

Chapter 2

Arbitrating Collective Dreams: Anthropology and the New Worlding

2.1 Introduction

From his earliest ethnographic research in Tikopia, Raymond Firth was interested in process, that is, in adjustments made within the framework of social structure.¹ One of his major contributions to anthropology, in fact, was to distinguish social structure and social organization. He observed, for example, that people in Tikopia would behave differently towards collateral and agnatic relatives while using the same kinship term to speak about them. At the London School of Economics and Political Science, where I first met Professor Raymond Firth, although he no longer lectured at the time I was there, I learned that in ethnography the starting point was to identify social structure while trying to re-introduce process through various methods. This could be done, for example, through situational analysis, or through Max Gluckman's dictum of "closed systems, open minds". Another aspect of Firth's work also interested me: his participation as a signatory of the *Second Humanist Manifesto*. I will comment on both these aspects in my discussion.

Several decades later however, in today's runaway world, social structures have rapidly become elusive as global trends chip away at traditional institutions and open paths towards warp-speed transformations. In my own research, I remember I always ran into this difficulty, mainly because I was always dealing with processes: the migration of indigenous peoples, the transformation of women's roles, the social perception of environmental change, the challenges of development and redistribution, the setting up of guidelines for international cultural policy and, in recent years, with the reconfiguring of intangible cultural heritage. I remember how surprised I was at finding that very homogeneous groups had, in fact, a great diversity of norms, some of them conflictive, and how these could be juggled so as

¹ This paper was delivered as the 'Raymond Firth Lecture' of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom (ASA), at the International Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held at the University of Manchester, Manchester, 10–16 August 2013. Unpublished.

to apply them to diverse settings. Then, I became fascinated by how the most tumultuous and conflictive debates could be suddenly compressed into precisely worded resolutions and world reports that achieved consensus. I was able to see this from the inside as I became what I have called a ‘decision-making participant’ when in the United Nations World Commission on Culture and Development and as Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO. Similarly, in my recent anthropological research I wanted to see how cultural practitioners of intangible cultural heritage manifestations reconfigure their practices and move on to new organizational and ritual grounds.

In this chapter I will refer to the core mechanism of such processes as ‘social arbitration’ and I would like to explore this concept as a tool that could be very useful at present for anthropology. Culture has been called a ‘site of contestation’ and for many years I have been referring to it as a ‘site of negotiation’. Now I would like to argue here that culture is, indeed, a ‘site of arbitration’.

Arbitration is defined in the *Webster’s Online Dictionary* as: “The hearing and determination of a cause between parties in controversy, by a person or persons chosen by the parties”.² Thus, while the terms of ‘exchange’, which is central to anthropology, and ‘negotiation’, so often used, for example, in policy anthropology, open up rounds of reciprocity which may be endless, the concept of arbitration focuses on a specific point in debates where a decision must be taken that leads to the resolution of the dispute and steps may be taken, hopefully, to a way forward.

Such arbitration, it seems to me, is particularly relevant to build the new ‘worlding’ to encompass our evolving humanity and emerging worlds in our contemporary times. I use this term ‘worlding’ with reference to postcolonial studies, in which authors such as Spivak (1987) have spoken of the way in which colonialism created a history and anthropology of the world for the ‘peoples without history’, as Eric Wolf would have said. However, ‘worlding’ as ‘mondialisation’, in the sense proposed by Philip Descola, is a broader concept which takes into account the way different societies have conceived of the relationship between human beings, animals and plants, as well as their location within the constructed natural environment. This, I believe, will be the new foundation on which to build a new narrative about the world.

In historical terms, the narrative that anthropology has used to describe the world has been primarily based on the concept of culture. However, “...the notion of culture as a massive system of classification which forms a grid for cognition”, as Maurice Bloch has recently defined it (Bloch 2012: 165), has already been challenged by anthropologists for several decades. In fact, in my own international experience I was very surprised to find that at the same moment that anthropologists wanted to throw out the concept of culture, let alone that of ‘civilization’, the political world took up these terms and instrumentalized them in policy applications. I have written on this in previously.

² Webster’s Online Dictionary, available at: <<http://machaut.uchicago.edu/?action=search&resource=Webster%27s&word=Arbitration&quicksearch=on>> (accessed 20 April 2014).

