

# **The 'Cultural Appropriation' of Traditional Textiles from Mexico: An Analysis of 3 Case Studies**

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Estibaliz Sierra Iracheta  
geboren am 11.02.1987 in Mexiko Stadt, Mexiko

Vorsitzender: Prof. Dr. Christer Petersen  
Gutachterin: Prof. Dr. Anna Amelina  
Gutachterin: Prof. Dr. Amalia Ramirez Garayzar  
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### **Statement of Authentication**

I hereby declare that I have written the present thesis independently, without assistance from external parties and without use of other resources than those indicated. The ideas taken directly or indirectly from external sources (including electronic sources) are duly acknowledged in the text. The material, either in full or in part, has not been previously submitted for grading at this or any other academic institution.

Berlin, Germany, January 2023.



Der Faden sagt, es gehe ihn nichts an, er folge nur der Nadel.  
*(Sudan)*



## Abstract

### **The 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles from Mexico: an analysis of 3 Case Studies**

This Doctoral thesis intended to examine the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles from Mexico through an analysis of 3 Case Studies. This research had the objective of understanding the phenomenon through the relationships, perspectives, and discourses of the social actors involved, by following the development of controversies involving different objects of material culture from different communities: the *xaam nixuy* Ayuujk (Mixe) blouse from Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca; the Hñuhú and Hñahñ (Otomi) "Tenango" embroideries from the communities of Tenago de Doria and San Nicolás in Hidalgo; and the mestizo *gabanes* from Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen in the State of Michoacán.

This Doctoral examination was sustained through theoretical approximations that located the occurrences within transnational/transcultural processes, engaging with qualitative methodologies and multi-sited ethnographies in order to obtain data that elucidated on the diversity of objects, actors, relationships, understandings, perceptions, values, and discourses involved in the 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles controversies in the country.

The content analysis of this Doctoral research dissected a number of different processes, effects, and consequences of the phenomenon as it developed in dissimilar locations and periods of time. The examination revealed a complex intersection of meanings, productions, circulations, and consumptions of culture, that simultaneously affected cultural meanings, relationships, and processes, raising concerns over the management of traditional textiles as objects of cultural heritage, and the unviability of protecting communal creative domains through national legal mechanisms.

Keywords: cultural appropriation, traditional textiles, crafts, transculturation, cultural rights, cultural copyright.





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**¡Tioskujuyip!**

**¡Jamädi!**

**¡Muchas gracias por todo!**

**Herzlichen Dank für alles!**

**Thank you so much for everything!**



## **Disclaimer**

Due to a number of concerns over confidentiality, this Doctoral thesis has been published maintaining the anonymity of all the participants involved in this research. This decision was primarily held as a mean to protect the identities of all of the individuals who conveyed detailed, accurate accounts on the 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles in the 3 Study Cases analysed for this work. A number of issues discussed involved the identification of political figures and/or State institutions that are currently intervening on the topic. The integrity of all of the participants had to be contemplated, not only in an attempt to sustain mutual trust, but as primordial effort to avoid possible repercussions and/or negative consequences that could affect the respondents and their artisanal endeavours and communities.



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## **SECTION 1**

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### **Approaching the research**



## Introduction

This Doctoral thesis examines the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' by explicitly focusing on 3 Case Studies involving traditional textiles from Mexico. Based on methodological and theoretical perspectives from the social sciences, the work intends to closely follow the development of different occurrences – developing in dissimilar locations and periods time – in order to clearly elucidate the diversity of objects, actors, voices, relationships, and perceptions involved in the controversies. Based on the content analysis of data obtained from interviews carried out with different interested parties, this work intends to follow objects and actors in order to dissect the different processes, effects, and consequences of the phenomenon.

The following examination stems from the critical approaches of Cultural Studies, and specifically, from the interdisciplinary field of Heritage Studies, representing a series of academic perspectives that position and constitute cultural heritage as a fundamental force within contemporary societies. The main theoretical perspectives presented revolve around Post-Colonial and Intercultural approximations, which concern the analysis and comprehension of a broad range of politically frail, socially sensitive, and scientifically fascinating topics. As with other pressing issues explored within these disciplines, the subject of this dissertation presents an opportunity to deconstruct knowledge in the modern world, while promoting symmetric dialogue, and the recognition of cultural diversity in a globalized world.

This thesis is structured in 12 Chapters divided into 5 sections. The initial section is composed by an introduction which briefly describes the topic and research problem for this thesis, further complemented with a State of the Art (Chapter 2) and the examination of previous theoretical assessments (Chapter 3) to complexify the issue of 'cultural appropriation'. Serving as a fundamental approach to initiate the examination of the phenomenon, this section then introduces the working assumptions, as well as the questions and objectives (Chapter 4) raised during the initial stages of this research. Section 2 contains a delineation of the empirical approaches, presenting the methodological aspects (Chapter 5) and strategic plans for obtaining and analysing the data (Chapter 6) to develop the research. Section 3 is focused on the main empirical approaches that enable a deep understanding of the domains analysed in the thesis, conformed by an historical and conceptual contextualization of textiles in Mexico (Chapter 7). Section 4 presents analysis of the Case Studies (Chapters 8 to 10). The final section of this thesis includes the analysis of the results (Chapter 11), as well as a final conclusion (Chapter 12) that comments on the methodological, theoretical, and empirical examination of the Case Studies and the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation'.

Moreover, this dissertation intends to adopt a neutral position, opting instead to access and discern the many threads and forces that weave this complex, multidimensional phenomenon without *a priori* judgements. Unlike widespread opposing stances and assumptions based on moral convictions, this work further proposes an empirical approach to analyse 3 Case Studies involving the 'appropriations' of the *xaam nixuy* Ayuujk (Mixe) blouse from Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca; the Hñuhú and Hñahñ (Otomi) "Tenango" embroideries from the communities of Tenago de Doria and San Nicolas in Hidalgo; and the mestizo *gabanes* from Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen in the State of Michoacán.

This national perspective entails a transethnic identification of the number of objects and actors involved, as well as the analysis of the relationships that are articulated through different networks of interaction. Thus, the questions that guided this research were primordially directed towards their recognition – what are the objects, who are the actors, and what are the relationships and related ideas implicated in the events? – as well as the questions of where and when do cases of 'appropriation' occur, in an attempt to locate the sites and chronology of events through which the controversies develop, further revealing the series of discourses, perceptions, understandings and values at stake.

### 1.1 Presentation

My interest on the issue of 'cultural appropriation' dates back to the year 2016, after French fashion designer Isabel Marant was first accused of 'plagiarising'<sup>1</sup> the traditional blouse from the Ayuujk (Mixe) people from the Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec community in the southwestern State of Oaxaca. During that period, I had been working under direction of Anthropologist and folk-art specialist, Marta Turok Wallace, in the Ruth D. Lechuga Folk Art Research Centre of the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City.

The controversy incited a series of vigorous discussions over the use of cultural expressions that were considered examples of Indigenous and national cultural heritage by commercial brands, adding to the succession of cases of 'appropriation' that gained global prominence in the past decades. Surrounded by media disinformation and fuelled by incendiary reactions on social media, the Ayuujk-Marant controversy would detonate a wider upheaval, once it was revealed that fellow Paris-based fashion house Antik Batik, was suing the fashion atelier before French authorities, claiming the legal ownership of the patents and rights for the design and commercialisation of the garment.

The occurrence unleashed a series of responses over the following months – including a small protest outside of Marant's shop in New York City – that lead into the recent approval of a law intended to protect the cultural heritage of Indigenous and Afromexican communities in the country. As the controversy gained national momentum, I had the opportunity to partake in a private academic worktable organised by Marta Turok, with the participation of singer Susana Harp Helú, Sociologist Ishtar Cardona, and Lawyer Carlos Arturo Martínez Negrete, who had been advising and legally representing Hñahñu (Otomi) communities who had their "Tenango" style embroidered motives reproduced by commercial brands, without their consent and without any form of retribution.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'plagiarising' is the colloquial term through which the phenomenon is generally referenced in Mexico.

# GENTE CONTRA ISABEL MARANT Y EL ROBO DE DISEÑOS OAXAQUEÑOS

( PEOPLE AGAINST ISABEL MARANT AND THE THEFT OF OAXACAN DESIGNS)

Isabel Marant and Antiquité Vati are attempting to claim Oaxacan designs. They are attempting to take legal rights of the textile patterns from the Mixe Indigenous people.

#marantisathief

"Diseños Oaxaqueños que hace unos meses fueron plagiados por la modista francesa Isabel Marant y a empresa Antiquité Vati, comenzaron un juicio para reclamar los derechos de autor del diseño textil, originarios de Indígenas Mixe de Oaxaca." - Maria Guzman, Mexico

PETICION

<https://www.change.org/p/consejo-nacional-de-las-culturas-y-las-artes-lo-que-es-de-oaxaca-se-queda-en-oaxaca>

#marantisathief

FACEBOOK

#marantisathief

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/918058451619462/>



Figure 1. Poster denouncing Isabel Marant's 'appropriation' of Oaxacan designs. (Personal Archive, 2016).

This worktable would reveal to me that the issue of 'cultural appropriation' was not a novelty. The Ayuujk-Marant controversy was not unique, as several national and foreign companies and designers resorted to the practice, with motifs and textiles from Indigenous and national origins being found in collections from American, Brazilian, Chinese, and Mexican commercial and fashion brands. The discussions would eventually lead to a series of promotional activities – namely "1, 2, 3 por Tlahui" – to which I was unable to join, since I was embarking in my preparations to move to Germany to study the Master's in World Heritage Studies at the Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg, as a beneficiary of the FONCA-CONACYT Scholarship 2016.

As a professional and academic dedicated to the research, promotion and safeguarding of traditional textiles, the question of 'cultural appropriation' remained a pertinent one for me to address. Embedded in the infinite array of meanings and understandings conceded by the ideas of cultural heritage – which are as abundant and diverse as its various forms, circulating throughout all different levels of society – the complexity of 'cultural appropriation' involves some of the contingencies that have surged since the adoption of the World Heritage Convention, and which have emphasised the dissimilarities between the diversity of perceptions, definitions, classifications, interpretations, and approaches to cultural heritage globally. Therefore, it is within these disputes, and through a conciliatory position, that I pose the relevance of my Doctoral research, as an academic contribution to the overall discussions on cultural heritage and the phenomena of 'cultural appropriation'.

The late-modern world is, to say the least, complex, characterised by major shifts in economic, political, and social orders around the world. The intricacies of new global interactions and exchanges, abruptly brought by globalisation, required of the conception of new terms to define and describe the diversity of phenomena and processes, composing the multifaceted realities that were experienced in the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Evidence suggests that the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' was first detected within the legal arenas in the United States, but was not conceptualised and coined into a term, until scholars began assessing the processes and consequences of Colonialism. Displaying an extensive array of connections and interactions between different social actors, objects, practices, and beliefs, the issue of



'cultural appropriation' began to be considered an increasingly frequent and recurrent problem, reaching political agendas on national and international scales. However, far from elucidating the particularities of the phenomenon, it seems that the propagation of the term in public, academic, and political discourse has tainted its broader understanding, contributing to its categorical ambiguity, and thus, to the generation of controversial legal proposals intended to solve the problem.

Most of the time, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' arises in artistic and creative contexts, particularly within the fashion and music industries, where accusations – usually followed by summary online trials and backlashes – are held against celebrities or individuals who use certain compositions, aesthetics, garments or artefacts that are considered to be the property of another cultural group; a group to which they do not belong to, and to which they have not asked for permission nor remunerated for their commercial use.

However, accusations of 'cultural appropriation' have not been limited to controversies over commercial use, surging as well in discussions over the use of traditional garments and artefacts of Indigenous origins by assistants to music festivals (Lynskey, 2014; Jer, 2018); in the use of Halloween costumes and the demeaning portrayals of minorities (Doyle, 2018); as well as the use of specific hairstyles that are considered to be representative of a determined cultural group (Silvera, 2016). As matter revolving around notions of cultural identity and heritage, 'cultural appropriation' has also been a topic related to the cooking and fusion of foreigner dishes and cuisines (BBC Newsbeats) (Young & Brunk, 2012).



Figure 2. Assistants to a festival wearing Native headdresses. (Getty, 2016).

In the public arena, most discussions are girded by generalised assumptions and frantic deliberations, noting that the majority of opinionated pieces lack any form of substantial empirical research. Significant discussions seem to remain limited and restricted into two sole seemingly plausible and superficial positions, as arguments over 'cultural appropriation' either energetically defended the acts, or argue against the practice, sustaining a never-ending, inexhaustible debate. The generalised sense of increased public outrage has resulted in the controversies reaching the political spheres, ensuing number of initiatives and legislative proposals that aim to protect or halt the usage of what has been deemed to be the cultural and intellectual property of cultural groups by external parties. Nevertheless, these proposals have been associated to other critical issues, suggesting that the resolution of 'cultural appropriation' controversies through legal mechanisms, represents an inadequate and deeply flawed measurement that will generate further detrimental consequences.

There are many modes or examples considered to be cases of 'cultural appropriation', the vast majority of which are never manifested in theory nor in practice in simple ways. This makes me part from the assumption that although generally considered as equal, cases of 'cultural appropriation' are never the same since they develop in different manners and through different relationships. As a social phenomenon, constantly evolving through individual and external influences and forces, cases of 'cultural appropriation' involve different objects and groups of people, suggesting that the controversies have particularities and variables that influence the ways in which cultural resources are impacted. This approach implies the existence of dynamics that are more complex than previously thought.

Moreover, the complex subtleties at play occur in diverging social, political, cultural, and economic contexts, simultaneously impacting the factors and conditions that affect the process and outcomes of each case. My working assumptions suggest that the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' is not a singularity, but a commonplace of social global interactions and realities: a nuanced process whereby cultural forms literally move through time and space, interacting with other cultural forms and settings, influencing each other, producing new forms and changes in the cultural settings. It is my belief that 'cultural appropriation' revolves around conflicting and opposing notions, as well as different processes and understandings, that are circumscribed by conflicting frameworks, further sustained, and maintained by differing postures, theories, and judgements.

As a cultural researcher and promoter in this very specific area of cultural expertise, the 'appropriation' of traditional textiles – a concept which I utilise in reference to the non-industrialized, manual, or semi-mechanical manufacture techniques of producing textile objects; as well as the knowledges to manufacture the artefacts as expressions of material culture – represent an indispensable subject for me to address.



Figure 3. Printed shawls by Mexican designer Pineda Covalin with motifs from different Indigenous communities from Mexico. (Personal Archive, 2016).

In countries like Mexico, traditional textiles are regarded as examples of cultural heritage – cultural resources, that are until today, available for commercial exploitation within the unprotected public domains of crafts in both Indigenous and mestizo idiosyncrasies, and national identities. The realms are usually associated with the concepts of the 'tangible' and the 'intangible' within authorised heritage discourses; through the hegemonic contrapositions between the notions of the 'Indigenous', the 'ethnic', the 'mestizo', and the 'national'; as well as the 'traditional' vs. the 'modern'. This has allowed for their unrestricted usage by businesses and transnational corporations as inspiration for the creation of marketable product – a practices that is believed to only benefit commercial producers, as the practice is carried without economic retribution, recognition, nor permission from the communities or people who created the elements.

The perception of the unequal circumstance between the 'appropriators' and the 'appropriated' has attracted the attention of academics, mass media, and the general public, generating an expanding wave of combustible outrage. The perceivable power asymmetries between these actors have encouraged political figures to pursue the development of legal solutions.

Consequently, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' has motivated the attempts to create and establish of new system of property law regimes, aiming to regulate and protect the use of certain cultural expressions from their profitable use by third parties. However, the

approach raises a series of concerns and questions that reveal a myriad of problems and contradictions. The possibilities of long-term implications and detrimental consequences seem to have been overlooked. In this sense, this investigation will offer a detailed exploration of the phenomenon in order to evidence the themes, contexts, processes, and interactions through which the 'appropriation' of traditional textiles from Mexico has occurred.

For this reason, this Doctoral proposal intends to revisit and transcend the overall debate, by presenting and maintaining a conciliatory position: an effort that should allow space for the active participation of all actors involved, to access the key elements of the discussion. Hopefully, this exercise will result in a valuable contribution for the foundation of viable mechanism, providing suitable devices to ensure mutually beneficial relations and compromises that stimulate the overall appreciation, safeguarding, and promotion of traditional textile in Mexico, and around the world.





## Chapter 1 – Contributions and perspectives: previous studies on the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon

The following chapter aims to expose the main scholars, disciplines and academic perspectives that have previously addressed the question of 'cultural appropriation' from a scholarly perspective, in order to pinpoint the relevance of my Doctoral investigation and its possible contributions to the overall analysis of the phenomenon.

The State of the Art has been organized in different sections, presenting first a brief review of the strategies that were applied to systematize and catalogue the number of different perspectives related to the concept of 'cultural appropriation', as a mean to identify the main authors of reference. This literary review then delved on the number of debates and key elements of the discussions surging from diverse geographical and disciplinary perspectives, in order to locate the main dimensions that problematize the study of the phenomenon.

Over the past few decades, 'cultural appropriation' has become a growing focus of public, academic, and political concern, surrounded by an infinite array of debates and resources intended to dissect the phenomenon. From the existence of opinionated articles online to the publication of specialised academic material, ethical guidelines, and legal proposals, references to the issue of 'cultural appropriation' have become increasingly miscellaneous and accessible to different publics.

However, considering the ever-expanding pool of information addressing the subject a selection criterion had to be applied. This strategy had the purpose of tracing the main academic deliberations and perspectives conforming what is considered as the state of the art, allowing me to properly identify and document the recurring themes and ideas revolving the subject; and to recognise the main scholars and schools of thought that have previously explored the topic in the past years.

To do so, prime consideration was given to secondary and conceptual/theoretical resources, which offered different layers of assessment and interpretations of the issue. Due to the large number of primary sources dedicated to particular cases of 'appropriation' on a global scale, attention was mainly driven towards sources that involved the appropriation of different objects of material culture – especially those regarded as expressions of 'cultural heritage' or concerning 'intangible' natures. Moreover, particular consideration was given to sources related to traditional textiles, which represent my foremost academic and professional area of interest. Major importance was also given to cases of 'appropriation' committed by fashion industries and commercial brands.

The identification of suitable material commenced with the consultation of a series of online academic databases and search engines. Most relevantly among them were Google and its platforms Google Books, Google Scholar; Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Springer Link, Jstor, and Taylor & Francis Online. The online searches were carried by introducing the academic term given to the concept – "cultural appropriation" – as the main keyword. "Cultural misappropriation" was also entered in these engines, although all results directed to links using the aforementioned term. Additionally, in an attempt to find articles centred on Latin American perspectives, and to refine the analysis of material from a regional point of view, the searches were also carried out in Spanish, using the term "apropiación cultural"<sup>2</sup>. However, it came to my attention that particularly in Mexico, references to the phenomenon directed to the colloquial term of "plagio" (plagiarism).

The number of academic references in Spanish were noticeably reduced – Escalona Victoria (2016), Castillo (2017), Sánchez Cordero (2018), Lara (2019), Aguilar Gil (2019) – and thus, it must be highlighted that most of the articles examined for this thesis were written in English and produced outside of Latin American contexts. Being a subject of particular relevance within the region it was surprising to discover the lack of academic publications addressing the subject. In this sense, it is my belief that this thesis represents a valuable attempt to reduce this contextual gap, by adding the experience and understanding of the phenomenon from a Latin American and Mexican perspective to the transnational study and discussions on 'cultural appropriation'.

The majority of references focusing on the topic have been produced by scholars working in countries from North America. In Canada: Todd (1990), Handler (1991), Fung (1993), Coombe (1993, 1997, 1998), Hladki (1994), Rowell (1995), Ziff & Rao (1997), Young (2008) and Haig-Brown (2010) – and in the United States: Tsotsie (2002), Ashley & Plesch (2002), Scafidi (2005), Brown (2005), Rogers (2006) and Matthes (2016). To a minor extent, works by European scholars and from Oceania were also available, including, from the UK: Schneider (2003); and from Australia: Cuthbert (1998) and Shand (2002). Studies on specific cases of 'appropriation' of Indigenous cultures are predominant in American literature, with essays authored by Black (2002), Buescher & Ono (1994), Churchill (1994), Ono & Buescher (2001), Kadish (2004), Torgovnick (1996) and Whitt (1995).

The selected academic literature was largely developed within the social and cultural disciplines, most predominantly in the areas of Law, Anthropology, Sociology, Communication, Political Science, Philosophy, Art, and Art History. Moreover, the critical and theoretical traditions through which 'cultural appropriation' has been explored are derived from the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of Critical/Cultural, Postcolonial, Media, African American and Gender Studies.

However, as with other matters of scholarly inquiry, the observation of different forms of 'cultural appropriation' predates the appearance of its theoretical concept, and as such, detecting the conceptualisation of the phenomena in a world of distinct meanings, conjunctures, academic disciplines, and historical processes, seemed like an odyssey.

The existence of legal evidence suggests that 'cultural appropriation' had been recognized in the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (New Mexico, 1909, p. 293), surging in context with the intensification of State involvement in Native affairs, the patrimonialisation of national heritage, and the development of Anthropology as an academic discipline (Berlo, 1992). The early reasonings over the issue resulted in the implementation of laws intended to regulate the commercialisation of *imitation* Native American crafts, an attempt which had the

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that when using Google engines, searches for the English term yielded over 3,360,000 results on Google.com. In Spanish, the use of the translation "apropiación cultural" only reached 133,000 results in Google.com.mx. The terms "plagio" + "textiles" yielded about 332,000 results.

purpose of guaranteeing the *authenticity* of artefacts, the *continuity* of the communities and of their *traditional* ways of life. By State determination, these deductions, and particularly the assumptions over the negative inferences of 'appropriation' on Native Americans, reveals that the question has been a matter of ongoing legal and commercial concern from much earlier than it is commonly acknowledged.

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century marked the initiation of the discussions on the cultural and ideological legacies of colonialism and imperialism on a global scale, generating a series of epistemological, social, and political conundrums. Along with the discussion of issues involving the notions of race, gender, culture and power, a series of relevant sociological explorations on the practices and processes of culture were produced. These academic perspectives began to raise questions over the aesthetic appropriation of Others by non-Westerns (Clifford, 1988, p.197).

The first academic groups to prompt a critical analyse of 'cultural appropriation' in the early decades of this Century, were the intelligentsia from the Pan-Africanist movement and the Harlem/Paris Renaissance. Conformed by intellectuals, artists and writers of black and African origins from the United States and the Caribbean – among them, Locke (1925); Cruse (1964) – these groups commenced to distinguish and denounce certain 'appropriative' practices that had flourished within European and American cultural industries in the aftermath of the First World War.

Framed by the social and political tensions of the historically-virulent racism against Blacks, and in the midst of a seemingly contradictory appeal towards the 'exoticization' of "blackness", these discussions would condemn among other situations, the instances in which White artists had used creative elements of Black cultural expressions to enrich their theatre, music, and film. Through these perspectives, the subject of 'cultural appropriation' began to gain relevance as an issue intrinsically related to notions of race.



Figure 4. Shamanic Inuit tunic 'appropriated' by UK brand KTZ in 2015. (Personal Archive, 2016).

With the development of Postcolonial Studies and the advancement of critical thought in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the subject of 'appropriation' would evolve into a matter of amplified interest, drawing attention not only of scholars, but of the general public. As such, the issue began to be progressively addressed by political and diplomatic agendas.

The relevance of Postcolonial Studies to the analysis of 'cultural appropriation' has been vital in understanding the phenomena, its processes and contexts, representing one of the most relevant theoretical traditions through which different disciplinary approaches have addressed the subject until today. Thriving in the 1960's, this school of thought denounced the series of discourses that had defined and categorised the entire world according to Western perspectives, imaginaries and hierarchies, by contrasting with Other cultures, and between different peoples.

Amid many of its significant consequences, these perceptions – simultaneously created and established by *power/knowledge* structures – generated a series of dichotomic and essentialist notions that had justified and perpetuated certain processes and behaviours in regions

that had been previously colonised by the West. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, this system had propagated and founded different patterns of subordination and domination, based on the diffusion of cultural particularities and differences into single encompassed categories. The process, known as 'Othering', derived into the creation of 'exotic' entities, and with it, the consolidation of stereotypes and other detrimental systems of representation.

Postcolonial academic contributions had been critical in demonstrating how the reaffirmation of these prejudices, originated and conceptualised solely through Western visions and practices had noxious effects on societies, particularly to those from which elements had been extracted. Amongst many of its consequences, these *power/knowledge* processes and structures had justified slavery, systematic oppression, and racism, as well as the pillage of cultural heritage/artefacts from around the world. Equally, the processes had also prompted a rejection towards *traditional* forms of living in juxtaposition to the notions of *civilisation*, *modernisation*, and *development*, that perpetuated social and power asymmetries. The discourses had also provoked a sense of moral burden, propagating beliefs of entitled obligation among Westerners to rule and 'civilise' the 'primitive' non-Western world.

Colonial discourses permeated international organisations, states, governments, institutions, and experts in the field of culture - affecting not only all sort of authorised practices, policies and institutions, but every other aspect of society in the late-modern world. Highly influenced by a Postcolonial theory, the development of Cultural Studies, and eventually of Heritage Studies, provided an academic platform through which these issues could be addressed and scientifically analysed.

The academic review of these disciplines encountered references relating to different forms and processes of 'cultural appropriation', appearing in the works of renown scholars, including Coutts-Smith (1976), Edward Said (1978), Paul-Michel Foucault (1982), James Clifford (1988), Stuart Hall (1992; 1997), Jeremy Waldron (1992), Charles Taylor (1992), bell hooks (1992) and Appadurai (1998). Among Heritage Studies researchers, the issue has also been referenced by Laura Jane Smith (2006), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006), and Rodney Harrison (2013). Nevertheless, it was not until the decade of the 1990's, that the question of 'cultural appropriation' began to be specifically addressed by scholars, changing its understanding as a multidimensional phenomenon, occurring through different modes.

The affluence of academic interest that spiked in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was triggered by a controversial public debate that initially detonated in Canada. This involved a mediatic debate that spanned for more than two years, concerning the Writer's Union recommendations over 'voice appropriation' (a term coined by the institution to refer to the properties of writers depicting other cultures or of them telling "someone else's story").

Framed by Natives claims over self-determination, and the concerns of other non-dominant cultures over the 'appropriation' of their works and cultural artefacts by dominant groups, the Canadian incident encouraged an upsurge in public debate with the participation of social activists, cultural theorists, policy makers and legislators that raged in printed media. Ultimately, the controversy would encourage the publication of the first sources entirely dedicated to the question of 'cultural appropriation', authored by groups of scholars interested in the different forms of cultural production and social interactions. This academic problematization of 'cultural appropriation' revealed it as a complex and multidirectional occurrence, conformed by a broad and diverse range of meanings, understandings, modes, and themes - all of which were intrinsically related to other significant issues within the Cultural Studies fields and its different categories of critical analysis.

In this assortment of multidisciplinary approaches, the overall contributions of Canadian scholars - Todd (1990), Handler (1991), Fung (1993), Hladki (1994), Rowell (1995), Ziff & Rao (1997) - have been globally accredited, as the group began to explore different approaches to the issue, independently reworking its theoretical frames of reference and presenting diverse theoretical positions that appertained to the power relations and dynamics embedded in the phenomenon.

However, it was the publication of *Borrowed Powers: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* by Ziff & Rao (1997) that a milestone in the global discussion would be reached. Comprised by a heterogeneity of authors - including Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao themselves, Nell Jessup Newton, Kwame Dawes, Rosemary J. Coombe, and James D. Nason, to name a few - *Borrowed Powers* exposed a diversity of topical concerns, theoretical orientations and analytical methods, that addressed the 'appropriation' of a diverse array of cultural elements - mostly of Indigenous and Black origins - in the domains of music, art, art narratives, colonial and post-colonial discourses, popular culture, scientific knowledge, and tangible cultural property.





Figure 5. West African Dashiki shirt and creation by Ron Bass & Forever 21, 2015. (Personal Archive, 2016).

The book was vital in demonstrating the constructions and implications of 'cultural appropriation' as a social process, simultaneously influenced by power dynamics and by different processes of cultural transmission. Moreover, the variety of perspectives added valuable assessments on the contested issues of *authenticity*, *representation*, *heritage* and *intellectual property*, influencing with this, every forthcoming scholar contribution and legal attempt to protect intellectual cultural property on a global scale.

The impact of *Borrowed Powers* extended to other disciplines of cultural interest throughout the next decades, influencing works in disciplines such as Media Studies and Intercultural Communication: Rogers (2006); Philosophy: Young (2005, 2008), Matthes (2016); Art and Art History: Ashley, K. & Plesch, V. (2002), Schneider (2003); Education: Haig-Brown (2010); and Fashion: Shand (2002).

The main definitions and understandings of 'cultural appropriation' that had been upheld until then had showed a predisposition to focus on its political dimensions, revolving, fundamentally, around power asymmetries between dominant and subordinate groups. However, the multidisciplinary approaches that surged in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, allowed authors to engage with the problematization of the empirically questionable and ideologically circumspect assumptions that prevailed from the previous decades.

Among the academic developments that surged in the period was the identification of the four main categories that determined the power dynamics involved in the phenomenon, placing a particular focus on the inferences of the *transculturation* processes, in context of global capitalism in the neo-colonial and postmodern eras, that challenged the dominant conceptualization of 'cultural appropriation' and of culture itself.

These critical observations were also pertinent in addressing significant themes surrounding the *transmission*, *preservation*, *access* and *control* over objects, practices, and places of culture and heritage. This expanded the discussion into analysing matters such as *cultural identity* and *diversity*, the notions of *integrity* and *authenticity*, the issues of *representation*, the processes of 'exotic otherness', the *values* of cultural goods, the *universalisation* of knowledge and heritage, and the *commodification* and *fetishization* of cultural elements. Among these perspectives, the conflict presented by the use of essentialist notions that compose the general idea of 'appropriation' on the dichotomy of "insiders" and "outsiders" was also addressed.

The works of Jeremy Waldron (1992), Charles Taylor (1992), bell hooks (1992), James Clifford (1998) and Edward Said (1978), on multiculturalism, cross-cultural contact, the construction of identities, the politics of representation, and the processes of exotic otherness have all been related to the discussions on identity, diversity and cultural hegemony surrounding the 'appropriation' debates. The topic of *representation* between the *West and the Rest* has also been widely addressed by Hall (1992; 1997). Specific cases of 'cultural appropriation' involving issues of representation in the United States have been further explored by Churchill (1994) and Whitt (1995).

The second largest disciplinary approach that can be distinguished in this assortment of academic perspectives ensuing the Canadian debate, are the ones that focused on the creation and establishment of prescriptive policies or laws intended to protect cultural expressions – particularly those of Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal origins. The socio-political and legal aspects of 'cultural appropriation' have been extensively addressed by Coombe (1993, 1993b, 1997), Tsotsie (2002), Scafidi (2005), Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), Brown (1998, 2005) and Haig-Brown (2010).

In the legal arena, the diversity of references mainly addressed the issues of *rights, ownership and legislation* in American and Canadian contexts, through an exploration of the social and cultural implications of intellectual property laws, and the examination of the politics of cultural properties and heritages within modern consumer societies. By questioning the concepts of culture and identity upon which legal categories are based, these investigations revealed that present-day legal notions have been founded and based on colonial histories, concepts, and categories. Similarly, these constriction of legal imaginaries and categories within lawful frameworks, have been associated to the *art/culture system* created and dictated by Western perceptions over art, culture, and identity.

The conceptualisation of *ownership* has also been explored, highlighting how the granting of property rights would have to be contested between individuals and the communities from which they surge. Most relevant to this discussion has been perhaps the fact that legal regimes – as a development of the West – are considered to lay in opposition to Indigenous conceptions, ruling systems and cosmovisions, as current legal systems disregard and further disarticulate Indigenous world viewpoints, practices, and interests. Surprisingly, the majority of authors have unanimously agreed that the current systems and laws that regulate matters of ownership and authorship are inadequate to address the issue of 'cultural appropriation'.

Both the phenomenon of *commodification* and *fetishization* have been broadly theorized in critical and cultural studies, with authors referring mainly to works by Marx (1986), Ono & Buescher (2001) and Whitt (1995). The conceptualisation of agency, in regard to commodification of cultural objects has been widely discussed by Clifford (1988), Cooks (1998) and Rogers (2006). These authors have also observed how in the overall discussion of the phenomenon, culture is reduced to the principles of *intellectual property*, subduing *social identities* to the processes of *commodification*, in which communities are forced to enter neoliberal dynamics, such as creating collective brands to commercialise their cultural goods.

Overall, the selected material represents an indispensable reading for initially approaching and understanding the very complex nature of 'cultural appropriation', as the authors have outlined and explored its implications and relation to other conflicts and contingencies, appertaining to the social and political dynamics of contemporary cultures. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, most of these works have been focused on Anglo-American contexts, highlighting the relevance of investigating the topic from a different perspective in order to contribute to a broader understanding and analysis of the phenomenon and its consequences, widening the debate.

## **Chapter 2 – Towards the complexity of 'cultural appropriation': what is known and what has been said about the question**

The following chapter intends to examine the concept of 'cultural appropriation', by highlighting the relevant themes and concepts surrounding its academic debate. This exercise was attempted as a mean to deepen the analysis of the phenomenon, following a number of lines of research that examine the origins of the term, the discussions over the perceived asymmetries in power relationships and dynamics, and the construction of the controversies through problematic essentialist perspectives, which have ultimately structured the comprehension of the phenomenon as a harmful process. Additionally, this chapter intends to introduce the debates over the legal dimensions involved in 'cultural appropriation', presenting evidence from a number of authors that have rendered regulatory mechanisms as inadequate for the protection of the cultural expressions involved in the controversies.

Altogether, the section aims to serve as a starting point for constructing the working assumptions for this thesis, providing some of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that contextualize the analytical axes for this research. This literary review was carried with the purpose of explaining some aspects of the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon, further attempting to detect the absence of approaches that provide a full or specifically explained empirical or theoretical solution to the problem. Moreover, the following subsections provide an insightful opportunity to reflect on the research questions guiding this work – what is cultural appropriation? what are the objects, and who the actors involved? what are the relationships and related ideas implicated in the events? where and when do the controversies surge?

### **2.1 What is 'cultural appropriation'? The origins of the controversies and the definition of the concept**

The origins of the term 'cultural appropriation' have been explored by Fassin (2018), who stated that the term originated in the English language at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but erroneously suggested, that it first appeared within the artistic field in references to "cultural colonialism" (a topic widely discerned by Coutts-Smith, 1976). Furthermore, according to the French sociologist it was bell hooks (1992), author and figure of Black feminism, who had first developed the concept, summarizing it through the metaphor "of eating the Other" in the early 1990's.

However, academic evidence suggests that the term has earlier references within African American Studies, dating back to the 1920's, with early mentions pointing to the benefiting of American cultural industries from the creativity and contributions of African Americans, as white creative artists used elements such as spirituals, jazz, and dances, to enrich their music, theatre and film (Locke, 1925; Cruse, 1964, p.14). Historian James Clifford has mentioned that the 'négrophilie' interest and irruption of black figures to European and American cultural scenes, as well as the recognition of African "art" during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, had since then raised questions over the aesthetic appropriation of others by non-Westerns (as well as other issues involving race, gender, and power) (1988, p.197).

The current pervasiveness of 'cultural appropriation' in public and academic discourses implies that the concept and general understanding of the phenomenon is widespread. Yet, although descriptions are presented in all works consulted until today, some academics maintain that as with other terms within the social sciences, the concept remains undetermined, and therefore, should be considered terminologically ambiguous (Hladki, 1994; Ziff & Rao, 1997; Rogers, 2005; Haig-Brown, 2010; Matthes, 2018).



Figure 6. "La Revue Nègre" poster (1925) promoting black artists in Paris shows by artist Paul Colin. (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian).

For this reason, the notions that compose the term – the idea of "culture" and of "appropriation" through the acts of 'taking', 'using' or 'possessing'– have become a matter of inquiry among scholars, whom have recurred to dictionary definitions, as well as to generally held deliberations over the two concepts, to explore the wide range of meanings, understandings, and complexities of terminology ascribed to the term (see: Hladki, 1994, p.95, Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 2; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 928-929; Rogers, 2006, p.476; Ashley & Plesch, 2002, p. 3; Schneider, 2003, p. 216). Depending on the context, the events, world interpretations, and word distinctions, the definitions of 'cultural appropriation' can present dissimilar connotations and implications between different commentators (for instance, see Coombe, 1997, p. 74).

In a general sense, 'cultural appropriation' is understood as the using or taking of intellectual property, cultural expressions, symbols, genres, rituals, artefacts, histories, technologies and ways of knowledge produced by a cultural group ('insiders') by members from another culture – a culture that is not one's own ('outsiders') (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p.1; Young, 2005, p.136; Rogers, 2006, p.474; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 929).

It is also described as a phenomenon that might include occurrences such as the representation of cultural practices or experiences by cultural 'outsiders', the *adoption* of artistic styles that are *distinctive* of cultural groups by non-members, and the procurement or continued *possession* of cultural objects by non-members or culturally distant institutions (Young, 2008, p.4; italics by the author, Matthes, 2016, p. 2). In these instances, it should be noted that the descriptions presented by some scholars are less evaluative or normative, disregarding with this, any intent, ethics, functions, or outcomes of the acts of 'cultural appropriation'.

## 2.2 So what is the controversy? – Power relations and issues of essentialism in 'cultural appropriation'

According to Canadian professors Ziff & Rao, the modes of 'appropriation' are broad, representing multidirectional phenomenon in which three major aspects can be highlighted: first, that it affects and concerns relationships among people and communities; second, that it functions and occurs through a wide range of different modes; and third, that it remains a wide and pervasive practice (1997, p.3).

However, for many authors, the conversations over what constitutes 'cultural appropriation' leans towards the recognition of its political dimensions, including in their definitions and descriptions the ways in which asymmetrical power dynamics and relationships are central to this matter. These perspectives have been mainly influenced by Foucault's theory of power (although he is only expressly referenced by Hladki, 1994, p.111; Haig-Brown, 2010, p.932; and Shand, 2002, p.59), and contemplate that the 'appropriation' of the properties – 'originally' created or expressed by groups considered as subordinate (also identified as subalterns, disempowered, colonised or peripheral) – is committed by a more powerful cultural group, and from a position of privilege. Therefore, as something done without the consent nor retribution to the source communities, the 'usage' of these expressions only suits the purposes and needs of the dominant cultures, becoming a particularly harmful practice when the source community has been historically oppressed or exploited, or when the appropriated object is considered culturally sensitive or even sacred among marginalised groups (Todd, 1990, p.24–52; Browning, 1992, p.31; Scafidi, 2005, p.9; Tsosie, 2002, p. 300, 310–311; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 928–929).

However, categorizing and defining 'cultural appropriation' *solely* through the binary perspectives of asymmetric power relations between dominant and subordinate cultures has proved problematic for a series of different reasons. Most relevantly, this dualism is believed to disregard the role of the socio-political context in which the acts or practices of 'appropriation' occur, having the risk of erasing individual and/or collective agency. This perspective has been particularly relevant to Rogers, who considered that:

*"Socially positioned subjects engage in acts of appropriation for a variety of reasons and with a variety of understandings concerning the implications and ethics of such acts. These intentions, motivations, and interpretations are part of the system in which such acts occur and can serve to reinforce, modify, cope with, or actively resist that larger system."* (2006, p.477)

As such, 'cultural appropriation' should be considered an *active* process among different actors, in which the acts of appropriation can be shaped by a series of factors, such as the level of voluntariness (individual or cultural), the asymmetry or symmetry of power relations, its role in the domination and/or resistance processes, and the nature of the cultural boundaries involved. Rogers considers that 'cultural appropriation' is inescapable to processes of cultural contact, but that not all acts of 'appropriation' should be considered equal, as they vary in terms of the degree and relevance of its (in)voluntariness, (in)equality, (in)balance and (in)purity dynamics and processes (2006, p. 476, p. 499).

Although the phenomenon is usually understood as the result of a process where dominant cultures allocate and use certain resources – the various forms of cultural production, expressions, and creations from a subordinate group – it has been noted that the process can also occur in the opposite direction, with the subordinates integrating or adapting cultural elements from a dominant culture (known as *cultural assimilation*) (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p.5. see also Kipnis, 1993; Appadurai, 1998; Hannerz, 1996, 2014).

Roger's thesis has been particularly significant for highlighting essentialist issues with this conceptualization of 'cultural appropriation'. Among them, the author contemplates that most of the discourses on how 'cultural appropriation' operate, surge from an empirically questionable model of culture that contemplates it as being clearly bounded, static, singular, and organic (Scafidi, 2005, and Young, 2005 have been highly criticised for this). Moreover, the identification of symmetrical and asymmetrical power relations between cultures can also be complicated by the varying forms that power can take (economic capital to cultural capital, and their complex intersections), and by how agency can be multiple and differently constrained.

The author has also noted how these approaches can similarly disregard how the targets of cultural impositions negotiate their relationship to the dominant culture through a variety of tactics, and how agency and inventiveness of subordinate peoples can appropriate dominant cultural elements for resistive ends. Roger's thesis defends that the notions of transculturation questions the validity of the essentialist models of culture within contemporary and historical contexts, and further challenges the assumptions that are generally expressed in the other categories of 'cultural appropriation' (2006)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Roger's approach is similar to what Norwegian Anthropologist Arnd Schneider (2005) had previously articulated, although the latter, had focused his analysis on the art practices of individual producers, and their role in the processes of globalisation and cross-cultural contact.

Other implications of cultural essentialism in the discussion of 'cultural appropriation' have been recently explored by Erich Hatala Matthes (2016, 2018), who considered that most moral objections to 'appropriation' are predicted on making distinctions between cultural "insiders" and "outsiders", or "member" or "non-members", having the potential of falling prey to harmfully exclusionary practices (2018; 2016, p.31).

Based on this, the author considers that essentialist generalizations about culture are liable to operate in a similar way to the stereotypes and misrepresentations of group members (2016, p.16). In this sense, disputes over 'cultural appropriation' are often converse over racial dimensions. However, the issue cannot always be circumscribed by this category, as claims have been raised among different people and cultural groups, including the 'appropriation' of cultural expressions surrounding disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religions (Matthes, 2016, p.356).



Figure 7. American artist Beyoncé wearing traditional Indian attire for a video. (*Shades of Noir*, 2019).

Ultimately, Matthes has observed that 'cultural appropriation' is understood as the way in which an individual can act detrimentally in conjunction with systematic inequality, but that the need for identifying a specific agent and/or attributing responsibility to someone in order to understand the nature of the damage being done (especially in functions of artistic expression and representation) should be unnecessary. Instead, the author proposes that the focus should be directed towards ameliorating noxious effects (i.e. poverty, racism), combating and working with this, towards the elimination of systematic social marginalisation (2016, p. 28). This position has also been sustained by Clifford, who mentioned that 'cultural appropriation' represents a matter that should deal more on issues of power (and rhetoric), rather than of essence (1988, p. 14).

Celia Haig-Brown has added a valuable observation on this regard, highlighting the fact that the idea of 'cultural appropriation' arises and precedes a discourse. In this sense, without the context provided by sentences and specific events, the distinctions over intention and its implications (i.e. the 'thieving' vs. the 'using', or the moral inferences between the 'rightful' or 'wrongful' appropriative acts) would render the phenomenon unclear. Likewise, without relation to action structures or agency to power or historical events, the idea of 'cultural appropriation' cannot be constructed (2010, p. 929). As Clifford mentioned earlier: "every appropriation of culture, whether by insiders or outsiders, implies a specific temporal position and form of historical narration" (1998, p. 232).

Matthes has also pointed out to the *conceptual restrictions* in which cases of 'cultural appropriation' would be undermined without the distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. However, according to the scholar, retaining the offending concepts and distinctions has become a characteristic of what is coined as "*strategic essentialism*": the calculated use of the term as warrant to cultural politics (2016, p. 24). This stance has also been highlighted by Hladki (1994, p. 112) and Rogers (2006, p. 500).

Nonetheless, the debates over the fairness or "moral algebra" of 'cultural appropriation', remain inexhaustible, with discussions generally limited into two plausible positions: it is either defended<sup>4</sup> or argued against. However, a case has been made against the *prima facie* reasoning that considers 'cultural appropriation' to be a *profound offense*.

<sup>4</sup> For example, by Young (2008) who has been highly criticised by Rowell (1995) and Matthes (2016, 2018), for his philosophical axioms based on moral and aesthetic claims, and his position claiming that there is nothing inherently wrong with the practices of 'appropriation'.



Figure 8. American singer Katy Perry wearing Japanese attire for a concert. (Getty Images, 2018).

Drawing on the works of Joel Feinberg, this proposition was first presented by Young, who considered that the acts of appropriation represent "an offense to one's moral sensibilities... (that) strikes at a person's core values or sense of self" (2005, p. 135). Matthes (2018) rejected this consideration, by pointing that the practice can be morally permissible "because other morally relevant features of the act, such as its social value, the value of freedom of expression, the time and place of the act, the extent to which it is tolerated by group members, and how reasonable the offense is" (quoting Young, 2005) are diverted by the multiplicity of values and sensibilities which are substantially found across the different domains of social life.

However, for the majority of social activists, cultural theorists, policy makers and legislators, the situation is still considered an overall injustice and an affront to the continuity and well-being of subaltern communities. Contrary positions have even drawn parallels between the theft of Indigenous cultures to the theft of Indigenous lands (Todd, 1992, p. 4; Coombe, 1993a, p. 79; Churchill, 1994, p. 16; Torgovnick, 1996, p. 150; Whitt, 1995, p. 3; Black, 2002, p. 613; Rogers, 2006, p. 486). This overall assertion implies that the "ripping off" Native cultures represents an act of "cultural genocide", and that therefore, should be considered as a major threat to the existence of Native peoples (Russell Means, as quoted by Churchill, 1992, p. 41).

### 2.3 Who does it harm? – 'Cultural appropriation' as a damaging process

Among the many reflections presented by authors, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' tends to emphasize the consideration of the values implicated in the acts, some of which remain grounded on the general assumption that the process presents harmful consequences for communities, and/or their cultural goods and practices. Ziff & Rao (1997) have detected the four main concerns that are usually expressed in regard to acts of 'appropriation' committed by dominant cultures to subordinates.

According to them, the first alarm is usually raised by the idea that by eroding or degrading the cultural identity of a group, diversity (cosmopolitanism) becomes highly threatened, giving place instead to cultural hegemony by a dominant group (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 14; Rowell, 1995, p. 138; Coombe, 1993, p. 254). For this reason, 'cultural appropriation' has become a matter related to social policing and identity politics within liberal democracies, resulting in increasing demands for the institution of prescriptive policies to protect cultural diversity and the integrity of marginalised cultures.

However, for Coombe, these propositions – based on notions of culture, integrity, identity and authenticity – are embodied by contingent concepts which have been integral to Western histories of colonialism and imperialism (1993, p. 254). Such claims are also supported by Hladki who considers that these colonialist approaches are unable to challenge systematic racism nor guarantees opportunities for non-dominant cultural producers to be heard (1994, p. 99-101). Furthermore, Rowell, considers that the establishment of policies would offer no protection against hegemony in the marketplace of cultures, simply because artistic freedom represents an important part of Western cultural systems (1995, p. 139).

Along these lines, issues of representation have also become a constant theme in the literature, denoting how certain appropriative conducts can erroneously depict subordinate cultures. This has been usually accompanied by the claim that the acts tear the cultural identity fabric of the group (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 9). The concern has been especially prevalent among Native peoples, who have dealt with

the ahistorical depiction of “Indianness” or “Indigeneity” in the public spheres, and with the Western art/culture imaginaries mediating the capacity of others to recognise their indigenous contemporary identities as people with specific needs (Hall, 1992; Coombe, 1993, p. 267). The topic of representation usually surges when non-Natives (some of them entitled as real Indians) claim authority in defining Natives through acts of ‘appropriation’, consequently distorting both Native and non-Native understanding of Native cultures (Rogers, 2006, p. 486).

The second general assumption revolves around the value of cultural goods. This is composed by the notions that cultural objects are best understood in their original setting (a claim based on aesthetics), and to their contemplation and consideration as precious resources. These perspectives have raised concerns not only over the physical removal of cultural objects (from museums) but also over the debilitating effects that certain acts can have on an appropriated culture – such as the distortion and disrespect entailed in the enactment of spiritual traditions by non-Natives, or the individualism and commodification that is fostered through a “cultural smorgasbord” approach to “other” cultures (Rogers, 2006, p. 487). This also emphasises the context or the settings in which ‘appropriation’ may occur – outside of the milieu of a community and beyond the reach of their audiences – as a detrimental issue (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 12-14).



Figure 9. *Te Vara Nui* dance performed for tourists in Cook Islands. (Denis Tolkach, 2018).

Hladki addressed the concerns about authenticity and self-determination by highlighting the underlying assumptions that only oppressed people possess ‘authenticity’, further revealing the commonly held insinuations that conceal how marginalised groups are usually expected to be solely accountable to their communities and of speaking about issues of oppression in their creative and artistic works (1994, p. 100).

Moreover, although ‘appropriation’ can yield the creation of new cultural goods or artistic practices, the claims over the wrongful exploitation of cultural elements for financial gain over the deprivation of others has become a major point in the general debate. The usual assumption revolves around the belief that ‘cultural appropriation’ represents an unfair phenomenon in which “cultural ‘outsiders’ profit from the cultural achievements or creations of ‘insiders’, who are themselves excluded from such opportunities due to the cultural marginalisation and socio-economic inequality (Matthes, 2018; Root, 1996; Brown, 2005). However, this assumption has been considered a difficult empirical question, as some cases of ‘appropriation’ have resulted in an economic boon for the community from where the expression was originally extracted (Matthes, 2018, p. 114-118; Cowen, 2002, Shelby, 2007 p. 194).

Additionally, Rogers (2006) and Matthes (2018) have also highlighted how these notions have been closely related to instances and extensions of colonialism, or to the contexts which are considered, at present, as forms of neocolonialism. However, considering that the concept of cultural property remains ambiguous and is highly contested, questions can be raised over the existence of exploitative frameworks between different agents, relationships, and modes of ‘appropriation’ (Matthes, 2018).

The third concern relates to a set of legal issues in which intellectual property – a Western concept – mediates competing claims of ownership. In this instance, copyright laws, for example, favour individual ownership over collective ownership, placing traditional cultural

forms as part of the public domain (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 12-14; Wallis & Malm, 1984; Whitt, 1995). According to Hladki, this issue is furthermore underlined by the universalisation of knowledge, an imposition by which non-Natives have been allowed to 'appropriate' practices and beliefs from Indigenous cultures, perpetrating with this, racist and colonialist practices (1994, p. 106).

According to Ziff & Rao, the phenomenon of 'appropriation' might also present other facets, like the occupation of commercial fields by those engaging in the act of 'taking', which might limit the access of others to the markets. However, the authors also recognise that these arguments are partly based on assertions over the market and how it may react. This point is highly pertinent for further investigations, as the responses of the market may differ between different cases of 'appropriation' and throughout different contexts and facets of the process. It may even be possible that the acts of 'appropriation' may open new venues for the participation of minorities who had no previous access to the market (1997, p. 14).

For Ziff & Rao, the legal and commercial aspects revolving around the debate have other implications related to stewardship and the failures towards recognising Native sovereignty<sup>5</sup>. This fourth point closely relates to the issue of material compensation, in the sense that Western legal systems and concepts of ownership not only allow the widespread 'appropriation' of traditional elements of traditional cultures without remuneration, but also often prevent traditional cultures from blocking what they perceive as inappropriate uses or adaptations of them (Rogers, 2006, p. 487).

Denying stewardship also represents a problem, since the means for the survival and maintenance of culture can be sustained, assured or enhanced through this, and thus, the unattendance of cultural practices tends to result in the disappearance of the elements through disuse, particularly among those in the intangible domain (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 13).

These perspectives also include concerns on the commodification and desecration of activities and objects (i.e. sacred rituals or images), which furthermore, have direct inferences over the perceptions of 'purity' of a given cultural expression and the culture that created it. As Rogers, mentions, "the discourse of cultural exploitation also implies, especially via the trope of "degradation", that sovereignty involves a right to remain pure, (and) uninfluenced by others" (2006, p. 488).

Abstracting the value of a cultural element and removing it from its native context also raises worries over the changes to its meaning and functions. This also suggests an idea of cultural 'purity' of subordinated/colonised peoples, as an entity that has to be maintained static and unchanged. This dichotomic conception has been formerly associated with "primitive" peoples, and the latter, with the "developed" world (Clifford, 1988; Torgovnick, 1996). Furthermore, it also relates to a sense of resistance, where appropriation can be contrasted with 'cultural autonomy' in the sense that Indigenous people have the right to determine the disposal of one's own cultural traditions (Todd as cited by Schneider, 2018, p. 222).

The 'appropriation' of Native cultural expressions has also been linked to the abrogation of difference and the fetishization of the 'Other' (Hladki, 1994, p. 97). In this sense, the commodification of cultural elements relies upon, and constitutes culture as essence – an entity analogous to an individual or state, via fetishization – a process through which culture is reified and transformed into a commodity fetish.

As such, the social relationships involved in production are not perceived as relationships among people, but as economic relationships among the money and commodities being exchanged in market trade. This combination of essentialist culture and fetishization, perpetuates the denial of agency, dynamism, and inventiveness of Native peoples (Rogers, 2006, p. 490).

## 2.4 Who owns what? - Concerns over the legal protection of cultural expressions in the 'cultural appropriation' controversies

The perceived notions of harm produced by 'cultural appropriation' have encouraged the idea of developing legal regulatory systems against these acts. This has surged in two main contexts. The first comprises the attempts by nation-states to reclaim art and artefacts that are said to be part of 'national heritage', while the other one involves the efforts by Indigenous people to reclaim sacred antiquities and other properties. Both instances, have been reflected in both international and domestic national laws<sup>6</sup> (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p.18-19; Tsotsie, 2012, p. 346; Clifford, 1988).

However, commercial interest over information available in the unprotected public domain of Indigenous societies has become a matter of contempt. Cases of 'appropriation' of Native knowledge – also identified through the categories of 'tangible' and 'intangible heritage',

<sup>5</sup> Ziff & Rao mention that one of the major issues come from the fact that claims over the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty have been unsuccessful in many countries, including Canada, the United States and Australia. Although 'cultural appropriation' is considered a wrongful act, a 'theft' by the majority of communities, their ruling systems might be unacknowledged by the State, and thus, their claims are immediately dismissed. However, several exceptions are known, including the successful copyright action of Aboriginal Australians against manufacturers of carpets (Milpurrurru et al. vs. Indofurn Pty. Ltd. Et al., 1994), which marked an important precedent in the legal protection of Indigenous cultural expressions. However, although the court Australian acknowledged the ruling system of the community, the governing of the action by that same scheme was not entertained (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p.16). Similarly, as of 2001, the Kunas of Panama encouraged the approval of the 'Regulations of Use of Collective Law' for the protection of their textile molas and other Indigenous expressions. This special register system was passed by the Panamanian Government, establishing that the cultural and artistic expression of the molas can only be considered a collective property, and thus, no individual – including any single member of the community – can own the designs and/or benefit from their selling without retribution to the community. However, the Law No. 20 has created a series of major problems within the community. This include, among others, raising tensions resulting from the clash between the individual cultural rights of the women who produce the molas, and the collective cultural rights of the community, supervised by a general council entirely integrated by men. Women from the Kuna communities have also taught the techniques to members of other communities, transgressing with this, community rules; while others have decided to sell their products in Costa Rica, not only in defiance to community authorities, but to avoid having to pay economic retributions to the community, (Sánchez Cordero, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> For example, through the ratifying of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), and in United States through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1990), the Peyote Act (1978) and the Native American Languages Act (1990) – all of which were drawn on rationales of cultural integrity, aesthetics, and stewardship (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 18-19; Tsotsie, 2012, p. 346).



or through the use of 'traditional' in counterpart to the 'industrial' - for commercial purposes by transnational corporations have been extensively addressed by Brown (1998, 2005), including the acquisition of native crop varieties for genetic seed patenting, the development of marketable drugs based on traditional herbal medicine knowledge by pharmaceutical firms and the incorporation of graphic designs into consumer goods (1998, p. 195).

However, the questions of rights, ownership and legislation become deeply problematic when addressing cultural elements, since, according to Coombe (1993, 1997), the arenas in which 'cultural appropriation' controversies are likely to be evaluated and defined - intellectual property and cultural property laws - are based on colonial discourses.



Figure 10. *Anthropologie Tartan Henley Dress 2015 with Wixarika motifs. (Personal Archive).*

By exploring the philosophical premises of authorship, culture and property that generally underlie the arguments for legal protection, Coombe identified the philosophies of possessive individualism and Orientalism in the creation and classification of the legal categories of property. Her theoretical perspectives are similar to those expressed by Stuart Hall (1992), Rodney Harrison (2013) and Laurajane Smith (2006) in relation to 'cultural heritage', proposing that these modes of categorisation divide people and things *only* through Western perspectives.

According to Coombe, the construction of authorship represents the artist in Romantic terms, as an individual who creates autonomously and with an imagination free of all constraints. Developed during the Enlightenment and in a Lockean theoretical context, the origins of property laws therefore highlighted the importance of individual 'Genius', allowing the creator to claim the property of physical objects - as well as the artistic expression which it contained - over shared or communal possession (Coombe, 1993, p. 251; this has also been mentioned by Scafidi, 2005, p. 11). However, in some cases, the concept of author and thus, the notions of authorship, are usually alien to Indigenous communities (Shand, 2002, p. 64).

In the same way that contemporary discourses limit categories in the legal imaginary, these are also constricted by the art/culture system that dominates Western perspectives on art, culture and identity (Coombe, 1993, p. 255). This topic has been extensively explored by historian James Clifford in his influential work *The Predicament of Culture* (1998), where he delineated how the Western art/culture system developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century - in context of global colonialism and imperialism - as a mean of categorizing artistic and cultural goods. However,

this rigid demarcation conflicts with Native interpretations, in which all relationships – between humans and non-humans, nature and culture, matter and mind, for example – are viewed as flowing and integrally related to each other (Harrison, 2013, p. 34). Indigenous conceptions of property do not follow a Cartesian scheme, and as such, property is considered inalienable to their existence (Shand, 2002, p. 62).

Drawing on Edward Said's ground-breaking work, *Orientalism* (1979), Coombe has also recognised the essentialist perspectives through which culture has been considered as being both unified and singular: possessed by an individual or a collective that is imagined as having similar abilities to possess its own expressions. The lack of parameters for defining cultural groups as entities, as well as the complexity of tracing nexus between cultural groups and cultural practices – all of which are created through a combination of influences – restricts the possibilities of establishing protective laws. However, this logic can also be traced in the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, and in the arguments for legal protection based on concepts of cultural authenticity and cultural identity (these topics have been the focus of Canadian Anthropologist Richard Handler, 1991).

As the philosophies of possessive individualism and Orientalism defined the categories of property that dominate legal systems until today (including the models of authorship in copyright), Coombe considers that these conceptual tools are unsuitable to deal with conditions of postmodernity (1993, p. 250–254). Additionally, Ziff & Rao have highlighted that the establishment of property law regimes to regulate some facets of 'appropriation' host a series of associated problems. These include the conception of ownership in relation to the granting of property rights (should they be individual or communal?), as well as its effects on other interests (such as freedom of expression). The interference with organic cultural interactions and their incidence on the creation of new social goods are also a concern; in addition to the problem of judging and/or distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable creative processes of 'appropriation' (who should be granted with the authority to do so?) (1997, p. 18).

Ziff & Rao raise extra concerns on whether the complexity of the phenomenon would limit the efficacy of laws. For instance, the protection of intellectual property of intangible elements considers the evolutive and dynamic nature of them, and as such, under this rationale, the protection of practices and expressions recognises the potential of 'appropriation' in the generation of new artistic forms (1997, p. 14). For these reasons, many authors have cast doubts on the utility of instrumental responses, like Coombe, Philip and Newton in their essays on *Borrowed Power* (1997).

Although Ziff & Rao recognise there is a lack of theoretical basis for determining the nexus between cultural groups and cultural practices (as well as the fact that the parameters for defining cultural groups are complex, and that cultural practices are created through an amalgam of influences), both authors sustain that the difficulty for finding connections between communities (or individuals) and certain cultural products is directly associated to the commonly held notions of authorship and intertextuality. In the same manner that the authoring of creative works draws on contributions and inspirations from others, the nature of intellectual cultural property has to be considered as being non-rivalrous, meaning that its possession or usage is nonexclusive to a group (1997, p. 4).

