

# Chapter 2

## Singularity and Micro-Regional Strategies in Intangible Cultural Heritage

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### 2.1 Introduction

In his 2011 book *Anthropology Confronts the Problems of the Modern World*, Lévi-Strauss states that “... always and everywhere, scientific explanation is based on what may be termed good simplifications. Given this relationship, anthropology turns necessity into virtue” (2011: 21). Such simplifications are then, however, carefully analysed according to disciplinary theories and discursive metonymies. In contrast, the texts of international normative instruments must answer to a very wide range of types of discursive acts and political outlooks, to mention only the most important factor influencing international policy negotiations.

Over and above this complexity, any international convention must arrive at a consensus in a most succinct and prudent text. As everyone knows who has been involved in negotiating policy documents, each word in the resolution or convention is filtered through very intricate considerations of various forms of knowledge and forecasts of political outcomes. Putting an idea and a text up for scrutiny by representatives of governments and peoples, in fact, gives such policy texts an underlying richness and a political legitimacy that no other kind of document can claim. When such negotiations are thinned out, for many reasons, words and proposals lose reflexivity and their contradictions increasingly complicate operational practices.

One way of ensuring a constant renewal of concepts and operational strategies in international programmes has been to build spaces in which policymakers, societal agents and social scientists may contrast ideas, forward-looking strategies and assessments of current operations. Critical perspectives are necessary to

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promote diversity and to allow innovations to influence policy decisions and drive programmes forward instead of into protracted negotiations by particular interests.

In recent years, anthropology has developed its own critical perspective on intangible cultural heritage, with little or no dialogue with the UNESCO programme of the 2003 Convention for the protection of this heritage. The 2007 *International Convention for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage* fostered close collaboration with scientific organizations and even helped create and strengthen many of them. Since 2002, however, the work of the 2003 *Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage* has been conducted without the collaboration of anthropologists or other specialists, in spite of the fact that in the nineties and until 2002, anthropologists were very active in providing the foundational concepts for the Convention. The *International Social Science Council*, working closely with the *International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences* and other member organizations, was also active in the evaluation of the dossiers for the initial *Programme of Masterpieces of Intangible and Oral Heritage*. However, in 2002 UNESCO government delegations decided that only anthropologists brought to the discussions by governments were to participate in the debates for the final text of the Convention and in the follow-up of the Convention. In this sense it could be said that government delegations wanted a 'deregulated' Convention. It was only at the 2010 General Assembly of State Parties to the Convention that its statutes were changed to encourage collaboration with independent research institutions in the working of the Convention. Accordingly, in December 2010 the Commission on Intangible Cultural Heritage was formally created within the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and was adopted at the *International Social Science Council* (ISSC) in Nagoya in December 2010. The chapters in this book were all presented at the First Research Planning Meeting of this Commission at the *National Autonomous University of Mexico* (UNAM) in February, 2012.<sup>1</sup> The Report of this Meeting summarizes a large number of issues which need to be taken up in anthropological research, both in the general field of heritage studies and in relation to the implementation of the Convention.

The renewal of this dialogue between independent researchers in the field of anthropology and other related sciences and the policy-making bodies of the International Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage is now a very urgent matter, so that the vitality of its concepts can be maintained and new paths sought to overcome the difficulties that have arisen in the conceptual definition and operational methodologies of the Convention.

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<sup>1</sup> See at: <<http://132.248.35.1/informe/Informe.pdf>>.

### 2.1.1 *Three Examples of Singularity or Plurality*

In this chapter one of these main issues is taken up, that of establishing the cultural boundaries of cultural practices classified for inclusion in the national inventories, the Representative List, or other Lists of the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Each ritual, festivity, knowledge or skill, to name only a few of the possible cultural practices, must be, in a sense, considered singular, in order to be included. Most cultural practices, however, belong to specific cultural areas and so many similar practices may be found in neighbouring villages or in a micro-region. Anthropology must look deeper into the dynamics of why and how cultural practitioners in different villages decide to invent a new single cultural practice or to borrow, adapt or adopt a practice from other towns or villages. Also, as I hope this paper will make clear, we need a clearer understanding of the micro-regional strategies that cultural practitioners and stakeholders develop in setting up similar events in neighbouring villages.

The analysis will be based on the fieldwork we have conducted in the past seven years on intangible cultural heritage in Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Three examples will be mentioned in this chapter: the commemorative performances, ‘Simulacros’—a nineteenth-century term—, of the War of Independence of Mexico; the Dance of the Chinelos; and the Representation of the ‘Malinches’.<sup>3</sup> Villagers re-enact these narratives knowing full well that they are sharing and adapting a celebration but in each case according to their own cultural preferences, following their own discourse of belonging, memory and contemporary relevance. They understand, then, that they are performing ‘representations of representations’. How far is all intangible cultural heritage a ‘representation of representations’?

