

Memory Transmission through a Dance of Devils: from Costa Chica to Mexico City

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Abstract

A young man from the Costa Chica region of the state of Guerrero, living in Mexico City, feels a deeply rooted connection to the *Danza de Diablos* (Dance of the Devils), a native tradition from his homeland. Given that it was not customary to do this dance in the capital and because the tradition was starting to fade in his hometown, this young man did everything possible to ‘rescue’ this dance by creating the Grupo Danza de Diablos CDMX, in which he represents the character of the *Tenango*. This article intends to show the process of forming the group in 2021, framed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on memory transmission.

Keywords: Dance, memory, migration, transmission.

Introduction

In Mexico, a large part of the social reality has never been told by the dominant groups and media. However, the societies that were colonized—such as the Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, and Afro-indigenous peoples of the Costa Chica—have narrated their histories and their presents in diverse ways. One of them, perhaps the most significant, has been through their artistic expressions: dance, song, music, and poetry as an interlaced whole that is present in the religious festivities of these places.

Another more contemporary way has been through spreading audiovisual materials on social media, which are created or shared by these same groups. This phenomenon has contributed to transforming the vision that the Mexican population has regarding the ethnic diversity that shapes our identity, in which African ancestry has become a topic of debate, reflection, and awareness building.

What happens with these manifestations when groups migrate to large urban centers and their cultural context changes radically?

This text addresses the case of the *Danza de Diablos* (Dance of the Devils), an expression from the Costa Chica region of Guerrero and Oaxaca that is part of the Day of the Dead celebration. According to tradition, during this time of the year, the devils wander the streets of the town while they dance to the rhythm of the *sones*,¹ play with the people, visit the houses, and ask for offerings, among other actions that are typical of these characters.

Groups that preserve the tradition of the *Danza de Diablos* can be made up of an indefinite number of participants. The *Tenango*² or *Diablo Mayor*, has the role of organizing the dancer's lines, correcting the movements, reinforcing the rhythm of the feet throughout the performance. Simultaneously, the *Tenango* also scolds the Devils and the *Minga*, the devil's wife. It is said that the *Tenango* is the 'father of all Devils' and some people believe that this character is a representation of a foreman or patron of the colonial haciendas. The character of the *Minga* is traditionally personified by a man dressed as a woman, who carries a baby in his arms, has a seductive character and interacts and plays with spectators. It is said that the *Minga* is the mother of the Devils, wife of the *Tenango*. Some groups also add the character of the "Almita", which incarnates a little boy dressed as the Devil who dances near the *Tenango*.

Today, this dance has become one of the emblems of Afro-Mexicanity, mainly as a result of decisions made by its peoples and communities, but also because external agents, among them social scientists and audiovisual creators, have promoted the spreading of this idea. While this manifestation is still very much alive, for decades now, it has been experiencing discontinuities caused, on the one hand, by the migration of the population to big cities, both within Mexico (Acapulco, Mexico City, Cancún, La Paz, to mention a few) and in the United States (the states of California, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, and Nebraska, or cities like Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta) and, on the other hand, by the death of those who had played the role of agents of cultural transmission.

El Quizá, Guerrero—a town located just a few kilometers from Cuajinicuilapa, where I did the research for my bachelor's thesis³ (Lora, 2005)—is an example of this process. In this small village, founded in the 1930s, they stopped dancing the *Danza de Diablos* for several years due to the aforementioned factors: the death of *don Bruno*, who brought the tradition of the *Danza de Diablos* to El Quizá, and the migration of part of the young population.

As a counterpoint to this situation, migrants from these coastal regions⁴ have tried to recreate their traditions by adapting some of their elements to their current place of residence.

¹ A *son* is a style of Mexican folk music and dance that encompasses various regional genres.

² *Tenango* or the head devil, is a devil who is considered to be the father of the other devils. In the dance, his role is to organize the lines, correct the steps, direct the dance, and scold the devils and the *Minga*, his wife.

³ See also: the documentary *El juego de los diablos. Celebración del muertos en la Costa Chica de Guerrero y Oaxaca [The Game of the Devils. Celebration of the Dead in the Costa Chica Region of Guerrero and Oaxaca]*, INAH, 2008, Mexico. Coauthored by Rosa Claudia Lora and Natalia Gabayet. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdcOQBEVOWU>

⁴ *Costeños* (masculine) and *costeñas* (feminine) are the most generalized forms of self-designation.

By doing this, they seek to reactivate their ritual, music, and dance⁵ memory. One of these cases is that of the founder of Grupo de Danza de Diablos CDMX (Dance of the Devils Group Mexico City), who has devoted himself to spreading this dance throughout this city for a decade now, and, in 2021, was able to form a group that rehearsed in the streets neighboring the national fine arts palace, 'Bellas Artes', located in the heart of this metropolis.