The authors have also mentioned that the responses to acts of 'appropriation' are different, but that the creation of effective instruments which can have real consequences on the 'appropriators' are complex. These depend on the domains and modes of 'appropriation', and in the values which are perceived to be threatened. As such, laws governing matters such as copyright, trademark, and patents (at least in the United States and Canada, as well as the series of initiatives taken by the World Intellectual Property Organisation since 1981) are considered inadequate (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 19). The creation of laws for the protection of cultural forms and the prevention of 'cultural appropriation' has become, at present, one of the most controversial ponderings related to the phenomenon, in which advances have been hindered by problems with conceptualisation, conflicting stances and the diametrical opposition between Western and non-Western systems<sup>7</sup>.

### Chapter 3 – Theoretical approaches

The previous chapters presented an introduction to the concept and definitions of 'cultural appropriation', as well as an exploration of the main themes that have been previously examined by scholars in the fields of Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Intercultural Communication. Altogether, these perspectives have evidenced that ever since the concept of 'cultural appropriation' was first popularized in academic consciousness, its intrinsic association to questions of power have been crucial when addressing the matter. Until recently, the study of culture had focused on the cultural production of non-Western communities, however, the influence of the post-colonial turn, broadened the scrutinising of the political dynamics involved in culture – all of its processes and dynamics – providing vital reflections over the effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism.

Being a phenomenon that usually involves contemporary societies in and among post-independence nations, the critical theory of the discipline brought new outlooks to the examination and understanding of the phenomenon. This allowed to concentrate in the discursive operations and constructions of European/Western colonial legacies, their impact on subject construction, and the different range of responses surging from subjects that had been formerly dominated by Imperial enterprises around the world (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013).

However, although the examination of the social and political relations between colonizers and the colonised has been fundamental in the study of culture and of cultural heritage, some of these standpoints have proven narrow in order to the fully understand the range of other complex processes and subtleties which arise in the production and construction of cultural meanings.

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, this last point has not been addressed in any academic papers reviewed until today, bringing questions on how cultural communities can solve or address acts of 'appropriation' according to their own systems and perspectives.

Particularly for the study of 'cultural appropriation', the sole evaluation of its dynamics through the optics of dominant/subordinate power/cultural relations have been regarded as deficient, particularly since the phenomenon can also occur among communities who are considered hierarchically equal, based on this unique social reasoning (i.e. 'appropriation' of cultural heritage among different Indigenous communities). Furthermore, the binary schema has conveyed the term with mainly negative connotations, supporting the dissemination of generalised assumptions over the consequences and implications of these acts. Albeit invaluable to the debate, this limited assessment forecloses critical interrogation, and as such, some of the rhetorical devices have been conceptually problematic when succinctly analysed.

For this reason, the contributions of scholars in the field of Intercultural Communication have been emphasized for their pertinent contributions, stretching the post-colonial standpoints beyond a traditional or essentialist understanding of culture and dynamics between domination/subordination among peoples, to focus instead, in the interaction between individuals and groups from different or indeterminate cultural backgrounds.

The cross-cultural and intercultural perspective has underlined critiques to various outmoded and universalising theories on culture, challenging dominant paradigms, and further directing the attempts to understand and interpret diverse cultural practices and representations through a variety of qualitative systems, processes, and schemes. The methodological resources stemming from the discipline have allowed for the operationalisation and measurement of theoretical constructs and the introduction of practical concepts, resulting in a greater analysis and depth in information related to the nature of processes and certain phenomenon in particular research settings.

Intercultural communication addresses the complex interplay of colonial discourses and the materiality of the global moment, and it does so by recognising that culturally attributed social interactions and processes are the result of socially constructed practices. Under this perspective, cultural practices are considered part of an individual-collective dialectic in which multiple meanings can arise, being constantly reformulate through a broad variety of social and cultural perspectives. These are the series of matrices that are situationally and temporally located within inter/national histories and conditions, implying that culture is differentially distributed among different agents, and that not all the members of a given cultural group adopt, experience, reflect or identify with a common culture or cultural phenomenon in homogeneous manners, moments, or circumstances (Rogers, 2006, p. 495; Matthes, 2006, p. 16).

Considering the increasingly global environment in which acts of 'appropriation' occur, the perspective of Intercultural Communication provides suitable frameworks and methodologies for engaging with cultural complexities in contemporary societies in which new trends (such as technology, migration, and supranational identifications) impact and change the world and its understandings.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the theoretical perspectives and analytical concepts – as well as the articulation between them – that have stemmed from the fields of Post-colonialism and Intercultural Communication, in order to broaden the understanding of 'cultural appropriation' and its complex dynamics. This has the intent of locating the issue as a phenomenon affected by different social conditions and nuances in which a broad range of meanings, productions, circulations, and consumptions of culture, meanings and processes can intersect.

The following theories will provide the frameworks for building and supporting my research, structuring the philosophical and epistemological approaches of this dissertation. The task will also allow me to visualise a suitable methodological strategy to analytically address the questions at hand. However, most importantly, the section will introduce the concept of transculturation as a fundamental, indispensable element to properly understand the processes and dynamics involved in episodes of 'cultural appropriation'.

Although the work will continue to refer to the phenomenon as acts or instances of 'appropriation' and/or controversies, this thesis will rely on the use of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and terms, as transculturation represents a more accurate and suitable notion to address and approach the problem, with the term relating to all of the elements, occurrences, phases and factors involved in the phenomenon – from questions of power dynamics, to the actor's abilities to negotiate within the cultural field, as well as the processes of creation, adoption, and transmission of new values, objects, and actions – enabling a new level of understanding of the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon, as a dynamical result of cultural relationships, attributes, behaviours, and actions, among different collective and individual actors and objects of material culture and their interaction.

Although this thesis considers the political dimensions of the controversies – usually distinguishable in the allocation or use of cultural resources, products, expressions and creations from subordinate by dominant groups – the use of the transculturation conceptual and theoretical assumptions concurs with the interest of this research, primordially concerning the analysis of the relationships between actors, which are not solely arranged through dichotomic predispositions and/or hierarchical constructions or associations of power. The issue of 'cultural appropriation' will be regarded as controversies that are shaped by a series of factors, including levels of voluntariness, the characteristics of power relations, actor's roles and agency in domination and/or resistance processes, as well as the characteristics of the cultural boundaries involved. Moreover, it will consider it as an active and dynamic phenomenon: an inescapable result of cultural contact, dynamics, and processes, varying in terms of the degrees of voluntariness, equality, balance, and purity – and their absence of – involved.

### **3.1** Forms of cultural transmission: assimilation or appropriation?

Based on the assertions of Ziff & Rao, 'cultural appropriation' has to be understood as an active social phenomenon, in which different power dynamics are at play, impacting with this, cultural resources in a diversity of manners. This perspective emphasizes the relevance of power and politics – encompassed by the agents who control, as well as the processes through which scarce resources are allocated – as a crucial element of the issues involving the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon.

Ziff & Rao exemplified this power interplay through a structural representation, illustrating the instances when acts of appropriation

or assimilation may occur. This framework has been used to support the proposition that 'cultural appropriation' can be understood and constructed as one of two forms of cultural transmission.

In this scenario, the many and varied forms of cultural production, expressions and creations represent the resources. These can be adapted or appropriated as conditioned by the identification of the agents that control or produce them - which in case of this schema, are identified as either being dominant (Core/Centre, Colonizer) or subordinate (Periphery, Colonized). Whereas assimilated or appropriated, the processes of cultural transmission results in the transformation of culture and the emergence of culture(s).

A Structural Representation of Cultural Transmission: Appropriation or Assimilation?

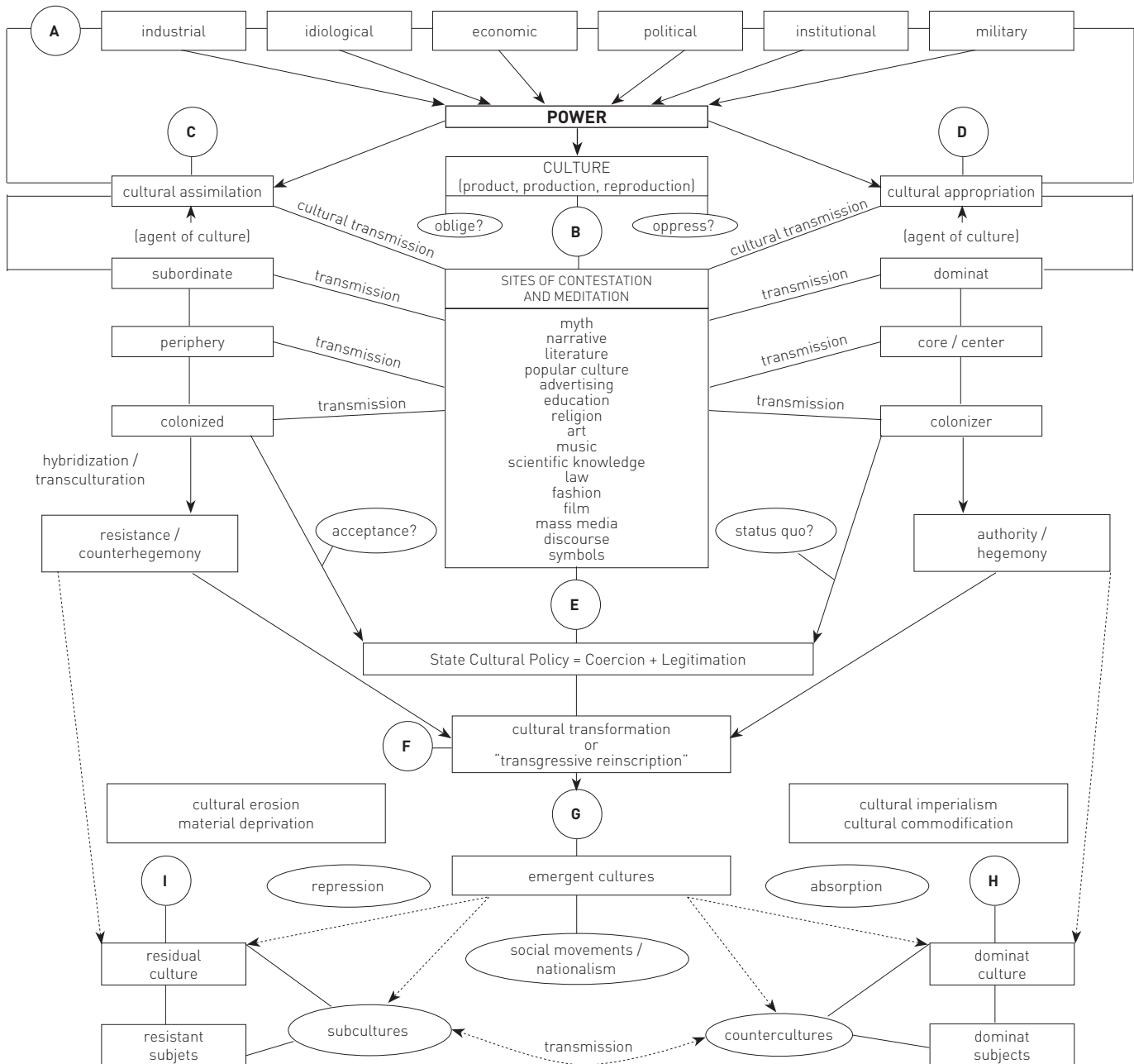


Figure 11. Structural representation of Cultural Transmission: Appropriation or Assimilation? By Ziff, B. & Zao, P. (1997). In: Borrowed Power. Essays on Cultural Appropriation, p. 6.

This structural representation displays differential access to sources of power, and how when flowing from these divergent points, the sources of power have different effects on the production of culture(s) and cultural forms. This framework is particularly relevant to the hypothesis that rejects the proposition of 'cultural appropriation' as being a two-way process: a reductive model whereby every act of appropriation is only imposed by power and by dominant agents.

The model situates POWER (A) – in capital letters, both as an analytical concept, and as sites/sources of it – the focal point of the schema. CULTURE or cultural resources (product, production, reproduction) is then positioned between the overlapping of power/sites of power (A) and socio-spatial networks (B), constructed as both physical and conceptual spaces. The location of the cultural resources between this intersection becomes fundamental, as particular process of cultural transmission can be considered assimilative (C) or appropriative (D) – either by contestation or mediation – depending on whether the receiver of culture (agents of culture) are identified as part of a dominant group (D) or a subordinate (C) one.

The process of cultural transmission then leads to cultural transformation (F). This transformation can be shaped then by the levels of acceptance or by the status quo, which can lead either to the creation of cultural policies by the state (E) – in which case it can be institutionalised and formed either by coercion or legitimation – or to materialisation, carried by the agents (C and D), through the sites of contestation and mediation within the socio-spatial networks (B).

Cultural transformation (F) can then outflow with the emergence of new culture(s), with legitimated forms becoming part of the dominant culture (H), and with residual culture and practices (I) being retained by the subordinate or resistant subjects. Additionally, subcultures and countercultures can also surge in the process, by linking to the residual culture or by breaking away from the dominant one (1997, p. 5-7).

Ziff & Rao's schema represents a useful theoretical framework that broadens the political implications and understandings of 'cultural appropriation' by recognising and highlighting that the phenomenon can operate as a process of cultural transmission, leading to the emergence of culture(s). This is pertinent to the understanding of how the production, circulation, and consumption of culture, cultural expressions, meanings, and products are affected by social and spatial conditions.

However, although it is relevant to know that in these instances the process can work in both directions – flowing as 'appropriation' from dominant groups to minority/marginal/colonised groups, and vice versa, as cultural assimilation, from minority groups into dominant ones – this theory has been criticised by Cuthbert, who considered that the schema "need(s) a category which describes appropriation-in-reverse not as assimilation but as postcolonial resistance, or as minority cultural maintenance, enhancement, or even transformation" (1998, p. 8).



Figure 12. African artifacts became an influence of Western art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (Personal Archive, 2018).

### 3.2 The where and how of the phenomenon? Assessing the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic contexts of 'cultural appropriation' cases

Drawing on Ziff & Rao's work, Rogers (2006) identified four categories which emphasize the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic conditions under which the acts of 'appropriation' occur. This theoretical framework, points to the increasingly complex dynamics involved in the phenomenon, demonstrating how 'appropriation' is an active process with different functions and outcomes, which simultaneously depend on the various ways and conditions through which the phenomenon occurs.

Roger's theoretical categories suggest that the acts of 'appropriation' are in constant dialogue with the context in which they are immersed, and as such, the defining trait of what constitutes (or not) appropriation is found in the contexts or conditions under which the events develop. These strongly question the dominant conceptualisations of the phenomenon – while challenging narrow understandings of culture as well – by considering how numerous factors can concurrently shape and be shaped, by the acts and processes of 'appropriation'.

Roger's categorisation is significant for recognising the importance of power relations within the phenomenon, while also reflecting and highlighting how other factors are involved and conditioned by the circumstances through which the cases occur.

#### 3.2.1 Reciprocal relations and cultural exchange

The first category refers to a reciprocal exchange between cultures with equivalent levels of power, assuming that cultures are free, and able to share without the implications of power dynamics. However, the category ignores the context in which acts of 'appropriation' occur as a defining feature, and thus, the identification of "pure" cases of cultural exchange is considered extremely problematic. This responds

to the fact that very few acts of appropriation (or intercultural communication processes) occur in contexts in which power imbalances are not relevant.

Roger contemplates that the category is used to serve two functions: as an ideal, through which ethical standards of appropriation can be judged; or as a theory, in which it is used as a model to demonstrate the inadequacy of pluralist and transparent models of power. Moreover, Rogers highlights that the assessment of cases of cultural exchange tend to focus on individuals as the primary unit of analysis. Through this standpoint perspective, the actions – which may appear to be reciprocal or voluntary – are isolated from the larger picture. By disregarding the contexts in which cases occur, the detection of possible inequalities or constraints to agency may be blurred.

The idea of cultural exchange presents other essential issues. Since power can take many forms, the recognition of power relations and imbalances between cultures can be thwarted, suggesting that simple dominant-subordinate binaries may not always apply. This is particularly true in specific acts in which the level playing field does not operate under this binary dynamic. A dominant-subordinate dual perspective over the multiplicities of powers and constraints to agency also complicates determinations over the nature of cultural exchanges, as some of them may be voluntary, and not coerced by dominant groups.

In conclusion, the identification of symmetrical and asymmetrical power relations between cultures can also be complicated within a cultural exchange framework, as power can take varying forms (economic capital to cultural capital, and their complex intersections), and forms of agency can be multiple and differently constrained.

### 3.2.2 What's yours is mine! Cultural dominance of subordinate cultures

This category corresponds to a unidirectional condition of cultural imposition. It is expressed by the use of elements of a dominant culture by a subordinate group, in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed on the subordinate one. The category of cultural dominance has been typically equalised or reduced to historical models of colonisation. This theoretical assumption implies that cultural dominance represents the only condition under which acts of appropriation occur, insinuating a relative lack of choice, as the "receiving" culture is overpowered (politically, culturally, economically and/or militarily) by the dominant group. However, under this framework, the fact that members of the subordinate culture can negotiate impositions through limited forms of agency and resistance are ignored.

Among some of its various forms, cultural dominance includes the processes of institutional assimilation: the use of educational, religious, or other institutions to replace the subordinated culture with that of the dominant one. The dynamic has also been related to the cultural imperialism thesis, a political economy approach according to which 'cultural appropriation' would respond to a process whereby cultural groups are considered to be "targeted" by cultural imperialism, resulting in the consumption or rejection of foreign cultural products in their environment.

However, these two forms of imposition do not involve appropriation by members of the subordinate group, in which case, the imposition of culture – made possible by the dominants' group disproportionate access to resources and modes of power – is not considered an active process – the using or taking of an element. This category also disregards how subordinated groups can individually and/or collectively adopt one or more tactics for the use of imposed elements in order to handle the conflicts between their native culture and the colonising one.

Although this category emphasizes the condition under which some forms of appropriation occur, Rogers notes that a full exploration of cultural dominance as a category of appropriation requires a focus on the tactics employed by members of subordinated cultures when negotiating their relationship to the impositions. This may include the following processes:

1. Assimilation: the internalization of the imposed culture, including reformation of identity, values, and ideologies. This involves the displacement of the subordinated/native culture by the colonizing culture, resulting in the complete appropriation of the dominant culture by members of a subordinated group.
2. Integration: the incorporation of some or all elements of the imposed culture, without a complete displacement or elimination of the native culture and/or identity. This phenomenon can involve the operation of two distinct cultures within an individual or a group, or the fusion of aspects of each one into a single culture and/or identity.
3. Intransigence: concerning overt resistance, the refusal to appropriate the imposed culture or other explicit means of opposition by individuals or the collective.
4. Mimicry: implying an acceptance of cultural motions without internalizing the imposed culture. In this case, the process of appropriation involves an intentional performance, an act that is devised to negotiate structures of power, while maintaining one's native culture. This demonstrates the active nature of appropriations under the conditions of cultural dominance and the significant role of agency.
5. Resistance: involving more overt opposition or the adoption of aspects of the imposed culture in such a way that native and/or resistance to cultural domination is maintained, while the colonizing culture remains unaware of the preservation efforts.

Among cases of cultural dominance, the idea of 'cultural appropriation' has also been used to name the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of subordinated groups as a mean for resistance and resignification. As possibilities for expressing agency, these occurrences aim towards the survival of the group, the obtention of psychological compensation and/or the demonstration of blatant antagonism, as instances that can lead to the denaturalization of the dominant groups' representational and discursive systems.

However, in some cases, the appropriative resistance can perpetuate the marginalisation of subordinate groups, as discursive opposition can be deployed against the group by the dominant culture, having the power to grant and limit the forms of cultural capital, agency and identity that is allowed or available to the subordinates. Furthermore, albeit the complexities and developments of power relationships being recognised, the binary structure remains implicitly founded on a desire to (re)turn to the “ideal” of cultural exchange.

### 3.2.3 Stealing culture: perspectives over cultural exploitation

Recognised as the appropriation of cultural elements from a subordinate group by a dominant culture, without reciprocity, permission, or compensation, in such a way that it only serves the interests of the dominant group. This dynamic usually involves treating the subordinate group as a mine for obtaining cultural resources, in which expressions are consumed by members or companies from a dominant group, without financial compensation to the subordinates. In context with neo-colonialism, cultural exploitation also includes the acceptance or positive evaluation of a colonised culture, even though the establishment and reinforcement of the system of dominance over the subordinates is upheld. The connotations of exploitation often involve the idea of stealing or of using the culture of the subordinate against them.



Figure 13 .“The War Bonnet” poster (1914). (Public Domain).

As mentioned before, cultural exploitation has been related to a series of concerns, identified by Ziff & Rao (1997) including the distortion of the cultural identity of the group from where the element was extracted, the loss or debilitation of the cultural expressions and the group's cultural identity, the deprivation of material advantage, and the failures to recognize autonomy and self-determination of the individuals or groups. Furthermore, the claims have also been related to the commodification of culture and its fetishization.

Nevertheless, Rogers argues that the simplistic binary of free choice versus coercion is inadequate in these cases, as subordinate people “do not choose to market and sell their cultural elements in a vacuum, nor do they always have their culture taken from them forcibly or otherwise without their consent” (2006, p. 17). This implies that the active participation, production, and sale of cultural elements occurs under economic circumstances that may be unequal, or to which the subordinate group has been pressured into participating without consent. In these instances, cultural elements can be shaped and/or constrained by external factors, established by the dominant group systems, such as tourist markets and/or the predominant artistic or aesthetic ideologies (see Chapters 7 and 7.2 on Ideological domains and the trajectory of objects within the ‘art-culture’ system).

Nevertheless, these cases do not necessarily deny agency to subordinates, as cultural producers can engage in the distortion and commodification of their own cultural elements to create products that will be valuable to tourists or collectors, or even appropriate cultural elements from other groups in order to increase their income (Cooks, 1998). Groups can also intentionally distort their cultural elements in an attempt to protect the sanctity or integrity of their cultures, exemplifying how the constraints on free choice do not necessarily deny agency in cases of appropriation.

### 3.2. Many cultures, many cultural products: processes of transculturation

The fourth type of cultural appropriation identified by Rogers is transculturation, a concept that was first coined by Fernando Ortiz to replace the equivocal term of *acculturation*, previously used in the field of anthropology to describe "the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions" (1940, p. 98). The term *acculturation* has been considered inadequate as it assumed that culture was solely limited to the processes of adopting and adapting to the cultural traits of a majority culture, whereas the use of transculturation implies and includes broader possibilities.

Transculturation, as a category of production and cultural reflexion, proposes that the creation of culture and of cultural elements is influenced by a multitude of cultures and cultural products of, suggesting that culture springs through amalgams of socio-historic approximations in such a manner that it is sometimes difficult to identify a sole group as being the originator of a cultural form or expression (Ziff & Rao 1997, p. 4; Rogers, 2006, p. 491; De la Campa, 1995, p. 118).

Additionally, in the context of hegemonic relations between cultures, this implies that although subordinate cultures can lose certain cultural elements through different processes, agency permits them to act and/or react in creative ways, allowing the generation of new cultural features or forms. According to Rogers, transculturation remains sensible to disproportionate power relations and makes its different influences (economic, politic, etc) visible, while simultaneously allowing the recognition of the – often denied – active and creative roles of subordinate groups in the dynamics of 'cultural appropriation'.

Rogers further conceives this category as an updating of the understanding of cultural dynamics, challenging the general idea of culture as a singular and clearly bounded principle. This allows for empirical validity and conceptual coherence as the concept can be extended beyond the contemporary condition and into previous eras, by recognising culture as a conjunctural, relational, and dialogic process. In this sense, transculturation distinguishes culture as being dynamically constituted by, and not merely engaged in, appropriative relations.

This problematises aspects of the other categories of 'appropriation' as well. Whereas the previous categories engage with intertwined pairs of entities – exchange: among two equal groups; dominance and exploitation: through the binary relationship between dominant and subordinates, founded on the existence of assumed distinctions between cultural groups<sup>8</sup> – the notion of transculturation engages with multiple lines of difference.

In the past, culture had been assumed to be an organizational phenomenon clearly bounded and discernible in space in relation to the idea of nation-states, on which its distributional formation created a 'world mosaic' composed by sharply defined and perfectly fitting pieces (Hannerz, 1991b, p. 10). However, the fall of globalization generated new and different flows and forms of meanings, which are able to cross international borders. This led to the idea that processes of culture and the creative forms which it generated, are social developments unrestrained by geographical location. Cultures and cultural boundaries are not attached to nations nor territories – or other much more controversial classifications, such as the notions of "race" – but recognised as multiple and constantly changing, intersecting, and overlapping with one another and between them. From a global perspective, culture is generated on an expanded field, one which is intersected by different variables and factors, such as identity, race, gender and multiculturalism.

In this scenario of global creative exchange, this suggests that cultural expressions are not generated as exceptional nor from spontaneous forms or processes, but as responses that result from the influences of external factors and other agents. This generates new cultures and forms that surge from the combination and synthesising between them (Hannerz, 1991b, p. 18). Furthermore, since cultural forms can be produced outside specific territories, as well as imitated, or elaborated with non-traditional materials, the concepts of purity and authenticity that are implicitly or perceptibly present on the other categories of 'appropriation' become highly problematic<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Spivak (1988) has noted that this can also be considered a constituent of "epistemic violence" against marginalised and/or colonised peoples.

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it is relevant to mention that the ideas of 'purity' and 'authenticity' of cultures and cultural elements, has served to perpetuate or to overcome colonial or neo-colonial relations throughout history (Clifford, 1998).





Figure 14. Photo of Mazahuacholokatopunks by Federico Gama. (Federico Gama, 2021).

Rogers further recurs to a broad description of transculturation provided by Lull who considered that the concept represents "the process whereby cultural forms literally move through time and space where they interact with other cultural forms and settings, influence each other, produce new forms, and change the cultural settings" (2000, p. 242). This follows a line of thought shared by a number of scholars, including Appadurai and Hannerz, whose observations on the globalisation of culture suggest that people in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century move quickly and in larger numbers, over great distances, all while carrying some of their culture along (1992, p. 10; 1996, p. 4).

On one hand, the syntheses and crossings that generate culture and cultural production can result from this movement: from the shifting of populations as peoples – migrants, refugees, tourists, etc – physically move from one geographic location to another. Additionally, the fusions can also spring while people remain static, through the movement of material goods, and especially through the access and contact with technologies of cultural distribution, such as electronic and mass media and/or the cultural industries.

Transculturation provides a contextual setting that includes vast cultural territories and movements, circumstances under which acts of 'appropriation' occur, such as globalization, neo-colonialism and the state of increased dominance of transnational capitalism on a global scale – all of which are conditions that have allowed for an increase in the interactions, encounters, confluences and exchanges among different peoples and cultures around the world.

In this sense, transculturation has also been related to the creation of cultural hybrids and the fusing of cultural forms – all of which are never originated nor developed from 'pure' forms – characterising the processes of culture and cultural development as the synthesizing of different influences by means of blending. In words of one of the most illustrated scholars on the subject, hybridity represents the sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices which existed separately, combine to generate new structures, objects and practices (García Canclini, 1992, p. III).

Understood as a historically specific condition, the concept of hybridity has become useful for clarifying the dynamics of 'appropriation' under transculturation. Roger refers to Kraidy, who in this context, proposed that the concept needs to be "understood as a communicative practice, constitutive of, and constituted by, socio-political and economic arrangements" (2000, p.4) that offers an alternative approach to the notions which consider hybridity as a product of local-global interactions.

The analysis of hybridity in diverse cultural phenomenon and processes has expanded over the past few decades. Both as a concept and a theoretic tool, the notion has been used in a variety of academic works to describe, among others, interethnic and decolonising

developments (Bhabha, 1991; Young, 1995), globalisation and transnational processes (Clifford, 1988; Hall, 1996; Hannerz, 1996) and a diversity of artistic, literary and intercommunication fusions that relate to the formation of cultural identities and of cultural expressions (Rushdie, 1991; see also, Guignery, V. (eds), 2011).

In international communication processes, cultural, economic and political forces become mutually constitutive, interplaying and overlapping with each other. Thus, understanding hybridity as a practice allows for the recognition of the complexity, processualism and dynamism of transcultural relations. This further avoids the undermining of its political potential, as Kraidy contemplates that hybridity represents "as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential power" (2002, p. 4).

Drawing on Clifford's reconceptualization of culture, transculturation suggests that appropriation does not occur between cultures as the constitution of their relationships, but as the relations and intersections that constitute cultures themselves (1998, p. 19). This ultimately suggests that transculturation and hybridity are inescapable of 'appropriation' in contemporary cultures, as transculturation "retains the implications of unequal power of cultural dominance and exploitation... while acknowledging the radically different nature of appropriation in the global-local contexts of transnational capitalism" (Rogers, 2006, p. 493).

With varying degrees of agency for most individuals and cultures today, the condition of transculturation is an involuntary one, demonstrating the international and transcultural contexts in which even "domestic" cases of appropriations occur. All of these are differently influenced by the markets and a group's access to it, the commodification of cultural forms, and the dialectics and ongoing dynamics of culture, cultural assimilation, identity, resistance and survival.

However, Rogers has also noted that supplanting the categories of cultural domination and exploitation with transculturation and hybridity as valid types of appropriation can have negative effects, as the processes can be deployed against people's interests. Despite providing a theoretical framework for defining the contexts and processes of acts, the concepts can also be utilised to delegitimise (or legitimise) claims of cultural ownership by subordinate groups, or to perpetuate illegitimate acts of cultural exploitation.

Although the other categories comply with primitivistic, organic and static conceptions of culture and essentialist perspectives that render culture as a singular, delineated and static entity that can be possessed (a situation that can be particularly noxious to Indigenous groups) some of its assumptions still inhere in the arguments of colonised cultures and other subordinate groups. However, the concerns should not be dismissed, as these positions tend to reveal larger, usually veiled issues, enriching the comprehension of the phenomenon through an inclusive debate.

The concept of transculturation is suitable for the characterization of cultural dynamics among peoples as it allows to engage with multiple elements – different places, subjects and practices – from a sufficiently broad perspective. It addresses various issues on a variety of cultural realities which have been developed and established through a myriad of exchanges and dialogues. The concept represents an effort towards finding categories of analysis that allow for the interpretation of processes on a larger historical and geographical scope, while critically contributing to the overcoming of national discourses and narratives.

Rogers categories highlight 'cultural appropriation' as an inescapable process of cultural production, yet emphasising that not all acts are the same, as the occurrences and conditions through which the cases happen always vary in terms of the degree and relevance of their (in)voluntariness, (in)equality, (im)balance, and (im)purity (2006, p.499). This supports the hypothesis that the understandings and responses of subordinate groups tend to be different among different actors.



Figure 15. Japanese "cholos" subculture, men and women wearing Chicano style fashion. (Huffpost, 2017).

As a theoretical framework, the categories of 'appropriation' presented by Rogers offers a mean for scrutinising cultural dynamics as a series of processes and interpretations with varying implications, all of which are simultaneously affected and impacted by variable degrees of power and agency. While retaining the other models, highlighting transculturation as its theoretical framework provides the variable conditions and contexts in which cases of 'appropriation' occur, recognising the existence of different agents and perspectives, while clarifying and broadening the examination of the phenomenon as an issue that involves and ensues through a diversity of contexts, practices and processes.

### 3.3 Connected world: transculturation and cultural flows in globalisation

In the past two decades, debates around the conditions and position of culture and cultural identities in contemporary societies influenced by the transnational phenomenon have been consolidated within the social sciences field, including a repertoire of academic texts, seminars and conferences focusing on the experiences of modernity and its relationship to the transformations in the local, regional and national spheres. As a vantagepoint for analysing modernity, transculturation has driven a rethinking of the role of anthropology and many of its traditional concepts, providing new perspectives to analyse global phenomena. However, despite the plethora of academic publications that have enriched the understanding of the condition, the works of two scholars have been particularly acclaimed.

Recognised as a major theorist in globalisation studies, the works of Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai have offered a new framework for the cultural analysis of globalisation, a thesis that suggests that imagination functions as a social force, providing new resources for the formation of identities and synergies that are alternative to those created and encouraged by national attachments.

Appadurai's proposals, as shared by the majority of transnational phenomena scholars, assumes a common point. This recognises that the late 20th Century is characterised by the novel impact of electronic media and mass migrations, resulting in the production of specific irregularities in the social and cultural processes. In this context, both the production and distribution of new images and new audiences are in constant circulation, and therefore, their identification to national, regional, or local spaces is blurred. The changing and unpredictable relationship between the events - circulating through electronic media - and the audiences - conformed by immigration - now define the core link between the global and the modern (Appadurai, 1996, p. 4).

The juxtaposition between flows of people and media content has given imagination a new role in societies. Following a classic Durkheimian conception, Appadurai considers that imagination is regarded as a social and collective fact, from which a "plurality of imagined worlds" constantly emanate (1996, p. 5; 2001, p. 21). The multiplicity of imagined realms is defined and constituted by the historically situated imaginary constructions of people and groups around the globe (1990, p. 297). Imagination, is therefore, transformed into an organized field of social practices: a way of working and a form of negotiating agency between subjects, who have the capacity to transform their social whole, entailed by a spectrum of globally defined possibilities.

Appadurai considers that we are at the presences of a rapture from traditional modernity, in which the works of the imagination, become elements that are constitutive of a new modern subjectivity (1996, p. 3). Having free rein, imagination relates to the possibilities of creativity, of pastiche and of cultural hybridisation, that reject the notions of the culturally 'original' and of primal identities. In this sense, imagination denies the existence of all essence, becoming central to all forms of agency. This, imagination "is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31).

The significant role of imagination in the modern world can be witnessed in three major distinctions:

1. Detached from the work of art and/or myth, where it becomes part of the daily mental work of ordinary people (anyone imagines).
2. In the distinction between fantasy and imagination, as fantasy separates from projects and acts, while further associating with the private and the individual. Imagination, on the other hand, is a scenario for collective action and not just for escape.
3. Distinction between the individual and the collective sense of the imagination, as mass media makes it possible for a group to begin to feel and imagine things collectively as a group.

For Appadurai, globalisation is not a process of cultural homogenization, as different societies appropriate the materials of modernity in different ways. This anthropological perspective detaches from the ideas that relate culture to specific people or ethnic groups, alternatively offering instead, a perspective that constructs culture not as a way of identifying but as a way of differentiating among people. This places culture as an inexorable dimension of human discourse that exploits differences in order to create diverse conceptions of group identity. Furthermore, this notion of culture raises the concept of *culturalism*: a designation that involves movement and identities as being both constantly and consciously developing (1996, p. 15). Carried out by different groups, the policies of cultural affirmation and differentiation represent the ways in which people tend to adopt culture in the era of mass media, mass migration and globalization.

For Appadurai, the problematic dislocations between economy, culture, and politics - stemming from the exchanges of advanced capitalism and the global forces - cannot be covered by the old dichotomies (such as centre-periphery, surplus-deficit, producers-consumers). The scholar therefore has allotted his theory into 5 planes or dimensions of global cultural flows. These frameworks propose that, in order to identify the building elements that compose today's imagined worlds, attention has to be drawn to their interrelation. It is within these relationships that different circuits or flows of cultural materials circulate when crossing national borders. Drawn from a variety of sources, the dimensions can be enlisted as follows:

- Ethnoscapes: related to migrations and the effects they create in current global contexts. This are composed by moving groups (tourist, immigrants, refugees, migrants, exiles, etc).
- Technoscapes: referring to the global configurations of technology and the crossing of its unthinkable limits. This dynamic landscape is not governed by the market nor political controls, but by the complex relationships between money flows, possibilities, qualified personnel, and policies, as businesses have multinational roots in many countries.
- Finanscapes: the flow of money and global capital today, which at present, has become increasingly fast and complex.
- Mediascapes: corresponding to the supply of images and stories that circulate globally through electronic devices, providing a humongous and complex repertoire of images, narratives and ethnic landscapes that impact the creation of imagined worlds. This shows a blurred and unclear division between reality and fiction.
- Ideoscapes: shows how the political narratives and discourses frequently related to nation-states and the counter-ideologies of movements that pursue power. Usually composed from Enlightened worldviews and include the ideas such as freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation and especially, democracy.

(Appadurai, 1990, p. 297-300; 1996, p. 33).

The overall relationship between ethnic, technological and financial landscapes becomes deeply problematic, as each one of them works under its own logic. However, each one of the '-scapes' conditions and becomes a parameter for the other ones to operate. The last landscapes (mediascapes and ideoscapes), both of which function through images, are on the other hand, related to each other, simultaneously functioning to refract the dislocations between the other landscapes.

The existence of ethnic landscapes, however, presents a paradox. The feeling – whose greatest strength laid in its ability to produce attachment towards a political state, while turning localities into a sphere for the staging of identity – has now spread and scattered throughout vast and irregular spaces. Although groups can move by means of migrations, they nevertheless can remain linked to each other through sophisticated media resources.

As people, machinery, money, images and ideas increasingly follow in non-corresponding nor similar forms, relations or paths at absolute speeds, scales and volumes, the global flows currently occur within and through the dislocations between the 5 landscapes. As such, the landscapes and their relations, become central to the politics of global culture (1990, p. 299). The relevance of them, entails the necessary depart from essentialist notions, that are composed, located, or associated to the ideas of borders, forcing us to think of current cultural forms as fundamentally fractal by lacking borders, structures, or regularities (1996, p. 46).

### 3.4 Crossing borders: transnational flows and connections

Similar to Appadurai's thesis, Ulf Hannerz's basic premise consists in the centrality of new transnational connections to describe any processes or relationships that somehow cross the boundaries of a state, increasingly interconnecting the world through the rise in migratory flows. As globalization generated new and different flows and forms of meanings which were able to cross national borders, the processes of culture and the creative forms which it generated, began to be characterised as developments unrestrained by geographical location (Hannerz, 1991b, p. 10; Hannerz, 2014, p. 10).

Expanding on the concept presented by Kroeber, who shared the ancient Greek notion of the ecumene as "the inhabited world" (1945, p. 423); and Kopytoff's definition as a "region of persistent cultural interaction and exchange" (1987, p.10), Hannerz presented the concept of global ecumene to refer to the world interconnections, through the interactions, exchanges and derivative developments that affect among other things, the organization of culture (Hannerz, 1991, p. 235; 1996, p. 7; 1998, p. 20-21).

In this sense, Hannerz suggests that the global ecumene has become a "landscape of modernity", where cultural processes are increasingly shaped by reflexivity as a major feature of modernity (1996, p. 44-55), affected by the inequalities of its dissemination process (symmetry and asymmetry, Centre-Periphery relations, creolization). From this global perspective, culture can be generated on an expanded field that intersects with different variables and factors, such as identity, race, gender and multiculturality.

Ulf Hannerz's assertions over cultural complexities in transnational settings provides a theoretical framework that explores the dynamics of cultural flows in contemporary societies, and which can be used to broaden Ziff & Raos framework on cultural transmission. According to the scholar, culture is composed by three essential dimensions, further understood through their interrelations, consisting of:

*"(1) ideas and modes of thought as entities and processes of the mind – that entire array of concepts, propositions, values and other notions which people within some social unit carry together, as well as their various ways of handling such ideas in characteristic modes of mental operations; (2) forms of externalisation, the various ways in which meaning is made accessible to the senses, and thus made public; and (3) social distribution, the ways in which (1) and (2) together are spread over individuals and social relationships".*

(Hannerz, 1991, p. 9, underlined by the author)

Understood as a distributional dimension, "shaped and carried by people in varying social constellations, pursuing different aims", the production and circulation of culture in transnational schemes has been sustained by Hannerz's theory of four frameworks (1991 p. 235; 1996 p. 65-77; p. 1998, p. 118). This proposal organises and explains how different cultural movements result from the constant

interconnections that complicate the global ecumene, entailed by the different tendencies in the way meanings and meaningful forms are produced and circulated through social relationships. It is within these differences that the frameworks diversely combine the cultural processes that characterise the totality of contemporary culture. The frameworks are:

- Form of life framework: proposing that the cultural flow within it is always present, in substantial forms as we interact with it through our daily lives. This represents the most important and fundamental frame of cultural flow in every human group, being a matter that involves observation, conversation and the experiencing of everyday life routines. Its typical circulation of meanings is found in the domestic space, in neighbourhoods, workplaces, and other similar locations, where knowledge and values are produced and reproduced freely and spontaneously, conforming a symmetrical dimension where cultural production and diffusion is equally shared by everyone involved.
- State framework: refers to the flow of meaning between the state apparatus and the people defined as subjects/citizens. Albeit conventionally thought as a political form, defined by the monopoly of certain forms of power within a territory, the tools of power have recently become more cultural in order to obtain loyal citizens. This is characterised by the propagation of nationalism and political ideologies intended to homogenise the citizenry through the idea of a shared cultural heritage. To achieve this, the state employs a number of institutions or cultural apparatus, such as media, schools, museums, civil rituals, monuments, etc, to construct meaning, knowledge and values for the citizens. The flow in this frame is organized in a much more deliberate and asymmetric manner, drawing its legitimacy in its duty as guardian of the voluntarily shared and historically rooted culture that emanates from the form of life framework. This conceals the invention of tradition addressed by Hobsbawm (1983).
- Market framework: encompassing commoditized culture, the production and dissemination of cultural goods and products for a profit that pass from the buyer to the seller. As with the state framework, the organization of cultural production and distribution seems to be centralised, premeditated and asymmetric. In the market, culture flows through a cultural apparatus, where few people produce for material compensation and many others pay to consume. Unlike with the life-form framework that is present wherever there are human beings, the state and the market deal with cultural management in most places in the contemporary world, which results in asymmetries in the cultural process. Additionally, with the decline of the state power, the market converts more products into culture, while simultaneously making products more cultural. As such, the market-oriented cultural processes expansively attempt to commoditise an ever-increasing proportion of culture, actively advocating and celebrating innovation as a mean for shaping cultural commodities.
- Movements: Occurring intermittently and in varying degrees of influence through time, this framework implies the management of meaning through decentralised proselytism, socio-political persuasion and commitment to ideals. Working in an inner and outward management of meaning, as with forms of life culture, this framework also lacks the power base of the state and occurs without the intent of making a profit. Examples of this include the women's movement, the environmentalist movement or the peace movement in the West – all of which impacted and influenced the production and dissemination of culture.

(Hannerz, 1991 p. 235; 1991b, p. 1-13; 1996 p.65-77; p. 1998, p. 118)

Within these four principles, the handling of meanings and of meaningful forms are shaped and regulated by their own tendencies and characteristics, while simultaneously behaving and relating to one another differently through time. Since the four frameworks interact, a variety of transformations can arise.

The life, state, market, and movements can promote ideas and manifest forms that can be absorbed by the life forms. Within the same framework, cultural phenomenon can be turned into commodities following new trends. The state can also compete with markets and/or other states, in the management and organisation of culture. Movements can be assimilated into states, or even create them, through the expansion of a nationalist movement. Movements can also merge with forms of life through the increase of an awareness over a certain problem.

According to the scholar, it is in the entanglements between these four frameworks that the dynamism of culture can be revealed. Currently, the flow of culture can have alterations in its velocity and path, but the meanings and forms which it contains, can further generate new components and combinations.

### **3.5 Combined cultures: creolisation and creativity in cultural forms**

In this scenario of global creative exchange, it has been suggested that cultural expressions are not created as unique, spontaneous forms or processes, but also as responses or results which are influenced by external factors and other agents that generates new cultures and cultural forms from the combination and synthesis between them (Hannerz, 2014, p. 18).

The critical analysis of transnational perspectives generated a series of significant advances on the theorisation of culture and all of its creative, dynamic processes, by addressing the impacts of globalisation on every aspect of human life. This interdisciplinary approach provided the field of Cultural Studies with an abundance of new terms, concepts, and frameworks, that elucidated the complex scenario in which multiple forms, processes and agents converge.

Led by the drastic and rapid changes of globalisation on societies, demographics, economies, technologies, natural environments, values, and ideologies, through time and space, the transcultural processes shaped and constituted new and different forms of culture. Some of these constructions of the phenomenon of culture have been delineated and defined by the concepts/ideas of creolization (as well as hybridity, syncretism, miscegenation, métissage, mélange, and others<sup>10</sup>) which evidence "that cultures can be intrinsically of mixed origins, rather than historically pure and homogenous" (Hannerz, 2014, p. 18).



Figure 16. "West Indian Women of Colour, with a Child and Black Servant" by Agostino Brunias (18<sup>th</sup> Century) (Yale Centre for British Art).

Borrowed from the field of linguistics, the term Creolisation was first introduced by French poet and essayist Édouard Glissant in 1990 in order to describe the diversity of cultural phenomenon that resulted from the creative interactions between peoples and cultures from different origins. In words of Ulf Hannerz, the term is used to "designate certain peoples and cultures which have in one way or other been products of globalisation" (1991b, p. 18).

Both as a conceptual and theoretical device, the appearance of the term in the Caribbean comes as manifestation of the fact that the region has been - historically, politically, economically, and socially - a place of global transit and travel, as well as of encounters and connivance since the XV Century (Glissant, 2010, p. 33-34). The cultural transformations that arose in the region - as in other territories with similar experiences: Latin America, southern Louisiana, Cape Verde, and islands of the southwest Indian Ocean (Baron & Cara, 2011, p. 4) - are discordant to the generalised assumptions and discourses on culture stemming from the XIX ideas that originated in Europe and were based on the notions of nationalism. In this sense, Hannerz considers that "a culture - in the sense of the complex meanings and meaningful external forms carried by the population of some territory - reflects on its organised diversity the external relationships in which people have been engaging, in the past or in the present" (1991b, p. 18).

The idea and processes of creolization, originated from the new connections, encounters, confluences and exchanges that resulted from the global interactions between European colonizers with the Native Indigenous communities in the Americas, and later, with the slaves

<sup>10</sup> This vast variety of similar terms is noticeable in the literature and are frequently used in interchangeable manners. There is an obvious need to develop clearer distinctions between the concepts/theoretical devices within the Humanities. However, on a personal note, I consider the term creolization to be preferable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is my belief that the links and examples of existing historical and cultural references are solid, adding to the theorisation of the transculturation processes (although this may also be a bias, since I come from the Latin American context). Secondly, as several scholars have pointed, the term hybridization alludes to a biological metaphor, which can be problematic when addressing cultural/social issues (e.g. biologization of race), while the term miscegenation similarly plays with the idea of races and of differences between people. The notion of syncretism, on the other hand, also raises doubts, since it seems to exclude modern forms in the hybridization processes, being usually applied in reference to religious fusions or symbolic traditional movements (García Canclini, 1992, p. 15). Rogers has also noted that the idea of hybridity, as a conception for types of appropriation can be used against peoples interests by delegitimising claims of cultural ownership or justifying acts of cultural exploitation (2006, p. 494). Altogether, it seems that the use of these other terms denies the possibilities of ambivalence in the complexities and diversities of cultural identity, ownership and/or ascription. Most importantly, however, it seems that these concepts and theories are contrary to the conception of cultural realities that transcend national cultural boundaries, carried by individuals in the transcultural globalisation processes. (Thomas, 1996, p. 15; Holliday, 2011, p. 165-166).

transported from the sub-Saharan African region into the New World. Following a period of voyages of discovery and exploration, European Naval Kingdoms (currently the countries of Spain, Portugal, France, United Kingdom, and France) would violently conquest and subjugate the peoples and territories of the Continent, followed by the settlement of colonizers, and the instauration of natural resources exploitative endeavours, that would change the region and the world.

These historical events would eventually lead to the establishment of new and repressive systems that for a period of over 300 years would dictate the novel forms and norms of coexistence that generated a series of social, political, and economic changes that directly and indirectly affected the formation of culture. The encounters among different peoples and their cultures – Europeans, Americans, Africans and Asians after the instauration of the transpacific trade routes – would irremediably alter the natural landscapes, populations and lives of the people in the Continent, ultimately affecting the development of human history and that of the entire world, until today.

Shaping and constituting new and different forms of culture in a fluid and constantly changing manner, the rhizomatic connections of creolization – extending through the relationships with the Other – would define and generate the powerful markers of identities in the region (Glissant, 2010, p. 11; Baron & Cara, 2011, p. 4). The radical modifications brought by the cultural concoction that in the Americas led among other phenomenon to the beginning of interracial relations and the generation of new cultural expressions and behaviours that would eventually shape, manifest, and become part of the cultural identity of the peoples in the Continent. The processes of creolization would produce, among other expressions, new languages, gastronomies, rituals, dances, music, ceremonies, belief systems, festivals, and innumerable forms of material and intangible cultural elements, that would become rooted into the identities and cultural heritages of the population (Baron & Cara, 2011, p. 5).

According to Glissant, the historical systems of erratic and mobile human relationships that originated in the XV Century, concretized the characteristics of unpredictability that culture and cultures have (2010, p. 95). As different groups of people encountered one another, creating cultural relationships throughout time and space, the conditions generated a paradigm full of ambiguities, imagination, resistance, and creolization, that can be further defined by the “archipelago thought”. Used as an alternative to classic Eurocentric ways of thinking, this epistemological device considers the world to be a collection of islands connected to each other. The connections – the type of relationships that emerge – among the parts – as sites for exploration, identity, socio-political formation, and economic and cultural circulation- work as models and represent an important factor for the formation and formulation of culture (Glissant, 2010, p. 34).

This notion suggests that communities, countries, or continents, had or continue to have, experiences of migration connecting one part of the world with the other. Present day cultures are therefore, living through a contraction of time and space, that simultaneously influences the present with the assistance of the continuous movements of images, cultures, and identities. Within this interplay of relations, mutual mutations are generated, in non-universalizing manners (Glissant, 2010, p. 89).



Figure 17. *El Costeño* by Agustín Arrieta, a painting of an Afro-Mexican boy from Veracruz. (c. 1843) (Sothebys).

Stemming from this context of globalised relations and openness, Hannerz retakes the creolization concept to further propose that creativity can surge in both the cultural and the artistic fields without the dangers of dissolving or becoming homogenised, as culture is influenced by different agents with varying motives and degrees of deliberateness (Hannerz, 1996, p. 70). The creolist concept, therefore, suggests that mixture in cultures is not necessarily aberrant, inferior, undeserving or inappropriate, since it comprises connotations of creativity and richness of expressions and meanings. Under this perspective, globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of the world can also result in cultural gain. Nevertheless, however inspiring and enriching these results can be, the processes of creolisation are still characterized and constrained by inequality of power, prestige and of material resources (Hannerz 1996, p. 66-67).

According to the Swedish sociologist, the asymmetries of the power relations of the Creolization process, and thus, of cultural diffusion, seem to be arranged into a Centre and Periphery patterns. This implies that in current political economies, Creolization surges in Capitalism, and through the configuration of a world system based on the interactions between the Centre - constituted by the economically developed and industrialized countries who control world markets - and the Peripheries - the economically developing countries who are economically dependent of the Centre (Hannerz, 2014, p. 11).

### **3.6 Long-distance relationships: the importance of space and centre-periphery affairs in the creolization process**

Hannerz further highlights the relevance of space in the association between the four frameworks and the concerns over global interconnectedness and centre-periphery relations. Although the majority of cultural flows within the life framework remain local, the connections and links between people have become less restricted by spatiality, further increasing through time.

Physical mobility allows people to engage with people in distant locations, whether the contact springs from one or two movements over a lifetime, or through a rapid drifting between different places. Additionally, the emergence of decentralised media - post, telephones - supports these long-distance relationships. The combinations between these two - mobility and media - can maintain cultural flows among national borders, oceans, and continents, as evidenced in the variety of small or large networks that arise and are sustained among dispersed relatives, ethnic diasporas, corporations, and other occupational populations that roam the world.

In a similar manner, movements have become least confined by territorial boundaries. Albeit many of them still remain local or national, some movements do breach borders, reaching transnational or even global strata - particularly when developing after a perceived threat or a desire to improve the form of life. When faced with shared risks, the rise of effective means of communication has allowed those facing similar situations to globally unite.

Nevertheless, unlike the previous frameworks, the market contains opposing tendencies. Considering its inherent predispositions to expand, in an attempt to reach and sell products to the largest possible number of consumers, the market is usually inclined to respect or celebrate spatial boundaries (unless placed with obstacles). Although the market is usually identified with the issue of global homogenisation, its inner workings tend to be more complex and demonstrate that at least in respect to Centre-Periphery relations, cultural differences still prevail.

On regards to space, the state framework remains the least flexible of them, as the notion itself is defined by its territoriality, and thus, the cultural flows within it are confined and organised in its own space. However, although its interest in maintaining cultural distinctiveness constrains transnational cultural flows, the management of contemporary culture is more complex. Firstly, the very notion of nation implies transnationality. Since its global spread in the XIX Century, limited modifications have occurred to its form. The distinctiveness of contrasting cultural contents within nations may be prescribed in some manners, but since the rest of the frameworks are able to cross borders, the state becomes incapable of completely guarding all the distinctive ideas and modes of expression of its inhabitants. Since competing ascriptions to shared cultures transcend national borders, the state is presented with the difficulties of anchoring or delimiting cultural flows to its territory.

Additionally, the state needs to acquire new ideas from abroad to maintain the material well-being of the society it contains. In recent history, the acquisition of foreign knowledge, competence and expertise by the state and all of its apparatuses, has been a major force driving cultural flows between centre and periphery. In this endeavour, the state, as an agent that creates transnational alliances, can also promote the creation of networks and subcultures that can directly compete with those within the nation.

Furthermore, the maintenance of boundaries in relation to cultural welfares, promotes the introduction of novel ideas and symbolic expressions, as the state is committed to offer its citizenry with the best of human technological and cultural advancements. Although highly contrasted with national culture through a variety of policies, the idea of "imported cultural junk" that is usually identified with the market, does not necessarily mean that cultural foreign expressions are intrinsically nefarious nor that the quality of national products is always superior.

Hannerz concludes that all four of the organisational frameworks for cultural flows engage in border-crossings. Since globalisation represents a very differentiated phenomenon, the relation of cultural flows to national boundaries is different and complex, contributing to an extent to the asymmetry and organisation of world culture in centre-periphery terms. This is particularly obvious in the market and state frameworks, both of which tend to operate on transnational levels with centring tendencies.

However, for the form of life and movement frameworks, their organisation on the centre-periphery configuration depends on a multitude of particular circumstances, including the number of people engaging with the pattern, their resources, and/or their relations to the state and market frameworks. Although the scope of the form of life and movement frameworks tend to be more symmetrical and less centrally arranged, a variety of specialised centrings are still available.



In the open continuum of forms, the distribution of culture within societies represents different combinations of centre-periphery relations. Since the creative processes of cultural Creolization are strongly influenced by the market, the transnational cultural flows influencing cultural exchanges and the creation of new cultural entities leave the Peripheries at an economic disadvantage. Centre-Periphery relations affect the asymmetries of cultural flows because the Centre often comprises more power and prestige (Hannerz, 1991b, p. 18; Hannerz, 2014, p. 11).

The creative capacities of Creolization in the Periphery are usually more evident through the entanglements between the organisational frames. The market, for instance, presents an opposing tendency to the expansion of products and consumers, through the segmentation of markets. This implies the creation of niches, where commodities are adapted to the particular needs and desires of specific categories of consumers, in an attempt to obtain competitive advantages. Market segmentation is heavily based on the diversity found within the form of life framework, since its characteristic strength is based on the shaping of everyday experiences among people. The daily life of some groups in the Periphery may be similar to the corresponding groups in the Centre, and thus, cultural commodities originating in the Centre, may be well accepted and desired by the Periphery.

Concordingly, the groups or masses of the Periphery who tend to be more rooted in tradition, can be provided with products under the market segmentations of creolizing entrepreneurs. However, it is noted that the situation can be complicated when anti-Centre reactions are taken into account. Groups under strong cultural influences of the Centre, tend to romanticise the fostering of local traditions in the Periphery, although such traditionalism is usually understood as another form of creolisation.

However, the visibility of creolisation processes in the Centre has further consequences. With the intensification of Centre-Periphery interconnections, and the creation of mixed cultural forms that originally come from the Periphery but change in the Centre, the creation of marketable creole commodities that are more attractive than the original forms may result. This has been particularly obvious in the popularisation of certain genres of literature and music styles, in cities like New York, Paris or Stockholm.

In conclusion, the varying reach of different current cultural flows, resulting from the diverse and relatively inconsistent tendencies of the organisational frameworks denotes that the cultures of Centre and Peripheries will not disappear nor that the differences will be eradicated by an homogenisation of culture. In transcultural processes, the active developments of creolisation result in the creation of new cultural flows and forms. Centre and Periphery will never be the same (Hannerz, 1991b, p. 20).

### 3.7 People and objects: the interactions of material culture and the value of things

The recognition that cultures do not constitute isolated entities, but that are instead, maintained by permanent and constant interactions, changed the paradigms for understanding culture. Among other inclinations, this marked a tendency towards rejecting notions of culture in which people were contemplated as cultural artefacts or texts, irremediably determined by their respective cultural backgrounds or settings. Furthermore, encouraged by the cultural and theoretical theories of transculturation and postcolonialism, the shift led to the understanding that, although culture pre-exists in a given social group or setting, individuals actively participate in its processes, implying that people have agency in the construction of culture, as individuals re-create, transform, and transmit it through their own personal experiences, while symbiotically changing when in contact with other ones.

The flexibility of the transcultural concepts provided a mean to address the particular modes through which individuals and groups create culture as an active social practice. As mentioned before, this allowed rigid notions, such as the idea of 'national culture', to be replaced by their construction through global constituents. Moreover, the development of new consumer technologies, communication, and means for accessing information – as information itself – had transformed the modes for interpersonal exchange and communication, generating a "pool of cultures" from which individuals and groups assemble particular repertoires from the global ecumene, changing with this, the forms of representation, social practices, and material culture (Hannerz 1996, p. 49).

Since its origins, the material dimensions of culture had been of particular interest in Anthropology, as examining objects and their related technologies represents an indispensable activity to understand the complex schemes of human life and development (Hicks & Beaudry, 2010, p. 2-5). But as epistemological assumptions and scholarly practices changed over the decades, so did the understandings of the relationship between objects and people, as well as societies and their consumption dynamics.

Generally speaking, the interpretative frameworks of Social Anthropology considered that objects were actively involved in the formation of culture and all of its components, as elements that sustain both the cognitive and social systems that compose culture. Accordingly, objects could be conceived as mere reflections of culture, serving a representational purpose; or as active elements, used to define, activate, and maintain reality (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 7).

Among a variety of theoretical currents, the approaches of symbolic anthropology had originally proposed that objects could be recognized as texts. Under this perspective, signs and meaning were condensed in objects, all of which were modified and altered through power relations. In this sense, the analysis of material culture could reveal the symbolic systems of meanings of the social world, as the use and production of objects correlated and reproduced the system from which they are part (see Geertz, 1973). However, although the objects might satisfy functional needs, their constituency as symbolic and active products within a society are not an isolated phenomenon.

The introduction of consumption as an analytical category allowed anthropology to discuss key disciplinary concerns by focusing on the relationships of materiality with social and cultural processes. Preceded by Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff in *The Social Life of Things* (1991) the commercial implications of objects began to be broadened – justifying the idea that goods, just as people, have a social life.

Focused on the circulation of goods through their potential processes of exchange and commodification, the new approach contradicted prevailing trends that had previously contemplated objects as inert and silent elements, a principle sustained by the belief that objects and their meaning could only be animated through language and/or people (Dumont as cited by Appadurai, 1991, p. 4).

Influenced by the ideas of several pioneering anthropologists such as Boas, Malinowski and Mauss, the introduction of Appadurai's and Kopytoff's thesis into the discipline provided a novel vision under which cultural objects – as any form of goods – were understood as merchandise, and thus, defined by the possibilities of exchange. Therefore, it is through the analysis of their forms, uses and trajectories – interpreted throughout the entire procedures of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption – that the ultimate significances and values of objects can be disclosed (Appadurai, 1991, p. 19).

According to Appadurai, commodities can be divided into four types:

(1) commodities by destination, that is, objects intended by their producers principally for exchange; (2) commodities by metamorphosis, things intended for other uses that are placed into the commodity state; (3) a special, sharp case of commodities by metamorphosis are commodities by diversion, objects placed into a commodity state though originally specifically protected from it; (4) ex-commodities, things retrieved, either temporarily or permanently, from the commodity state and placed in some other state.