At present, I agree with Bloch (who was one of the best teachers I have ever had) when he suggests that active internal debate and the continuous debate between people engaged in a social exchange of inferences are the most interesting aspects for anthropology. Having said that, I would add that the traditional terms of ‘exchange’ and ‘negotiation’ have limited use as analytical terms in understanding how cultural practitioners and organizations actually **move** to new arenas in their thoughts and actions. I believe that something else is going on which anthropology should take up. This is the mechanism of social arbitration.

In this chapter I will take up three examples to explore this mechanism. Firstly, Raymond Firth’s participation in the *Second Humanist Manifesto* published in 1973.³ Secondly, my own participation as a member and supervisor of the writing of the Report *Our Creative Diversity* by the United Nations World Commission on Culture and Development (UNESCO 1996). Lastly, I will present the ethnographic data delivered by the cultural practitioners of the Aztec Dance of Central Mexico, to show how the ‘Captains’ of the dance take decisions for their group as they go along, in the context of rapidly changing social and political conditions in the regions in which they perform their ritual dance. In all three examples, it seems to me that leaders and participants have actually been ‘arbitrating’ collective dreams. They are doing so as they try to give social meaning and social organization to new rapidly emerging processes. In a sense, in all three cases, even though the procedures are carried out at different levels of magnitude, the international and the local, the same search is present, the attempt to synchronize ideas, performances, actions and performance, both to influence and to fit into the new worlding.

2.2 Arbitrating International Visions: The Humanist Manifesto II

Raymond Firth was one of the original signatories of the *Second Humanist Manifesto* published in 1973 (see footnote 3). At that time, allow me to say, I was a student at LSE, and having attended some of Firth’s informal talks, since he was no longer teaching there, I actually signed the Manifesto, together with many of my classmates.

The *Second Humanist Manifesto* was published in *The Humanist* of September–October 1973. It was signed by scientists and writers such as Francis Crick, H. J. Eysenck, Julian Huxley and Margaret Knight from the UK, as well as Isaac Asimov, Betty Friedan, Irving Horowitz, B. F. Skinner, Andrei Sakharov and Jean-François Revel. It asked for a more ‘hardheaded and realistic approach’ in its seventeen-point statement, which was much longer and more elaborate than the *First Humanist Manifesto*. It was ‘a statement reaching for vision in a time that

³ Humanist Manifesto II, at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanist_Manifesto_II> (accessed 13 July 2013).

needs direction' (see footnote 3). Importantly for us anthropologists, the Manifesto was a social analysis in an effort at consensus. Similarly to the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, it was 'a design for a secular society on a planetary scale'.

Many of the proposals in the document such as opposition to racism and weapons of mass destruction and support of strong human rights are now part of the international policy discourse, and its prescriptions that divorce and birth control become legal are now a reality in a majority of countries. However, various controversial stances were also strongly supported, notably the right to abortion, in addition to its rejection of religion. One of the oft-quoted lines of this manifesto is, "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves" (see footnote 3). This surely applies today to the urgency of achieving sustainability.

Interestingly, in its twelfth point, the Manifesto looked towards "the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government. This would appreciate cultural pluralism and diversity. It would not exclude pride in national origins and accomplishments nor the handling of regional problems on a regional basis. Human progress, however, can no longer be achieved by focusing on one section of the world, Western or Eastern, developed or underdeveloped. For the first time in human history, no part of humankind can be isolated from any other. Each person's future is in some way linked to all. We thus reaffirm a commitment to the building of world community, at the same time recognizing that this commits us to some hard choices" (see footnote 3).

With great foresight, the Manifesto emphasized that "the planet earth must be considered a single ecosystem. Ecological damage, resource depletion, and excessive population growth must be checked by international concord". In its fifteenth clause it read "World poverty must cease. Hence extreme disproportions in wealth, income, and economic growth should be reduced on a worldwide basis". It considered technology a vital key to human progress and development, yet cautioned that "We would resist any moves to censor basic scientific research on moral, political, or social grounds. Technology must, however, be carefully judged by the consequences of its use; harmful and destructive changes should be avoided. We are particularly disturbed when technology and bureaucracy control, manipulate, or modify human beings without their consent" (see footnote 3). This was written in 1973.

In closing, the signatories of the Manifesto stated: "We urge that parochial loyalties and inflexible moral and religious ideologies be transcended. We, the undersigned, while not necessarily endorsing every detail of the above, pledge our general support to Humanist Manifesto II for the future of humankind. These affirmations are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing faith" (see footnote 3).

