DOI: 10.46586/er.12.2021.8901
License: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0

Entangled Religions 12.3 (2021)
er.ceres.rub.de

Dancing for the Saints in the Time of Covid-19: Responses to the 2020 Lockdown in Central Mexico

David Robichaux
Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de México (Mexico)

Jorge Martínez Galván
Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de México (Mexico)

José Manuel Moreno Carvallo
Université Jules Verne-Picardie, Amiens (France)

ABSTRACT During religious feasts in the Teotihuacán and Texcoco regions northeast of Mexico City, people 'dance for the saint,' often to fulfill a vow made in a supplication for healing. Based on fieldwork carried out between 2011 and 2019, and online interviews and monitoring of Facebook postings in late 2020 and early 2021, in this article we explore the impact of the coronavirus on the devotional dances staged in the context of religious feasts. In particular, we examine the cases of new practices adopted during the lockdown. Drawing on Jeremy Stolow's (2005) concept of "religions as media," we show how a combination of digital and in-person media make it possible for local Catholic communities to maintain the relationship with their patron-saint during the pandemic, based on the principle of *do ut des*, "though differently." We conclude by raising questions concerning the future of the devotional dances and religious feasts in these regions as pandemic restrictions entered their second year.

KEYWORDS devotional dances, Mexico, popular religion, coronavirus lockdown, media

Introduction

Abundant use of flowers, music, fireworks and dances in ritual situations that bring together large numbers of people characterize the religious feasts celebrated in the Texcoco Region and the Valley of Teotihuacán, adjacent regions near Mexico City. All this came to an abrupt halt with the quarantine measures implemented by the Mexican government on March 23, 2020 to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus. Non-essential businesses were closed, in-person classes suspended, and extreme limits were placed on gatherings, including the [1]

closing of churches for three months. Dances, when performed, were staged on a reduced scale, termed "symbolic representations" ("representaciónes simbólicas," in Spanish) by some of our informants. *Representación* (singular) is the equivalent to a performance as in a play or a dance, while in this context *simbólica* means "token." Thus, a "symbolic representation" is a token performance, one of reduced scale, a substitution for what is usually considered proper and was permitted by the authorities or what was possible given the lockdown measures and perceived danger of contagion during the pandemic. In some cases, increased use of digital media appears to have resulted in more online postings of photos and videos than in the recent past, possibly another form of "symbolic representation."

[2] In this article, we look at a form of public religious practice rooted in towns of pre-Hispanic origin where a specific type of lay religious organization was imposed during the sixteenth-century evangelization process. The complex town-centered ceremonialism in the present-day successors of these ancient communities is self-managed, i.e., in the hands of lay people, and in this sense, it is truly "popular religion" (Carrasco [1970] 1952, 1976; Giménez Montiel 1978; Nutini 1989).[1] By using this term, it is not our intention to suggest that the specific brand of popular religion we look at here is an entity completely apart from the 'official church.' A priest is required in some of its practices and only he can say mass. As Kirsten Norget (2021) has noted in her study of lay-organized mortuary rituals in Oaxaca in southern Mexico, there is a dialectic encounter between official Catholicism and the practices we term here as popular religion. We believe that the term is warranted by the complex, laity-controlled organization involved in ensuring that highly visible community rituals prescribed by local custom take place during the annual religious cycle.

[3] In the ritual calendars of the towns in the two regions, the great and frequent expenditures on music, floral arrangements and fireworks in religious feasts, along with masses and the performance of dances, all form part of a large-scale offering to the patron saint in a contractual relationship whose object is the assurance of collective and individual health, prosperity and general well-being.[2] Our previous research has found that many individuals participate in or organize dances to fulfill a vow to a saint or to God (Robichaux, Moreno Carvallo, and Martínez Galván 2021). In curtailing the celebration of these feasts, the Covid-19 lockdown brought to an abrupt halt the most salient practices of a highly public type of religiosity. The usual media of religious expressions were thus hampered or completely blocked, giving rise to alternate solutions to fulfill the communities' and individuals' part of this contractual relationship. Some people spoke of fulfilling their obligations to the saints, "though differently," referring to substitution or scaled-down use of the customary media.

[4] In this article, we consider 'media' in its widest sense and identify masses, music, flowers, fireworks and dances as the primary media in local public popular religious practices. In this approach, we draw on Jeremy Stolow's (2005) concept of "religion as media." He argues that

1 Such communities are usually not categorized by the Mexican State or anthropologists as "indigenous" as twentieth-century Mexico witnessed a state-promoted "de-Indianization" process in which language loss determined the passage from Indian to "mestizo" (Bonfil Batalla 1987; Robichaux 2007). Today, only three towns in the two regions where we conducted our research are identified by the State as "indigenous." However, despite language loss, all the towns retain forms of community ritual organization originating in the aforementioned sixteenth-century evangelization process. "Post-indigenous" is an apt term for the towns in this and other regions of Mexico that have been often classed as "mestizo" by both the state and anthropologists, thus contributing to erase these distinctive traits and histories (see Robichaux and Moreno Carvallo 2019, 23).

2 Each town has a patron saint, and in many instances the name of the saint is part of the town's name such as San Jerónimo Amanalco or San Pedro Chiautzingo.

religion can only be manifested through a process in which techniques and technologies are employed. In his words:

> Throughout history, in myriad forms, communication with and about 'the sacred' has always been enacted through written texts, ritual gestures, images and icons, architecture, music, incense, special garments, saintly relics and other objects of veneration, markings upon flesh, wagging tongues and other body parts. It is only through such media that it is at all possible to proclaim one's faith, mark one's affiliation, receive spiritual gifts, or participate in any of the countless local idioms for making the sacred present to mind and body. In other words, religion always encompasses techniques and technologies that we think of as 'media', just as, by the same token, every medium necessarily participates in the realm of the transcendent […]. (Stolow 2005, 125) [5]

In this same vein of thought, Birgit Meyer (2015, 336), quoting Robert Orsi (2012), has emphasized that, in seeking to make "visible the invisible," religion involves multiple media for "materializing the sacred." She, too, understands media "in the broad sense of material transmitters across gaps and limits that are central to practices of mediation". To this effect, Meyer (2015, 338) coined the term "sensational forms," which include body techniques and serve as "formats" that "make present what they mediate." Undoubtedly, the dances and other media characteristic of the religious tradition we deal with here can be described in this way. Viewing dances and the other media common in our regions in these terms helps us to understand why people continue to use them and to celebrate feasts, even in reduced form, during the pandemic. [6]

This paper is based on three types of sources: 1) fieldwork involving extensive participant observation since late 2011 focused on devotional dance groups in more than twenty-five towns in the Texcoco and Teotihuacán regions (see Figure 1); 2) monitoring of Facebook profiles of town governments, parishes, dioceses, local religious authorities (*mayordomías*), dance groups and individuals from the two regions; and 3) fifty-two interviews, conducted on Teams or Meet platforms and by telephone between October 6, 2020 and February 18, 2021 with twenty-six informants from fifteen towns. The authors already knew most of the interviewees from their previous fieldwork, while a few new research participants were contacted via Facebook. [7]

When we responded to the call for papers in July 2020, we assumed that the pandemic would soon be over and that we would be able to engage in in-person fieldwork. As it became evident that this was not to be, we took a new tack in our research and resorted to a particular version of what has been called "digital" or "virtual" ethnography (see Hine 2005; Pink et al. 2016). This involved contacting people who at one point had given us their phone number over the years of our fieldwork since 2011. Some were people with whom we had spent many hours during dances and rehearsals and had spoken with frequently, sometimes over the course of several years; others were but casual acquaintances with whom we had established little rapport in the field. As it turned out, more than half of the numbers were no longer in service. As in our regions of study it is considered improper for women to give out their numbers to males outside their circles of kin, none of our informants were women. Although we did manage to contact a few informants through Facebook, our best interviews were with people with whom we had previously established rapport in the field. We also privileged interviews with persons with computers, as this facilitated face-to-face contact which [8]

enhanced rapport, while enabling us to record for later transcription. In view of these strictures, all our informants were men, heavily involved in dances in different ways, as organizers, participants or musicians.

