

FROM CHURCH TO PYRAMID: NEO-INDIANISM AND THE CHANGING ETHOS OF THE CONCHEROS DANCE

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Abstract: Sometime after coming to Mexico City in the early twentieth century, the Concheros gradually became involved in the growing cultural interest in the Aztec past. By the last decades, however, they found themselves in an antagonistic situation with those dancers who called themselves the Mexica who, although they performed the same dances, espoused *mexicanidad* a strong neo-nationalistic and neo-indianist ideology. The Mexica reject Spanish colonialism and have discarded the clearly Catholic ritual practices of the Concheros who habitually dance outside Churches: the Mexica's preference is for pyramids. The article, using historical and fieldwork data, examines the growing use of archaeological sites as they have slowly been refurbished, focusing on two: Teotihuacan and Cholula. Importantly, in the last two decades, a gradual rapprochement between the Concheros and the Mexica has occurred as the overall ethos of the dance has been changing once again.

Keywords: Dance; Pyramid; Mexicanidad; Concheros; Heritage; Neo-indianist

Introduction¹

Humans do not make their history 'just as they please'; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past (Marx quoted by Hamann, 1992: 367)

Groups of dancers, who frequently call themselves Concheros, convene on a number of specific occasions throughout the year at various locations, most of which are outside Catholic churches to perform a ritualized circle dance. Predominantly, such dancers see themselves as Catholics. However, increasingly today groups have

formed who call themselves Mexica who are followers of an ideology known as mexicanidad: they reject all aspects of those practices that can be seen to be linked to Catholicism. They aim to perform, if possible, at archaeological sites and I shall be focusing on two—Teotihuacan and Cholula. The choice of place is but one of the many changes that have affected the ethos of the dance during the course of the twentieth century.

‘Ethos’ as a term was brought to social anthropology by Bateson (1936). Defined as “the prevalent tone or sentiment of a people or community” by the SOED (1974), it concerns the “feel” or “sprit” of inculcated values that are linked to practices—to a culture on whatever scale. As change occurs, traditions “grow hand in hand with the ethos”. A tradition that is alive retains its connections with a persisting ethos. Choice as to which new practices to accept is guided “both by tradition and by the ethos of the group” (Bateson, 1936: 121). A particular ethos is thus linked to the emotive and expressive aspect of a particular “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977). Ethos can thus be defined in terms of the habitus; the practices performed by persons are “structured” by the habitus, which in their turn “structure” the habitus which exhibits a certain ethos. The predominant habitus of the dancers can then perhaps be said to be neo-indianism or indianity. ‘Indianness’ has recently become the accepted term to apply to some of the practices of those who are not strictly indigenous—that is pure autochthones—but who claim indigenous roots and are intent on recreating indigenous practices. In the Aztec region of Mexico, it manifests in a desire to go back to an indigenous pre-Hispanic past but the ‘indianity’ of the Concheros is very different from that of the Mexica.

Can the Mexica be said to be neo-pagans? The term ‘neo-paganism’ can be a useful analytical tool that has gained increasing currency in the last few decades as Christianity (for example) has declined and many are turning to other forms of religiosity. In Europe at least ‘paganism’ has tended to have pejorative connotations, denoting the religious beliefs of rural, largely pre-literate people: that is of folk religion. The Aztecs in Mexico certainly had a religion which would undoubtedly have been seen as ‘pagan’ by the conquering Spaniards as they enforced Catholicism. The Aztecs were however an urban people with a highly developed society and religiosity. It may not have been, in Redfield’s terminology, strictly

a ‘great tradition’ which encompasses many cultures like Catholicism or Buddhism but certainly could not be classified as a ‘little tradition’ (Redfield, 1956). In that sense the Mexica are not just neo-pagans: I thus prefer to refer to the dancers as neo-indians as their practices encompass many more aspects of their lives than just the religious. This category can be used too, to encapsulate both the Concheros and the Mexica, as I focus on the changing location and ethos of what has constituted “indianity” for them both during the twentieth century.

The concheros

I begin by looking briefly at the organization of the Concheros before examining their origins which are significant for the subsequent changes in their ethos. A group or *mesa* consists of a leader, the *jefe*, and a *sahumadora* who controls the incense burner both usually positioned in the centre of the circle during a dance. To assist in its execution various incumbents are a prerequisite such as the *alferez* or standard bearer: for each *mesa* exhibits a banner giving details of its name and origins. The dance is accompanied at certain times by songs, *alabanzas*, sung to music played on the *concha*, a stringed instrument that gives them their name. A dance obligation usually begins in a ritualized way in the morning, with a break to eat in the middle of the day and ends just before sunset. Important in maintaining the ethos of the dance is the terminology used. The *palabras* who are chosen for each dance, aim to aid dancers to achieve “union, conformity and conquest” (*unión, conformidad y conquista*). *Palabra* is also used to apply to those *mesas* that are in “conformity” with each other and belong to the same larger segment of the organization (such as the *palabra* of Santiago Tlatelolco). Before some dances an all-night vigil (*velación*) is held, at which during its course, a flower form is ritually laid out on the floor accompanied by music, singing and prayers. At dawn it is disassembled and the flower heads deployed to cleanse those present. Thereafter the attendees will rest briefly and if a dance is scheduled dress-up and go out for that.

The five most important dances that any adept must not miss take place at La Villa, Los Remedios, Chalma and Amecameca—locations all close to Mexico City. The last occurs at the centre, Tlatelolco and is dedicated to Santiago who is said to be the courier of the four winds

(referring to the other locations). All are sites of Catholic significance with churches that have been built over or near to Pre-Colombian edifices.

From myth to history

According to their foundation myth, the Concheros' dance began in the area of Mexico known as the Bajío where in 1531, some 10 years after Cortes had defeated the Aztecs, a battle was fought against the Chichimeca by the Spaniards—many of whose troops were indigenous Otomi converts. The Chichimeca were predominantly hunters and gatherers and were difficult to trounce. The battle is said to have taken place on a hill called Sangremal—situated in what is today the city of Queretero. During it, a shining cross appeared in the sky with Santiago on a horse. The Chichimecas were so astounded that they converted to Christianity and demanded that an initial wooden cross be made around which they danced.

But what form did these dances take? The Aztecs certainly danced and depictions of their dancing in various codices have come down to us from soon after the Spanish conquest. Dance and song were inextricably intertwined and were an important aspect of most social relations. As Pedro de Gante commented, “[a]ll their worship of their gods consisted of singing and dancing in front of them” (Alberro, 1998: 123). Little can be known however about the steps enacted or the precise nature of the rhythms beaten out on the drums that accompanied them. Although more is known about the cities, circle dances must have existed too in country towns: a form that was clearly not brought to the New World by the Spaniards.