Importantly for the topic of this chapter, the signatories indicated that not all of them endorsed every detail of the *Second Humanist Manifesto*. That is, they were arbitrating between competing ideologies and goals, not to create a new final credo or dogma, but to engage in a living and evolving process—one which, in my view, has more to do with arbitration, that is, deciding which ideas and goals are discarded, which are left in the margins, and which ones are highlighted.

It is worth mentioning, very briefly, how this blueprint for the world contrasts with the Millennium Development Goals which we have been hotly but subtly debating at the United Nations. In assessing the previous Millennium Development Goals, we at the Committee on Development Policy of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations have argued that the very practical focus of the previous goals, i.e. focusing narrowly on poverty, potable water, maternal mortality—a goal which, incidentally could have been easily achieved yet where there has been little progress—or education, among others, had left out broader yet vital goals.⁴ These, we argued, should emphasize inclusive growth, promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption, developing open and accountable institutions, and forging global partnerships. In this international arena, arbitration is based on geopolitical considerations that go through countless rounds of lobbying and political negotiation until a consensus is reached. Using Maurice Bloch's terms, what is interesting in such negotiations is that one is continuously 'reading the minds' of diplomats and politicians as they waver in their decisions according to constantly shifting agreements, disagreements and alliances. Actors are constantly rereading the intentions and words in discourses and then arbitrating decisions in order to obtain the best possible outcome in resolutions and policy actions.

2.3 Harvesting Culture Around the World: The World Commission on Culture and Development

A second example of arbitration at the international level is the Report *Our Creative Diversity* produced by the World Commission on Culture and Development. As explained in a previous publication (Arizpe 2004), the concept of culture began to be coupled with the term 'development' in the fifties and became a political emblem for decolonizing and developing countries in the sixties and seventies. The 1982 Intergovernmental Conference on Culture and Development, *Mondiacult*, gave a broader, more anthropological definition of culture for policy initiatives. In 1987 the Group of 77, a coalition of developing countries, was successful in having the General Assembly of the United Nations set up a 'Decade for Cultural Development', with UNESCO as the lead agency. This programme fell into my hands when I arrived at UNESCO in 1994 as Assistant Director-General for Culture. The general opinion of this Decade was that it had dissipated itself into hundreds of folklore and art events and music festivals but had not generated new guidelines for international policies linking culture and development. To fill this gap, the World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) was established (1992–1995). This independent Commission was chaired by former Secretary-General of the United Nations Javier Pérez de Cuellar, and included among its forty members four Nobel laureates and three

⁴ UN MDG, at: <http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2013).

anthropologists: Claude Levi-Strauss, Tchie Nakane and me. In 1994, as I had already accepted the invitation to be Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, I was asked to be in charge of the Secretariat that wrote the Commission's Report. In November 1995 the Commission presented its report *Our Creative Diversity* at the General Conference, where there were delegations from 182 countries. Let me very quickly go through the Commission's perspective.

The first key message is that development embraces not only access to goods and services, but also the opportunity to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued way of living together in society. Culture, for its part, cannot be reduced—as is generally the case—to a subsidiary position as a mere promoter of economic growth. Its role is not to be the servant of material ends but the social basis of the ends themselves. In other words, culture is both a means to material progress, and the end of development seen as the flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as a whole.

The second key idea is that issues of development cannot be divorced from questions of ethics. Views about employment, social policy, the distribution of income and wealth, people's participation, gender inequalities, the environment and much else are inevitably based on ethical values. The Commission also saw that the intense cultural interaction caused by globalization can be a source of conflict, just as it simultaneously opens new spaces for cultural exchange, borrowing, and lending. People position themselves in these spaces by turning to the most immediate, familiar, collectively shared instrument at hand that they can mobilize: *inherited culture*.

At the head of its concerns, then, the Commission placed the notion of a *global ethics* that needs to emerge from a worldwide quest for shared values that can bring people and cultures together rather than drive them apart. It then explored the challenges of *cultural pluralism*, reaffirming a commitment to fostering coexistence in diversity both nationally and internationally. But we added a caveat: *that only cultures that have values of respect for other cultures should be respected*. In other words, intolerance and cultural domination could not be respected under the guise of respecting cultural pluralism.

In other chapters, the Report takes up the challenge of stimulating human *creativity* and the world *media* scene. The Commission also addressed the cultural paradoxes of *gender*, as development transforms the relationships between men and women and globalization impacts both positively and negatively on women's rights. It looked at the growing importance of *cultural heritage* as a social and economic resource and built on the groundwork laid by the Brundtland Commission to explore the complex relationship between cultural diversity and biodiversity, between cultural values and environmental sustainability.