The three examples of celebrations in the micro-regions of the Sierra de Guerrero and the north-east of the state of Morelos will be examined in terms of their singularity in a larger micro-regional framework of plurality. Singularity, as dealt with in anthropological literature, has to do with the originality and uniqueness of a cultural practice. Fieldwork has shown that these intangible cultural heritage practices are performed on the basis of the same narrative, and yet, significantly, are deliberately set apart by introducing a ‘contrast’ that will make the practice in each village slightly different from other similar practices in the micro-region. Underlined by friendly and sometimes not so friendly rivalry towards neighbouring villages, these ‘marks of contrast’, as I will call them, allow each group to construct a ‘distinction’, in the sense in which Bourdieu developed

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<sup>2</sup> The project on intangible cultural heritage began in 2004 at the Center for Multidisciplinary Studies of the National University of Mexico, and since 2010 has been conducted in the framework of a Unesco–Unitwin Chair on Research on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Diversity.

<sup>3</sup> The word ‘Malinche’ comes from the Aztec (Nahuatl) *Malintzin*, originally used by Indians to refer to Hernan Cortes, the Spanish army commander, who had a native woman, Malintzin, translate native languages for him. The term then shifted towards the real Malintzin but became a pejorative term, synonymous with betrayal and, more recently, with anti-Mexican sentiments.

this concept. These ‘marks of contrast’ allow a group or a village to feel they belong to their larger cultural circle while at the same time maintaining their singularity.

The issue of singularity is closely related to that of authenticity. I will argue in this chapter that the problem of authenticity in intangible cultural heritage cannot be solved by isolating a single form of performance of a given practice since this would require an infinite listing of its historical, political, social, artistic and symbolic ontology. Instead, I propose that authenticity always be examined in the framework of the strategies of singularity and plurality of a cultural heritage practice. It is this framework that provides a template for the deliberate marking out by each group, village or town of their specific cultural event. This would make it easier to evaluate candidatures for inventories of the Convention Lists. It often happens that two groups or communities claim the origin or ownership of an event, and sometimes two or more countries may do so.

Pluriculturalism is also a theme that can be found in at least two of the celebrations: the Dance of the Malinches in Tlacotepec and the Dance of the Chinelos in Yautepec. Local cultural practitioners have assembled their celebration by bringing together elements of several cultural traditions: the pre-Hispanic Meso-American cultures, Mexican mestizo culture, and Spanish and European traditions. This issue, however, will not be taken up in this chapter.

Attention will be paid to unfolding the dynamics of singularity-plurality on to geographical space so as to understand how the cultural practices that were studied are managed on a micro-regional basis.

## 2.2 Anthropology and Global Frameworks

The recent surge of interest in intangible cultural heritage may create new possibilities both for safeguarding existing living heritage and for constructing a new cosmopolitan vision of the ongoing transformation of such heritage in settings that none of us could even imagine a few decades ago. This is creating interesting new trends in knowledge and culture. As always, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in a recent lecture in Japan, expressed this way of understanding the plurality of world cultures:

...since the Western type of civilization no longer finds in its own resources that which would allow it to regenerate and take off towards a new flourishing, may it learn something...from those humble and, for a long time, disdained societies which, until recently, had escaped its influence? These are the questions that are being posed, after several decades, by thinkers, scholars and men of action and which incites them—since the other social sciences, more focused on the contemporary world, do not provide an answer—to interrogate anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 2011: 17).

Indeed, after two decades of a deconstructive transformation of its perspectives, anthropology is once again poised to make a vital contribution to the construction of a globalized cultural world. Anthropology seems to be coming out into the

world again, as shown by many papers at the *Anthropology in the World* conference held at the British Museum in June 2012. The foundational ‘global’ viewpoint of anthropology, encompassing all human societies around the world, is an idea whose time has gradually become more relevant, as the world becomes more ‘global’ and, more to the point, as sustainability creates an imperative to work for all humanity. More specifically, anthropology’s global ambition and its exact knowledge of microspheres, of local groups and places, is now urgently needed to reassess a process of maldevelopment and globalization that has created extremes of wealth and access, of exclusion and violence.

Interestingly, while anthropologists have been highly critical of many of the foundational concepts of their discipline—including the concepts of ‘culture’, ‘civilization’, ‘community’, ‘indigenous’ and so on—it is highly significant that recent political ideologies, for example in the discursive form of ‘multiculturalism’ or the ‘clash of civilizations’, have not hesitated to reify culture and to revive many of the terms that anthropology had discarded precisely because they obscure, rather than illuminate, cultural processes.

### ***2.2.1 Anthropology and Intangible Cultural Heritage Programmes***

Locating anthropology’s interest in cultural heritage no longer in the framework of seeking universals in ethnological patterns of human organization but in the current debate about globalizing human communications, economic exchanges and political allegiances provides a very rich soil in which to ground research. Cultural heritage is studied in anthropology not only because of its evolutionary or inter-cultural salience but mainly because of its importance to current negotiations on remaining ‘human’, protecting vulnerable peoples, defending cultural identities, linking culture to development and finding effective paths towards sustainability. That is, anthropology is dealing with new social forms of intersubjective relations.