[9] It is important to stress our particular approach to dances and what is known in the literature as the "cargo system", or community organization of religious feasts. Early twentieth-century Mexican ethnographers recognized the religious functions of dances in communities such as the ones we study here (see Adán 1910; Noriega Hope [1922] 1979). However, the secular, anti-clerical Mexican State promoted what it termed "regional" dances, viewing them as the expression of the soul of the nation, useful in promoting national identity, but which had to be "polished" and divested of their religious symbolism (Gamio [1935] 1987, 181).

[10] A similar neglect of the religious dimensions in studies of the "cargo system" is also noted. Early studies viewed this institution as a barrier to economic development, or as a means of gaining prestige, and religious functions and motivations of participants were given short shrift (Wolf 1957; Cancian 1966). Building on Danièle Dehouve's (2016, 15–30) critique of this approach in studies of the cargo system, we posit that figures other than the formal office holders also play a ritual role in ensuring community well-being and prosperity. These include the organizers of dances and dance groups which, together with officials in the cargo system, make up a somewhat acephalous community organization, a local bureaucracy whose purpose is to make sure the customary rituals of the local annual cycle are properly financed and carried out. While the dances of Mexico undoubtedly lend themselves to analysis from the point of view of performance or theatre, our interest here is centered on their ritual function as part of an offering to the invisible. We share this standpoint with our informants, which we came to understand through long years of interacting with them and participating in many of their experiences.[3]

[11] This paper is divided into three sections followed by final considerations. In the first section, we briefly describe the historical antecedents and current operation of a type of community-centered ritual organization controlled by the laity. Next, we describe the devotional aspects of the dances and their role as an offering to the saint as part of a contractual relationship. In the third section, we present some of the responses to the lockdown measures affecting religious feasts, focusing on the experiences of specific dance groups and individual dancers. These include use of electronic media, what some of our informants referred to as "symbolic representations" of dances, and other substitution strategies. In the final considerations, we summarize our findings and reflect on the future of the feasts and dances which, in some cases, have now been suspended for two years in a row.

3 An observation in 2011 in one of the towns we have studied brought the question of the function of the dance and music to the fore. At a religious feast, two of the authors watched as some thirty dancers performed before a public half that size and a 24-piece orchestra played for hours in front of the church without an audience. While such renditions can be analyzed from the standpoint of performance, the term comes up short if the presence of an audience is part of the quotation. Is performance the right concept to capture the full dimensions of a costly display that took hours and days of preparation if performers outnumber the spectators? This insight led to the particular perspective that has guided our research, a perspective inspired by Dehouve's (2016) work. The fact that one of our informants stated that, under lockdown conditions, there would be no problem in staging the dance in the church behind closed doors, with no spectators, supports our position (see below).

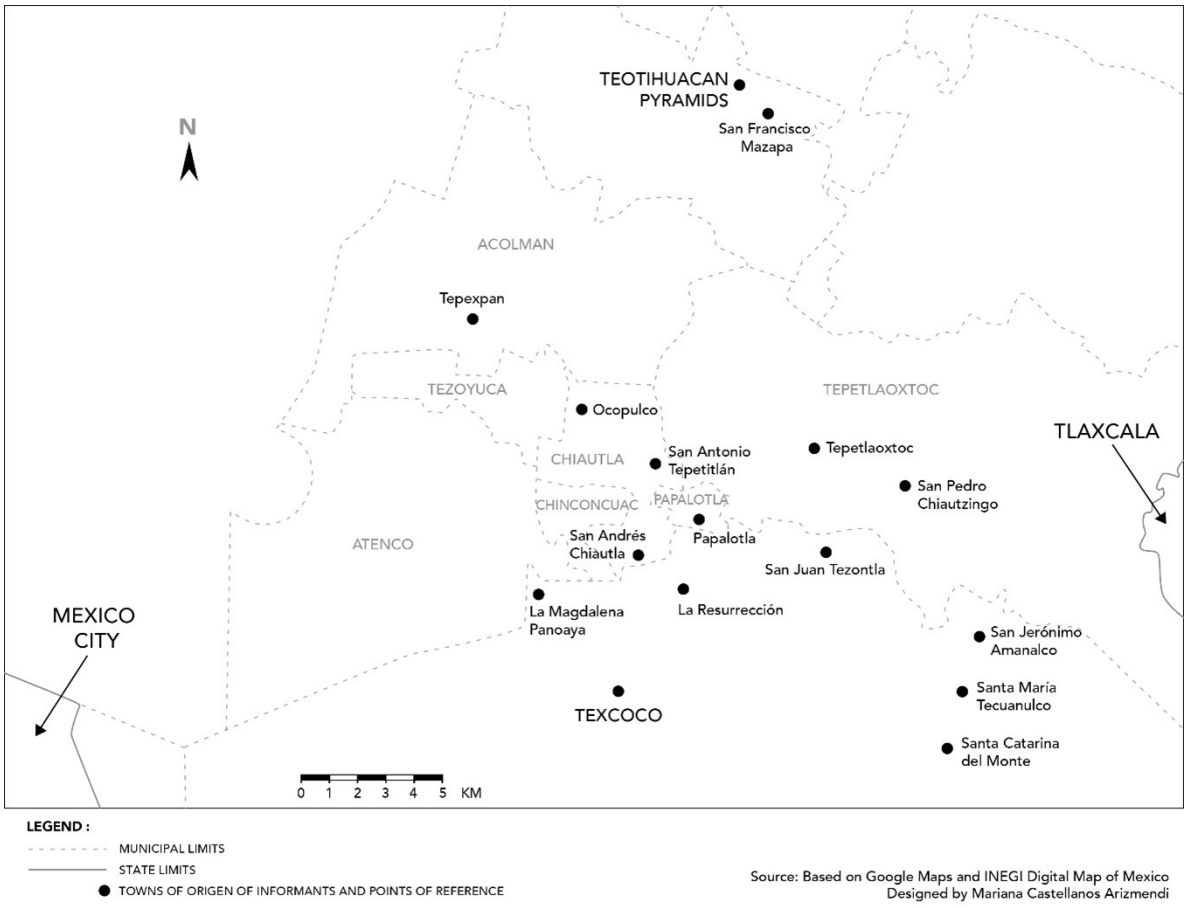

Figure 1 Towns of origin of informants interviewed for this article.