The path forward proposed by the Commission, then, was to create new systems of cultural allegiances in the setting of civic communities. The Commission viewed culture as “the foundation spring of remembrance and identity, as the major source of energy for creating new senses of belonging as well as new ways of living together...” (UNESCO 1996).

Within the Commission, as in the *Second Humanist Manifesto*, there was, of course, dissension. I would say a World Commission is the site of a great battle, and of great arbitration. In such a setting, the skill of diplomats such as Javier Pérez de Cuellar in reading the Commissioners' minds and then forcefully taking a decision is a crucial element of the success. For example, some members of the Commission wanted the Report to focus primarily on a commitment to cultural pluralism, but many of us opposed this view and insisted that the broader commonalities among peoples should be addressed. It was just at that time that Samuel Huntington was publishing several articles as well as his book on *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993, 1996). To counter his view, which has had such a disempowering effect on the West, we decided that the first chapter of the Report should focus on a global ethic and on the commonalities that bind humanity in the search for sustainability.

At this point, I would like to say a few words about the role of an anthropologist in these international debates. Both Tchie Nakane and I, as well as Henryk Ole Magga, the leader of the Sami People of Norway, spent most of our time trying to stop the reification of the concept of culture as set out in the text of the Report. Yet when I became Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO I could understand the difference in using concepts in scientific and in political discourse. The analytic quality, the precision and subtleties an anthropologist introduces into a political document are extremely useful. At the same time, our training in rapidly recognizing patterns in cultural and political relationships is very helpful in managing debates and in lobbying for a useful outcome. At the same time, there are moments when, as a 'decision-making participant', one must give way, as Max Weber would have said, to 'responsibility and efficiency'.

The following example may illustrate this. Every time UNESCO staff (among whom, at that time, I must say there were excellent scientists and intellectuals) wrote a speech for me specifying that there were 6,000 languages in the world, I struck it out and inserted a vague statement that there were 'thousands of languages and variants'. Such vagueness, I soon found out, was totally useless in trying to get government delegates to support a good project to safeguard local peoples' languages. Clearly, the political has to be based on assertions that will convince an audience. Stretching as far as feasible the precision and rigour of scientific discourse whilst still trying to make an impact on a political audience, then, becomes the 'art of the possible' for a social scientist.

Coming back to my argument in this chapter, I would say that the work of the World Commission on Culture and Development is an example of the fine-tuning of arbitration at the highest international level. After nine meetings on all continents, and after more than 200 papers written by scientists, cultural functionaries, artists and activists, there came a moment when a decisive carving out of core ideas was placed on the table. And then it was the various skills of the Commissioners and especially of the Chair of the Commission which led to a minimal consensus in which all of us commissioners won some points but also lost some points. But the purpose of arbitration, as I see it, is to set a fixed point that becomes a referent towards which different positions can then be explicitly stated.

This is the core mechanism that I believe anthropology should look at more carefully, and for which the cognitive sciences now give us more precise tools. To advance farther along this path, we have to change our notion of ‘the ethnographic’.

2.4 The Mind-Reading Anthropologist

‘The path towards seeing the ethnographic as the product of active psychological beings’ is the subtitle in one of the chapters of Maurice Bloch’s book *Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge* (Bloch 2012: 146). Maurice Bloch cites Edmund Leach (who was a student of Raymond Firth) with reference to the dangers of anthropologists considering explicit states as the foundation of cognition. The example he gave was that Australian aborigines could have interpreted the dogma of the virgin birth as evidence that Europeans did not think that a masculine contribution is necessary for the woman to fall pregnant. What we observe from the outside, he goes on to say, “...is merely the outward superficial manifestation of the complex activity of the bodies and minds of naturally existing human beings” (Bloch 2012: 145). We now have the tools to overcome this false realism, as Maurice Bloch calls it, of studying ‘culture’ as an independent self-contained phenomenon, derived from the harmful nature/culture dichotomy.

In a sense, a cultural practice becomes a ‘moment in time’ or, as I like to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, a ‘moment of cultural being’. Viewed through this theoretical lens, the most important aspects of a cultural practice to analyze are the decisions taken by actors that have reconfigured that practice to its present form. Such decisions are a form of arbitration since they open and close possibilities of action.