What the Spaniards did bring was the dance of the Moors and Christians which with time became known as the dance of the Christians in contra to the Chichimeca (Warman, 1972). It thus seems likely that these would have been the dances that the Chichimeca performed after their conversion by the Franciscans who drew them into confraternities which were charged with organising the Catholic fiestas.



Figure 1: A dance of Aztec nobles, Tovar Codex, 1585.

Source: courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, USA.

However, pre-Colombian forms of dance undoubtedly continued although attempts to extirpate them were made. As Sahagun noted in 1576, “secretly and at night they perform[ed dances] in honour of their idols” (Bierhorst, 1985: 527). But undoubtedly other dances spread too such as hispanized forms of circle dances known generically as *mitotes* but accompanied now by an instrument of Spanish origin, the stringed *Concha* made from the shell of a local animal, the armadillo. As the church gradually lost its hold over confraternities, many became private associations or secret societies (Taylor, 2012: 315). Moedano (1984: 6) likens the dances of a Chichimeca organisation in the early 1800s to those of the *Concheros*.

The Aztec past

But how interested were the residents of New Spain in the Aztec past? Torquemada as early as 1615 had drawn an analogy between the Aztecs, and the Greeks and Romans (Phelan, 1960: 761). During the second part of the 18th century, restrictions were placed on publications that praised the Aztec past for fear of provoking religious doubts and attacks against Spanish domination (Bernal, 1980: 102). In the following century however, museums began to be established where found artefacts could be displayed such as the Aztec Calendar stone (or sun stone) which had been unearthed as early as the 1790s (López Luján, 2006: 78).

Teotihuacan and the emergence of Neo-aztecism

The Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, known today as Mexico City had predominantly been built over: but Teotihuacan some sixty kilometres away had not. Although it had been abandoned and partially destroyed in A.D.750 parts were still standing. Explorations had begun as early as 1675 and were followed in 1767, by those of Clavijero, who was also the first to introduce the notion of neo-Aztecism (Phelan, *op. cit.*; Moragas & Sarabia, 2008). But predominantly, the sites of those pre-Hispanic cities that had not been built over continued to fall into disrepair. When pre-Colombian objects appeared in the course of agricultural activities, they were either destroyed or sold on to those who would be interested.²

During the late nineteenth century, during the presidency of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1911) interest in the Aztec past was largely emblematic. For example, it provided a source of symbols for the buildings designed for the Paris World Fair in 1889 in Aztec style (Tenorio, 1996). But full archaeological explorations had also begun. The first known use of Teotihuacan for an event dates from 1910, when the pyramid of the Sun having been fully restored and was deployed to celebrate the centennial of the Mexican War of Independence (1810) (Moragas & Sarabia, *op. cit.*).

During that period too, the Catholic Church had been able regenerate itself again after being curtailed in 1855 when much of its property was expropriated and dances which had had links with the church were forced to be performed in secret. Uncertain, however, is when the dance now known as that of the Concheros first came to Mexico City. There may well have been several *mesas* that came at

roughly the same time but the generally accepted date is 1876 when Jesus Gutierrez “came conquering from the Bajío” where the dance had been well established for some time and assumed the position of Captain General de las Danzas de Tenochtitlan³ (Stone, 1975: 209; Fernández & Mendoza, 1940).

The last years of the Porfiriato were a nationalistic period, a time of great social change; migrants from many regions were flooding into a rapidly expanding Mexico City in search of a better life. Many brought their rural practices with them and this included the practices of their confraternities and their various dances. The name Conchero probably originated at this time; dances having previously been called “Apache”, or “Chichimeca”, the later tending to indicate that they had originated in the Bajío (de la Peña, 1999: 56-57). Others were known as “danzas de conquista” and this appellation persists for some to this day (Jáuregui & Bonfiglioli, 1996: 207-227).

Neo-Aztecism and the concheros dance in Mexico City

After the 1910-20 Revolution, the interest in the Aztec past became more sophisticated. An Aztec zeitgeist was in the ascendant, and that past was to be utilized as the foundation for Mexico as a nation. It was a time of optimism: a period that Monsivais has called “cultural nationalism” (Lavalle, 2002: 45). At Christmas in 1930, for example, the President Pascual Ortiz Rubio decreed that the deity Quetzalcóatl would replace the Three Kings (and Father Christmas) at a ceremony on a pyramid especially constructed in the National Stadium (Díaz Maya, 2019).

Throughout that decade those aspects of indigenous cultures that were part of the plastic arts were being brought into the national culture. Ballets and operas were being written with Aztec themes. By the mid-1930s a programme of folkdances, *Danzas Auténticas Mexicanas* had been organised sponsored by the wife of the then President, Lázaro Cárdenas. This included Conchero dances (but performed by professionals). Currently called *The Ballet Folklórico*, it continues to this day. The elite gave Aztec names to their children or assumed them themselves and Aztecism had filtered down too into everyday life: There were depictions on calendars of Aztec warriors with dying maidens in

their arms. Organizations adopted Aztec logos or names and clubs, bars and restaurants followed suite.



Figure 2: The pyramid with “representations” of “Aztecs, priestesses, tehuanas and other indigenous people.” Dances were performed and gifts were given to the children of the poor (Díaz Maya, 2017). Source: El Universal.

Some of the *mesas* of *gente humilde* (that is the less well educated many of whom may have been of recent indigenous descent) became involved in the Aztec trend and began to introduce neo-Aztec traits. The group of *La Gran Tenochtitlan*, claimed that they danced for Tonantzin⁴ rather than the Virgen of Guadalupe at La Villa; at Chalma for Huitzilopochtli⁵ rather than San Miguel and that their headdresses were like those of Cuauhtémoc⁶ (Solórzano & Guerrero, 1941). But at that time, the dancers of this *mesa* were still clad in costumes that covered their whole bodies which had clear Catholic connotations and which had originated in and come from the Bajío.

Aztec clothing is more minimal and its introduction was an important marker of the changing ethos of the dance. The *jefe*, Manuel Pineda is said to have been inspired by the murals of Aztecs by Diego Rivera in Cuernavaca, and introduced his dancers to this more minimal style. It consisted of a loin cloth, pectoral and/or a cloak, although dancing with a bare chest was not initially well received by the Church (Stone, 1975; De la Torre, 2007: 164-165, 168). Pineda also introduced Aztec drums into the dance—the Huehuetl and Teponaztle (Gonzalez Torres, 2005). Thereafter other *jefes* followed suite and in particular Felipe Aranda and Andres Segura. By 1979, the latter had founded a *mesa*

known as *Danzas Aztecas Xinachtli* and began to “conquer” in the USA: forming groups in Austin Texas and elsewhere predominantly amongst Chicanos (Poveda, 1981). These *jefes* also provided a bridge between the Catholic religiosity of the predominantly conservative Concheros and a new neo-nationalistic ideology that was gaining ground.