This reconfiguration, carried out through a call for participants on the platform of Facebook,⁶ brought about a radical change in the group, which had a much higher number of members that year compared to the year before. Likewise, its members were now mostly people who were not from the region where the dance is a tradition. This is in contrast with the previous group, which had members from Lo de Soto, Oaxaca and El Quizá, Guerrero. In 2021, the group was made up of people from Mexico City and the State of Mexico. Thirdly, there is a large number of women—higher than the amount of men—which stands out considering that the dance is traditionally performed only by men.

This text aims to describe and analyze the process of the group's reconfiguration during the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on this young man's role as an organizer and transmitter of a piece of knowledge that is embodied and charged with memories. A *danzante de diablos* (dancer of devils) from the coast who 'does not want to lose his roots' and seeks to 'recover' a dance that, for a time, was considered to be lost. His way of doing this was by creating a group and sharing his dance and musical knowledge. Accordingly, at the same time that he is reactivating his motor memory (Bastide, 1967) and that of the few members who are from his town, he is also transmitting his knowledge to people from outside of the tradition and strengthening a new community of dancers and followers.

This article proposes to emphasize these two aspects based on the teachings observed in the rehearsals, in what was recorded for the documentary that is underway, and in the conversations with the main character, who, hereinafter, will be referred to as 'Tenango.' Through his experience and personal lessons, shared both at rehearsals and on social media, the Tenango of Grupo de Danza de Diablos de CDMX has been able to disseminate a manifestation that was practically unknown by the capital's population.

The intention of this research is to analyze the group's change in direction and highlight the issues of transmission and embodied memory from the viewpoint of studies on social memory and cultural transmission. This is under the premise that, in the current process, *costeños* and *costeñas*—as the people from this coastal region call themselves—are seeking to reproduce their traditions by adapting some of their elements to the place where they live and by reactivating their ritual, musical, and dance memory.

⁵ In Spanish 'danzaria/o,' which is a term taken from the Caribbean language. I use it because it better encompasses the exercise 'of dance.'

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064014851702&sk=about>

I will explore the new inter-cultural context that the group is experiencing in depth, in which dance, video, and social media operate as an access key for reworking and updating their identity. The phenomenon presented here stresses the role that audiovisual media and social media play in establishing a traditional dance group as well as in cultural transmission and the activation of the collective memories of those who have migrated from this region of Mexico.

The following are among the questions formulated for this purpose: What is happening with the Afro-diasporic dances that have had to migrate time and time again? What are the preservation and transmission strategies of the traditional dances in foreign contexts where people suffer racism and/or discrimination? What is the role of the *Danza de Diablos* in this process of identity reconfiguration?

Jô Gondar—a Brazilian psychoanalyst and collective memory scholar—states that because the social sphere is alive, pulsing, and in a state of constant change, the representations are only the static reference point of what is in constant movement (Gondar, 2011: 23). The main interest of this study is to understand the process that these expressions of memory are currently going through along with the forces that combine so for the *Danza de Diablos* to be represented in such a way today.

A Tenango in the City



Illustration 1: Tenango in the Zócalo of CDMX. Photography: Claudia Lora, 2022.

This 35-year-old man from El Quizá Guerrero, in addition to being the Tenango, is currently the organizer, teacher, and one of the musicians of the current Grupo de Danza de Diablos CDMX. Approximately ten years ago, he migrated to the State of Mexico seeking better working conditions. As a resident of Ecatepec and a street food vendor, for years now he has been tasking himself with finding allies who want to participate

in this dance, which is part of the rituality of the black, brown or Afro-descendant, Afro-indigenous or Afro-mestizo⁷ population of Costa Chica, with the aim, in their own words, of ‘their tradition not being lost.’

To accomplish this feat, he first had to find all the elements that make up the devil’s mask for the

⁷ Some of the interviewees describe themselves as Afro-mestizos, a term coined by Aguirre Beltrán. ‘Mestizo’ is a Spanish word meaning ‘of mixed race,’ and specifically, ‘Afro-mestizo’ refers to the mix of black ancestry with that of the indigenous peoples.

dance in a metropolis where finding deer antlers or goat horns and horse's mane is no small endeavor. After looking everywhere in the city, he found a place that could supply him with these materials without him needing to travel to his hometown, and this allowed him to finish his outfit, whose main requirement was 'to have a good mask.'