Explaining such decisions, as an anthropological task, is very complicated. The individual herself, as has been frequently remarked, may not have a conscious view of her decision. We must then, as Maurice Bloch argues, ‘read people’s minds’. I would like to apply this method to the present form of the Aztec Dance, as briefly described in the following pages.

2.5 Reading the Mind of an Aztec Dancer

The ethnographic example I will use to illustrate this proposition is the recently reconstructed ‘Aztec Dance’ in villages of the state of Morelos in Mexico. In carrying out a large project for the safeguarding of what is now called ‘intangible cultural heritage’ in central Mexico, I was struck by the successive reorganization of a neo-indigenous dance, originally called the Conchero Dance, which has now ramified into different organizations and styles of dance, one of which is called the Aztec Dance.

In my own research I literally bumped into a group of Conchero Dancers during my early research on the Mazahua Indian migrants in Mexico. As I was carrying out a household survey I suddenly saw a group of men and women, dressed in purportedly Aztec attire and with magnificent headdresses, walking in single file along the narrow earth boundaries between *milpa* cornfield lands in Dotejiare. Such an apparition, I soon learned, was due to the fact that two of the Mazahua migrants of Dotejiare had become dancers in this group while living in Mexico City and they had now invited the whole troupe to come and dance in their community of origin.

At that time two of my teachers, Guillermo Bonfil and Arturo Warman, had just carried out research into this newly visible Conchero Dance. They filmed a most interesting video which can now be seen on YouTube. After conferring with Guillermo and Arturo, I interpreted this Dance as a new urban phenomenon that was drawing migrants from different ethnic groups who were feeling the loss of the ritual networks they had had in their communities of origin.

So imagine my surprise, so many decades later, when I began to find different variants of this Conchero Dance in another region, Morelos, to the south of Mexico City, not in cities but in rural communities. The cultural practitioners of these different Dances then told me their story. The generic form of Conchero Dance has continuously evolved since the 1950s in synchronicity with the actual livelihoods and ways of life of its dancers, most of whom emigrated from their villages to large cities where they met with other indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and began to reinvent a new kind of dance. Originally called the Dance of the Concheros, with a mythical beginning in the state of Querétaro, most groups of this Dance were living in Mexico City. As social and political settings diversified, so did the motivations, costumes, choreographies, music and verbal discourse of such groups, to such an extent that there are now groups which separately identify themselves as ‘Concheros de Tradición’ (Traditional Concheros), ‘Concheros de Conquista’ (Concheros of Conquest) and ‘Aztecas’ (Aztecs) all over central Mexico. Interestingly, many of these urban migrants then went back to their communities but brought with them this new Dance, which had by now become ‘traditional’.

In the words of Martha Oliveros, Captain General of the Aztec dance in the state of Morelos, the history of the dance is as follows: “there was first the time of ‘Concherismo’ (the Conchero Dance) but very closely related to the Catholic question; then came the ‘Aztequization’ (the Aztec Dance) with the rebel chiefs of the Dance but far from settling on whether you are Conchero and I am Aztec, it has to be understood as a historical-cultural process which we have been taking in, precisely to take into our own hands all the knowledge and greatness of our culture”.⁵

⁵ “Vino una etapa del Concherismo pero apegada muy a la cuestión católica; luego vino la Aztequización con los jefes rebeldes de la danza..., pero lejos de quedarnos en que si tu eres Conchero y yo soy Azteca, hay que entenderlo como ese proceso cultural histórico que hemos tenido que ir tomando todos, precisamente para retomar en nuestras manos todo el conocimiento y grandeza de nuestra cultura”.

The co-evolution of such groups can be analyzed in terms of a constant synchronization of intention and meaning in response to contemporary social and political events. Martha explains this further: “So we are at the Aztequization of the fifties to 1992, more or less, a new process begins for those of us in the dance, and this is ‘nativization’. It is a planetary movement; it is no longer from Mexican to Conchero, to Nahuaca (a follower of the Nahuatl–Aztec–tradition) to ‘Aztequita’.⁶ It goes beyond this...on the thirteenth of March the Mexica (Aztec) year began, but nothing ended and nothing is going to end. We simply have to renovate, and what’s it all about now? About unconditional love, unconditional solidarity, respect for our Earth, Air, for all that is our culture and to feel proud”.⁷

It is also important to note that, since the nineties, one of the most significant changes has been the establishing of groups of Aztec dancers in the United States. Like other such extensions of Mexican intangible heritage groups, for example the Mariachis and the Jaraneros, Aztec Dance groups have been set up by migrants from villages where such dances are performed. Most of them also attract American-born descendants of Mexican and Latino migrants, as well as other Americans. Among other events, one group from San Francisco, comes every year to the May 15 Festival in Chalma, a sanctuary which existed before the arrival of the Europeans.