Given these themes, it is easier to understand the relationship of anthropological research to a cultural policy programme as specific as the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Although studies of physical cultural heritage have developed rapidly in the last four decades through archaeology, architecture, anthropology and museology, this was not the case with the living heritage of indigenous and mixed peoples.

Since the eighties anthropology, and especially interpretive anthropology and ethnomethodology, have influenced the ‘cultural turn’ of critical and postmodern studies with attention shifting towards meanings, signs and symbols. This new emphasis was brought to UNESCO just at the time—in the nineties—when the culture sector was beginning a new round of consultations, on the one hand to link

development and culture, and on the other to develop an international convention on intangible cultural heritage.<sup>4</sup>

To put it simply, new perspectives and initiatives on culture were mushrooming around the world as globalization spread. The United Nations Commission on Culture and Development was able to tap into these in its nine consultations around the world for its report *Our Creative Diversity* published in 1996. To illustrate the diversity of viewpoints at the time, it is worth including a few of the major statements given at these consultations by artists, indigenous peoples, cultural activists and government cultural policy officials.

On the very first day of the meeting of the Commission, Claude Ake asked pointedly why wars of culture had increased at that time. Cultures, he explained, are not developed or underdeveloped; ethnic conflicts arise as a result of non-development. Yet, he warned, there also exists a culture of hatred, of discrimination, of fascism, “so it’s not a question of bringing in culture in a good way”. Comments came from Mahbub ul Haq: “... future conflicts will not be between nations but between peoples and nations...”; from Ase Kleveland: “... just as the culture of democracy seems to spread, the governability of our societies appears to decline ... it is clearly unacceptable, whatever our cultural background is, in world income distribution, that the richest receive eighty per cent of world income and the poorest twenty per cent only 1.4 %”; from Alain Touraine: “while the global market is in the hands of the North, identities are in the South ... we need political reason against tribes and the market”; from Edith Sizoo: “... isn’t culture behind separatism, racism, machismo, the burning of widows, the mutilation of sexual organs? ... a key problem is that actions and interventions are carried out in a power relation that determines whether things will change”; from Fernando Calderon: “... conflicts which prevailed in the sphere of production have now been transferred to the sphere of culture ... [some voices are now suggesting] a way to overcome the dialectics of exclusion by living individual identity, belonging to a community and engaging in productive modernization”; from Roberto Da Matta: “... what are, then, the sources of national identity? Rituals. In Brazil, the classical components of the bourgeoisie have been lost but instead, there is popular music, the carnival, they give a sense of place and identity”; from Yao Jie Hou: “... the culture of ancient civilizations continues to influence their development and culture is an entire system of spiritual and social values”; from Kapila Vatsyayan, who referred to the Asian, African and Meso-American cultures: “... the only contrast among such civilizations is with post-Renaissance Europe and this is the difference of thinking in terms of man and Nature and not man in Nature. This makes for a very different understanding of what the self is, of what a human being is in the matrix of the natural world”; from Mamadou Dia: “... indigenous institutions are limited, they have women and age discrimination; and transplanted ones as well. So even with investments we have not had good results. So we went to the other side, to the ‘fundamentalist tradition’ institutions, to romanticization. So now we need renovated indigenous institutions

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<sup>4</sup> The author was Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO 1994–1998.

and converging transplanted institutions”. Ms Werewere Liking commented: “... it is the practitioners of culture that should be in the forefront. We have had segmentation due to apartheid. ... Every person has the right and possibility of creating culture. It is also being shaped by the man chiselling a mask in his backyard”, and the Director of the South African Museum “... in Africa cultural actions are much more important than cultural buildings, we have life inside us, which we share with others”.

The point in citing these statements is that they gave us members of the Commission a much nuanced view of the possibilities of focusing national and international policies on new guidelines for the safeguarding of the diversity of world cultures. The Report of the Commission established the background for many of the international cultural initiatives taken by UNESCO and its member states at the beginning of the new century.

### ***2.2.2 A New Concern for Living Cultures***

As mentioned, concern for the safeguarding of living cultures began with the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage in 1972. By the nineties, demands for ‘cultural survival’ and the protection of living cultures seemed to come from everywhere: from government delegates and diplomats at the United Nations; from anthropologists concerned with the cultural survival of small-scale societies; from the rising movements of indigenous and autochthonous peoples; from artists and performers; from Ministries of Culture in very different countries. All were confronted not just by the impact of globalization and the market economy but very markedly by the rapid expansion of the media and telecommunications, films and videos.