Another fundamental element of the dance is its music. This became yet another challenge and, this time, he saw the need to return to his town and ask the musicians to teach him to make and play the *bote*⁸ and the *charrasca*⁹ After gathering all the paraphernalia and instruments, the next step was to find somewhere to present their performance:

When I was a Tenango in the city, I wanted to make myself known. I wanted many people to know what there is in Guerrero, for them to meet a *diablo*, not a Tenango, but any *devil*, and to see how the *charrasca* is played, and what the footwork is like, and those things. And well, I went to Madero Street. I was there for a while standing like a statue on Madero, and lots of people saw me, and when someone would ask, I would tell them what the mask was about and that sort of thing. (Interview with Tenango conducted by the author, Ecatepec, State of Mexico, 2021)

As we can see, in the construction of the Tenango's character, the dance steps are not all that appear; the costume and music also fulfill an incredibly significant role. Another aspect



Illustration 2: Diversity of traditional Mexican dances in the Basilica de Guadalupe. Photography: Claudia Lora, CDMX, 2017.

was finding the space to present the dance. He mentions Madero Street as the first place where he presented himself as a statue. Nevertheless, while Mexico City's historic center is a place where great national and international ethnic diversity can be found, the predominant 'traditional' dance is marked by the strong presence of the so-called 'Aztec dances,' which are performed in the city's *zócalo*, or main square, as it is considered a sacred ceremonial space by the members of the *mexicanidad* groups.

⁸ A friction drum from Costa Chica. It is an instrument used to dance the Danza de Diablos and to call the onzo-lion.

⁹ The *charrasca* is a horse's jawbone that is used as a percussion instrument.

Noticing this, and seeing that dance diversity was not part of the Day of the Dead celebration, the Tenango looked for a ritual context that was similar to what he knew: the festivities of the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in



Illustration 3: First Diablos Dance group in CDMX.
Photography: Claudia Lora, 2017.

Mexico City, which is held every December 12. This is a national holiday that attracts pilgrims from all over the country who dance to show thanks, to fulfill offerings, or simply to be part of this collective celebration. It was there where the Tenango found a favorable place to dance and ‘make his tradition known.’

Little by little —at the same time that he was establishing the group with coastal migrants from El Quizá, Guerrero and Lo de Soto,

Oaxaca along with a few folkloric dancers from Mexico City who were interested in learning—he concentrated on rehearsing to perform, year after year, at the Basilica of Guadalupe. Both the dance group and I, collectively, thought that I could help film. We even applied for grants from the Mexican Institute of Cinematography (IMCINE, for its Spanish abbreviation). Thus, from 2016 to October 2021, I recorded those moments, without any funding and with the help of collaborators, as the intention was to make an independent documentary about the process they were undergoing. From that point onward, they considered me part of the group; I was the one who was documenting and helping out in production matters. Here it is important to digress for a moment to mention that this request is tied to my relationship with the town. While I was no longer visiting frequently, provided that I had left to do research in other Latin American countries, I formed good friendships, and they still remember me as the one who filmed the documentary several years ago. Because of this, sometime later, the Tenango looked me up on social media and proposed the idea of continuing to document the dance, now in Mexico City. I gladly accepted because of our friendship and the great appreciation I have for the *Danza de Diablos*, for El Quizá, for Costa Chica, and for what the dance represents as an expression of resistance and re-existence of migrants from Costa Chica and others who are involved.

The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Watershed

The arrival of COVID-19 and what it brought along with it—restrictions on physical closeness, business closures, the effects on family finances, and the difficulty to do social and recreational activities that relieve stress in the large metropolis—led the group to split up, and two of the members from El Quizá returned to Costa Chica.

Consequently, we stopped rehearsing as a collective and started to use audiovisual and digital media to connect, through platforms like Zoom, which allowed us to greet and talk to each other and with people who were interested in the dance (filmmakers, musicians, and researchers). Likewise, we met to share images and remember Costa Chica. Social media networks were also useful for showing support during difficult times by holding online raffles and dance classes. In this context, a *diablos* mask made by the Tenango was raffled off to support two of the group members who were sick with COVID-19. It was announced through a Facebook page we had opened a year earlier and that, up until this point, we had barely used. On the day of the drawing, the Tenango did his first live broadcast to show the raffle was done honestly, and he took advantage of the moment to speak briefly about the dance, the mask, and his town.

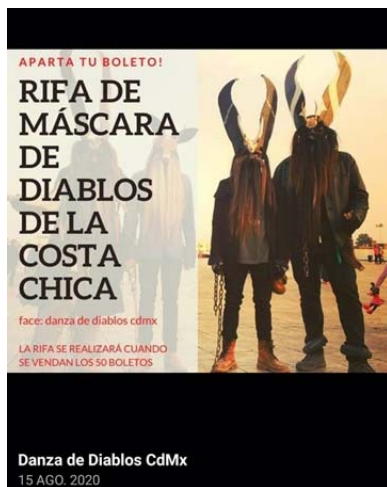


Illustration 4: Screenshot. Publication of the mask raffle on the facebook page, 2020. Poster: Claudia Lora.



Illustration 5: Screenshot. Post on facebook page, 2021.

The live broadcast had such a great reception and impact that the group took a radical turn. From that day on, the Tenango took over the page, constantly publishing photographs and videos about the mask, the dance, and the performances along with emotive texts explaining the images and giving expression to the dance in El Quizá.