(Appadurai, 1991, p. 16).

The processes of value construction occur in the multiple displacements in time and space, and between and around the social objects. These are attributed by what the scholars rendered as 'regimes of value', implying that the value of an objects is mediated by desire, remaining dependant on who and how much a merchandise is coveted or demanded (Appadurai, 1991, p. 4).

Since exchanges occur in circulation, rather than in a single plane, the construction of value is traversed by a multitude of universes, through which relationships, strategies, negotiations, and disputes surge. This influences the meanings and significances ascribed to objects, depending on the context and value system in which they are found. As objects acquire active, dynamic, and changing dimensions, subjected to commoditization, decommoditization and recomoditization processes, new identities are developed through the gradual processes of incorporation into new social arenas, within or between cultural units (Appadurai, 1991, p. 16).

Rethinking the association of consumer goods and merchandise in the Western world showed that consumption was not a practice that belonged exclusively to industrialized and capitalist contexts, as anthropological thought had previously esteemed. Furthermore, original ethnographic experiences from different geographies and contexts in the world, revealed the capacity of traditional systems of meaning and exchange to incorporate what had been previously expected to threaten them. The mass consumption of merchandise was not a sign of cultural erosion, homogenization nor loss of cultural differences, but presented instead heterogeneity and diversity through the differential experiences of consumption (Miller, 2005, p. 266).

In this sense, the dichotomy between market and culture diffuses in contemporary complex societies – although they tend to become confused or remain dependant to one another. However, through processes of singularization, usually instrumentalised by States and specific control groups, goods can become part of the symbolic inventory of a society (i.e. cultural heritage, art collections, ritual objects, political paraphernalia, etc.) (Appadurai, 1991, p. 98-100).

Appadurai's work has also been valuable for presenting notions on luxury goods, condensed by those commodities whose main use would be rhetorical and social, as embodied signs that solely respond to fundamentally political needs. In this sense, the existence of luxury goods differentiates them from others, as they are restrained by sporadic and private uses that are exclusive to certain sectors. Accordingly, luxury goods follow attributes such as:

- a) Being restricted to elite groups.
- b) Requiring means for complex acquisition (not necessarily related to scarcity).
- c) Being able to communicate complex social messages (semiotically virtuous).
- d) Their consumption requiring of predisposed or specialised knowledge (regulated through fashion).
- e) Consumption linked to body, person, or personality (to a certain degree).

(Appadurai, 1991, p. 56-59)

### 3.8 Themes in the analysis of 'cultural appropriation'

The following table disaggregates some of the specific aspects and concepts that have been previously addressed in academic discussions over 'cultural appropriation'. The identification of the main theoretical focuses and associated conceptual areas of interest has been intended to contextualize the research findings for this thesis, facilitating a better understanding of the phenomenon by emphasising the key elements of concern that have been previously discussed by relevant authors, inscribed to a variety of academic perspectives and backgrounds.

Theoretical current	Context	Key concerns and conceptual axes	Main reference authors
Early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century - Anthropology / Legal Anthropology in the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intensification of State involvement in Native affairs</li> <li>Patrimonialisation of national heritage</li> <li>Development of Anthropology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal regulations against the commercialisation of <i>imitation</i> Native American crafts</li> <li>Aimed at guaranteeing the <i>authenticity</i> of artefacts; <i>continuity of Native traditional ways of living</i></li> </ul>	Berlo, 1992
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pan-Africanist movement</li> <li>Harlem/Paris Renaissance movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rise in discussions on the cultural and ideological legacies of colonialism and imperialism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Black condemnation of White</i> 'appropriative' practices in European and American cultural industries</li> <li>Provided a racial dimension to the discussion</li> </ul>	Locke (1925) Cruse (1964)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postcolonial Studies</li> <li>Cultural Studies</li> <li>Heritage Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of <i>power/knowledge</i> structures established between the <i>West and the rest</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of <i>colonial discourses</i> permeating cultural heritage: authorised discourses, practices, policies, institutions in the late-modern world</li> <li>Processes of 'Othering'</li> <li>The creation of the '<i>exotic</i>'</li> <li>Consolidation of <i>stereotypes</i> and other detrimental <i>systems of representation</i></li> <li>Contrasting of <i>traditional or primitive</i> forms of living vs. <i>civilisation, modernisation, and development</i></li> </ul>	Coutts-Smith (1976) Said (1978) Foucault (1982) Clifford (1988) Hall (1992; 1997) Waldron (1992) Taylor (1992) hooks (1992) Appadurai (1998) Smith (2006) Appiah (2006) Harrison (2013)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural Studies – 1990's Canadian scholars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natives <i>claims over self-determination</i></li> <li>Concerns of <i>non-dominant cultures</i> over the '<i>appropriation</i>' of works and cultural artefacts by <i>dominant groups</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problematization of '<i>cultural appropriation</i>' as a <i>multidirectional and complex occurrence</i></li> <li>Diversity of topical concerns, theoretical orientations, and analytical methods to the analysis of the phenomenon: analysis of broad range of <i>meanings, understandings, modes, and themes</i></li> <li>Issues of <i>authenticity, representation, heritage, and intellectual property</i></li> </ul>	<p>Todd (1990)          Handler (1991)          Fung (1993)          Hladki (1994)          Rowell (1995)          Ziff &amp; Rao (1997)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multidisciplinary cultural approaches</li> <li>Intercultural Communication / Media Studies</li> <li>Philosophy</li> <li>Art</li> <li>Art History</li> <li>Education</li> <li>Fashion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problematization of the empirically questionable and ideologically circumspect assumptions on '<i>cultural appropriation</i>'</li> <li>Global capitalism in neo-colonial and postmodern eras</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the inferences of the <i>transculturation</i> in cultural processes, <i>multiculturalism, cross-cultural contact</i></li> <li>The significance of <i>transmission, preservation, access and control over objects, practices, and places of culture and heritage</i></li> <li>Discussions on <i>cultural identity and diversity</i></li> <li>Issues of <i>authenticity, representation, processes of 'exotic otherness', the values of cultural goods, the universalisation of knowledge and heritage, commodification and fetishization of cultural elements</i></li> </ul>	<p>Rogers (2006)          Young (2005, 2008)          Matthes (2016)          Ashley, K. &amp; Plesch, V. (2002)          Schneider (2003)          Haig-Brown (2010)          Shand (2002)          Waldron (1992) Taylor (1992)          hooks (1992)          Clifford (1998)          Said (1978)          Churchill (1994)          Whitt (1995)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Anthropology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conception and establishment of prescriptive policies / laws intended for the protection of cultural expressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examination of the <i>socio-political and legal aspects</i> of '<i>cultural appropriation</i>', <i>politics</i> of cultural properties and heritages within modern consumer societies</li> <li>Issues of <i>rights, ownership, and legislation</i> in American and Canadian contexts</li> <li>Social implications of <i>intellectual property laws</i></li> <li>Prevalence of <i>values from the art/culture system</i></li> </ul>	<p>Coombe (1993, 1993b, 1997)          Tsotsie (2002)          Scafidi (2005)          Comaroff and Comaroff (2009)          Brown (1998, 2005)          Haig-Brown (2010)</p>

Figure 18. Theoretical approaches to 'cultural appropriation'. (Sienna Iracheta, 2021).

## Chapter 4 – Refining working assumptions vis a vis the theoretical backgrounds

### 4.1 Many cases, never the same? Formulating assumptions over the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon

The initial approaches to the question of 'cultural appropriation' outlined throughout the previous chapters, focused on the multiple behaviours, modes, dynamics, and narratives formulated by a number of authors and disciplines, representing an essential exercise for the formulation of the working assumptions and research questions guiding the development of this research.

The literary review suggested that there are many examples considered to be cases of 'cultural appropriation', the vast majority of which are never manifested in theory nor in practice in simple ways. This makes me part from the supposition that although generally considered as equal, occurrences of 'cultural appropriation' are never the same. By further developing this line, the following section serves to present the course of this investigation, providing my personal assumptions over the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles of Mexico, further presenting the series of research questions that this thesis intends to answer.

Albeit surging from a generalised conception of the phenomenon – the 'taking' or 'using' of a cultural expression by someone who is alien to the group believed to have 'originally' created or who 'owns' the expression (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 1; Rogers, 2006, p. 474; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 929) – the 'cultural appropriation' controversies remain sustained by a variety of objects and actors at play. This hints to the existence of a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives and understandings of what the phenomenon is, and particularly, to the diversity of ideas and relationships that compose the polemics. This suggests that although cases of 'appropriation' can be arranged into heterogenous typologies, individually, cases should not be addressed in the same way, as the events and contexts, actors, interpretations, processes, and consequences of them, are dissimilar. Moreover, stemming from a line of thought that proposes that 'cultural appropriation' is more complex than it originally seems, my suspicions further revolve around theories that suggest that the phenomenon embodies a dynamic manifestation of the transculturation processes which promote cultural change (Lull, 2000 p. 242; Rogers, 2006, p. 477; Hannerz, 1991b, p. 18; Appadurai, 1992, p. 10).

Thus, regarded as an active social phenomenon involving different objects, actors, scenarios and times, cases of 'cultural appropriation' evolve differently, impacted by a series of individual and external influences and forces. This insinuates that the controversies also present variables in the power dynamics and in the boundaries or structures framing the conflicts, as both humans and material resources are diversely affected. Likewise, complex dynamics of 'cultural appropriation' occur in diverging historical, social, political, cultural, and economic contexts, concurrently impacting the multiplicity of factors and conditions that alter the processes and outcomes of the events.

Set in a globalised context, 'appropriation' controversies are influence by a variety of sites which are not bounded by geographic nor territorial locations. The workings of the phenomenon maybe harder to grasp because the conflicts are not limited to tangible manifestations nor cross-cut dichotomies, but sustained instead, by a series of connections and crossings that equally complexify the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities (Ziff & Rao, 1998, p. 8; Appadurai, 1996, p. 4; Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 2003, p. 206).

My working assumption on the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation', in context of traditional textiles from Mexico, considers that the controversies involve a variety of actors and objects, articulating a variety of relationships, meanings and values throughout different sites and temporal scenarios. As such, the perceptions, behaviours, and actions involved in occurrences may not only be divergent, but also fluctuate throughout time as an 'appropriation' dispute develops.

Although the phenomenon is usually deemed to represent a unique, entirely negative event, the evidence indicates that cases can have positive implications on the communities, and in the circulation of the objects, since the controversies promote the commercialisation and generation of new cultural forms and expressions (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 14; but also, Coombe, 1997, p. 52). The variety of conflicting discourses and perspectives that impulse the episodes throughout time can change, shifting with this the organisation of culture, of objects of material culture, and cultural heritage.

Ultimately, this work infers that the phenomenon represents a series of specific conditions, circumstances, and ideas relating to different historical, political, cultural, and economic contexts, that affect people and expressions of cultural heritage in a variety of intricate ways. The dissimilar considerations, circumstances, situations, perspectives, values, judgements, and consequences of the phenomenon, present different realities to different groups of people. Composed by both abstract and tangible considerations, 'cultural appropriation' seems to follow transcultural processes: the series of interactions, exchanges, and developments that affect the structuring of culture and global social interactions today.

Although much has been written on the topic from a legal perspective, my working assumption relevantly suggests that the implementation of legal mechanisms intended to avoid or solve the issues are not only deficient, but that they can affect the organic processes of cultural changes and transmission within communities. This stance has been suggested by a variety of authors including Ziff & Rao, Coombe, Philip and Newton (1997), who have additionally highlighted that the perspectives of legal regulations present a variety of issues that follow Western cultural values and that cannot be universally applied, since they are usually alien to Indigenous conceptions (Hladki, 1994, p. 1906; Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 12-14; Wallis & Malm, 1984; Whitt, 1995; Coombe, 1993, p. 251; Scafidi, 2005, p.11; Shand, 2002, p. 64). Therefore, I will argue that the phenomenon should be regarded as a site for contestation, and that the position and relationships between actors and objects, in addition to the overall development, processes and outcomes of controversies, should be concisely analysed by case.

## List of working assumptions

The working assumptions for this Doctoral thesis can be enlisted as follows:

1. Cases of 'cultural appropriation' are never the same since the occurrences manifest themselves through different contexts, and through a series of complex practices and behaviours, exhibiting different developments, processes, and consequences.
2. The controversies are sustained by a variety of objects and actors in different events, representing a multiplicity of dissimilar perspectives, understandings, ideas, values, and relationships at play. The events present different realities to different groups of people.
3. The material and human actors are diversely affected by the power dynamics and boundaries framing the conflicts.
4. The phenomenon embodies a dynamic manifestation of the transculturation processes which promotes cultural change.
5. The conflicts are sustained by diverging historical, social, political, cultural, and economic contexts, influenced by a variety of sites, similar to the series of connections and crossings affecting the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities.
6. The perceptions, behaviours, and actions involved in occurrences and its associated discourses fluctuate throughout time as an 'appropriation' dispute develops.
7. Incidences of 'cultural appropriation' have positive effects, promoting the circulation, commercialisation, and generation of new cultural forms.
8. The implementation of legal mechanisms intended to avoid or solve issues of 'cultural appropriation' can affect the organic processes of cultural changes and transmission within communities.
9. The controversies of 'cultural appropriation' represent a site for social tension and contestation.

### 4.2 What, who, when, where, and why? Research questions for the analysis of 'cultural appropriation'

In order to begin with this investigation, I will focus on a very general question – what is 'cultural appropriation'? – in order to obtain conceptual and theoretical perspectives that will allow me to draw on the broad range of ideas that have been expressed about the phenomenon and its understanding over the decades. This initial inquiry will further address some of the reasons why the phenomenon has been considered a controversy, exploring the origins of the term in order to understand its historical, social, and political backgrounds within academic and public attention. In this sense, gaining a general perspective of the phenomenon and its modes will assist in further defining and guiding the approaches that will be required to identify and address the specific subject matter of this thesis: the cultural 'appropriation' of traditional textiles from Mexico.

According to the incidence of political figures and the media, the number of recent cases of 'appropriation' in the country seem to have increased. However, this investigation intends to analyse the significance and implications of the phenomenon on the artisans and the textile heritages from different communities, following the elements and perceptions that are considered relevant by the participants themselves.

Therefore, the first step to comprehend this issue from a territorial national perspective, entails the identification of the actors involved, and the description of the relationships and expressions of material culture that are or have been, directly or indirectly, involved or affected in recent controversies. These questions – what are the objects? who are the actors? and what are the related relationships and ideas implicated in the events? – will then be followed by the localisation of the sites where the controversies rise, as well as the chronology of events, as it seems that the phenomenon is dynamic, developing differently through periods of time and locations, that are simultaneously impacted by a number of forces. To do so, the questions of where and when do cases of 'appropriation' occur will have to be taken into consideration and recollected by the participants who participated in the research. Eventually, the collection of data will then be strategically coded, analysed and compared using the qualitative Software tool ATLAS.ti, in order to derive meaningful findings that will answer the question of why the conflicts surge, and what are the discourses, perceptions, understandings and values at stake.

More concisely, the research questions that will be followed throughout this research are: what are the objects, and who the actors involved? what are the relationships and related ideas implicated in the events? where and when do the controversies surge?

### 4.3 Objectives

#### General objectives

- Understand the relationships involved in the controversies, through the interpretation of perspectives and discourses made by the social actors involved in the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation'.
- Propose a scheme for the theoretical analysis of 'cultural appropriation' from the perspective of the impacts it has on cultural heritage objects within contemporary societies.

#### Specific objectives

- Identify the theoretical approaches that relate to the concept of 'cultural appropriation' in the literature, distinguishable in terms of their relation to the disciplinary field of Cultural Heritage Studies.

- Know in depth the different developments and reactions of participants regarding the 'cultural appropriation' of textile crafts, through the analysis of Study Cases.
- Describe the different approaches and/or perspectives that focus on the reconstruction of the controversies and its developments as an object of study.
- Identity the different conditions, actions, changes, and consequences that the participants assign to the concept of 'cultural appropriation' and its association to other events.
- Develop a substantive analysis of 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon based on the information provided by the participants involved in the controversies.











## **SECTION 2**

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### **Methodological and Theoretical approximations**

## Chapter 5 – Outlining the research: methodologies for the analysis of ‘cultural appropriation’

The following chapter delves on the research methodology implemented for this project, providing the investigative route through which I intended to find answers to the research questions over the problem of ‘cultural appropriation’ of traditional textiles in Mexico. As previously mentions, the research framework presented in the introduction locates this investigation within two fundamental areas of multidisciplinary expertise: the fields of Cultural Studies and Heritage Studies, both of which provide the main theoretical foundations and methodological approaches to maintain scientific rigor and achieve the objectives of this thesis.

However, characterised as a qualitative process, this Doctoral thesis did not abide to strictly linear sequences of investigation, guiding its development instead, through a series of parallel actions and processes. This strategy allowed me to determine the major conceptual and theoretical aspects framing the phenomenon of ‘cultural appropriation’, as a crucial exercise to define the working assumptions, establish the research questions, and the thesis objectives, with the intention of being scientifically addressed through the elaboration of a methodological strategy.

This section presents the methodological approaches that were determined for this thesis, justifying the use of a multi-case study methodology and of qualitative methods, as well as the multi-sited ethnographic approach, to obtain the data for this investigation. This methodological scheme also justifies the means for the selection of Case Studies, and the use of different ethnographic techniques, in order to analyse the controversies and the phenomenon.

The phenomenon of ‘cultural appropriation’ exhibits a wide and confusing network of conflicts and relationships between people and objects of cultural heritage, supported by a multitude of differing perceptions and discourses that change throughout time. Generally speaking, the issue of ‘appropriation’ has divided commentators into two stances, with on the one hand, those who defend the practice, highlighting it as a celebration of human creativity, cultural diversity and freedom of expression (Lull, 2000 p. 242; Rogers, 2006, p. 477; Hannerz, 1991b, p. 18; Appadurai, 1992, p. 10, etc); and on the other, those who consider the entire phenomenon to be a threat, with arguments revolving around issues of power asymmetries between dominant and subordinate groups, the damaging implications of the practice on culture and cultural identities, and the unfair commercialisation of symbolic traditions (to mention a few) (Todd, 1990, p. 24–52; Browning, 1992, p. 31; Scafidi, 2005, p. 9; Tsosie, 2002, p. 300, 310–311; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 928–929).

Debates over the issue have mainly focused on four concerns, including the erosion or degradation of the cultural identity of a group, representing a threat to cultural diversity; the perceptions over the value of cultural goods/objects of material culture and their decontextualization; the exploitation of cultural elements in relation to claims of ownership; and finally, questions over the stewardship of communities (Ziff & Rao, 1997).

However, these conversations have been commonly sustained by dichotomic positions, encouraging a series of never-ending discussions, that mainly focus on whereas the practice of ‘cultural appropriation’ is a matter of appreciation/inspiration, or a ‘theft’, if the practice is immoral or not, or if it should be legally banned or legitimately accepted (see Coombe 1993, 1993b, 1997; Tsotsie, 2002; Scafidi, 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009; Brown, 1998, 2005; and Haig-Brown, 2010). These reduced standpoints have prevented a thorough exploration of the phenomenon, as they tend to ignore the variety of agents, relationships, contexts, forces, and factors relating and shaping the occurrences of ‘appropriation’ themselves.

Without completely dismissing general opinions and observations over the general debates, this thesis has proposed to transcend the widespread common arguments and dichotomic postures, to concentrate instead in all the elements that have been previously ignored in the analysis of the phenomenon. Thus, this work intends to immerse in a series of controversies, identifying the number of agents, objects, voices and perceptions involved in them, as well as the forces and factors that shape the events, in order to dissect its different processes, effects and outcomes throughout time.

This research proposition relates to the first premise of this theses: the suggestion that albeit being considered as equal, cases of ‘cultural appropriation’ should never be addressed in the same way, as their development, and thus, their processes, greatly differ among each other. Cases of ‘appropriation’ involve dissimilar relationships and surge in different contexts, giving rise to an extensive variety of conflicts between different groups of people, objects, interactions, and perceptions that change throughout time.

However, these suppositions present a noticeable working challenge, requiring in first place, a methodology that allows for the systematic investigation of a set of particular events relating to the broader category of the phenomenon. That is, the ‘cultural appropriation’ of traditional textiles from Mexico, and the recent controversies that have been considered examples of it.

### 5.1 Narratives, descriptions, and practices: doing qualitative research

What is sought on this study is to obtain data that will become in depth information from people, communities, contexts, and situations related to cases of ‘cultural appropriation’ of textiles in Mexico. In order to understand the social phenomenon, my interest will be primordially directed towards the concepts, perceptions, imaginaries, beliefs, emotions, interactions, thoughts, experiences, and processes, that are manifested in the language of the participants as they narrate the development of the events.

These objectives provide the investigation with a hermeneutic or interpretative orientation, as the research relays on providing significance to the attributes given to the phenomenon, as characteristics or traits that are not directly observable nor subjectable to experimentation. Therefore, in order to answer the formulated questions for the present research proposal, a qualitative approach was

established, as the method is characterised by the attempt to comprehend situations (facts, actions, moments, phenomenon) explained through the perceptions and experiences of those involved, in the context where they are located.

Qualitative research is developed from the direct observation of a specific audience or event, materialising in the descriptive analysis of what is found. Unlike quantitative research – in which instruments for measurement and massification of data are used to provide numerical or statistical conclusions – qualitative methods aim to obtain and organize accurate, reliable information from different units of analysis (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 171). The deliberations and comparisons of the data collected from events of 'appropriation', recognised as a series of extraordinary incidents disrupting and affecting the lives of people, will compose the conclusions for this research.

Since qualitative research is only performed when the central objectives of an investigation are focused on exploring experiences and perceptions from the participants of a phenomenon, in this order of ideas, the methods implies a deepening of the interpretations and significances, producing a higher level of detail.

Additionally, it must be noticed that the qualitative process is not linear nor carries strict sequence, as its stages are the actions taken to reach the objectives of the research and obtaining the answers from the fundamental questions guiding the study. Upon entering a field or site, the collection and analysing of data is carried as a parallel activity; allowing the researcher to observe, modifying, and adjusting the samples and sources as the work requires it.

## 5.2 Similarities and disparities: the multi-case study approach

The qualitative approach goes from the particular to the general, aiming to enquire and describe a phenomenon in order to formulate theoretical bases. Therefore, in order to analyse the 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles, the investigation required to analyse case by case profoundly, identifying general aspects, expanding on the specific experiences encompassed in each of them. In line with the working assumptions of this work – cases might be considered equal, but are never the same – the present investigation pretended to reach the research objectives through the strategic application of a multi-case or collective study design, a methodology that incorporates particularities in individualities, in order to focus on the exhaustive study of singular but associated events.

The issues of 'cultural appropriation' fathoms the occurrences of humans, relationships, perceptions, opinions, as well as a variety of meanings assigned to objects and beliefs. Therefore, the understanding of the phenomenon through single cases or individual experiences can present problems with matters of subjectivity, as people's perceptions, realities, behaviours, and experiences during a particular time or event can greatly differ among individuals, and communities (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 12).

Moreover, within this context of global encounters, research solely based on notions of ethnic affiliation and/or territorial parameters are problematic, as objects and conflicts emerge among social actors, giving place to complex questions relating to identity. Considering that the construction of the 'self' and 'others' change constantly throughout time, highly influenced by internal and external factors, and dynamically entrenching the lives and understandings of groups of people, sectors of a given population, and/or individuals differently, ethnographic research has to avoid recurring to essentialist notions, as the countless aspects that generate identity (including ascriptions related to gender, age, religion, ancestry, skin colour, language, discourses, social class, professions, sense of community, family structures, roles and activities, region, etc) can cross territorial boundaries (Clifford, 1999, p. 15; Holliday, 2011, p. 55).

Collective or multi-case studies are concentrated in inquiring about a precise phenomenon present in different cases and scenarios, implying that the 'appropriation' of traditional textiles can be explored through different cases, describing, gathering information and dissecting their peculiarities through the use of various units of analysis, therefore, permitting an effective understanding of instrumental, individual events of 'appropriation' on a collective manner.

The method considers that by highlighting the differences, several dimensions of the situation can be obtained, as the methodology provides the means to extrapolate key themes, illustrate their ascription to general theoretical concepts, and uncover the manifested interactions between the significant factors that are characteristic to the individual cases, and more broadly, to the phenomenon. The multi-case study approach facilitates the capturing of nuances, patterns, and elements in separate cases, enabling the comparisons between them, while further granting a better understanding of the insights and theorisation of the phenomenon on a broader context (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 170-180)

This approach also provides the means for revealing the development of the controversies, as well as the shaping of their processes by the individuals or groups involved in the occurrences, serving as a tool to expose the manners by which people make sense of the 'appropriation' events: how they frame, perceive and interpret this occurrences; while highlighting the behaviours involved: the actions, interactions and approaches to the conflict and their attempts towards resolution (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 171).

However, it is important to notice that individual cases are not isolated, stemming out of their own context, being affected, and influenced by other factors and actions. Under these premises, the methodological process opted to select distinct cases within the Mexican territory, focusing on instances that possessed both homogeneous and unique characteristics in order to expand the representativeness of the effects/impacts of the phenomenon on a broader scale. For this reason, the strategic design established case studies involving different cultural groups and objects of material culture, located in different territories of the country, where experiences of 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles have been known in the last decade.

Although connected by the 'appropriation' phenomenon, on an individual level, cases are interlocked to the elements surrounding it, making certain characteristics part of their own contexts. Addressing each case, therefore, has to aim at comprehending and extending the

understanding particular events by concentrating in what happened in each occurrence, without forgetting that the overall purpose depends on the understanding of all of its elements at depth. The research also considered the possibility of selecting cases where information could be limited, or difficult to access.

Altogether, the basic criteria for the selection of case studies revolved around differences and similitudes in relation to recent controversies, but the feasibility and capacity for data obtention within each context, considering the amount of time available and the level of accessibility to the locations during this phase.

### 5.3 Explore, describe, and explain: processes for the collection of data

The multi-case study implies its construction from the integration of all kinds of information, collected through different strategies, in order to effectively provide data from individual in-depth studies. The method is adequate to explore, describe and explain the complex and changing situations and realities conforming a phenomenon.

As mentioned before, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' is sustained by a variety of agents, objects, and relationships, with individual cases representing a particular context that embeds the occurrence with its own particularities. Therefore, based on the premise that identifies the phenomenon as a dynamic network of relationships and conflicts expanding through time and space, this analysis will begin by identifying the communities, defined as a socially delineated unit within a larger society (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 179).

The case studies from Mexico, will therefore, represent the groups of people sharing collective identities in a homogenous manner, in which the interactions and relationships between its members produce means for social identification among them. Once the communities are delineated, the focus of the analysis will be divided into the abstract categories of agents and objects, recognised as the most representative entities involved withing the controversies.

The selection of actors/participants for this research will primordially be based on their roles, as one of the main factors that defines people socially. In this sense, roles or social titles serve people to organise and provide meaning to their experiences and practices, as lifestyles require denominators to adjust or adapt to certain behaviours. Occupation or adscription to a social class, further provides people with a form of life framework within a community (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 178-179).

This investigation will primarily concentrate on textile craftspeople, as individuals who culturally identify as a member of a given community, but that at the same time, practice a textile production activity or exercise the trade in some form that directly relates to the production of material culture of the group. Additionally, this study considers other units of analysis that could provide broader information on the conflicts, based on their direct experiences and/or relation to the 'appropriation' disputes, including representatives or authorities within the cultural groups.

Qualitative research on this thesis will also focus on other units of analysis, in addition to the actors directly or indirectly involved in the cases. These consist in a series of relationships that may include:

- Dyad relationships: constituted by social groups of 2 people, interacting for a prolonged period of time, considered to be connected for some reason or form of social bond. This may include types such as intimate, marital, paternal, friendly, impersonal, political, or bureaucratic relations; and thus, a focus on their origins, intensity and processes have to be considered in this research.
- Groups: Sets of people who interact for an extended period, linked to each other by a sense of purpose or belonging, considering themselves as an entity. Families, neighbours, social networks, and work teams are examples of this unit of analysis.
- Organizations: units formed among people for collective purposes, an analysis that focuses on matters of origin, control, hierarchies, and culture springing from the association. This may include cooperatives or political parties.
- Communities: human settlements in a socially defined territory where organizations, groups, relationships, roles, meetings, episodes, and activities arise. This includes the geographical or electronic/technological territories where people interact.
- Subcultures: Media and new technologies have favoured the emergence of a nebulous social unity, giving place to 'cybercultures' in the internet, where geographically distant individuals associate and interact. This contains a large and practically unlimited population, so the definition of their borders might be complex.

Additionally, other types of units of analysis will be involved in this research, as their evaluation provides valuable data for the understanding of the phenomenon, including:

- Meanings: as the linguistic referents that human actors use in reference to the social life. The definitions, ideologies, and discourses that surround the subject of 'appropriation', shared by different groups of people. Some of these may be part of the rules and norms governing the social life of actors, being active or obvious, while others might be more difficult to grasp, being confusing or inadequately articulated.
- Practices: the units of behavioural analysis, referring to continuous activities or routines defined by the members of a social system. This is of particular importance to understand the different uses that culture and cultural objects may have in the controversies.
- Episodes: exceptional or remarkable events, that are not features of the practising routines or established behaviours. Their effect on people can be analysed in using various qualitative measures.

(Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 180; Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 8)

The task of the observer in the field is essential for collecting and recording data in order to interpret the significance of the occurrences of 'appropriation'. As the observation advances, the researcher can reorient the guiding questions, embracing a progressive focus, similar to what is required throughout the entire research process.

For this work, data collection will occur in the natural environments of the social actors, the agents, or first units of analysis of this work. In the case of individuals directly involved in the occurrences, recollection will focus in their lives and their experiences: how they speak about the incidents, what they believe about them, what they felt, how they interacted, acted and reacted, before and after the controversies began. The use of semi-structured interviews will allow me to collect and analyse data responding to the research questions of this study, expanding the knowledge and comprehension of the topic (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 171-172).

The collection will be carried through various mediums: in verbal language, through face-to-face interactions or telephone calls; in written modes, through email and social networks exchanges; and in nonverbal cues, as behaviours in presential encounters will also be observed. Additionally, audio or video recordings may be used, as well as taking photos. The main difficulty in capturing what the social actors/units express will possibly be access to the participants and/or their environments. This generates a particular concern regarding Indigenous participants as customs, language barriers, geographical location and technological communication exchanges might be intricate (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 179-180).

In the qualitative process, a researcher has to remember his academic role and the context in which the research process is carried. Some of the most difficult tasks of this endeavour is the creation of trustworthy, amicable bonds with the participants, while trying to maintain an unbiased, objective perspective. This made me consider my role in the personal interactions, the conditions under which they surge, and how I adapt to these particular circumstances.

Considering the effect of predisposed prejudices and assumptions, the influence of my own beliefs on those of the participants and their environments have to be, as much as possible, avoided or at least minimized. For this reason, I considered limiting the use of the concept 'cultural appropriation' when conducting interviews, as the term may contain predisposed notions and inferences – the idea of 'appropriation' as a 'taking of' from someone else's culture, as well as the impression that culture can be possessed (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 1; Young, 2005, p. 136; Rogers, 2006, p. 474; Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 929) that might interfere with objectivity, inducing responses and behaviours among the participants.

The use of semi-structured interviews has also been designed as a mean to allow participants to narrate their own experiences, perspectives, and opinions, without limiting their contributions and conversations to rigid responses. The relevance of using this qualitative research instrument, lies in the possibility of approaching the object of study from the perspective and concrete experience of the social actors involved, as they address the problem that will be analysed. In this sense, the social actors – as individuals or collectives – occupy a specific role in the controversies, as it is them who perform the actions related to the development and understanding of the events. The interviews will therefore be replicated among different participants, in order to acquire different perspectives and data based on their personal experiences.

Furthermore, respect for the participants is of utmost importance as a researcher in the field. This point is particularly relevant considering the contribution of Indigenous participants, who are governed by systems that I am alien to and unfamiliar with. Access to the communities has to be initially requested to the local authorities in accordance to their customs, and granted in advance in order to access the communities to carry the investigation. The existence of cultural differences, as well as those among individuals and groups represent unique realities that have to be considered. In this sense, differences among genders, age, ethnic affiliation, or among urban and rural agents, has to be noticed (see Holliday, 2011).

Reading about the places and contexts of each site will also be carried before entering them. Previous contact will have to be established, when possible with the participants before my arrival, in order to understand their daily lives, and obtain consent towards my participation in their localities, talking to them, to their relatives, friends or neighbours. The complexity of the topic also calls for the manifestation and the dealing with personal emotions, which should be regarded as another source of data and conveniently written as personal notes. However, this should not influence the research nor the results of this investigation (Holliday, 2011; Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 88-89).

#### **5.4 Asking questions: developing semi-structured interviews**

There are various instruments for collecting data, such as interviews or focus groups. Nevertheless, in qualitative research, the fundamental characteristic is the researcher, who not only analysis the information but becomes the mean for obtaining it, employing a diversity of methods and techniques. Data gathering can be achieved through observation, conducting interviews, reviewing documents, examining audio-visual materials, or organizing sessions, etc. Nevertheless, in qualitative inquiries, the instruments are not standardized, allowing the researcher to work with multiple data sources separately or simultaneously (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 67-70).

Due to the nature of the cases, semi-structured or semi-standardised interviews represent a vital instrument for the obtention of information for this research project. Prepared beforehand, this type of interview consists in a series of open-end questions and/or a selection of topics or themes to be discussed as a general content guide. Posed in flexible ways, this allows better interactions with the participants as new questions can be formulated as the interview develops. This further permits the researcher to manage, administer and conduct the conversations in ways that are more convenient to the collection of data and the achieving of the overall objectives in the research.

This type of interviews can be carried out in several stages, as the beginning and end of the interactions are not necessarily predetermined. Both the questions and the order in which they are asked, can be also adapted to the participants, providing space for largely anecdotal, undetermined answers (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 69-70).

Communication should also be adjusted to the context, norms or language of the interviewees. The interviews will be carried in Spanish, with the additional support of a translator, when the situation requires it. Although the transcriptions will be produced in the same language, the acquired data will be translated into English. This might represent an issue, as translations can disregard nuances. For this reason, the questions have to remain open and neutral, intended to obtain detailed perspectives, experiences and opinions from the participants that should not be affected by translation. Yet, semi-structure interviews still present a series of disadvantages, relating to the difficulty to code, classify and prepare questions for data analysis as the choice of the type of questions and the questions themselves will depend on the extent to which they can be possibly answered by participants (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 181-182).

The categories of questions have been arranged into themes, and include different types: general, structural and contrasting questions; inquiries designed to express opinions, feelings and knowledge; and approaches that focus on backgrounds and/or simulated scenarios (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 28). The semi-structured interviews and model research questions can be accessed in Annex 1.

## 5.5 From here... to there! Following objects and people in multi-sited ethnographies

As an issue that is currently inscribed to the processes of globalization, whose influence on culture is evident on different levels and configurations - characterised and increasingly marked by experiences of global interactions and exchanges among different peoples and cultures in contemporary societies - this thesis has proposed that the analysis of 'cultural appropriation' be framed under the theoretical assumptions of transculturation. Understood both as a process and a context for the converging and merging of cultures, this theoretical framework will allow me to focus on the multiple variables (diversity of concepts, definitions, agents, contexts, processes, outcomes) of the phenomenon, providing a broader background through which data will be gathered, analysed, and interpreted.

Drawing on Rogers (2006) categorisations, and enriched by the works of Appadurai and Hannerz, the notion of transculturation provides the contextual settings and the variable circumstances through which cases of 'appropriation' occur, including a range of subjects, relationships, places, objects, processes, and factors that are simultaneously shaped by the occurrences themselves.

However, influenced by individual and external forces, and manifested through different connections and evolving through different sites, these multiple variables in the cases imply the existence of very complex dynamics: a series of particularities that impact the processes and outcomes of cases of 'cultural appropriation' differently. This suggests that the phenomenon promotes dynamics and processes of cultural flows beyond the acts of 'appropriation' themselves, as the creation of new cultural understandings, expressions and practices are actively changing, resulting in a constant relocation from original places and meanings, into new settings, contexts, and forms.

This represents another issue in the designing of the research methodology, as inflexible methodologies based on rigid constructions of culture and cultural groups - as clearly defined entities, confined to single, specific geographic locations - are unsuitable to engage with an active phenomenon that is as complex and multidimensional as the 'cultural appropriation' of textiles. The selected Case Studies include a myriad of trans-territorial networks between different groups of people; the existence of cyberspace circuits connecting them, and revealing the social relations, cultural and political issues that arise in the virtual world; as well as different forms and flows of culture and information; that raise questions over cross-cultural interconnections and identities.

Being interchangeable and following the trends that conform the global ecumene, the sites were the conflicts of 'cultural appropriation' arise are various and connected to one another. Therefore, the relationships between them become as important for the formulation of the phenomenon as the relationships that are created within them (Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 2003, p. 206).

For this reason, this study proposes to follow actors, things, metaphors, stories, allegories, biographies and conflicts, through a multi-sited ethnography that will allow me to move freely from one site of observation and participation to another - enabling the uncovering of the connections, perspectives and relationships that could otherwise be missed when focusing on a single site.

Therefore, the methodological reflections on the construction of the fieldwork mapping for this investigation will be based on the multi-sited ethnography, first presented by Anthropologist George Marcus in 1995. This methodology does not intend to discuss collected data nor research results, but to expose some of its potentials to the analysis of 'cultural appropriation' and the relationships between the multiple sites that emerge in a transnational context. This has the objective of illustrating the general lines that will construct and conduct the fieldwork for this investigation, in the research sites that are geographically and epistemologically diverse among the selected case studies.

The perspective of multi-sited ethnography tracks ideas and practices circulating through translocal processes, a method that allows to identify and examine connections and contrast them through the crossings between them. This approach is valuable in the sense that it allows to overcome issues of cross-cut dichotomies (such as the "local" and the "global", the "lifeworld" and the "system") revealing the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in a variety of sites (Marcus, 1995, p. 96).

Performed from multiple observation and through multiple participation positions, this method is aimed towards investigating and constructing the life worlds of several situated subjects, while ethnographically constructing aspects of the system itself, through the connections, associations and presumed relations that surge from them. This modality, therefore, simultaneously traces cultural formations in and of the world system, by focusing on the parts that integrate to and into the whole.



Although the methods for collecting information are the same used in traditional ethnographies (interviews, note taking, audio/visual recordings, observation, etc) the use of multi-sited ethnography presents various difficulties, as in words of Fazan, this is preceded by a series of juxtapositions "in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations, rather than something monolithic or external to them" (Marcus, 2016, p. 2).

These circumstances can create a tension between the access to a physical place, the moving between different sites and their analysis through different directions, as well as problems with the relationships to which a researcher is usually directed within them. Multi-sited ethnography creates a novel challenge, in the sense that it demands an understanding of local/global historical encounters and that of the production of hybrid cultures, emerging from the encounters between cosmopolitan and local communities (Hannerz, 1996, p. 102; Clifford, 1999, p. 38).

The notions of cosmopolitanism were introduced into the fields of Intercultural Communication Studies from the broader sociological and anthropological perspectives in order to reject an oversimplification of the organisation of culture and the world. This had previously been based on a methodological nationalism that dominated social sciences over Centuries (Holliday, 2011, p. 11).

The world culture of today - marked by an organization of diversity rather than a replication of homogenization - is composed by a network of social relations between different regions, through which a variety of flows of meanings, peoples and goods circulate (Hannerz, 1990, p. 237). For Hannerz, the concept of cosmopolitanism, represents a perspective: a mental state that provides a mode for managing meanings. Under this perspective, cosmopolitanism can therefore be understood, in one hand, as a relation to a plurality of cultures - all of which are understood as distinctive entities - and on the other, as a mean to engage with the Other - a mean to construct the Self (Hannerz, 1990, p. 238-239).

Due to the intellectual and aesthetic capacities that people have develop in order to manage different stances of openness toward dissimilar cultural experiences, cosmopolitanism becomes a matter of varieties and levels. This implies that cosmopolitanism not only occurs among travellers - whose participation in local cultures can occur voluntarily (tourism, expatriation) or forcibly (exiles, migrants) - but as a matter of competence - through a desire or interest in the survival of cultural diversity. According to Hannerz, there cannot be cosmopolitans without the locals, as the incorporation to the global system and the conscious of local cultural identities are part of the same processes, constituting the different sides of the same coin (1990, p. 250).

## 5.6 Active objects, global circulations: the biography of objects in the examination of material culture

As previously argued, local social processes are embedded into broader social structures within the global system, sustained by a variety of concrete social and historic relations. This implies that the existence of material culture is directly linked to social reproduction and to the material maintenance of life, as instances that cannot be separated from the realms of culture and of cultural expressions.

In simple terms, the study of material culture focuses on the material conditions of the social and the cultural life, considering objects as active elements involved in the formation of culture and all of its cognitive components and social systems. In the social sciences and humanities, the term is commonly used to define the objects or material elements that relate to specific cultural and historical contexts, in which their use, consumption, creation, and trade, as well as the behaviours, norms, and rituals that they generate or in which they partake, serve different functions within an environment, community or belief system (Buchli, 2002, p. 241; Miller, 2010, p. 42; Hicks & Beaudry, 2010, p. 69-71).

The analysis of material culture has been a defining component in a variety of academic disciplines (such as Archaeology, History, Geography, Literature Studies, Philosophy, and Sociology) in which examining objects and their associated technologies, represent an indispensable task to understand the complex schemes of development and changes among humans and their environments. Nonetheless, within the approaches that examine the relationships of people with things (and vice versa), the study of material culture has become indispensable within the field of Social Anthropology, particularly within three of its conjectural currents (Hicks & Beaudry, 2010, p. 2-5).

The theoretical discussions on the relationship between humans and objects were extensively addressed by Jean Baudrillard (1968) who first suggested that people tend to confer practical and psychological functions to objects - using them as containers of meanings and representations of a past that is continually elaborated in the present. In later years, the structuralist currents (Levi-Strauss, 1983) reconfigured the centre of analysis, approaching material culture as a form of text, through which semantic patterns are decoded; while Poststructuralism, on the other hand, maintained the textual metaphor, simultaneously emphasising the semiotically constructed meanings attributed by users and audiences to the objects.

For anthropologists in the Symbolic current, such as Geertz (1973), the focus prevailed on the analysis of the meaning construction in context to the specific cultural symbols: the different interpretations of objects that surge within their places of origin, among the peoples and networks of meanings and actions surrounding them. Broadly speaking, this placed the focus on the analysis of language as the medium that reveals the multiple experiences of human beings, their interrelations, and that of the environment containing them, and thus, understood as a form of text, objects are constructed while simultaneously creating and modifying other relationships, condensing signs, and meanings. Therefore, it is through their knowledge and interpretation, that objects reveal the symbolic systems of significances of the social world, as the use and production of objects relates to the systems from which they are part, reproducing it.

By the decade of 1980, the valuable approaches of these anthropological currents set the frameworks for analysing objects of material culture, proposing new forms of analysis and methodological reflections that highlighted the inclusion of multiple voices, practices and

matters of power during the research process, changing with this the anthropological chore (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). However, it was not until the coming decade that the approaches were further expanded, revitalised by the influences of Economic Anthropology, and mainly encouraged by the perspectives introduced by Arjun Appadurai on *The Social Life of Things* (1991). These advances broadened the understandings of objects and of their study, connecting the analysis of material culture to that of the phenomenon of exchange. These novel approaches evidenced that the meanings of objects or things are substantially affected by their exchange value; denoting that the symbolic realms were not only constituted by the objects' ability to satisfy biological needs, but by their value and circulation as a social product, actively associated to the constitution of a society (Tirado, 2001, p. 196).

In order to revitalise the anthropology of things, Appadurai advocates: "We must follow things themselves, since their meanings are inscribed in their forms, uses and trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that animate things" (Appadurai, 1991, p. 19).

According to the authors in the collection, the vital history of objects would not be exhausted solely in its mercantile rate, but in its biographies, which can be receptive to some degree of individual manipulation. This new methodological proposal is described in the ethnographic example of the *kula*, a regional system of circulation that spread among certain groups in the Western Pacific, through which diverse objects are exchanged and circulated. In some Massim communities, the system is even referred to as *keda*, a term that translates into paths, routes, or course, that describe the trajectories of valuables from island to island.

As the objects move from one place to another, from hand to hand, their biographies change, affecting the making of memories and reputation, as well as the prestige of the acquirers. Once the objects are acquired or retained, strategies of social distinction through partnerships are set in motion, creating ties of social, political or reciprocity value among those involved in the journey of the objects. Thus, the critical form of capital in the *kula* and its production of profit, resides in the people rather than in other forms or factors involved in the production of the objects (Appadurai, 1991, p. 18-19).

For Appadurai, the notions of *kula* and *keda* serve to emphasise the transcendence of the social vitality that is attached to objects, further serving as a conceptual model to analyse the experiences of the circulation and use of them. This is expanded by the existence of funeral practices, in which great energy and expenses are invested in the manufacture of objects that play a central role in memorial rituals. Taking only one journey from the production to consumption, funeral objects in the region never re-enter the mercantile state, being de-commodified by a complex perception of significance that merges aesthetic, ritual, and social values, creating a specific ritual biography (Appadurai, 1991, p. 40).

For the purpose of this investigation, the concept of biography of objects, drawn by Appadurai and formulated by Igor Kopytoff, provides a basis for understanding the shifting value of traditional textiles as they circulate, moving through different hands, contexts, and uses, accumulating particular biographies. In this sense, both scholars argue that in order to fully understand the value of a commodity, its entire trajectory or "social life" has to be analysed, since their social and cultural biographies are not separated, crossing diverse social levels that delimit the different forms, meanings, and structures of the objects and their trajectories. Likewise, the changes in the cultural biography of things can over time, lead to changes in the social history of things. Therefore, the apparent separation between both spheres can be disbanded by addressing the sociohistorical factors as a phenomenon of reality, utilizing their cultural profiles as the analytical systems through which the trajectories can be recorded in the field.

The complementary perspective found in the biography of objects can be carried by asking questions about the things, in the same manner that people would be questioned, since following the trajectory of objects through different stages deepens our understanding of them. Kopytoff wields that to do so, researchers have to enquire: "what, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?" (1991, p. 66). Kopytoff questions represent a guide that allows us to understand the cultural context, and the specific meanings, classifications, and reclassifications, that are present within.

However, while constantly changing, the singularisation of objects through their classification as 'sacred' ensures that some things remain unequivocally unique, while avoiding others from commodifying or re-singularising others that have been previously commercialised. This implies that objects can always be protected from the market, remaining in the world of culture (Kopytoff, 1991, p. 73). Kopytoff further comments on the implications of power in the singularisation of objects, assuring that in every society, certain things are publicly protected against commodification. Some of the prohibitions are cultural and collectively upheld, while others can be implemented by the State, applying to a good part of what is considered the symbolic inventory of a society (1991, p. 100).

Consequently, the protection from commodification through both the notions of singularization and sacralization, contributes to this research by providing means to understand how the production and reintegration of objects into institutions of memory tends to assist in the attribution of sacred values to certain objects under specific conditions. Equally, the processes of singularisation can relate to the passage of time, consigning its longevity; and to the existence of a certain sense of integration with a person, creating attachments. Therefore, not attributed to the exclusivity of the objects within the markets, singularization can become an "insatiable hunger" for the collection of things that have changed spheres of value, where they no longer fulfil their functions nor form part of the circle of commodities for which they were originally intended for (Kopytoff, 1991, p. 80).

## Chapter 6 – Organising meanings, experiences, and processes: the empirical procedures

The objective of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation', and specifically, of those controversies related to the 'appropriation' of traditional textiles from Mexico, having the pretence of investigating the subjective experiences, meanings, and processes experimented by those involved in the disputes, and to discover the variety of networks, constellations, and circuits through which the phenomenon arises.

These objectives, deriving from the research questions, conditioned the type of research done, orienting the investigation towards a less reductionist, predictable proposition that aimed to generate a more comprehensible and substantial analysis of the phenomenon and its multifaceted dynamics. The following section exposes the empirical processes which I followed in order to find answers to the research queries, and with them, the resolution of the conundrums that motivated this work – What is 'cultural appropriation'? What and who is involved in the controversies? When and where do these occurrences happen? And what beliefs or ideas motivate the conflicts?

In regard to this process, interpretative studies differ from quantitative methodologies; with the literature review, formulation of working assumptions, topics of interest, data collection and analysis, occurring simultaneously along the process. This characterised the development of the research in a non-consecutive manner, through temporally separated phases that allowed for the examination of data to be carried out while being collected; subsequently guiding the focus of the research as new information became available.

Since the analysis of the data become part of the fieldwork rather than a consequence of it, the processes of elaborating, examining, and giving meaning to the information became an essential activity within the empirical process. However, in order to present a structured work for this thesis, the organisation of the information had to be divided into three main phases, conforming the distinguishable types of operations that were applied. These included creating a strategic plan to segment the units of analysis and categories, the identification of relevant themes or emergent thematic nuclei, the means for obtaining the data, and the integration and interpretation of the results in qualitative vectors.

### 6.1 A strategic plan for data obtention

The analysis of the experiences of 'cultural appropriation' within cultural communities materialised the work for this thesis, and thus, details on the context, as well as the interactions within particular settings, had to be previously explored. Influenced by the transculturation theories, the phenomenon was analysed as a process developing through time and space, and through the relations stemming from them (Glissant, 2010; Hannerz, 1991, 1991b, 1996, 1998; Rogers, 2000;). Under these perceptions, both time and territory are no longer considered social products, but social constructions where humans create symbolic elements, producing at the same time, instances of meaning and identity.

Although encompassing a broad conceptual understanding, the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' does not appear in isolated forms, making it necessary to pinpoint the occurrences within specific time and space frameworks. The initial strategy, therefore, implied elaborating a chronology of events for each case study, in order to situate the occurrences within historical, sociocultural, and geographical contexts. Chronicling the events emphasises a series of relevant geopolitical and socioeconomic factors that had to be taken into consideration in order to broaden the analysis. The expanded perspective allowed me to obtain preliminary information on a variety of agents, objects, relationships, conflicts, and sites, integrated in each individual occurrence.

Under these time and space construes, the schematisation of the incidents provided a familiarisation with the development of the cases, and of their interpretation, as the events are conditioned by the particular terms and meanings that have been attributed by a variety of actors over different periods of time. This exercise introduced me to a multilayer of understandings, and to the different forms of cultural and social organization, serving as a valuable instrument to determine what, where and whom to observe in order to collect further information. Nevertheless, the list of dimensions or observables detected at this initial stage has to be reworked as the investigation advanced, remaining a flexible tool that permitted the incorporation of additional or relevant aspects, emerging during the stay in the field.

As mentioned before, the multi-site ethnography prioritises mobility over long-term stays in different settings, as a research process that consisted in following actors and objects, their relationships, and convergences in wider networks. However, the academic commitments for this Doctoral thesis were restricted by geographically distant locations (Berlin-Mexico), implying that the limited opportunities for engagement, to carry presential interviews and observations, had to be optimised to take maximum advantage of the research capacities and resources.

Once the observables were identified, with elements and factors arranged into chronological/contextual frameworks, planning the research submersion in the fields began. The ethnographic process had the overall objective of accessing a variety of sites in which the 'cultural appropriation' controversies occurred or where they had been prompted. This defined the particular settings where the social situations, integrated by people, objects, and the interactions between them where present, providing additional information on the contexts and the organisation of the social lives.

The selection for research locations were established in accordance with the selection of case studies, and the strategic viability and requirements for entry into the research field. Since data collection had to be obtained in the natural environments of the participants – the main means for accessing information on the categories and observables for this work – the empirical processes proceeded with the elaboration of a brief diagnosis of the geographical and cultural settings, reviewing the historical and social contexts where the studies had to be carried in site.

Furthermore, the creation of chronologies of events revealed a number of sites that had been previously disregarded by scholars, where fundamental discrepancies among agents and objects, and their interrelations, could be further explored. Supported by the ideas of Arjun Appadurai on the '-scapes' frameworks (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes), the recognition of these less obvious sites, allowed me to recognize the complexity of the phenomenon, challenging the notions of space, place and community, on which the analysis of 'cultural appropriation' is usually limited to. In this sense, the '-scapes' frameworks were used to recognize the spatial and social morasses between the global and the local, providing a broader canvas on which to locate mutual influences as both instances are mutually permeated by transnational flows of goods, messages, and people, as well as differentials in economic, micro and macropolitical factors. This allowed me to work simultaneously on different dimensions of the controversies, as the agents and objects become interrelated and dispersed on different scenarios, influenced by the circulation of people, the media, technologies, money, and certain ideas shaping discourses and narratives.

Once the cultural communities had been delimited and recognised within territorial locations, with the sites for research expanding the limits between the local and the global, the logistics for travelling from Berlin to Mexico City had to be coordinated, while simultaneously contacting possible participants in advanced. With international flights booked, and invitations for participation accepted, the itineraries to access and stay in the communities where the participants lived had to be completed. This process was completed by visiting Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, in the State of Oaxaca in Winter 2020 (flight from Mexico City to Oaxaca City, and then a 3-hour collective taxi drive to the community). However, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, starting in Winter 2021, a different strategy had to be developed for contacting and accessing the communities from the second and third Case Studies of this thesis (See Chapter 5 – Digital Ethnography in times of Covid-19).

Additional to the difficulties in logistics and finances that these trans-Atlantic efforts represented, early stages presented me with a presumable challenge, cautioned by a variety of authors: the contacting of, and establishing of, mutually trustworthy and respectable relationship with participants. However, the advances of technology allowed me to contact individuals through social media first (Facebook), resulting in a surprisingly easy endeavour that defied previous assumptions over access to communication technologies in remote areas. The initial exchanges allowed me to receive preliminary impressions on people's own norms and customs, as well as a sense on their receptiveness to the investigation, and possible reactions to my presence, particularly within Indigenous communities.

However, due to the means of technological communication used (internet, social media), this inferred that the initial participants would be among the younger age groups, representing the new generation of tech-savvy artisans with digital skills and constant access to the internet, who use social networks as a tool for promoting and selling their textiles online to external consumers. Hence, it was expected that older participants (possibly above 40 years of age) would have to be approached while in the community or by contact through younger artisans by means of snowball sampling.

Since the entire investigation revolved around an issue closely related to their personal lives and trade, impacting them on individual and/or communal levels, the invitations to participate in this research were well received and warmly welcomed by all participants. Not surprisingly, all of them had thoroughly followed the development of cases involving the 'appropriation' of traditional textiles or other elements of the material culture of their community – except for some artisans in Santa Clara del Cobre – as well as from other groups and communities from around the country and/or the world.

Their positive reception encouraged this research, while further providing valuable assistance by reassuring other members of the artisan community about the relevance and importance of their contributions and participation in the investigation. Thus, it should be emphasised that the successful execution of this thesis was foremost, and most importantly, subjected to the disposition of all trustworthy participants, with all of them willingly compiling with the requirements/processes, further acknowledging a significance to their participation, and that of others, for personal, professional, and/or collective reasons.

Similarly, once communication was established with the initial participants, current Indigenous local authorities had to be contacted before entering the field, in accordance with the participatory approach determined for this investigation. As an expression of respect to their own political/cultural customs, and to uphold to the codes and expectations of the communities, the formalities had the objective of presenting my credentials and the project to the authorities, ensuring that the investigation addressed issues of current interest to the community and attaining to high ethical and academic standards. Nevertheless, the request and granting of permission was only interpreted as a formality endorsing my presence in the community, since consent from individual participants was personally agreed once authorities accorded their consent.

The research project was introduced with a printed presentation/debriefing letter, explaining the purpose and processes for the investigation, including the approximate times for my stay in the community and the extension of the interviews. Likewise, these documents were also tendered to the selected participants, stating the estimated duration of the exchanges, so that time frames could be prearranged, avoiding any sort of disruptions to their daily activities (Annex 2). Photographs, videos, and voice recordings were also previously discussed and agreed on by presenting a consent form that had to be signed before the interviews took place (Annex 3). In case of engaging with underaged participants (younger than 18 years), consent had to be granted by their parents.

Once dialogue was established with different members of the community, and my academic approach officially approved by the authorities, the curiosity that my presence in the village of Tlahuitoltepec had originally provoked turned into a familiar and welcoming event. This set the right disposition to commence with the investigation.

Initially, interaction with the participants involved the observation of their surroundings and the routines of their daily life, creating mental maps of the spaces where they lived and worked, and of the various locations of the village and sceneries in which they mingled

in public. Making a rough listing of all the daily activities of the domestic and communal life allowed me to identify possible changes in behaviours, as people tend to conduct themselves differently, depending on the context and the social surroundings. In order to maintain the privacy of the participants, the interviews were carried in their place of choice, with all of them extending invitations to their homes and/or working spaces. However, due to time and distance limitations, meetings in larger cities (Oaxaca) had to be organised in conveniently located cafés.

The research conversations commenced with an introductory presentation of my scholar credentials, the investigation, and its overall purposes. General information on the interview was noted, stating the date, time, location, place, and the medium for the interaction (in the fieldwork all where presential). The social profile of the individuals was incorporated too, providing general information that included their name, gender, age, ethnic affiliation, occupation (name of organization or institute), place of origin, address/locality, etc. The conversations were then encouraged by inquiring over background personal information, as a preparatory exercise that allowed them to present themselves. This denoted the particular emphasis laid by people on their professional activities and ethnic/cultural affiliations, allowing me to understand their position within the community and the impact of the controversies in their lives.

Moreover, this exercise served as a starting point for the introduction of open-ended questions, permitting them to specifically delve on the topic at hand. The accounts over the occurrences of 'appropriation' generally began by describing their personal relationship to the textiles and the artisan trade, as well as the significance of their creations in context with the historical and cultural value given to these elements within their communities and outside.

Artisans further explained the production processes, the changes, and continuities in the textile work, revealing important themes such as the notions of *authenticity*, *innovation*, and *creativity*. Similarly, the mechanisms and strategies for production, selling and consuming textiles, was thoroughly explained. Without much input from my part, the conversations lead to narrations over the chronology of events, as well as their past and present beliefs: how and what they felt/feel about the 'appropriation' occurrences, how they framed their understandings of them, how they approached the conflict, who was involved, what was their interaction with other actors within and outside the community as the events developed, etc.

This information was used to reconstruct the cultural biographies of the objects in different spaces, as the artisans emphasised the material conditions (aesthetic qualities, symbolic meanings) of the textiles; the economic transactions involved in the production and consumption chain; and the social relations articulated in the circulation and utilisation of the pieces. The conversations were schematised into different units of analysis and categories, providing information that revealed the interactions, displacements, and social features of the traditional textiles through time and space. Framed by the 5 frameworks of the '-scapes', (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes) the information indicated to the variety of practices, meanings and discourses articulated around and through different objects, giving place to the perception of conflict that the controversies generate.

As previously determined, data collection was carried out in different modes: through written, verbal, and non-verbal language; through observable behaviours and with assistance of audio/video recordings and/or photographic evidence within the field. Other tools of participatory research to complement specific information were also employed. These included personal documents such as family photographs and diplomas, drawings of the traditional design motives, diagrams for the construction of the garments, etc.

Most of the material obtained corresponds to photos and videos related to the garments and their production – the materials, manufacturing stages, decoration of the pieces; as well as the contexts where the textiles were being used and publicly exhibited – such as domestic spaces, shops, public markets, etc. Equally, the locations – the natural, the work, and domestic environments – were also documented in order to revive the memories, experiences, processes, and scenarios that were investigated.

The semi-structured interviews were planned based on the actor/scenario and the available times. Due to the flexibility of the method, the application of open-ended questions instead of rigid interviews, allowed me to add more information as the conversations progressed.

The direct and/or indirect observation through which the qualitative research approach was developed further enabled me to detect the displacements between the different spaces and contexts where the conflicts of 'appropriation' occur. This carefully conducted strategy allowed me to obtain organized, accurate and reliable data by observing and recording the particularities and variations among the units of analysis, and the displacements through which the object of study arises.

In this sense, the movement maintained – from one place to another, in and out of the sites, through time and space – responds to the same movement that agents and objects sustain through the networks of relationships and practices they articulate, through which the events and conflict arise. Since cultural meanings, objects and identities are created through new connections and through the crossings between them, moving from one location to another, allowed me to better understand the dynamics between them, as well as the procedures and characteristics of value construction that generate the conflicts of 'appropriation', through different personalities and encounters that arising in particular contexts and the juxtaposition between them.