By now there was also a different perception of cultural policies among the governments of developing countries. At a very memorable meeting of the Executive Board of UNESCO in Fez, Morocco in 1995, delegation after delegation, especially from developing countries, asked for a new direction in UNESCO’s cultural policy. Just a few months earlier, at a meeting in Nara, Japan, the criteria for the World Heritage List had been thoroughly reviewed and changed. Now, member states insisted on having greater attention given to ‘living heritage’ so that historic centres in cities would not become silent, so that peoples’ living cultures should not only be put behind glass panes in museums but rather that local neighbourhoods and villages could be active participants in safeguarding their cultural heritage.

A new, initial programme was set up, the programme on Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage which was the forerunner to the Convention. At the time, following the traditional way in which UNESCO programmes operated, the dossiers for the candidatures of the Masterpieces Programme were relayed to

the International Social Science Council.<sup>5</sup> Through its scientific member organizations, the Council then distributed the proposals to anthropologists and other social scientists around the world who had specific knowledge of the cultural groups in the regions involved, for a technical assessment.

As mentioned earlier, this collaboration between international scientific organizations and the work of the Convention ceased when UNESCO government delegations decided that all scientific knowledge and cultural expertise would be filtered exclusively through government delegations in negotiating the Convention and making it operational. Consequently, no independent anthropological research, no systematic examination of the outcomes of inscriptions on the Lists of the 2003 Convention, and no reaching out towards new knowledge that was being developed in universities, museums and many other cultural institutions were brought in so as to refresh the thinking and management of the Convention. In some countries, such as Mexico, the selection of candidatures for the Representative List became over-politicized, leading to a multiplicity of experimental forms of decision-making in the work of the Convention and, more disquieting still, the proliferation of many kinds of intermediaries who, in some cases, have swept aside or manipulated cultural practitioners as the major actors of the Convention.

Debates based on philosophical and scientific knowledge, in my experience, by their very nature bring in a diversity of interpretations that enlarge the spaces for negotiation and for finding the exact conceptual nuances to slowly work towards consensus. Without such debates, content becomes empty and debates drag on bitterly and mainly on the basis of immediate political interests. Most importantly, scientific endorsement gives a legitimacy which is tied to historical and larger political concerns that help keep checks and balances between politics and institutions.

For all the above reasons, it is very important that anthropology engages in rigorous study of intangible cultural heritage, both to bring clarity to its concepts and interpretations but, most importantly, to support, through in-depth knowledge, the development of new ways of understanding and organizing fluid identities and cultural claims in a liquid and effervescent second modernity. Most centrally for this paper, the engagement of anthropologists and other social scientists is vital to maintain the checks and balances that will give agency to cultural practitioners in the work of the Convention.

### **2.3 “We Will Continue to Celebrate Here”**

In contributing to understanding the dynamics of the singularity and plurality of cultural practices, anthropology is also very important in insisting on the flowing nature of culture, so that cultural fundamentalisms leading to violent conflicts may

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<sup>5</sup> At that time, this author was President of the International Social Science Council.



be stemmed. In the UNESCO World Culture report of 2001 (UNESCO 2001), we argued that reifying cultures into hardened, discrete units was not only far from reality but unhelpful in setting up policy-oriented programmes. Instead, we proposed that cultures be understood as ‘Rainbow Rivers’ in which, at different historical times, cultural practitioners either kept up separate and singular cultural traditions or mixed or blended their own cultures with the cultures of other groups. This cultural flow is one of the great challenges of the Convention, since a List, any list, entails carving the boundaries of specific cultural practices from their historic cultural tapestry.

In many countries, one of the issues creating heightened conflicts over intangible cultural heritage is the rivalry between different ethnic, cultural, religious and national groups in decisions about inventorying and presenting candidatures for the ICH Representative List. An ethnic group may claim as exclusively its own a certain dance or cultural practice while another or several others may also lay claim to it. It is clear that cultural proximity, syncretism, hybridity and imitation of cultural practices, all inherent characteristics of cultural evolution, inevitably limit the right that one group may have over others in proposing their representations as candidatures and in receiving the exposure and privilege that inclusion in the List is now bringing. While historical and anthropological data and research may assist in clarifying questions of cultural boundaries, a much more complex model is needed to explain the dynamics of cultural borrowings or exchanges. A complex methodological question is: how can the singularity of a given cultural practice be mapped out, in local and micro-regional terms, so that all neighbouring representations are given proper recognition? What happens when two or more villages claim to be the site of origin of a celebration?

A key remark was made by Eugenio Navarro, a young man in the town of Acatempan. He explained that for many, many decades, they have celebrated the ‘Abrazo de Acatempan’—the ‘Embrace of Acatempan’—in his village, with the participation of a neighbouring town, Teloloapan. This event in Mexican history commemorates the purported meeting in 1820 between the General of the Insurgents (those who fought for Mexican independence from Spain), General Vicente Guerrero, and General Agustín de Iturbide, who had formerly belonged to the Royalist Army of the King of Spain but who now switched sides to fight with the Insurgents. The historical evidence for this meeting is shaky and there is another town of Acatempan in a neighbouring state which also claims that the meeting took place there. Amid the doubts and claims, Eugenio Navarro, the young man in Acatempan in the state of Guerrero (the name was taken from General Guerrero) told us flatly, “... some historians say that the meeting did not take place here, that it was elsewhere, but we don’t care. We have been celebrating this meeting here for more than a hundred years and we will continue to do so.”