Connecting with others on social media made it possible to meet members of the Afro-descendant movement in Mexico City, who invited the Tenango to participate virtually in the ‘Encuentro de Pueblos Negros’ (Meeting of Black Peoples). For the first time, the group introduced itself at a national event, with activists who had been unknown to them up until that point, and ties were formed with the black or Afro-descendant movement in Mexico City. Dialoging online with other people and political-cultural organizations allowed the group to recognize



Illustration 6: Cultural Act for Women's Day.
Photography: Claudia Lora, Coyoacán, CDMX, 2021.

problems that were set forth at the meetings, which let them reflect on and raise awareness about issues such as racism, social exclusion, and feminism, among others. In March 2021, a group of women belonging to the organization México Negro even held an Afro-feminist event in which some women from the association dressed and danced as *diablas*, using the group's masks; two of the male members had to take on a different role, as

musicians, and one female member, who usually did not dance, was inspired to do so on this occasion. Thus, for a moment, the group joined a larger community network with similar characteristics that was fighting for a similar cause.

However, the Tenango wanted to remain independent and create his own group. Given the circumstances, in a transition in which the group was dismantled, he used the platform of his Facebook page to invite everyone who wanted to learn the dance to join the group. The new group began to form at that point, and in 2021 it had around 15 dancers and musicians who played the harmonica, *charrasca*, and *bote*. In early 2022, the community was still meeting each Sunday to rehearse, make masks, refine their costumes, and spend time together. Likewise, they remained in dialogue with the outside world through images or videos that the Tenango shared and is still sharing quite often on Facebook.

Transmission and Reconfiguration

As mentioned above, the direction that the group took throughout 2022 came from the Tenango's invitation on Facebook to the entire population of Mexico City and the State of Mexico to join the new Grupo Danza de Diablos CDMX. Little by little, people started arriving to the rehearsal site, located on a street adjacent to 'Bellas Artes,' which is used by various dance groups for their practice sessions. On Sundays, many of these people came from far away to attend the morning rehearsals. In an interview from 2021, the Tenango comments that:

Those who stayed did so because they knew something about the dance or because they wanted to know more, not only about the Tenango, because I post a lot of photos, but more beyond that. They wanted to know why [the costumes are] black; why they wear chaps and spurs; why we use the bell, why the *bote*, why the *charrasca*, or why the Minga... And they are the ones who are still here. They are

the ones who have prevailed in the dance. (Interview with Tenango conducted by the author, Ecatepec, State of Mexico, 2021)

The people who joined took special interest in learning the meaning of the dance in greater depth. They were mostly folkloric dancers, actresses, musicians, and businesspeople whose ages ranged from 20 to 49. For the Tenango, organizing a group of committed people who were respectful of his tradition was fundamental, regardless of whether or not they were from the community. What is important, he says, is that they like to dance the *Danza de Diablos* and take an interest in its origin and meaning.

While the Tenango has needed to adapt his performance to where he currently lives, he always tried to teach it in a way that was as faithful as possible to how the *diablos* danced, played their instruments, and dressed up when he was in El Quizá, Guerrero. In his opinion, many aspects of that historic moment have been lost and, therefore, it is important to ‘recover them.’

In contrast, something that did change was the issue of gender. The Tenango never limited participation in the dance to men. As mentioned, most of those who joined the group in 2021 were women; even transgender people have taken part. Even though it was not long ago that only men danced, the situation has changed, and today, there are even groups of *diablas* (with only women dancers) in Costa Chica:

Many people wrote to me when I put out this call for participation... Many of the young women who are there now wrote to me and asked, “And can anyone dance this dance, or only men?” Because in many of the videos, there are only...in many of the dances, there are only men. Now there is also a *diablas* dance in Cuaji. Before, there were *diablas*, but it was a mess. They didn’t take it seriously like they do now. And now they are more serious. Now they participate. Now they make their masks too. (Interview with Tenango conducted by the author, Ecatepec, State of Mexico, 2021)

It is interesting to see how a young man who is looking to keep the tradition recognizes and accepts this cultural change. This means that respect for the performance of the traditional *Danza de Diablos* is not so much tied to aspects such as gender as to others such as commitment, respect, the way of dancing, dressing, and making the masks.

My field work in Costa Chica allowed me to observe that the women from this region learn to dance from a very young age. Although it is something that is socially learned both in public spaces and at home, there are still villages, like El Quizá—the Tenango’s place of origin—where the Minga is the only woman in the group, in contrast to Cuajinicuilapa—the city that is closest to this town and one of the most populated in the region—where women started to participate a number of years ago.

These changes in gender within the dance that have taken place in the city indicate that certain embodied cultural knowledge is transformed as a result of phenomena such as migration, education, and gaining awareness of matters such as equal rights among men,

women, and the LGBTTIQ population. While the expression of this knowledge was previously only tasked to men, today, women and people of other gender identities also participate.