Figure 3: Dancers at Los Remedios during a break in the dance and wearing Aztec style costumes: A mesa of *gente humilde* with probably scarce resources judging by the simplicity of their headdresses (1989). Source: Susanna Rostas.

The growth of the neo-nationalism and neo-Aztecism

Many fledgling associations were pushing neo-nationalist and neo-Aztec ideas, such as the “Indigenous Confederation of Mexico.” However, the most influential organization was the later *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anáhuac*, the MCRA, which was not founded until 1955 (Odena Güemes, 1984; Friedlander, 1975).⁷ Its initiator was Rodolfo Nieva, a lawyer who worked in the offices of the Federal District in Mexico City. Its members were predominantly professionals and from the upper middle classes. Nieva claimed Aztec ancestry and glorified the Aztec

past. He proposed that Náhuatl should replace Spanish as the *lingua franca*.⁸ In 1967, he formed a political party, *El Partido de la Mexicanidad* but died before he could be elected. After his death ‘culture’ was added to the movement’s acronym (MCRCA) and his sister known as Izkalotzin became responsible for the more performative side of its activities. In the 1990s, for example, she was still teaching Náhuatl and arranging ad-hoc Aztec style weddings for aspiring young men who were of more humble origins.⁹

Mexikayotl and the emergence of mexicanidad

The MCRCA published both a journal, *Izkálotl* and a book, *Mexikayotl* (1969). *Mexikayotl*, as an ideology was both anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic. It excoriated Mexicans for their sense of inferiority urging them to return to the “*raza pura*” that had been sullied by miscegenation with the *gauchupines* (Spaniards). A syncretic view of Mexican history was presented: all pre-Hispanic cultures had undergone Nahua influences and most of the western world had also learnt from the Nahuas: for example, they had taught the Egyptians how to build pyramids. *Mexikayotl* argued that the Catholic religion, religions in general and beliefs in supernatural entities were superfluous and suggested that the cosmos had been created by natural forces: Teotl or Omoteotl then is not the supreme (Aztec) deity but rather the essence of the cosmos. From this it follows that there are no anthropomorphic deities: rather Huitzilopochtli was a type of energy with Tonantzin representing the power of the earth. Finally, Cuauhtémoc as the culture hero was given particular significance and it was prophesized that he would return at the time of the sixth sun.¹⁰

Photocopies of *Mexikayotl* circulated widely amongst adepts in the late 80s and early 90s as the movement, known today as Mexicanidad grew. An aggressive form of it was spread by Tlakaelel¹¹ whose *kalpulli* was called Koakalco.¹² Rather different was that of the intellectual, Antonio Velasco Piña who was also involved with various Eastern and esoteric traditions (such as Buddhism, Hinduism and the Hermetic tradition). He propounded a form of nationalistic spiritual extremism which predicted that in the very near future Mexico would become the leading chakra of the spiritual world as that moved westwards from Tibet. Regina (1987), the title of one of his many published books led

to the formation of a new movement known as the Reginas. Its dancers wear red head bands (*izcoahuecatl*) and enact a form of dance known as *Citlalmina* that combines Tibetan dances with those of the Concheros. They are cosmopolitan, global and decidedly New Age.¹³

By the 1990s, other more accessible publications had begun to appear such as *El Mitote*, *Tlamatini* and a professionally produced journal, *Ce-Acatl*. The latter, calling itself the journal of Anáhuac culture, aimed to redeem the culture of “nuestros antepasados” (*Ce-Acatl*, 1991: no 1:3).¹⁴ It reported on and advertised the activities of those involved in *mexicanidad*. Mexica *kalpultin* in general offered a range of Aztec classes: on the Náhuatl language, on Nahua philosophy, mathematics, calendars and astronomy, on cosmic vision, on song and poetry, on the making of autochthonous musical instruments, and enacted various ceremonies and rituals including curative baths (*temazcal*) and importantly dance (*chitontequiza*). One offered guided tours once a month to archaeological sites (*Ce-Acatl*, 1992 no 23:31-32). The Kalpulli Movimiento del Sexto Sol, for example, offered classes on calendars, cosmic vision, and astronomy, and in addition, guided tours once a month to archaeological sites presumably not for ceremonies or to dance as the idea that the dance could or should occur at such sites was still only incipient (*Ce-Acatl*, 1992 no 23:31-32).

Importantly, Mexica *kalpulli* in general offer a range of Aztec classes from Náhuatl language, mathematics and philosophy, to Nahua song and poetry, the making of autochthonous musical instruments, to various ceremonies and rituals including curative baths (*temasca*) and dance (*chitontquiza*): but importantly, the Mexica’s dances have in fact been adopted and adapted from those dances performed by the Concheros.

The concheros and mexicanidad

I want to return now briefly to the Concheros. Until recently the Concheros had an oral tradition and much of their history was celebrated in their songs. Aside from the mandatory dances, each *mesa* has its own programme of dances (some linked to vigils) which take place in locations that are particular to its history. There are too other events which are political as much as religious such as the celebrations for Cuauhtémoc which have been occurring since the 1950s (de la Torre, 2007: 157).

Although, as already indicated, certain Conchero *mesas* had by mid-century taken on some Aztec features; at their core most of their practices still had strong Catholic elements. They danced to achieve transcendence—to become god-like. Another of their leitmotifs is *El es Dios* (literally—he is God) which appears on their banners, is enunciated before a dance begins, at frequent intervals during it and also, at all-night vigils.

During the dance it is important that each female dancer places herself between two men and that each enacts the dance steps in as disciplined way, as possible, such that no one dancer disrupts the others. The dance is performed not to be looked at (although it often draws an audience) but rather each dancer is aiming to still his or her inner voices, and thereby to ‘conquer’ the self so as to be in touch with the deity and if the dance is being performed by invitation to make a ‘conquest’ of that location.

For the Concheros much was and still is based on taken for granted assumptions: they tend not to make assertions of belief. Their religiosity can be said to be incorporated into and to emerge from their practices, which are said to have been “bequeathed to them by their ancestors”: by the *animas conquistadoras* (the spirits of former members of the *mesa* and the association in general). Their political concerns (if such they can be called) are primarily about stability and succession. Although the organization of a *mesa* is apparently hierarchical—with names such as General (for a high up *jefe*), Captain and Sergeant (having been adopted from organized armed groups in the Bajío)—these are titles based on know-how rather than coercion. And finally, they are inclusive rather than exclusive.