The first case for this investigation – in the Ajuuk (Mixe) community of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca – served as a "pilot case". The experienced allowed me to determinate proper mechanisms for the collection of data and other key elements to observe. This preliminary engagement in the field, facilitated the modification and adjustment of the research strategy, in order to take into consideration, the actors, the daily activities in which they were involved, and the existence of certain social contexts that could negatively influence the obtention of data. Although the first strategy considered approaching other participants through snowballing, once in the field it was obvious that certain connections and familiarities within the community influenced a similarity in perspectives. As such, some participants had to be independently engaged, in order to obtain dissimilar standpoints.

Likewise, the research project had originally considered approaching solely artisans, but as investigation in the field advanced, it was apparent that other members of the community had been directly involved with the overall development of the controversies by taking active roles, generating, or encouraging certain outcomes on the cases. This implied changing the previous strategy, in order to consider the position of political agents or other opinion leaders within the community – such as local authorities, politicians, academics, etc – since their status as representatives of the group and/or other interests, strongly influenced the progression of the events.



## 6.2 Existing online: digital ethnography in times of Covid-19

As with other innumerable activities, the global outbreak of Covid-19 in the year 2020 irrupted the process of this investigation. In addition to noticeably reducing concentration and productivity levels, as well as any form of scholarly interest due to the generalised atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, the pandemic brought regular life to a halt, further presenting a series of academic setbacks.

Among its multiple consequences, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted most forms of human interaction. As severe quarantines were imposed and major travel restrictions enforced on national and international scales, limiting with this, social exchanges and traveling, the possibilities of conducting presential fieldwork in the immediate future were completely ceased. This radically changed the means by which researchers were able to carry ethnographic research, and implied that the original methodological guidelines and methods for data collection for this investigation were no longer suitable in context of a global viral epidemic and had to be changed.

The Covid-19 places individuals at risk of a highly contagious and dangerous disease, a situation that required prioritising both the physical and mental health of all the participants involved in this study – without exemptions. This meant that the ethnographical process and the previous strategies for infield data collection had to be modified, as social contact had to be minimised in order to protect individuals, their families, and their communities – including mine and that of my nuclear family. Hence, adjustments in the methodological approaches, research queries, resources, and ethical implications had to be adequately reassessed.

Although I was able to travel to Mexico in mid-December 2020, the stoplight monitoring system for the regulation of public space use, in accordance with the risk of Covid-19 contagion, turned to red, enforcing a second national lock-down. Preventive measurement were further enforced with the closing of roads to remote communities – including those of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, Santa Clara del Cobre, Nahuatzen, San Nicolás, and Tenango de Doria – in order to guard off their inhabitants from the disease. Consequently, new possibilities for data collection had to be implemented, relying on the use of technology to maintain human interaction and connections across the distances and sudden restrictions to regular social life.

Although traditional ethnographies have been based on the notions of locality, the rise of the globalisation processes has challenged the implications and theoretical basis for conducting practical research (Wittel, 2000, p. 1). As previously mentioned by Marcus (1995), traditional ethnographies on regional levels tended to underestimate the transnational and global forces shaping local contexts, further introducing the idea of multilocal or multi-sited ethnographies to reckon the increasing mobility by which people and objects circulate and interact, trespassing all types of geographically and culturally defined localities, borders, and boundaries (Wittel, 2000, p. 2). Similarly, scholars such as Gupta & Ferguson (1992) and Appadurai (1990, 1991, 1996, 1998) have suggest decentring the notions of the field towards its reconceptualization as a "political location", where the interlocking of multiple socio-political sites and locations are intertwined.

The Internet, with its online platforms and social networks, presents different kinds of virtual interaction patterns, enabling the collection of textual data, sequences, images, or narratives of people's realities, in what has been described as a mean for recounting *places that are not places* (Rutter & Smith as cited by Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 124). With an increased significance in the Social Sciences, the use of digital ethnography has been used to explore virtual social worlds, characterised as locations where persons are disembodied, and in which the researcher's observations are based on the interactions and the communication within the networks. Examples of this include multiplayer games, blogs, discussion boards and other types of virtual spaces and social media platforms (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 124).

The significance of digital ethnography in the Social Sciences has increased over the past decades. Although a relatively novel, the protocols, tools, and techniques for conducting online investigations are presently available in a number of methodological handbooks and guidelines, representing valuable instruments to conduct ethnographic research and amassing qualitative data, particularly in situations when the field is virtual or access is limited (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 124).



Figure 19. Medical face masks against Covid-19. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2021).



Conducting online ethnography can be similar to traditional ethnography, albeit reducing the amount of data that can be otherwise accessed when meeting people and talking with them in person. Nevertheless, the Internet is intrinsically connected to social life and cultures, presenting a wide range of access to different groups, extending from the mainstream to the subcultural – with people constantly expressing their own practices, behaviour, and ways of thinking (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 124).

Granting that the parts share the same language, textile artisans from different cultural backgrounds can be easily contacted through social media, since these technologies provide a popular mean (specially for the younger generations) to sale their crafts, meet other artisans, or share their traditions with a wider public, among a myriad of other reasons. For outsiders – and especially researchers working during pandemic times – online ethnography has opened a path to inexpensively communicate and collaborate with groups of people that would otherwise be difficult to contact, not only because of present health restrictions, but because of privacy, traceability, geographical distances, or reduced budgets.

Similar to traditional ethnography, online ethnographies can extend over a period of time, from days to years, as it has been the case with the experts I met during my visit in Tlahuitoltepec. Until today some artisans have stayed in touch, sharing their ideas, digital photographs, and opinions over cases of 'cultural appropriation'. In this sense, the use of computers not only produces more richly and accessible textures to research, but allows to bridge gaps between audio, visual and documentation on the field, as multimedia archives can be used to record information in photos, digital videos, audio, documents, etc. (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 124); with social media platforms (Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter) allowing the free circulation and sharing of information.

Access to the Internet not only presents opportunities to further interact, but to collect more information from a variety of sources. Links to blogs, diaries, photos, informal interviews, videos, and many others, offer a vast array of content, comparable to the type of documents that would be required or available during immersions in the field. Nevertheless, although valuable for this research, online information can be limited, constrained by the type of data and information that people are willing to post and share virtually. This represents a great deal less of what can be observed in a physical scenario (Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 125).

Moreover, due to its intangible nature, the use of the Internet for the purpose of investigation can be questioned by the validity of the data presented by internet users. Issues over online identities and information accuracy can surge as the interactions do not rely on hard observable and verified facts, but on the trustworthiness of the informants and the researcher's own judgement. Likewise, information can change, as new content becomes available or removed (Wittel, 2000, p. 6).

The topic of identities posed a particular obstacle when reaching and sampling "Tenango" embroidery experts using Facebook groups. Some people reached me with intentions of participating in the research, despite not complying with the characteristics that had been previously established for this study – self-described artisans who are active producers of traditional crafts, ascribing to some form of ethnic, family, or affiliation, involved or directly linked to a cultural community. People elaborating handicrafts as a leisure activity involving the making things by hand, with no connection to traditional craft communities were not considered for this research.

It is in situations like this, that the need for properly defining the body of knowledge, objects of study, and concepts, has to be emphasised. Notwithstanding, this further highlights the importance of conducting ethnographies that allow for a better understanding of the social situations, routines, and embodiment of cultural practices, which can be more easily observed when conducting presential fieldwork (Wittel, 2000, p. 7).

Based on networks and hyperlinks, online ethnographies can also present impoverished or unidimensional representations and expressions of social connections; further generating a displacement between researcher and field, missing the mutual and common perceptions of physical context. As such, the virtual modality does not provide sufficient information on the physical and aesthetic characteristics of people and the environment, nor of the physical cues – gestures, mimics, voice tones, smells – that would otherwise be more obvious in face-to-face interactions. Relying on video meetings, audio messages, texts, and emoticons to communicate does not entirely support spontaneous exchanges nor external forms of structuring communication, but nevertheless, virtual ethnography presents a methodological possibility when carried through a multi-sited approach (Wittel, 2000, p. 6-7).

### **6.3 Virtual exchanges: conducting online interviews**

In qualitative research, personal interaction for data collection is of outermost importance. However, in confinement contexts, avoiding in-person interactions became a reality, and therefore, mediated forms for conducting ethnographic research surged as a prospect to achieve similar ends.

The abruption of the Internet in all facets of modern lives has led into new modalities for conducting qualitative research. Generically known as digital ethnography, 'virtual ethnography' (Hine, 2000, 2015), or 'netnography' (Kozinetz, 2010), the era of e-research has provided a series of viable techniques and models of good practice for researchers wishing to participate and understand the different forms of life, on and from the Web, as well as the use of networks as part of the investigation procedures (Maddox, 2020).

There are numerous tools and data sources available in confinement contexts, allowing to explore narratives allusive to phenomena related to cultural heritage, such as the opinions, perceptions, or descriptions of ways of life of the individuals or communities, that can be studied using virtual ethnography, the Internet, and social media tools.

The development of a digital ethnography, as an alternative that surged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, necessitated of a rigorous reflection, in order to select the most appropriate procedures and ethical practices to carry the investigation during mandatory lockdown. This implied revising online research techniques, relying on the expertise of my supervisor, and reading about the relationship between

information and communication technologies, and the development of digital explorations. Moreover, this also required understanding the basic elements of online investigations, reviewing topics related to identity, image, privacy, and data protection.

Online interviews can be described as a conversation, supported by a set of pre-defined questions between an interviewer and an interviewee, with support of communication technology used to conduct and record interviews through the Internet (Maddox, 2020).

Unlike face-to-face interactions, these modalities are enabled by the role of equipment which facilitates real-time co-presence and interactivity across geographical distances. Current technology, including mobile phones, lap-tops, computers, tablets, can be used to carry online interviews through audio-visual interfaces, such as Skype, Zoom, Google Meetings, Facebook Messenger; or by IRC texts (Internet Relay Chat) such as Whatsapp or Facebook Messenger. These technologies imply that research can be conducted with audio-visual interactivity and textual synchronicity, allowing the researcher to:

- Seek clarification and follow conversational threads.
- Understand the meaning of what participants say or express.
- Conduct real time interviews in different spatial locations and contexts.
- Conduct anonymous research using IRC text chats and/or other interfaces.

(Maddox, 2020)

The sampling and initial contacting of the experts was carried through private direct messages to individuals or craft brands/cooperatives, found using the search bar tool on Facebook – introducing the type of crafts and the region – or through public posts on private Facebook groups ('Bordados Tenangos', 'Bordados Tenangos con el corazón'). The initial message or post contained a brief introduction of me and the project, extending a personalised invitation to collaborate with their opinions and experiences on the topic of 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles in Mexico.

However, the use of social media and the Internet represented an evident impediment for contacting older and younger artisans. According to Statista (2020), the majority of Facebook users in Mexico, are aged between 18 and 34 years (56.9%). The younger generations – aged 17 and less – represented a scant 34.7%; while the older sectors – 55 years and more – only accounted to the 8.4% of the population using the social network (statistics for the year 2020).

Nevertheless, this issue with sampling could be adverted when researching Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen, as young artisans offered to contact me with other older artisans by visiting their homes, lending me their time, smartphones, and Internet data in order for me to be able to conduct the interviews. I will be forever grateful for their generosity and friendship, and for their noticeable motivation and interest on assisting with this study.

Other than occasional interferences, the rest of the interviews were possible due to reliable Internet connections and easy access to communication platforms (Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Zoom, Google Meetings, etc.) with participants joining the conversations at home, in their workshops or at their workspace. All interviews were conveniently arranged at the times and dates in which the experts were available to participate individually or in groups. Due to the characteristics of digital ethnography, and in regard to the time and costs of consuming personal Internet data, most interviews had to be arranged in frame periods that did not exceed an hour – although some of the conversations were extended over a longer period of time.

Furthermore, previous to the interviews, topics over the use, handling, storage, analysis and presentation of their personal data and individual contributions to the study were verbally discussed and/or consented in written message, since printers nor scanners were available at the time. Permission over the use of identifiable content as well as photographs was granted in all cases, with participants successively sending more comments and images over the consecutive weeks through text messages.

The immediacy of the Internet and virtual spaces generates great documentary, observational and conversational potential once mutual trust was established. As such, rapport had to be built. The conversations had to be curated beforehand, using the model format for interviews (Annex 1), in order to establish a structure and consider the time limitations.

The use of social networks as a mean for initial communication also permitted the participants to glance at what I share of my professional and private life on Facebook, while equally allowing me to glimpse imageries of their personal lives, opinions, affiliations, and activities. The coherent and rigorous management of this social network immersion and connections, as well as conducting the interviews at a distance, allowed me to contextualize and further contrast the data obtained for this research.

#### **6.4** Different cases, different participants: sampling and distribution of interviews

The content of this thesis combined both in field and digital ethnographies, through a series of collection techniques that included semi-structures interviews, observation, and audio-visual recordings. Altogether, the semi-structures interviews were applied to 24 participants.

In relation to the *xaam nixuy* of from Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, 11 artisans and political figures from the community were interviewed in the village and in the city of Oaxaca.

<b>NAME CODE</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>CULTURAL AFFILIATION</b>
Tla1	30	Male	Artisan, family brand owner and manager, Anthropologist	Ayuujk (Mixe)
Tla2	55	Female	Artisan	
Tla3	57	Male	Authority, retired teacher	
Tla4	26	Female	Artisan, brand manager, Fashion designer	
Tla5	Approx. 64 (not sure)	Female	Artisan	
Tla6	14	Female	Training artisan, Secondary student	
Tla7	20	Female	Training artisan, Fashion design student	
Tla8	57	Female	Artisan	
Tla9	46	Male	Artisan, family brand owner and manager, Agronomist	
Tla10	43	Female	Retired artisan, convenience shop owner	
Tla11	11	Male	Training artisan, Primary student	

Figure 20. *Participants from Case Study 1: the community of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca.*

Information on the “Tenango” embroideries was collected from the interviews applied to 6 participants from the village of San Nicolas and 1 from Tenango de Doria, using digital technologies.

NAME CODE	AGE	GENDER	OCCUPATION		CULTURAL AFFILIATION
San1	Not available (40-50)		Artisan, cooperative / brand manager	San Nicolas	Hñuhú
San2	26	Female	Artisan		
San3	28	Female	Artisan, Bachelors in Sustainable Development		
San4	34	Female	Artisan		
San5	28	Female	Artisan		
Ten1	Not available (40-50)	Male	Artisan	Tenango de Doria	Hñahñu

Figure 21. Participants from Case Study 2: Tenango de Doria and San Nicolas, Hidalgo.

The case study involving the *gabanes* was analysed from the testimonies of a single family, composed by 5 artisans located in the community of Santa Clara, and 1 from Nahuatzen. The interviews were carried online.

NAME CODE	AGE	GENDER	OCCUPATION	LOCATION	CULTURAL AFFILIATION
Sc1	21	Male	Artisan, University student	Santa Clara del Cobre	Mestizo
Sc2	62		Artisan		
Sc3	67		Artisan		
Sc4	87		Artisan		
Sc5	16		Training artisan, Secondary student		
Nah1	68		Artisan, retired construction worker, migrant USA	Nahuatzen	

Figure 22. Participants from Case Study 3: Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen, Michoacan.

## 6.5 Reasonings: the theoretical and methodological justification of the project

The empirical process started with the operationalisation of the research variables, an activity that allowed me to justify a suitable methodological proposal, and to establish a solid universe for the investigation and corpus of this work. The research queries guided me into identify the units of analysis, as well as the number of categories and observables that were required in order to access the data and perform the analysis.

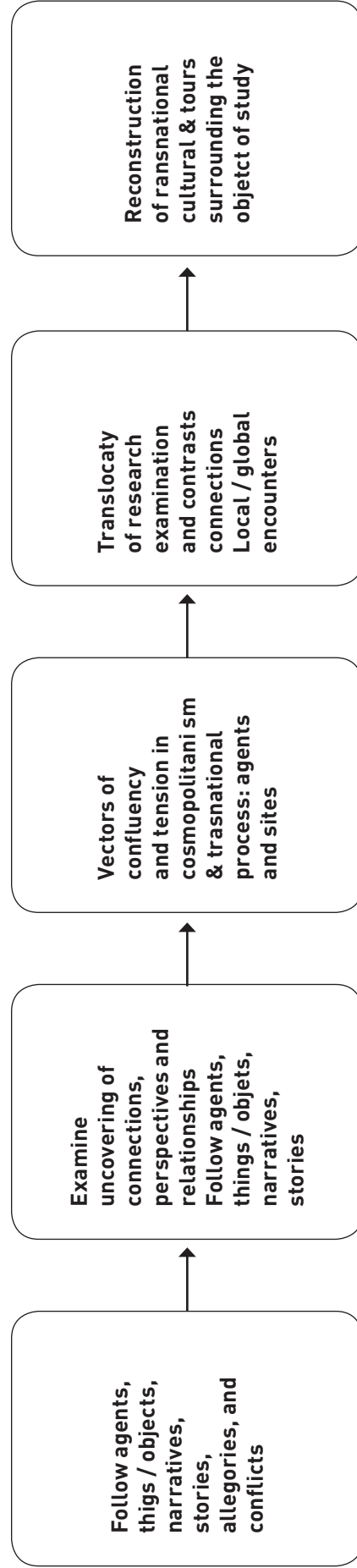
This process further evidenced the type of methodology required to work with the data obtained, all of which was sustained by the theoretical concepts borrowed from the fields of Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Intercultural Communication, composing the new anthropological horizons, highly influenced by the propositions of Appadurai (1992) Marcus (1995), Hannerz (1996), Clifford (1999) and Holliday (2011) (among others), who suggested to attend transnational circuits and circulations in order to transcend the typically limiting perspectives of monographic ethnographies focused entirely on dimensional particularities of cultural groups, cultural practices, processes and/or contexts.

Bearing in mind these theoretical and methodological construes, the empirical process then opted for a multi-case, multi-sited approach, focusing on the ethnographic analysis of three cases of 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles in Mexico, to explore how agents, objects and relationships integrate the occurrences, constructing new cultural formations and processes, resumed by the theoretical concepts of transculturation, cultural flows, and creolization. These concepts represented the main departure points for analysing the possible conditions through which compounded, complex cultural realities emerge today, providing a theoretical foundation to recognizes the dynamisms of cultural constructions and its tensions.

After this, this work had the clear objective of following the actors, the objects, the relationships, meanings, and practices, involved in each individual case, in order to broaden the understanding of the episodes and the phenomenon at large. Since the events are also in line with the series of interactions, exchanges and developments affecting the organisation of culture and of global social interactions which at present are unbounded by territorial demarcations, occurrences of 'cultural appropriation' enable the emergence of new dynamics through a variety of sites. The incidences generated new cultural meanings, objects, and identities, through novel connections, and the crossings between them, requiring that this thesis prioritizes movement from one cultural arena to another (See Table 1).

**Multi-sited ethnography**

- **Moving between different sites**
- **Tracks ideas and practices circulating through transnational processes**
- **Multiple observations and participation positions**



*Table 1: Structural representation of the Multi-sited ethnography process in transnational/cosmopolitan contexts.*

As with any other empirical investigations an exploration of the contexts, landscapes, and elements through which these disputes arose had to be carried first. Although the empirical process for this work was not linear nor followed strict sequences – abiding instead to a series of phases or actions carried in no particular order to achieve the objectives of this thesis – this exercise allowed me to locate the main dimensions problematising cases of 'cultural appropriation', by reconstructing the phenomenon as an active process expanding through time, influenced by differing historical conditions, factors, and therefore, consequences.

As such, the chronologies of events had to be considered during the empirical process as the occurrences altered people's involvement, behaviours, and perceptions, simultaneously causing transformations on the social and cultural fabrics of the groups, as the events of 'appropriation' developed. In context with a rapidly evolving and interconnected, globalised world, the broader implications of transnational cultural transitions and circulations offered a solid framework to comprehend these new cultural realities and experiences, in line with the dynamics of cultural change, resistance, and survival.

Carried through an ethnographic qualitative approach, the empirical process allowed me to account for the procedural construction of the issue of 'cultural appropriation' by delineating the dynamics of value and meaning construction, further exposing the sites where the relationships and connections between cultural agents and cultural objects develop and circulate. The phenomenon is embedded by new forms of trans-territorial networks and cyberspace circuits, influencing cross-cultural interconnections and information flows that generate new meanings and meaningful forms produced and circulated through social relations.

To approach this, the research process was supported by a brief review on the contemporary debates on material culture in anthropological research, in order to grasp the works and theories focusing on the intrinsic relationship between objects, the socio-cultural agents who create them, the environments from where they originate; as well as their processes of adscription with meanings, and their circulation through different systems.

This multi-sited ethnographic mission involved the traveling or moving from one place to another, but also, the tracing of the routes that allow for the re-composition of specialized circuits (Marcus, 1995, p. 100), implying that in addition to understanding the objects, the social actors or audiences relating to them have to be regarded as well. Under the perspectives of the materiality of culture, the analysis of crafts reveals the conditions of the social and cultural aspects of a group, contributing to the multiplication of the artistic and aesthetic expression of cultural objects produced and used for ritual, ceremonial, or domestic purposes among groups of people (Turok, 1988, p. 19).

Defined by the historical and cultural processes that constitute the world around them, this process simultaneously denoted that cultural meanings cannot be solely analysed from the standpoint of particular subjects, as their values are affected by the historical and politicized frameworks that provide both people and the objects with features of identity and differentiation throughout time. In this sense, personal interpretation becomes highly pertinent, as cultural expressions, their values and functions vary among actors, being further interpreted, and reinterpreted depending on the system under which the objects originate and are used (Marcus, p. 100, 1995).

The analysis of material culture considers the processes of mutual construction and/or correspondence that have emerged from the relations between the social and the cultural features. This provided an approach that avoided losing sight of the historical depth of the object of study, and thus, a failure in the ability to carry a rich ethnography in which special attention has to be given to the translation of the reality of the cultural practices and its meanings, justifying the idea that objects, just like people, have a social life (Kopytoff, 1998, p. 89).

These notions directed the qualitative method primordially towards the means of engagement between the agents and the objects of material culture. Since the figure of the craftsperson, the craftsmanship work and trade, bear a simultaneous position as both creative individuals and as members of a broader cultural group creating the objects of material culture to which people attach; their figure placed on a crucial position within the controversies, and thus, within this research. As bearers of the knowledge and techniques employed for the creation and transformation of crafts, artisans directly contribute to the cultural environment, practices and diversity that characterises a community, and it is for this reason that the empirical process had to examine the relationships between them and the objects of material culture that they create, in order to determine the place that traditional textiles play on their lives on domestic and communal levels.

Moreover, based on studies on the materiality of culture, regimes of value and the trajectories of cultural artefacts, the research process also had to revise the social, economic, cultural and historical functions and significances of the traditional textiles in the communities throughout history, as well as their uses, users and consumers in different contexts. The emergence of material culture is linked to specific schemes of understandings, simultaneously placing actors in the foreground with the activities that determine their organizational capacities (Turok, 1988, p. 19), implying that within the social life, objects embody the means that assist in the organisation of the world, and in it, the values, beliefs, practices, and rituals shared by a group of people. Objects move, circulate, interact, and are classified, providing meaning to existence, establishing social relationships among them and among actors. It is through this constant circulation that the exchanges of meanings, identities, powers, and affections are guaranteed – generating a mutual ontological construction between the objects and the social subjects (Appadurai, 1998, p. 18; Miller, 2005, p. 8; Rosa, 2018, p. 103-108).

The research mission does not involve traveling or moving from one community to another, but also the covering of other routes within different locations, making it possible to identify specialized circuits – that is, other sites for research. In this sense, following the agents and the objects through a displacement between different spaces and contexts, allowed me to observe and record the particularities and variations that traditional textiles take, as their acquisition and use by internal and external agents lead to transformations. Responding to these trends, artisans can elaborate different pieces for different purposes, users and/or functions, as the trade is characterized by creativity and innovation, thus, enabling the creation of new narratives in relation to questions of identity, representation, and authenticity, while conserving antique forms of elaboration and introducing new ones, in order to satisfy the necessities, likes, and creative sense of the artisans (Turok, 1988, p. 30).

Using the multi-sited methodology allowed me to follow the flow and itineraries of material culture, recomposing the different circuits in which they are produced and used. Crafts can be created for self-consumption, internal and external mercantile or capitalist consumption, directed towards different markets and consumers, such as tourists, interior decorators, collectors and other special commissions, craft stores, art/fashion galleries, national/international craft competitions, etc. (Turok, 1988, p. 146). This revealed that traditional textiles no longer coincide with their traditional functional characteristics, nor with their acquisition for self-consumption within a specific group.

These observations further indicated that different interpretations, uses, and meanings had to be recognized, as all of these adjust to a variety of circuits and factors affecting the elaboration and uses of the pieces among individuals, the community at large, and other external agents. As such, the multi-sited ethnography had to address, simultaneously, a multiplicity of codes, since in the same site where a cultural practice or object of material culture is shared, different values and meanings schemes can be at play among a diversity of agents and sites that converge (Holliday, 2011, p. 54-58).

This provided another line of research, as 'appropriation' controversies encourage social and cultural changes on people and objects, having repercussions on the cultural fabric of a community at large. This panoramic assessment prepared a thinking ground for analysing the various planes of relationships and meanings originated in the production and circulation of textiles directly associated to cultural groups and cultural processes in constant transformation. As traditional textiles circulate through diverging cultural and economic systems, their categorisation - founded on the constructions and conceptions of an 'art-culture system' (see Clifford, 1998) - defines contrasting systems, enabling the controversies to surge. Since actors and objects are framed by processes of cultural formation, the occurrences of 'cultural appropriation' reveal the paradigms of contrasting cultural models, cultural transformations, and value systems.

Additionally, the link between agents had to be established, as the variety of relationships involved in the cases served as vectors that create trans-regional, trans-state and trans-national networks of understandings of cultural objects and of the phenomena of 'appropriation'. Equally, the tracing of networks in geographical spaces became a necessity, as the movement of objects, people and conflicts offers the possibilities to trace the realms of discourses and modes of thought that circulate using signs, symbols, and metaphors, usually presented in language, print or visual media (Marcus, 1995, p. 108). Traversing and organizing sites, these networks produce new landscapes and orders: a plurality of "imagined worlds" that constituting constructions that had been previously dispersed, or not assimilated within pre-existing geographical boundaries (Appadurai, 1996, p. 5; 2001, p. 21; 1990, p. 297-300; Appadurai, 1996, p. 31-33).

## 6.6 Words, themes, and concepts: analysing the content in the data

As previously exposed, ethnographic research represents a broad range of possibilities for understanding social processes, being a technique that focuses on the social actors that allows the researcher to identify the symbolic and material meanings found in social dynamics. Its empirical process is characterised by carrying a constant analytical reflection of data obtained in the field - that is, in the spaces where social dynamics occur - through interpretative methods. As such, the ethnographic approach is consistent with the intention of overcoming generalisations and single-person interpretations when studying a culture, community, or social group, in depth.

In a general sense, the ethnographic method has the purpose of understanding processes and phenomena. This broadens sociocultural understandings by expanding on perspectives that consider a diversity of perceptions in the social environment, revealing the internal and significant logic of dynamics. As a qualitative method, ethnography is based on the collection of extensive detailed descriptions and interpretations in the area being studied, attending phenomena which can be observed but not quantified. Thus, in this type of studies, empirical data is obtained by first-hand immersions in the field, becoming a product of direct observation and interaction with the subjects of study. However, in order to reconstruct social realities through the establishing of relationships and the extraction of meanings to provide conclusions, the process requires of concise strategies to organise and manipulate the data. This embodies a complex task since data is composed of dynamic elements, correlating to the interpretative efforts of the researcher.

Within the social sciences and particularly for studies of media content, the multiple techniques of content analysis have represented a useful tool to deduct information from large bodies of data. The technique examines the artifacts of social communication, providing a systematic and objective mean to discern communication, messages and symbols from observable events, things, properties, or people. In simple terms, content analysis is used to uncover a diversification of discourses, contents, and continents of communication; used to reveal the properties of the producers or carriers of the message, and the forms in which the senders, receivers, and institutions in which their exchange is embedded, are cognitively influenced.

Conventionally, content analysis addresses, as the term implies, the content and contexts of communication. That is, what the message is, who says it, and to whom. However other circumstances and contexts can be taken into account, including the psychoanalytical, institutional, and cultural frameworks supporting these exchanges. Accordingly, inferences resulting from this analytical process have been used to reveal trends and differences in the content of communication; compare messages, levels and means of communication; discover communication styles; expose advertising and propaganda techniques; reflect attitudes, values and beliefs of people, groups or communities; among others. Consequently, it can be a useful technique for allowing researchers to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Berelson 1952; Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403; Weber, 1990).

Methodologically speaking, content analysis seeks to analyse data in view from the meanings attributed to any form of verbal and non-verbal expressions by someone - be it an individual, a group of people or a culture. It is designed to formulate reproducible and valid inferences from data to their context, usually applicable to a set of texts, including written documents (newspapers articles, books),



transcripts of verbal records (conversations, speeches) and other forms of visual communication (photographs, videos, etc.). Simply put, the technique does not intent to analyse the style of documents, but rather the ideas expressed in it, being the meaning of the words, themes, or phrases, of what is trying to be quantified (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403; Lune & Berg, 2008, p. 184).

Unlike other techniques, content analysis diverts from literal descriptions of communication content by applying a systematic treatment of the data through coding; by virtue of which, the relevant characteristics of a message's content is transformed into units, permitting their precise description and analysis. In this sense, codes can be depicted as labels used to identify categories that describe a segment of a text, image, artifact, or other material. Codes can be words or numbers, depending on what the researcher finds easier to remember and apply.

To make a further distinction, coding can be understood as the physical manipulative process of data, while categorization is conceptual. In other terms, categorization is the assignment of a conceptual category to obtained data; while coding represents the concrete operation through which an indicative code is assigned to identify it (Goetz & Lecompte, 1988, p. 31). In order to code, the researcher has to first define the universe, units of analysis and categories. Whenever a segment of a text is considered relevant, a unit of analysis can be extracted and added into a category, later acquiring a code.

Units of analysis constitute segments of the message's content that are characteristically located within the categories. These can be recognised in two types: those with a grammatical base, typical of verbal or written communication (syntactic, expressive, or semantic based elements) and the non-grammatical, in which segmentation of the material has independent properties (such as space, quantity, or time) (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 428; Lune & Berg 2018, p. 189).

Most commonly, units of analysis can be divided into seven major elements, which are:

1. Words or terms: the smallest elements or unites used, measured by the frequency of its distribution within a text.
2. Theme: a string of words with a subject and a predicate, conforming a simple sentence or a statement about something.
3. Paragraph: covering a unique idea or claim.
4. Characters: relating to the characters who become significant to an analysis, counted by the frequency and manner in which a specific person(s) is mentioned. This usually highlight the consistent meanings in the saying of an influential personality or that has impact on the context in which it operates. Common examples are politicians, religious or community leaders, presidents of associations, celebrities, etc.
5. Item: the whole unit of the sender's message, such as an entire book, a letter, speech, a radio or television program, an interview. It is usually the most used unit of analysis.
6. Concepts: representing groups of words, binding conceptual clusters (ideas). Typically constituted by variables in a typical research hypothesis, their analysis can lead towards more latent than manifest content.
7. Semantics: focusing on the number and type of words used, as well as how emotionally laden they are in relation to the sentiment of a sentence.

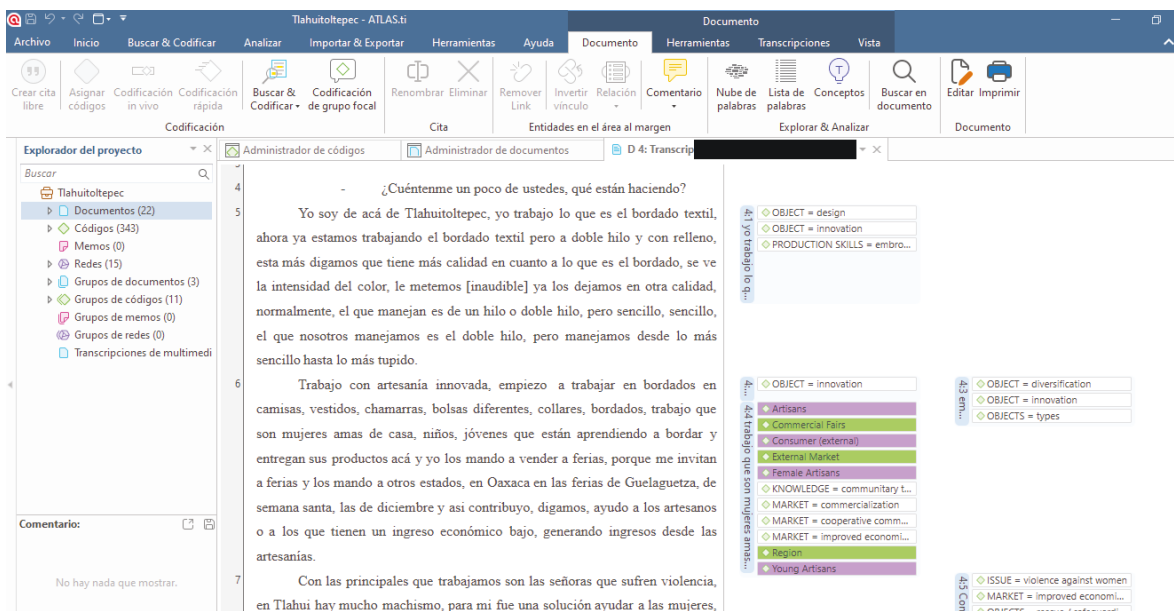


Figure 23. Screenshot of the units of analysis detected in the transcription of an interview using the ATLAS.ti Software.

The screenshot shows the ATLAS.ti interface with two windows: 'Administrador de redes' and 'Administrador de códigos'. The 'Administrador de códigos' window is active, displaying a list of units of analysis under the category 'MARKET'. The units are organized into a table with columns for 'Nombre', 'Enraizamiento', and 'Densidad'. The units are listed as follows:

Nombre	Enraizamiento	Densidad
MARKET = client requests	13	13
MARKET = commercialization	40	40
MARKET = commission	5	5
MARKET = communication with clients	9	9
MARKET = competition between artisans	1	1
MARKET = cooperative commercialization	17	17
MARKET = decreased prices	2	2
MARKET = demand	22	22
MARKET = diverse clients	3	3
MARKET = expansion	22	22
MARKET = external	27	27
MARKET = external merchant	2	2
MARKET = fashion	10	10
MARKET = foreigners / tourism	2	2

Figure 24. Screenshot of the units of analysis detected in an interview, relating to the category of "Markets", using the ATLAS.ti Software.

Groupings of units of analysis are arranged and classified into one or more systems of categories, encompassing concepts, experiences, ideas, and all relevant and meaningful facts (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 429). Paraphrasing Schatzman & Strauss (as quoted by Lund & Berg, 2018, p. 191), categories can be arranged into different classes:

- Common classes: as categories of a culture in general, used by laypeople in society in order to distinguish between and among persons, things, and events (e.g., age, gender, social roles), designating meaning to thinking and communication in social interactions. As categories, they become essential when assessing if certain demographic characteristics relate to patterns in the analysis of data.
- Special classes: labels used by members of certain areas (communities) to distinguish among the things, persons, and events within their limited province. They are linked to jargon terms, commonly used in professional or subcultural settings, and are often described in their classification stemming from out-groups (terms generally used by the greater host community or society) or in-groups (conventionally used among a specified group or emerging through theoretical classes).
- Theoretical classes: those that emerge in the course of analysing the data, providing an overarching pattern (a key linkage) that occurs throughout the analysis. The nomenclature used to identify them usually borrows from the special classes, accounting for novelty and innovations when paired with analytically constructed labels. Their substance is grounded in the data. Noticeably, these are not immediately knowable or available to observers until a considerable time has been dedicated to analysing the way in which respondents (or messages) identify themselves and others.

As the research develops, the number of categories increases each time the researcher identifies new or different units (meanings) in the data (the previous units that have been already categorized). This is usually achieved on the basis of constantly comparing between units of analysis, making the number of categories grow as more units are analysed (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 429). The number of categories found or generated, depend on the volume of data, the problem statement, the type of material reviewed, and the extent and depth of the analysis (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 431).

According to Hernandez & Fernandez, various types of categories can emerge during an investigation, among them: 1) The expected categories or those which have been anticipated; 2) The unexpected; 3) Those which are central to approaching the problem; 4) Those which are secondary to the approach; and 5) the miscellaneous. Additionally, other categories have been suggested, such as the unusual (extraordinary situations that still contain conceptual interest for understanding the phenomenon); and the theoretical categories (obtained from theories).

On the other hand, Bogdan and Biklen (2003; as cited by Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 433) mention the following types of categories that can arise from an analysis, encompassing the groups of units related to:

1. of context or environment.
2. of participants' perspectives.
3. of ways participants' thinking about other people, objects, and situations.
4. about processes.
5. about activities.

6. about strategies.
7. about relationships.
8. about structures.

Hernandez & Fernandez (2010, p. 436–438) present a simple technique for producing categories based on “groupings”, in which first, the topics mentioned in the interviews or groups, or detected in the observations and other documents, are noted, and arranged into a graphical format (Figure 7).

Nombre	Enraizamien... ▾	Densidad	Grupos
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = meaning	35	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = change after controversy	33	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = origins of objects	33	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = identity	30	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS CONTROVERSY = feelings	29	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = copyrights	27	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = changes	21	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = ownership	14	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = appropriation among comm...	14	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = authenticity	13	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = exploitation	12	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = not artisans / commercializa...	10	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = gender differences	7	0	[PERCEPTIONS]
○ ◆ PERCEPTIONS = losing meaning	7	0	[PERCEPTIONS]

Figure 25. List of codes related to the category of “Perceptions” identified in the content analysis of the data, using the ATLAS.ti analytical Software.

Consecutively, the categories can be created by establishing how often they are repeated. Other means for scrutinizing data, and producing categories involve searching for:

1. Repetitions: when a unit or idea referring to the statement problem is frequently repeated (recurrent regularity).
2. Local concepts: or frequently used in the context of the study: terms that are uncommon in other environments, typical of the participants. Relevant expressions in the analysed context, revealing deep meanings for the participants. These represent “live” codes that people often use to highlight something, useful to find categories in messages present in networks (especially in media and other social networks).
3. Metaphors and analogies: frequently representing the thoughts, behaviours, and experiences of people, that reveal meaning.
4. Transitions: changes that occur naturally in conversations and interactions. In texts, these are usually new paragraphs; while in verbal language these may include changes in tone of voice, interruptions, long pauses, or the presence of certain phrases, all of which are used for making transitions and other indications.
5. Similarities and differences: similarities between passages, units, verbal, and non-verbal language segments, attained through constant comparison.
6. Linguistic connectors and adverbs, pronouns or similar: useful for finding categories and establishing relationships between them by searching for groups of connecting words. This includes searching for words such as “no”, “never”, “none”, or their opposites; or phrases such as “because”, “since then” and “as a result”, that often indicate causal relationships between categories. Usually, terms like “if” or “then”, “more than” and “instead of” often mean conditional relationships; while the use of “X is a” is often associated with taxonomic categories. Temporarily oriented relationships are expressed by words like “before”, “after”, “then”, and “next”.
7. Lost or undisclosed data: what is missing, what is ignored or lost, as participants may evade topics intentionally or unintentionally, due to topics being compromising, difficult, or complicated to some. Equally, this happens with common themes, since people put aside information that is considered to be known by everyone (also known as abbreviation).
8. Material linked to theory: categories that relate to illuminating on theories, knowledge or creating new theoretical proposals. These surge from examining the environment or context, the participants’ perspectives and their perceptions, what they think of other people, objects, processes and relationships; as well as the conditions, interactions and consequences of the studied phenomena.

## 6.7 Emic perspectives and types of codes: rules for coding

The validity and reliability of results in content analysis is determined by the setting of analytical rules, instructing the researcher (and others) on the conditions for coding and categorizing material. However, due to the qualitative character of content analysis, rules can be open to modification as the material is processed. Open coding is therefore a continuous process, surging from the data to the formulation of the rules, and vice versa.

As units of analysis produce new categories and are grouped into previous ones, the incorporation of new data constructs the criteria for categorisation and simultaneously modifies it. Each code requires a precise definition supporting its scope, exposing the appropriateness of the criteria applied, and its significance. This should surge directly from the content or source of the text, in order for the investigation to include both an "etic" definition – that is, a professional designation – and an "emic" one – coming from the participants. Using this sort of "language clues", assist in reducing misinterpretation, preconceptions, and omissions, increasing the chances of generating a high validity and reliable analysis. The guiding principles for the generation of categories and their definitions, will be presented in the coding log or analytical memo (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 431; Lune & Berg 2018, p. 197).

Codes can be distinguished by their theoretical scope – descriptive codes – and analytical purpose – exploratory codes. On one hand, descriptive codes, defined as identifiers of the characteristics of registered segments, cannot be individually used in the inferential process, since the descriptions that they entail are integrative of a set of data. Meanwhile, the explanatory codes, defined as identifiers of themes that the researcher denotes as recurring or with the same meaning add a greater inference component, which depending on their level of abstraction, can lead to the enunciation of categories with a strong interpretive component, proving material for the generation of higher-level theoretical formulations (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 431)

In the majority of qualitative studies, the coding of data is directed towards summarising and producing complete descriptions, eliminating irrelevant information, and performing a quantitative analysis – questions that revolve around the better understanding of the analysed material. Coding is divided into two phases or levels, starting with open coding, where the units (raw data) are categorised; followed by a second phase, where the categories are compared with each other to group them into topics and detect possible links (Hernandez & Fernandez, 2010, p. 426).

In this sense, categories can be defined as the class or divisions where the coded content is definitively sorted and classified (Hernández, 1994, p. 429). As with coding, categorisation requires following criteria. Nonetheless, the consolidation of categories responds fundamentally to inferential elements, based on the reasonings and theoretical approaches of the researcher – unlike with coding. This means that the categories represent the moment in which information is grouped or linked, incorporating the critical perspectives of the study. Categorisation, therefore, establishes the first steps towards providing the research with new interpretations and theoretical connections.

Grupos de códigos		Mostrar códigos en grupo ACTORS			
Nombre	Enraizamiento	Densidad	Grupos		
ACTORS (17)					
CONTROVERSY (2)					
DEVELOPMENTS (6)					
FAMILY (5)					
LAW (1)					
MARKET (30)					
OBJECTS (15)					
PERCEPTIONS (24)					
PRODUCTION (8)					
SITES (43)					
USERS (5)					
Academics (external)	7	1	[ACTORS]		
Artisans	8	14	[ACTORS]		
Brand / Designer (external)	36	1	[ACTORS]		
Community	12	9	[ACTORS]		
Consumer (external)	13	1	[ACTORS] [USERS]		
Cultural / Academic Institution (external)	2	1	[ACTORS]		
Cultural Promoter	1	0	[ACTORS]		
Entrepreneurs	17	1	[ACTORS]		
External merchant	2	1	[ACTORS]		
Foreigners	0	0	[ACTORS]		
General Public	0	0	[ACTORS]		
Government	41	8	[ACTORS] [SITES]		
Higher Education Institutions (external)	0	0	[ACTORS] [DEVELOPMENTS]		
Intermediaries	4	1	[ACTORS]		

Figure 26. Screenshot of the groups of codes and categories detected in the content analysis generated for this research using the ATLAS.ti Software.







## **SECTION 3**

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### **Contextualization: textile domains**

## 7. Weaving histories through time: an overview of textiles in Mexico

The presence of textiles in what conforms the modern-day territories of Mexico date back to several millennia, and although unfavourable climatic conditions have limited the conservation of archaeological resources due to the organic composition of the materials, remaining evidence suggest that textile activities had been practiced since 1400 BCE. The geographical and cultural location of Mexico, characterised by scholars as Mesoamerican and Aridoamerica, has been recognised by the extent of its biological and cultural diversity. The rich combination of environmental and social variables – conformed by different ecosystems, climates, and elevations – allowed its ancient inhabitants to manage natural resources and to reach exceptional levels of textile knowledge and development. Although the number of archaeological textile remains is reduced, a large corpus of secondary resources – including figurines and pottery, frescoes and murals, pictographs, or relations of Spanish chroniclers – attest to the immense repertoire of textile techniques, variety of garments, complexity, and richness of fabrics that were produced and circulated in the region before European arrival.

The elaboration of textiles in pre-Columbian Mexico relayed primordially in the collection of natural resources and agriculture. Textiles were produced using vegetable fibres, most commonly those from the Agave and Yucca genus (such Agave sisalana, Agave lechuguilla, Agave zapupe, Yucca carnerosana, Yucca treculeana, and Samuela carnerosana) and to a lesser extent, bark and stem fibres; as well as the two variants of endemic species of cotton: the white (*Gossypium hirsutum*) and brown (*Gossypium mexicanum*). Yarns were elaborated by spinning the fibres manually, by rolling against the thighs, or with the assistance of wooden and stone tool known as spindle and wheel. Finished threads were later woven into fabrics, using backstrap or horizontal looms. The characteristic of these allowed for the weaving of rectangular canvases with completed ridges; allowing garments to be composed by hemming canvases together, without the need of cutting and sewing patterned moulds. The combination between materials and weaving instruments, as well as the weaver's abilities, enabled the mastering of at least fifteen different manufacturing techniques, including complex fabrics such as gauzes, brocades, wrapped wefts, and curved weaves (Mastache, 2005a, 2005b; Filloy Nadal, 2017).

The archaeometric analysis of pre-Conquest textiles evidences the use of a variety of pigments, including iron, black carbon, and red hematite, as well as animal and vegetable dyes, which enabled the creation of a broad range of colours through the use of seeds, flowers, and plant extracts – including indigo (*Indigofera suffitica*), zacatlaxcalli (*Cuscuta tinctoria*), pericon (*Tagetes lucida*), and axiote (*Bixa orellana*), and dyes from animal origins, most relevantly cochineal (*Dactylopius coccus*) and purple sea snail (*Plicopurpura pansa*). Yarns and finished fabrics were also dyed or painted in order to create motifs and designs with vestiges corroborating the practicing of different procedures, including freehand painting, and two types of resist dyeing techniques, namely plangi and batik. Fabrics and attires of the higher social hierarchies were also embellished with animal skins and feathers, shells, and precious stones (Witlaner, 1967, 1970, 1976, 1977; Sayer, 1985; Mastache, 2005a, 2005b; Stresser-Péan, 2012; Filloy Nadal, 2017).



Figure 27. Backstrap loom. (MNAH, 2018).



Figure 28. Codex demonstrating the cultivation of cochineal (16<sup>th</sup> Century). In: 'Gomez de Cervantes' Memorial and the Anonymous Pictorial Manuscript (British Museum)





Figure 29. Dyeing with *Plicopurpura pansa* in Huatulco, Oaxaca. (Personal Archive, 2015).

In pre-Hispanic eras, textiles were the result of available resources, local needs, and particular aesthetics; as expressions of material culture that were fundamentally conditioned by the social and economic forces which dictated the means for subsistence and the forms of organization at the time (Johnson, 2015, p.9). Textiles were used at weddings to metaphorically connect couples, further representing the symbolic alliances between different manors and the sharing of their possessions. They were used to shroud bodies to form of funerary coverings or paid as tribute in the establishment of lordships and other economic-political relations among towns. Fabrics wrapped goods and religious relics for the celebration of ceremonies and deities, further representing distinctive demarcations of status and identity, serving aesthetic and symbolic functions which differentiated cultural groups, social roles, and status within ancient societies (Witlaner, 1976; Mastache, 2005b; Stresser-Péan, 2012).

Many cultures developed and flourished in different regions, providing textiles with particular characteristic features. Although not one type of attire, garment or textile existed in pre-Columbian Mexico, most scholar references have examined the textile culture of the Mexicas - colloquially known as the Aztecs - representing the society and Empire that inhabited central Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest.

Mexica male attires were comprised of two main garments: the *maxtlatl* or loincloth, tied to the waist and passed through the crotch; and a *tilmahitli*, a canvas worn as a cape secured at the shoulder, which additionally served as an implement to carry and transport goods. The use of the *xicolli* vest, was restricted to priests and used during ceremonial occasions. Female attires included a wrap-around skirt, known as *cueitl*, and although evidence suggests that the torso tended to be exposed, in certain contexts, the upper body was sometimes covered with a *quechquemitl*: a garment constructed with two rectangles of cloth, joined at the selvages to form a triangle that hanged from the shoulders and was worn with the points facing the front and back.

However, just as the *huipil* - a dress composed of woven canvases sewn on the sides, originally from the Mayan region - the use of these garments remained restricted to the privileged classes, to impersonators of goddesses, and victims of sacrificial rituals within ceremonial events. Females also resorted to the use of *mamallis* or carrying shawls, which served to carry children and transport objects (Lechuga, 1992, p. 9-15). Only members of the nobility, the higher military and religious hierarchies were allowed to wear elaborate or richly decorated fabrics and cotton garments. Improper use was punishable with death.



Figure 30. "Matricula de tributos" or "Tribute Roll" (16<sup>th</sup> Century) showing cloths and adorned garments that had to be paid as tributes to the Mexica Empire (Library of Congress, 2011).



Figure 31. Codex Cozcatzin depicting Moctezuma's heirs wearing tlihmahtli and huipil, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Individual production of textiles for self-consumption at the time was carried within the domestic unit, while the Mexica State controlled the production intended for tributes or consumption by the nobility. According to the historical evidence, shortly after birth, females were presented with the necessary tools for weaving, with the implements being burnt after death, in order for the deceased to continue weaving in the afterlife (Weitlaner Johnson, 1959). Additionally, the symbolic relevance of textiles in pre-Hispanic times was intrinsically related to divinity, femininity, and fertility, with the existence of deities protecting and favouring weavers. According to Mexica beliefs, Xochiquetzal had invented spinning and weaving, and granted the skills to the women, while the Mayas in the Peninsula praised Ixchel: the deity was commonly depicted with a headdress carrying a spindle and skins of cotton (Lechuga, 1992; Weitlaner Johnson, 2005; Stresser-Péan, 2012)

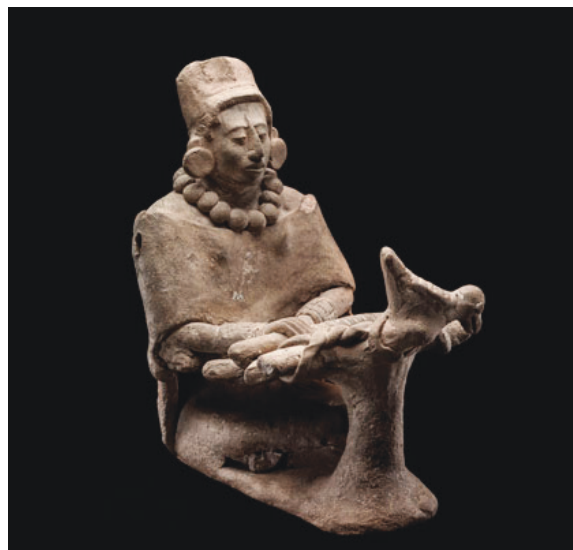


Figure 32. Jaina figure of Mayan woman weaving on a back-strap loom, wearing a quechquemiti. (MNAH, 2016).

The population of the territories of what would later be officially recognised as the Viceroyalty of New Spain had their own systems and structures of socio-political, religious, and cultural organisation. However, the conquest of the Mexica Empire, and the eventual integration of the populace and territories of modern-day Mexico into the Spanish monarchical regime, instigated to a series of changes in the political orders, disrupting the structures that had previously organised societies in pre-Hispanic times, resulting in the instauration of new hierarchies, that enabled the management and exploitation of the human, social and material resources of Mesoamerica and Aridoamerica by the Spanish Monarchy (Bonfil, 1996).

The dawn of the Conquest instigated the generation of new social norms and cultural identities, as well as changes in the forms of textile production and dressing in the regions. Although pre-Hispanic forms of social organisation had collapsed because of disease and subjugation, Indigenous idiosyncrasies transformed, drastically changing the hierarchical norms that had previously defined Indigenous attires and garments. According to textile researcher Patricia Anwalt (1992) these processes, expressed in terms clothing and textiles were enabled by strategies of replacement, adaptation, persistence, innovation, mimicry, survival and/or incorporation of new elements.

Indigenous nobilities were not completely disbanded but incorporated instead into the higher classes of the new colonial structure – primordially, by strategy of marital unions with the Spanish conquerors. The changes in the socio-political orders affected Indigenous attires, as the upper castes began to wear European garments and styles – embellished with metal embroideries and precious stones – which distinguished the groups from others in lower strata. After the subjugation of the pre-Hispanic population, most forms of Indigenous dress and body adornment were regarded as ‘uncivilized’ and thereof, banned by the Spanish authorities; with nudity being rendered unchaste according to Catholic morals. The processes of evangelisation further instigated heterogenous changes, as friars forced men and women to cover their bodies in an attempt to eradicating what was regarded as an absence of modesty. Since women were forced by the Spanish to cover their nudity and bare-chest torsos, the *quechquemitls* and *huipiles* – previously reserved to members of the Indigenous nobility and priesthood – were adapted by the population. Females also had the addition of skirts, blouses, and shawls of European origins as complements to their wardrobes. On the other hand, changes in male attires were more radical, as the Spanish instigated the use of shirts, overcoats, and trousers in the style of 15<sup>th</sup> Century European peasantry on the population – particularly in *haciendas* and cities – substituting with them the *tilma* and the *maxtlatl*. Likewise, the use of certain materials – such as cotton – as well as embellished weaves, fabrics, and designs that had been only allowed for the privileged classes began to be adopted among different levels of the population (Lechuga, 1990, p. 96-100; Pomar, 2005, p. 32-39; Stresser-Pean, 2016, p. 242).

By 1530 fears that Spanish textile workshops would be unable to respond the simultaneous demand of domestic and overseas markets, encouraged a ban on the export of fabrics produced in the Peninsula. Since products of European origin were scarce and costly to acquire, the prohibition encouraged the introduction of new materials, textile instruments, and production techniques into the newly acquired territories of the New Spain. In 1526 Hernan Cortés had introduced sheep which quickly adapted to the environmental and cultural conditions of the territories. In 1536, the first Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza planted the first mulberry trees in the communities of Huejotzingo, Cholula, and Tlaxcala to cultivate silkworms<sup>11</sup> (AGI, 1536). The introduction of new textile fibres such as wool and silk further implied the import of adequate machinery for the production of fabrics, as well as tailors to produce European style garments. The spinning wheel, the rotating vertical warper, the fixed frame, and the draw pedal looms – colloquially known as the “colonial loom” – as well as metal needles for sewing patterns and embroidering, represented some of the European technological contributions to the textile industry in the New World.



Figure 33. *Silkworms from Oaxaca.* (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> By 1596, a Royal ordinance banned the production of mulberry trees and the breeding of the worms in the Viceroyalty in an attempt to favour European silk production. Although production decreased and the export was interrupted, locally grown silk continues to be used in some communities in Oaxaca: in the Mixteca of San Mateo Peñasco in the Mixteca Alta, and in various Zapotec communities in the districts of Villa Alta and Ixtlán, including San Pedro Cajonos, San Pablo Yaganiza and Santiago Laxopa (de Ávila, 1997, p. 136).

Noticeably, textiles signify forms of communicating and representing identity and social status – symbolic constructs that became a mean for control and cohesion within the colonial regime. Sustained and characterised by a system of racial classification that sought to simultaneously preserve and segregate different social categories, the intertwining of clothing as elements of socio-political and cultural distinctions was defined through the instalment of a Caste system, imposed by the Viceroyalty establishment in an attempt to organize the increasingly diverse and complex society by emphasising perceived cultural and phenotypical differences.

The inhabitants of the New Spain were organized according to a hierarchical pyramid that conceived and positioned people from European, American, African, and Asian origins located within the territories, under strict racial categories. Thus, the diversity of Indigenous peoples and cultures was gradually reduced to the term 'Indian', as a category that defined them according to European perspectives, depending on the proximity or distance from Western forms of life (Carrillo, 2009, p. 8). The Caste regime functioned with the Spanish at the top – classified as both 'peninsular' (born in Spain) and 'criollos' (Spanish descendants, born in the New Spain); followed by the rest of the population: Indians or 'naturals' (original peoples from the territories); the Moors (Arabs and Jews); and the Blacks (victims of transatlantic slavery) who were deemed as the lower caste strata. Miscegenation between these racial/ethnic categories was then followed by innumerable caste denominators: *mestizos*, *mulatos*, *saltapatrás*, etc.



Figure 34. *Las Castas* (XVIII Century) painting showing the system of racial/ethnic miscegenation and differences in attires. (Museo Nacional del Virreinato, 2018).

The implantation of the colonial regime in the Americas represented a break from the social systems of organisation of the pre-Columbian past. The legislative apparatus imposed by the Spanish monarchy restricted action and agency among the population through the Council of the Indies and the Laws of the Indies, further influencing the definition and typification of peoples clothing according to moral and social strata. The Laws determined visible identity through the imposition of norms and fines, punishing nudity, and prohibiting the use of certain garments and materials identifiable with the higher social hierarchies. Colonial administration further enforced the use of attires for the identification of Indigenous groups and peoples from diverse regions; while imposing the incorporation of different textile

production methods to distinguish and classify them according to the Caste system. As a result of this – and until today – certain garments and styles began to determine attires of Indigenous groups without correlation to geographical origins; certain textile techniques remaining isolated within specific groups and/or regions of the territory (Lechuga, 1990, p. 154).

The introduction of new materials, garments and textile techniques allowed innovations to emerge, with the population adopting the novelties – sometimes without completely replacing their own – promoting the creation of new types of textiles and designs that combined new and old elements into attires, in accordance with Viceroyalty regulations, people's own environment, needs, aesthetics, and creativity. The blouse was incorporated as a daily use garment among different Indigenous groups, with ornamentation on the neckline, chest, and sleeves which resembled the structures of woven *huipils*. The use of wool also became extended particularly in regions with colder climates. The expansion of cotton cultivation made the material – previously banned to the general Indigenous population – more accessible. The processes of cultural exchange would also result in the creation of certain outfits which would be rendered as 'mestizo', such as the *rebozo* shawl – surging as an adaptation of Christian modesty garments and the Moorish *almaizar*; or the costume of the Tehuantepec Isthmus, influenced by the construction of the *huipil* but transformed into a skirt and blouse, richly embroidered with floral motifs (Lechuga, 1990; Scheinman, 1996; Gamez Martinez, 2009).

The foundation of the Viceroyalty of the New Spain and the introduction of new textile technologies and means for production was also accompanied by the import of new modes of work specialization, which diverged textile production from the confinements of domestic units and female labour, into the establishment of male dominated *obrajes* – colonial weaving workshops which operated under harsh working conditions, practically sustained by slavery (Anawalt, 1979).



Figure 35. "Dama utilizando Rebozo" of "Lady wearing a Rebozo shawl" (18<sup>th</sup> Century) painting by painter Juan Rodríguez Juárez. (Museo Nacional de Historia, INAH).

Workforce in the *obrajes* was mainly acquired through the employment of Indigenous people – as punishment for committing a crime – or with Indigenous men who were hired and then retained through a scheme of financial indebtedness. Children began working from the age of 12, becoming young apprentices approximately until age 17. This system of work specialization followed a model that originated in Medieval workshops, where the young learned the skills and competences of the trade under the direct supervision of a master craftsman, who was simultaneously in charge of overseeing the production and correct functioning of the site (Miño Grijalva, 1990).

The fundamental differentiation and specialization of craftspeople and workshops in the Viceroyalty of the New Spain would be eventually organised and associated through guilds. The close association of craftspeople with Church resulted in the formation of Christian confraternities in charge of managing the funds collected for intercessory endeavours. Textile guilds began to work under the protection and sponsorship of Patron Saints corresponding to the vocative tasks required by the different production activities. The organisation of processions, banquets, masses, and events for the distribution of alms to the poor, celebrated on behalf of the protective holy figures, are still practiced until today by textile artisans in many regions of Mexico (Turok, 1988, p. 24–25; Jovinelly & Netelkos, 2007, p. 24; Epstein, 1995; Richardson, 2005, p. 11).



Figure 36. Lord of the Rebozo celebrated in the Temple of Santo Domingo Mexico City. (Como en el Tianguis, 2019).