African Diaspora, Dance, and Embodied Social Memory



Illustration 7: Screenshot of video recording. Photographer: Venancio López, CDMX Center, 2021.

Bastide stated that the cultural reproduction of African cultures in the Americas occurred by transmitting the previous symbolic structures represented in their rituals, based not on stones and geographical points but on muscles and motor actions performed by the body. What is important, he said, is the organization, the symbolic structure, which is what guarantees the transmission of the traditions. For both Halbwachs and Bastide (1970: 94), all memories are simultaneously past and present, provided that previously lived experiences can only be remembered when they find a channel for expression in the present, that is, a new social framework of memory.

While the system of slavery made it impossible to form the same structures, it was possible to rebuild pieces, fragments, and parts of those previous experiences and memories. The African legacies were reproduced when they were able to adapt symbolic structures that existed before the new life conditions even though they were fragmented. However, due to immigration processes, this has continued to transform. The transculturation (Ortiz, 1963) of African cultures with indigenous, Spanish, and, later on, South American (Chilean and/or Peruvian) ones along with those from other latitudes that reached Costa Chica, did not hinder certain embodied structures from being maintained. Yet, others were also transformed and/or included. An example of this is the ‘chilena’ musical and dance genre, which would also be

incorporated into the *Danza de Diablos* through a specific *son* and movements danced in couples. Other examples are the violin, the harmonica, and, later on, wind instruments that, for several decades now, have been used to perform this dance in some areas of the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, such as Lo de Soto.

Furthermore, to understand its meaning, the symbolism of the *Danza de Diablos* during the season of the Day of the Dead is very representative. As members of the population itself have narrated to me on numerous occasions, the *diablos* arrive in this season to accompany the souls of the dead to the homes of their families.

And the *diablos*, since they are supposedly the ones who take care of them [the dead] there in the other world, God gives them permission to leave, and they come with the dead to make their mischief, to come here and wander about. And so, they composed a dance for them. (*don Aldegundo*, in an interview with the author, 2004, El Quizá, Guerrero)

We know that the relationship with mourning, death, and one's ancestors, in both African and indigenous cultures—and, in this case, I would say Afro-indigenous—is different and can even be contradictory within the vision of the Judeo-Christian religion. The idea of the *diablos* as entities that 'accompany' the spirits in 'another world' and that they come to earth to make mischief—in this case, to eat the offering, order beer, clown around, and play with people—is something that lives on over time. In the same way, the steps live on, as this corporal memory is the way of representing the collective imaginary through the body. These movements must be learned before any other aspect of the dance. As the Tenango asserts, "First, they have to learn the movements, the choreography... If they like it, then afterwards they learn how to make their mask."

Before the mask, do you remember that when I got here I told you all, the first thing I'm going to teach you when we meet: you're not coming to just do the dance steps. You have to see where this comes from, where it began, what the music's instruments are, why it is danced this way... The first thing of all is the history of where all this is from, and then the mask is like your graduation. (Interview with Tenango conducted by the author, Ecatepec, State of Mexico, 2021)

Diana Taylor (2003), in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, says that:

Memory, like a heart, beats beyond the capacity to control it, a lifeline between the past and future. [...] There is a continuum between inner and outer, much as there is between the live present and the living past, and the notion (or act of imagination, perhaps) that individuals and groups share commonalities in both the here/now and there/then, made evident through embodied experience. (82)

Moreover, there is something that goes hand in hand with this corporal learning. As mentioned, the Tenango takes a great interest in the members knowing that the *Danza de*

Diablos comes from a specific place in the state of Guerrero: from Costa Chica, and specifically from El Quizá, Guerrero, his hometown. Then, he wants them to know its history, that is, who the forebears and ancestors are who danced and taught the dance and brought it both to the region and to El Quizá.

The ancestors are related to the dance's African roots and the origin myth of the ship that ran aground at Punta Maldonado. The forebears are the people who taught him, in his place of origin. This is related to the music, as the ones who brought the *Danza de Diablos* to El Quizá are three men from 'brown,' 'black,' or 'Afro-mestiza' families, from the first generations of the families that came to the town and who were always playing the *sones* for the dance there. *Don* Bruno, may he rest in peace, played the harmonica and organized the dance, teaching and encouraging the youth to take part. The other two musicians are still important pillars of the *Danza de Diablos*: *don* Hermelindo and Nico, who have also passed on the tradition to their children, grandchildren, and other children and youth of El Quizá.

The memory that the Tenango relays is part of the community's history and is spread orally, which is a fundamental means for providing continuity to the transmission of another part of the memory of the *Danza de Diablos* from El Quizá. Oral tradition is part of the construction and resignification process of the collective memory of the towns of Costa Chica. Although this memory is constructed as it is collectively told and remembered, the collective voids, obscurities, and silences, which are part of the reconstruction of this memory, are also important (Hoffmann, 2002).