2.6 The Social Structure of the Mexica Dance

The internal structure follows a strict hierarchical order which has many similarities with ancient indigenous Meso-Americans. Herminio Martínez explains it thus: “In the (Conchero) Dance, everything is set by levels. There is a chief, there is a command, there is a hierarchical organization...as to the ritual, that’s it, the Concheros in the ceremony, all we do is for God, the ‘Giver of Life’,⁸ the one, as many chiefs say, who is father and mother at the same time, God, firstly, or whatever he be called. Then, the honouring is for different images, as in our case for

⁶ Reverential term for Aztec.

⁷ “Quedamos en la Aztequización de los años 50 a 1992, más o menos, y empieza un proceso nuevo para las gentes que estamos en la danza: la Nativización. Es un movimiento planetario, ya no es de mexicano a conchero a nahuaca, a aztequita, eso va mas allá...hoy estamos, el 13 de marzo empezó el año nuevo mexica, pero no se acaba nada, ni se va a acabar. Simplemente nos tenemos que renovar, ¿y de que se trata ahora? Del amor incondicional, de la solidaridad incondicional, del respeto a nuestra tierra, al aire, a todo lo que es nuestra cultura y sentimos orgullosos”.

⁸ A literal translation of the concept of God in the ancient Meso-American Nahuatl language.

the Señor de Sacromonte, we do the *festividad*, the ceremony, the sacrifice, this is in second place. Then for the ‘ánimas’ (spirits of the dead), for all the chiefs who died before us and through the years and centuries have left us this tradition”.⁹

The terms used for the hierarchical organization vary from group to group, but the name of the officials all come from military orders: the ‘soldiers’ are allowed to play a musical instrument and to dance and obey instructions; ‘sergeants of mesas (groups)’, organize the followers according to the captain’s orders; ‘field sergeants’ are entrusted with carrying the musical instruments, flower insignias and other artefacts when the group marches out to dance in other venues; ‘alferez’ (an old colonial term which translates as second lieutenant) carry the standard-insignia of the ‘mesa’ (group); ‘colonels’ take on decision-making responsibilities when the ‘captain’ is not present. Women are the ‘sahumadoras’; they perform the function of ‘opening up the four cardinal points’ and the cleansing of the path they are taking and of all artefacts with smoke. For this they use a ‘copal’ burner, which burns an aromatic tree resin; they are led by the ‘Reina Malinche’, the Malinche Queen.

The leader of the group is a Captain, who directs all activities of the group and is responsible for collecting the funds to feed all the dancers and for travel and food along the way. ‘Generals’ have several groups under their charge but when they lose their groups, meaning that people no longer want to dance under their leadership, they become ‘caudillos reales’ (royal caudillo), an old Spanish colonial name for a military or political leader, or ‘cacique general’ (general cacique), again, an old name for indigenous nobles under colonial Spanish law. Significantly, Ernesto said, “you never lose your rank, you may lose your people but they continue to recognize you. You may lose your people if you are a drunkard, a womanizer, a thief, or if you are irresponsible, whatever you like or command, but everyone knows you were a general.” This position, then, is structural, even if the individual transgresses the responsibilities of this position. Again, we find that social organization adapts to specific behaviours but leaves the core structure intact.

The programmatic structure of the all-encompassing Conchero Dance is described as ‘Union, Conformity and Conquest’, a phrase that is written in almost all standard-insignias. However, Ernesto cautions that “...sometimes this phrase is as false as it gets”,¹⁰ and he goes on “Yes, we are united because in the end (of all stories¹¹) we are here” and he pointed to the ground. “Conformity”, he went on, “is

⁹ “La Danza tiene, todo está por niveles. Hay una cabeza, hay un mando, hay una organización jerárquica...en cuanto al culto, así es, los danzantes Concheros, en la ceremonia, todo lo que hacemos es para Dios, para el “Dador de la Vida”, como dicen muchos jefes, el que es padre y madre a la vez, Dios, primeramente o como se le llame. Después, la honra es a las diferentes imágenes, como en nuestro caso, al Señor Sacromonte, es para él la festividad, la ceremonia, el sacrificio, eso en segundo lugar. Luego, en tercer lugar, para las ánimas, las de los jefes que murieron antes que nosotros, que, a lo largo de los años y los siglos, fueron dejando esta tradición”.