How Public Popular Religion is Organized in the Texcoco and Teotihuacán Regions

The term "popular religion" has been used in different contexts to refer to diverse practices and beliefs diverging from what has sometimes been called "official" or "organized religion" (Vrijhof 1979; Isambert 1982; Lanternari and Letendre 1982). Some authors have proposed discarding the term altogether, considering it to be "badly tainted by pejorative connotations" (McGuire 2008, 45), and alternative terms such as "lived religion" (McGuire 2008), "vernacular religion" (Flueckiger 2006) and "local religion" (Christian 1981, 178–79) have been put forward in its stead. "Popular religion," "popular Catholicism" and "folk Catholicism" have all been used in Mexico since the second half of the twentieth century to account for different practices and beliefs outside the 'official' teachings of the Catholic Church (Carrasco [1970] 1952, 1976; Giménez Montiel 1978; Nutini 1989). We use "popular religion" or "popular Catholicism" here to refer to a specific type of public religiosity based on a lay community organization whose purpose is to ensure that the rituals of the annual calendar are carried out according to custom. [12]

In the process of contact between Catholicism and pre-Hispanic religion and its transfer to native populations in sixteenth-century Mexico, the missionary friars trained trusted Indian assistants to enforce obligatory attendance to mass and catechism. In smaller towns with no resident priest, these lay assistants registered and even performed baptisms or burials and reminded residents of their religious duties (Ricard 1947, 206–7). Empowerment of lay officials in the early colonial period laid the groundwork for what became known as the "cargo system"—also known as the civil-religious hierarchy, fiesta or *mayordomía* system—in twentieth-century Mesoamericanist anthropology (Carrasco [1970] 1952; Cancian 1966).[4] Popular Catholicism, as discussed in this article, sprang from this tactic used by the official Church during evangelization, but today it has an existence and logic of its own. [13]

It is important to note that Catholic missionary parishes and their divisions were usually a continuation of pre-Hispanic socio-political and religious units, many of which had a long history of migration of specific groups that were under the protection of and identified with a tutelar deity. With Christianization, the deity was replaced by a saint who in some cases had some of the attributes of that deity (López Austin 1998, 49–50, 69, 76–77). Furthermore, churches were commonly erected on the sites of pre-Hispanic temples, thus facilitating the transfer of loyalty to the Christian saint. Aztec gods were thought to provide material means; failure to comply with ritual would incur their wrath, and loss of their protection would lead to want (Madsen 1967, 370). The friars gave pagan songs and dances Christian motifs, and they were performed in Catholic ceremonies (Madsen 1967, 376). In what William Madsen calls a process of "fusional syncretism," "almost all visible vestiges of paganism" were eliminated and Our Lady of Guadalupe-oriented Catholicism became "the focal value of Aztec culture in central México"[5] (1967, 378). Patron saints replaced tutelary gods in each village and received offerings, similar to practices in pagan times. Religion today remains "the means of obtaining temporal necessities" and, "as in ancient times, the neglect of ritual obligations subjects the individual or the whole community to the vengeance of supernatural beings who punish […] with sickness, crop failure, and other misfortunes" (Madsen 1967, 380–81). What Madsen [14]

4 *Cargo* means office in Spanish, as in an office held by an official.

5 The Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, the Mexican national symbol, replaced a mother goddess formerly venerated on the site where the Virgin appeared in 1531 (Wolf 1958).

describes in terms of syncretism can truly be termed an "entangled religion." As he notes, at one level Christian saints replaced pagan deities, but the contractual relation oriented towards protection and ensuring temporal needs has persisted to this day.

[15] Stressing the contractual relationship between the patron saint and the community in Mexico, Hugo Nutini (1989, 88)[6] writes: "[B]y the end of the seventeenth century a folk Catholicism had been structured encompassing diverse elements of the indigenous and Spanish religions. Superficially, this folk religion had a predominantly Catholic appearance, i. e. structurally, ritually, ceremonially, and, in general, its physical manifestations were not much different from urban Catholicism of the time." However, it included (and does so to date) "many ideological and structural elements of pre-Hispanic polytheism", such as "the conception of supernatural beings and figures and the principle of *do ut des* that obtains in the relationship between the individual and collective body with their makers." For Nutini, "it is here that the pre-Hispanic contribution is most important and acts as a counterweight to the preponderance of more visible Catholic elements."

[16] "[T]he essentially lay character of ceremonial organization" in the cycle of public religious festivities has been noted by Gilberto Giménez. When a priest is involved, his role is reduced to that of a "ceremonial auxiliary subordinated to requirements of the popular ritual." As diocesan priests replaced the religious orders that introduced community ceremonial institutions in colonial times, a process of "autonomization" began and, with Independence in 1821 and separation of Church and State in 1857, the gap between the clergy and popular religion further widened. The community institutions introduced by the missionaries in the sixteenth century were appropriated and became "traditional," operating "parallel to the Church and, at times, outside of, and even against the Church" (Giménez Montiel 1978, 150–51).

[17] Although much has been written on the cargo system, scholarly attention has centered on topics such as its function as a leveling mechanism that erased budding wealth differences in supposedly egalitarian communities; its role in reinforcing existing internal differences; acquisition of prestige by cargo-holders; and individual versus community financing of religious feasts (Carrasco [1970] 1952; Wolf 1957; Cancian 1966; Chance and Taylor 1985). Following Arthur Maurice Hocart (1970), we view the cargo system in our regions of study as a ritual bureaucracy whose purpose is to organize collective ritual in order to ensure health and prosperity and to ward off illness, misfortune and death (Dehouve 2016). We consider the dance groups to be part of this ritual bureaucracy as they provide an offering to the saint, complementing those of flowers, music, fireworks and masses, for which the cargo-holders are responsible.

[18] The term *mayordomo*, recurrent in the literature on the cargo system, literally means "steward," a reference to the fact that these office-holders were formerly stewards of plots of ground cultivated to finance religious feasts (Carrasco 1961, 493). Today, *mayordomos* in the two regions under study are responsible for overseeing the organization of religious feasts. They usually hold office for one year and, depending on the town, are selected in different numbers and organized in different ways. While in some towns, a single group of *mayordomos* is appointed or elected to be in charge of the entire annual cycle of feasts, in others there are specific *mayordomos* for each feast. Certain towns have a system in which different offices rotate from house to house and all households eventually assume specific responsibilities in organizing the annual ritual cycle. Whereas in one town a group of as many as 100 *mayordomos* is responsible for most of the ritual expenses, in other places each married male or male

6 All translations by the authors unless indicated otherwise.

eighteen years of age or older is responsible for contributing to help the *mayordomos* cover costs. Collectively, the group of mayordomos is known as the *mayordomía*.

[19] The responsibilities of this ritual bureaucracy include organizing the usual celebrations of the Catholic liturgical calendar, particularly those related to the birth and death of Christ, and that of the patron saint or other major feasts specific to each town. The major feasts usually take place over a nine-day period, from one weekend to the next. During this time, in the church and forecourt, many months of *mayordomos'* work materializes in its most evident manifestations as masses, flowers, music, fireworks and dances all form a collective offering to the saint.

[20] The *mayordomo* or *mayordomos* have the obligation to reserve the masses and pay officiating clergy. They are also responsible for having the interior of the church decorated by professional florists with flower arrangements sometimes covering practically all the walls and even hanging from the ceiling (see Figure 2). They must also provide special floral adornments, known as *portadas,* that bedeck the façade of the church. In 2018 and 2019, the cost of interior floral decoration varied from US$2,000 to US$7,500, depending on the size of the church and elaborateness of the floral arrangements, while the *portada* cost US$1,000 or more. The *mayordomo* or *mayordomos* must also contract one and sometimes two wind-instrument or other orchestras with sixteen to twenty-five musicians to perform in honor of the saint in the churchyard during some sixteen hours each day and to accompany processions. In 2019 a wind-instrument orchestra of this size cost some US$2,500 to play for five days, with three meals provided daily in addition to this fee, a substantial sum, given the fact that many of the towns' inhabitants are employed in the informal sector.