Nevertheless, over the Centuries, textile workshops in Mexico and the Americas were unable to expand commercially, as production was solely directed towards local market demands. For two and a half Centuries, the Spanish Crown had established a commercial trade route that connected the port of Acapulco with the Spanish territories in East Asia, monopolizing the introduction of products into the Continent, and thus, preventing legal, large-scale trade from occurring between two or more geographic locations within the territories. The incipient upsurge of capitalism – initiated by the establishment of global trade triangles used to transport and commerce economic and human resources – influenced the production and commercialisation of luxury and sumptuary objects, pursued, and acquired by the members of a new rising social class: the bourgeoisie, composed by accommodated people, merchants, and other powerful figures (Turok, 1988, p. 25; Braudel, 1992, p. 23).

Over Centuries, textile craftsmanship in Mexico had followed two main paths: the rural and domestic, where craft production was directed towards the satisfaction of agricultural subsistence, mainly produced by women in households; and workshop production, representing an urban division operated by males in *obrajes*, simultaneously immersed in its own dynamic for mercantile and luxurious consumption, sustained by a market of commercial exchange and trade specialisation. None of these forms exceeded the small-scale manufacturing of textiles, however, the dawn of industrialisation and the establishment of factories would once again alter the course of the textile histories and culture of Mexico.

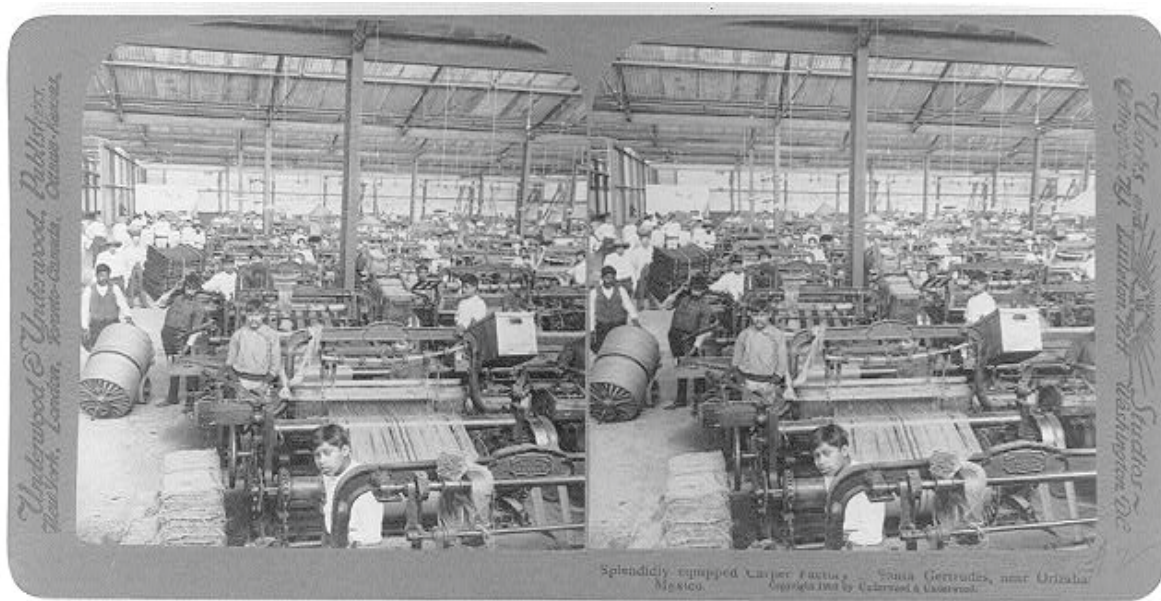


Figure 37. "Splendidly equipped carpet factory" (1903). Photograph of Orizaban Factory in Veracruz. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 1903)

The Industrial Revolution drastically transformed the world and all of its dynamics. The succession of scientific discoveries and technological inventions that surged in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> Century reformulated labour and transformed agricultural economies into industrial ones, initiating with this, a period of time in which 'modernity' would be defined (Hall, 1992, p. 313). Chronologically, the invention of the flying shuttle, the stocking frame machine, the sewing machine, the Jacquard loom, and the power loom provided new technological advancements that enabled the mass, mainstream production of yarns, fabrics, and cloth. New materials such as aniline dyes, rayon, and nylon were developed, and later introduced into the country. The availability of this commercial products, transformed the production, trade, market, and consumption of textiles – not only in Mexico but around the world (Landes, 1969, p. 40; Gordon, 2013, p. 190-191).

## 7.1 Modernist, nationalist trends: textiles as expressions of national cultural heritage and economic development

The social and economic reconstruction of the country following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) required a strategy to reunite a population that had suffered from the ravages of political divide and war for close to a decade. The integration of all of Mexicans into society and the enhancement of the economic situation after belligerent conflict became a priority for the nationalist agenda. Like many other Nation-State projects at the time, the conception and use of a shared identity and of a common cultural heritage that concurrently enabled and supported the advancement of modern development began to advance in Mexico.

As objects of material culture, textiles possess identarian attributes associated to a number of ideological, ethnic, cultural, and political conceptions; recognized as manifestations of the knowledge and culture of particular groups of people and communities at a given period of time. As goods and products that had been previously considered part of the natural economies of the population – that is, the plastic expressions mainly produced for utilitarian purposes for self-consumption and internal exchange withing agrarian societies, culturally defined by aesthetical values – textiles began to be revaluated and rendered as products of an autochthonous cultural inheritance.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the notion of 'cultural heritage' had appeared as a tool with which different political groups could represent and inculcate certain norms, values, and ideologies among the population, concurrently materialising and constructing the very symbolic and subjective sense of national identity and belonging to the State (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). Crafts and textiles had been associated to peasants' claims and demands for autonomy and independence, symbolising the social and revolutionary efforts to overthrow monarchical regimes and colonial enterprises, and the establishment of independent, democratic Republics. Moreover, their characteristics opposed those of the objects of art, historically associated to their production and consumption by educated elites from Europe or urban centres, serving the purpose of affirming their condition as "nationalist" expressions created by popular and Indigenous hands. Textiles began to occupy a transcendental role in the rescuing, conservation, and continuity of cultural expressions deemed to possess value to the Mexican nation and its population. The trends began to emphasis national products and production over foreign models, garments, and dressing styles (Turok, 1988, p. 27; Pérez Monfort, 2017, p. 119; Gordon, 2013, p. 194).





Figure 38. Photograph of "Soldaderas" or "Adelitas", female participants of the Mexican Revolution. (Walter H. Horne/Courtesy of The Library of Congress).

The revaluation of textiles accompanied the establishment of a series of abstract constructions defined by the authorities – the notions of 'cultural heritage', of the 'traditional', of what was 'authentic' – as part of the discourses referencing the cultural and creative legacies produced within national borders. The phenomenon added to the creation of a series of narratives and 'invented traditions' used to legitimize power, in which different forms of representation were used to compose the main social and political imaginaries, enabling the creation of the identities associated to "Mexicanity". The ideological processes influenced all the domains of official cultural production: literature, the plastic arts, music, dance, press, movies, and radio; that would affect the perception and forms of representation of the multicultural population of the country, which began to be divided and characterised into different identity groups, conforming the popular ideas of the 'Indigenous', the 'mestizo', and the 'national'. (Turok, 1988, p. 25; Perez Monfort, 2017, p. 10; Ramirez, 2014, p. 35; Smith, 2006, p. 11; Harrison, 2013, p. 43).

As visual markers for communication and identity, clothing responds to the canons of social norms and contexts, representing part of what is imposed and negotiated between society and the individual. This allows textiles to represent implicit relationships, such as the tensions that surge between differing identity categories, generating particular manifestations that are indicative of distinctions such as ethnicity, rank, gender, and/or status, particularly when modelled in contraposition to the 'other'. Symbolically, identity markers are regarded as essential and exclusive to a given group. However, part of their expressive functions are still connected to context: to the realms of culture and tradition – which can be invented or not.

The projections of the Nation-State utilized textiles as means to express and reaffirm certain archetypes and stereotypes of 'Mexicanity' through clothing. In addition to their characterisation in context to different national holidays and parties, types of music, and dancing styles, the strategies supported the emergence of 'traditional' or 'typical' costumes – most noticeably, the China Poblana and the Charro outfits, as well as a number of regional attires such as the Tehuana – which were used to define and represent the notions involving the supposed 'mestizo' ancestry of the population, providing Mexicans with distinguishable archetypes that could be both regionally and internationally recognised (Lechuga, 1990, p. 112-119; Perez Monfort, 2017, p. 119).



Figure 39. "Flor del Bajío" or "Bajío Flower" (1964) by Eduardo Cataño painting of woman wearing a sarape and 'charro' sombrero. (Museo Soumaya, 2017).

Similarly, two textile garments would be positioned on national imaginaries as emblems of "Mexicanity": the female *rebozo* shawl, and the male *sarape* – which had surged from the historical transculturation processes involved in the cultural and technological miscegenation between Indigenous, European, and Asian influences in the territories. Pictorial evidence found in the representations of the Caste system suggest that the garments had been adopted by the general population for at least 300 years. However, by the 20<sup>th</sup> the *rebozo* and the *sarape* would be readapted from their original functions – as tokens of modesty and garments to protect from the environment in agricultural/rural settings – to express sentiments towards the nation. Converted from everyday garments into emblems of the country, used in traditional dances and festive events by the general population, the *rebozos* and the *sarapes* would eventually become luxury pieces produced with expensive materials, exalted by the media, and used by the intellectual elites, social activists, socialites, and politicians to demonstrate their sentiments towards the nation (Lechuga, 1990, p. 112-119; Gamez Martinez, 2019; Ramirez Garayzar, 2022, p. 63-73).



Figure 40. *Woman wearing a Rebozo shawl (1936) hand-coloured photograph by Luis Marquez. (Wikimedia Commons).*

The process was similar with Indigenous attires. Since the foundation of the Viceroyalty of the New Spain and the imposition of the Caste system, Indigenous populations had been systematically forced the use of certain attires and materials, consequently defining the division among individuals by social status and/or delimiting groups into categories based on racial/ethnic traits. The impositions of Spanish settlers and missionaries was also accompanied by processes of resistance, as Indigenous people reaffirmed their indigeneity, by contrast to other groups and impositions through textiles. Clothing could distinguish the general population by means of ancestry and belonging – from the Indigenous nobilities and upper-caste groups, and from Europeans and Sub-Saharan slaves – allowing attires to be used in the reconstruction of identities. The use of textiles and attires denoted internal association to cultural groups, simultaneously rejecting other external imposed models and forms (Fábregas, 1998, p. 25).

The advances of the nationalist agenda began to correlate textiles to official idealizations, contributing to the establishment of criteria that abided to the demands and norms of the ideological project. Textile objects became part of the systems of institutions, legislations, and programmes entirely dedicated to the identification and protection of Indigenous and popular cultures and expressions that were financed by the State (de Ávila, 1997, p. 136). The valorisation of the past and of Mexican identity with concerns for its preservation through material objects, shaped the efforts to create inventories, acquire, conserve, display, study, and safeguard certain expressions (Turok, 1998, p. 31; Harrison, 2013, p. 44).

The national projects enabled the establishment of Academic institutions dedicated to the formation of professionals who were committed to the study of history and societies; while simultaneously sponsoring Museum projects and other agencies that provided official sites for the displaying of the past, of folklore and tradition, providing the guides for the management of cultural relations in an attempt to facilitate governance over the population.

Following pacification of the revolutionary conflict, the emergence of Anthropology began to be recognised as a useful tool for public administration. The discipline represented a valuable instrument to assist and support the objectives that intended to guide the future of the recently created Mexican Federal Republic, and the formulation of institutions and public policies sustaining the ideals of social cohesion, progress, and development. The discipline served as a professional medium to comprehend the pre-Hispanic past, as well as the different groups and cultures that conformed the population of Mexico in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, the symbolic and cultural capital of different groups within the country began to be recognised and considered as part of the ideals of a national culture and national heritage – simultaneously encouraged by the perspectives that had influenced the creation of organisations and professionals in charge of managing those relations, the cultural objects, and study of communities within the territory – through their official discourses and nationalist preconceptions (Stavenhagen, 2014, p. 82).



Figure 41. Photograph of the "Aztec sun stone" monolith (20<sup>th</sup> Century) in the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City by unknown author. (Wikicommons).

As a result, the extensive cultural diversity of Mexico began to be encompassed and assimilated into the idea of a single, united nation, delimited by territorial borders. Functioning under integrational discourses, the national zeal would swerve the objective of granting different groups of people with a sense of identity and belonging, further bonding groups of people through the notion of sharing a common, collective past. Textiles were shaped as symbol-oriented forms in the economisation of society – through a simultaneous process of revaluation and enactment of their histories – transforming them into economic resources that served the strategies to construct and communicate the nation's unique identity, further providing economic and productive possibilities for the population.

Encouraged by their adscription with values of nationalism and national identity, the textile culture of Mexico began to be appraised as valuable collectibles, resulting in the establishment of a market for their consumption; their collecting, displaying, conservating and study within Museums, private collections, and Universities around the world (Turok, 1988, p. 27). Noticeably, the national agenda broadened the narrative divides that separated historical periods – Pre-Hispanic, Colonial, and Post-Independent Mexico – to facilitate the categorisation and hierarchisation of the symbolic elements intended to represent the history and people of the country. Conditioned by the State, the National Museum of Anthropology would become the main institution in charge of displaying and representing the nation's cultural heritage. However, the inception of the institution would only consider archaeological ruins, artefacts, and relics from pre-Columbian times as elements of historical and cultural value – disregarding the traditions and material culture of contemporary populations<sup>12</sup> (Pérez Vejo, 2012).

Mexican nationalism created narratives and emblematic imageries that involved the construction of citizenship through notions of a shared cultural identity. The project would link the present with the past, providing narratives that connected the origins of Mexicans to a common ancestry; while transforming a selection of culturally significant objects into relics and symbols that represented all of the nation and its people (Morales Moreno, 1994; Pérez Vejo, 2012). The textile culture of the country was then defined as history, following a biased, romanticised notion of cultural continuity, that primordially connected pre-Hispanic times with the present (de Ávila, 1997, p. 90).

<sup>12</sup> In context of the discussions for the restitution of objects of material culture by Museums, this represents a point of major scientific interest. The demands for relocation of archaeological remains, artefacts, and other expressions of cultural heritage from the Archaeological and Ethnographic collections in Mexico to their communities of origin have not been a subject of public interest. I believe that the subject deserves further analysis, considering that the relocation of the Tlaloc monolith (Mexica deity of rain) to decorate the entrance of the National Museum of Anthropology in 1964 was committed against the explicit wishes of the community of San Miguel Coatlinchán, Texcoco, where it was located. According to the inhabitants, the pre-Hispanic figure was part of the religious, social, and economic life of the community, as it was believed that the figure possessed certain qualities – such as controlling the weather and the raining season in the region; further providing "curative waters" from the rain collected in its basins, used in traditional medicine rituals (México Desconocido, 2017).



Figure 42. "The Ancient Indian World" (1929 - 1935) fresco mural by Mexican artist Diego Rivera in the National Palace of Mexico. (Wikiart).

The constructions of the Nation-State and its characterisation through the idea of a collective national heritage and shared cultural identity, sustained the emergence of a homogenising formula enforced by the State. Similarly, concerns over the modernisation of the country had resulted in efforts that addressed issues including rural education and agrarian reform that intended to promote the advancement of the social and economic development of the country. The aims of the national project influenced a contradictory phenomenon. Policies were implemented compromising viable and sustainable forms of communal organization – particularly among indigenous peoples – generating a series of detrimental issues that facilitated cultural disintegration.

The ideals for modernisation had been imported from Western schools of thought – European and North American models for education and wellbeing – consequently disregarding the local cultural differences and realities of Mexican people. Accordingly, the national project and its characteristic public policies were influenced by the discourses of *Indigenism* and the nationalist zeal generating a paradoxical scenario. While the past of the country and its ancient civilizations were celebrated, rural and Indigenous communities began to be considered the main sectors of the population hindering the economic development of the country, interfering with the image of advancement and modernisation that authorities wanted to portray on national and global scales.

The discourses of *Indigenism* encouraged the deconstruction of the multicultural, rural, and indigenous populations as the system regarded them as 'primitive' and thus, opposed to the 'modern'. As a formula to promote economic development and governance, the biased and dichotomic discourses of *Indigenism* allowed the State to exert its power, creating and implementing diverse programmes and policies that aimed to change the 'undeveloped' status of the country - without the consent of the Indigenous and rural communities that would be subjected to the changes and reforms. Different agents and processes began erasing specific cultural characteristics, traditions, and traits, in order to procure the social and cultural integration of Mexico.

The modernisation of the country had included projects for the introduction of new agricultural technologies to improve farming and cropping processes; the exploitation of local natural resources by transnational corporations; the privatisation of environment capitals; and the expansion of national and international markets; resulting in different communities losing their territories and the natural resources for their own sustainable maintenance. This increased migration numbers as people moved to urban centres and/or the United States to find sustenance and work. The expansion of services, technologies, schools, and hospitals improved living conditions and life expectancy in the country but impacted the continuity of particular cultural characteristics and forms of living, mostly among the rural populations. *Indigenism* and the national plan operated on different levels, drastically changing the circumstances of daily life, and with it, the cultural processes and cultural identity that conformed the multicultural society of Mexico (Stavenhagen, 2014, 2001, 2001b; Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Harrison, 2013, p. 47; Perez Ruiz, 2004).

The policies surrounding *Indigenism* had the explicit intention of generating a shared national identity centred around the notion of 'mestizos'. Consequently, the discourses reduced all cultural and identity differences in the country through the idea of cultural miscegenation, influencing the creation and induction of narratives that presented biased descriptions of the history of the country. By linking the present of the country to the supposed glory of the pre-Hispanic past, the celebration of pre-Columbian societies was characterised for its disregard for contemporary cultural communities in Mexico (Stavenhagen, 2014, p. 85).



Figure 43. "Mestiza" and "Charro" (1945) lithographies by artist Carlos Merida. (Personal Archive, 2022).

However, the drastic changes generated by the advancement of modernisation and industrialisation in the nation eventually began to raise alarms over the disappearance of Indigenous and rural ways of living. By the 1960's the development of industry had accelerated the displacement of handicrafts as the dominant form of production of goods and mercantile products with factories replacing textile workshops and commercialisation drastically changing domestic production. The continuity of manual work and handmade crafts began to be considered threatened by the advancements of capitalism and industrialisation (Turok, 1988, p. 26).

The rapid changes and the exertion of external forces impacting all forms of organisation and lifestyles in Mexico was evident in textile culture, as the abandonment of garments and the loss of some of their original functions within communities was accompanied by the indifference of younger generations in learning the textile traditions and production techniques. The expanses of tourism, mass media, and commercialisation in previously remote areas of the country introduced new ideas, cultural elements, and forms of living - including Western notions over fashion and style consciousness - that prompted cultural deterioration and changes on local and regional levels.

Moreover, the public school system exerted pressure for the disuse of traditional attires, as schoolteachers arriving from outside the communities disapproved the ways of dressing, leading to the compulsory enforcement of uniforms around the country (Cordry, p. 16, 1968). Additionally, mass migration encouraged the loss of garments, particularly among Indigenous men searching for work in urban centres. Individuals did not want to become segregated by their dress - nor suffer from virulent discrimination and racism in the cities, since attires immediately evidenced their Indigenous or rural origins. As more men abandoned communities, the disuse of traditional costumes increased. However, the phenomenon was less obvious among women, who usually remained in their communities and/or the confines of domesticity, consequently being able to retain part of their dress (Cordry, p. 16, 1968; Turok, 2008, p. 10).

The arrival of external visitors, following improvements in the transport infrastructure and services that led to a boom in commercial trade and tourism, further restructured the daily life and social weave of communities. The textile culture and forms of dress were further affected, as artisans responded to the demands of an expanding tourist market as visitors intended to acquire a piece of local or 'national' culture. Moreover, the phenomenon influenced the use of attires in communities. According to Cordy & Cordy, Indigenous women from the Mixtec town of Pinotepa de Don Luis in Oaxaca, began adopting the use of aprons to cover their bare breast in order to feel less vulnerable to the stares and remarks of tourists and truck drivers arriving to the village (1968, p. 13).



Figure 44. "The Hug" (1962) photograph of women from Pinotepa de Don Luis wearing the wrap-around skirt, with and without apron to cover the breasts by Austrian photographer Ruth D. Lechuga (Fundación Ajaraca A.C, 2022).

The irruption of tourism and the introduction of national-led development projects into Indigenous and rural communities generated a series of complex problems, directly impacting the lives, realities, environments, and socio-economic and cultural systems of the population in Mexico. Functioning within an asymmetrical scenario, the State and all of its apparatuses, as well as tourists and the capitalist market, exerted both direct and implicit coercions over the lives of Indigenous and rural groups, eventually intensifying the concerns over the disappearance of the traditional ways of living in the country. The sense of uncertainty and risk in relation to the loss of Indigeneity and other customs, relating to the notions of cultural identity and authenticity, would enable the creation of projects for the promotion and conservation of cultural expressions. Encompassed into the idea of national cultural heritage, these processes enabled a generalised approach that considered certain cultural elements to transcend symbolical, physical, and political boundaries. The past, perceived as a vulnerable and disappearing resource, intrinsically related to identities and to the idea of multiculturalism had to be protected.

Although the projects of the Nation-State promoted the social transformation of natural economies and agrarian societies into manufacturing ones – by placing the idea of modernity as the main motor for expanding and generating economic wellbeing as part of political discourse – the legacy of nationalism and the political policies applied to achieve social cohesion further enabled the attribution of crafts with a double potential. Nationalist agendas endorsed crafts as both vindictive expressions of autochthonous, traditional cultures which represented and defined the culture of the entire Nation, while concurrently representing some of the material and productive possibilities that were able to increase income and the economic situation of its producers.

The influence of State intervention and pressure exerted to promote artisan activities – parallely encouraged by the acceleration of the newly created and accelerating craft market, plus the changes in economic systems heartened by industrialisation and the ideals associated to modernity – consequently affected textiles and the artisan trade. Textile artisans in Mexico began to organize in associations, as a mean to cope with the increasing demands of the market and the effects of foreign actors imposing and establishing criteria and standards based on systems that were external to the communities and their forms of economic, social, and cultural organization. Craftspeople began to increase production to obtain higher incomes and improve family finances, simultaneously innovating and diversifying textiles by introducing new materials, designs, and forms – ultimately changing the local functions and uses of certain expressions (Turok, 1998, p. 28).

## 7.2 Ideological domains: the systems of classification, interpretation, and value adscription of textiles

This chapter aims to delve on the existing strains between different forms and definitions surrounding textile domains in order to critically reflect on the origins, development, and articulation of dissimilar systems of understanding, interpretation, and representation that have conceptually separated textile crafts and the artisan trade from the realms of art, and of later, of fashion/design. These ontological discrepancies position the categorisation of both within a system of relationships assembled and influenced by institutions of power which organise and mediate the production of value and other adscriptions associated to the realms of material culture and the idea of cultural heritage.

The categorical deviations of value and meaning represent a fundamental point of tension when exploring some of the conundrums of this thesis, since the phenomenon of 'appropriation' is sustained by dissimilar experiences and insights preceded by questions over the categorisation, contextualisation, governing and ownership of objects. These correspond to the contexts and networks of social relationships that change throughout history in order to establish, regulate, and guide the understanding and appreciation of objects, as well as the production and circulation.

Discussions about the conception of art and crafts are increasingly abundant within different theoretical disciplines, including those on the fields of Art History and Art Criticism, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Sociology, and Anthropology, where a number of scholars have delved on the topic, analysing the inference of symbolic dimensions and linguistic devices used to understand, define, enunciate, and attribute meanings to things. However, this section will revolve around the examination of the social roles of art and crafts among Western and non-Western societies.

The complex dynamics through which textiles are intertwined – adding to the multiplicity of conceptualisations with which they are woven – has enabled their association to a variety of understandings. These places the objects in an intricate field of relationships and displacements in which values and meanings are constantly at change.

From a material perspective, the analysis of textiles reveals the cognitive and sociohistorical processes that have accompanied and shaped the development of humanity, individuals, and societies through time. Textiles contain a series of technical-functional aspects, including production processes and technologies, which further reveal the aesthetic and/or visual attributes relating to the performance of agency. In that sense, textiles can be understood as identity markers, additionally indicating the different levels of learning processes and the mastering of skills within specific contexts and historical periods.

Similarly, when regarded as cultural artefacts and/or objects of material culture, the intrinsic association of textiles to particular groups of people and cultural communities enables them to perform a variety of social and cultural uses and functions, responding to environmental circumstances, and the social dynamics that may be determined according to notions of ethnic and/or cultural affiliation. In this way, textiles can be contemplated as means for creative and emotional expression: textual forms which embody the stories and collective memories of a given group and/or the interior worlds of individuals. For this reason, the transmission and continuity of its forms and significances convey political potentials, as textile production may also be regarded as acts of cultural resistance and survival against external impositions, challenging dominant forces and hierarchies.

Furthermore, the conceptualisations of textiles can be complexified by their entrance to the marketplace. Within the economic domains, textiles can be recognized as resources for attaining income: as goods for economic and commercial exchange among people. Textiles can be re-signified and commodified throughout different markets and forms of consumption: produced and acquired to satisfy human basic needs for self-consumption, or for commercial purposes. Its changing values and characteristics also allow them to be considered as pieces of art, objects of luxurious consumption, and/or collectibles – depending on a series of factors including, the laws of supply and demand, the conditions of their production, and their meaningful adscriptions: their perceived aesthetic qualities, and/or their rarity, among many others. Textiles are constantly influenced by commercialisation: their circulation through different networks of exchange, and the impact of consumption trends (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Braudel, 1992; Barber, 1991, 1994; Wong on Soffer, 2000; Heyes, 2012; Gordon, 2013; Wilkinson-Weber & Ory DeNicola, 2016; Brown, 1970; Turok, 1976, 1988; Museo Textil de Oaxaca, 2014; Méndez González, 2018).

Broadly speaking, textiles reveal the threads discourse, and the knots and warps of narratives that thread and embroider innumerable adverbs and adjectives to the objects, generating with this, a complex mesh of conceptual entanglements, constant negotiations, and translocations – simultaneously influenced by their circulation, the intervention and mediation of actors, power relations, and their assignation with different and changing values.

Over Centuries, textiles in Mexico have been transformed through dynamic strategies of appropriation, experimentation, and reinterpretation; combining new materials, techniques, and designs, that have been historically and technically adapted from Indigenous knowledge, Hispanic colonial traditions, and the developments and trends surging in modern times. Therefore, placing value on textiles as objects or cultural expressions solely related to particular periods of history, geographical locations, social and ethnic constructions can be problematic. In this sense, the domains of material culture are constantly modified by both internal and external factors and dynamics (Lechuga, 1990; Turok, 1988, p. 25; de Ávila, 1997, p. 90).

Although textiles in Mexico tend to be regarded as objects that correlate to the static preservation of local traditions, researchers agree that the artefacts are characterised by distinctions and conceptualisations, appertaining to different discourses and forms of interpretation. Textiles represents a medium that connects to all forms of natural, social, and symbolic elements within a given group, within a given context; representing a juxtaposition of various features and factors which affect the human nature and its condition, further serving a



series of needs. Therefore, this complex scenario should be understood as the main framework under which this research has to be visualized and addressed, as textiles provide a vital, evolving medium to understand the intricacies of culture, and thus, the extent and forms of the relationships between places, people, and time, and the means by which these are created (Wilkinson-Weber & Ory DeNicola, 2016, p. 1; Turok, 1988, p. 19).

### 7.3 Art vs. Crafts: different histories, ideologies, and systems of validation

As exposed in the prior chapter, the complex and diverging history of textiles in Mexico has been integrated into radically different systems of appreciation and understandings, where the crafts – associated to the categories of 'fine crafts' and 'folk art' – have been essentially associated to notions of identity, tradition, authenticity, permanence, and cultural heritage; standing in direct antagonism to those objects which are considered expressions of art – and other related ideals, such as the modern and the aesthetic – responding to the formulation of conceptualisations and forms of representation that categorically separated, differentiated, and legitimised objects as detached domains.

Based on an historical vision, the most common categorization of crafts and of traditional textiles in the country tends to associate the expressions to imaginaries that connect the past with the present, and/or as objects that were generated through production systems originating before the global rise of capitalism. According to these essentialist and nationalist narratives, the textile culture of Mexico excludes any form of cultural change and exchange.

According to Shinner, the gradual perceptual divergence between arts and crafts began during the Renaissance, characterised by the ideals of Romanticism and the humanist visions perpetuated by Western thought. Although the spheres of art and culture describe a large conglomerate of material expressions, ways of thinking, behaviours, activities, and customs; the establishment of certain associations and values during the period would result in an increased interest over principles of originality and creativity, drastically impacting the attribution of principles, as well as the generalised understanding of objects and peoples in posterity (2001, p. 81).

After this period, commonplace imaginaries were extensively provided with particular modes for understanding, approaching, managing, and valuing objects and their creators. Therefore, the complex webs of human and material interrelations crossing time and space that conformed the spheres of 'art' and 'culture' were reduced, arranged, and separated into independent categories. According to Western canons, art represent an elevated form of creative expression and the inequitable expertise over material embodiment: attributes that are only conferred to the individuals considered artists by the system itself. Under this status, artists are regarded as creative geniuses, possessing free creative reigns – in addition to the superior skills and talents for manipulating materials – which allow the individuals to fully express and display their imagination, ideas, or feelings, as a form of conveying their 'higher-self' (Clowney, 2011, p. 310, Good, 2010; Becker, 1982).

The invention of the category of art – including fine arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, theatre, and dance) – was historically accompanied by the role of the artist, and its consideration as the ultimate, talented creator. Until the Renaissance, cooperative production had represented the norm for craft production in Europe with workshops conveying requests from the Church, the court, and the bourgeoisie. The construction of a different, modern image of the artist, gradually dissociated from the image of the artisan, as individual commissions began to emerge, altering the productive activities by interest and taste of the client. Art began to be considered a domain that provided aesthetic pleasure for decorative means, while trades and crafts were rendered as primarily functional. The aesthetic pretensions of art overshadowed its utility (Shiner, 2010, p. 81).

These definitory perspectives would result in the separation of artistic endeavours from those coming from communal origins – where skills and knowledge were shared and transmitted within a defined group to cover basic necessities. The internal creative processes of individuals began to be contrasted with the groups and traditions, eventually relating to the dimensions of culture and cultural identity, that were later generated according to geographical location and associated notions of cultural and ethnic identity (Metcalfe, 1997, p. 70).

Relevantly, the gradual separation between the domains of art and crafts was accompanied by the foundation of new institutions dedicated to academic training and specialisation – simultaneously in charge of dictating the canons and practices for artistic appreciation. The proliferation of new academies generated the formalization and specialization of artistic practices, raising the cultural prestige of artists over that of artisans, through means of institutionalization and legitimization. The formal shift transferred former popular characteristics previously assigned to artisans, into the figure of the artists, resulting in the portrayal of craftspeople as bearers of certain shared abilities, knowledges, and skills, while officially depicting artists as independent, individuals working under professional formation and unrestricted creative schemes.

Before their ultimate decomposition throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the qualities attached to craftspeople and the artists within the former system, revolved around a combination of notions: geniality, inspiration, innovation, imitation, freedom, and service. These influenced the attribution of "poetic characteristics" into the artist, while all of those "mechanical" features (bounded by skills, customary regulations, processes of imitation, and service) passed into the domains of craftsmanship. Genius and freedom became the superlative qualities separating the imaginative artist, concurrently portraying the artisan as a tradesperson, limited and dependent on productive routines and traditional practice. The signing of objects further established the general consciousness over the existence of individual artist-creators, enhancing the divide between forms of expertise (Shiner 2014, p. 164).

The divorce between the art and craft was additionally intensified by the emergence of the private activities of collecting, and the eventual development of Museums as institutions for the education of the population, with the spaces canonizing the artistic role, its

endeavours, and all of its creations. The act of collecting concerned the conscious preservation, value, and exchange of selected material forms by specific groups or individuals, although previous to the establishment of the institutions, objects had been collected in sporadic and fortuitous ways; their acquisitions being primordially founded on their aesthetical qualities as valuable pieces of art, novelties, or as curiosities coming from extraneous or distant lands. Thus, the act of collecting created categories for the assembling of the objects, functioning through an arbitrary and ramified system of symbols and values (Clifford, 1988, p. 221; Lidchi, 2013, p. 128).

Moreover, the French Revolution had resulted in the isolation of works of art into spaces for their conservation, in an attempt to save any form associated to monarchical reign from popular defacing. The development of the museum as a site for aesthetic contemplation, freed objects from their contextual boundaries, encouraging the sense of autonomy in the arts and among the artists. Additionally, the establishment of new institutions – music concert halls, rooms for literary criticism – began to shape a new category of expressions, encompassing what is recognised as the 'fine arts' (Shiner 2010, p. 256).

Through this process, the figure of the artist underwent a transition from the old patronage system of creation to that of direct contact to sellers through the open market. The artistic endeavours had been previously sponsored and commissioned by rich patrons to decorate specific private spaces. However, the development of the incipient art market, enabled artists to produce in advance, offering their creations to a much larger audience (included anonymous buyers), that ultimately influenced the perceived autonomy of the creative artistic process. Once more, unlike the artisan, the artist began to be moulded as a free creative entity that produced without following established norms nor traditional formulas (Shiner 2010, p. 184). Moreover, the rise of the art market further motivated the economic interests among creators of objects, since objects in the spheres of the fine arts began to reach higher prices than those of handicrafts (Shiner, 2010, p. 34; Good, 2010, p. 45).

Eventually, with the diffusion of Kantian ideals over aesthetics – the notion of disinterested contemplation, free from reasoning nor concepts – gave place to the principles of aesthetic contemplation, posing that beauty was above all, a matter of pleasure without interest (Kant, 1992, p. 128). Consistent with the construes of the time, aesthetes began to raise the idea that aesthetic taste did not represent a democratic virtue, but a feature that was only available to the educated minorities. This implied that the general public had to learn and adopt an aesthetic and disinterested attitude towards art. The reverence of artistic objects placed them on a category distinguishable from that of common objects, increasing the perceived differences between the arts and crafts domains. By the end of the Century, the separation between the two had reached an established preconception on the public, as the criteria that separated types of objects further divided the perceptions over their producers.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century would represent a determining period in the enhancement of the artist and its image, while artisans and other trades began to be degraded, declining under the pressure of the Industrial Revolution and its technological advancements. Some artisan trades would survive the industrial expansion, supported by the emergence of arts and crafts schools: official institutions in charge of teaching the necessary skills for the creation of the new decorative/artistic forms. Although the production of some everyday objects became irrelevant due to the industrialization of merchandise, other objects lost their specific social and functional utilities, transitioning to the level of art (Shiner, 2012, p. 286).

By the middle of the Century, European museums had created the category of "applied decorative arts" as a form that would determine the most refined artisan creations. The abundance of Museums and galleries that opened their doors at the time to house artistic objects contributed to formation of particular tastes around certain objects. Throughout its evolution, the *museum* had been characterized by its private and excluding nature, being only accessible to intellectual elites among members of the nobility, the monastic communities, academics, and editorial publishers. However, humanist notions over the pedagogic utility of objects, as well as the collector's senses of civic duties towards their communities, resulted in an expansion of its restrictions and audiences in the Enlightenment. Works of art were seen as creations of the human mind, rather than the product of manual tasks, that were revered for their aesthetic attributes, favoured by the configurations of specific audiences, and further seen as a mean to educate the public. This encouraged the appreciative notions of the category of "fine arts" (Findlen, 1989, p. 72).

Moreover, the categorial separation between objects of art and objects of material culture was further widened through the particular relationships and dynamics that surged since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century between Western and non-Western civilisations – as a process that was intimately linked to the colonisation processes. Prior to the establishment of Museums, objects had been collected in sporadic and fortuitous ways; their acquisitions being primordially founded on their aesthetical qualities as valuable pieces of 'art', 'exotic novelties', or as 'curiosities' coming from extraneous or distant lands. The artefacts that had served a purpose within specific geo-territorial contexts and other cultural forms beyond Europe, began to be contrasted through the category of the 'ethnographic', as the of objects that were created by 'the Others' – the groups of people or cultures which were different to European societies, and thus, considered as 'exotic', 'primitive' or 'savage'. These demarcation of frontiers between human groups and their objects, followed an objectivists perspective, shaped by the *etic* voice of external researchers that generated inventories of cultural markers and stereotypes in order to pinpoint the specificities of different ethnic groups (Lidchi, 2013, p. 128).

However, the objects collected during European colonial interventions – originally found in cabinets of curiosities, science, and ethnographic Museums – would begin to enter the domains of the art museum, influenced by the rise of the Avant-garde artistic movement that found inspiration in objects coming from "primitive worlds". The European fascination towards any "uncivilized" objects, enhanced the polarity of perceptions towards objects of art and culture (Clifford, 1988, p. 192).

By the 1930's a number of scholars began expanding on the divergences, determining criteria to distinguish both spheres, based on the planning and processes of execution for the pieces. The observations suggested that the artisan knew the result of his work in advanced,

requiring solely of the technical knowledge to achieve the desired results; while the artist ignored the final form of the piece, remaining open to unforeseeable changes during the entire creative process. These reflections implied that craftspeople solely employed mechanical and repetitive activities, while artist were determined by unbounded creative freedom.

The factors that drove the emergence of the modern art system were enhanced by the development of the art industry, specialisation, and a market for the production and commercialisation of objects which were considered the product of artistic merit, and whose value – independent from their function – relied on the sole purpose of displaying their aesthetic qualities. Requiring of the disinterested contemplation of the items by its consumers, art became a realm related to economic status, class, education, and other subjective notions such as beauty, luxury, and taste (Bourdieu, 1984). All of these factors, developing gradually through time, would establish a system of its own – the 'art system' – used to classify, regulate, and validate itself according to its own criteria and standards.

The rise of the 'art system' would further mark the historical division between fashion – conceptualised as a social phenomenon regulated by constant and controlled change of style – and the 'ethnic' – as a contrary phenomenon built around the notions of tradition, permanence in time, and cultural heritage (Kawamura, 2005. p. 7). As a Western system of organisation sustained by its own values and historical experiences, the categorical division would determine what would be defined as ethnic: the construction of identity markers to define those who were alien to the West. This was accompanied by the generation of categories that would be employed to refer to styles related to European fashion forms and associated with colonialism that schematized identity markers to construct the idea of '*oriental*', '*african*', '*ethnic*', or '*exotic fashion*'. Built in contraposition to Western perspectives, the sensitivities would associate fashion with the same notions prevailing in the 'art system', while decontextualising the local and regional cultural systems that corresponded to ethnic groups.

The Western discourses and systems of interpretation began to utilise all of its social mechanisms – catwalks, photographs, magazines – for the representations of the 'ethnic', providing and disseminating constructs that were not originally defined by the cultural value of the object within its group of origin. Instead, the system created the division based on: (1) the aesthetic expression associated with the merchandise – the properties of the object itself; (2) the communication boundaries that restricted the circulation of the ethnic objects in certain commercial circuits; and (3) the historicity that surrounded the performativity of the "other" within the framework of the historical project that produced it (Mora Silva, 2018, p. 95)

Before the industrial revolution, all means of production had been artisanal. Broadly speaking, this referred to the peculiar ways of using instruments to produce objects for consumption, as well as different forms of relationships, that mediated the forms of production, distribution, and exchange. Artisan work corresponded to a pre-industrial era in which the production of goods was carried in contexts of different social relationships, dependant on the organization of the work process and its types. In this sense, artisans dominated the entire production process, the sourcing of raw materials, the tools and works spaces; further deciding over the time, rhythm, and exposure of the product, maintaining different relationships with colleagues and clients, which were different to those of the factory worker (Novelo, 1993).

The advances of industrialization and capitalism, resulting in the dawn of modernity, initiated a series of processes to dismantle hegemonic paradigms and practices, affecting the axis between the 'arts' and 'culture' universe. The rupture between arts and craftsmanship influenced by critics and aesthetes of previous decades, found opposition in a number of currents during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century which attempted to unite both spheres. This disruption on the economic, political, and cultural organization of the world had introduce the category of art of as a distinct system, emerging and evolving through specialized means of production and distinct aesthetic qualities, based on the principles and standards of the West. The artisan, as well as the peasant, used to refer to a different class of workers prior to the entry of capital (Acha, 1988). The notion of classical crafts, associated with feudal European societies, had corresponded to a sector of specialists carrying different trades, who produced for the rest of the population, and who were mostly located within urban areas. Thus, the development of the artisan figure as a specialized tradesperson, increased the number of workshops and the creation of a particular market, prefiguring the introduction of wages that regulated economic relationships and manufacturing process, to create new forms of social relationships (Novelo, 1993).

However, the influence of the "Arts & Crafts" movement gave rise to the idea of 'fine crafts', as a novel category that considered objects of material culture and its trades as valuable expressions of creative virtuosity, comparable to objects of artistic brilliance, due to their painstaking laboriousness and characteristic aesthetics. This revaluation process instigated an intermingling of new appreciative philosophies and criteria for value adscriptions, as a reaction to industrialization and to the modern ways of living that had replaced manual work. Revealing a philosophy towards social utopia that involved the "regeneration" of man through crafts, the principles that estimated expressive and/or creative genius and talent were changed (Crane, 1893; Turok, 1988, p. 24; Clowney, 2011, p. 315).

Likewise, in Europe, the rise of the Bauhaus movement suggested a restoration of the social purpose of art, encouraging the union between function and design in the creation of everyday objects (Gropius, 1919). This allowed the dialectic contradiction between craftsmanship and industry to be overcome, creating a new type of object that presented the qualities of both forms of production, giving rise to what is now regarded as 'industrial design'. In this sense, both currents and their philosophies changed heterogenic dichotomies, marking an amalgamation between beauty and utility, between art and crafts, crafts and industry. Highlighting manual dexterity as a valuable quality, and the conjunctions between the previously defined categories – art, craft, and industry – the historical events encouraged a disregard of the objects metaphysical attributions, revaluating and democratising the objects, its creators, and its uses, in pro of a motto of art and crafts in service of society and the State.

The influence of these processes, disseminating throughout the newly formed European and American Nation-States, further transformed the appreciation and valuing of objects. Originally produced within peasant contexts with the intent of satisfying self-consumption and exchange necessities, crafts began to be sought and collected by Museums, commercial galleries, and private collectors, as manifestations

that depicted the distinctive qualities of nationally bounded creativity. The objects that had been originally created within a system of natural economy, possessing idiosyncratic plastic qualities, produced, and used for utilitarian purposes within specific ecological and cultural territories, swiftly began to be regarded as objects of 'popular art' or 'folk art' (Turok, 1988, p. 27; Clowney, 2011, p. 315).

Since the reappraisal of crafts simultaneously supported the social and revolutionary processes leading to the establishment of Republics, the objects began to suddenly acquire a status that embodied the nationalist and proletariat fights against monarchies and colonial regimes. Under this new socio-political and economic perspectives, material culture became partisan symbols and mediums to enhance values, while extrapolating people's local cultural manifestation against those imposed by force or power entities (Turok, 1988, p. 27).

The later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, would testify an upsurge in the presentation and displaying of crafts in Museums and galleries as objects of art. However, this trend tended to disregard the cultural minorities that had created the objects – with curators and art professionals generating narratives that focused solely on the perceived similarities between the art and cultural worlds. This circumstances further materialised into a new phenomenon, resulting in the appearance of stores that resembled traditional art galleries, presenting, and offering a combination of artistic and craftsmanship objects, with both utilitarian and aesthetic values. Consequently, this caused the rise of a niche market that provided middle-class with objects for the purpose of decorating interiors (Shiner, 2010, p. 375-378).

It is at this point in history, that the gradual division of artists and artisans reached a symbiotic relationship, blurring the discursive ideologies that had historically separated and divided the artistic and cultural worlds. Nevertheless, the majority of the categorical distinctions still remain, supported by the same institutions that further solidified and dictated the divisions. The expansion of the borders of the modern world system, consummated by the internationalization of fashion brands, made it possible for some of the ethnic markers – especially those sensitive to aesthetics – to experience a reorganization that resulted from the new uses and appearances of ethnic objects in different scenarios.

#### 7.4 The trajectories of objects: the 'art-culture' system

Overall, we can assume that the artisan production is related to sociocultural, economic, and political contexts, as a productive and cultural activity surging from daily activities and experienced realities. As such, the elaboration of material expressions corresponds to their multifaceted and dynamic participation in the cultural contexts and experiences of different groups – whether described as Indigenous, mestizo, rural, or urban – emerging as a vehicle for dialogue between the objects and the members of the community, and the consumers who acquire them. As such, the artisan object, placed on a distant field from the context of Western artistic traditions, responds to different systems and foundations, separated by the divergences in the processes of production, reception and distribution, aesthetic qualities, and uses (Stromberg, 1985).

Even though the present-day characteristics of the artist and the craftsman are often interchangeable, certain differences still persist, underlined by obvious distinctions in their formal traits, functions, purposes, consumers, and markets. In some cases, certain characteristics may remain indiscernible, detached from the materiality of the objects, but defined by the observer's personal interpretation and/or purpose for consumption. According to the considerations of García Canclini (1982), on regards to the particular contexts of Latin America, the position of crafts and the artisan trade – particularly those stemming from Indigenous communities – are considered a cultural and economic manifestations, embedded by double inscriptions. These relate to the historical processes that link the expressions back to pre-Columbian societies; and to the structural processes that currently function within the logic of capitalism – and its dependence to it – enabling their hybrid aspects. It is within these fields that the transformation of functions can be located, as their original uses for self-consumption have been impacted by deficiencies in the agricultural sectors, the demands of consumers, the economic stimulus of tourism, and the promotional policies of the State (García Canclini, 1982, p. 91).

Crafts, regarded as both a productive activity and the objects of consumption, can be characterised as expressions containing different cultural and historical aspects, placing them beyond the characteristics of merchandise circulating in different commercial spaces. However, by influence of the market, crafts can adapt to satisfy the needs of the artisan, and the tastes of a diversity of anonymous consumers (i.e. purchases of 'typical', 'curious' souvenirs). In this sense, craft production is characterised by continuity, with objects undergoing changes in their biographies, as they adjust according to the supply and demand of the societies producing and consuming them (García Canclini, 1982; Novelo, 1976; Turok, 1988).

Therefore, in order to extend the criterion of crafts beyond the shape and production of the objects, social and cultural contexts have to be fully examined by taking into consideration the intentions of the creator, replicating the phenomenon by which the artist's discursive abilities represent a fundamental factor for the creation of value and other ontological criterion<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, the definite criterion to distinguish a objects and things is embedded by the existence of "worlds" and the theories that support it in order to make it possible. Similarly, the departure from reality in the depiction of imagery in art, implied that meaning could only be constituted with references to ideological discourses. Since both the artistic and artisan objects are not created in isolation but through social and historical contexts, both the creators and the observers require of codes and parameters – not explicitly found in the pieces – to recognise the domain from where

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<sup>13</sup> A similar approach can be exemplified by the conceptual and pop art movements that surged during in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, through which the artist's own proclamations sufficed to deem common objects as pieces of art (i.e. Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades). The lack of representational forms, marking a categorical independence from the real world, characterised by abstraction and its evolution, meant that art forms had to be sustained by narratives, requiring of theoretical conjectures to properly constitute the virtues and terrains of artistic creations.

they surge (Danto, 1964, p. 571-584).

Academic and political literature addressing different forms of material culture and their symbolic values accounts for a number of paradoxes relating to the differences in the contexts, production, means for acquisition, and distribution between objects. Therefore, when addressing the topic of crafts, the perspectives borrowed from different theorists focusing on the presence, and trajectory of objects of material culture as collectibles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century, provides an opportunity to comprehend the objectification of cultural differences.

Although the conceptions of art/design/fashion and of objects of material culture are considered to stand in opposing poles according to Western canons – sometimes accommodating cultural expressions from certain societies into the ideals of art or denigrating them to the level of manual trades – these dissociations are only evidenced under certain contexts, as imposed by the discourses and narratives that are sustained by official institutions. Although objects of material culture are intrinsically related to their places of origin and to the people that produce them, and thus, associated to notions of cultural identity, objects can still be relocated into spaces destined to exhibit or assemble collectibles of artistic merit and aesthetic contemplation – without losing their status as referents of cultural collectivities. This complexifies the conceptual reformulations historically used to define and arrange the relationships influencing the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' in the modern world.

As previously mentioned, the interest over the 'art of others' promoted by Western powers, can be traced back to the artistic avant-gardes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in association to the deployment of colonial expansion and the expropriation of human resources and material goods that characterised Imperial domination. As a result of the processes, the complex dynamics of identity formation and othering, European colonialism encouraged the collection, acquisition, the management and hierarchization of objects of material culture coming from distant lands. The process supplied objects and groups of people with specific characteristics, created and defined through Western perspectives. The trajectories of artefacts and objects rendered as expressions of material culture, classified, and conceptualized as symbolic goods, was influenced by their consideration as examples of 'primitive' or 'exotic' art.

The complex dynamics between the intersecting domains and phenomenon affecting the understanding of textiles can be understood through the 'art-culture' system, delineated by James Clifford in his essay "On Collecting Art and Culture" published in the book "The Predicament of Culture" (1988). The work sought to reveal another path for understanding the complex relationships between the fields of culture and arts – which can be superimposed, albeit separated by different arguments and practices. Antagonistic stances between the fields of art and culture – as historically defined by Western canons, and the Academic influence of the Arts and Social Sciences – has to be rejected. Consequently, the disconnection between the categories can be assumed as dynamic and shifting, allowing for the generation of four related terms, that constructed into horizontal and vertical axes can form semantic zones. These are: (1) the zone of authentic masterpieces; (2) the zone of authentic artifacts; (3) the zone of inauthentic masterpieces; (4) the zone of inauthentic artifacts (Figure 9).

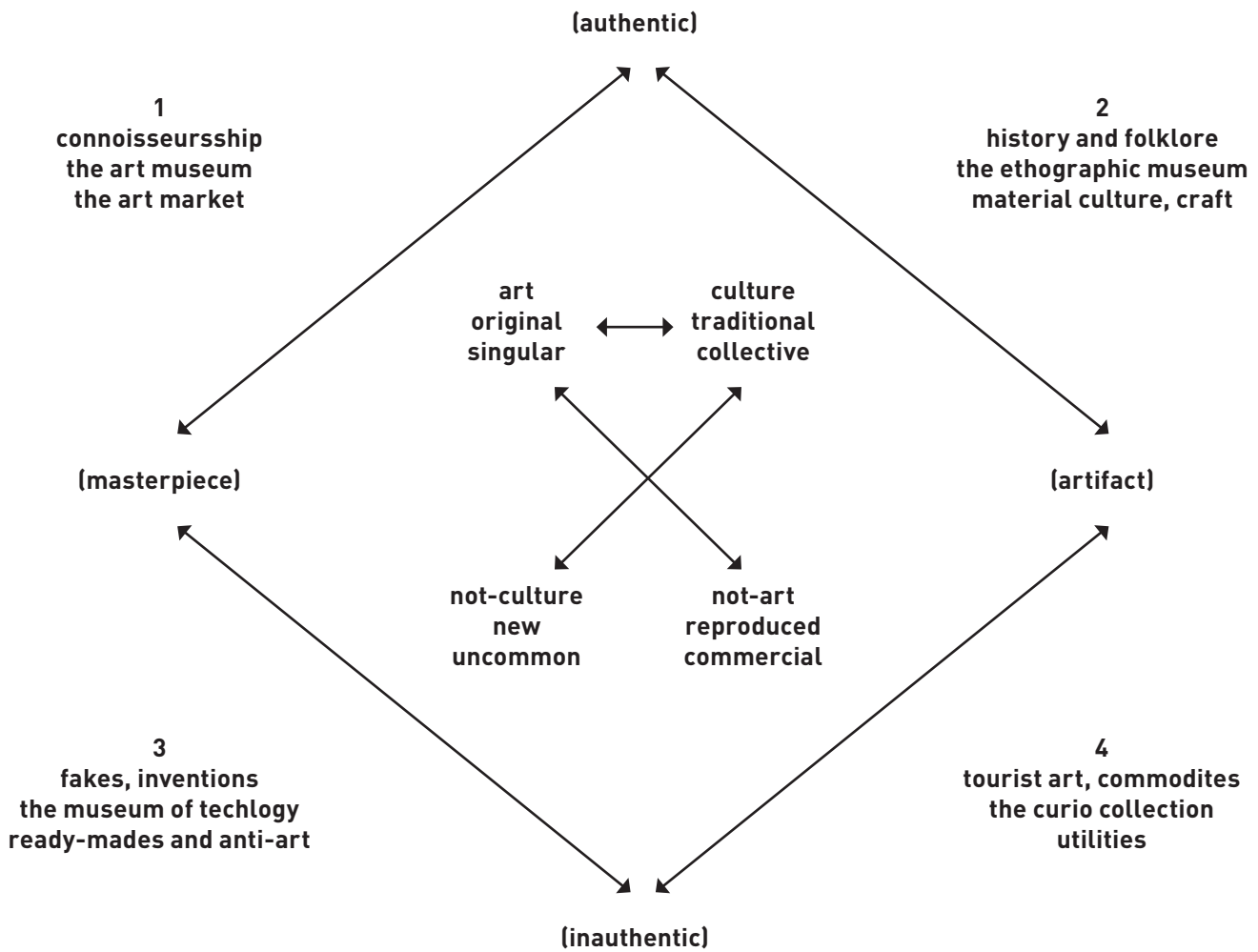


Figure 45. *The art-culture system*. By James Clifford (1988). In: *The Predicament of Culture*. p. 224.

Clifford argues that the Western systems that classified artistic objects and any other related phenomena between two opposing poles – the artistic and the cultural – can be broadened and subdivided, according to their context and circulation, and to their evaluation through their assignation and classification with relative values. This implies that movements can occur from the bottom to the top – based on notions of authenticity; and from the right to the left – based on their appraisal as masterpieces or artifacts.

Revolving between this axis's, the circulation of objects has plenty of movements. Crafts, as objects of material culture, can be considered among the realms of the cultural artifacts (zone 2). However, some of them can be considered as expressions of great value and/or as a rarity. In such cases, their value may shift depending on their status and their demand. Moreover, objects that are considered at risk of disappearing, can be reevaluated in order to enter the domains of singularity; selected through the same mechanisms originally established by the arts market to value them. Adscription with values of rarity, are usually provided by experts and/or collectors, as mere demand or appreciation could be provided by more simplistic aesthetic principles. However, these values, as well as the definitions of what is considered beautiful and/or interesting tend to change rapidly over different periods of time.

The conceptualisation of crafts as pieces of art, moving from one zone 4 to zone 1, represents a promotion of status, by adding plus-value in the market. This is justified in Clifford's work by presenting examples of historical or cultural artifacts that have been promoted to the 'fine art' status – that is as masterpieces – in the present. Regarded as singular, and/or selected on the basis of the principles of artistic genius and/or for their inventive creativity, such objects can be widely found in ethnographic collections, as well as in art galleries and museums around the world. This is usually the result of political and economic strategies for validation.

Further examples of the circulation, further includes commercial objects exhibited in museographic institutions dedicated to the displaying of decorative arts and technologies; or in other instances which arrange and display them, according to more formalistic rather than contextual principles. Similar examples can be seen when commodities in zone 4, become rare period pieces, and thus, their demand as collectibles increases within the art market.

Moreover, objects from zone 4, created as commodities by non-Western people, usually migrate between the status of "tourist art", and other forms of commercial artistic and creative strategies for economic survival. Circumscribed by notions of authenticity or ascribed with national values which may render them as traditional or goods of collective interest, their status will however remain out of the reaches of the art market due to their perception as commercial – and thus, unoriginal – objects.

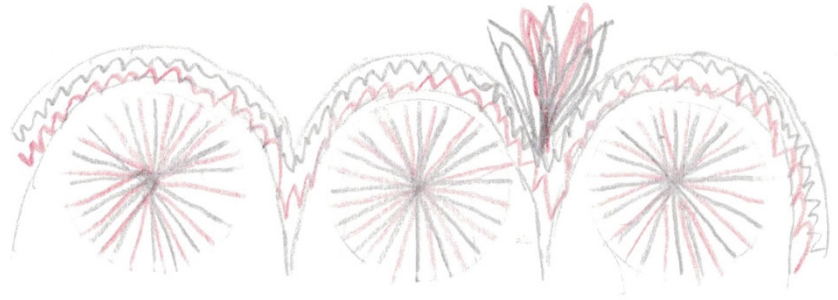
In addition to demonstrating the construction and often contradictory divisions between the cultural and artistic spheres and its values, Clifford broadens the understanding of the system by revealing the exclusion and marginalization of various objects and/from emerging contexts. This includes objects of secular and religious origins, which are valued depending on their origins, contexts, and functions, including objects considered 'folk art'.

This Post-Modern interpretation provides a precedent to think more broadly on the dynamics encompassing the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation', allowing the examination to trace complex experiences, as well as competing, dialogical transformations that characterise the circulation and exchange of objects (and people and ideas) in the contemporary world.

Altogether, the approach of James Clifford offers a framework for delineating the means of differentiation, generalisations, interests, and negotiations in the relationships and circulation between cultural and artistic goods. This analysis supports a number of debates in the fields of Art and Anthropology, further serving as a mean to comprehend the relevance, significance, and complexity of human production, when located within the arenas of creativity. Moreover, this emphasises the need to analyse the categories of art and the traditional, through a critical and relational approach that considers the practices, processes, differences, and similarities converge in the production and circulation of material culture; as well as the number of narratives originating in educational institutions, museums, art and design schools and universities; and the state through public policies, which are inserted in order to classify different types of objects.







## **SECTION 4**

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### **Case Studies**





## Chapter 8 The *xaam nixuy* from Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec Content Analysis Case Study 1

The following chapter presents a brief description of the geo-cultural location and histories delineating the first individual case study, in order to locate the agents and objects involved in the *xaam nixuy* 'appropriation' controversy. Fundamentally, this had the purpose of positioning all the narratives - the data and information for this research - within the specific territories and cultural characteristics defined and organised by the participants themselves to evidence the cultural complexities and multitude of dynamics presented in the case.

This examination addressed the objects of artisan trade and the figure of the artisan in order to identify the who and the what implicated in the controversies. This intended to delve on the primordial relationship between artisans and the textiles crafts they create, to reveal the factors influencing and modelling the dynamics and relationships between creators, objects, users, and consumers, across different sites. The analysis of the data enquired on the association that the actors of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec maintain with the *xaam nixuy* in order to reveal on the perceptions and actions that impacted the evolution of the cases. This was organised by first presenting an examination of the object in relation to the figure of the artisan and its role, the processes and knowledges involved in the production of textile crafts, as well as the histories of the object and relations to the contexts in which they are acquired and used. This content analysis explored the relationship of both objects and actors with other social entities, across different sites, as a contextualization that was presented throughout time spans, in an attempt to locate the development of the changing relationships between agents and objects, as they enter and re-enter spaces, changing their perceptions over time.

The biography of objects was designed to reconstruct the cultural profile of the textile. As previously mentioned, a variety of methodological tools (semi-structured interviews, observation, etc.) were applied to collect the information, which primordially revolved around axes that explore the conditions of material, symbolic, functional and/or aesthetic qualities of the objects; the economic transactions involved in their chain of production and consumption; and the social relations that are articulated as the objects circulate from the past to the present, and from site to site. These tools were used to observe the interactions and displacements of the *xaam nixuy* within diverse temporal and social dimensions, through timelines.

Subsequently, this process was also used to analysis the 'appropriation' controversy, as a singular event that impacted and changed peoples' lives. The examination intended to encompass the controversy as an exceptional episode that altered the social conditions and relationships that involved the *xaam nixuy* and the community of Tlahuitoltepec over a period of time. Regarded as a unit of analysis, the reconstruction of the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' served as an indicator of social impact, evidencing changes in the practicing of routines and established behaviours. By affecting people and objects, the influence of the event altered the perceptions, behaviours, actions, relationships, definitions, classifications, interpretations, and approaches to the topic itself. Moreover, this exercised served to highlight the consequences of the controversies, as well as the internal interests and needs of the individuals and the community that were directly concerned.

### 8.1 Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec: Location of fieldwork

The first attempts to contacting artisans from Tlahuitoltepec were carried through the use of social media (Facebook), serving as a convenient tool that allowed me to connect with a number of artisans and brands before my arrival in the community. The tool represented a starting point to organize successive encounters with the participants for this thesis, further granting me with initial impressions over the controversy and the willingness of the community and participants to share their knowledge and experiences with the events.