¹⁰ “...Unión, Conformidad y Conquista es una frase que traen la mayoría de los estandartes, que a veces es de lo más falso que hay”.

¹¹ ‘A final de cuentas’ is a familiar expression in Spanish meaning ‘at the end of accounts’. I highlight it because of the importance of the word ‘cuentas’, which may be translated into English

because we have to come to an agreement about everything that we do yet we are incapable of stating when we do not agree". Finally, he added "Conquest refers to the conquest of ourselves as a people, as human beings. The first thing we have to conquer is your own body, because you may be tired, in the night-long vigils you want to go to bed, so you are told, no, you came here to dance, not to drink, you came here to the Dance because you put yourself up to it. The moment you put yourself up to it, you are stuck because you have to assent to whatever the chiefs tell you to do"¹².

2.7 Constructing the Self

Taking up the cognitive challenge that Maurice Bloch speaks about, the expression of Aztec dancers as to their intentionality and feelings in dancing opens up a different dimension. Few dancers are able to put into words such feelings as Mariana Xoxotla is able to do. What is the dance about, I asked. Mariana, a dancer of the Concheros de Conquista Dance said: "In itself it is a war of conquest...first you conquer yourself, your strength, your fatigue, the heat, you go along conquering yourself. Then you conquer others, you say to them, here we are. Even if we are 'mesticitos' [endearing term for 'mestizo', a culturally mixed person] and even if we wear jeans every day, and even if we have cell phones, and all that, we're still Mexicans and we are still that indigenous part that gives us sustenance. In many places it is still like that, people don't realize it, but in their heart, in their inner self, they are still maintaining this (indigenous) part. What is happening is that the world today is very overwhelming. The more you lose your identity, the better it is for them, right? So then, it is a war of conquest, you have to conquer yourself, you have to conquer the hearts and minds of those who see you and of yourself".¹³

(Footnote 11 continued)

as 'counts' as in counting peanuts, or 'accounts' as in giving an explanation or an interpretation of an event; but it is also close to the word 'cuentos' which, in masculine form, as opposed to *cuentas* which is feminine, means 'stories'.

¹² "Sí, estamos unidos porque a final de cuentas estamos aquí... Conformidad porque se supone que estamos de acuerdo con todo lo que hacemos aunque tampoco seamos capaces de decir cuando no estemos de acuerdo". "Conquista se refiere a la conquista de nosotros mismos, como seres humanos. Primero conquistas a tu cuerpo porque puedes estar muy cansado. En las noches de vigilia te quieres ir a dormir, pero te dicen que no, que viniste a danzar y no a beber, viniste a la danza porque así lo quisiste. En el momento que lo decides ya te amolaste, porque debes asentir a lo que te dicen los guías".

¹³ "En sí es una guerra de conquista... primero te conquistas a ti mismo, tu fuerza, tu cansancio, el calor. Te vas conquistando, luego conquistas a otro, le dices, aquí estamos. Aunque seamos mesticitos y aunque vistamos de mezclilla todos los días y aunque tengamos celulares y todo, seguimos siendo mexicanos y seguimos siendo esa parte indígena que nos da sustento. En muchos lugares así es, la gente no se da cuenta pero en el corazón, y en el interior, sigue manteniendo esa parte. Lo que pasa es que el mundo es muy avasallador, el mundo actual. Entre más te

In her discourse, two phases are clearly marked. The first refers to how you construct your inner self, by ‘conquering’ your own impulses in response to sustained efforts, to prolonged physical discomfort, to constantly looking after others. Then, once you have constructed yourself, you are able to ‘conquer’ others. To win over their hearts and minds. Importantly, there is a third phase that she also tries to put in words: “In the end, for me, I feel connected to something beyond my own self”.¹⁴

2.8 Why Do They Dance?

When asked why they do the Mexica Dance, Ernesto Solares answers: “At times because the people asked you to do it, but now it is your conscience that demands it of you. We are here because of something, in first place because we like it, even though you spend a lot of money. In second place because we want to, sometimes without too much success, we try to preserve the tradition. We know it is not like it was before but we try to do it. Another question is to make it known, because otherwise, what a laugh, I die and I take all the knowledge with me and that’s it. So, no, one has to evolve and teach the others and now with electronic media, with Facebook and YouTube, now you open sites and you are going to find millions of opinions, all different, and what I say is...let’s create many points of encounter, I think this is best”.¹⁵