[21] *Mayordomos* are also responsible for fireworks used profusely during the celebration. Rockets are shot off along the entire route of the procession in which the effigy of the saint is paraded through the town, an event that may last up to eight hours. Dozens of rockets are fired off at the beginning and end of the masses celebrated during the feast, and in long bursts at the time of the consecration of the host. The feast ends with the lighting of a *castillo* (literally, a castle with one or several turrets), a structure erected in front of the church (see Figure 3). Some *castillos* are as much as thirty-five meters high, and they contain explosive charges that often set off gyrating wheels flying into the air, as well as pyrotechnic representations of the saint or religious motifs or phrases. A large *castillo* with several turrets may cost up to US$7,000.

[22] As we have seen here, public popular religion in the two regions under study is a highly organized, community-oriented affair aimed at providing the customary offerings to the saints. In the next section we specifically deal with the dances, one of the five media that, along with flowers, music, fireworks and masses, are the salient manifestations of a contractual relationship with the invisible.

Devotional Dances at the Religious Feasts

[23] Dances were an important part of the elaborate rituals in honor of the gods in pre-colonial times and were considered by some missionaries as a form of prayer (de Mendieta 1870, 99). *Maceua,* one of the Nahuatl equivalents of an English verb "to dance," can also be translated as "to do penance," "to obtain something," or "to deserve or merit something" (Siméon 2010, 244). Pointing out that *itotia,* another Nahuatl equivalent of a word "to dance," shares a common root with *itoa*, the equivalent of the verb "to speak," Alfredo López Austin (2007,

Figure 2 Interior decoration, Parish of Saint Mary Magdalene, Tepexpan. Feast in honor of Our Lord of Graces, 2019. Tepexpan, Acolman, State of Mexico. Copyright: Isaac Trenado MX.

Figure 3 Burning of fireworks 'castles' during the feast in honor of Our Lord of Gracias, 2019. Tepexpan, Acolman, State of Mexico. Copyright: Isaac Trenado MX.

186–87) has proposed that dancing was a way of "speaking" to gods and a dancer was "a bridge" between people and deities. Sixteenth-century reports indicate that missionaries tolerated dances as long as they were Christianized. New words were set to pre-Hispanic rhythms and chants and Spanish songs were translated into Nahuatl. It was preferred that dance celebrations take place in public in churches, churchyards and houses rather than clandestinely, away from the vigilant eyes of the missionaries (Ricard 1947, 340–41).

In most towns in the two regions under study, the celebration of major feasts is inconceivable without dances. Together with the numerous masses, flowers, music and fireworks, they are the key elements of a massive collective offering, or gift to the saint, in the sense of Marcel Mauss (1983). These five elements constitute the media through which the contractual relationship between humans and the divine is maintained.[7] In interviews and casual conversations during our fieldwork, terms such as "devotion," "penance" and "sacrifice" often appear in connection with the dances offered to the saints. This is not surprising considering the physical exertion involved in some dances. Furthermore, the dance principals[8] must pay for musicians, rent sound equipment, tarpaulins and platforms to dance, as well as organize meals, sometimes three each day, attended by hundreds of dancers and their families. They must also spend long hours in rehearsals and in some cases learn lines in dances with speaking parts. A common reason why some men and women organize or participate in a dance is to fulfill a vow made in an appeal for divine intervention in cases of personal illness or that of family members, and to give thanks for a divine favor received. The motivation may also be more diffuse, such as expressing gratitude for enjoying a general state of good health or for having a favorable economic situation. These individual motivations take on a collective dimension as part of a community's offering to the saints (Robichaux, Moreno Carvallo, and Martínez Galván 2021, 235). [24]

The devotional character of the dances is clearly evidenced in the rituals carried out at the beginning and the end of their performance, especially on the first and final days of the feasts.[9] Public staging of a dance is always preceded by a group entry into the church in which the dancers make the sign of the cross and genuflect or kneel in prayer before the effigy of the saint. In some cases, they intone a chant (a prayer to the saint with references to their purpose) and perform a small part of the dance in the church. This opening ritual often takes place after a mass. On the last day of the performance, a ritual known as the "coronation" takes place with great pomp and ceremony inside the church. It is accompanied by a slow, repetitive music and intricately choreographed movements, in which each dancer successively embraces each of his or her companions. This highly emotional ceremony may last two hours or more and some of those who have been "crowned" (*coronado* in Spanish, meaning they have made a vow to dance) or have fulfilled their vow give speeches, giving thanks to the saint or asking for his or her aid to keep their vow the following year. It is believed that if the vow is not kept the wrath of the saint can be incurred and the dancer or a member of his family will be punished in the form of illness or an accident. [25]

The dances take place in designated spaces in the forecourt of the church or nearby, and in [26]

7 The procession could be viewed as a sixth element. We consider, however, that the five we note here are clearly offerings, while the procession is a specific moment that brings together several of these elements, in other words, a diffused setting in which the offerings of fireworks, music and dances, as well as the physical efforts of those participating, are made.

8 *Principales*, in Spanish. Persons in charge of organizing the dance, referred to in at least one town as *mayordomos*. Among their responsibilities are collecting money to pay musicians and offering a meal to dancers and their families during the feast.

9 Depending on the town, dances are usually performed one to five times during a feast.

Figure 4 Serranos dancer with daughter in arms during the celebration of the feast of Saint Sebastian, 2018. Tepetlaoxtoc de Hidalgo, Tepetlaoxtoc, State of Mexico. Copyright: Manuel Moreno Carvallo.

some towns as many as five or six groups of usually forty to sixty dancers may simultaneously perform from four to six hours with little rest. While certain dances have always had both female and male roles, others have been exclusively for men, children, or young girls. In the last few decades female versions of certain dances have appeared in some towns and women have assumed roles traditionally assigned to men. It is common to see parents dancing with babies and young children in their arms, and children dancing alongside their parents (see Figure 4). Many dancers in their thirties and forties spoke of first dancing with their parents at age four or five, and some stated that only as they grew older did they understand the full religious significance of what they were doing. In most cases, with the assistance of paid specialists, known as *ensayadores* (literally, "rehearsers"), rehearsals begin four to six weeks prior to the first performance (see footnote 4). These ritual specialists not only teach the dancers the steps, choreography and lines of dances with spoken parts, but, acting as ritual specialists, direct the previously described initial ceremonies and the coronation.

The dances—of which the authors observed twenty-one types and their variations—always [27]
have a leading theme. But regardless of their content, the opening rituals and final coronation show that all the dances are dedicated to the saint and that vows and devotion are ever present (Robichaux, Moreno Carvallo, and Martínez Galván 2021, 235–38). As we will discuss in the following section, the lockdown was a challenge for dance groups, most of which were not able

to dance. However, some groups did manage to perform, "though differently," and creative solutions were developed to fulfill the contractual relation with the saints.

Lockdown, Social Distancing, and New Ways to Fulfill the Contractual Relation in Religious Festivities and Dances

[28] The Mexican Federal Government's declaration of the health emergency on March 23, 2020 meant the immediate cancelation of nearly all activities involved in the celebration of the feasts in the towns of the Valley of Teotihuacán and Texcoco regions. The media, without which the celebration of the religious feasts had once been unthinkable—masses, floral adornment, fireworks, music and dances—were put on hold or their use was greatly modified. For three months or more following the outbreak of the pandemic, masses were said behind closed doors with no one in attendance and livestreamed on Facebook.[10] Religious processions were held with the effigy of the saint paraded in the back of pickup trucks with people watching from their homes. The few dances staged were performed with a greatly reduced number of dancers and for a much shorter time than usual.[11] Digital media, already used before the pandemic by some groups of dancers, *mayordomos* and parishes, increased in importance in some towns and became the primary means of communication and display.