When questioned further, Eugenio explained that this allows them to have friendly discussions with people in the neighbouring town of Teloloapan, where they organize the group that comes with General Iturbide. Dressed in full regimental garb, General Iturbide and his soldiers, all on horseback, come to meet with General Guerrero and his group of cavaliers, who have been riding all over the

hills surrounding Acatempan. Riders take three letters between the Generals. After meeting in a plaza filled with people of both places, and a long dialogue—written, they say, in the nineteenth century—with both protagonists showing off their prowess as cavalrymen, the two Generals embrace, joining their two armies and ensuring that Mexican independence was then rapidly achieved.

When I asked another older woman in Acatempan why they held this celebration with the people of Teloloapan, she said shyly, “Well, it is much better this way, they don’t fight so much”. “Who fights?” I asked. And she murmured, “It’s because they are hacendados (in this context ‘rich landowners’) over there. Here, we’re Indians, so it is better this way”. This example, as did others during the fieldwork, indicates that the dynamics of celebrations in towns and villages are marked by the previous historic relationships between such neighbouring towns and villages. Such ‘civic intangible cultural heritage’ is seen as a way of maintaining peaceful and friendly relations between different communities (Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5).

I have also termed this civic cultural heritage ‘social capital’ because several informants in that and other villages mentioned that holding these large celebrations was a way of keeping young men off the streets and off drink, and of having young men and women participating in the celebration meeting and having fun. As such local celebrations wane, the loss of cooperative mingling leaves young people in empty spaces, where they are easily swept up by the drug traffickers and criminal organizations.

In this micro-region, as well as in others where I did fieldwork, local people said that they are very keen on their own celebration—or that of any other of their fiestas, for that matter—being well appreciated by people coming from other localities in the region. What makes the celebrations appreciated by neighbouring



**Fig. 2.1** El Abrazo de Acatempan, Acatempan, Guerrero (2010). *Source* Photo by Edith Pérez-Flores



**Fig. 2.2** Representation of Mexico's Independence, Chilacachapa, Guerrero (2009). *Source* Photo by Alejandro Hernández

cultural practitioners and stakeholders? Items mentioned in different villages vary but basically they refer to showing off the affluence of the village, which can be made ostentatious in the costumes, horses and artefacts used by the performers, in the copiousness of the meals offered freely at the villagers' houses for visitors from outside, in the abundance of free liquor and beer offered to the public, and in the beauty of the floral and other decorations at the sites where the celebration is held.

The voices heard as people disband after the performances are unequivocal in this respect: "...this year [the celebration] was a very sparkling display" ("Este año [la fiesta] salió muy lucida"); or, on the contrary, "...this year [the celebration] was very poor" ("Este año salió muy pobrecita"). The responsibility for the glitter or the opaqueness of the celebrations is in the hands of the organizers, whether the traditional 'majordomos' or the municipal authorities. Such is the importance of these celebrations that municipal governments are known to have been toppled because they held a very inadequate celebration.



**Fig. 2.3** Representation of Mexico's Independence, Chilacachapa, Guerrero (2009). *Source* Photo by Alejandro Hernández

## 2.4 “We Do the Same, But Different”

Through fieldwork, with the team of young anthropologists working on the project to create an Archive of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the National University of Mexico, we discovered that in many rural communities in Mexico, they hold performances related to the War of Independence, as well as to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The reason these celebrations had been overlooked in anthropological research is that they are neither wholly indigenous, nor official commemorations of the War of Independence. And I ask myself how much intangible cultural heritage has been overlooked because it does not fit neatly into the cultural classifications of general ethnographic grids applied in many countries.

In the eighteen communities (Arizpe 2011) in which we carried out fieldwork, the general discourse is based on the national historical narratives, yet, in each village, the organizers decide which scenes to highlight and which ones to leave out, thereby opening up spaces of contrast. In some villages they have an original text. For example, in Jantetelco the ‘Comedy’—as theatre plays were called in Mexico in the nineteenth century—on the life of the one of the distinguished leaders of the War of Independence, Mariano Matamoros, was written in 1881 and is still performed today. In others, the celebration was recently invented, as in





**Fig. 2.4** Chinelos of Tlayacapan at Yautepec's Carnival (2012). *Source* Photo by Carolina Buenrostro



**Fig. 2.5** Dance of Las Malinches, Tlacotepec, Morelos (2008). *Source* Photo by Cristina Amescua

Tetelpa in 1943—and focuses only on the victory over Fort Alhondiga de Granaditas that was held by the Spaniards.