Initially, the followers of *mexicanidad* took a political stance and although they found it difficult to accept the pluralism and religiosity of the Concheros, joined a number of *mesas* and danced with them as they began to form their own *kalpultin*. Each *kalpulli* tended to an extent to have its own ideology but their ideas about the non-material realm were clearly based on those propounded in Mexikayotl. They danced to get in touch with, or recreate the various energies of those entities that have been “falsely” called deities. To begin with they had little interest in achieving ‘union’ and ‘conformity’ and were more interested in external ‘conquest’—they tended to dance individualistically, faster and often in

a more aggressive, flamboyant and exaggerated way and, initially there were few women in their groups (as they found it difficult to keep up). The Mexica eliminated many of the Concheros' practices. They do not play the *concha* which is clearly of Spanish origin but rather deploy Aztec style drums to accompany their dancing; do not sing *alabanzas* as many have Catholic elements (and often indicate a history of the dance that is not Aztec, i.e. not Mexico City centric); nor did they hold all night vigils (at least initially)—as these too were considered to be Catholic. The dance for them rather than being the means to achieve transcendence, was and still is for many a form of spectacle that produces an endorphin high, which in the breaks between sets of dances provides the opportunity to proselytize about their movement. Dance was and is (as already indicated) just one part of a larger project. Finally, they often tend to consider themselves to be more indigenous than the country's indigenes.

Neo-concheros and neo-mexicanidad

During the last three decades, however, the two distinct types of dancers have begun to converge: many Mexica have softened their attitude, while quite a few Conchero *mesas* which had already begun to show an interest in the Aztec past, became increasingly open to the ideas of mexicanidad. The organization of the Concheros' rituals—such as their vigils—have become both more ritualized but also more performative (Rostas, 2009). In country districts (in Guanajuato for example) during vigils procedures were often carried out in a fairly relaxed way, while in Mexico City, Concheros on the whole followed a fixed pattern of ritualization. The Mexica's influence has added many more intricacies and these minutiae often appear to be performative flourishes.¹⁵ They have given Náhuatl names to the dances—La Guadalupana becoming known as Tonantzin, El Cojito becoming Tezcatlipoca: names that are increasingly used too by Conchero *mesas*. Some of the Concheros' *sahumadoras* have become known as *malinches*.¹⁶ During vigils, many Concheros no longer lay out their flower forms as a (Christian) cross with no predetermined plan but instead follow a preconceived design consisting of Aztec symbols and in particular the Nahui Ollin, a kind of cross on its side representing the four movements (which is also the insignia of the MCRCA). This symbol, amongst other representations of energy, is also deployed by Mexica *kalpultin* for some now hold vigils. Their

forms consist not just of flowers but also fruits and other objects—rather similar to the offerings that most Mexican families assemble on their altar for the Day of the Dead. Moreover, if constructed outdoors at the centre of the dance circle, can include images. Their *Kapultin* also now include many women. The rigorous sumptuary code that in the 1990s mandated that their costumes should only be made from natural materials that would have been available at the time of the Aztecs has loosened with time: many dancers now dress as they wish to or can. They accompany their singing with drums and other (wind) instruments, not *conchas*; their songs, rather than being *alabanzas*, are predominantly rhythmical chants some of U.S. indigenous origin translated into Spanish, or more usually Náhuatl. As their formation is very recent, they have as yet few *animas* of their own to call up during a vigil so enlist Cuauhtémoc or the various instigators of mexicanidad.

The Mexica and Pyramids

But where do the Mexica dance? They tend to dance in a wide variety of places (often by invitation) just as do the Concheros although locations outside Roman Catholic churches imbued with Christianity will frequently be eschewed unless they are close to an archaeological site.¹⁷ Within Mexico City itself they dance at locations such as the Zocalo beside the Templo Mayor (Tenochtitlan) and the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (at Tlatelolco); and outside the city at the pyramids at Teotihuacan, Xochicalco and Cholula—none of which were Aztec pyramids per se. And even further afield at Chichén Itza (for example), a Mayan site well over a thousand kilometres away. They dance at such sites partly because both Conchero *mesas* and Mexica *kalpultin* are to be found today in many parts of Mexico and often invite other groups to come and dance with them—but this is also linked to the previously mentioned belief that many other Mexican cultures were influenced by the Nahuas.

The use of the Zocalo in Mexico City is a fairly recent innovation. In 1978, for example, the *kalpulli* Mazatl was strongly discouraged by the authorities and so danced outside the museum of Anthropology: but by 1989, the Zocalo had been “taken” (de la Peña Martínez, 1999: 16, 25).¹⁸ Since then, it has attracted a number of groups on a regular daily basis. This also includes the *chimaleros*, dancers who aim to be seen

by tourists and to collect monetary contributions.¹⁹ Also convened are annual celebrations of a more political nature (which some Conchero *mesas* also attend), such as *Día de la Raza*, renamed the ‘Day of Dignity and Resistance of the Indian’ and, on the ‘Day for the Heroic Defence of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.’ Importantly, on May 3rd a celebration is held known as *Día de la mexicanidad* which coincides with Nieva’s birthday when all *kalpultin* should attend. Other possibilities of places to dance are the Cerro de la Estrella in Iztapalapa and Mixcoac both archaeological sites.