[29] The varied strategies adopted during the feasts in different towns can be explained in part by the severity of restrictive measures at the time of the feast. In towns with feasts soon after the lockdown, *mayordomos* and dancers had little time to adapt. For example, on March 21, the parish in the town of La Resurrección posted a program on Facebook of activities for Holy Week and the week following (April 5–19, 2020) when the patron saint's (Our Lord of the Resurrection) feast is celebrated. It included the usual Holy Week processions and masses in addition to the participation of five different dance groups, scheduled to perform on two different days as in any other year during the week after Easter. But on March 28, following the declaration of the health emergency, it was announced that these activities would be "modified." In fact, all processions were canceled, and since churches were closed, masses were celebrated behind closed doors and livestreamed on Facebook. Thinking the epidemic would soon be over, it was announced that the dances, music, floral arrangements and fireworks would be postponed until Pentecost (May 31), the town's second major feast.[12] This did not happen, as it was soon announced that the Pentecost celebrations would also be canceled.

[30] The different *mayordomías* and dance groups of La Resurrección had already made partial payments for various services, including US$12,000 for two *castillos* and all the rockets. One of the dance groups had made an advance payment of US$1,000 for music and sound equipment. Another group had made a contract for US$10,000 with an expensive group of celebrity

10 Depending on the parish, after three or more months attendance at mass was resumed, but initially with limited seating, a thirty-percent maximum capacity in the church, obligatory use of masks and use of hand sanitizer before and after communion, and without the handshake of peace. In some places, attendance at mass was initially by appointment only and livestreaming has continued. The general tendency has been toward increased capacity, with adjustments made with each new wave of Covid-19.

11 As of this writing, the first quarter of 2022, dances have resumed, but with restrictions. In the cases of dances in feasts that have taken place or that were in the planning stage, the number of dancers has been limited, dances have been performed, or are planned to be performed with masks; and the number of attendees has been restricted or plans are in place to limit attendance.

12 *Facebook Parroquia*. Accessed January 3, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/ParroquiadelaResurreccionTexcoco/photos/a.1743867959053187/2595250977248210

Figure 5 Serranos dancers during the celebration of the feast of Our Lord of Graces, 2019. Tepexpan, Acolman, State of Mexico. Copyright: Jorge Antonio Martínez.

musicians and had already paid half the amount before cancelation. With cancelation of Pentecost, the advance payment on contracts for music, flowers and fireworks were 'lost.' With the new surge of the pandemic in December and early January 2021 severely affecting the town, festivities for 2021 were also canceled. It was decided that the *mayordomos* responsible for the 2020 celebration would remain in office in 2021 as they were not able to fully discharge their duties, and it remains to be seen what will happen next.

[31] With time, some dance groups developed creative solutions to substitute traditional practices and renew the contractual relationship with the saints. One case in point is that of the *Serranos* dancers of Tepexpan, who dance in honor of *Nuestro Señor de Gracias* (Our Lord of Graces), celebrated on May 3. Performed only in this town and on that occasion, this dance is unique in that it brings together up to 700 participants (see image 5). After a meal attended by as many as a thousand people, the dancers go to the church in slow rhythmic steps in two rows numbering as many as 350 each, and file in, intoning a melancholy chant that opens the dance. Many have their eyes fixed on the image of Our Lord of Graces above the altar and are visibly moved. After kneeling in prayer and making the sign of the cross, the dancers perform some of the dance steps. They then file out of the church and dance for five to six hours, in the view of hundreds of spectators.

[32] None of this occurred in 2020. As one informant put it, the feast was celebrated "to the extent possible and with all means that were allowed [by the authorities], but with an enormous

amount of faith to receive the blessings of Our Lord." Although there were "few flowers, little music, few fireworks" and no dancers in the churchyard, digital media served to remind the town's inhabitants of the dancers' normal offering. In early April, when it became evident that the May festivities would be canceled, the principals of the *Serranos* dance group opened a Facebook account and appealed to the townspeople to share photos and videos from previous years.[13] People were also requested to display arches, crowns, hats and other regalia used in the dance outside their houses beginning at 3:00 pm on May 3. Several pickup trucks paraded through the town carrying pictures of the patron saint and playing recorded music from the dance, all the while livestreaming on Facebook. People from the households of many of the dancers came outside to greet the procession, some dressed in their dance costumes, and at one point a group of children in costumes performed some of the steps of the dance.[14] Some dancers used their personal Facebook profiles to post photos of their household altars where they had placed dance regalia (see Figure 6). Symbolically, at the end of the procession, the pickup trucks backed away from the churchyard gate, replicating the recessional movement of the *Serranos* when they file out of the church, never turning their back to the saint, all to the accompaniment of a recording of the chant intoned by the dancers on that occasion. Those riding in the back of one of the pickups ended the procession with applauses and shouts of *Viva el Señor de Gracias* and hugged each other as in the coronation ceremony.[15]

[33] Over time, as people became accustomed to what Mexican federal authorities termed *la nueva normalidad* (the new normality), some groups of dancers succeeded in honoring the saints by dancing, but on a much-reduced scale. The town of San Francisco Mazapa celebrated Pentecost (May 31, 2020), one its two major feasts, while lockdown measures were still in full force. The church was closed, and mass was said behind closed doors and livestreamed. The statues of the saints, normally displayed inside the church, were set up in the forecourt and honored with floral offerings and a band. In ordinary years, the *Alchileos* and the *Santiagos* dance groups, each with thirty to forty participants, perform for five to six hours. On this occasion, a group of *Alchileos* dancers paraded through the streets, and a small group of their representatives entered the churchyard, made 'reverences,'[16] and placed a floral offering before the statues of the saints, though they did not dance. A group of eighteen *Santiagos* dancers, accompanied by musicians, entered the churchyard and, after making the sign of the cross and kneeling before the saints, performed for about twenty minutes.[17]

[34] As cases of Covid-19 dropped off, sanitary restrictions were relaxed in early July and *mayordomos* and dance principals in San Francisco Mazapa began organizing and collecting money for the coming feasts. Churches were now open, but only at thirty percent capacity. For the

13 One of the authors of this article, Jorge Martínez Galván, edited four videos from the recordings we made since 2015. These movies were posted on the "*Serranos de Tepexpan*" Facebook Profile and viewed thousands of times. *Serranos de Tepexpan Facebook Profile*. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/100049879428660/videos/109660100706637/?extid=bEFwUPk1zlbskHsA https://www.facebook.com/100049879428660/videos/118844669788180/?extid=2dghGE972RzIAm0h https://www.facebook.com/100049879428660/videos/121994952806485/?extid=ZeWgdU1x9gTeLbeL https://www.facebook.com/100049879428660/videos/124921319180515/?extid=LMnDuwJ6ygrJeCEQ

14 *Facebook Parroquia*. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/ParroquiaTepexpanOficial/videos/234357064327879/

15 *Facebook video*. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/100049879428660/videos/122478216091492/

16 A movement typical in this dance, in which dancers lower their upper bodies with outstretched hands in a "bowing" motion.

17 *Facebook page*. Accessed December 6, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/106066384062216/videos/1520194508140138/

Figure 6 Special home altar with dance paraphernalia during the celebration of our Lord of Graces, 2020, Tepexpan, Estado de México. Copyright: Andrés Jaime González.

feast of the town's patron saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, on October 4, a greatly reduced number of *Alchileos* dancers performed, beginning with 'reverences' at the home of one of the principals. They then paraded through the streets and danced for a short while in the church forecourt.[18] These symbolic representations or acts substituting normal performances did not free the dance principals from their obligations, since they were expected to organize the full dance in 2021.