The first meeting was organized in the city of Oaxaca, where I met Tla1 (male, 30-39, Anthropologist) from Tlahuitoltepec, who along teaching at the University, runs a newly established family brand dedicated to the production and commercialisation of the traditional blouses. After discussing the purposes of the research, Tla1 began to share his personal and family history, delving on their experiences during and after the 'appropriation' controversy. Tla1 also introduced me to the formalities required for external researchers when entering the community, and further provided me with the names of artisans and other key agents that could contribute to the research.



Figure 46. Geographical location of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec in the State of Oaxaca. (Sierra Iracheta, 2022).

The journey to Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec involved a 3-hour ride on a collective taxi, zigzagging over the mountains of the Sierra Norte range. Among other things, the driver explained to me that the town named *Xaamkëjxp* in *Ayuujk* (Mixe), is known by the locals as "cold place" or "place among the clouds". After parking in the town centre, the driver directed me to "La Cuarta Estación" hotel and to the Municipal building, where I had an appointment with the Municipal President at the time, Leon Díaz Perez, to introduce myself. After completing the procedures and explaining the objectives and processes for the research, access to the community was formally granted. Noticeably, as a stranger to the community, I could notice that any initial interaction with people were first met with curiosity, followed by a sense of suspicion and untrustworthiness when the research was mentioned. Once I had made clear that my visit had been welcomed by the authorities, people opened up and actively engaged with me.



Figure 47. Image of the town square and municipal building of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

The community of Tlahuitoltepec is part of the Indigenous Normative Systems, a legal framework that recognizes political plurality in the election of municipal authorities through both the regimes of political parties and the Indigenous normative system (previously known as "Uses and Customs"), recognising both municipal and agrarian authorities. This system implies the participation of all members of the community with all of the decision-making processes, through the Community Assembly, involving the municipal authorities, the Council of Elders, and the Council of Principals. Furthermore, the community is socially organised by means of *tequio*, a traditional form of communal work intended to satisfy communal needs, synthesising the cultural values of solidarity and social welfare through compulsory but temporal, free collaborative work.

The town centre of Tlahuitoltepec is composed by the main square, surrounded by the Municipal buildings, the food market, the Church, a roofed area - serving as the town hall, concert venue and the market on Sundays - and an open-air basketball court. A couple of murals, located on one side of buildings presented visual references to the nature and the textiles of Tlahuitoltepec. However, after a couple of hours familiarizing myself with the surroundings and observing people, it became evident that the blouses and any other traditional garments were absent from people's attires.

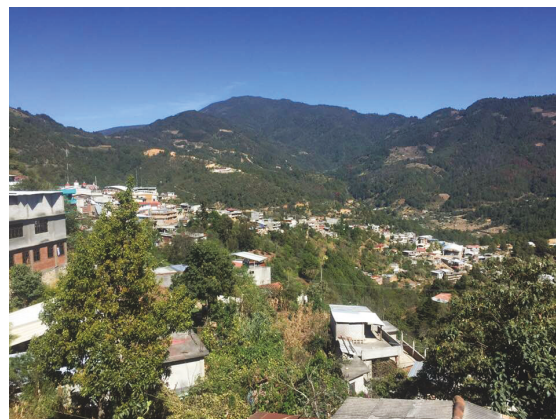


Figure 48. Panoramic view of the village of Tlahuitoltepec, perched on the mountains. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).



Figure 49. Examples of mural art depicting the *xaam nixuy*, and its traditional designs. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

## 8.2 The *xaam nixuy*: an Ayuujk object of material culture

The identification of the objects of material culture involved in the 'cultural appropriation' controversies represented one of the key elements of this research, since according to the theoretical perspectives, the interactions between objects and people reveal the number of actors, factors and behaviours that influence the cultural, political, and economic dimensions shaping the polemics and their development through different sites and periods of time.

Following this underlying premise, the research was able to identify the *xaam nixuy* as the man-made object, produced, used, and purchased in Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, which according to the participants, became the subject matter of a number of 'appropriation' controversies since 2015. The *xaam nixuy* reflected the beliefs and understandings of the participants - both as individuals and as members of the community at large - over the materiality, function, and purposes of the object, as well as its construction as an expression of material culture and cultural heritage.



Figure 50. Example of the *xaam nixuy*, worn by one of the participants of this thesis. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).



Figure 51. Close up of the embroidered motifs of the *xaam nixuy*. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

When initially asked over the significance of the *xaam nixuy*, participants responded:

"All the cultural elements that give meaning to community life are somehow impregnated in the blouse. That is the reasons why they are there" – (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

"We occupy it as a community... Our countrymen work it... We conceive it as a community tool, a community heritage. People who wear it, don't turn it into a capital company... It is how we conserve [our culture]... It is everything that surrounds us, what still moves us as people. The blouse is one of the important elements where it is reflected. It encompasses the vision we have with nature" – (T1a3, 25 February 2020)

The first impressions evidenced the relevance of the blouse as an object linked to the community, exposing different levels of relationships between social actors, ancestors, and the natural environment. Succinctly, the interviews highlighted the importance of the *xaam nixuy*'s embroidery and ornamentation in the construction of meaning, with participants concentrating on describing the graphic contents and meanings enclosed by the *xaam nixuy*:

"In the times of my mother, my grandmother, sewing and embroidering was inspired. They captured the elements of nature, the river, sun, flowers, everything that gave them protection. Here, a lot of importance is given to the maguey plant because it produces pulque. For us pulque is fundamental. When we first arrive in nature, a baby is offered pulque on the third day... That is what is first offered by nature with the arrival of the new being. That is why it is so important. It is expressed, it was manifested by our great-grandparents since years ago. That is precisely how they shaped our thoughts as a people, as a community, as Tlahuitoltepec, all in relation to our Mother Earth..." – (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"The motifs on the blouse, of course, provides the sense of identity. We have the sun, the foot path. All which synthesizes, in the embroidered motifs, the community life" – (Tla1, 24 February 2020)

"In it [the embroidered motifs] the life that we have is reflected. For example, that we are between mountains, that's what the arches mean. The sun is reflected in the flowers, the maguey is a pulquera. That is why it is embroidered. What it is nature" – (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"All I know is that what is embroidered [in the *xaam nixuy*] is the flora of Tlahui. The maguey, because that is where the sacred drink comes from, the drink that we use in each event we have. The sun that looks like flowers, the foot path, the mountains..." (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"I tell you about the daisy. Many people say, it's the sun... but here in the streets, there is a plant that is used [to prevent] diarrhoea, a plant for more common medicinal use... That flower is called the *tuu 'paajt* [translated into "street broom", "from the road"]. The [flower] motif is very similar. It has a little yellow inside, and the flower is like this, like the daisy, with little sticks [petals] but white..." – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"It means many things, because according to what they told me, everything has its meaning. For example, the sun rises from the mountain, that is why the mountain is on the blouses. The maguey gives pulque in the upper part, and in the lower part, it also gives mezcal. So, the maguey has its meaning here. The zigzag means that they are the footpaths, because before there were no roads, nothing" – (Tla5, 26 February 2020)

"Before it was more about capturing the figure of the mountains, before it was much about capturing the maguey, below [in the lower fringe of the blouse], which occurs in the lower zones [of the mountains], from where the mezcal is extracted. Then a little bigger maguey from where the pulque is extracted, that occurs in the upper areas [of the mountains]. Then there is a representation, the wheels, that is like the sun. They are like the basic principles... The arch, which represents the church, the door of the church. Even the door of authority. Almost always the authority had that door, right now it is square, [because] architects made it squared. Before it is like the way to capture the meaning, the elements. What it means for the community" – (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

"I went to interview one of the older men [artisan]... And he mentioned to us that he was very drunk. He drank mezcal, pulque, everything. He was always drunk, and he was always working drunk. It occurred to us to say that maybe he put the pulque, the maguey plant, for that reason. That occurred to us. I don't know what crossed his mind" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

General understandings of the *xaam nixuy* were explained through the analysis of the graphic components contained in it, as the aesthetic aspects of the garment were related to symbolic representations of the biocultural heritage of Tlahuitoltepec. Some of the characteristic visual elements of the garment and their name in ayuujk were enlisted by the participants, including: *pijj* – flowers; *xëw ok* – the sun or daisy flower; *kojpk* – mountains; *tsääjts* – maguey plant; *nëäj* – water; *patuu'* – foot path; and *tä'äky xuy* – embroidered braid or 'chorizo'.



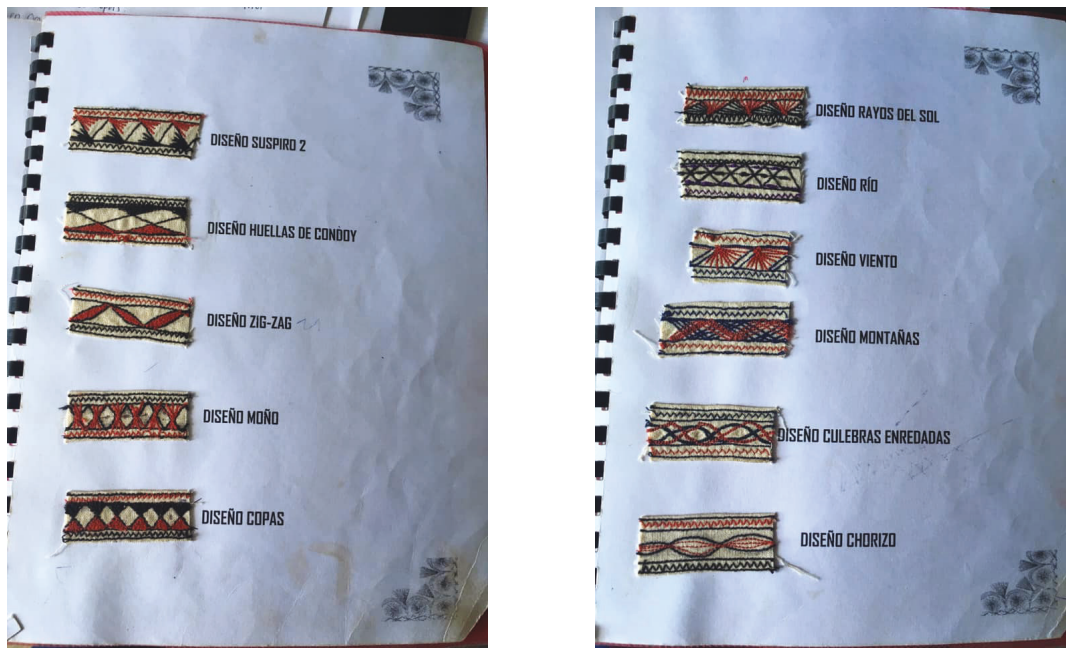


Figure 52. Embroidery sampler with motifs from Tlahuitoltepec. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).

In this sense, it is implied that the garment reflects the *ayuujk* Indigenous worldview in which biodiversity and culture are considered indivisible, representing an integral part of the holistic wellbeing of the people and community of Tlahuitoltepec. Data from the interviews reveals that the graphic content relates to different aspects of the social life within a natural environment, from which a variety of cultural traditions and relationships emerge, including the use of the maguey plant for the production of sacred drinks used for communal events and religious ceremonies, the use of endemic flora for practices of traditional medicine, the presence of the mountains as religious entities, etc. In this sense, the research implies that the embroidery of the *xaam nixuy* provides a mean to express the cosmovision and interpretations of the world from the *ayuujk* perspective and particular contexts.

Albeit general understandings were spread among the participants, individual information further included the motivations and inspiration of artisans for creating and applying graphic embroidered motifs. Some of the artisans that participated recalled:

"I really liked being in the mountains. I would sit in the shade, see the clean, beautiful air, and cut the leaves, cut the flowers, and put them inside my book, so when the plants dry... I would put them on the blouse and embroider the shapes. My blouses sold more. They didn't take long to be sold. They were very pretty and that's why I sold mine so easily. [Later] I used the colours they had embroidered with thread. Depending on the colour of the flowers, very beautiful sky blue, there is pink, and there are also other shades of pink, very nice" (Tla5, 26 February 2020).

"When we started [with the artisan group] some time ago, we sat down to draw. The colleagues that integrated the group, we started [creating motifs]... In fact, we had our catalogue of embroidery. We began to give them names. I remember that there was, for example, wind, footprints, there was even one called sigh. We identified them, so if someone said, I want [a blouse] with sigh, I knew what it is... We had the catalogue of frets, a catalogue of the flowers..." – (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"I think maybe my grandfather did not think of it in the form of a worldview, he produced it [the blouse] just like that, to make them. But people began to interpret things in their own way... and I imagine that according to how people interpreted, he began to modify, and perhaps improve it" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

According to the data, the processes of meaning construction around the *xaam nixuy* places the artisan in a symbiotic relationship with the objects of material culture, the community, and the natural environment. Moreover, the information places the craftsman as a creative individual, maintaining a constant dialogue with themselves and with other social nucleuses. However, the information implies that the selection of graphic elements is not solely related to individual inspiration nor to the appreciation of the biocultural context from where they surge, but to other factors that influence the production of the blouses.



Figure 53. Sacred hill of Zempoaltépetl near Tlahuitaltepec. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2018).

Although the inspiration for the graphic elements of the *xaam nixuy* were drawn from the natural surroundings in accordance with the predilections of the artisan, the production of the garment was simultaneously formed by the market, as consumer demands affected its acquisition and adoption within the community. The processes of meaning construction are not only the result of artisan creativity – both as individuals and/or as groups – nor of the specific natural and social sites through which they circulate. According to the data, the market is also revealed as a force influencing the adoption and flow of the *xaam nixuy*.

In addition to the symbolic aspects, participants further described the importance of the blouse in regard to its utilitarian functions:

"The bib and the back were constructed with double pieces of fabric... The women worked very hard, they went out to bring firewood, they worked in the field and split firewood. [The blouse] it used to wear away very quickly. They would put double fabric on it to hold it... The shoulders had four linings because when they carried firewood, it was rubbed with the *mecapal*<sup>14</sup>. So, they put more resistance in the back so it will not wear down and last longer... The sleeves were very wide, so they could roll them up and move comfortably. It also had double fabric because it was worn by working, always by working. In the cuffs, it is always worn first there. This blouse was for performing hard-work, almost for the entire duration of a lifetime" (T1a5, 26 February 2020)

"The grandmothers used a wide blouse and... they pulled the collar, and they put their wallets, the money, inside it. It is not lost; it does not fall. The blouses were looser because it was much better for them, because they could move and not be wearing tight clothes with which you can't even move" – (T1a9, 28 February 2020)

"... the were more folds in the blouse [and] the girdle was tied here... So, women could breastfeed. [The upper section] was more open, so they could put out their breast to breastfeed their babies... When they went to the market they put their things here, since there were no backpacks... Inside the blouse [they would put] their money, and other things they bought... And they put in their chicks, as it was very cold. They put their chicks there to warm them up. That's how my mother-in-law did it, I still got to see it... Grandmothers sat by the fire... And they put their chickens there, very warm... She takes the chicks out and puts them on the ground, then she chews the corn dough, the *nixtamal*<sup>15</sup>, then with the hand... That was how she fed the chicks" – (T1a5, 26 February 2020)

<sup>14</sup> From classical Nahuatl *mecapalli*, based on *mecatli* ("cord, rope"), meaning tumpline: a strap attached by a rope to both ends of a sack, backpack, or other luggage. Used to carry objects by placing the strap over the forehead, holding the weight down the back/spine.

<sup>15</sup> From the Nahuatl terms: *nixtli* meaning "ashes," and *tamalli* meaning "cooked corn dough." Nixtamal is the dough used to make tortillas, tamales, and other dishes from Mesoamerican cuisine.



Figure 54. Mural depicting a woman carrying wood and child, wearing the xaam nixuy. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

In this sense, the provided data implied that the *xaam nixuy* surged in context of an agricultural system of subsistence, where the garment, its composition and adoption, provided protection against abrasion from heavy duties, working in the field and in the forests, while also representing a mean to keep farm animals warm. Appropriately, its functions were also related by the participants to the transporting of goods and the keeping of possessions secured, also highlighting its use as a practical garment that assisted women with breastfeeding.

However, the data reveals that the blouse has experienced a number of transformations over the decades, with participants explaining the evolution and symbolic transformations in the composition and adoption of the garment:

"Before we did not have a traditional costume, but it was for everyday use" (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

"My grandmothers... used one, that is, the old one. The one that [is being used] right now is the modern one, the one with a lot of embroidery... There was one before, that was adjusted towards the chest, that had small and large embroidery on the cuffs, on the chest and on the waist, and nothing more. Later, when my mother grew up, one that was larger began to be used - like the one that the Xëtumpë group occupies in the Guelaguetza - the traditional one of the town, that has large [motifs] embroidered... When seamstresses began modifying it, they began to draw more shapes, designs. The present one has tiny flowers. Before they were big, big. Right now, the most modern one right now, is the one with the small flowers" - (T1a7, 27 February 2020)

"The first one had huge flowers and it had magueys. And then there was one with the flower in the middle [of the shoulder area], from 1970... That's how it was... It had evolutions. My grandfather also developed blouses in different stages, and after he died, people did a lot of things that also contributed to what the blouse is now. For example, the sleeves were hanging, they improved the seams... so that the calico would not tear, because there was not much money. And to make it last longer" - (T1a4, 26 February 2020)

"In the photos that Juan Rulfo took when he visited the Mixe, in the background you can see some blouses. The ladies' blouses have flowers but really big. That was the design, we could say, the first designs of the blouses which were with large flowers" - (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

"Previously, embroidery was... scarce. Now they do more, and each person puts whatever [motifs] they want ... but the first had very little embroidery, very little ornament... Not as it is now" - (T1a10, 28 February 2020)

"Today's youth no longer want it so wide because they already want to show the slenderness of their bodies. And the people from the cities alike, they do not understand that there were movement facilities, freedom to be able to manoeuvre... raise or lower the arms, move. That has changed" - (T1a9, 28 February 2020)

Participants recognised that the blouse originally used by their grandmothers greatly differs from its present form, recognising that the adoption and adaptation of the *xaam nixuy* has also responded to a more complex process of selection and evolution.



Figure 55. *New design of a xaam nixuy blouse. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).*

The data revealed that additional changes in the working conditions of women, and the shifting perceptions over the body and body image of women, reperculated the composition, evolution, and adoption of the blouse. The perspectives used in the interviews contained comparative dichotomies and contrary notions, such as the old and the modern, the traditional and the present, the fat and the slim. Moreover, the construction of the blouse as an object of cultural heritage, embedded by its dynamism and changes over the decades, became more evident after the existence of two other garments were revealed:

"...Sacks of corn... were not [made of] plastic, they were made of burlap... [Women] saved I do not know how long to have the money to buy calico for five pesos. Calico was very expensive for them at that time, so they cut open the burlap sacks. They cut it here and here [from both sides, and the top] and they just tied it. Men and women. Sometimes they would only have one garment and when they washed it, well, they were naked... We suffered a lot growing up" - (Tla5, 26 February 2020)

"When the [*xaam nixuy*] blouse began to be seen, the blouse was for the rich. There was another, the *nētse'et* blouse, that no one uses anymore. It is already extinct. And that was the blouse for the poor. Here everyone was poor, but in the community, there were people who had more money. The Tlahui blouse [*xaam nixuy*] was for those with better economic resources... The *nētse'et* blouse had a collar, like the collars from the burlap sack, but it didn't have the correct structure" - (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"Originally, the blouses weren't exactly blouses. They were attached rags, squares, torn [from the fabric], and that was the garment. Right now, more recently... around the 1950's, people here began to give it [the *xaam nixuy*] the figures, the worldview" - (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

The information provided by the participants, suggests that the adoption, evolution, and permanence of the *xaam nixuy* in Tlahuitoltepec, was not only related to its symbolic relevance and functionality, but to other socio-economic aspects as well. This suggests that the increased availability of calico fabric in the community and the reduction of its costs, ultimately eliminated the use of burlap sacks for the

confection of garments; while the perception of economic differences and an awareness over social status, influenced the disappearance of the *nētse'et* blouse. The symbolic meanings and adoption of the *xaam nixuy* was a sociocultural and economic process that was moulded over the decades.

The research was able to identify the present uses of the garment, linking them to the celebration of official events:

"It will be difficult for it to be used on a daily basis for various reasons. We already walk in many places and different climates. The [*xaam nixuy*] is not very suitable for hot, warm weather. It is adapted for here, not so much for hard jobs anymore, but for events that continue to be maintained until now" – (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"I do use them [the blouses] for special events. I use it when we are going to play [music with the band] and officially we need the full attire" – (Tla11, 27 February 2020)

"We also give it a use of respect, which at the moment happens during the change of authorities, when there are social, and religious events" – (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"When you go out to a party or you're named as an authority you have to wear the full attire, because you represent the people, and that is the way the people dress. Nobody can be badly dressed, because you are supposed to represent the people, and you are going to receive a command in town" – (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

"Now it is used for festive events. Let's say, it has been given a higher rank of importance ... For us [now] it is [used] when there is an event, Quinceañera<sup>16</sup> parties. People goes in Tlahui costume. You go to mass, the change of authorities, you use your Tlahui costume. It is not common that it is used on a daily basis, as much as before. Right now, it is like, take good care of your blouse, because otherwise it can get stained" – (Tla5, 26 February 2020)

"I use the blouses for important events like weddings, baptisms, a first communion, or when one goes out, because it is more comfortable and refreshing. For me, it's like the traditional but a bit elegant, I think. If you go to any other place and wear a Tlahui blouse, it looks elegant, it looks pretty well" – (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

"There is a lot of consumption, for example in the change of authorities. There is already a norm, a code that everyone dresses [with the attire] from Tlahui... We are talking about 120 members of the council, plus their couples... Almost 300 people. At the end of the year there is a very large demand" – (Tla1, 24 February 2020)



Figure 56. Band playing during an event in Tlahuitoltepec. (Casita Colibri, 2012).

Moreover, the present values involved in the wearing of the *xaam nixuy* that were detected in the data, relate the garment to symbolic conceptions over time and space, connecting its users in the present with the past and the future, with the community and with their ancestors:

<sup>16</sup> The celebration of a girl's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, marking her passage from girlhood to womanhood. The term is also used for the celebrant herself.

"That's what my mom used, what my mother-in-law used. That's what women used" – (Tla5, 26 February 2020)

"I wear my typical blouse because that is the life I lead, it is my roots, it is my past, my future, because my grandparents left it to us" – (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"[I use it] mainly because of my grandfather. For me it is total pride that everything, through a root, everything has spread. For me it is a pride, I like it" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)



Figure 57. *Intergenerational knowledge exchange in Tlahuitoltepec. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).*

Overall, the recognition of the symbolic, functional, and historical value of the *xaam nixuy* arise as significant aspects that were widely recognized by the participants. This was evident in the interviews carried out, in which the transgenerational transmission of the garment and of its figurative meanings, was characterised as a valuable legacy. Accordingly, it can be observed that the relationship of the blouse to the community of Tlahuitoltepec is largely sustained by the perception of its permanence over time, linking the community with traditions across decades, simultaneously recognised as an inheritance from the past to the present, and from generation to generation. The symbolic, historical, and utilitarian significances of the *xaam nixuy* represent distinctive elements that generate a sense of bonding and belonging, continuity, and pride among those interviewed.

Relevantly, the production of the garment, its production, and commercialisation was also related to other principles:

"We mainly work with women who suffer violence. In Tlahui there is a lot of machismo. For me [producing the blouse] was a solution to help women and young people with limited resources. I teach them to embroider because apart from maintaining the cultural heritage of Tlahuitoltepec, they generate income. It is beautiful because it sustains, contributes to their economy and quality of life...Through embroidery we can do much more great things that can impact, generate an economy for the community, many other things that cannot be seen, and also break certain stereotypes" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"... Our ancestors have looked for a way to resist, ever since the enemies who wanted to exterminate us arrived... In Mexico, they [ancestors] looked for the way to resist and how to counterattack that extermination... Many forms have been sought... One of the resistances that we take great care of... is the cult that they [foreigners] wanted to eliminate... That is what they [our ancestors] took

care of. If that had been annihilated, we would not exist as peoples with our language, with our gastronomy, medicine, and also, in this case, with our attires. There are many more things that relate [to this] the worldview, our vision as a people" - (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

Under these perceptions, the production of textile crafts is also understood as a medium to supports the economic and social emancipation of women within the community. Moreover, as a symbol of their culture, the blouse represents a form of resistance to outer economic and social pressures, the destruction of Indigenous forms of living, and hegemonic domination by Western, industrializing and modernizing forces.



Figure 58. Store commercialising Tlahuitoltepecan textiles. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).

### 8.3 The *xaam nixuy* vs. Isabel Marant and Antik Batik: reconstructing the 'appropriation' controversies

The controversy over the 'appropriation' of the *xaam nixuy* was reconstructed by the participants who participated in this research. They revealed the instances or mediums through which individuals from the community first learned about Isabel Marant and the blouse sold under her luxury brand. They evoked:

"My daughter told me about it, the one who is [living] in the United States. She saw it on the internet, on the news, that's how it happened. [She said] that they were already making the garments there, the blouses with our design" - (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

"On Facebook. That's where I found out" - (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"[I first heard about it] on the Internet. And then it was like, a mess, no? I do not know, but through the internet we found out, in reality, about the diffusion. The officialization was through the authority when they convened [the assembly]" - (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

"I found out through my son, he was studying the Bachelors, and then the authority began to notify the community... My son found out through Internet... This is what he saw when he went to Los Angeles. That's where he realized that this lady [Marant] adjudicated the embroidery. And then the authorities... Those who were studying abroad, they warned their parents. There are some [young people] who were on [community service] duty. That's how we found out" - (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"It was on Facebook, they already began to share it on social media, and it became great because it was [published by] an important personality, and from there, it became big [news]" - (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"[I saw it] on Facebook, on the Oaxaca news page, and on the pages that the town has online. Some guys create some Tlahui internet page, and that's where they upload the news of what happened and all of that" - (Tla7, 27 February 2020)



Figure 59. Screenshot of Isabel Marant's 'appropriated' blouse. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2016).

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Figure 60. Screenshot of fashion e-commerce platform selling Marant's 'appropriated' blouse. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2016).



The 'appropriation' of the *xaam nixuy* from Tlahuitoltepec had been first denounced by Oaxacan singer Susana Harp Iturribarria on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, through the publication of three consecutive messages on her public Twitter account (Figures 61-63)

The singer would explain: "I was in Las Vegas with my husband at Neiman Marcus when I saw the huipil [sic]. At first, I was excited, because I did not know that the store was only for designer clothes, and I thought it was wonderful that they sold a Mixe design in a store like that. When I got closer, I saw the tag and uploaded the photo to Twitter" (Milenio, 2015).

The first tweet, directed to Isabel Grañen Porrua (president of the Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation, and wife of the Mexican businessman, who is also a close relative of the singer) read: "Huipil [sic] de Tlahuitoltepec, Oax is sold in Neiman Marcus with designer signature! Where can it be reported? @isabelgorrua" (Figure 61) The publication was accompanied by two images. The first, a blurred photograph of the blouse hanging from a clothing rack; followed by a close-up of the two tags attached to the garment. The Neiman Marcus label indicated the price in \$290 USD, while the second justified the irregular quality of the garment to the reduced scale of its production, the type of fabric used, and its manufacturing procedures.

A second message by Harp was directed to the Twitter accounts of El Weso (Mexican political-satirical-social radio program, broadcasted on Cadena W Radio) and to renown journalist Joaquín López-Dóriga 36 minutes later. The Tweet included a better-quality image of the blouse, and the previous image displaying both tags. The translated message stated: "Plagiarism!: Designer "Blouse" in Neiman Marcus. It's IDENTICAL to the huipil [sic] from Tlahuitoltepec, Oax. @elwesomx @lopezdoriga" (Figure 62).

Finally, the third publication posted at 3:47 am, presented two images as a comparative example. One image showed a group of women from Tlahuitoltepec, wearing the traditional attire, posing with the singer. The second one, repeated the image of the blouse previously published in the preceding tweet. The message explained: "Photo of Tlahui's Women Philharmonic Band with their Huipil [sic] and photo of the "designer blouse" Stolen Design!" (Figure 63).



Figure 61. Tweet by Susana Harp denouncing the 'appropriation' of the Tlahuitoltepec "blouse" [sic] by a designer brand.

 Susana Harp Iturribarría ✓  
@SusanaHarp

Plagio! : "Blusa" de diseñador en Neiman Marcus. Es IDENTICA al Huipil de Tlahuitoltepec, Oax. @elwesomx @lopezdoriga

[Translate Tweet](#)



3:33 AM · Jan 4, 2015 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 62. Tweet by Susana Harp suggesting the "plagiarism" of the Tlahuitoltepec "huipil" [sic].

 Susana Harp Iturribarría ✓  
@SusanaHarp

Foto de la Banda filarmónica de mujeres de Tlahui con su Huipil y foto de la "blusa de diseñador" Diseño robado!

[Translate Tweet](#)



3:47 AM · Jan 4, 2015 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 63. Tweet by Susana Harp comparing the "huipil" [sic] from Tlahuitoltepec with the blouses worn by women from the Philharmonic Band of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec.

Over the following days, Harp's social media denunciation gained online momentum. The participants recalled some of their initial thoughts, after being informed of the occurrences:

"When we saw it [the blouse] in France, we wondered: what seamstress would have gone there? It was very strange for us" - (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

"[Initially I thought] Isabel did it, just as someone else can also do it. There can't be much problem because they also do it here in the city of Oaxaca. They go [to Tlahuitoltepec] and buy a blouse and sell it there [in Oaxaca city]. Of course, Isabel puts her brand on it, she sells it more expensive, and sells it in an international market. But as Isabel did it, someone else could have done it" - (Tla1, 24 February 2020)  
"I didn't know if they had really embroidered it there, or they came to buy the embroidered canvases here, as everything can already be bought [from Tlahuitoltepec]" - (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"Personally, I did not feel so strong about it. She plagiarized it and was going to sell it, but surely the collection was going to end, like many other fashion collections that are presented [by fashion designers]... I was in the city when I found out, like many others, from Susana's tweet. But really at the beginning it was like, ah yes, the blouse, whatever. In my case I did not give it much importance...In the month of February, they let me know that there is something that is happening with our blouse, but at first, I did not take it very much into account..." - (Tla1, 24 February 2020)



Figure 64. Screenshots of demonstration organised by Mexicans outside Isabel Marant's store in New York. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2016).

Participants conveyed that the initial reactions to the news were of surrounded by conundrums, since it was believed that the blouse had been either produced for the designer's brand by an artisan from Tlahuitoltepec, or produced within the community, but sold under the Isabel Marant luxury label in a department store. Although the similarities of the Marant's blouse to the *xaam nixuy* were acknowledged,

and even recognized as an instance of 'plagiarism', the information collected over the developments of the case reveals that initially the news was received with general indifference. Negative connotations were not conceived when the case first reached public attention, as members of the community did not react nor engage with the subject until sometime later. In this sense, one of the participants indicated:

"What people [in Tlahuitoltepec] said before was... It's good that they like it. It's good that they plagiarize it because that means that we do a great job... Like we didn't see the bad side of what Isabel had done" - (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

Over the following weeks, new information began to circulate, as several actors from the community began to address the matter more profoundly. The involvement of academics from the community were referenced in the interviews, suggesting that their engagement had encouraged a shift in general perceptions:

"The ones who did some follow up were Tajëëw [from Tlahuitoltepec] and Yasnaya [from Ayutla], they were very involved in the subject. I did not know well how it happened. But Tajëëw was following the case very closely. She was involved in the issue..." - (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

"I did not give it much importance because there was not so much formal information. It was not until the information was expanded... That is what made us think, what is happening with our blouse?" - (T1a8, 27 February 2020)

"I have followed the subject since Susana's [Harp] tweet. There is a collective called COLMIX, they are the ones who also promoted the subject a lot, this Anthropologist Tajëëw... She followed the issue a lot, they have worked on the issue" - (T1a1, 26 February 2020)

However, the implications of an 'appropriation' act were not collectively discussed until the months of March and April 2015. Erasmo Hernandez (T1a3, 25 February 2020), the Municipal President at the time, narrated the events that followed, as authorities began to actively engage with the situation:

"When we found out that our clothing, the blouse, was being taken in other places, but with a different sense. When we found out that our *xaam nëxuy* was being used with a more capital, more economical, more commercial vision, that we did not conceive here. [Because the blouse] is sold and everything, but not as they [the designer brand] were proposing it. That was what worried us, even more because they were not people from our country, but from another one"

"I commissioned the councillor of Education to see that in detail, to get more information, and they are the ones who actually saw that our heritage was being plagiarized"

"Between the months of March and April, we were observing, carrying out processes to mature [our position], until we reached the press conference. We did not arrive there without first lobbying internally. There is this problem, our blouse is being used by other companies. What do we do? From there, several activities began, entrusted to me as Municipal President. We had to hold assemblies, meetings with the artisans, with some young people who were also there and who also had knowledge about the blouse, and with the Council of Elders" - (T1a3, 25 February 2020)

The comments from the Municipal President disclose that the internal process, followed their own political system of organization, highlighting the participation of different crucial actors from the community, in order to reach an understanding and a consensus to address the implications of the event. The decisions were influenced by the assessment of perceived differences between the Tlahuitoltepec's *xaam nëxuy* and the pieces signed by Isabel Marant. Accordingly, it was the prospective of the designer's garment as a commercial object that contradicted local interpretations of the *xaam nëxuy*, which is regarded as a valuable object of cultural heritage within the community. Noticeably, these observations exposed the existence of national narratives, through which the event raised concerns by constructing the ideas of 'the foreigner', corporations, and commercial objects, in strong opposition to that of 'Mexicans', Indigenous production, and cultural heritage. On this point, many participants expressed:

"I feel that it is better for a Mexican to copy, than someone from another country, that are brands" - (T1a9, 28 February 2020)

The involvement of local authorities, resulted in the organization of a community Assembly to discuss the state of affairs:

"When [local authority] summoned all the artisans. He [the President] said what we had already said: that they had copied, that he wanted to rescue it. That they [designer brand] were already selling a blouse for \$8,000 pesos. On the other hand, we are selling for \$300 pesos... less, we were selling the finer [works] for \$150 up to \$300" - (T1a9, 28 February 2020)

"I only remember what the President thought... Authorities called the seamstresses because it was also about them, about their work. What they [authorities] said was that the designer was going to be sued, because it was, let's say, something of the people, the root of

the town. The people got very angry, they reacted in a way... People from the town never react like that. And the first thing said was that they should demand, speak directly with her. That is why the President Erasmo, summoned the authorities, and they went to Oaxaca to make the complaint, the lawsuit, uploaded it to the internet" – (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

According to the participants, it was after this collective meeting that general perceptions over the occurrence began to be transformed:

"There was a reunion with artisans, and they talked about what was to be done with the plagiarism. There, people described what the worldview is, what the artisans felt in the blouse..." (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"[I felt] a lot of outrage, a lot of outrage, because the designer said that it was her creation, when it is not true. It was totally copied. She just turned it into a dress, and I don't know for how many thousands she was selling it for. Much, much indignation. [Marant's blouse] it was not real, because I know it [the *xaam nixuy*]. I worked on it, no one can't tell me "I created it"... I don't really know how she did it, but what I do know is that it isn't hers, it wasn't hers" – (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"[They] left us naked, they stole everything from us in order to have sales, personal benefits for the brand or a designer - when we sell at a very minimal price. They didn't even value [us]... [they] just put a brand on it, use an industrial machine, selling the blouses for a \$1,000, \$8,000, \$10,000 pesos. It hurt us a lot... One feels bad because it belongs to us. It is our design, not hers [Marant]. We complained a lot... – (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

"Even those who were not artisans in the community felt that their identity, the whole culture, had been stolen from them. In all the words that our President gave in that period, he himself said that they were leaving us naked, that they were stealing from us everything that Tlahui represented. They were not stealing a simple garment nor a garment that was being reproduced in large amounts. [It was] a garment that supported us, that identified us, and that represented living as Tlahuitoltepecans" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"I felt, as if I had been undressed, because [the blouse] is part of our life, we live it daily. It is our root, we live it. The lady [Marant] made it easy for her to say, I copy, but she does not have that feeling of living or being in Tlahuitoltepec" – (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"I felt sort of bad, because one works here, we designed it... For me it was, like it hurt a little. The women [in Tlahuitoltepec] work and design, and they would just plagiarize them, copying all of their designs" (Tla6, 27 February 2020)

"I felt a little angry, because it had costed a lot of work for the seamstresses to maintain the tradition all this time... More than anything, the embroidery has an ideology. For the people it is unique, to have the flowers, the magueys, the roads, all of the motifs... So, when someone else copied like that, it was wrong" – (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

The assembly with the artisans and authorities of Tlahuitoltepec led to the generalised condemnation of the events by the community, inducing a sense of injustice and dispossession that raised anger and outrage. According to the participants, it was after this reunion that the incident began to be regarded not with indifference but with resentment. The shifts in the consideration of the event and its perceptions as a negative action, resulted in its understanding and description as a theft in both symbolic and economic ways. Words of the participants implied the stealing of their possessions and of their cultural identity, which were metaphorically compared to the hostile acts of stripping people off their clothes. Moreover, the adjudication of the blouse by Isabel Marant, was perceived as an offence that disregarded the economic situation of the artisans in Tlahuitoltepec. The acts of the designer were considered disrespectful towards their culture and towards the living experiences of the people in Tlahuitoltepec.

After the community assembly, the local authorities of Tlahuitoltepec were encouraged to act:

"The Municipality entrusted me to work on bringing our disagreement to the public light. Then the councillor for Education did the favour of contacting agencies working with textiles, and that's how we contacted the Textile Museum of Oaxaca. We communicated with them, we raised our problem with them, and realised that they also saw that we were dissatisfied. They said, with great pleasure, if they want to, there is space here, and it can be organized [a press conference]. You can express the disagreement. And from there we worked on what we do..."

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2015, the Municipal authorities called a press conference in the facilities of the Textile Museum of Oaxaca in order to present the official position of the community, with the representatives submitting a declaration condoning the appropriation of their cultural heritage (Figure 65). They described the blouse and its patterns as invaluable elements of the graphic and cultural identity of Tlahuitoltepec, denying that the blouse could be rendered as a novel creation by the designer. On regards to Marant, the representatives additionally demanded that the designer "stopped the production of the garments under her signature, and repair any the damages caused" (Municipio de Tlahuitoltepec, 2015).



Figure 65. Screenshot of public announcement by the authorities of Tlahuitoltepec at the Textile Museum of Oaxaca. (Youtube, 2016).

The congregation also publicly emphasised the fact that it was not in their own interest to sue the designer, clarifying that the *Ayuujk* community wanted to address the issue through their own communal norms, and not through the means of legal systems – neither national nor international – which are considered alien apparatuses to their Indigenous autonomy. Instead, the assembly extended an invitation for the French designer to publicly recognise the origins of the *xaam nixuy*, and to visit Tlahuitoltepec to meet their people and culture. The Municipal President expressed:

“If she came to see and lived with us, she would realize that it is not because of the economical aspect, but of the life that we lead. That is why we expressed it like this, inviting her to come and see all of that for herself. To realise herself if she was acting right or against people who continue to resist” - (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

The public statement also urged other Indigenous groups, community organizations, civil and academic institutions to support their cause; demanding national and international institutions to assume their responsibility in the defence of indigenous people against all practices that violate their human and cultural rights (Municipio de Tlahuitoltepec, 2015). Erasmó further discussed the responses to the press conference:

“When we approached them [Textile Museum of Oaxaca] and they kindly attended to us, we were expanding more this information, this knowledge. And also making a little space for the defence that may exist on legal aspects. This motivated us to see if there was some way to protect us, support us. There are [instances] for the rights of indigenous peoples, and their protection, but we realized that in general terms... this topic has hardly been worked. In text there is legal support, but in the operation with the institutions, with the dependencies, there is nothing. At least for us at that time there was no favourable responses...

“Once the pronouncement was given, fortunately, some organizations approached us. But with [Governmental] agencies, we hardly counted with their presence... The first impression was that our State and national authorities did not give importance to what happened, [nor] what was being expressed. But there was an impact among social organizations, who also took up these manifestations of disagreement. There were organizations in France that took up these manifestations because they had indeed plagiarized an Indigenous

garment. It did have a social impact. However, as a matter of formal work [with Regional and Federal authorities], we could not make much progress"

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2015, the British newspaper The Guardian published a note reporting that Parisian designer brand Antik Batik had filed a legal complaint against Isabel Marant on French courts. According to the indict, Antik Batik had previously registered the blouse and its design as their own, claiming ownership of the intellectual copyrights to the garment (Larsson, 2015). The news reached Tlahuitoltepec, with participants recalling the outrage that the turn of events generated within the community:

"When we found out that someone else had rights to the blouse it became a matter of concern, [and the community] began to dimension the matter... It was not only Isabel's plagiarism, but the deeper implications that someone had the rights to the blouse... Then someone said: now we will have to ask permission to wear our blouses! Now we will have to pay the rights to our own blouse! And that of course, began to penetrate into the people, the authorities. That was when the topic of defending the blouse became stronger. To make visible that the blouse is from Tlahui... That it is not from Antik Batik, that it is not from Isabel... That it is from the community and that it has a cultural background... It is not the same to know that your blouse is plagiarized and that someone can reproduce it, to someone having the rights to the blouse. That was what concerned people. They said, how can someone else have the rights to our blouse? They can wear it, sell it... But having the rights to it... That's what really bothered the people... I think that what we felt the most, to think that the blouse was no longer ours. That someone else had the right to... At least personally, I said, no way! how can someone else have the rights to something that is ours, which has been occupied for so many years. And of course, there are always those who say, now we will have to pay for our own blouse, that we wear, that our women, grandmothers, mothers use. And someone else saying this is mine, because I did the registration of the rights of the blouse... That really upset us... That was what bothered us, more in the sense of our pride, of our identity... What bothered us, finally, was this sense that someone else had the rights. Not so much that someone bought and sold it. That does not bother, because who cares that you sell? At least that is what I heard in the town" - (Tla1, 26 February 2020)

"It was more like an offense to our identity, to our memory, to what is ours. To what has always been ours, to what our grandmothers have left us, our motives, all these elements" - (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"At first we took it easier. We had to be careful, that the authorities followed up on it. But when they published that Batik had patented, and that it was forbidding people from the community to continue producing blouses... It was like, let's see, bring them here, and here we fix this ourselves" - (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

"We are not against it being used that's fine, but it has to be done respecting the community where it originates, where it occurs, not only seen as a profitable, economic privilege, as it was done by Isabel Marant and the Antik Batik company. They embellish and show off, saying it's ours. But in that sense, it's our personal pride. They totally ignored that there are people that lives, that uses it, and that grow up with that blouse..." - (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

Fait main depuis 1992

# ANTIK BATIK

ORIES

LAST CHANCE

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Figure 66. Screenshot of Antik Batik blouse. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

Isabel Marant would publish a public disclaimer on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, denying any claim over patent ownership, further intending to clear herself from any official request intended to prevent the community from selling the garments (Isabel Marant, 2015). That same day, the authorities in Tlahuitoltepec would make a public pronouncement, debunking the existence of a supposed missive in which French authorities requested the payment of copyrights to Tlahuitoltepec on the designer's behalf. Moreover, the document also included a demand, directed to the Mexican State, its institutions, and the civil society, to respond to the compromises and historical debts that were pending to the Pueblos and Indigenous communities of the country (Vive Oaxaca, 2015b).

In December 2015 the French court ruled in Isabel Marant's favour, as Antik Batik's claims of property rights had been cleared, with the judge declaring that the designs and their rights were held by the community in Oaxaca<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, the legal process did not include any artisan nor representatives of the group, excluding once again, the participation of the Ayuujks from Tlahuitoltepec in the protection of their own expressions of heritage.

<sup>17</sup> The court ordered Antik Batik to pay Marant 3.000€ to cover her legal fees, as a "symbolic figure". Jean-Marc Felzenszwalbe, lawyer to the designer would comment: "The Tlahuitoltepec people have said that they do not want any money, but that their work be recognized, which is what Isabel Marant has done in front of the French court" (The Fashion Law, 2015). Felzenszwalbe also defended Marant's blouse, explaining that the designer had not plagiarized but had actually been inspired by the culture and its people: "in this village there is plenty of designs that deal with the same vocabulary, same colours and same kind of patterns. Both companies [Marant and Antik Batik] were inspired by them" (The Fashion Law, 2015).



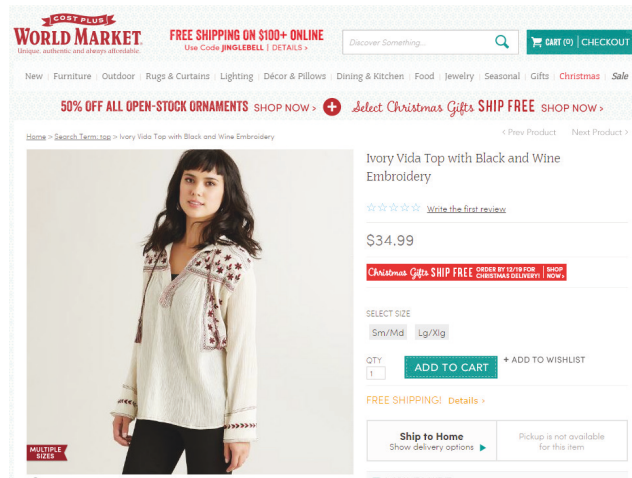


Figure 67. Screenshot of Worldmarket Top. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

Over the following months, the imitation of the *xaam nixuy* as a fashion item followed a social itinerary recognizable through as the "trickle-down effect". The concept, first developed by Lloyd A. Fallers (1954) refers to the process by which elite tastes begin to permeate lower classes in terms of fashion preferences: luxury / haute couture pieces begin to influence prêt-à- porter brands, to successively affect the domains fast fashion. 'Appropriated' versions of the *xaam nixuy* were produced by brands such as World Market, Weekend, and Somya; further appearing in movies and media (Figures 67-71).



Figure 68. Blouses from the brand Weekend. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).



Figure 69. Isabel Marant blouse used in American movie. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2022).



Figure 70. Blouse produced by Indian brand Somya. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2022).



Figure 71. Example of 'appropriation' using the motifs from Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec by unknown brand. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive 2018).

#### 8.4 Pride and sales: perceived changes after the controversies

According to the results obtained from the content analysis of the interviews, the controversies involving the 'cultural appropriation' of the *xaam nixuy* by Isabel Marant and Antik Batik generated a series of rapid changes that influenced several aspects of life within the community. The participants shared:

"There was a change in that the blouses went up in price. In which people got to know more about it; and at the national level - most, if not the entirety - have valued our custom, the culture we have, more. Why? Because our boys wear it, whether they are in dance groups, groups of musicians, in the municipal school. They have an opportunity and proudly wear the shirts and the blouses, the typical costume. That is what has been recognized from us more" - (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"It was a *boom!* It was advertising without paying. It was also like raising an awareness and an appreciation for our own. It was like a push: why do I have to be buying garments from outside if I can produce here? If I have my own thing? They value it, and it is very beautiful, and it may be even more than that. With the broadening demand, many began to be handicraft merchants, because outside the prices rose to the double or triple of what was paid in Tlahuitoltepec" - (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

"After Isabel we sell and we sell a lot, before you couldn't live off your blouses... With the case of Isabel Marant, [Tlahuitoltepec] textiles became fashionable and that meant the prices increased. Certain artisans knew how to capitalize very well on that new market and sales soared, increasing the demands for handicrafts. This implied that, a year ago, two years ago, the blouses were sold in the touristic market of Oaxaca for up to \$1500 pesos, when in town you can buy them for \$500... The artisans said it is the opportunity to sell blouses, because if they sold five before, now they sell twenty blouses" - (Tla1, 24 February 2020)

"Before [the controversies] economy was very low because the blouse was not recognized. The artisans did work but had nowhere to sell it. Now, many became artisans" - (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

According to the participants, the controversies had a number of positive outcomes in the community of Tlahuitoltepec. The interviews revealed an apparent increase in the sense of internal appreciation for the *xaam nixuy* and the traditional attires, as participants conveyed that the garments began to be worn more often, nurturing a communal feeling of dignity and pride for their identity and cultural expressions. An acknowledgement of the aesthetic qualities of the garments, linked to the creativity of its producers, promoted an appreciation for its production, and the consumption of local garments instead of Western, commercial clothes. The disputes had also placed Tlahuitoltepec under the focus of national and international attention, fostering a sense of external recognition that was welcomed as a token of appreciation and respect for the people and culture of the community. Equally, the polemic cases of 'appropriation' had boosted the demands for the blouse, encouraging the expansion of the textile craft market. The events resulted in a considerable increase in the monetary value of the *xaam nixuy*, that consequently benefited the economy, promoting the incursion of many individuals and groups in the textile crafts trade. Once stalled by the lack of consumers, the data suggests that the controversy contributed to the activation of the market and craft economy of Tlahuitoltepec.

However, the changes in the orientation of the economy, accelerated by the demands of the market and the insertion of new artificers in the productive activities of the *xaam nixuy* had other perceived adverse repercussions. The participants explained:

"Economically, Tlahui depends on handicrafts. When there were still no handicrafts, the economy of Tlahui was low. Suddenly, when it was plagiarised, the media made it visible. This increased the price of the blouse extremely. Even so, that many of the artisans no longer wanted to sell their pieces here but send them outside...The most expensive blouse was \$ 450, but suddenly after the plagiarism, the blouse was no longer supplied because people wanted to sell it for the price of the city. They [artisans] started to offer it in \$ 550, while outside it was sold for up to \$800, \$900... Some people sold the pieces [outside] for \$2,000, \$4,000, when they had bought them for much less money in Tlahui... I consider that an abuse" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"A year ago, two years ago, the blouses were sold in the touristic area of Oaxaca for up to \$1500, when in town you buy it for \$500... As always, this falls on economic necessity. When artisans realize that they can have sales, demand, they also start altering the prices. The bad thing is that the prices are reflected from outside the community here with their countrymen from the community. The consequence is that the blouse begins to feel expensive, and what results? When this handmade blouse has a high cost, the handmade... The advertising of modern and cheap clothes, they can buy a blouse more economically, and that runs the risk that after a while, if the prices are not lowered... Right now, this has a demand, but after a while it decreases, and the use of the blouse will be lost" – (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"Another detail is that everyone is going to start fighting to make space [in the market]. The competitions, the artisans, internal conflicts begin, do this, the other. It is not necessary for external people, the intermediaries, to take advantage of that. I don't know much about sales, but that might happened, and it will precisely alter the essence. That is what will diminish that sort of life, identity. And after a while, it will become something to be worn, nothing more" – (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"There were people who sold too much and from then on, the price of the blouse increased. I think it is fine for the artisans, that maybe that is really its value. But the people who do not have that purchasing power. It is sad because you have to wear clothes that you cannot afford to buy. A lady who might earn \$50 pesos a day, do you think she is going to buy a blouse for \$800? Because that is the price they give now, \$700, \$800" – (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

The increase in the prices of the *xaam nixuy*, influenced by the boost in external demand, has become an axis of concern among the participants. Although artisans and members of the community recognise the economical and emotional benefits resulting from the controversies, the data also evidenced the perception of negative impacts. The interviews reveal that people within the community were suddenly unable to acquire the garments due to inflated prices. These economic disadvantages among the community have led to an anxiety over the eventual disuse and disappearance of the *xaam nixuy*, particularly as the financial restrictions compel people to buy cheaper non-traditional clothes.

Moreover, the growing demands of the market have increased internal issues between artisans. According to the gathered information, finding a position in the market has increased levels of competition among producers, being perceived as an opportunity for intermediaries and other external agents to exploit the artisans. Furthermore, the observation of the heightened economic motivation to produce and sell textiles, has raised an alertness over the loss of cultural meaning, as it is assumed that the inclination towards the commercialisation of the *xaam nixuy* will convert the garment from a cultural object into a marketable product devoid of its "essence".

Over the successive months, the 'appropriation' of the Tlahuitoltepec *xaam nixuy* by Isabel Marant and Antik Batik, prompted discussions over the intellectual property of Indigenous designs and the creation of legal mechanisms to protect the domains. Participants shared the perceptions over the external political actors<sup>18</sup> and the legal proposals which were being developed in an attempt to protect, regulate, and solve the 'appropriation' of cultural elements and the identity of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities<sup>19</sup>:

"All communities suffer the same way, it is not only Tlahui, it is on a state level. Even at the federal level, throughout the country, the authorities have not done anything. Authorities at the time did not raise their voices... but as soon as Tlahui gets up, Tlahui begins to ask for an explanation, to demand. That is when the [Federal] authorities began to gather... But what have they done, nothing, because they *have rested on their laurels* [colloquial expression implying that no further efforts are done, due to the satisfaction of what has already been achieved] - (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

"Some politicians took interest in this topic... However, they generally want to work according to their own vision and to their own knowledge, in order to protect. We think that the solution should start from the root of the problem, and based on that, adapt the legislations... It should be based on our reality and our necessities, and not only in sessions in the dependencies where they work" (Tla3, 25 February 2020)

"The Laws have a double-edge. The lady [Susana Harp] has her own interest. Of course, she bragged about helping Tlahuitoltepec. But in reality, there were only a few with whom she contacted for the events in Mexico City... These [Laws] will not support artisans in general, only a few of them" - (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

"When there was the promotional event of the candidate Susana Harp... For many artisans, unfortunately, that was a disappointment. Until now it has been something ugly because only one artisan is officially recognized... There are ladies and gentlemen who are much older in terms of age, and in what they have done, and they are not given that recognition" - (Tla10, 29 February 2020)

At the time that exchanges with the participants of Tlahuitoltepec had taken place, it was revealed that none of them had been consulted regarding the proposals. The local authorities corroborated this, claiming that no Regional nor Federal agency had contacted them to address the topic. The assumed implications of the mechanism produced a range of concerns internally, with some participants manifesting:

"When the Law that Susana is promoting was announced [I asked] what implications does it have? Someone has to register the blouse, who has the authority to do it? The authorities? Ok. But who determines what is and what is not from Tlahui? What is the original? Who can grant [the rights] and who cannot? Certain rights would have to be paid to the community if someone wanted to sell the blouses. Who is paid for the copyrights? Who is going to administer those resources? How will the community manage them? And those of us, who are from the community to what degree do we have the right to benefit or not? How will they determine who can and who cannot benefit from the law?" - (Tla1, 24 February 2020)

"Personally, it worries me, because I don't know what the facts of a Law with these characteristics imply. And many people don't understand it either. I think they think that whoever is going to sell the blouse, has to pay a little bit of money to the municipality, and the municipality administers... But we are not sure how it would work" - (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

"She made her Law, but this Law is only national, and not international. It will not be applicable to the other countries. So, it is not useful. In the end it will not achieve anything" - (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"It is very difficult to protect something with Laws... and then it would have to be thought by the village, by the seamstresses" - (Tla10, 28 February 2020)

"You need to find someone to register it, but it should not be like that! This is the heritage from the community... Then they say it has to be registered by the community, but that is difficult. This is the root of the life of the community... We feel that the authorities in power

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<sup>18</sup> In early July 2015, singer Susana Harp organised the "1, 2, 3 por Tlahui" series of events, sponsored by the Harp Helú Foundation, the Cultural Association Xquenda (created by the singer in 1998), and the Independencia Market from Mexico City. Some artisans from the community were invited to join the promotional activities, which included the selling of blouses directly from the producers around different spots in Mexico City. On the 3rd of July a collective picture was taken in the Juárez Hemicycle with people using the blouse in order to encourage sales. The reunion was later followed by a concert in the Teatro de la Ciudad, with the participation of the CECAM music school from Tlahuitoltepec, Héctor Infanzon and Susana Harp herself, with all proceeds from the concert being donated to the CECAM.

<sup>19</sup> The singer Susana Harp embarked on political career as candidate to Senator of the Republic, for the LXIV Legislature in the Congress of the Union, as the representative of the State of Oaxaca, taking the legal protection of folk art and crafts as one of her main political bids. After winning the position on the 1st of September 2016, she would later present, in cooperation with Senator Ricardo Montiel, two legal initiatives to the Senate. The first one, was a reform to the Copyright Law, through a bill called "Law for the protection of collective property rights of indigenous peoples and communities over their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions"; the second one, the initiative for the creation of the "Law to safeguard the elements of culture and identity of indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities". The policy was intended "to solve the problem of plagiarism of the expressions of culture and identity of indigenous peoples and communities... an initiative to regulate the use of cultural property by national or foreign companies outside the communities" (Harp Itubarría, 2019).

[Government] are often unaware of our feeling as people, and if that form were to be concluded, we would be breaking the essence of community life. Because when registering by someone, even a small group, it would no longer be the vision of promoting, of caring for life. It would be driven by the economic sense, of how I market my clothes, how can I get more profit" - (T1a3, 25 February 2020)

"Right now, we as artisans have free will, in the embroidery, we can draw models and make things. But if suddenly they tell us, you can't do that on anything other than the blouse, it will be difficult" - (T1a10, 28 February 2020)

According to the interviews, the existence of regulatory mechanisms presented a series of major concerns regarding the bureaucratic processes that would be involved, and particularly, about the appropriate authorities, who would be in charge of registering the cultural elements and managing the retributions or resources obtained. The conversations also raised questions over the granting of rights, especially when notions of authenticity or origin – as issues that have been recognised as problematic by the participants themselves – would have to be determined or established in order to register and/or claim benefits.

Anxiety over the equal distribution of copyrights were also present in the conversations, since artisans identify a number of differences between themselves – including age, trajectory, styles, uses of machinery/technologies, working schemes, etc. Points of concern were also expressed when the existence of legal mechanism was perceived as a restriction to the individual creativity and freedom of the artisans in generating and creating new cultural expressions. Moreover, the recognition of the conflicting perspectives between Western and Indigenous understandings and attitudes, stressed a fear over the transformation of cultural elements and their relation to internal processes fostering community life. The application of a legal mechanisms – foreign to the Tlahuitoltepec system of organization – was perceived as an instance of commodification, encouraging the transformation of their cultural expressions into commercial products.

However, although optimistic reactions to the legal proposals were not considered a majoritarian discourse in the data collected, some participants did express a positive response to the possibility of having a legal regulatory system, stating:

"Yes, I do want it [the Law]. I say it's good. Why is it good? One, because the community is going to have an appreciation, something that is recognized, something that is promoted by the Government, by the authority. Because the majority of people value it too, but now they might feel more secure, and feel stimulated to do things... At least I visualize it that way. Another thing is, we can use it for economic purposes or not. It is a tool that will allow you to negotiate if someone is interested in producing. You can tell them there is no problem, but by law you have to give me a benefit, if we want to see it in a matter of money" – (T1a8, 27 February 2020)

"From my point of view, I think that they should make some treaty, some document where it said that the embroidery is from the people, uniquely from Tlahui, so it would be recognized. Or that it is only from the Sierra Mixe... For me it would be nice if they made a law or a treaty" - (T1a7, 27 February 2020)

"It seems good to me because it is not just Tlahui that has suffered plagiarism, in fact, all of Mexico. But I knew something, that there was no law, nor how to protect, nor how to say or how to verify that it really originates from here. I am not totally aware, but I read something on an article somewhere, that here in Oaxaca, they are working on that. I hope that it no longer happens. [The law] sounds good to me, because the day China does it, for example, what will the people who dedicate themselves to that do now? Unfortunately, people will prefer those, especially the people who do not have enough money, they will prefer to buy from the Chinese. We are going to wear those clothes that cost \$50 pesos, which for us cost \$500. It would be our downfall because it will be lost, no one will want to work anymore, if you can find the blouse wherever you want" - (T1a10, 28 February 2020)

The participants conferred that the prospective of having a legal mechanism for the registration and regulation of designs would prevent further cases of 'appropriation' impacting Mexico from happening again. The comments further inferred that the legal implications would provide positive outcomes for the community, emphasizing that the official recognition of their cultural expressions by Governmental instance would be reassuring. The information also disclosed that the application of a Law was recognized as a medium that would allow for negotiations between producers, providing artisans from Tlahuitoltepec with legitimate tools to demand retributions for their creative and productive work.