Teotihuacan

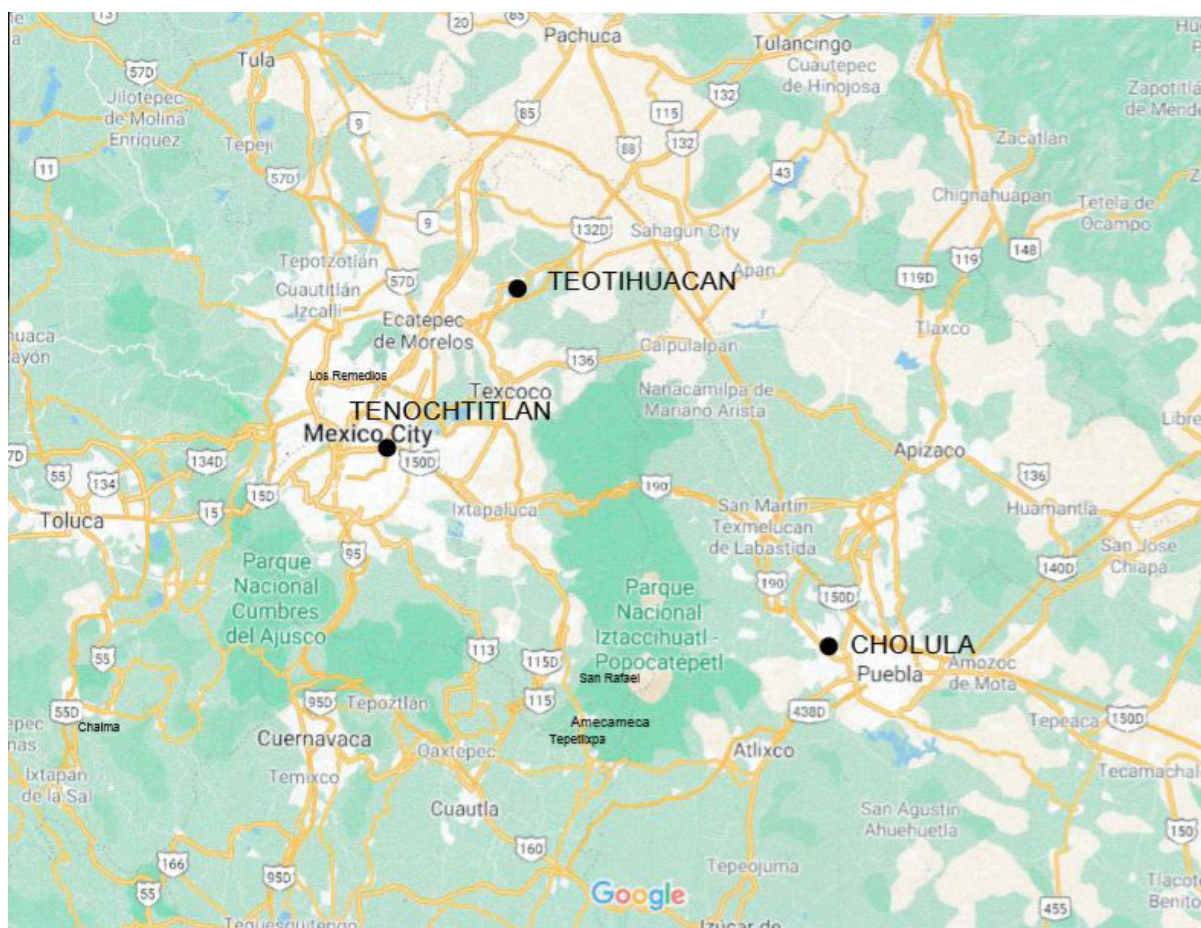
The most important site however is Teotihuacan. As indicated earlier, the city had already been abandoned by the time of the Aztecs, but it was still considered of great significance. Its layout was copied for the then new city of Tenochtitlan and objects such as stone masks and ceramics from there have been found in excavations of the Templo Mayor (in Mexico City). According to Sahagún ceremonies were performed every twenty days at Teotihuacan for it was believed that it was from there that the fifth sun had risen (Hamann, 1992: 356; McCafferty, 2000: 344). And the Aztecs had proceeded “metaphorically” to take “ownership of this Sun, for whose continuance their sacrifices and offerings were responsible” (Carrasco et al., 2000: 13).

Serious archaeological work began in 1917 under Manuel Gamio who was also interested in the then current indigenous population of the area. By 1929, he was encouraging the use of archaeological sites for tourism and promoted Teotihuacan in particular as a way of “visualizing the phases of civilization that humanity has gone through hundreds of centuries ago until the present day” (Díaz-Andreu, 2013: 228).

It also attracted members of the Supreme Order and the Great Universal Brotherhood who claimed that they had been coming to Teotihuacan for years, the latter to initiate the “cosmic year” ruled by Mars which signifies strength and positive creativity.²⁰

As its material conditions improved, Teotihuacan increasingly began to be used for other celebrations and in 1968 the Olympic flame was received there. Until the late 1980s, a light show was staged which was a spectacle which attracted many tourists, but which displeased some archaeologists. The central theme of the show was the fifth sun, the sun of movement and of the Nahui Ollin, although this sun was soon

to be replaced (Villalobos, 2013). During the 1990s, a new show was in preparation—“Resplandor Teotihuacano”—which was to occur twice a night. But it was abandoned, as it was in violation of national and international requirements for the conservation and use of archaeological sites, but by 2016, a less intrusive version of the show—“Experiencia Nocturno” opened.²¹



Map 1: Central Mexico – showing Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), Teotihuacan and Cholula.
Source: Google Maps.

But Teotihuacan also became a place for *mesas* or *kalpultin* to dance and this was closely linked to the emergence of the New Age tendency and Velasco Piña whom I mentioned earlier. In 1989, Velasco Piña had brought the Dalai Lama to Mexico City and established the Casa Tibet-Mexico which drew a large number of adherents and: he took groups of Reginas to Teotihuacan to open the energy channels of the neighbouring volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl.



Figure 4: A Mexica kalpulli at Teotihuacan.

Source: Roger Blench.

In 1991, on the 21st March (the equinox) some 500,000 people went to Teotihuacan at dawn for a ceremony to unify the “four races”, accompanied by the leaders of mexicanidad.

There were dancers, many meditating with upheld arms, thousands dressed in white lying on their backs, young people lighting incense and copal to the rhythm of music on a cassette by Jorge Reyes and a large queue of people waiting to ascend the pyramid...to receive energy from its summit (Mejia Madrid, 1993, my translation).

The throng consisted of those who were part of Casa Tibet-Mexico, Hindus and people from other religions and other parts of the world. The practise continues and dances for both the equinoxes and the solstices are held there every year.

However, in 1992, some Mexica manifested xenophobic tendencies which caused considerable concern. A group of Tibetan llamas and their followers were allowed into the ruins before dawn for an “oriental style ritual”, but were routed by a group of Mexica who entered later with the general public.²² They claimed that the site was effectively theirs and pointed out that it was inconceivable that they would go to a mosque or a monastery to carry out an Aztec-Chichimec ceremony: thereby living

up to the unflattering designations they had received of being “fanatics”, “charlatans” and “Aztec imbeciles” (Anzaldo Meneses, 1990: 1; 1993: 12).²³

Many groups danced there during that decade: Santo Niño de Atocha for example danced at Teotihuacan in 1990 to celebrate the fifth Sun and for the subsequent five years to celebrate the spring equinoxes. But worried by the damage being done to the ruins and the lack of respect shown went in 1996 to celebrate at the pyramid of Cuicuilco, located in the parque ecológico Peña Pobre. However, as the pyramids at Teotihuacan are considered by many to be a source of universal energy, other multi-ethnic events have been and still are held there.²⁴

The use of archaeological sites by the Concheros and the Mexica is thus a fairly recent innovation, instigated by the influence of Antonio Velasco Piña but also by others involved in the esoteric and to the so-called celebrations for the 500 years discovery of the Americas when awareness of Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past was at an all-time its highest level.

Cholula²⁵

The conchero *mesa* of Santo Niño de Atocha usually goes to Los Remedios (at Naucalpan in the State of Mexico) in September for one of the principal vigils and dances linked to the equinox. However, in 1989 some of the dancers decided to go to Cholula (in the State of Puebla). First an all-night vigil was held for the Virgin in the church followed by a dance outside on the following day.

After the demise of Teotihuacan, Cholula became “the primary religious centre of central Mexico... the Rome of Anáhuac” (McCafferty, 2000: 359). The church which appears to have been built on a hill is in reality on the top of a pyramid which had been abandoned as early as the eighth century. The initial structure is thought to have been built some two thousand years ago and to have been enlarged six times in volume: it is in fact the largest pyramid in the world. At the time of the Aztecs there were hundreds of other places of worship in the city, all of which were destroyed by the Spaniards but they mistook the mound (known as Tlachihualtēpetl) for a natural hill.