In San Jerónimo Amanalco, some six dance groups usually perform to celebrate the town's [35] patron saint, St. Jerome, on September 30. In April, although the number of deaths was rapidly rising in the town during the first wave of the pandemic, the principals of the *Arrieros* dance group decided that, regardless of the circumstances, they would perform the dance, at least on a reduced scale, either in front of the church or in some other open space. In May, the father of one of the principals, formerly active in the dance himself, died of Covid-19. No funerals were allowed then and when his ashes were interred in July some forty members of the group danced in the cemetery and at the municipal offices where the deceased had worked. Despite the fact that other dances were not performed and although other *Arrieros* dancers and members of their family had been stricken and died of Covid-19, the rest of the group became even more determined to dance for the saint and began rehearsing in August. As one of our informants put it, "those who died knew that we were going to dance. Let's do it now for them. Let's continue with this devotion to honor their memory."

The *mayordomos* allowed them to provide a morning serenade and leave a floral offering for [36] the saint, and the principals went into the church to pray before the saint's statue. Next, some forty dancers, most of them wearing protective masks, danced a while outside the church. Leaving the churchyard, the dancers also performed outside two of the town's small chapels before proceeding to the home of the dancer where the rehearsals had taken place; there they

18 *Facebook Danza Alchileos*. Accessed December 6, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/DanzaAlchileosOficial/videos/335114391053998/

danced for several hours. Photos and a video posted on the Facebook profile of a person close to one of the dancers elicited varied comments. One said: "This wasn't like other years, but they danced with great faith for our holy patron." But another, more cautious comment read: "It's great for those who had the courage to dance. But those of us who choose to respect the confinement measures join in the sorrow of the families who have lost a loved one. San Jerónimo is in mourning!!!"[19]

[37] A curious set of circumstances enabled some dancers from Papalotla to perform and honor the town's patron saint in a unique way. None of the nine dance groups scheduled for the feast of the town's patron saint, Saint Toribio of Astorga (April 16), was able to perform. The town has a strongly entrenched tradition of the *Santiagos* dance, which reenacts a conflict between Christians and Moors in medieval Spain. In 2017, encouraged by local and state officials seeking to promote tourism, a group of thirty dancers obtained certification from the International Dance Council, an affiliate of the UNESCO. This was the subject of controversy, as some less-experienced dancers with greater financial resources paid the 164 Euro fee, while others could not afford it or chose not to be certified because they felt this was contrary to the dance's devotional character. In October 2020, when the spread of the coronavirus was abating, Santiago dancers were invited to perform at a virtual cultural event sponsored by state authorities near the state capital of Toluca.

[38] The interpretation of the dance, promoted on the festival program as one of the "cultural values of Texcoco," was far removed from its religious significance. Nevertheless, one of the most seasoned dancers, who had adamantly refused to be certified in 2017, was more than happy to participate, explaining that this was an opportunity to dance for Saint Toribio. The festival organizers were informed that the *Santiagos* dance was not a "ballet or folk dance" like other dances on the event program, but a religious expression, and that a special wooden platform would have to be erected for the performance. On Sunday morning of October 18, before traveling to the festival venue, a group of twenty-six dancers, accompanied by a few relatives and fourteen musicians, gathered at the church. Their temperatures were taken, masks were required, a safe distance was maintained, and hand sanitizer was in abundant supply. For our informant, the purpose of going to the church was to "do honor to and ask permission" from Saint Toribio for "his consent to perform his dance in his honor, to stage the dance away from his temple."

[39] As the video posted on Facebook shows, what took place inside the church was much like the initial ceremony prior to performance in the context of religious feasts. The ceremony started with a rendition of the Mexican birthday song, *Las Mañanitas*, by the musicians. The dancers next made the sign of the cross and knelt in prayer before the statue of the saint, and briefly executed several of the different dance steps.[20] Once at the festival venue, the statue of Saint Toribio was placed on the platform set up for the dance. The dancers recited segments of the spoken parts, and the performance was livestreamed and later posted on the festival's Facebook profile.[21] In the view of our informant, participating in the festival allowed the dancers to honor, "though differently," the saint in times of the quarantine. Although the dancers were formally required to wear masks, they took them off for the performance. As

19 *Facebook video*. Accessed October 21, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/100010996571284/videos/1216982425344965/

20 *Facebook video*. Accessed December 8, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/Cr%C3%B3nicas-de-Papalotla-M%C3%A9x-108439897360858/videos/1010572529459590/

21 *Facebook video*. Accessed December 10, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/FestivalInternacionalQuimera/videos/2135356990105397/

our informant put it, "once we were on the platform, with the blessing of God, practicing our religion, demonstrating our faith, we felt we would be aided. Although we were aware of the risk, God took care of us and no harm came to pass."

[40] The new surge of the pandemic in December 2020 and January 2021 dashed whatever remaining hopes of dancing as in normal times, at least for early 2021. "Symbolic representations" substituted the normal dances, and Facebook and other social platforms came to play an important role in this process. During the eleven-day feast of Saint Sebastian (January 20) in Tepetlaoxtoc, eight dance groups performed in 2020. In early January 2021, the Facebook account "*Tepetlaoxtoc Historia, Tradición y Cultura*" invited its followers to "virtually celebrate" the feast by posting photos from past years of different events of the festivities.[22] One of the *mayordomías* opened the *Mayordomía San Sebastián 20 de enero 2021* account and posted videos showing numerous displays of the traditional media—flowers, fireworks and music, as well as symbolic representations of two dances. One of the symbolic representations was that of the *Sembradoras* dance. Instead of the usual sixty to eighty dancers, a group of twelve heard mass on the second day of the feast and entered the chapel where they genuflected and crossed themselves before dancing some twenty minutes. The other took place on the final weekend of the feast and, instead of the usual three to four hundred dancers, thirteen participants in the *Serranos* dance heard mass and performed several steps of their dance for about twenty minutes.

[41] During the feast, masses were said at the entrance of the church with few in attendance and the space in front of the church was cordoned off to limit access. Nevertheless, the façade of the small chapel was lavishly adorned with flowers and different musical groups played. Some of the videos posted have a professional quality and seemed to have been made specifically for livestreaming and viewing on Facebook. One of them attracted more than 8,000 views in just two days after it was posted on January 20. The fireworks display was, in fact, a sophisticated combination of pyrotechnics and laser technology. Geometric shapes and the figure of Saint Sebastian with the words "Saint Sebastian, Bless Us" were projected on the walls of buildings on the chapel plaza, accompanied by recorded music. All of this, including shots taken from a drone, was livestreamed and later posted on Facebook.[23]

[42] In the town of Tepetitlán, symbolic representations of two dances were performed during the festivities of the Purification of the Virgin Mary (February 2, 2021). Every year, on the occasion of this feast, the *Santiagos* dance group puts on a spectacular and costly performance (see Figure 7). Although in 2020 a new set of principals had committed themselves to organizing the dance in 2021, they decided not to perform. The reason was that their commitment included having several sets of costly costumes, as the combats in this dance nearly always result in torn and soiled costumes, making it necessary to have replacements on hand to continue the performance. Principals must also offer three meals a day during the three days this dance is put on, in addition to paying musicians. However, as the date of the feast approached, a group of dancers who had danced in previous years and thus had the costumes and knew the lines decided that it would be an insult to the Virgin if this dance was not staged for her feast. Some sixty men, all wearing protective masks, danced for one hour to the accompaniment of

22 *Facebook website*. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/Tepetlaoxtoc-Historia-Tradici%C3%B3n-y-Cultura-620321778108590/photos/a.623882814419153/1870976586376430

23 *Facebook video*. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/Mayordomia-San-Sebasti%C3%A1n-M%C3%A1rtir-20-de-enero-2021-101745744811188/videos/d41d8cd9/762130577744155/?_so_=watchlist&_rv_=related_videos

Figure 7 Santiagos dancers during the celebration of the feast of the Virgin of Candlemas, 2021, San Antonio Tepetitlán, Chiautla, State of Mexico. Copyright: Eladio Cerón Sol.

musicians hired by the *mayordomos* for the general ritual needs of the feast and recited some of the lines.