The concept of registering and copyrighting motifs and designs in an attempt to protect individual creations within the community itself was also expressed by a participant:

"It also happens to me that my designs are plagiarized here [inside the community]. There is still no collective that protects this. I make my designs, but if it happens to me that they [other artisans] see it and they start producing it. On one hand, I suffer thinking about what and where I am going to embroider, and then they can just copy it very easily. Within the community, there is still no protection, nor way of saying, I don't want you to produce my designs, and I will not copy yours... I would like to have a law that protects those designs, because there are dresses that I like a lot. It is my own idea, and it is something super different. I want it to be only mine, and that nobody copies it"

"They see it on the internet and customers come and ask another craftsman for the same design. And the craftsman makes them. That is why it is competition. And then it is a problem. There is nothing nor someone who can say, this is from this artisan. It was my idea. Do not do it, ask for my permission, it was my idea first. If you ask me for permission, I will say yes" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

Altogether, the information indicates that the consensus over the creation and application of legal mechanisms has not generated a consensus among the artisans and other authoritative actors within Tlahuitoltepec. Noticeably, it has also demonstrated that communication with the Governmental instances and political figures promoting the legal dispositions has been lacking.

Additionally, the discussions over legal mechanisms to protect cultural elements also revealed other instances, discovered, and regarded as acts of 'plagiarism' by the participants themselves. Surprisingly, the instances involved neighbouring Indigenous communities from the region. Participants described:

"I saw in Oaxaca City, that they were making Tama's [Tamazulapa] blouse on a backstrap-loom, but with Tlahui embroidery. And I was petrified. How? If Tama's [huijils] are not like that, how are they going to add Tlahui's designs? I did complain, with the Oaxacan Institute of Crafts, so that they would not do that kind of thing... I went to tell the director [of the OIC], that there are supposed to be regulations. Each town must produce what they know, what is native to their community. They would do the same if I reproduced Tama's blouses, and if I did that, they would be upset. I have received many comments that Tama's people make Tlahui blouses, and they go to sell them in Oaxaca... I saw the Tama blouse but with the Tlahui embroidery in an Exhibition fair" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"Not only Tlahui has the variety of Tlahui, other towns have the same embroidery, similar but just a little larger... Yacochi has, there are some in Ayutla, there are others in Alotepec that have similar embroidery. Tama already has another variety, but on white calico... Those are the most similar to [the embroideries] of the town" – (Tla7, 27 February 2020)

"They say that they are already making the blouses in Ayutla, and in Tama... with the designs from us" – (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

When mentioning the situation, one participant commented:

"That is what Tama's [people] do. Once, they brought fabrics to embroider, but theirs is made on a loom, so when you cut it, everything [the weave] is loosened. And you cannot work on that. I told them to better come for the [finished] fabric" – (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

On this line, one of the most relevant aspects of this research, identified the interrogations that participants raised on regards to the origins of the *xaam nixuy*:

"Someone told me that the design of the blouse comes from Yalalag, from the Zapotecs of Yalalag. That someone went to Yalalag, and that those from Tlahui are exploiting the blouses, and that the designs come from there. [Yalalag claims] we invented it, and they [Tlahui] appropriated it, and that now it is ours. It would never have crossed my mind. But on a second thought, it makes sense. Not the designs, but the idea that the embroidered blouse came from Yalalag. It turns out that in a text of Julio de la Fuente, I found out that the first Singer treadle sewing machines were operating in Yalalag". ((Tla1, 24 February 2020)

"The bad tongues tell that it [the blouse] was created from seeing it in the neighbouring community of Yalalag, which was the commercial centre of the highland area since the times of the Spanish conquest. The calico arrived there [to Yalalag], and from there it was brought [to Tlahuitoltepec]. There [in Yalalag] people began to sew with red and black thread, only for the union [of the garments]. So Yalalag had the red and black threads, which was wonderful, and from there, they [Tlahuitoltepecans] began to request these threads... Here people say we adapted it. I do not know since how long this debate has been going, but it is a general assumption" – (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

"Many people say that the blouse comes originally from Yalalag... They [Yalalag] say, you stole the designs from us. But that is not true, because I investigated it and also asked the older women. They say no, that it was different, and that it changed over the seasons. The blouse began to be seen around the time of my grandfather" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"Part of the embroidery was brought from Yalalag, but as always, Tlahui is so ingenious and creative, adding its own embroidery... That is how it originated" – (Tla9, 28 February 2020)

The hypothesis that links the origins of the garment to the neighbouring community of Yalalag became a matter of concern among the participants, since the ethnic and/or geographical sources of the cultural expressions were a considered factor to be considered for the in order to grant the rights of the cultural expressions to the communities.

The problematic of instances of 'appropriation' among Indigenous communities, and other groups, further revealed an issue when discussing similarities and the sharing of technical processes. Questions over the transmission of knowledge to embroider and embellish the *xaam nixuy* were highlighted by one participant:

"People from outside, from the city... There are people who also come [to Tlahui], and ask how to embroider, and you teach them so that they see how you do it. But they come, observe, and start doing it themselves... There has been people who have done that. Another craftswoman told me that [a person] bought the pieces from Tlahui, [the craftswoman] distributed to this lady. And then one day, she was embroidering, and she asked her how to do it. And that she saw [and expressed] Oh, how easy! I can do it! And from that day on, the lady no longer came, although she was a frequent customer. These are cases that occur, not only here, but also in the city"

"I have to show people that I really know how to embroider [so] I record videos, and all that, and then people also see it [the technique and embroidery processes] from the videos... and copy it" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)



Figure 72. Embroidering using electrical sewing machine. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).

According to the artisans, the demonstration of technical knowledge, in presential form or through digital media, to external actors represents a dilemma. On one hand, the artisans recognise that the displaying of their abilities with the sewing machine represents an added value to their pieces, with consumers justifying their decisions to acquire textiles, based on their perception of the artisan's talent and their assessment of the authenticity of the garments. Nevertheless, these demonstrations of knowledge can also be recognised as a commercial threat, which allows external actors to reproduce the techniques and create their own garments, resulting in the 'appropriation' of their pieces and/or reductions in the artisans' sales.

The data further revealed the different forms of knowledge transmission and sites through which the techniques and processes for producing the *xaam nixuy* are transmitted within the community which included transmission within the family unit, among members from the community, and through capitalist-workshop modes of exchange. Equally, the processes for transmitting the knowledge to produce the *xaam nixuy* occurred in schools and church, as settings which promoted the activities.





Figure 73. Industrial embroideries in a workshop in Tlahuitoltepec. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2018).

While the sharing of knowledge and its implications on the reproduction of Tlahuitoltepec embroidery and garments by external actors represents a matter of concern that was particularly addressed by a younger artisan, data from the interviews revealed another critical issue developing within the community. The artisans conveyed:

“Right now, with the automatic industrial embroidery machines, we are affected a lot. The truth is that we are faced with a lot of competition because there is less work. They do, fifty pieces or one hundred pieces a day, when it takes us a month [to complete a piece]. We embroider for two, three, days. It affects us a lot, but fortunately there are people who value what is done manually, which is also done with machines [sewing machines] but done manually. There are people we know and who appreciate that [manual sewing machine] detail, but nevertheless, some do not know and end up buying the industrial ones. We as artisans, this affects us. Well, at least, [it affects] me” - (T1a9, 27 February 2020)

“It is what is *making us very ugly* [damaging] now... [production] with [automatic digital] embroidery machine, with computer. That affects us more, it produces cheaper, and also [finished garments] come out faster. It affects enough, but now not so much because the *akäts* [outsiders] have already realized [the differences]” - (T1a5, 26 February 2020)

“There are a lot of discussions about embroidery machines. There are artisans who say that what the machines do is make their products cheaper... For example, you buy a blouse produced with an embroidery machine, sold in Tlahui for \$450, and then you go to an artisan, and she tells you that for \$450.00 the work cannot be done. She sells it for \$550, \$500 pesos. So according to the artisans... these machines... make products cheaper. The lady [artisan] spends all day working with her sewing machine, which is not the same with the automatic embroidery machine” - (T1a1, 24 February 2020)

As the participants commented, the recent introduction of automatic, digital technologies for the production of embroidered pieces within the community is seen as an unfair competition, perceived as a productive and commercial disadvantage for artisans who only work with manual sewing machines. This indicates that the debates over the adoption of technological developments represents a controversial subject within the community, in which the notions of tradition and authenticity, as well as the values of work, effort and productivity are at play. Although the existence of industrial machines represents a concern among artisans, the recognition that external consumers tend to appreciate the differences between objects created with industrial or manual machines - preferring the later when acquiring textiles - remains a relief.

Notwithstanding, although general reactions to the use of new production technologies within the community were condemned, notions of traditional permanence are not always valued in positive terms, particularly when the topic of innovation were discussed:

“Innovations are deemed too modern, they are no longer the typical, but are considered very modern blouses. However, the modern and casual fashion is better received outside. So that’s where I have to show them any finer patters, or more detailed embroideries and sewing... I consider that innovations are better accepted outside than here” - (T1a8, 27 February 2020)

“There are people [in Tlahuitoltepec] who told me: you are decomposing the blouse; and that a cultural protection committee had to be organised, so that this does not happen... Many people said, why don’t they let Tlahui’s blouse stay as it is? Why do they have to change it? And so on... I told them that we do not all have the same tastes! There are people who wants to see new blouses” - (T1a4, 26 February 2020)

When concepts of creativity and innovation were revealed, some of the participants perceive that the deeply ingrained ideas over the blouses and its customarily established meanings, appearance, and forms of production, presents an obstacle to their imagination, while further limiting access to external markets. In this sense, it is obvious that the traditional meaning of the blouse can also be combined with aspects of dynamism and innovation, suggesting that the configuration of the utilitarian and aesthetic qualities of the blouses responds to the creativity of the artisans, but in function to the consumers terms.



Figure 74. *New styles and garments using the traditional motifs. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).*



Figure 75. *Examples of new products and innovations in the styles and garments inspired by the xaa m nixuy and its embroideries. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).*

Even though the customary prestige of the *xaam nixuy* was established by the participants, the ability to adapt it to connect with the demands of the market remains a very conscious matter. Participants implied:

"The work that [name of brand] does with my family is external. We take everything outside, because in Tlahui people already have someone to buy their blouses from. There is no longer a local market, as there are so many artisans. There are artisans everywhere, so there is no longer a market in Tlahui" – (Tla1, 24 February 2020)

"The problem is that we do not sell well here [in Tlahui] that is the problem, because right now there are many artisans, they already embroider a lot. It [the blouse] sells better outside... There are more sales outside than here" – (Tla2, 25 February 2020)

"I sell more outside, but the fact that I sell more abroad does not mean that I stop selling here... I do not make many blouses, I make dresses, but I have more sales outside. In fact, [people] they do order [blouses] from me here in Tlahui, but I'm the one who cannot cope [with the demands] because I have more orders from outside" – (Tla4, 26 February 2020)

"Thank God almost all of my market, since I started to insert myself fully in the production, comes from outside" – (Tla8, 27 February 2020)

This Case Study intended to provide a broadened understanding of the transculturation processes framed by the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon, by determining the objects and actors involved in the occurrences involving the *xaam nixuy* - the traditional Ayuujk blouse of the community of Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec- and the artisans that produce it. This aimed at answering the research questions through the testimonies of the participants, who emphasized that as an object of material culture, the blouse presents different forms that have developed over the years, manifested through the use of motifs, patterns and colours, organized and reproduced within the community over the decades as cultural symbols.

The interviews established that the cases of 'appropriation' were affected by the interference of different local and global actors, with the participants focusing on the diversity of associations and negotiations that occurred between them throughout the development of the events. The testimonies presented the ideas and discourses surging at individual and communal levels that enabled the actors to construct their own concepts, meanings, and understandings of the 'appropriation' controversies. Moreover, this Case Study allowed to detect and describe the perceived changes that occurred after the incidences.





## Chapter 9 – The embroidered “Tenangos” from Tenango de Doria and San Nicolas - Content Analysis Case Study 2

The following chapter will present and analyse the data related to the second case study of this thesis, focusing on the ‘cultural appropriation’ of the objects of material culture, colloquially known as the “Tenango” embroidered textiles. The realization of the empirical research was based on the content analysis of the digital ethnographies in which artisan groups from the *Hñuhú* community of San Nicolás, and the *Hñahñu* community of Tenango de Doria collaborated.

As previously noted, the irruption of the Covid-19 pandemic implied changing the original ethnographic process for this Doctoral thesis. This resulted in the application of a digital protocol that relied on online technologies to contact and interview participants living in the State of Hidalgo. Due to the epidemiological conditions experienced during the Winter of 2020/2021, the development of this case study was carried through Skype and Zoom online calls in group sessions.

The first contacts were generated through the use of Facebook, by access to the private group “Bordados de tenango”, comprised by approximately 22,300 members. This allowed me to post a message to invite participants, while explaining the objectives of the investigation, to which several interested parties responded. Nevertheless, questions of identity and adscription became an issue, as some of the members of the group elaborated the embroideries as a hobby, not complying with the conceptual characteristics that had been previously established – self-described artisans who are active producers of traditional crafts, ascribing to some form of ethnic, family, or affiliation, involved or directly linked to a cultural community. Thus, people elaborating handicrafts as a leisure activity involving the making things by hand, with no connection to traditional craft communities, were not considered for this research. This sampling rules allowed me to connect with groups of artisans organised into cooperatives and other individuals who practiced the trade, inhabiting the villages of Tenango de Doria and San Nicolas.

### 9.1 The “Tenango” embroideries: Hñuhú and Hñahñu objects of material culture

Tenango de Doria is recognised as a town, and one of the 84 municipalities of the State of Hidalgo, located in central-eastern Mexico. According to the 2020 census, the municipality had a total population of 17,503 inhabitants, out of which, 5,030 spoke Indigenous languages (mainly Otomi and Nahuatl). The town of San Nicolas is located in the municipality of Tenango, with a medium height over sea level of 1,740 meters. The overall population is comprised by 1,430 persons, with 1,416 of them living in Indigenous households (INEGI, 2020).



Figure 76. Geographical location of the towns of Tenango de Doria and San Nicolas in the State of Hidalgo. (Sierra Iracheta, 2021).

According to the theoretical discussions introduced in this thesis, the study of objects of material culture has to simultaneously focus on the direct or indirect ties that the cultural expressions maintains with the society, contexts, practices and relationships through which the object itself surges and circulates. For this reason, the identification of the cultural elements and social actors that interact with them, becomes fundamental in order to reveal the symbolic, material, identity, social and cultural conceptions through which ‘appropriation’ controversies develop through time.

Following these theoretical assertions, the first step of this exercise sought to identify the objects of material culture involved in this case study. This revealed that the “Tenangos” represent a category of analysis materialized into a diversity of tangible objects with characteristic graphic motifs, that encompass a number of expressions, values and dynamics, among the *Hñuhú* and *Hñahñu* (Otomis) people from the communities of San Nicolas and Tenango de Doria in the State of Hidalgo.



Figure 77. Ñhuhu "Tenango" embroideries from the community of San Nicolas. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2017).



Figure 78. H̄ah̄ñu "Tenango" embroideries from the community of Tenango de Doria. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2022).

When inquired over these textile objects, participants explained:

"My grandmother made them as ornaments for the tortilla napkins, something to decorate the table with, things like that... The Tenangos were used to decorate what grandparents had at that time. Their calico shorts, their napkins for personal use...We represent our customs



[in the embroideries]. For example, the Water Festival. We represent how the land was worked, how a wedding is celebrated... Someone marrying, someone carrying the chickens that were used as wedding gifts before..." – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"We are the fourth generation. My grandmother drew, and the Tenango was not commercial at that time. I grew up with my grandparents, and my grandmother embroidered, like many others... The only ones who keep that design are going to be us. My daughter [name] inherited the design from my grandmother, may she rest in peace. The classic, now [will survive] in this new generation" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

The above statements confer that the "Tenangos" have covered a number of functions within the domestic units in both Otomi communities. Participants indicate that the expressions surged as artifacts within rural/agricultural contexts in order to fulfil utilitarian roles. The embroidered textiles were used as everyday objects that assisted in daily life activities such as transporting and maintaining food warm. The embroidered motifs were also used to ornament garments.

Moreover, the data indicates that the objects represent a site of intergenerational cohesion and memory. As part of a communication process and continuum, the "Tenangos" were used to transmit the traditions and customs of the group, as a medium that bestowed new generations with the knowledges and skills transmitted by the older ones. The participants indicate that the "Tenango" embroidered textiles reaffirm the bonds of family cohesion, memory and of cultural identity within their communities. These conceptions were further addressed when discussing the techniques and the learning processes involved in their production:

"Family production... We are four. There are three grown up children. Two daughters, they are the oldest, they also draw. And my son too, he is 15 years old. He draws together with my wife. We all dedicate ourselves to drawing, because fortunately at the moment we are the most popular, our designs are enchanting, people really like them, truth be told... My wife draws, she inherited that. Her grandparents were illustrators. We call ourselves 'genetic illustrators', we are illustrators by blood. My children draw, all of my children automatically became drawing artists. Not all children come out as illustrators. There are illustrators who do not have descendant illustrators now, but this [skill] can come out in the third generation" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"I embroider. I think it is from generation to generation how it passes. In my case, they only taught me by watching. My grandmother, my mother, after the daily activities of the day, we sat down to embroider. And when I, for example, was wrong or made my embroidery very ugly, they would cut it... Since I was a child, they taught me to embroider, to combine colours" – (San3, 19 February 2021)

"Well, embroideries are like this, from childhood they instil this in us... [I started] since I was little. Since I can remember. I do not know exactly at what age I started, but since I can remember. My mother taught me... There are 2 types of stitches that are important to highlight. The *goat foot* and the *mouse rib*. The *goat foot* is a bit more open, but the one that we usually work with precisely is the *mouse rib*. It is a very, very closed stitch" – (San4, 5 February 2021).

"[Started embroidering] since I was little, I have the same version as the others [in the interview]" – (San5, 5 February 2021)

"I learned by watching my relatives, since some of them are still dedicated to this. I started at the age of about 16 years old. I started to draw... Animals, the flowers... Little by little I started developing my skills more, and I began to learn to draw large tablecloths, strips for dresses, everything that is customary here in the locality" – (San6, 5 February 2021)

According to the interviews, a system of family relationships and traditions are constructed around the "Tenangos" embroideries. Since childhood or adolescence, future artisans inherited the knowledge, technical skills and cultural meanings ascribed to the textiles by their older relatives. Therefore, learning how to execute the motifs and embroider them is related to the generation of spaces within the domestic unit, that strengthens family ties and intergenerational bonding. As an activity that is carried in company of grandparents, parents, or siblings, learning how to create the "Tenangos" enables spaces for communication and coexistence. Moreover, the activity is also considered a recreative occupation that can be practiced once the household chores were completed. Participants also expressed how over time, these practices enabled them to develop and improve their technical skills and personal capacities.



Figure 79. "Tenango" hand embroidery. (Caro Alvarez, 2020).

However, although the "Tenango" handicrafts were recognised as elements with functional and traditional components, the objects began to be considered part of the economic strategies of the groups:

"[I learnt] embroidery from childhood. They [older relatives] taught us to embroider because with that we helped our mothers to get some money" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"Thanks to embroidery I was able to get a career. That was thanks to the work of my mother, who after her work raising us, after the activities that she had to do, she had to be fully embroidering, so that she could give a better life. She always embroidered for her children, so that we would not suffer as she suffered. She now speaks to me about the right to have fun, to go out, and other things, because they forced her to embroider, especially when they get married... Thanks to that, I was able to finish the career that I am working on now" - (San3, 19 February 2021)

"This job [embroidering], because it is a job for us, it is our way of living. And well, without this job, unfortunately, we cannot support each other, get everything we need... My mother was a widow when we were little, and with that job and other jobs that she had, she took us forward" - (San4, 5 February 2021)

"Embroidery is our livelihood and the support of the house, it supports us among relatives for what is needed in the house" - (San5, 5 February 2021)

"it was not so commercial in some communities, such as mine, it was not so commercial yet, but it was produced. We know this because of research... For them [grandparents], the Tenangos were neither known, nor commercial, yet... Now we work according to what [the final piece] is going to be. For example, we work normal, Tenango normal, which is what we commercialize for reasonable payments, we handle a normal price... That is a normal Tenango, like the ones you have seen, with flowers, birds. But for example, if you ask me for a drawing with particular measurements, I will make a quote for you, but I am going to give you a more detailed piece" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"[I learnt to draw] seeing how it was like, drawing the Tenangos. One day it occurred to me to grab the pencil, when I first started, it's

been three years. I [used to] send them to be drawn, but it was very expensive for me what he [the illustrator] charged me. Then one day I took a pencil to try drawing, at first it did not come out very well, but I kept practicing until it came out" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

The transformation processes implied by the interviews, demonstrate that objects of material culture can simultaneously become objects of consumption, circulating in commercial spaces. The economic aspects of the production of the "Tenangos" have therefore determined some of its transformations, appearance, and aesthetics, motivating artisans to continue with the tradition. Participants pointed out that over the decades, the production of the textiles became a mean for survival through which monetary income could be obtained. The activity of embroidering became a mean for employment, enabling remuneration for the time spent producing them, resulting in economic benefits for households and families. Furthermore, learning the different processes to produce them has become an incentive to reduce production costs.



Figure 80. Drawing of a "Tenango" motif before embroidering. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

Nevertheless, the relevance of the "Tenangos" do not revolve solely around the functional, cultural, social and/or economic domains. A number of participants emphasised the emotional dimensions involved in their creation:

"The ranges of colours are the colours that your heart or mind tells you. You have to put; it doesn't matter if they match or do not match; if it fits or if it does not. It is what your conscience, your heart tells you. And that's why when you finish the embroidery, it reflects a lot. I embroider my feelings like that. When people are lazy, it is reflected in the drawing; when people are angry, it is reflected in their drawing, in the embroidery, in the colours. When you are a very happy person, the same thing happens. The embroidery itself calls you, attracts you, speaks to you... The embroidery that our people embroider... it speaks. It is like the embroidery was alive. It's how if it had feelings, it would speak... It reads, it feels, that's the right word, it feels. It calls you. It's like, for example, a flower. I don't know if you like flowers, I don't know which flowers you like... You say that about roses, sunflowers, carnations. I like the sunflowers, and the sunflower calls you. You like it. It attracts you. So, it's the same with embroidery... but there are some that speak to you more than others. That is the correct word that we would use, embroidery calls you, speaks to you" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"The Tenango at the time of embroidering, it is reflected. I know how you feel. I send garments to be embroidered, and I asked a lady to help me embroider. She put a lot of blue, blue. In that moment, how did you feel? She had already told me that she had a problem. No wonder this embroidery was like this, a lot of blue, a lot of dark colours. That's where we realize it, as well as how you feel, you express yourself embroidering them" - (San3, 19 February 2021)

"There are many people who say that the threads tell stories. For me this is very, very significant. The embroidery represents people. The truth is that I have seen it when I embroider. I have expressed it, I have experienced it. What you embroider depends a lot on your state

of mind. A person who is always happy will use very, very cheerful colours. A person who is sad, that is in a depression or has some problem, uses very dark colours. A rebellious person always uses red colours a lot. It expresses a lot about each person, from the drawing to the form in the embroidery and the colours of the embroidery" – (San6, 5 February 2021)

"...Each is unique because each embroidery has something, a part of us. Maybe we transfer ourselves or I don't know, something happens to us in each embroidery. And that is why we say about each embroidery, each is unique" – (San4, 5 February 2021)

"To draw a large tablecloth, it can take almost one day. Depending. For example, a 4 meters long table centre, usually one day or two to draw. It takes time... The drawing always comes before. It is pure imagination. People cannot tell me, you know what? I want you to draw this and I will do it like that again. All the drawings always come out differently. There is no drawing that comes out exactly the same. For example, in a small piece of fabric, if I draw one motif, then I can no longer draw it the same, because all the drawings come out from my imagination. I just sit down and start to draw what comes out of my head" – (San3, 5 February 2021)

The data collected suggests that the "Tenangos" also contain personal emotional components, with the participants confiding how the creative and productive processes are intrinsically related to their own interior experiences. This implies that the production of the textile crafts in the communities correlate to psychosocial aspects of well-being and self-expression, with artisans conveying and narrating their inner worlds through threads and colour schemes. This provides the objects with the capacity to communicate intangible notions, connecting the mind with the materials, further allowing artisans to recognize the emotional state of others. The collected information reveals that embroidery is perceived as a metaphysical activity through which artisans transfer "parts" of themselves into the pieces, suggesting that the objects become unique and unrepeatable because they are embedded with the ephemeral and dynamic emotional landscape of the people who created them. The time spent on the creation was also highlighted as an added value.

Conferring to the data, participants revealed that the "Tenangos" are understood as multifaceted objects of material culture, in which the cultural constructions relating to the social uses of the artifacts, and its multiple interactions – creative processes, social relations, and commercial activities involved – converge with the subjective construction of the objects – influenced by the history and personal experience of the artisans that created them. This places the "Tenangos" as identifiable objects of material culture and objects of cultural heritage, which allowed the participants to determine their involvement in multiple instances of 'cultural appropriation' over the past years.



## 9.2 “Tenango” motifs in commercial products: reconstructing the controversies

Multiple cases of 'cultural appropriation' involving the “Tenango” embroideries have been broadly documented by a number of organisations and news outlets over the years (See Figure 30 Table of 'appropriated' “Tenangos” found in a broad range of commercial objects). According to Mexican NGO ImpactoTextil, the list includes: Mexican luxury designer brand Pineda Covalin, and American designer Mara Hoffman (2014); food and beverages corporation, Nestlé (2015); American home furnishing store chain and e-commerce company, Pottery Barn, and Mexican fashion brand, Draco Textil (2016); Spanish textile multinational Mango, and the influencer Yuya's cosmetic range, (2017); American brand, That's it!, Indonesian fashion brand Batik Amarillis, and British multinational retailer, Mark & Spencer (2018); Spanish fashion brand Desigual, French luxury brand Louis Vuitton, and American brand United Colors of Benetton (2019); and Carolina Herrera (2020) (ImpactoTextil, 2020).

Additional cases were detected in 2021, by the British fashion brand, Aster Tomorrow, and the Princeton Architectural Press. Furthermore, a quick search for the term “printed Tenangos” on internet search engines, throws innumerable examples of objects stamped with the motifs. According to ImpactoTextil: “the Tenango de Doria embroideries are the favourites in cases of appropriation... Painted, stamped or machine-embroidered, the iconography known as “tenangos”, is at the head of a long list of appropriation cases that strip this work of its traditional technique” (ViernesTradicional, 2019).

Although cases of 'appropriation' of the “Tenango” embroideries have been considered the most evident and extended by the media and government institutions, surprisingly, participants from the Tenango de Doria and San Nicolás communities only referenced a few of them. The artisan who had brought the issue to courts narrated the development of one of the major disputes, and his direct involvement in the lawsuit against the Swiss multinational corporation Nestlé, recounting:

“I went up to Tulancingo, [where I found] the first edition of mugs that Nestlé produced with Chocolate Abuelita. I went up to Aurrera [supermarket] and while taking a look... The chocolate comes, and it had the designs of my daughter [name] and mine's.

When we saw the cups, saw our figures reflected... Not knowing the truth, because at that point, we did not know about the subject of plagiarism... At first, I liked it. Wow! Something that is mine here, on a cup! I showed it to *maestro*<sup>20</sup> Carlos Lima. Look, *maestro*! Look what they produced! One of the designs that I sent you. He said: did they ask for your permission? No. Are they giving you royalties? No. Not at all. Did they communicate with you? No, neither, why? Because they can't get anything out without your permission, it's a robbery, this is plagiarism. From then on, we learned more about the subject, we got soaked with it. And he says they have to pay you. They can't take your things because they're yours. I know that they are yours. It was then that we started with the lawsuit.

Professor Carlos handles that a lot, he is a businessman. He handles a lot of advertising, he knows many media outlets, and when they saw that we had gotten involved with that [the controversy], they all approached him and asked for the note, things like that. He is known by many media outlets; he is a journalist too. From there, it was done as he said, the whole issue.

We had been working on exhibitions together with him [Carlos Lima] to raise the sale of embroidery, so that more people knew about it. And it was the media that continued with this, and it was then that the plagiarism occurred, around those days.

The lawsuit was stopped. Detained because of the [Covid19] pandemic. We talked with a lawyer and things were not done well. I do not know properly about it because we do not know much about the subject of legal questions, in matters of cultural rights. I worked with a legal instrument, supporting and everything. When the lawyer Jose Manuel Herмосillo, who is handling the case until today, takes up the lawsuit, we realized that there were many things that were wrong. They were not done correctly, otherwise we would have already won that lawsuit. But then the lawyer who was previously handling the case, he was a lawyer in a different legal practice, and there was a need for a lawyer specialised in cultural rights, which is a totally different thing. When the lawyer Jose Manuel Herмосillo gets involved, we realize that things had been done wrong, we get involve with the subject, we do the follow up, but the pandemic comes and it stops everything” - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

In 2014, the food and drinks conglomerate had entrusted the advertising agency JWT with the creation of a campaign to promote the traditions of Mexican culture, hiring the Mexican artist Mike Infierno to produce a collection of mugs, released in the year 2015 for the chocolate brand Abuelita.

<sup>20</sup> “Maestro”, translated into teacher, is a courtesy term used in Spanish to refer to people in respectful manners. There is no equivalent term in English.



Figure 81. Comparison of 'appropriated' motifs from Tenango de Doria used in a Nestlé mug. (El Universal, 2020).

The same participant, from the community of Tenango de Doria, also discussed the controversy that was raised between the publishing house Alfaguara and the Spanish graphic designer, Nora Grosse, who created a front cover of a novel, published in the year 2016, using Tenango graphic motifs:

"That design is from my daughter [name]... The *teacher* Carlos let the bookstore and this lady know – I don't remember her name – that the design she had taken was not hers... The lady automatically deleted everything, she deleted the page, changed the cover page. We couldn't follow through..." (Ten1, 14 February 2021)



Figure 82. Cover of book, illustrated with motifs from Tenango de Doria. (Twitter, 2018).

Even though participants from the San Nicolás community recognise the existence of 'appropriation' controversies involving designers and brands, their general concerns were directed to what they perceived to be a more common and noxious form of the phenomenon:

"People take embroidery as a hobby because drawing is something else entirely. Many people are making *piracy*<sup>21</sup>, that is a fact. They are pirating us. Many people have plagiarized our drawings. They have nothing to do with Tenangos but they sell it as such, many people are buying things that are not authentic Tenangos... People who don't even know how to embroider... they will never be able to do [the authentic designs], because we are artists, we are true artists. They are plagiarizing it, it is misuse, appropriation. That is what they do" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"Unfortunately, people are buying things that we say are *pirated*. It is *pirated* work, they make *pirate* embroidery, because it does not originate from the community. People began to learn how to do them. Now that they understood what embroidery was, they have even started to create stories that have nothing to do with the originality of the embroidery. And well, they did embroidery, perhaps [made it] famous, valued, but unfortunately... People who are not even from the community take it away" - (San3, 19 February 2021)

"As we have observed, many people come to the community and ask the people, the artisans, the illustrators, or the people that embroider, if they can invite them to take courses in different places. Once these people learned from each other, they begin making paid courses, where they teach embroidery... The first people who attended the courses only taught, and now after people learned, they [new embroiders] do trainings at a cost. It multiplied. As the cradle of embroidery that we are, they pushed us aside. They no longer took us into account because some other people were doing it. And they even had the luxury of selling a story. We have seen books about embroidery that have nothing to do with the original embroidery. And it has lost this unique touch, [what is] original of our embroidery" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"The embroidery is not differentiable, because there are many people who embroider everywhere. But for example, the original designs we can just say... This is from this lady; this is from him... Among us we know the designs, the original artists" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)  
 "Embroidery workshops are happening everywhere, there are many" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

According to the transcripts, participants place the popularisation of "Tenango" embroidery lessons as a menace to their craft. The perceptions contrast notions of authenticity and origin with those of piracy and plagiarism, as the reproduction of textiles by actors who are external to the community, are believed to change the cultural meanings and narratives contained within the objects. Moreover, the

<sup>21</sup> Term used in reference to the unauthorized use or reproduction of another's work.

data indicates that participants considered that the values ascribed by the artisans and the community to the textiles are altered once the transmission of knowledge and technical skills to produce them begins to be capitalized. The implications of this are also perceived as a threat to the dissemination of their authentic culture and cultural values, as non-members invent new stories about the objects, their origins, and meanings.

The artisans also recalled how they first learned about instances of 'appropriation' and how they were emotionally affected by them:

"We found out when things [appropriations] had already happened because they publish them online..." – (San3, 19 February 2021)

"The first time I saw it [appropriations] was on a television program. I saw that there were designs that were very similar to the ones we embroider. Regularly, we realize about it [appropriations] on social networks. Because we see that there were several people that have tried to get all our designs...I feel, we feel like we were stolen. A part disappointed, angry. We have many mixed feelings when we see things like this [appropriation]. We know the origin of all this..." – (San1, 19 February 2021)

"Personally, [I feel] sadness, lots of sadness, seeing what large companies or large businesspeople are doing with this embroidery. It makes me sad, because we who know the communities, we know that they really live only from embroidery. It is difficult for them, because then their product is no longer marketed. When they are plagiarizing, what is imitated, whatever they are copying, is marketed. It gives me [a feeling of] impotence because unfortunately, we do not have the support to defend it. We do not have someone to stand up for these communities, for the ones who carry out this work. Unfortunately, these are vulnerable communities. They depend solely on their work to get ahead. They comment and say they don't want to be inspirations. They don't need to be an inspiration. What they need is that their work is recognized and that [appropriators] come with them to give them work. Not that they copy and plagiarize, or say they are inspired. They have to come to the communities and tell them we are going produce a collection of Tenangos and you are going to work on it, personally work on it. Of course, this plagiarism [topic] bothers me a bit" – (San3, 5 February 2021)

"The truth is the feeling is very ugly because when we see that type of fabrics, as soon as they are selling it, what comes to our mind, our way of thinking [is] we're doing original things, [and] how long does it take us to do them? Be it, embroidering or drawing them... And then when we see that they are plagiarizing and that they do it [the motifs/embroideries] in an easy way... It hurts us a lot because the truth is that people no longer buy from us" – (San4, 5 February 2021)

"I sometimes get annoyed... I see with sadness that maybe these people [appropriators] do it to earn money, while we do that work because it is our life, it is ours our daily sustenance, and for them it is very easy... For us it is a lot of effort, it is dedicating time, dedicating hours, even sleepless nights... Seeing that our work, which is made by hand, perhaps sometimes with pain in our hands or our body. But there we are, embroidering. It is very easy for them to copy something, a drawing... And yet they sell more or earn more than us here in our town, unfortunately. Sadly, here there is a lot of sadness about what we are paid for the embroidery... As I say, this is our livelihood. Sometimes we sell them almost for free and sometimes we have no other choice, because we still don't have someone to support us, or we don't have people to buy them from us. This is the reality of our people... Our reality is different. It is sad to see that people buy the imitations rather the original embroideries" – (San5, 5 February 2021)

"When we see news that someone won an award, that a Tenango won a place [in a competition]... We have seen that many garments have gone very far and unfortunately, they are garments that are *pirated*. They are not the original garments, and they will not have the impact that we would like... There was a gift given to the Pope of Rome. We saw that it was a very poorly done embroidery, poorly combined. And we don't want that. We feel like they gave that gift, but the Pope is not going to like it. Or he is going to think this is the best? And no, on the contrary, that embroidery is badly done. And he will say, all the embroidery is like this? Honestly, I don't see the gist of it. I do not see how beautiful it is, because it was not done by a person who did not have a purpose for it, [someone] from outside... Maybe he received it for education and things like that, but within him, he doesn't see the gist of this embroidery they brag so much about... That's what we feel in that position, we feel angry, sad" – (San3, 19 February 2021)

According to the data, perceptions over the issue of 'appropriation' changed over the years. Knowledge over these instances resulted from access to media and social networks. Although the cases were not specified, the collected information suggests that the perception of 'appropriation' from companies and external actors doing the embroideries generates a general sense of sadness, anger, and discomfort among the artisans. The reproduction of "Tenangos" by third parties is regarded as an injustice, emphasising the lack of support and protection that the groups perceive. The idea that the textiles could be regarded as inspiration was determinedly rejected, as the participants convey that their vulnerable economic position should encourage companies and designers to work directly with them. However, artisans recognize a number of problems relating to the development and following of the cases:

"The truth is that there are many things that we do not know. For example, the case of Carolina Herrera, very strange. I really tell you I do not have that very clear. Did you know about the issue with Carolina Herrera's attorneys? Her Lawyers said they had compensated, that they had paid!" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)



"When it is more of a political issue... I cannot say that they have not received resources. They might have received something, but for them, not for us, the people who are involved. Really, even if there are retributions, there is no way to do this, to distribute them. People are never satisfied. And also because of the disorganization we have..." - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"Many people stayed with that idea, and really, nothing came here [retributions]. It is assumed that there was a demand presented by the State Government, of the State of Hidalgo. But if Carolina Herrera said that there were resources already paid to us here, obviously she is not going to lie, she is not going to get into that sort of troubles..." - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

The involvement of the Government was also addressed by the participants. Following the 'appropriation' of the Tlahuitoltepecan *xaam nixuy*, Senators Susana Harp and Ricardo Monreal developed a legal initiative, designed to protect the culture and identity of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities. Participants shared their perspectives over the Law:

"Seeing Susana Harp's reform in depth, it is really not beneficial at all. For me personally, if the designs that I can show you are mine, then they are mine. They do not belong to anyone, they do not belong to the community, they are mine... Culturally it belongs to the community, but personally it is mine. That Law implies, for example, that if you have a company and you want one of my Tenangos for your company to market it, I cannot sell the image to you. I cannot negotiate it with you. It would have to be consulted so that the community gives permission. Now, why the community? The design is mine. At the moment when you go to the community, and then the resources have to be distributed among the entire community. The Law is protecting, but not protecting me. It should protect from those who plagiarize, from those who steal, but not from me, because the designs are mine... The community has to give permission, has to negotiate, it is the community that has to receive the resources that are negotiated. I'm in total disagreement of this Law because it is not the way to protect. For example, if I make a design, a very beautiful one that I like a lot, I negotiate. Maybe I say that [the sale] contributes to the community, of course. I would gladly do it, and specially more with a company in order to receive some royalties. I would support that, but not that the community has the copyrights, which are mine... and that is what she is doing, what is going on in the reform of the Law. Hence the *amparo*<sup>22</sup> that was brought" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"It has to be different in each case because it is different in each case. [Cases of appropriation] are not the same, and she [Harp] is establishing a general Law" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

According to this interview, notions of individual creativity are being emphasised over the idea of communal ownership, with the information expressing a number of concerns regarding the agency of artisans in the negotiation and commercialisation of the designs. This reveals that among some participants, the property of the motifs remains on the individual level and not in the community at large. The participant added:

"What I could do is to no longer call it Tenango, but something different so that it does not fall within the Law. But that will be taking away the cultural part. It is my right, if I do the designs, I know what I can call it. But this changes everything" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

However, more positive perspectives were shared by other participants:

"It is important that the embroidery is protected, that it is respected, so that if there is some type of project like with Nestlé, the community is open to receive Nestlé. They can expose their project and of course, there should be a benefit for everyone. We would be supporting [collaborative projects] as long as we see a benefit for the community and not just for one person... It is important that there are laws that protect our embroideries, because as we are seeing it now, everyone becomes the owner of the embroideries when it is not like that... So that people who do not have the credit do not take advantage, and use this embroidery for their own benefits" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"What we are asking for, what we would request from the Governments, is not that they protect our drawings, because indeed, many look very alike. None are the same... but all of them are so different, everything is different. What I do believe that can be done... It may be very ambitious, but I think it can be done... Whoever wants to learn Tenangos should come to Tenango. And then those who want [textiles], the people from the Otomi communities should produce and carry out the embroideries" - (San6, 5 February 2021)

The data evidenced that the perspectives over the Law are considered positive by some, with participants finding the prospects of protecting the "Tenangos" as beneficial for the Otomi communities. The information suggests that participants consider the embroideries

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<sup>22</sup> Juicio de Amparo or Juicio de Garantías is a native Mexican legal institution. It is a constitutional remedy to obtain relief against violation of constitutional civil rights committed by the government or by a court of law. It has no equivalent in US or in English proceedings. Its purposes are to preserve the rights and freedoms granted by the Federal Constitution to private persons against executive, legislative and court acts and to preserve Federal, State and local sovereignty in interstate or Federal-State disputes. Relief applies only to the petitioner and the decision serves only as a reference for subsequent cases (and does not have the same force and effect as precedent does under US or British law). (Becerra, 1999, p.488).

a community asset, and thus, that the application of the Law will strive to protect their creative domains, allowing the Government to negotiate between companies and individuals who want to work with the Tenangos in order to end the disputes.

However, when addressing the processes of community consultation and communication with the external political actors involved in the passing of the Law, participants commented:

"No, not at all, because she [Susana Harp] is from Oaxaca. I think she is from Oaxaca, so she has nothing to do with Hidalgo" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"They [legal measurements] are always done by people with other interests. Sometimes they are governments, deputies, or someone who has a good position or has interactions with these important people. They themselves make their agreements, ignoring us in these cases. We have never been consulted; they never take us into account. When we find out, [the Law] it had already been published" – (San3, 19 February 2021)

"Nobody has come here. Sometimes they do tell us that about how this custom that we have with embroidery is not lost. But in reality, nobody has done anything for us. Nothing else is done, other than saying that we are artisans and that we have embroideries. But actually, no one has ever really been seen supporting this... Not even from the Municipality, for the artisans" – (San5, 5 February 2021)

"That I heard off, only one lady who is from the community [San Nicolás] has been contacted, but unfortunately, this lady has used this for her own benefit... She has even been awarded, recognised with prices of a lot of money. They publicise it and say that [the money] is for the community, but the awards or recognitions that have been given to her, stay with her... There are people who use her... She's a person who lends herself to be bossed around. She doesn't even realise what she is doing" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

"Maybe in this case there is a benefit to other people who are not even creators of the embroideries" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

The data informs that at the time that the interviews had been collected in February 2021, participants had not been consulted regarding the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities". The information further revealed a generalised contempt towards the Government, and the political actors involved in the topic of 'appropriation', as participants perceive a disregard for their opinions and needs. Moreover, the involvement of the communities in the topic was regarded as complicated. One of the participants explained:

"Many people do not get involved, and it's not so much a matter of saying I do not engage, there are many reasons. First, is to understand what we are involved in, and the other, are the resources. Because of this issue [appropriation lawsuits], I have to go up to Mexico City... For me, this is a social question, what I do is social work. Sometimes people ask what I am going to win. No, nothing... We have to defend ourselves because someone has to do something, but the truth is that all of this represents expenses. But here we are... I grew up with that idea. If someone has to do something, we cannot sit around and see what God says, because someone has to do something and there we are, we are in" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

The content analysis revealed that the legal protection and promotion of the "Tenangos" had been an ongoing topic of concern among the *Hñuhú* and *Hñahñu* communities even before the passing of the Law. The participants commented the existence of previous legal mechanisms installed by the State of Hidalgo:

"What they [State of Hidalgo] did was the collective brand, which is not really working either... They did it to protect us, for the artisans to be able to sell with a label. But with the same generalized one, the same label for everyone. It did not work for us either. You he gave the designs to the Government, and they put the label on them, and sold my designs together with other people's designs" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"The State government had approved a safeguarding Law. In fact, they declared a day the Tenangos throughout the entire State. But there is nothing that protects the work that Mrs. And Mrs. [names of artisans] do. It is something very general that we have. There is nothing that defines who plagiarized something or who takes advantages out of to market. Unfortunately, there is no law that takes care of what is behind them. There is no law, there is nothing that takes care of Mrs. [artisan] blouse or that says the blouse of Mrs. [name] costs so much and you can buy it in that place. There is nothing, unfortunately" – (San4, 5 February 2021)

"Sometimes, we curse the person who did all of this. It was a [Municipal] President who did all this. It was not given to us, we were not taken into account. It was registered as Tenango collective brand, from that first moment. We felt very angry, very sad, very disappointed in the Governments because they always use us, our work. We have never been asked, we have never been taken into account. Those who turn up their necks are other people..." – (San3, 19 February 2021)

In the year 2014, the "Tenangos Bordados de Hidalgo" was registered as a collective brand before the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property (IMPI)<sup>23</sup>. The measurement was applied as a mean to protect and copyright the name "Tenangos", and to market the textiles under a collective labelled brand. However, the data indicates that the perceptions of Government involvement in the protection of "Tenangos" embroideries through the mechanism have been negatively received. Among the issues highlighted, participants esteemed that the registration of the "Tenango" textiles under a collective brand implied a lack of regard and recognition for individual creators, as the textiles were sold by bulk, under a general label. Likewise, it was conveyed that the efforts were unable to protect designs from being 'appropriated', since the mechanism implied the individual registration of every motif, design, patterns, and product that is created.

Along this line, one of the informants highlighted previous instances of concern, regarding the involvement of Government dependencies in the subject of "Tenango" protection. The situation was reconstructed as follows:

"When they begin to make themselves [Tenangos] known - we are talking about 2008-2010 - sales had already started but through the CDI<sup>24</sup>. FONART<sup>25</sup> came and bought them. My wife made the pieces that we embroidered. FONART came and bought to take them to the CDI to sell. They were rude. People made a tremendous line because they all wanted to sell. They [agencies] handled low prices. I remember, they wanted the tablecloth for \$25 pesos, but when you told them, hey in Mexico City it is worth much more... They said, well you take them to sell them there yourself, we are not going to buy it from you here [in the community]. We are talking about a government institution, and they acted like that. It filled me with rage, most of the women took it very badly... In the FONART conferences they said that they were paying super well, that the artisans were [being treated] super good, blah, blah, blah. But when I tell people the real prices that were paid here, *they go backwards*<sup>26</sup>, how can FONART sell at such a prices? And I show people the papers [receipts]... It's an abuse, an outrage, it is a robbery...

Now, each *Licenciado*<sup>27</sup> who came to work at FONART, for two, three months, eventually saw it was a business. They quit the dependency and began to buy by themselves. There were like four *Licenciados* who left and began to trade directly with us, because they saw that it was gold...

When I met the *maestro* Carlos Lima, I had entered as an alderman in the Municipality and I had started like crazy to search, to knock on doors, find how to untie us [from institutions], because we were [treated] like slaves. The *maestro* Carlos Lima gives me an opportunity to talk with him and asked me to explain... He said FONART is an institution... He was also outraged, and says: you know what? We are going to do something, I'm going to help, don't worry! That's how we started with the events. We did an exhibition in the Senate of the Republic. He involved several artisans, managed the media for the shows. Asks artisans to join so they could meet and get to know him...

And that is how we got rid of FONART. FONART no longer had power because people started coming down here, and started buying directly from us... Artisans had the opportunity to say, it [textiles] are worth so much, unlike before, when they told us: we are going to pay you so much, if you want, otherwise take them to Mexico... After working and everything, we found people. Did you go to this exhibition? Yes, that's right! Many people already got to know us, they came down here. Everything was fine until the pandemic..." - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

The data indicates that the involvement of the FONCA [National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts] with the communities has been considered problematic. According to these individual perceptions, the agency controlled the access to external markets, regulating the commercialization of the products as an intermediary. The situation encouraged a sense of exploitation, and a perceived undervaluing of the products and of the artisan trade. In order to counter the incidence of Federal institutions in the commercialisation and management of the "Tenangos", artisans began to coordinate and group into cooperatives and associations:

"Jose Manuel [a lawyer] said that we had to make an association. We now have the Tenangos illustrator association. We did it, but for me there are expenses. I have to see that members are paid, since I am the president of the organization. I have to pay an accountant because it is necessary to declare everything when one has an association. Things that one did not know... It is complicated with the artisans, people believe gossips, lies. They don't say, let's see that it everything is clear and if they received any money. They just come

<sup>23</sup> The collective brand was created by the Governor of the State of Hidalgo State, José Francisco Olvera Ruiz, after a number of meetings with Secretary of Social Development, Geraldina García Gordillo; and the Undersecretary of Economic Development of the State, Secretariat for Economic Development, Velia Asiain Díaz de León; and the Ministry of Economy, Grissell Ubilla Ramírez.

<sup>24</sup> The National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the decentralized agency of the Mexican Federal Public Administration recognized as "the authority of the Federal Executive in matters related to indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples". The agency has been a replacement for the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, created in 2003; and The National Indigenist Institute, established in 1948.

<sup>25</sup> National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts.

<sup>26</sup> Colloquial expression for surprise.

<sup>27</sup> The term "Licenciado" is a courtesy used in Spanish to refer to a college graduate with a bachelor's degree. There is no equivalent term in English.

running with accusations. That means there is no unity. That's why I made it [the association] small. If I had done it with thirty people, then I would have had twenty on top [accusing me]" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"She [Anthropologist] came to the community and she contacted us, my family. She gave us like this great vision that we have right now. That is why we made a team together with the women who work [textiles] so that it is exposed, so that it is valued. You can see the work, which is not only about buying, but seeing the background, the work that is being done. As we are right now, embroidery is being appreciated a lot" - (San3, 19 February 2021)



*Pineda Covalin, printed "Tenango" designs presented in bag and scarf (2014).*



*Mara Hoffman, swimming suit and dress collection (2012).*



*Nestlé, chocolate mug collection for the brand Abuelita (2015).*



*Pottery Barn, pillow collection, produced in China (2016).*



*Draco Textil printed skirt (2016).*



*Mango, embroidered sweater (2016).*



*Yuya cosmetic range (2017).*



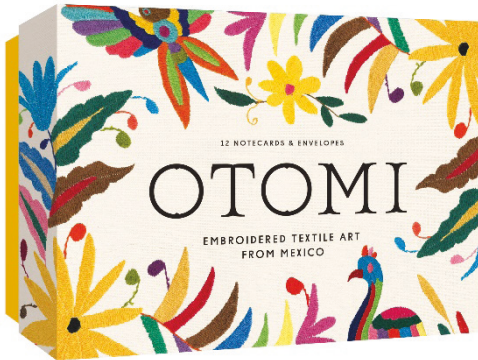
*That's it! (2018).*



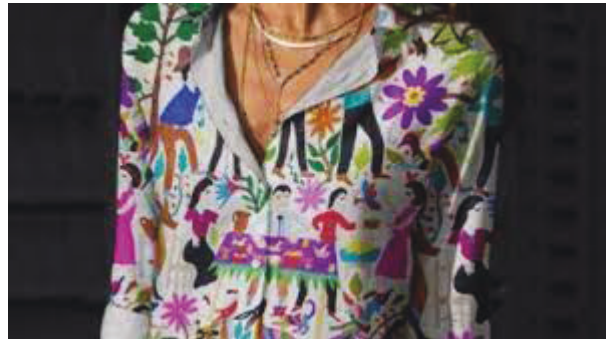
*Louis Vuitton, printed chair (2019).*



*Carolina Herrera, Resort 2020 Collection.*



*Princeton Architectural Press, printed card collection (2021).*



*Aster Tomorrow, printed blouse (2021).*



Figure 83. "Appropriated" "Tenangos" found in a broad range of commercial objects and Government led regional branding. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2021).

### 9.3 Questions of origin and authenticity: perceived changes after the controversies

As previously evidenced, the consideration of the "Tenango" embroideries as object cultural value, further enhanced by their involvement in "cultural appropriation" controversies, encouraged a number of efforts to protect the "Tenangos", including the creation of a collective brand, and the promotion of the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities". These developments not only enhanced the popularisation and commercialisation of the expressions but began to direct people's attention towards the origins of the embroidery. Participants delved on the source of the motifs:

"Well, the designs were taken, *here where your house is*<sup>28</sup>, in Tenango de Doria. Ten minutes away are the mountains of sand, called El Cirio. There in those mountains, there are a series of rock paintings that are similar [to the drawings]. It is from there, that our grandparents took the designs to decorate..." - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"I do not know if you have heard that they are from here, the Tenangos are from San Nicolás... I don't know if you've seen the cave paintings in El Cirio. The cave paintings were not found very long ago. It's been about 20 years, 15 years since these figures were found, and no one knew about those figures until the land was bought. They appropriated and found the drawings. But the embroideries have nothing to do with the paintings because they are very different drawings... They [the cave paintings] were very hidden, they [older relatives] didn't inspire from them. What we have learned is that for a long time, our grandmothers, our grandmothers' mothers had other types of embroidery, similar to these ones... They came to do it [Tenangos] because of an economic problem that existed in the community, which was urgent. And in this case, [they needed] to do something different and fast. The embroidery that they did was another type that took much longer. It needed even more time... This embroidery had even more complexity. Before the Tenango embroidery was born there were two, and they abandoned those two embroideries originating in the community due to the difficulties with which they were made. They opted for something easier and modified the form... A strategy... They invented [Tenango] embroidery about 50, 60 years ago, and began with figures of people in their environments, inspired by what was in their environment. Until one day, a gringo<sup>29</sup> arrived with some people who came from another place. They put them [older relatives] to paint on canvas: people, things that they did in the community, they represented life in the community there. But previously, they had only always worked with figures related to their environment. Birds, fish, tigers, there are tigers in the embroidery, and deer for example. People ask why they do it, if there is no sea, there was no sea, but there are many rivers where people went to fish. That the reason for the representation of fish, butterflies, birds, there were countless birds" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"The women who draw say, I don't even go to the hills. How is that going to be? [inspiration from El Cirio] I don't go to collect wood; I always stay at home. How am I going to be inspired by that [the cave paintings]? I didn't even know those things existed" - (San3, 19 February 2021).

"A boy [who was studying] says... The embroidery is reflecting the activity of the people, they were customs, creativity... I just kept listening, and when he finished and I told him, what do you think? I don't know who told you that story. [He replied] My mother. Where is your mom from? From here? They told your mom the wrong story. The embroidery did not start like that. The story of the creation that you are telling me, surged because a *gringo* came and told them to do this activity. And people are going to tell you that. Ask any craftsman who is of old age. He will tell you how this type of embroidery was made because a *gringo* imposed it on them, told them to do this activity and they did it. The *gringos* liked it a lot, and from there, they [people from the community] also began to have a taste [an appreciation] for the embroideries they represented. In fact, he [the American] was an anthropologist. He liked this activity that was reflected in the blankets that each one did.

The gringo was a person who came to the community a long time ago. I think he was a person, one of those people who go to the communities to teach people to read, to cook some things, to take care of themselves, clean themselves, house, things like that. A missionary, and his name is, because the gringo still lives, we have contacted his children who have come here, in fact the *gringo* learned to speak Otomí, he lived here for many years... His name is Richard Engel" - (San2, 19 February 2021)

"An archaeologist arrived and pointed out that these images that are found in there [in El Cirio], the paintings correspond to another culture that is not ours. It resembles the Aztec, Mayan culture... At some point they arrived there, lived there, and made those drawings. Obviously, the cave paintings don't match our culture" - (San3, 19 February 2021)

<sup>28</sup> Common Spanish expression to "welcome" people, implying that their home is yours.

<sup>29</sup> A usually facetious term used in Latin America or Spain to refer to a foreigner, especially non-Latino people of U.S. or British descent.



Although the "Tenangos" exist as a shared object of material culture along several communities in the Otomi-Tepehua Mountain range, participants shared different stories over the sources and inspirations that gave birth to the embroideries. Along these contrary perceptions, the apparent differences and similarities among the communities were also highlighted as a matter of relevance.

"Tenango, the municipality... I have not seen an embroidery from there that can surpass ours. They are beautiful, maybe, with a good design and everything, but it is not enough to impact as we would like it to impact; or as we would like it to reflect [the culture]. Obviously, the people who do not know, come to buy... as long as they [embroidered pieces] are cheap, and more or less done. Many people do not know what the difference between an original embroidery and any embroidery is... They don't realize it, I'm very sure. They might also have the same feeling, but since they don't know how to interpret it, they say, I'll take it with me, it's an embroidery, it's a Tenango, it's all the same" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

"An embroidery from our town [San Nicolas] and one from other towns, there is a lot of difference... Our embroidery is unique, we know how to combine colours" – (San3, 19 February 2021)

"We have also realized that for example, sometimes, we give them to several people who embroider in the neighbouring communities. There are two communities in particular, who are brothers, San Nicolás and Santa Mónica. They also belong to the same culture as us. They speak the *Hñuhu*, Otomí language... We have seen the work they do, and we really like how they work. It coincides a lot with us [San Nicolas]. I don't know if it's because we are brothers of the same culture, who share the same ideas, the same combinations. It is the only community that does the same as us, that we understand" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

Furthermore, the perceived distinctions between the communities, highlights one of the major issues involving the 'appropriation' controversies, relating the objects and their origins, and to the notions of authenticity.

"Here [Tenango] we are like forty authentic illustrators" – (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"Differentiating is very easy, it's in the way that it is drawn. The shapes of the drawings are unique, they are not repeatable... They are like magic drawings because each drawing is not repeated. A person who copies, you see the same order of their drawings. That is the difference between an original drawing and a moulded one. I don't know if it has a mould, but the mould of the hand they have, is the drawing they embroider. It is the same drawing that can be captured in two, three identical parts in a single fabric" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

"Another very easy way to identify [the authentic from the copies] are the colours. Many people make the combinations with what exists on the internet" – (San3, 19 February 2021)

"The embroidery that we do, speaks; and that is why we can see when other embroideries are not original ones. They can even stress you. A lot of embroidery that I see causes me a depression, a stress. This thing happens with an embroidery when we identify it as a fake embroidery, so to speak. A few days ago, someone presented some chairs. We saw the work they did on the chairs, and I no longer wanted to see them. Those images caused me a lot of stress... That is the difference from an original embroidery, an authentic embroidery" – (San2, 19 February 2021)

"Obviously, some [embroideries] are not the same. They are known, but obviously they are not the original ones. They are not from here [San Nicolas]" – (San1, 19 February 2021)

According to the analysis of the data, the concepts of origin, authenticity, representativeness, and cultural significance were established by the participants as some of the mechanisms used to construct and maintain the differences and similarities of the expression, their value, and consumption. The origins of the "Tenango" embroideries, and their relation to ethnic and/or geographical sources, as well as to their familiar and community bonds, play a relevant role in the construction of the objects as cultural goods. In this sense, the "Tenango" handicrafts are affected by the degree to which they remain ingrained to the commonly shared interpretations of their origins, the traditional practices for producing them, the relationships through which they surge, and the forms and aesthetic characteristics which constitute them.



Figure 84. "Danza del Palo Volador" embroidered "Tenango". (Museo de Culturas Populares, 2020).

However, although notions of authenticity and tradition are highly entrenched in the categorisation of the "Tenangos" as elements of cultural value, the implications, demands, and satisfaction of the market remain a conscious matter among the participants:

"Now when the orders are made, it depends on what the client asks for. There are those who ask just birds or combined. There are others who ask for more deer than birds..." (San3, 19 February 2021)

"[The Tenango embroidery] has already evolved, effectively. We have the classic, the commercial, and the traditional or customary. The classic is the authentic design, as it was born in Tenango, just as grandparents drew them. The commercial is the one that you see everywhere, the one that people *plagiarize* from us, the one that people know... The traditional or customary one... It's the tablecloth where a wedding is portrayed, where the *Palo Volador*<sup>30</sup> is depicted, where a drawn community is shown" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"...[the designs] we had created them, a little more as art rather than crafts. We make fusions, we merge, and put something out [in the market]. I always wanted to do something different, and we put those images out, which were a little different... The fusion are the designs, the drawing that are a little different from the normal Tenangos" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"I manage the creative part [for the collective], I say now we are going to get a Christmas boot out in the market, but with these characteristics. It was like that last year, to make it attractive to people" - (San4, 5 February 2021)

<sup>30</sup> The "Dance of the Flyers", or of "Flying Pole" is an ancient Mesoamerican ceremony/ritual that is performed until today, albeit in modified form, in some isolated areas of Mexico. It is believed that the dance originated among the Naha, Huastec, and Otomi peoples of present-day central Mexico, who still practice it. The ritual consists of dance and the climbing of a 30-meter (98 ft 5 in) pole from which four of the five participants then launch themselves tied with ropes to descend to the ground. The fifth remains on top of the pole, dancing and playing a flute and drum.

According to the data, changes in the production, and the creation of new categories and forms of the "Tenangos", suggest that the external market has fostered the proliferation of new products. This concurs with the theoretical assumption implying that the market is not as a simple place of exchange of goods, but part of more complex site of dynamic sociocultural interactions that affect the creation of objects of material culture. Moreover, the data suggests that the reappraisal of the "Tenangos" through their circulation in the 'art-culture' system, had made the characteristics of the material object and that of the role of the artisan interchangeable with those of pieces of art and the figure of the artist. In this sense, the "Tenangos" are defined by their interpretation by the consumers and producers, and by the purpose of their consumption.