In yet other cases, the whole sequence of scenes of the War of Independence is performed during a great three-day event. In the latter case, in Chilacachapa, the

local historian, Eusebio Ramirez, when asked why the same celebration was held in over seven neighbouring villages of the Sierra, explained “Yes, we are doing the same, but different” (“Si, hacemos lo mismo pero diferente”). Clearly, it seems to me, this is a case of cultural practitioners being aware that they are performing ‘representations of representations’ rewritten and resignified through their own agency.

Chilacachapa, a large village in the Sierra of Guerrero perched over the valley of the Rio Balsas which flows into the Pacific Ocean, holds an extraordinary three-day event involving some 120 young cultural practitioners and more than 3,000 stakeholders. I consider the latter stakeholders because they are not only an attentive audience but most of them contribute something to the event: a meal, some sweets, a bottle of drink; or they are directly involved in helping their daughter, son, niece, cousin or grandchild sew up their costumes. The scenes performed at various sites in the village are based on the historical narratives of Mexican independence, but the villagers are proud of the choices they have made as to the different kinds of scenes.

How do these celebrations vary? While the way the ‘Simulacros’ are organized in the villages depends on the specific conditions of each annual event such as the amount of money provided by the ‘majordomos’—village-appointed heads of the celebration—authorities and stakeholders, the number of volunteers, especially young people, who want to participate, and the agreement of other villages near and far to bring their groups of dancers or performers, many other differences are deliberately introduced. People in the villages were constantly explaining what they did differently from the commemorations in other villages. For example, in Chilacachapa, Don Eusebio explained that “We don’t build a big Alhondiga [Fort] here, but, instead, the party goes on for three days. Over there, it only goes on for one day” (“Aca no hacemos una Alhondiga grande pero, en cambio, aqui dura tres dias la fiesta. Allá [en Teloloapan] dura namas un día”).

In Chilacachapa, they have chosen to hold a skirmish—‘escaramuza’—between Insurgent forces and the Spanish Royalist army in the evening of the first day, and a grand battle—‘la Batalla’—the next day in the afternoon. There is also another ‘small battle’ held on a bridge on the second day at 6 a.m. They also enact the ‘hanging’ of the Royalists by tying a rope around the waists of the ‘soldiers’ and hoisting them over a pole. Young men and women have hilarious fun trying to pull them upwards when some of the ‘soldiers’ are quite stout men. Other villages do not perform the skirmish nor the ‘hanging’ of the Royalists nor the ‘small battle’ on the bridge. The people of Chilacachapa very proudly declare that their ‘Simulacro’ is the largest and best known of the celebrations among the seven others held in the neighbouring town and villages.

Another ‘mark of contrast’ of their celebrations is actually the day on which it is held and which I interpret as a micro-regional strategy. Although the national official date of Independence Day is 15 September, the Simulacro in Chilacachapa takes place on 8 October. When I asked why it is held on that date, it was explained me that in this way people from other villages could come to their celebration. Indeed, the celebration of Independence is held in the municipal town

on 15 September; in Machito de las Flores on 28 September; in Apipilulco on 22–26 September, in Apetlanca on 18–20 October, and so on. This pattern is very similar to that of at least the Mexica (Aztec) empire in pre-Hispanic times. The larger town, *altepetl*, held the most important festivities and established the very profuse ritual calendar that allowed the smaller villages and barrios, *calpulli*, to hold their festivities consecutively. This micro-regional strategy allowed, as it does even today, every village the possibility of holding their own celebrations and market so that everyone else from neighbouring communities is able to attend.

### 2.4.1 *Micro-Regional Strategies in the Dance of the Chinelos*

A second example of a cultural practice which is carried out as singular event, yet it is included in the framework of a plurality of similar events, is that of the ‘Jumping Chinelos’ (‘El Salto del Chinelo’). This dance is held in three different villages in the northern region of the state of Morelos, each with very marked contrasts in costumes, choreography, parades, and the gender participation and social diversity of its performers. The dance was invented, according to informants, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the village of Tlayacapan. The dancers created a new mask, white with a pointed black beard, which, as they explain, represents the Spaniards. The original Tlayacapan Chinelo costume was a simple white gown embroidered with blue lace, and the headdress included, initially, vases of flowers and later faces and symbols, all embroidered with beads.

Several years later, in the same Tlahuica<sup>6</sup> micro-region, cultural practitioners in the neighbouring village of Tepoztlán also took up the Chinelo dance, and made it quite famous by including it in their annual town festival honouring *Ce Acatl Tepiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, a Meso-American historic and mythical figure, on 8 September. These practitioners say they made the costume ‘more elegant’ by using black velvet for the gown with colourful borders added, by embroidering more elaborate scenes in the headdress, and by wearing black, very pointed shoes. “Why?”, I asked. “Because here we are different” (“Porque aquí somos diferentes”) was the answer. Thus, while borrowing the Dance from Tlayacapan, they introduced ‘marks of contrast’ to create a cultural boundary.