Figure 5: The pyramid at Cholula with the church of Los Remedios at its summit and with drums readied for the winter solstice dance.

Source: L.A. Arenas Fernandez.

As it has attracted less archaeological attention than Teotihuacan, serious excavations only began recently and the pyramid is still predominantly covered with grass. Tunnels were dug into its centre in the 1930s to try to assess the various stages of its expansion while other areas such as the Patio de los Altares (figure 5) have been carefully excavated. The vigil in the church had been organized by the *mesa* from Amecameca who also invited Tepetlixpa and Saint Ramon—all places just over the border in the State of Mexico. Dancers from Santo Niño de Atocha were included as part of the strong alliances between these groups. There were representative dancers from other Mexico City groups too—such as that of Felipe Aranda—but also, some from Puebla.

Since then, several *Kapultin* in Cholula itself have formed who dance either on the periphery of the pyramid but only occasionally actually within the fenced-in space of the ruins which is now a site for which the public must pay an entry fee.²⁶ Every day there are dancers in the Parque Soria, an extension of the site devoted to tourism, where they take turns to perform with the *Voladores* from Papantla.²⁷ Dances are held too in the area above the enclosure of the ruins (close to the church). *Kapultin* only rarely dance within the demarcated space. One

occasion is the vigil and dance held for the winter solstice for which various groups assemble. The groups arrive before dawn—at five in the morning—gaining access by special arrangement. They bring with them all they will need for the day—food, water, musical instruments, flowers and standards.

Generally, it is the female captain from San Bernadino Tlaxcalancingo whose *kalpulli* is charged with this obligation. Songs are sung as the sun rises mostly in Náhuatl (*cantos guerreros* – warrior songs) some based on native American ones. Ideally the men should wear only a red head band (*Ixcualmecatli*)²⁸ and loin cloth (*maztlaj*), despite the cold.²⁹ In the area known as the Patio de los Altares the groups (both *Kapultin* and sometimes *mesas* too) assemble an altar consisting of a large circle of flowers usually of four colours (one for each of the four directions) laid out on the ground with a large image of Huitzilopochtli (as the sun) in the centre.

Subsequently after some sustenance and the appointment of *palabras* to lead the various aspects of the obligation, the dancers dress for the dance. After the fourth, they stop to enact the so-called run of Huitzilopochtli: whoever wins will be in charge of the standard for the coming year. By this time the public have arrived on the site and are either just looking and/or involved in taking photos, some may be trying to copy the dance but will make way for the run. Later on, the dancers may stop again briefly for a naming ceremony (*la siembra de nombres*): the taking on by a dancer of a Náhuatl name.

This obligation usually takes place on a Sunday when access to the ruins is free and draws a large crowd. Many of the public come dressed in white to meditate some with medieval swords, who lift their arms up to the sun to receive its energy. Others who would usually be in the Parque Soria will also be present to offer cleansings (*limpias*) or simply to take photos of, or with the visitors.

Getting permission to hold an obligation within the ruins is currently difficult. Permission has to be solicited months in advance from the INAH both in Mexico City and locally.³⁰ The group from Tlaxcalancingo have good relations with the administration but an archeo-astronomer and ‘metaphysical maestro’, Ángel Farpón, has recently apparently been denied such authorization. It seems that Farpón had in the past tried to join the dancers and sometimes encircled them but this was not

acceptable. Farpón does however hold a special event on the pyramid for the spring equinox. Taking a fibre—glass copy of a stone dedicated to Quetzalcoatl—the original of which sits at the base—he ascends the steps to the top of the most heavily reconstructed part of the pyramid. There, with the aid of his followers and with his white clad assistants, whom in 2016 included some Mexica dancers, he holds a New-Age ceremony and meditation.³¹ He performs similar ceremonies each month at other archaeological sites (Velazquez Valdes, 2011: 101).



Figure 6: The dance for the winter solstice.

Source: L.A. Arenas Fernandez.

Many dancers are grateful to dance on the day when there is no admission charge as some have no secure source of income. Most *mesas* and *kalpultin* receive invitations to dance on occasions that are not related to their annual calendar and will then be offered a form of monetary reimbursement. Known as ‘co-operation,’ this is not seen as pay but as a way of covering the expenses for say transport or providing for new feathers for their *copilli* (headdresses). As Arenas Fernandez has shown, many are in fact dependent on this co-operation as a source of

income but which on occasions when they are not actually inside the ruins can be added to by other means (Arenas Fernández, 2018, 2019).

Why archaeological sites?

For the Mexica who reject the effects of the Spanish invasion on their country and the Catholic religion, the most appropriate spaces in which to dance are in those places that instantiate the pre-Hispanic past. The clearest option is the pyramids which are part of most archaeological sites. As ritual can be seen to create links between man and the cosmos, these locations are thus seen not as archaeological ruins but as ceremonial centres, places that are *milieux de memoires*—with a difference—having suffered centuries of disuse (Nora, 1996). The pyramids are considered to be animated, and to energize in a special way those who hold ceremonies or rituals on or in them. This energy would have been felt by the ancestors and is to be found only in certain locations which determined where the pyramids were to be constructed. For as Carrasco has noted for Cholula, “[t]he... pyramid was believed to be the opening to celestial forces as well as the covering over [of] the primordial waters of the underworld” (McCafferty, 2000: 344). The pyramid at Cholula was indeed built over a spring whose source was only uncovered comparatively recently (Ibid., 342-343).³² There is also a belief that certain stones have ‘doors’ or ‘portals’ into the other world—such as the stone dedicated to Quetzalcoatl at Cholula or fissures in the rocks in the community of Amatlán near Tepoztlán in Morelos.³³

At their summits, pyramids are related to the upper-cosmos: to the celestial sphere. Many were constructed in such a way that the sun rose or set at the solstices or the equinoxes behind them. Diego Duran mentions that in Cholula petitioners went to pray to the Lord of Created Things, Tonacatecuhtli—that is the sun—when at the summer solstice, it sets behind the pyramid and the mountains of Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl (McCafferty, 2000: 343).

The Mexica tend to be drawn to those archaeological sites that have been extensively excavated often with large rebuilt areas. A site that has barely been excavated would not be appropriate as it would not offer surfaces large or flat enough on which to dance nor offer easy opportunities to sell handicrafts to visiting tourists: often an important aspect of the Mexica’s choice of location.

Heritage

As the pyramid of Cholula is essentially within the town, it has become a site for tourist entertainment and indeed both Teotihuacan and Cholula have become part of the heritage industry. The Mexica have to an extent been drawn into this process of “heritagisation” as it has been labelled by some which “offer[s].. a field of seduction”, and “a promise of recovery of an allegedly lost world,” often involving a myth of origins while legitimising the use of power (Del Mármol et al., 2014: 3-4).