The other symbolic representation made in Tepetitlán, that of the *Vaqueros* dance group, [43] was somewhat different. In 2020, a group of several brothers and sisters and their adult children made a collective vow to organize this dance in 2021 in gratitude for the recovery from cancer of a daughter of one of the brothers. Instead of the traditional three full days of dancing, they performed in front of the church for about an hour in a space closed off to the public. Our informant, a member of this kin group, described this act as a "a small symbolic advance [payment]." In this way, they partially fulfilled their vow to the extent allowed by local authorities, making a partial payment of their commitment that they expect to be able to fully honor in 2022. This will include rehearsing, paying musicians and offering three meals a day to hundreds of guests during the three days they dance.

In early 2022, the symbolic representations characterizing the devotion of the saints in 2021 [44] became a thing of the past. As more and more people were vaccinated and developed natural immunity from the successive waves of the virus, the case loads dropped off. The elaborate ritual cycle described above was resumed, although not yet with the intensity of pre-Covid times. Dances took place under rigorous sanitary restrictions, reflecting the so-called "new normality." At the time of writing, maintaining a safe distance and the use of masks, sanitizing gel and even disinfectant aerosols are now the norm as far as we can ascertain throughout the two regions under study (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 Principal dancer, Serranos dance in the procession of the feast honoring Our Lord of Graces, 2021. Tepexpan, Acolman, State of Mexico. Copyright: Isaac Trenado MX.

Final Considerations

Drawing on Stolow's (2005) concept of "religion as media," we have identified masses, the lavish public displays of flowers, fireworks and music along with dances as the five principal media characterizing the religious feasts in the regions of Texcoco and Teotihuacán in central Mexico. Although all five were severely curtailed by the measures adopted to slow the spread of Covid-19, the dances have been affected to the greatest extent. Most dance groups simply did not perform, although we learned of scattered instances of dance principals presenting a floral offering to the saint. All told, there were few instances of "symbolic representations," a term we have adopted from one of our informants to refer to scaled-down or modified forms of dancing. These instances bring to mind other cases of substitution or reduction of offerings in contractual relations with the divine. For example, according to E.E. Evans-Pritchard, among the Nuer of South Sudan a cucumber can either replace an ox or be offered with the promise of a future sacrifice of an animal (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 128, 148, 197, 205, 279). In a context much closer to our research, Danièle Dehouve (2009, 140–41) found that among the Tlapanecs of the Mexican State of Guerrero, in case of need, an egg or chick could replace a chicken in some sacrifices. The Tlapanecs even haggle and inform the power to whom the sacrifice is made that they are getting an egg instead of a goat, while presenting excuses explaining that they were not able to provide the customary offering (Dehouve 2009, 38).[24] [45]

Already considering the probable cancelation of the dance he was supposed to participate [46]

24 One important difference with the examples of substitution reported by Evans-Pritchard and Dehouve should be stressed. As Roberte Hamayon has noted, in ancient Rome, wax and bread figures could replace real oxen when they were not easy to obtain, and while among the Nuer a cucumber could serve as an

in, one of our interviewees expressed an idea echoing these customs. He said that on the day of the feast, he imagined going to the church dressed in his dance costume, kneeling and making the sign of the cross before the saint's statue and saying: "I have come to see you, but You know how things are. I have to go now." Other informants imagined a near future with performance of the dance under quarantine in terms similar to the symbolic representations we have described in the previous section. One said that the combat dance in which he is involved would have to be performed with a much smaller number of dancers who would wear gloves and simulate the battle, all the while keeping a safe distance. Another informant noted that some members of his group were considering an hour-long performance of twenty-five masked dancers instead of the usual three to four hundred, one day instead of two, with recorded music and lots of hand sanitizer available. He was aware of the possible risk of being fined by the civil authorities, but said he would gladly pay it: "After all, I owe more to the patron saint." He also noted that the opening chant of the dance says, "We are here to fulfill our vow, Father", and that most of the dancers had made a vow to dance, whatever the circumstances.

[47] The words of another experienced dancer and *ensayador* reveal how important the religious significance of the dances is for many people in the two regions. They also bring out the deep principles underlying observable behavior that has often been seen as folklore in Mexico, where 'folk dances' have been promoted by the State as one of the performing arts and part of the national identity. He envisioned a version of the dance in quarantine, stripped down to its bare essentials. The customary visits and performances of the dancers at key points in the town, along with the meals offered by the principals to dancers and townspeople, would all have to be canceled. Instead, they would provide food only to the musicians, as this is a customary part of their payment. The dance would be performed inside the church, after mass, once everyone had left. He emphasized that the spirit of the dance, its true purpose, was to perform for the saint. Omitting adjacent traditions, all carried out in normal times, would not be a problem.

[48] The similarities between actual and imagined symbolic representations reveal that "the spirit of the dance, its true purpose"—or "the essence of the dance," as another informant put it—is, indeed, an offering to the saint. They also show that these substitutions aim at maintaining an ongoing relationship with the saint in times of severe restrictions. But the use of livestreaming and posting on Facebook reveal another important religious need that we believe many people in the two regions have felt during the lockdown. In calling for an understanding of religion as 'mediation,' an attempt "to bridge the gap between the here and now and something 'beyond'," drawing on Orsi (2012), Birgit Meyer (2015, 336) has stressed that multiple media are involved in "making the invisible visible." To the same end, she coined the term "sensational forms" to give account of "body techniques as well as sensibilities and emotions that become embodied in the habitus" (Meyer 2015, 338). Dancing is a sensational form and, as a public act, serves to make visible to the audience and the townspeople in general the covenant with the saint. It is in this sense that we believe that livestreaming symbolic representations, as well as posting pictures of dance regalia and videos and photos of past dances on Facebook all constitute an attempt by those with access to this technology to convey at least part of the sensorial dimensions involved in the performance of the dances

acceptable offering for the ancestors, it could not replace an ox in marriage prestations (Hamayon 2015, 3–4).

in normal times. In this way, they remind viewers of the ongoing contractual relation that will one day be made visible again through the traditional means.