The cultural practitioners of Yautepec went even further in establishing a contrast when they took up the Dance of the Chinelos. They readily accept that they also borrowed the general idea of the Dance and the costume from Tlayacapan, but they explain why they introduced many changes both in the costume of the Chinelo and in the way it is performed in Yautepec. The members of the

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Tlahuica’ is the name given in some historic sources to the Nahuatl peoples of the northern part of the state of Morelos in some historic sources and has been used recently to establish a contrast between speakers of the Nahuatl language in the state of Morelos and those of the adjoining states of Mexico and of Puebla. Again, this is an example of the use of contrast to create a tenuous cultural boundary that reinforces a micro-regional identity.



'Cultural Group' organized to promote the Dance explained that the village of Yautepec was famous in pre-Hispanic Meso-America for its production of highly-valued textiles which were given as tribute to the Mexica (Aztec) Empire. So they decided to honour this tradition by introducing highly-skilled embroideries of pre-Hispanic historical scenes in the Chinelo gown and headdress.

Also in contrast to the other two villages, they inserted the Chinelo Dance into their Carnival festivities in the month of February along with various other parades. The fiesta starts with a Widow's Parade or the Parade against Bad Humour. It is a humorous parade of men dressed as women, who carry the dead husband, the Bad Humour, in a coffin that is then thrown into the river. The best-dressed and best-looking of them then participate in a beauty pageant. Although people in the town quickly explain that all these men are actually married, there is evidence that in Meso-American and North American pre-Columbian traditions homosexuals had an accepted role in society so it is highly probable that they also participated in festive parades. Many European Carnivals, though, also include what have been termed 'inversion' scenes or characters that exhibit out-of-the-norm ways of behaving.

In the recent initiative by a group of local people to establish a Museum of the Chinelo, they found evidence that women had been very active in creating the parade in Yautepec in 1935. This participation has continued, since women dress up as Chinelos for the parade. A few elderly women interviewed explained that they had been 'dancing' in the parade for more than forty years. This is in contrast to the festivities in Tlayacapan and Tepoztlan, where only men participate as Chinelos. Again, a mark of contrast.

Yautepec cultural practitioners recently innovated by holding a Chinelo children's parade in the morning on the day before the Carnival. "If they don't learn and then love it, then they won't participate in the parade later on." As it happens, at present, the main parade is also filled with young people. Some dress as Chinelos, but interestingly, creating their own generational marks of contrast, they participate in groups that practice the Capoeira, the Brazilian martial dance, Senegalese drum dances—a group in the region actually went to Senegal to refine their techniques—, and the Arab belly-dance. This aspect is very significant since it shows that, while people in Yautepec want to claim their own identity among the different Chinelo celebrations, they are very open to the participation by local practitioners of the cultural dances of other countries.

It is worth summarizing here the overlay of cultural traditions that went into creating the singular event of the Chinelo Dance in Yautepec. It may be called its 'cultural stratigraphy'. Firstly, as mentioned, Yautepecans borrowed the idea and costume of the Chinelo Dance from Yautepec, with additions from Tepoztlan which they also kept, thereby adhering to a micro-regional tradition of *plurality*. Secondly, they innovated by adding original applications of embroidered Meso-American depictions to the Chinelo costume, thereby establishing a 'mark of contrast' to highlight its *singularity*. Other marks of contrast are the participation of children and women and a gay parade. Thirdly, they allow the participation of groups of young women and men dancing international cultural traditions: in the

framework of the European Carnival, they have made a cultural collage with African, Brazilian and Middle Eastern influences, thereby affirming that theirs is a *pluricultural* event. In sum, through their innovations to the Chinelo Dance, Yautepecans have both confirmed their belonging to a plural, micro-regional cultural tradition, and to a pluricultural world, while at the same time highlighting their singularity as a town that has a unique historical tradition to offer.

A very different but interesting point that may be raised here is that the scenes that are embroidered on the gowns are depictions taken from the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City and other historical and anthropological sources of intangible cultural heritage. This is clearly a case in which the reconstructions and representations constructed by historians, archaeologists and ethnologists bring back ancient traditions that today cultural practitioners proudly want to acknowledge. This flow of cultural knowledge was made possible because of the cultural policy sustained by the Mexican government throughout the twentieth century. Its main tenet was that culture, in general, is a public good. Hence the cultural policy that led to the building of exemplary museological, ethnographic, popular culture and educational cultural programmes in Mexico which influenced the cultural policies and programmes of other countries as well as the International Convention for the Protection of Cultural Heritage.<sup>7</sup> In recent years the 'right to culture' has been inserted into the Mexican constitution.