The use of the term or concept of corp-orality in recognizing the interpretation of collective memory and the cultural processes of the traditional dances seem fundamental to me, as both are a type of artery through which the transmission circulates.

What we see here is that, while the corp-oral memory transmitted through the Tenango of Group *Danza de Diablos* CDMX contributed, at some point, to the recollection process of some of the group members who grew up in El Quizá or Lo de Soto, it is also transmitted to a new community within a new socio-spatial context. This also happened in El Quizá, which is a town established in the 1930s by settlers from other parts of Costa Chica. The difference here lies in that the capital's culture and territorial space is diametrically distinct from where these young people grew up.

To understand this new process, we will reintroduce some ideas from the anthropologist Margaret Mead, a scholar of intergenerational transmission, which is a subject that I have been studying in recent years. Mead distinguishes three types of culture and their solutions for continuity (New Guinea). The first culture, called postfigurative, depends on the 'living presence' of at least three generations, in which the elderly are essential, as they provide the model for life. This type of culture is particularly generation-based, and its continuity depends on the real presence of the three generations, where there are alliances between grandchildren

and grandparents, and parents are responsible for establishing discipline: “For the Arapesh, there is no past except the past that has been embodied in the old and, in a younger form, in their children and their children’s children” (Mead, 1970: 40). These cultures can be nomadic, sedentary, and may have even experienced significant historical changes, such as the Balinese people.

The second culture, the cofigurative, originates with the generational rupture from the post-figurative culture, which can have various causes: migrations, in which grandparents are physically separated from other generations; as a consequence of new technologies, in which the elderly are not valued; religious conversions, in which new ideals are established; conquest, in which the population is forced to learn a new language and new customs (Mead, 1970: 60). In this stage, the parents cannot offer ‘living models’ that are appropriate for the new generation’s era. “They themselves must develop new styles based on their own experience and provide models for their own peers” (Mead, 1970: 69). As such, there is a ‘generational discontinuity’ in which the new generation seeks orientation among those who are part of their own generation. It may also happen that this new lesson takes place through a new society —another group that establishes the rules and promotes the integration of a new order. Yet, even so, in the previous generations or outside of them, the youth see values that the two generations before them share. In this stage, there are expectations for each new generation to know a different world from a technological viewpoint, but this does not include a new order.

The last phase is what Mead named prefigurative, characterized by new mechanisms of change and cultural transmission, which are radically different from the previous stages. The new generations are so different that it is impossible to lead them with the previously used resources. As a solution, the author, very astutely, proposes to apply a model to this situation that she has analyzed in the cofigurative stage: that of the migrants who enter an unexplored and uninhabited territory characterized by ‘a drastic, irreversible division between the generations’ (Mead, 1970: 69).

Like the members of the migrant generation, the people who were born before this moment have learned values and abilities partially appropriated for this new phase as well as governing and power techniques. This generation is made up of rebellious youth who do not accept control, who do not know a world without war, pollution, overpopulation, violence, and racism. But it is also a generation that has new ways of communicating, which makes it better informed. This generation wants a better system, Mead says. The adults live alone and grow used to the change, but they are not able to accompany and dialogue with the new generation, for whom the past is not significant.

Since 1960, Mead had anticipated a new culture characterized by a rupture from cofigurative cultures, as the institutionalization of this culture had to go through a process of

“orderly —and disorderly— was a departure from the postfigurative style.” In this new culture, the children —and not the parents or grandparents— are who will outline the future. Because this new moment was in an initial phase, the author compares it with a child who has an uncertain future. What can parents teach their children in a world that is so different from the one they knew?

The answer, says the author, is to create prefigurative means of teaching and learning that keep the future open: to create teaching models that do not show what to learn but rather demonstrate how to do it, and that do not dictate what commitments to make but rather indicate what the value of commitment is (Mead, 1970: 121).

While the societies analyzed by Margaret Mead are different, and the historical moment varies from the present one, the text invites deep reflection on the processes and forms of transmission in traditional dance. In the case of Grupo Danza de Diablos CDMX, the three phases of transmission can be observed in the Tenango. On the one hand, there is the postfigurative phase, which was how he gained his knowledge about the dance through older people in the community, but also from his parents and elder brothers. His father was also a Tenango at one stage of his life, and his brothers were *diablo* dancers and relayed the enthusiasm for the dance to him. On the other hand, he learned lessons from *don* Bruno Morgan, who ‘rehearsed’ the *diablos* in the years that he participated in the dance, as well as from Hermelindo and Nico, who still play the *bote* and the *charrasca*, respectively.

Still today, this form of transmission continues to exist in El Quizá, in which three or more generations of the family participate in teaching the dance. However, due to migration to faraway cities, the transmission becomes cfigurative. In this case, the youth have to look for their own styles and ways of life, which are especially based on their peers’ ways of life, and, in many cases, they lose interest in their parents’ traditions.