It is still too early to weigh in on the full impact that the Covid-19 pandemic will have on [49] the dances and religious feasts. The examples we have provided of limited use of traditional media, substitution practices, symbolic representations and use of digital media offer only a partial picture of a truly catastrophic situation that has disrupted the customary sociability revolving around an inordinately rich public religious life. Due to the complexity of human emotions, the inner feelings of actors are not easy to penetrate, making the full breadth of the religious dimension of the dances difficult to capture even in normal circumstances. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, our research was mainly limited to people with telephones and internet access with whom we were acquainted before the lockdown and to those towns where substitution practices were posted on Facebook. Notwithstanding these limitations, we identified several crucial questions that warrant further study: Have illness and recovery from Covid-19 been a common motive for making a vow to dance as it was for one of our informants? Did the symbolic representations, in addition to maintaining the relationship with the saint, take on the added function of a supplication to end the pandemic? Has the pandemic shaken people's faith, preparing the way for a possible repudiation of traditional practices due to perceived abandonment by the saint? Or, on the contrary, will it result in a reinforcement of the dance offering as a means to ward off future disasters? Further research, including in-person fieldwork, is needed to answer these questions and gain a better view as to how popular Catholicism in Mexico has weathered the effects of Covid-19.

References

Adán, Elfego. 1910. "Las danzas de Coatetelco [The dances of Coatetelco]." *Anales del Museo Nacional* 14 (2): 133–94.

Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo. 1987. *México profundo. Una civilización negada [Deep Mexico. A Civilization denied]*. Mexico City: SepCIESAS.

Cancian, Frank. 1966. *Economy and Prestige in a Maya Community. The Religious Cargo System in Zincantan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Carrasco, Pedro. (1970) 1952. *Tarascan Folk Religion: An Analysis of Economic, Social and Religious Interactions*. New Orleans: Tulane University, Middle American Research Institute.

———. 1961. "The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Hispanic Background and Colonial Development." *American Anthropologist* 63 (3): 483–97.

———. 1976. *El catolicismo popular de los tarascos [Popular Catholicism of the Tarascans]*. Sept-Setentas 298. Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública.

Chance, John K., and William B. Taylor. 1985. "Cofradias and Cargos: An Historical Perspective on the Mesoamerican Civil-Religious Hierarchy." *American Ethnologist* 12 (1): 1–26.

Christian, William C. 1981. *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dehouve, Danièle. 2009. *La ofrenda sacrificial entre los Tlapanecos de Guerrero. [The sacrificial offering among the Tlapanecs of Guerrero.]*. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos. http://books.openedition.org/cemca/873.

———. 2016. *La realeza sagrada en México (siglos XVI-XXI) [Sacred royalty in Mexico. 16th-21st centuries]*. Mexico City: Secretaría de Cultura/Instituto Nacional de Antropologíga e Historia/ EL Colegio de Michoacán.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1956. *Nuer religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. 2006. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Gamio, Manuel. (1935) 1987. "El nacionalismo y las danzas regionales [Nacionalismo and regional dances]." In *Hacia un México nuevo. Problemas sociales* [Toward a New Mexico. Social problems]. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

Giménez Montiel, Gilberto. 1978. *Cultura popular y religión en el Anáhuac [Popular culture and religión in Anáhuac]*. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos.

Hamayon, Roberte. 2015. "Du concombre au clic. À propos de quelques variations virtuelles sur le principe de substitution." *ethnographiques.org* 30. https://www.ethnographiques.org/2015/Hamayon.

Hine, Christine, ed. 2005. *Virtual Methods. Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford/New York: Berg.

Hocart, Arthur Maurice. 1970. *Kings and Councillors. An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Isambert, François-André. 1982. *Le sens du sacré. Fête et religion populaire*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Lanternari, Vittorio, and Marie-Louise Letendre. 1982. "La religion populaire. Prospective historique et anthropologique [Popular religion. Anthropological and historical perspectives]." *Archives de sciences sociales de religions* 53 (1): 121–43.

López Austin, Alfredo. 1998. *Hombre-dios. Religión y política en el mundo náhuatl [The myth of Quetzalcoatl. Religion, rulership, and history in the Nahua world]*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

———. 2007. "Ofrenda Y Comunicación En La Tradición Religiosa Mesoamericana [Offering and Communication in the Mesoamerican Religious Tradition]." In *De Hombres Y Dioses*, edited by Xavier Noguez and Alfredo López Austin, 177–92. Mexico City: El Colegio Mexiquense/El Colegio de Michoacán.

Madsen, William. 1967. "Religious Syncretism." In *Social Anthropology*, edited by Robert Wauchope and Manning Nash, 6:369–91. Handbook of Middle American Indians. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Mauss, Marcel. 1983. "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques [Essay on the gift. Form and reason of exchange in archaic societies]." In *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, edited by Claude Lévi-Strauss, 145–279. Paris: PUF.

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mendieta, Fray Gerónimo de. 1870. *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*. Mexico City: Antigua Librería Portal de Agustinos.

Meyer, Birgit. 2015. "Picturing the Invisible. Visual Culture and the Study of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 27: 333–60.

Norget, Kristin. 2021. "Popular-Indigenous Catholicism in Southern Mexico." *Religions* 12 (7): 531. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070531.

Noriega Hope, Carlos. (1922) 1979. "Apuntes etnográficos [Ethnographic notes]." In *La población del Valle de Teotihuacán* [The population of the Teotihuacan Valley], edited by Manuel Gamio, 4:207–81. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

Nutini, Hugo G. 1989. "Sincretismo y aculturación en la mentalidad mágico-religiosa popular mexicana [Syncretism and acculturation in Mexican popular magico-religious mentality]." *L'Uomo* 11 (11): 85–123.

Orsi, Robert. 2012. "Making God's Presence Real Through Catholic Boys and Girls." In *Religion, Media and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Gordon Lynch and Anna Strhan, 147–58. London: Routledge.

Pink, Sarah, Heather Horst, John Postilll, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi. 2016. *Digital Ethnography. Principles and Practice*. Los Angeles/London: SAGE.

Ricard, Robert. 1947. *La conquista espiritual de México*. Mexico City, Editorial Jus.

Robichaux, David. 2007. "Identidades indefinidas: entre 'indio' y 'mestizo' en México y América Latina [Undefined identities: between 'Indian' and 'Mestizo' in Mexico and Latin America]." *Cahiers Amérique Latine Histoire & Mémoire ALHIM* 13. https://doi.org/10.4000/alhim.1753.

Robichaux, David, and José Manuel Moreno Carvallo. 2019. "El Divino Rostro y la danza de Santiagos en el Acolhuacan Septentrional: ¿ixiptla en el siglo XXI?" *Revista Trace*, no. 76 (July): 21. https://doi.org/10.22134/trace.76.2019.162.

Robichaux, David, José Manuel Moreno Carvallo, and Jorge Antonio Martínez Galván. 2021. "Las danzas como 'exvotos corporales': promesas individuales y sus dimensiones colectivas en las regiones de Texcoco y Teotihuacán [Dances as 'corporal exvotos': individual vows and their collective dimensions in the Texcoco and Teotihuacán regions]." In *L'exvoto ou les métamorphoses du don/El exvoto o las metamorfosis del don [The Ex-Voto or the Metamorphoses of the Gift]*, edited by Caroline Perrée, 221–53. Mexico City: CEMCA. https://tienda.cemca.org.mx/producto/el-exvoto-o-las-metamorfosis-del-don-9782111627147/.

Siméon, Rémi. 2010. *Diccionario de la lengua náhuatl o mexicana [Dictionary of the Nahuatl or Mexican language]*. Colección América nuestra América antigua. México: Siglo XXI.

Stolow, Jeremy. 2005. "Religion and/as Media." *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (4): 119–45.

Vrijhof, Pieter H. 1979. "Official and Popular Religion in 20th Century Western Religion." In *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*, edited by Pieter H. Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg, 217–43. The Hague: Walter de Gruyter.

Wolf, Eric R. 1957. "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Java." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13 (1): 1–18.

———. 1958. "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol." *The Journal of American Folklore* 71 (279): 34–39.