### ***2.4.2 The Dance of the Malinches: A Pluricultural Celebration***

A third example may help to clarify the issue of pluriculturality in intangible cultural heritage. This is the totally original event of the 'Danza de las Malinches' of Tlacotepec. Original in the sense that such an event was constructed by schoolteachers in rural villages in the 1930 by amalgamating both the indigenous and the Spanish cultural heritage, while giving it, in Tlacotepec, a very special contrast. The event begins with a performance of the literary 'Dialogue between America and Spain', a beautiful text written by Juan de Dios Peza, a Mexican writer from the end of the nineteenth century.

Two young women, one dressed as a Mexica (Aztec) princess, another as the Queen of Spain, recite this text that describes the beauties and bounties of America and Spain, ending with the reconciliation of both traditions. The Mexica princess is dressed in a satin robe with the national colours, green, white and red, and wears a

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<sup>7</sup> The second UNESCO General Conference was held in 1948 in Mexico, where archaeological, ethnographic and educational cultural programmes were demonstrated. A year later, the Culture Sector of UNESCO was created. Mexican specialists were also very active in UNESCO's work on international conventions to protect cultural and intangible cultural heritage, as well as in other culture programs.

diadem with feathers, resembling the Meso-American headdress, indigenous sandals and arrows in a *carcaj* (quiver: container for arrows).

Then, the most ebullient part of the pageant unfolds. Four or five little girls dress up as '*inditas*'—an affectionate term for little Indian girls—, with a reinvented costume that mixes local and regional indigenous elements: '*ixtle*' woven sandals ('*cacles*' in Nahuatl), black woollen wrap-around skirts, and Mexican ribbons and necklaces. While dancing, they sing a song which was originally meant to be in Nahuatl, the indigenous language which is still spoken in the region, but whose words can no longer be recognized as such. In the final scene, indigenous baskets, '*chiquihuites*' (also Nahuatl), are brought on stage. This creates a great stir and expectancy in the audience, as the girls begin to throw out savoury tamales, a Mexican bread made of maize that people, especially young people and children, catch in the air with great joy.

The pluriculturality of this event has both visible and implicit references to different cultures. The art of declaiming and speaking 'beautifully' was a highly developed activity in the Mexica empire and most of Meso-America. It is even attested to in the pre-Hispanic Codices by the inverted comma that signals public speech and by the appreciation for 'flowery singing or speaking', '*flor y canto*' ('in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl*' in Nahuatl). At the same time, public recitation was a much appreciated activity in Spanish culture, as was rhetoric. The colours, symbols and dress of the young women and girls reflect a representation of Spanish culture or of Mexica and contemporary indigenous cultures.

As the aim of the literary text of the Dialogue of America and Spain is precisely the reconciliation of both sides of the Mexican identity, the composition and performance of the event goes beyond the images, to underlying cultural meanings. The mark of contrast introduced by the people of Tlacotepec, since a similar kind of event also takes place in other communities of the micro-region, is the throwing of tamales to the public. This is a gesture of generosity and of sharing which is at the core of indigenous cultures in Mexico.

### 2.4.3 Conclusion

As a conclusion to this brief explanation of three types of practices of intangible cultural heritage, I would point out that the classificatory grid for intangible cultural heritage events must take into account these three dimensions: firstly, the singularity of an event, marked deliberately for contrast in the framework of a plurality of similar practices; secondly, the pluriculturality of the event must be signalled, simply stating the major cultural influences that it has received from other cultures; and, thirdly, attention must be given to micro-regional strategies that also allow communities to integrate into a single, ritual calendar which holds together their conception of time, unity and belonging.

Developing operational criteria to understand the reassembling of symbolic, social and political undercurrents is very important for the inclusion of cultural

practices in the Lists of the International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. It will also help in giving recognition to other groups having the same kinds of practices, and acknowledging histories of pluriculturality.

There have already been many conflicting claims about specific practices of intangible cultural heritage being presented for the Lists, which are becoming ever more complex as they begin to be couched in terms of intellectual property, a term that is still controversial. This issue becomes even more complicated when it is linked to the administrative and political scale of representation of such events.

## 2.5 Multiscalar Representations in Intangible Cultural Heritage

If one were to ask, which of the Chinelo Dances of Tlayacapan, Tepoztlan and Yautepec is the “authentic” one, it would be difficult to answer. To unfold the intricate narrative of the Yautepec Chinelo Dance, one would have to delve into the various criteria to be taken into account: who invented it? Did they actually authorize other copies of their Chinelo Dance? Who agreed to hold it in other villages? How were innovations introduced in the other two towns? All these questions of who and how, it must be said, would be considered totally absurd by local people. Why, because culture flows. For them the borrowing or offering is part of the natural order of things.

This is how intangible cultural heritage is perceived among most indigenous, autochthonous and local townspeople around the world. Hence the difficulties in pinning down types of cultural practices and especially their attributes. It would facilitate this task, however, if cultural performances were analysed as processes in which, at different times, events were highlighted because they are singular, plural or pluricultural; this would allow programmed activities to keep the natural flow that all intangible cultural practices have.

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