2.9 The Dynamics of Social Arbitration

This chapter has dealt with the dynamics of arbitration in the case of an International Commission, and that of the cultural practitioners of the Aztec Dance in central Mexico. The main point I wish to highlight is that, in the endless rounds of

(Footnote 13 continued)

‘desidentifiques’ para ellos es mejor, ¿no? Entonces, pues es una guerra de conquista, tienes que conquistar los corazones, tienes que conquistar la mente de los que te ven y de ti mismo”.

¹⁴ “Al final de cuentas para mí, para mí, es, pues es un goce particular en el sentido de que yo me siento conectada a algo más allá de mi misma”.

¹⁵ “A veces porque la gente te lo pide lo haces, pero ahora ya es tu consciencia la que te lo exige. Estamos aquí por algo. En primer lugar porque nos gusta, aunque te gastas mucho dinero. En segundo lugar, porque queremos, aunque a veces sin mucho éxito, pero queremos preservar la tradición. Sabemos que no es como antes, pero tratamos de hacerlo. Otro punto es para darlo a conocer, porque si no, qué risa, me muero y me llevo todo el conocimiento y se acabó. Pues no, uno tiene que evolucionar y enseñar a otros, y ahora con los medios electrónicos, con Facebook y con YouTube, ahora abres una página web y vas a encontrar millones de opiniones, todas diferentes, y por eso es que yo digo... creemos muchos puntos de encuentro, creo que es lo mejor”.

communication, discussion, negotiation and exchange, arbitration becomes necessary to allow groups to set a reference point to go forward as groups adapt to changing social, political, and environmental conditions.

Explaining arbitration is a task that we can only get at with great difficulty, for reading people's minds is enmeshed in subjectivity. The narrative that Martha Oliveros, the Captain General of the Aztec Dance, has given allows us to reconstruct the actions and reactions, the fission and fusion, the frictions and fractions which, through her arbitration, has kept up the social meaning and the cohesion of the Aztec dancers amidst changing conditions. At the same time, that particular group of Aztec dancers is active within the wider framework of the more general Conchero Dance tradition, which has also undergone a process of arbitration. In this wider framework each individual in different rural communities is free to cross over the thresholds which separate Dance Groups from each other. Yet all of these groups retain a broader historical and ethnographic metonymy with other pre-Hispanic Meso-American indigenous rituals.

Just as practitioners of ritual dances, as in this example, create decision-making structures that allow ritual leaders to arbitrate between the differing interpretations of the Conchero Dance, it seems to me that, in a sense, we anthropologists pursue a similar endeavour. Anthropological tradition creates the intellectual and scientific codes and metonymies that allow us, first, to identify and classify the diversity of cultural practitioners' versions of their own social practices, and then, to arbitrate between them as we construct the best possible narrative of such practices. Tracing the construction of such practices through one informant's interpretation over time gives one the possibility of accessing the continuous cognitive perceptions and arbitration in such processes, but we need to develop much finer tools to do so.

Before ending, I would like to say that this chapter has been a celebration of anthropology and its analytic power, and a tribute to teachers like Raymond Firth, Guillermo Bonfil and Arturo Warman, who give meaning, continuity, and purpose to our science.

I would like to end with Martha Solares, who summarizes the intentionality of all the arbitration in cultural processes. She asks, in carefully worded sentences: "Who, then, will write history? What are we going to write in this history? What are we going to write that is worthwhile that may give guidance to future generations, what? I, myself, was prepared by my grandparents and they left me many things to teach. Here is the knowledge. A people who don't know where they come from cannot recognize where they are going. It is this simple".¹⁶

¹⁶ "¿A quién le toca escribir la historia? ¿Qué vamos a escribir en esa historia? ¿Qué vamos a poner que valga la pena y que sirva de guía a las futuras generaciones? ¿Qué? A mí me prepararon mis abuelos y me dejaron muchas cosas para enseñar. Aquí está este conocimiento. Un pueblo que no sabe de dónde viene, no puede reconocer hacia dónde va, simple".

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Culture, Diversity and Heritage: Major Studies

Arizpe, L.

2015, XVI, 199 p. 35 illus., 34 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-13810-7