in a spiral of evolution that leads to a new world, of which women, gathered in circles interwoven throughout the planet, are the architects.

The communicative nature of the information and communication technologies has performed a key role in our society. The society of information (Castells 2012), is a matter closely linked to communication; our relationships, from individual to global ones, are increasingly supported by technologies that allow them, potentiate them and configure them. The possibility of networking, face-to-face or virtual (some linked or not to others), is essential to the projects of women's circles, red tents and other forms of evolutive communities, which purpose is to make women's voices heard, for whom the group, the clan or the circle, is their support and their contention with which their own identity is redefined.

Women's eco-social communities hold face-to-face and virtual gatherings, offer workshops, talks and courses; some provide the sale of some articles on websites or social networks. Most of them express their own approaches regarding women or share the content of other similar sites. In many cases, from the use of the Internet, these groups have become visible.

Cyberspace is present in the strategies of women's communities to carry out their objectives. They convene to collaborative work, their discourses on menstruation, healing and spiritual development circulate on the Internet, as part of their objective to change the current conceptions in this regard. By acquiring and promoting an accrued awareness and self-knowledge of themselves, women are empowered. This constitutes one of the main purposes of their actions. Based on the foregoing and what has been expounded, we can coin these communities as defined by Touraine "agents of transformation of the cultural change" (2007, p. 126).

Lastly, the technological component adds a dense complexity to the capacity of acting on the network, of creating virtual communities, of potentiating their practices and specifying as well as limiting them. The discussion on the use of ICTs made by the coordinators of the eco-social communities and how these are articulated in their reflexive process, is embedded in other questions about women and their access to the information and communication technologies as well as the possibilities in issues of communication, the cultural and social implications of talking about communication through the Internet, the global participation dimensions that technologies offer, the copyrights on the information and many more.

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<sup>1</sup> The *temazcal* is a construction that can be made of wood posts covered with several layers of tarpaulin or blankets or of material such as cement or clay. People gather inside in a circle around red-hot stones on which water is poured to produce steam. It is a practice that come from native populations of North America and Meso-America. The intensity of the heat inside the *temazcal*, together with prayers, chants and a person guiding the spiritual work, produces a mystical effect on the participants. It is a metaphoric experience for women eco-social communities, for whom the *temazcal* represents the womb of the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Doctoral thesis: Analysis of the Reflexivity of Women Eco-social Communities as Agents of Cultural Change. Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Currently, these characteristics of the media (storage, analysis, retrieval and reproduction of information) are part of the current electronic media and technologies of information and communication in general.

<sup>4</sup> In italics in the original.

<sup>5</sup> During the interviews with the coordinators of the women eco-social communities conducted between 2015 and 2016, most women declared to be against being classified as feminists even though the data show that their discourses revisit many feminist terms of feminism and particularly of eco-feminism. This is related to the crisis over the term feminism, which is perceived as a label that excludes the rest of the women that do not think of themselves as feminists or that represent radical ideas of anger and struggle instead of healing and harmony. It should be mentioned that the two coordinators are openly feminists.

<sup>6</sup> The order in which the concerns are listed does not indicate any difference of importance among them.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/CirculoDeMujeresMadreTierra/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.deannalam.com/global-network/global-network-latin-america/>

<sup>9</sup> In italics in the original.