When they migrate to closer places, such as the city of Acapulco, and can sporadically return to the town and keep in touch with the family in a significant way, the new generations learn how to relate to one another, socialize, and express themselves from their parents and grandparents. However, for the families that emigrate to the United States or migrate to Mexico City and do not spend time with people from their region, it is unlikely that they will acquire their parents’ habits. Depending on the social organization and the time spent with the culture itself, some families organize themselves to keep the practice of the dance in their new homes,

such as the Candela family, who would organize themselves year after year in Mexico City to commemorate the Day of the Virgin of Juquila and celebrate with relatives and friends from Costa Chica by dancing and playing different rhythms from the region. Accordingly, the transmission comprises a mixture of post and cofigurative cultures and is achieved in an effective way.

The Tenango's case is exceptional, as last year, far away from his family and other people from the region, he made an individual effort to 'rescue the dance,' teaching people from outside the community to dance, thus producing a cofigurative transmission in which women and men, most of an age similar to his, have approached him to learn about an outside tradition to which they aspire to belong.

Filming the Dance So as Not to Forget It



Illustration 8: Dance rehearsal-presentation of Danza de Diablos CdMx in the Plaza de Revolución. Photography: author unknown. Mexico City, 2019.

I first approached the *Danza de Diablos* in 2001 in El Quizá, Guerrero when I was researching this dance as part of my bachelor's thesis. For this aim, video recording both the *Danza de Diablos* and the Day of the Dead ritual that it falls within was fundamental for the research. The camera was part of the socialization with the population and, later on, it was how they remembered me: "Claudia, the girl who liked the *Danza de Diablos*, the one who came to record." Years later, there was an opportunity to edit the footage and make it into a documentary called *El juego de los diablos: celebración de muertos en la Costa Chica* [*The Game of the Devils: Celebration of the Dead in Costa Chica*] with the support of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, for its Spanish initials) and co-directed with my colleague Natalia Gabayet. The release of the documentary in DVD, its television broadcast, and, today, the possibility of watching it on YouTube have immortalized the images and sounds that were recorded two decades ago and turned them into archive material, which is consulted by the community to remember the people, the dance, the steps, the celebration, etcetera.

Celebration of the Dead in Costa Chica] with the support of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, for its Spanish initials) and co-directed with my colleague Natalia Gabayet. The release of the documentary in DVD, its television broadcast, and, today, the possibility of watching it on YouTube have immortalized the images and sounds that were recorded two decades ago and turned them into archive material, which is consulted by the community to remember the people, the dance, the steps, the celebration, etcetera.



Illustration 9: Dance rehearsal recording with the support of colleagues Bianca Pires and Venancio López. Photography: Claudia Lora, CDMX Center, 2021.

Later on, researching other dances along with the migration and violence that was experienced in the communities of Costa Chica made me distance myself from the town for a decade. It was through the Tenango, who contacted me in Mexico City, that I connected with the place again, and in 2016, I started to attend the rehearsals and presentations of Grupo de Danza de Diablos CDMX. Then, at the request of the Tenango and

the group, I began making an audiovisual record of those moments that would later become a documentary and, thus, a way of remembering this group.

The documentary has served as a medium and document of memory storage. Jacques Le Goff already considered sound and image to be mediums at the service of memory, on par with written or illustrated documents (Le Goff 1992: 232). More recently, the German researcher Astrid Erll, who is a specialist in cultural memory, wrote the following about the mediums:

The construction and circulation of knowledge and versions of a common past in sociocultural contexts —is only possible with the aid of media: through print, radio, television, and the internet for the diffusion of version of a common past in wide circles of society; and, finally, through symbolically charged media such as monuments which serve as occasions for collective, often ritualized, remembering. (Erll, 2011: 113)

Thanks to these ‘medial constructs’ (Erll, 2011: 113), some relevant facts about the *Danza de Diablos*—such as the corporal movements of an era, the way the masks were made, the way the music was played, the people who have danced it or played the music, the recording of the Day of the Dead ritual—in which loved ones appear, have been preserved and turned into reactivators of collective memory, as they are moments that are remembered time and time again, and they produce collective constructions of the past reality that strengthen the identity of the people and the ritual, musical, and dance memory.

The study of memory is key for understanding why some cultural elements continue to be remembered time and time again and why others may be so traumatic that they are 'forgotten' or hidden. As a starting point, those of us who study social or collective memory define it as the practice of 'bringing the past into the present.' In this case, the action is carried out through audiovisual means. Today, the visual and audiovisual representations are largely responsible for the understanding we have of the world in which we live; they are part of our learning experience; they are present in our imaginary and are, therefore, an important part of our social and individual memory. Through these representations, we approach foreign worlds, distant and nearby realities that are often unknown to us.