In 2001, Cholula gained the sobriquet of becoming a *pueblo mágico*—one of 132 towns chosen for this ‘honour’ by the Federal Government. The programme aims to boost local economies and to develop tourism by emphasising authenticity whether by means of say, local food served in restaurants or by so-called indigenous dances such as those of the Mexica presented as show.

Cholula is divided between two municipal councils. San Pedro is supportive of the dancers who are permitted to dance in the central Zocalo (for example) where they act as a tourist attraction. The other municipality of San Andres includes the pyramid and organizes a spectacle of Music and Dance to Quetzalcóatl during the spring equinox. Occurring mostly at night, it consists of staged groups playing music and various kinds of dancers. But mexicanidad receives especial emphasis: during the opening ceremony a number of Mexica dance in the presence of the mayor. In 2012, the event culminated with a pre-Hispanic spectacle staged by dancers from the local university.³⁴ A further heritage moved in 2017 was the establishment of the twinning between Cholula—the City of Quetzalcóatl—and Teotihuacan—the City of the Gods for which a ceremony was staged in the Patio de Altares aiming to preserve and recuperate, create and disseminate intercultural and touristic ties in both municipalities.

Conclusion

Many of the Mexica dancers at Cholula claim that they are the “guardians of the tradition.” But as this paper will have demonstrated this is not a tradition that has been continuous but an “invented” or a reinvented one, of comparatively recent innovation (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). In Mexico City, the Conchero’s lineages are deeper and

in Guanajuato especially there are *mesas* that can trace their roots back to the 16th century (Santamaria Hernandez 2014). As I have already indicated one of the Concheros' frequent enunciations is that the habitus of the dance is a constant: that the dances never change as they have been inherited from the ancestors and the latter's spirits (*animas*) oversee and even comment on the practices.³⁵ Change does of course occur sometimes imperceptibly as a tradition adapts to its current circumstances; sometimes more consciously as a new habitus with an enticing ideology manifests itself such as mexicanidad. Much has changed in the last few decades, but it seems likely that there is a sufficient degree of similarity between the dances performed a century ago—at the very least—and those enacted today for a claim of continuity to be “good to think with” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). But if the underlying forms of the dances have predominantly endured unaltered, the actual manner of their enactment has changed: for as executed by the Mexica the dances have become faster, more aggressive, more flamboyant and sometimes more complex.

As I have discussed in this article, a clear disjunction became apparent in the organization of the dance in the middle of the twentieth century as the Mexica emerged. A strong initial distinction could be made between the Concheros, some of whom had taken on certain Aztec traits and the Mexica, the latter rejecting most of the practices of the former. But in the last few decades the major differences in the habitus between the two types of dancers has diminished as each has become more amenable to and inclined to adopt some of the practices of the other: the Mexica have become increasingly spiritual, the Concheros keener to take on Aztec features.

In Cholula the Mexica do now hold vigils and build flower forms to honour the sun as Huitzilopochtli (rather than a Christian saint) which in the heady days of the early 1990s would have been inconceivable. But the hours for their vigils are somewhat constrained: Conchero *mesas* can hold vigils in churches from dusk to dawn by prior arrangement but the Mexica cannot be in the ruins all night as these have yet to be perceived by the authorities as living ritual centres. The habitus of the various *mesas* and *kupultin* is changing once again but the difference in the locations of the dance—church or pyramid—still remains

However, the Catholic Church has accepted non-Christian practices in its churches over the centuries, especially in those indigenous areas at some distance from Mexico City, such as Chiapas. But there are now signs that it is perhaps prepared to accept the indianization or neo-paganism of some of its practices at its centre. For example, in 2014, the padre in Santa Ana Tlacotenco, Milpa Alta (in the State of Mexico) had a pyramid constructed in the courtyard of his church. It is small—probably no more than two metres in height but built of stone and with various carved glyphs. At the top of its steps a fountain spouts water from a head of *Quezalcoatl*. For its inauguration the padre donned a sumptuous feather headdress, and on Sundays holds mass in *Náhuatl* (which is not his native language) (Whittaker, 2016, 2018: 55). But his pyramid is not totally an indianist edifice for it is also an altar to Catholicism crowned as it is by an image of Juan Diego, *Cuauhtlatoatzin* kneeling to the Virgin of Guadalupe. He was the indigenous man who it is claimed saw the Virgin in a vision and was canonized in 2002. The apparition in 1531 was the initial step that enabled *Tonantzin* to be seen as the Virgin of Guadalupe thus creating an enduring link between indigenous and Catholic religiosity.

While the church itself is apparently built over a pre-Hispanic temple, its outside space may not yet be a place to dance although in the community there are some Aztec dancers. Were excavations to be carried out in a large number of Mexican churches, it might be possible to reveal the foundations of the pre-Christian edifices over which they had been built: a practice which is common in other countries.³⁶ This may be a sign of what is to come—a melding of the places where the dance will occur—not church or pyramid but church and pyramid although not all will have had tetragonal pyramids, the physical form that has become iconic of the ‘pagan’ past in the popular imagination.

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Notes

¹ For the section on Cholula, I am deeply indebted to Luis Acatzin Arenas Fernández who before he gained a master's degree in social anthropology, danced with various groups in his home town of Cholula. He has shared his written work with me (Arenas Fernández, 2018, 2019, 2020) and also added extra notes: any errors in that section of the paper are mine and mine alone.

² This process still continues as Dansac (2013) has pointed out for the twentieth century at a site in Jalisco that was only excavated in 1999. Until then finds were often sold to increase household income.

³ Note that the Aztec name for Mexico City is being used here although it is said that his standard stated that they performed “Danza Chichimeca de Mexico” (Moedano, 1984: 4).

⁴ Tonantzin – Our mother linked to the power of the earth.

⁵ Huitzilopochtli — the supreme deity, the sun but also god of war.

⁶ Cuauhtémoc — the last tlatoani (emperor) whom the Spaniards defeated

⁷ Anahuac meaning ‘close to water’ in Náhuatl, was the name given to the basin of Mexico but also to the whole of New Spain (which often includes the southern United States too).

⁸ It has been claimed that Náhuatl or Uto-Aztecan was the stem-language spoken not just in Central Mexico and the Southern United states but in the northern United States and South America as well (Rostas, 2002: 30).

⁹ Important too in the 1970s was Zemanahuac Tlamachtilyan founded by Kuauhkoatl (Miguel Angel Mendoza) who with the MRCA was behind the finding of the so-called tomb of Cuauhtémoc located in the village of Ixcateopan in Morelos. Cuauhtémoc was said to have left behind an ‘insignia’ as Tenochtitlan capitulated. In a spectacular ‘discovery’ in 1949 his supposed bones were unearthed in Ixcateopan (Gonzalez Torre, 2005: 165; de la Peña Martínez, 1999: 278 - 280).

¹⁰ The fifth sun, the sun of movement and of the Nahui Ollin was said to be replaced by the sixth sometime between dates for this cosmic event vary from 1988 - 2000. See de la Peña Martínez, 2012.

¹¹ Issue 23 (Jan- Feb 1992). *Kalpulli* (pl. *kapultin*) was an Aztecs term for a small self-governing political entity which was autonomous and self-sufficient (Carrasco, 1994: 165-288).

¹² Tlaekalel introduced the Sioux Lakota sun dance into its repertoire which is rather different from the Concheros’ sun dance: involving four days of fasting and a form of bloodletting (bloodletting (de la Peña Martínez, 1999: 149; González Torres & Acevedo Martínez, 2000.) < <https://kalpullichaplin.com/tlakbio2014.pdf> > (accessed 06/12/20)

¹³ For more on the New Age and mexicanidad see de la Torre, 2008; de la Torre; Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2011; de la Peña Martínez, 2012.

¹⁴ Published until issue 103, it had by then become more interested in indigenous communities. Currently it has a Facebook page: < <https://www.facebook.com/ceacatl.ac> > (accessed 08/12/20)

¹⁵ For a discussion about ritualization versus performativity see Rostas 2009, Chapter 4.

¹⁶ Malinche is the name of the woman given to Hernan Cortes who is believed to have betrayed her people.

¹⁷ They do dance occasionally inside churches (as do the Concheros) but the Mexica will ensure that their dance is imbued with “prehispanic energy” (Arenas Fernández personal communication)

¹⁸ ‘Taken’ in the sense that although dancing had not been permitted there for some time Xoconochtle (of the kalpultin Mazakoatl and Tolteckayotli) was able to re-establish the practice (de la Peña Martínez, 1995: 16).

¹⁹ From the Film “El es Dios” made in 1965, it is clear that when hard pressed dancers (even jefes) asked for contributions.

²⁰ For more on the early use of Teotihuacan for ritual purposes by members of occult or esoteric groups see De la Torre & Gutierrez this volume.

²¹ < <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2008/12/24/index.php?section=cultura&article=a03n1cul> > (accessed Dec 14th 2020). See also Galván González, Luis Adolfo, ‘Resplandor Teotihuacano’: Proyecto turístico comercial.

< <https://www.proceso.com.mx/cultura/2016/3/19/inauguran-espectaculo-de-luces-en-teotihuacan-experiencia-nocturna-161216.html> >.

²² The disruption was caused by the CNCN. (the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Náhuatl. (La Jornada 1992, Domingo 22 March: 16).

²³ The emergence of the Mexica had elicited strong antipathy – members of the MCRA were described as “cultural extremists” (de la Peña Martínez, 1999: 16), and the organization as a “cultural farce” (Anzaldo Meneses, 1990: 1).

²⁴ Every four years for example since 1992, a festival known as “the eagle and the condor” has been celebrated uniting Native Americans representatives from Patagonia to Alaska (Johnson, 2013: 137).

²⁵ See footnote 1

²⁶ They dance in archaeological sites when possible or in their environs, but they also perform elsewhere in the City and sometimes in more natural locations

²⁷ Papantla is located in the State of Veracruz. For more details see: < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danza_de_los_Voladores > (accessed Jan 6th 2021).

²⁸ But known as an ‘izcoahuecatl’ by the Reginas.

²⁹ See < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jC9kQUcIXcA> > but with the accompaniment added afterwards.

³⁰ Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia. It is essential that adherents prove that they will not consume alcoholic drinks, enter into commercial negotiations, cause problems or do damage to the site.

³¹ For the equinox of 2016, see: < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=i-MpGTsCbyw> >.

³² Tunnels at Teotihuacan which represented access to the underworld were also only unearthed some decades ago.

³³ Kalpulli Huehuecoyotl a community established by Alberto Ruiz and a place often visited by Antonio Velasco Piña.

³⁴ This is not the first time that the dance has been incorporated into spectacle. The *jefe* Manuel Pineda travelled with his group to Europe in 1957 and in shows that were pure spectacle, re-enacted dances which were very 'Aztecized' and so difficult that they necessitated especially trained dancers (de la Torre, 2007: 169)

³⁵ This is especially the case during vigils when it is claimed that the ancestors can communicate via the candle flames.

³⁶ See for example Italy: < <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199369041.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199369041-e-28> >.

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*Del templo a la pirámide:
el neo-indianismo y la evolución del ethos de la danza de los concheros*

Resumen: Poco después de llegar a la Ciudad de México a principios del siglo XX, los concheros se involucraron gradualmente en el creciente interés cultural por el pasado azteca. Sin embargo, en las últimas décadas se encontraron en una situación antagónica con los danzantes de la mexicanidad o mexicas que, aunque interpretaban las mismas danzas, defendían una fuerte ideología neo-nacionalista y neo-indio. Los mexicas rechazan el colonialismo español y han descartado las prácticas rituales claramente católicas de los concheros, que se llevan a cabo en los atrios de los templos; mientras que los mexicas son partidarios de las pirámides. Con base de datos históricos y de trabajo de campo, este artículo examina la práctica danzante en el creciente uso de los yacimientos arqueológicos centrándose en dos de ellos: Teotihuacán y Cholula. Es importante destacar que en las dos últimas décadas se ha producido un acercamiento gradual entre los concheros y los mexicas ya que el *ethos* general ha vuelto a cambiar.

Palabras clave: Danza; Pirámide; Mexicanidad; Concheros; Patrimonio; Neo-indianismo

*Da igreja à pirâmide:
o neo-indianismo e a mudança de ethos da dança dos concheros*

Resumo: Algum tempo depois de terem chegado à Cidade do México no início do século XX, os Concheros envolveram-se gradualmente no crescente interesse cultural pelo passado asteca. Nas últimas décadas, porém, encontraram-se em uma situação antagônica com dançarinos que, embora executassem as mesmas danças, abraçaram uma forte ideologia neo-nacionalista e neo-indio - a mexicanidad. Os mexicas rejeitam o colonialismo espanhol e descartaram as práticas rituais claramente católicas dos Concheros, que dançam habitualmente fora das Igrejas. A preferência dos mexica se volta às pirâmides. O artigo examina, utilizando dados históricos e de trabalho de campo, o uso crescente de sítios arqueológicos, uma vez que esses foram lentamente renovados, concentrando-se em dois: Teotihuacan e Cholula. É importante ressaltar que, nas últimas duas décadas, uma aproximação gradual entre os Concheros e os Mexica tem ocorrido e o *ethos* global tem se transformado uma vez mais.

Palavras-chave: Dança; Pirâmide; Mexicanidad; Concheros; Patrimônio; Neo-indianismo