The use that the *diablo* dancers who migrate give to video, to documentaries, and to information and communications technologies (ICTs) for their self-representation through social media speaks of their social and cultural implications on the level of collective imaginary and memory. In recent years, thanks to the ease with which a cell phone that includes a camera can be acquired, there are increasingly more records of the *Danza de Diablos*. In Mexico City, even more audiovisual material is produced by people who have had the opportunity to see the dance on the streets, as well as the TV channels, the dancers themselves, and those of us who help record the rehearsals or presentations. Much of this material is shared on the group's Facebook page, which attracted new members to join until forming the current group: Danza de Diablos CDMX which today (2022) has been modified again.

We know that Facebook is one of the new ways to socialize, share, and create networks. For the group in question, and specifically for its founder, it has been the way of sharing their individual and collective performances. Reviewing and recording collective images and then sharing them on this platform offers the *Danza de Diablos* group structures, and these memories that have been embodied are located within them. In his book *How Societies Remember*, the researcher Paul Connerton said: "We situate what we recollect within the mental spaces provided by the group. But these mental spaces [...] refer back to the material spaces that particular social groups occupy" (Connerton, 1989: 37).

The Facebook page or profile works as a mental space that offers an archive for individual and collective memory. The photos and videos of the dance evoke moments that were shared collectively, but they also show a corporal form, a way of dressing, a way of speaking that is specific and shared. This structure also constitutes what Diana Taylor (2003) called archive and repertoire. For her, the archives are the supposedly long-lasting materials (texts, documents, buildings, bones), while the repertoire refers to a set of embodied practices/knowledge (language, dance, sports, rituals) (48–49). Here, the Facebook page

would serve as a kind of archive in which the recorded or photographed repertoires are preserved.

It is worth highlighting that this has been possible thanks to recent technology, which is increasingly more accessible, such as the cameras incorporated into cell phones; however, neither the use of video and photography cameras nor the exchange of videos is a new phenomenon. For more than twenty years, migrants from Costa Chica had recorded their dances and shared the videos, first in VHS format and then in DVD. These were sent back and forth; that is, from their hometowns to the places to which they migrated and vice versa. Today, social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp have made it possible to share those audiovisual products more quickly and affordably, not only with family members but also with anyone who is interested in researching or understanding these expressions.

Conclusions

We are in an extremely complicated moment in time, in which the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to neoliberalism—which has reached its peak, producing greater inequality, unemployment, violence, drug trafficking, and migration, among other phenomena. In this context, the youth from the towns of the Costa Chica region who live in Mexico City are experiencing a moment similar to Mead's prefigurative phase. It is a generation that does not envision the future, in which its previous references do not suffice, and it thus seeks symbolic reference points and ones of collectivity through its most representative dance. Lacking significant pillars in the social structure, the dance creates identity and collectivity, which allows them to develop a new style of expression based on what is traditional, inspired by knowledge from the town's elderly. In this new context, this knowledge is considered highly valuable.

We can state that the eldest generations of El Quizá—despite their experiences of internal migration (within the region)—created favorable conditions for the youth of today to maintain and provide continuity to their teachings. The Tenango is one of the beneficiaries, and, today, he teaches his peers and requires them to be committed, responsible, and dedicated. In this way, he has played the role of a generational and cross-border bridge. The forms of transmission learned in the place of origin, with values established by the town's eldest generation, play a central role in the retransmission of dance memory. Similarly, teaching/learning among contemporaries, whether or not they are from the area where this expression originated, plays a fundamental role in the continuity of the dance outside of its cultural context.

The need to create a collective space that is similar to the one he had in his town leads him to reconstruct a group with people interested in learning their dance and tradition. As we

have seen, the new group has a bit of each of the cultures suggested by Margaret Mead, because while there are generational ruptures provoked by circumstances and specific historical moments, transmission continues to take place.

La Danza de Diablos El Quizá CDMX, led by this young man, originally from El Quizá, in the Costa Chica region of the state of Guerrero, represents a space of collective containment and for reworking identity for young migrants and non-migrants in Mexico City. The time and space of the dance become a place/time for recreating memory, in which the migrants from the coast and the new actors of this performance give meaning to their lives through the dance in the middle of a pandemic that has made us question ourselves about our place in the world. This is where dance and its capacity to unite and liberate appear in a more energetic form.

Moreover, today, social media and audiovisual media play a central role in the new forms of cultural transmission. Dance and audiovisual media represent means of expression, communication, and representation for the different youth cultures. On the one hand, these records function as memory storage documents, and, on the other hand, social media serves as memory archives (media at the service of memory, as Le Goff would say, 1992: 232).

The context of the pandemic has brought about the review and recording of collective images and their spreading on social media, which has offered the group a platform to meet, preserve, and locate their dance memories. Thus, the social impact of the audiovisual representation of the *Danza de Diablos* that is shared on these networks has helped strengthen the individual and collective identity of the dance group and of its members along with disseminating a little-known artistic expression in this grand metropolis.

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