Similarly, the rise of new commercial technologies has been vital in enhancing those changes:

"I have a [Facebook] page where I upload my clothes that I have, so it [commercialisation] depends on who contacts me" - (San3, 14 February 2021)

"I send photos of the drawings, in addition to all the material, when someone tells they want to see everything that is in stock. What you love will be there. But if I send you a photo of what already does not exist [because it was already sold] that is complicated. I send them photos of what there is [in stock], what I already have finished, for them to choose" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

"My goal has always been to get them [embroideries] out of here, so that what we do here is known and so that the whole world can see it. I have sent them abroad, enough products so that people already know where those embroideries come from. It doesn't come from so-and-so lady, it doesn't come from a so-and-so man. It comes from us. It comes from here, in Hidalgo" - (San3, 14 February 2021)

"We have been working in this way for about 6 years now, selling through social media... That's the way we market, mainly through social media" - (San4, 5 February 2021)

The public and decentralized nature of the Internet has provided a tool for artisans to access external markets without the need for intermediaries. The commercialisation of the "Tenango" handicrafts on virtual platforms and on social media directly to consumers, demonstrate the transformation of the spaces in which the expressions circulate, representing new sites for the distribution and consumption of cultural goods. According to the participants, the incorporation of the "Tenango" handicrafts to the external market (national or global) includes all of its categories, with the new commercial forms – created by influence and demand of the external market – maintaining values and relationships under the criteria of authenticity. New commercial forms did not surge from the cultural conceptions and practices which are endemic to the Otomi groups, but still maintain a solid affiliation to the community. Nevertheless, one of the participants presented a different perception, with the production of crafts being related to values of uniqueness and exclusivity:

"We do not use social networks [for commercialization], because for example, if I make a tablecloth, 10-15 people will want to buy it, and five will want the same drawings. But there is only one. It is unique piece. I can sell it to one person, but then I lose face with four. Now, if it is a special drawing, then thank God, there are people who will pay. But people who throw a tantrum over a Tenango, they tell me, I want that one, and you can't sell them anything else. They only want that one! That's the reason why we do not use social networks" - (Ten1, 14 February 2021)

Thus, the data analysis suggests that the notions of self-representation in relation to the commercialization of cultural artifacts remain, even though the type of objects and the notions related to them (authentic, exclusive, etc) change depending on the artisan, their perspectives and relation to the objects.

The Case Study relating to the "Tenango" embroideries produced by *Hñuhú* and *Hñahñu* artisans from the communities of Tenango de Doria and San Nicolas had the purpose of presenting the specific elements that compose the 'cultural appropriation' controversies, as a phenomenon influenced by transculturation processes. The testimonies enabled the description of the objects of material culture, specifying the different conception of the "Tenango" forms were embedded by patterns of embroidered motifs, which have been symbolically arranged as expressions of the culture and identity of the communities.

The testimonies were also intended to respond to the question: who are the actors involved? Denoting that the participation of local and external actors played a relevant role in the development of the occurrences, as well as the shaping of the events into controversial incidents. The reconstruction of the 'appropriation' narratives was obtained through the interpretation of the relations and negotiations that occurred between the social entities involved, providing different meanings and understandings to assess the results and consequences of the phenomenon. Presenting the particularities of this Case Study, allowed to detect the perceived changes and alterations that affected the communities and the "Tenango" embroideries as the events developed.





## Chapter 10 – The gabanes from Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen - Content Analysis Case Study 3

The main objective of this research focuses on analysing the main aspects and factors involved in the development of cases of 'cultural appropriation', as conveyed by the perspectives of the social actors involved in three different case studies. This exercise was first directed towards the identification of the different objects, agents, relationships, and contexts through which the controversies surge, collecting and examining accurate information to reveal the different perceptions on the objects and the behaviours of the actors involved, in order to assess their impact on the evolution of the events. Additionally, this process intends to bring attention to the individual and communal interests of the participants that were directly involved in acts of 'appropriation'.

The following chapter presents the analysis of the third case study, concerning the cultural objects known as *gabanes*, and the artisans from the communities of Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen that produce them in the State of Michoacan. Following the theoretical and methodological strategies presented in this work, this process was able to identify the traditional *gabanes*, produced by a single family of artisans living in two separate communities, as the starting point to analyse the interactions and behaviours – influenced by different contexts and times – that guided the development of the 'appropriation' polemics.

According to Anthropologist Amalia Ramirez, the *gaban* is a rectangular woven woollen coat used by men. The garment usually measures 1m wide x 2.20 m long and is characterised by a neck-opening or rim in the centre, through which the head is introduced, allowing the garment to hang from the shoulders, covering the front and back of the body. Decoration on the *gabanes* is usually located around the neckline, on the edge/frames of the canvas or near the bottom, near the threads that compose the warp fringes (2014, p. 5-6). The *gabanes* from the region became the object of controversy after French designer Isabel Marant presented an 'appropriated' fretted overcoat/cape on her Etoile Fall-Winter 2020 collection. Currently, the garments are only produced by a family, living in two separate communities.

### 10.1 Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahutzen: locations for the digital ethnographies

As previously mentioned, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the year 2020 interrupted the presential ethnographic process that was originally intended for this research. Due to the epidemiological conditions, a new strategy for data collection had to be developed, relying on the use of digital technologies to create connections and interactions with the participants of this thesis. All interviews were carried using Zoom and Facebook video calls.

The use of Facebook provided the first attempt to locate artisans who produced *gabanes* in the villages of Santa Clara del Cobre in the State of Michoacan. As a starting point, this tool allowed me to connect with Scc1 (male, 21, artisan and student) who served as the main contact to access other members of the artisan community. Noticeably, the conversations revealed that all of the producers of *gabanes* belong to the same family. Although most of the relatives inhabited the town of Santa Clara del Cobre, one of them lives in the neighbouring village of Nahuatzen (male, 65, artisan and retired construction worker), implying that the research had to be focused on two simultaneous regions.

Santa Clara del Cobre is a recognised as a "Magical Town" ("Pueblo Mágico"), part the programme led by the Secretariat of Tourism and other federal agencies in the country, to promote special experiences that increase tourism in rural areas. The municipality is located in the centre of the State of Michoacán, and lays 18km away from the town of Pátzcuaro, and 79 km away from the state capital of Morelia. According to official monographies, the community is located at a height of 2,227 meters above sea level, providing a home for 14,359 inhabitants (6,931 male, 7,428 female) (INEGI, 2010).

On the other hand, the municipality of Nahuatzen is located in the Tarascan Plateau west of Lake Pátzcuaro at an elevation between 2,300 and 3,300 metres. An estimated a population of 28,074 inhabitants live in the town. In the Purépecha language, Nahuatzen is recognized as "the place where it freezes" (2019). Politically, the governance of the village is shared between an Indigenous Citizens' Council, and the municipal government.



Figure 85. Geographical location of Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen in the State of Michoacan. (Sierra Iracheta, 2020).

## 10.2 The gabanes: A family tradition of 'mestizo' origins

The theoretical and methodological implications of this work considered that the study of material culture sustains the connections with actors and sites, revealing information on the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of a given phenomenon. Accordingly, this work intended to follow the objects and actors in order to determine their circulation through different spatial and temporal networks, in an attempt to expose the symbolic, material, identity, social and cultural conceptions through which 'appropriation' controversies develop through time. Therefore, this exercise was first directed towards the identification of the objects of material culture and the actors involved in the controversies. This positioned the *gabanes* from Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen as the main object of study.





Figure 86. Examples of gabanes from Santa Clara del Cobre. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2022).







Figure 87. Images of the gabanes produced in Nahuatzen. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2022).

The members that were interviewed for this collaborative work shared descriptions over the materiality, function, and purposes of the *gabanes*, further highlighting the values associated to the objects as expression of material culture, family heritage and economic exchange. The significance of the *gabanes* were broadly defined as follows:

"The *gabanes* have some history; people have been using them for a while now... My grandfather was taught [weaving], my grandfather, my father and then all others" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"My parents have dedicated themselves to weaving. In other words, this job is already a family heritage. And so, we have continued to conserve it to date. The loom was my father's inheritance. I used to work with my dad, and it's been almost thirty, about thirty-five years since I became independent" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"It is a craft that has lasted and has been preserved here for years. We can say, we are already the fourth generation of inheritance that our ancestors left us..." - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

The first impressions suggest that the *gabanes* in Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen are intrinsically associated with the concepts of tradition and heritage on both community and family levels. However, the use of *gabanes*, *sarapes* and *jorongos* – as the garments are colloquially known in different regions – is extended throughout the country. Historically, these types of coats were created after the introduction of sheep, and the use of wool in the territories of the former New Spain, accompanying the rise of important pedal-loom textile centres in cities such as Zacatecas, Puebla, Texcoco, Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende, and Tlaxcala. Nonetheless, the production, distribution, marketing, and use of these type of garments are not only defined by particular socioeconomic and technological aspects, but by the experiences of the world in which the weavers are immersed.

The testimonies suggest that the differences of the *gabanes* produced by the family are reflected through the techniques, designs and motifs found on the woven fabric. This emphasised the relevance of weaving and ornamentation in the construction of meaning and identity, as participants focused on describing the graphic contents that differentiated their *gabanes* from others:

"There are several regions that work a lot of *gabanes*, but no, no, no, they don't look like ours. It doesn't compare with the ones that we manufacture. Those who sell *gabanes*, that have stores open all the time, are going to say that some are from Michoacán, but one who works with them knows that the *sobregaban* is not from Michoacán, that it is from another region. Because, if you have noticed, during fairs there are many gentlemen who carry their *gabanes* on their shoulders and offer them to the customers. But all those *gabanes* are not from here, from Michoacán. They bring them from Guanajuato, from Coroneo, or from Acámbaro. We know the styles, the designs. They bring other ones that are very different. All that *gabanes* they bring are "half work" that's what they call it. That is, no more than a crossed fretwork and a "mouth" [neckline] with some drawings, and the rest is plain. It doesn't have a lot of work, and mine are special because it's certainly fretted, it's a special design... There are quite a few types of *gabanes*... Well, sometimes the simplest is the "T" fret, the "Aztec" fret... And then it starts with the double fret, there are two, three types of double frets..." - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"They are designs that in today's times - there are other places where they also make *gabanes* and *sarapes* and that, but they are more modern designs, more modern. But people still like the designs from before... Also, ours bring a little more reality, a sense of being real [authentic], and not as sophisticated... People are very interested in that... There's an infinity of frets we use. There are so many. I alone can count about 300..." - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"They [family] didn't teach me to draw on the canvas [like in Oaxaca], and besides, our looms are more open and that can't be done... The very realistic designs can't be done... That's something that limits us. But that's how all the looms here in the region are. It is also something very characteristic of our *gabanes*" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"The typical designs that are from here, from Santa Clara del Cobre were originally only like 3. These were the "Aztec" fret, the "T" fret, and the typical *sobregaban* with laurels at the top" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"The Santa Clara *gabanes* have "candles" and the fret that is the fret of the "Lle". The stamp of on the grey is called the "edge". On the edge there is always a fretwork... And at the bottom they always have a stripe. You have the "cajon" and the edge, and the figures in different sizes... In the bottom you have the "tacos" [fringes]. The traditional *sobregaban* always begins with a white part. Some no longer have it because they are not so traditional. They are already modern. From the "tacos" [fringes], which are about one and a half centimetres, there is always, always, always something called a "ribbon", and it always has a ribbon with a comb. Then there are others, which have a "vein" below. The *gabanes* have figures... There are like little flowers, little monkeys, little balls, arrows... And we also have different "mouths" [necklines], like the star..." - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

The descriptions of the *gabanes* based on the graphic content of the garments, suggests that the distinctiveness of the objects integrates notions of locality, and of specific technicalities involved in their production. However, the reciprocal relationship between artisan and object revealed further relationships. When further addressing the creative processes and selection of designs that conform the pieces, the impact of family transmission began to surge as a main theme:

"My father taught me how to make all the designs" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"Well, having the drawing, having the wool, I already knowing more or less how to [weave a *gaban*], because my dad taught me. I already have the designs and so on, so I start getting the ideas. And many times, well, I no longer have to ask him [father], I already know many things... My dad is the one who tells me what colour to make the *gabanes*. He tells me: "a grey *gaban* with white", because I already know more or less how the combination is, I do it" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"First, I see what there is, I see photos of my *gabanes*, those of my grandfather, of all of them. I start looking. And then, the little things that I like, I write them down, and that's it... So that the threads and the designs are good for me, I first put them on paper... otherwise they won't come out" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"According to my mum, my dad invented some frets. Because my dad was really a very creative person. He already rescued some of the samples [of *gaban* designs], those that my grandfather used... He used it to make new figures... And she says that she believes that he did them" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"I make the designs, the frets, figures, of animals, horses, deer, letters, also letters. And that's the way I work... Some designs my dad inherited them. Some others my grandfather, my father's father. He inherited some designs and to date, I have kept those designs. We are talking about many years ago, we are talking about an average of 40, 60 years that people liked that" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"All the designs are very similar to the ones used in Pátzcuaro... Because family from there then taught in Santa Clara... The designs they use in Pátzcuaro, in Nahuatzen, they are very similar to ours and it's because the uncle that taught my grandfather came from there... My grandfather told me that he also got designs from his own imagination" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

As suggested by the testimonies, the *gabanes* and their designs are tightly associated to family ties and to the transmission of the trade from generation to generation. This revealed that the learning processes involved a constant dialogue among family members within the confines of the domestic unit. When enquired over the learning processes, the participants added:

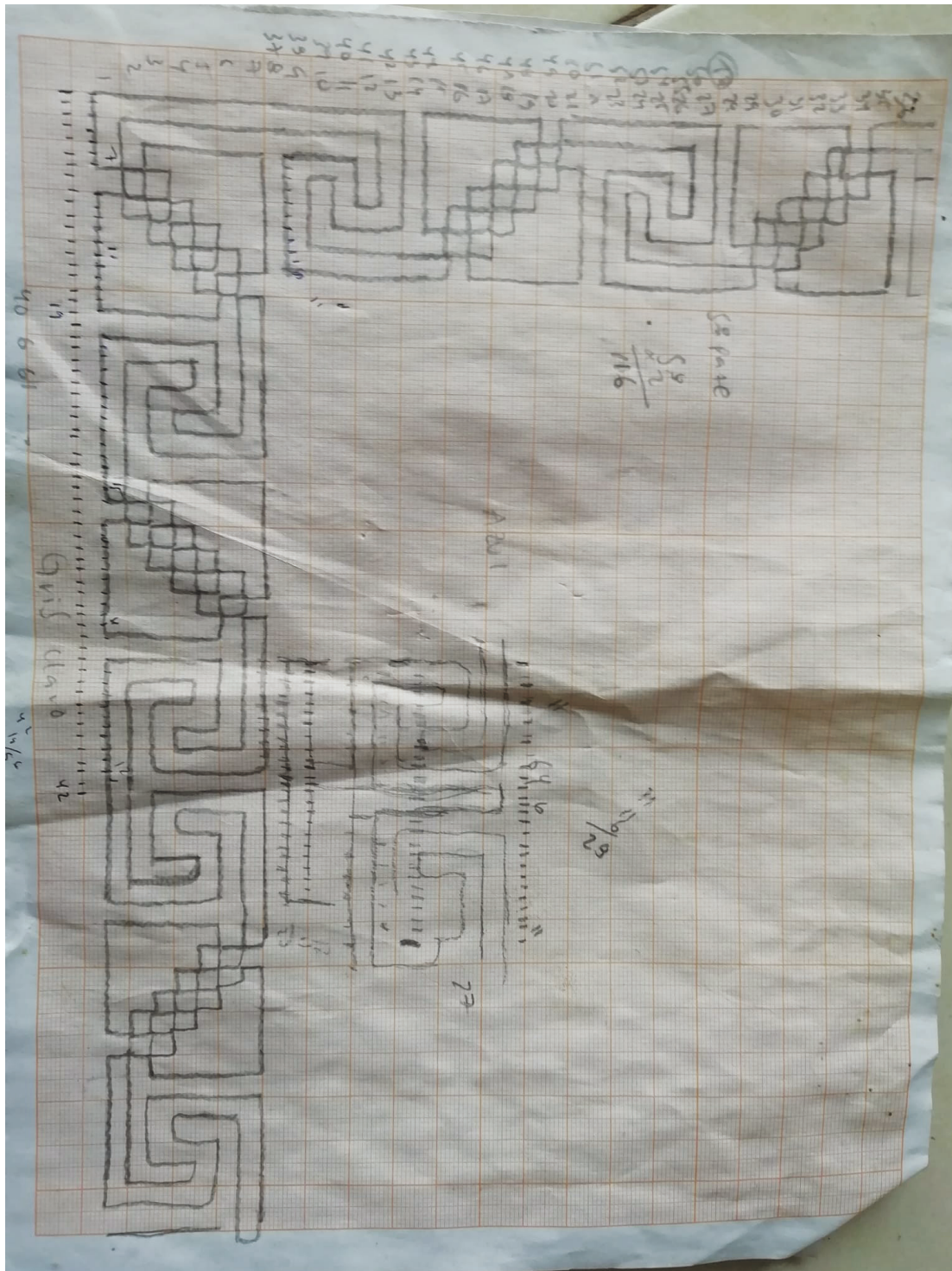


Figure 88. Paper drawn designs for the *gabanes*. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

"This is family heritage, from my father. He taught several of us, and now I have taught all my sons" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I started learning with my parents and my brothers. My father was dedicated to weaving..." – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"I worked with my father, my grandfather... before we lived in my grandfather's house and my grandfather lived with my father and another of my uncles and my cousins. So that's where my dad made me do small tasks... When my brothers finished studying and started working on their careers, there was one loom left. And that was the loom where my dad taught me to weave... My grandfather was taught... by his uncle! My grandfather's father passed away when he was eight years old. So, no... his father did not teach him. But the father of his uncle also weaved. And so, his uncle taught him... His uncle, he lived in Pátzcuaro. And then he came here, to Santa Clara. I really don't know how he was, how he managed to come here, but he came here and taught him... My dad first taught me the simplest jobs, which was to make plain, that's what we call "flat" weaving. Afterwards, he made me make a little *sobregaban*, and the simplest figures which are: little balls, which are a kind of little flowers. They also teach you how to make the basic "cajón", which is the part of the *gaban* that goes on the inside. Then, what do they call "bottles" – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"At my place we're working my dad, me, and a cousin who is learning" – (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"We are only... They are my uncle, his children are four... five, six, and with me there are seven. Seven weavers in the family..." – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"I started working from a very young age, because my father worked making the *gabanes*. When I was 10-12 years old, at that time we carded the wool and spun it by hand because there were no spinning factories like there are now... I learned it from my father... Even my dad taught me to paint the colours [dye]- Be it red, blue, navy blue, orange,... cherry, brown. Now I am 68 years old... I taught four of my children and they are working, [weaving] *gabanes* and rugs. Especially because it is more convenient, they work for a lady who is the one [buying] the *jorongos*" – (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"The trajectory I've had working [in the trade]. There was this man in Patzcuaro, named Don Diego Solís. I got close to this man when I was in Pátzcuaro. I asked Don Diego if he could teach me how to do the fretworks around. He told me yes, I'll teach you, as I had already learned with my godfather... He told me: Yes, I'll teach you, but you know what? You're going to work with me for a while, but for free. Because I'm already old, and I need to dedicate myself to teaching you this, so of course one thing will go for another, he said. You give me the way to get my money and to sell my *gabanes*, and you will teach yourself [as in, being taught]... And I was already here in Santa Clara. So, from here I travelled every day to Pátzcuaro with Mr. Diego. I didn't last as long as he had allotted me, much less. After three months he said: Now yes, I already taught you how to do some little fretworks and now you are going to do them yourself. You invent them, or you to see how you do them, but this is it. He says, and in gratitude, I'm going to give you some carding brushes, a lathe, and a spindle. You did work hard to be able to teach yourself, and it helped me a lot, both of us". And that's when I set up my little workshop here, in Santa Clara" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

The testimonies emphasised the importance of the intergenerational processes of knowledge transmission among the male members of the nuclear, and sometimes extended, family line. Participants further addressed their life-long trajectories producing the crafts:

"I learned to weave at the age of eight. Right now, I am 16 and this year I turn 17" – (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"I started weaving when I was twelve years old. And right now, I'm currently sixty-two years old... One teaches oneself by pure sight. Now when you get on a loom it's easy, easy to learn how to make the drawings and everything... You start with the easiest and when that comes out, you start opening the way [improving], making more complicated designs." – (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I started weaving when I was 13, but really doing small tasks [on the loom], since 6-7 years old... Like winding, which is removing the thread from the winder. Make the bobbins for the fabric. Those little things are what they made me do first. Remove the thorns from the *gabanes*. It was the little things that they [relatives] made us do. Later, we moved here to my new house [from the grandfather's house]. My older brothers also worked on the loom. I have three, two older brothers and three sisters. I was the sixth child..." – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"I started making my crafts at the age of 7, weaving, weaving. I'm 67 years-old now, just weaving. I did all the process by hand, everything: carding, spinning, and finishing the weaving" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I started working with wool crafts, very young. It seems to me that I was 6 years old, 7 years old... From that age we started, not to weave but to prepare all the materials... That was the age that I started working, and then I started weaving when I was 19 years old. I began to weave and make pieces for *gabanes*, blankets, serapes... I started from that age. That's what I dedicate myself to" – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

According to the data, the processes for learning the trade began at an early age. Weaving is an activity that was primordially taught by older male family figures – grandfathers, fathers, godfathers – suggesting that the trade follows a patriarchal model in which the organization of work and the transmission of knowledge remains embedded by gender roles. The data implies that the tradition of weaving is traced in unilinear manners through principles of patrilineality within the domestic unit, allowing the descendants to recognize common ancestors, while simultaneously providing the lineage with a sense of identity and belonging to both family and artisan social groups. The information also suggests that the system grants individuals with the right to inherit the artisan trade, allowing family members to fulfil social prerogatives, providing them with a position within their homes and within society. The kinship between males, providing norms related to descendance and inheritance, further guide the organisation of working conditions in which the ties fulfil different tasks around the craft for the establishment of organised family workshops.



Figure 89. *Gaban* being woven on a pedal loom. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2021).

In addition to the relevance of family notions of heritage participants further described the cultural and utilitarian importance of *gabanes*, emphasizing the uses of the objects, both in the past and in the present:

"Many overcoats are for used to ride horses on the ranches or in the fields, but there are also *gabanes* for parties. The *gabanes* are used to gift at weddings... For example, the bride's relatives give a *gaban* to the groom, so that he can hug the bride... There is another type of *gaban* that is made for dancing. It is a very traditional dance here, in the state of Michoacán, the "Danza de los Viejitos"<sup>31</sup>" – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"Previously, the *gabanes* were used by the people from the shores of the lake in Patzcuaro, or by the people from the mountains, to shelter themselves from the wind and rain. And nowadays, they occupy them a lot for the dances. We have even sent *gabanes* to the United States. They buy us from other countries to use them in the traditional dances of Michoacán" – (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

<sup>31</sup> Translated to "Dance of the Old Men" the dance is performed by men – usually four – in representation of the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air. The dancers request El Dios Viejo (The Old God) for good harvest, communication with spirits, and to learn about the past or to predict the future.

"In here [Santa Clara]... Older men use them in the mornings, generally when they ride horses, because it's quite cold here... But in the Purépecha plateau they are used daily by old men, and they are also used for weddings. I believe that the godparents give one to the groom. And the groom wears it in the ceremony, in the church. So, in that part, it also has a meaning of ritual, he [groom] has to wear it at the wedding... And also, where they use it a lot, it is in the celebration of the New Fire, of the Purépecha New Year. That is the 2nd of February. On that day, they do it in a different community and everyone, all the Purépechas wear a *sobregaban*. It's a very, very cool celebration that came out about 26 years ago, more or less... This celebration is relatively new, and that is where I have seen that they use them, and wear them very well... I also imagine that they wear them because of the cold. Because the celebration of the New Fire begins at 6:00 in the morning, and that is when everyone carries them, and afterwards in the night, because it ends at 12, that is also when everyone brings them. And the communities are almost all on the plateau and the plateau has a lot of forest. That's why they use them... I divide the types into three: the simple *gabanes*, the dance *gabanes*, and the traditional *gabanes*" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"Everything was *gaban*, for domestic use, well, for the consumer's use... Before, *gabanes* were used a lot, a lot, here in Santa Clara. And I still remember that when I started working here all the people wore *gabanes*. And they come from the ranches, they send to make a *gaban* with us, about two or three. And like here, well, we had the forms with a variety of drawings. That is why my children were encouraged to work, because it [money] was easy to get" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

The testimonies suggest that the *gabanes* have functions that were originally linked to subsistence activities in agricultural/rural contexts. Accordingly, the garments were employed when working in the fields and in other daily activities, such as horse riding, in order to protect the body from cold temperatures and humid environments.



Figure 90. *Gaban with religious images.* (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

However, although participants esteemed that the garment is solely used as an everyday object by older men living in agrarian environments, the *gabanes* play an important role in ritual practices. These include the celebration of marriages, in which the man is presented with the garment by their relatives, so that it can be worn during the ceremony, and later used to cover and protect the bride.

Moreover, the *gabanes* are part of the attires used in the 'Danza de los Viejitos', a ritual dance of Purepecha origins, also known as *T'arche Uarakua*, in which a group of masked men stage the ailments of old age, followed by flaunts of youthful vitality, expressed with intense stomping of the feet. The content analyses further revealed that although the garments have utilitarian and cultural purposes used in agrarian and ritual practices among Purepecha communities, the artisans that produce them do not identify with this group. One participant discussed:

"Here, in Santa Clara, no one really speaks Purepecha anymore, we are all *mestizos* now. No one speaks Indigenous languages anymore"  
- (Scc1, 23 January 2021)



Figure 91. *Traditional regional dancer. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).*

This information suggests that discourses of national identity are present as parameters that sustain cultural and ideological convictions over matters of representation and identity in the country. Although the *gabanes* are used in Indigenous ceremonies and rituals in the State of Michoacan, the garment is produced by 'mestizos', as a product that resulted from the processes of miscegenation between European and Indigenous inheritances.

In addition to the values involving family and cultural traditions and identifications, the data further suggests that the process for creating the *gabanes* is also motivated by other factors:

"I'm half distracted with my cell phone when I weave, but anyway... When I get to weave well, I forget that I even have a cell phone" -  
(Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"This work fascinates me. It completely fascinates me. It's that for me, this work absorbs me, it completely absorbs me, and I don't have time to think about negative things or bad things, nothing, none of that. If I concentrate on my work and some drawing that I haven't done, it's almost as it is my challenge that I have to do it!" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"People would be watching me weaving when I took my loom to the fair in May. They said: "No, well, this is difficult", because it is a lot of work and there is no advantage in weaving, because everything is complicated. And, a fret *gaban*, the more fretwork it has, the more difficulty it has. And that is where the [visual] movement is... That makes the piece valuable, gives it the appearance it has... Knowing how to match the colours is the most difficult, because if they don't know how to match the colours, a craftsman is still not a craftsman, because he puts the colours together and the drawing no longer comes out" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"Well, in real time, weaving, it could take me about... 16 hours? Coming from me about 16, more or less, 18 hours... The time to assemble and disassemble the loom takes a while, more or less 30 minutes... It requires a lot of time, all of my time" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"So in general, I start work at 7, 8 in the morning. During the day I get off the loom to walk, because I have spent a lot of time with this, a lot of time standing, and likewise, I have to rest mentally and physically, because weaving contains all my concentration. More than anything, this improves my mental work, because one has the practice in the hands" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"If it's a simple *gaban*, and you don't have a lot of work, it takes you more or less three days [to finish it]. Everything is made by hand, on wooden looms... Mounting the loom takes one entire day because you have to make the warp<sup>32</sup>. You have to make the warp in an artifact called the warper... I work 12 hours a day, every day, from 9am to 11pm, with some breaks in between. The entire day. I work at home and everything. If I were salaried, I would almost have a schedule, but since it is family work, I work hard. I have to work hard for a while, and then I need to rest" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I think it takes me about three days to complete an *gaban*, but it would be putting twelve hours a day on it. And that would be strange, basically when I'm on vacation, because I'm totally clear [minded]. When it's not like that, it takes between a week and a half, or so" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"It takes me... Let's say, about sixteen hours, because I'm already tired. I don't work the same as when I was... new hehe But when you are new [young], well, you can do one in a day, right? It depends then, the fretwork or the drawings, all that goes. That the *gaban* is going to be very ornamented with frets, very laborious... then it is more entertaining... I also paint [dye] the yarns. I paint them in a saucepan, in a copper saucepan. There I prepare, either a kilo or two kilos, and make the grams that I have to put on it. And there are colours that I affirm [fix] with sulfuric acid, and there are others that I affirm [fix] with white vinegar, right? It is a very special process" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

These testimonies suggest that the significance of the *gabanes* also relate to aspects oriented towards introspection and self-fulfilment. The creative processes represent a mastery of both physical and intellectual abilities, which positions artisans as creative individuals, capable of taking decisions, solving issues, and selecting graphic elements, based on prior knowledge. This information places the craftsperson as a creative individual, as the participants convey that the weaving of the pieces is tied to the artisan's ability to plan, create, and express their individual minds. The creative approach of artisans represents a dynamic process that allows individuals to solve problems throughout a transformational process, requiring the completion of a series of stages or technical steps to complete a *gaban*.



Figure 92. Weaving of a *gaban* on the pedal loom. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> The warp and weft are the two basic structural components that compose a woven fabric. The lengthwise or longitudinal warp yarns are held stationary in tension on a frame or loom, while the transverse weft is drawn through and inserted over and under the warp to compose a fabric.



According to the analysis, the talent, dedication, efforts, and times that are required to complete a woven piece, are associated as immaterial factors that further provide artisans with a sense of self-accomplishment. The task of completing a *gaban* is regarded as a laborious activity, requiring the mastery of specific knowledge and a constant physical and mental commitment to the task, which in turn, adds value to the object and its production. This evidences that the *gabanes* are not only appreciated as utilitarian, cultural, emotional, aesthetic, or economic objects, but as psychosocial elements that demand talent and perseverance, producing feelings of pride and well-being among the artisans. Along these lines, the theme of creativity surged:

"We create to our liking and depending on how aesthetic it looks. For example, this *gaban* if you see, the edges are very squared, and everything looks very squared. So, the "mouth" [neckline] is more circular and it breaks that composition, because if it were squared, it would all look very squared. And it's what I like to do! And it's what my dad also imposed on me a lot: to imagine how things are going to look, hehehe, the *sobregaban*. He told me, when they were coloured *gabanes*: "No, don't put that colour on because it will be overshadowed", or "don't put that colour on them like that, put it somewhere else, in another place". And that's how you acquire that, like, sensitivity in seeing what looks good and what doesn't. Yes, and that's why the *gabanes* from here, from Santa Clara and from my family are like that, basically" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"Well, the colours, each one [decides], according to the designs that one is going to make, that is the colours that one is preparing [on the loom] or that one will start to dye" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

Although the transmission of the trade is valued as symbolic family and social resource, incentives to continue with the activities was also connected with economic motivation. The participants expressed:

"I learnt because it caught my attention and I kept telling my dad to teach me for more than a year. He didn't want to teach me because there were no more looms... I have thought about studying something else, but ... I know that if I study such a thing for a while, after I finish my studies, I will not have a job or find one quickly. And for that reason, I am also encouraging myself to want to learn more how to weave and do the *gabanes*..." - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"I liked the trade. Since you're raised in the house where people work, well, you pay attention, you pay attention, and then when you start weaving, in about two weeks you already know [how to weave]" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I taught my son because he didn't want to study so he better had to work. That's what happens when someone is lazy. If you have to work, it is better to start working on the trade" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"It really was a matter of having to weave [an obligation]. My dad first taught my other two older brothers, and then... "you go", that is what he told me, because "if not, who is going to help me?". He had orders, he had quite a few orders. And he told me: "and now who is going to help me? If the other ones are no longer going to be there [at home], then you're going to have to start weaving". And he had a very strong character, very, very strong. It was no longer the times of getting beatings [from parents], or *coscorrones* [smacks in the head]... Not anymore, he only pinched me. But then I would start to cry, and my older brother later told me, that he told my dad that I didn't know, that it wasn't fair that I was being taught so harsh. And so, one was taught like that. That was the hardest part [of the learning process]" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"For me it means a craft that is very beautiful and that not every craftsman can learn easily. And it needs a lot of dedication, and well, whoever wants to teach it, can teach... It is what we live from, from crafts... On the one, hand I needed it [to learn, to weave]. I did it because I was orphaned for seven years. And a godfather of mine was the one who picked me up for Pátzcuaro at that age, and from then on, I began to do what was is in principle, the textile-wool [trade]. He taught me the principles of textiles-wool. And then, at the age of fourteen, I started making the fight [make an effort]. I had to look for a teacher who started [taught] me to make the frets, to do everything that is required of textiles." - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I worked on my own, first with my brothers. And... then I dedicated myself to teach my children. Because my sons don't have... I don't have any son who studied to become a teacher of whatever, right? So, they all worked on the *gabanes*. They all went to primary school, and then they all dedicated themselves to the textile-wool [trade]. And I, for example, if I hadn't left a single son to work in the trade, or had taught anyone, well, they'd start working on something else. If I hadn't taught them, right now, the trade would run out. Here is the chief who taught them! [expressed with pride]... I dedicated myself strongly, actually, because if I hadn't dedicated myself fully to this, my children wouldn't have continued working. And I pushed hard and hard, and they all caught on with the trade. And right now, I can say that I am proud because they became good craftsmen. And they all do work well worked" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I started weaving again because I had surgery, a very dangerous surgery, and for that reason, due to medical orders, I could no longer return to working in construction. For that reason, I had to return to craft work... I am grateful to my parents, although I no longer have

them. Because thanks to them, my parents, my grandfather, my ancestors, I know how to do that job, and today that job is giving me [resources] to get ahead. Thanks to this work, I no longer have to leave my house. I don't have to go outside anymore. Here I am in my house, I am aware of what is needed, and more so right now with this pandemic. Well, I don't have to go out or anything because I spend almost the whole day, I spend it at my work weaving" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)



Figure 93. *Gabanes hanging in the courtyard.* (Participant's Personal Archive, 2022).

As conveyed by the data, the forms for learning the trade were usually based on observation and imitation, while assisting a master figure. This implies that the familiarity with the production techniques bounds the act of weaving with knowledge, evidencing that the process of cultural transmission is accomplished throughout the productive process, and vice versa. Motivation for specializing in the weaving of *gabanes* rests on criteria such as age, familiarity with the trade and technical knowledge within the domestic workshop, and the availability of material, economic and human resources that provide the possibilities for exercising the craftsmanship trade.

Moreover, according to the analysis, the activity represents productive and commercial benefits, providing the activity with an economic dimension. The data indicates that the concerns of older figures for instilling the trade among younger relatives not only relays on notions of maintaining family legacy, but on the recognition of the importance of transmitting an occupational skill that provides sustainable economic income without the need to access formal academic education. These patterns describe economic, social, and cultural attributes, suggesting that the artisan trade is understood as a familiar legacy and a lifestyle, while being simultaneously configured as an economic-productive activity.

The information reveals that the *gabanes* have a high production cost, due to the materials for their production, the long production times, and the high levels of physical and mental energy that are required for creating detailed products. Workshops and artisans do not exceed small-scale manufacturing, and thus, although their prices might not be accessible to the general population, *gabanes* continue to be mostly acquired by particular consumers. Demand in the commercialization of *gabanes* have implications on the creative aspects of weaving and in the production of the finished objects, as consumer requests play an important role in the designing of the pieces:

"My dad is commissioned by resellers... Sometimes there is one from Pátzcuaro who asks us for colours, which my dad mostly does, but I have also made several for this person. Or my dad tells me to do it with such a fretwork, and well I do it with the fretwork, or also with the horse heads, we do it" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"I show the clients my designs, they select the designs and then I do [weave] them. I have clients that I have been delivering *gabanes* for them, for about 30 years. They just tell me "We want it in such a colour", they select the colour and the designs... We make them with wool or with acrylic yarn, depending on what the client wants" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I show them [clients] photos. I have photos of *gabanes* with frets, one fret and another, several frets and... Sometimes of horse heads, of standing horses... [We discuss] the process of us being ready and the prices, since all the designs vary in price" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"My clients are from here, from the region, in Nahuatzén, Michoacán. Usually, the client asks me for some photographs as a sample, or if I already have some pieces made, they ask me to show them. And depending on their tastes, what I show them, they choose, and they decide which one. And that's the way I work... I do what the client tells me to do. What the client sends me, that's what I do. There are occasions when they request me a rug, I make a rug. There are occasions when they request me to do a *gaban* to ride a horse, I do it. There are occasions that they request me to make a blanket to shelter themselves. I do it. I work on request" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)



Figure 94. *Gaban* made by request. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2021).

The information suggests that the production of the garment not only relays on individual and familiar creativity, and the processes of knowledge transmission, nor to the added values of creativity, time and effort, materials, and quality of the pieces. The testimonies suggest that the marketplace influences the production of *gabanes*, as consumers acquire and adopt the pieces on demand. The consumption of the garments and its movements through different markets reveals their economic prospective, with the topic surging as a main theme in the data:

"My dad is the one who sells them to vendors or so. My dad sells them to someone in... ¿Pátzcuaro? I think from there, to someone in Pátzcuaro. And about a month ago, he sold to someone in Los Angeles [USA]... We also sell in [commercial] exhibitions... A long time ago my father went with my grandfather, I believe, to Uruapan, and they took a loom with them. But also we sell when it is the "Copper and Salt Fair"... The friars show what is being done here, crafts and so on" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"We send everything to be sold in Pátzcuaro. As it is, there are many stalls, all my life I have delivered my production there, to Pátzcuaro. We sell to people who are intermediaries, who already have their store, and we offer them the *gabanes*. When their parents die, the children continue with the same stores and continue buying. They are dedicated to the sale of handicrafts... And we also have orders from neighbours or from people from the local ranches." - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I have clients. I worked a lot with the Crafts House of the State of Michoacan [Casa de Artesanias del Estado de Michoacan]. I'm still in the union, but right now there's been suffering, for the reason that they are not working with the Craft House, and we have run out of markets, where I went out to sell my production [due to Covid-19]. I also I had quite a few clients who came to buy from me, here directly in my house, to have an *sobregaban* made, two, three. And those were my second clients, apart from the fact that my forte was the market that I went out to sell, organized by the State's Casa de Artesanias. We went to Uruapan, I went to Morelia, I went to Mexico about three times. In Pátzcuaro, in Morelia they were held twice a year by the Casa de Artesanias, and to another fair that was held in Morelia" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"We sell to this lady, she is foreign. She is American, just that she came here to Pátzcuaro with her parents. There they were giving [weaving] classes to her parents, there she married a boy from Pátzcuaro. She opened a store and started working, and she exports it [*gabanes*] a lot... She [exports] to various parts of the world. She has the internet, and all of that, so that's where they [consumers] place the orders" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"Right now, I almost only work with direct clients. Since they know me a lot, from Atacámbaro, Uruapan, Morelia, Pátzcuaro... They come and ask me for a *gaban*, two *gabanes*, a blanket and so on... In the *tianguis* [open-air markets or bazars] that is coming up from Holy Week, then in August and then on the Day of the Dead [1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November] and in the Christmas *tianguis*. There are people that get to know you, and you find a lot of clients in that" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"I sell to people who are in the United States, and here in Mexico, not only from here [the region], but from different States [of the country]. They already know me, and they know my work, and they ask us to do it. I made some *gabanes* for the Fernández family from Jalisco, from the famous [singer] Vicente Fernández" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

According to the testimonies, the commercialisation of the *gabanes* has expanded beyond the local markets in Santa Clara and Nahuatzen into regional, national, and even international markets, implying that the sales of the textile crafts are no longer restricted to community environments - solely integrated into general productive dynamics - but that the products circulate within global systems of commercial exchange. These forms of commercialisation include stores in the tourist municipality and town of Patzcuaro, managed by intermediaries; direct commercialisation to customers, through the organization of craft fairs and open-air markets; as well as exportation to other States and countries.



Figure 95. *Gaban* produced for consumption in the United States. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

Noticeably, one of the main channels for the marketing of the *gabanes* relays on seasonal craft fairs organised in circuits by geographical areas by municipal and regional authorities.

"Every year, I would go out to the fair, with my loom and my boys working. Those who participated were pure family. The whole family, kids and everything. Promotion was done and we gave prominence to our little town, because that's what it was all about, that people came, right? To see the work that is done here in Santa Clara and, for that reason, many realised that not only copper crafts were done, but also *gabanes*" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"For the fairs, we go out on an allegorical car... There are three of us at the top, with a few flowers showing what we do. My grandfather went to Morelia, Uruapan, and Patzcuaro during various seasons when there were handicraft fairs. The front of the car was decorated with the *gabanes* or with skeins of wool" – (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"Well, I will tell you, I won many diplomas, awards, first places, I have a lot of diplomas. But the most important piece, which I did with great enthusiasm, was the one that was given to the Pope [Francis] when he came here to Morelia [2016]... It was a contest organized by the Casa de Artesanías (Craft House of the State), for the most outstanding artisans to make pieces. So, I came out among them, among the five artisans, because they were artisans who met the requirements with diplomas from the first places. And I was lucky enough to win the third place. And the three pieces that were made, Uruapan made a lacquerware, and Paracho made a guitar, and I, from Santa Clara del Cobre, made a *sobregaban*... Today I am proud to say that I have about 100 diplomas!" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"There is a dependency of the State of Michoacán called the Fomento Industrial de las Artesanías (Industrial Development of Handicrafts) made up of all the handicrafts that are made here in the state of Michoacán... Pottery, embroidery and weaving, all that is elaborated here. That dependency, in coordination with the State Government, promotes and invites different communities to exhibit what is produced in each region... According to what I have heard, I have to belong to the House for the Industrial Development of State Handicrafts, so that they have the knowledge that I also work in handicrafts. And I have to be registered there. It doesn't seem very good to me, because in those institutions there is a lot of favouritism... People are invited to compete in some other States of the Mexican Republic... [but] I have never been invited, to say the least, to any of the exhibitions. Although I know I'm going to win one of the best places..." – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

The results contained in the analysis evidence that the involvement of the State in the commercialisation and promotion of the pieces represents a key factor influencing the marketing and commercialization of the pieces. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the activities had to be paused. Government activities include exhibitions intended to promote the crafts, providing a seasonal effort to increase commercialization by circulating the pieces in external regional markets. The existence of crafts competitions was also considered an endeavour that ultimately motivated the safeguarding of the textiles and the rescuing of the trade, by promoting artisan production and creativity. However, according to the participant from Nahuatzen, access to this type of support was regarded as limited and unequal, condemned by a perceived sense of nepotism.





Figure 96. Images of the commercial fairs and allegorical cars used to promote the commercialisation of gabanes. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

The participants commented on how access to digital technologies has provided them with new tools to promote their work and to sell directly to customers.

"In 2019, I started to commercialize alone. My first clients were my dad's old clients, who had stores in Pátzcuaro, but really, they are all resellers. And they did not pay what was fair. I didn't like that, so I created the page on Facebook, and on Facebook, at first, I only showed my *gabanes* to my small circle of friends, acquaintances from Santa Clara. And well, I didn't sell much, and in fact I had accumulated *gabanes*, about 5 or 6, and I was getting very upset because I was not selling anything. And then I contacted Stefania Espinosa, a cultural promoter. And it was with an online publication that she made of me, that I sold the *gabanes*. And little by little, with that, people got to know me... And then afterwards, with the plagiarism, well, more" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"With the internet you find a lot of clients. Almost all foreigners, although they are Mexicans who live in the United States. And they order a *gaban*, two *gabanes*, a vest, a little jacket" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"Most costumers already know me, but sometimes new ones... They sometimes contact me on Face, on Facebook" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

Although handicrafts are usually created for particular customers by demand and marketed through different platforms – official exhibitions and commercial fairs, individual digital social media – artisans further discussed that the success of *gabanes* sales derived from different factors, including the presentation of the pieces, the quality of materials and the weaves, as well as the differentiation of prices. Along these lines, the data revealed that innovation represented a relevant strategy:

"To avoid them from disappearing, we have tried to continue drawing attention with new designs or new types of *gabanes*, even though it would be more difficult to start creating new designs" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"This figure is like new, relatively. In fact, I don't identify it with any name yet because it's new... [Showing a piece] This is acrylic. The green, green-yellow and red are made with acrylic wool. It is a new variant that emerged in recent years. But I can tell, it looks a lot like real wool, it kind of fits... In fact, I have combined. I combined one that I did for a contest to create this. This is a rug, but I created it in the form of a *gaban*" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"There are many frets that I invented myself, and others that are, let's say... I make little drawings as a preview, what I see in a program,

in a magazine. We do them [the designs] but not exactly. We just get an idea of how to do it, and everything else is made up, invented by me" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

This information suggests that innovation surges as an aspect that combines the notions of traditional with that of novelty, as artisans explore the creation of new designs and the use of different prime materials in order to appeal to new customers. The collected information indicated that although *gabanes* may be appreciated for their traditional forms, their utilitarian and/or aesthetic qualities, the artisans explore their creative capacities in order to increase demand by responding to the conditions of the market and the requirements of customers. Since laborious work can also be considered a commercial drawback as artisans cannot produce many pieces, *gaban* productivity and commercialisation can be limited under these conditions. Thus, suggested incentives to innovate, revealed access to commercial and industrial products that allow artisans to introduce new materials for weaving.

"Previously, we made everything, from buying the wool... Today we have stopped making, preparing these materials, because currently there are already factories that make everything that we used to make by hand. The factories already make it, and we already buy it prepared, nothing more is needed to make the fabric and put it on the loom and weave. The difference is that we here, at least here on the Purépecha plateau, find it very difficult to obtain materials because it is too far for me to go to all the States where they produce wool. For example, I need wool, I have to get it to the State of Tlaxcala and the State of Mexico. And that's the way I get them. I also make *gabanes* and serapes from acrylic wool. I get acrylic here, the only difference is that acrylic is more expensive than wool... There are many advantages and disadvantages between wool and acrylic. For example, wool is thermal. When it is cold, wool is warm. When it is hot, wool is cool. That is the difference. And not acrylan, acrylic is cold. And after 8 or 10 years, acrylic loses its texture. But not wool. Wool can last up to 40, 50, 60 years, it all depends on how the person takes care of their *gaban*, and it doesn't lose its texture" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"My grandfather buys [the wool] from a merchant, I think, and ... but he buys large quantities so that we can have materials for a year or so. My dad also sometimes orders [from a merchant]" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"We already buy the materials in stores, from outside of the state [of Michoacan]. In Coroneo, Guanajuato. There is a factory there, and they bring us the wool or acrylic wool from there. There are factories in Toluca, in Tlaxcala..." - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I took on the task of looking for small factories, that made the material. So I get them from Cerro Colorado, in Guanajuato, or in Acámbaro, Guanajuato. That they make the materials as I ask them, and if I don't like them, then I don't receive them" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I am getting the materials in Coroneo, Guanajuato. There I get what is normal wool, but I go there because they work it very clean. It's not nearly as dirty... In Acámbaro the materials produced are very dirty to work with, a lot of rubbish, very ugly wools. Full of dirt, and of thorns. In Coroneo they sell it to me a little more expensive, but it is cleaner. And that's where we got the Merino wool. But that Merino, it's \$300 pesos and something per kilo, does not compare to the normal one that is over \$100 *varos* [slang for Mexican pesos]" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"We now use acrylic because it gives more vivid colours and hardly wears out over time... Older *gabanes* made with wool would be worn, faded... that is the advantage [of using acrylic wool]" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"Some material factories began to enter the state of Santa Ana Chiautempan, and they came and supplied materials in Morelia. We left the carding and spinning by hand, because the [commercial] material was already spun" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

Although the information suggests that changes in the materials are not solely related to innovation, the reduction of costs and/or the increase of sales of the *gabanes*. The use of commercial and industrial materials, manufactured and acquired outside of the communities, surged in line with to the abandonment of the domestication of sheep and the production of wool inside the communities. The collected data showed the concerns of artisans over the abandonment of the object, and with it, the continuity of the trade.

### 10.3 Reconstructing the appropriation controversy

The 'appropriation' controversy of the *gabanes* was reconstructed by the participants of this research. This included information over the moment when they first learned about Isabel Marant and the existence of a cape, commercialised in the brand's Étolie 202 Collection under the name Gabin Cape. Some artisans reminisced:

"I saw it in a Facebook post, in a news site, and from there I started reading articles, seeing more, looking for the news" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"The person who first shared it with me, shared it from a post of another [Facebook] wall, but it was only shared among his friends. So, from there, my friend took it out [shared the post] and only referenced the person who had originally posted it" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"We saw the [Marant] *sobregaban*, I saw it on the internet. But I don't remember who showed it to me" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"My sister already knew, and I think she had told my dad, and from there... I also heard things from them. Well, at a meal, they started talking about it, but I forgot what they commented" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

The appropriation of the *gabán* was first denounced through a Facebook post, adjudicated by J. César Gallardo from the community of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca (Figure 97). According to the public message that circulated online, published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2020, the user had expressed:

"ISABEL MARANT Has she returned to her old ways? The French designer who in 2015 became known in Oaxaca and Mexico for PLAGIARISING the Tlahuitoltepec Mixe blouse, seems to have done it again.

In the *Étoile* Autumn Winter 2020-2021 collection, she has published some "capas" and coats that suspiciously have the same colour patterns and designs as the *gabanes* that are made in the Purhépecha community of Charapán, Michoacán. And some of these patterns she uses for other garments such as sweatshirts, shirts, skirts, etc.

Will she say again that she was only "inspiration" in the clothing of this town? What about the Mexican laws that have been created so that this does not happen? Is there an agreement with the community?

The garment in the photo is advertised on her page (<https://www.isabelmarant.com/.../isabel-marant.../mujer/todo>) at a cost of 530 euros, just over 13,000 Mexican pesos.

More photos of the collection here: <https://www.vogue.es/.../otono.../etoile-isabel-marant>" (J. César Gallardo, 2020)



Figure 97. Comparison of Isabel Marant's cape and Purepecha gabán from Charapan, adjudicated by J. César Gallardo. (Facebook, 2020).

The emotional reactions following the dissemination of the online post were invoked and shared by the participants:

"At first you don't feel anything, you know? Until one does research, and when they tell one, hey, this is your piece, yes, it's from here. And it's a piece that doesn't really require a lot of work, because that piece being made with a fretwork around it. Even for them, it's



difficult for them to copy it because everything is made by hand. And I don't know if you have already seen her way of weaving" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I was like... It can't be! I've been doing this for eight years, learning to do everything, so that suddenly someone comes and changes everything so easily... Doing it with machines.... I felt an annoyance, rather, because it's like a lifetime's work" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"It feels like you've been stripped of your identity in what you've always done... That you've seen all your life, well, in my short life... It's so bad... Another person from another country, and doing something that is industrialized, profiting as such, from something that is yours... And that is why you feel dispossessed, stripped of what is yours. You feel that sense of wanting to do something, but you cannot because there is no one to support you or tell you anything" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"And there is also the other part of the Mexicans who tells you, why do you think is bad? If you are making yourself known. Or what do you see as wrong if we take things from the Europeans? Or things like that. Well, it is ours! They also have to respect what is from here and what has been forged and came out of the imagination of the artisans of Mexico. And that was my feeling, more than anything, of being stripped of something, of what is ours. Something that has always belonged to us, that feels very own. It was my feeling and also my grandfather's, that it was a lack of respect towards someone, wanting to grab something that is yours to resell it, or do it in simpler work, not to make it known, without giving a remuneration or anything, simply to profit with something that is not yours" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"It is one of the worst things, because they want to grab things that are made just to help themselves, to fill their pockets with money. And we, us who break our heads to make the drawings, because you make an effort to make those little designs... It's an injustice. It is flat out, something that has bothered us in many aspects. Not only here, or me; in various places that people only come to take photos and take the drawings. Why? Because they make them by series, they no longer make them by hand, but in mass production" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"A person who is introducing a Michoacan *sobregaban* as if it were their work. How bad is that!" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"My opinion is negative. Here in Mexico, we call that *pirating*... We all have the right to life. And find a way to stand out. But it is not fair to use someone else's mentality. That's what I think of this woman [Marant]. We all have the right to seek life in one way or another. But what is not valid is to use the mentality of another person" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

The collected data suggests that the initial reactions exposed concerns that followed a series of discourses. In some instances, participants judged the event by contrasting notions over the value of manual vs industrial work, in which the industrious labour and precise skills required to practice the trade and complete a *gaban*, were undervalued when compared to the production of industrialised garments manufactured in factories. The construction of the idea of foreigners in opposition to nationals – Mexicans, Michoacans – also surged in the testimonies, with data suggesting a sense of recognition over shared cultural traditions and values on both national and regional levels. A sense of unfairness was also present in the testimonies when recognition over life-long dedication and pride over the creative skills of artisans was acknowledged. However, one artisan admitted to finding differences in the pieces:

"I say that this [designer piece] comes from some piece that they bought in Pátzcuaro, in the excursions that I used to go out to. Because it is identical, but it has a composure that we never do here. It is different in that they put a collar on it and opened it. That were the differences they put in it, but the drawings are authentic from here, from us" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

Although the controversy had been known by some of the artisans, these series of interviews also revealed that some of the participants had remained unaware of the events:

"I haven't heard about the French designer you mention. Maybe because I don't have Face [Facebook]... At the moment I don't have an opinion because I didn't realize, until now, that I'm finding out. That's why I haven't thought about it. I can't give you an answer right away." - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"No, we didn't know about that [Isabel Marant Gabin Cape], right? [asks relative]. That's the thing. We only found out right now because you mentioned it" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

By the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2020, Senator Susana Harp had organized a press conference before the Mexican Senate to denounce the French designer, sharing a message on Twitter: "Another cultural appropriation from @isabelmarant. In 2015 the traditional mixe blouse from Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca; now she plagiarizes the Purépecha [sic] *gabanes* of Michoacan. Will he have the nerve to argue that he was inspired, or will he say that it is a tribute?" (Figure 98).



Susana Harp Iturribarría ✓  
@SusanaHarp



Otra apropiación cultural de @isabelmarant. En 2015 la blusa tradicional mixe de Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca; ahora plagia los gabanes purépechas de Michoacan. Tendrá el descaro de argumentar haberse inspirado o dirá que es un homenaje?

Translate Tweet



9:05 PM · Oct 29, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 98. Tweet by Susana Harp denouncing the "plagiarism" of "purépecha gabanes" from Michoacan. (Twitter 2020).

One of the two only participants directly contacted by external political figures narrated the reconstruction of the events:

"The news of the plagiarism came out. And well, I was on Facebook, as always hahaha and I saw the *gaban* and said what's up with that? It said on the description that they [the *gabanes*] were from Charapán [Michoacan] but the image they used of the *sobregaban* was totally different from the designer's. And I said, this doesn't match with that, you cannot say that it is *plagiarism* because as such, they are not the same or anything..."

"Charapán's have a totally different structure than ours, theirs are totally plain, with one colour at the bottom in all of the fretworks, and that's it, with only a figure in the centre. That's how all of them are, and as you saw, ours have a stripe and a "cajón", that's what sets them apart... So that *sobregaban* is one of the ones we make here... The figure is the same, it is identical, and in a part of it, she also used the strips that I told you about. It had "little devils" that are the small figures, the ones that are called "diabolical" in it. And the three bottom stripes that are of the same thickness, that we call the "ribbons" and the "mouth" [neckline] part. She made a "mouth" that we call the "step mouth", which is the part that's in the centre, in the neck. And then I remembered that I had an image just like that same *sobregaban*..."

"In recent years, I had dedicated myself to do a lot of research, inquiring about textiles and all of this. About the *gabanes* and the fretworks. So there, in Dr. Amalia Ramirez's book, I saw it, information that had to have some use, because it's all about everything that my family has done, right? And it was all there, so I could defend myself, to say that these *gabanes* were from here [Santa Clara]. Those were my sources, and you can really see that in other communities they don't do them like we do. They are from here"

According to the information shared by the participant, the original accusation shared on social networks erroneously considered that the piece resembled the *gabanes* from the Purepecha community of Charapan. This research further confirmed that the misconception was later reproduced in media and in speeches by other political figures in the successive months. Additionally, the collected data suggests that issues of misidentification were a concern among at least another of the artisans interviewed for this thesis, with the participant commenting:

"I say that this [designer piece] came from some piece that was bought in Pátzcuaro. Because it is identical, but it has a composure that we never do here. It is different in that they put a collar on it and opened it. That were the differences they put in it, but the drawings are authentic from here, from us" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

According to these perspectives, the concept of 'appropriation' represents a series of issues regarding not only the correct origins of an appropriated garment, but also the determination of the elements that have been appropriated to create another one. The testimonies questioned conceptions over the source of the designs, the forms, and structures of the garments, as well as the colour composition and the arrangement of the motifs.

The reconstruction of the events continued:

"And that's also how they [Government authorities] found me. Otherwise, if I hadn't been so involved in social networks, no... Otherwise, it would have been more complicated to explain what the original *gaban* was and where it came from... And that's when the director of the Patzcuaro Museum of Arts and Crafts, who I have added [on Facebook], sent me a message. After that, a bunch of messages came. The Instituto del Artesano Michoacano [Institute of the Michoacan Artisan] contacted me. Then Deputy Susana Harp contacted me. After that, Natalia Toledo. She is the only one who came to Santa Clara, out of all the others, there wasn't even a trace. She was the only one who came, because she was the Undersecretary of Culture..."

"That's why they contacted me and at first, I had to explain to them that these were not my designs, because they thought they were mine, only mine. But I told them, no, they belong to my family and apart from that, it's not only us using them, but all other communities, like in Nahuatzen, which are the most similar *gabanes* resembling ours"

"She [Natalia Toledo] only *came to take the classic photo*<sup>33</sup>... And then I got a call from, I don't know what he was, some deputy, who wanted to come with us. And I said no, leave me alone. And her [Natalia Toledo] basically did an interview with my grandfather. Then she did an interview with me, that I didn't even know we were going to have"

"For my grandfather's interview, they just took some photos, very few photos of the work he has done. They asked him what his name was, where he was from, how he learned to make the figures, and what he felt about the *plagiarism*, how he saw the situation and if he cared about any collaboration with the designer. They also asked me the same, and I had a very similar opinion to my grandfather. The only part that was a little more different, was about the collaborations. My grandfather didn't say anything. He said that he was leaving his grandchildren and my uncles to make that decision, because since he is already 86 years old, he said that he could no longer be involved in that nor in legal lawsuits, or anything like that. Those who are going to have the designs are his family

I commented that we had to first see it in a society, in a group of people who say what they think and what they think about whether they want to make a collaboration or not. Because I cannot be the only one saying if I want or if I don't want to, but rather, to also see it from [the perspectives of] my uncles and from other people from other communities who also make *gabanes*. And that was the part that was differentiated. Because well, my grandfather didn't want to know anything about it, neither did I. So, if the opportunity arises to do something like a collaboration, only if the others want to do something, there should be no problem" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

External political figures and Government agencies were then able to contact the participant through social networks, after he publicly corrected the information over the origin of similar *gabanes* online. The observations of the artisan reveal that external political approaches had preconceptions over the events, regarding it as an act of *plagiarism*. The controversy was initially addressed as an individual dispute, with political figures suggesting that the designs were solely owned by this particular participant. Moreover, the data suggests that the presence of external actors was received with contempt, as their visit was perceived as a political manoeuvre for polling purposes.

The collected data further evidenced that no other artisans from Santa Clara del Cobre nor Nahuatzen were approached nor consulted over the situation, with some of the artisans affirming:

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<sup>33</sup> Translated from the Spanish "solo vino a tomarse la clásica foto", a colloquial expression used to describe politicians photographing themselves with people, solely for political or electoral purposes.

"Well, many from the Government came here, came to have interviews... Well, to do all of that publicity stuff for themselves. But they didn't contact me" - (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"The Government authorities only arrived at my grandmother's house to talk to my grandfather" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"Until now, no one from the Government has approached me about it" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

When enquired over the proposal for the creation of the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities" the artisans conveyed:

"I read about it but did not inform myself well on the Law. I only saw about it in the news" - (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"Well, I don't see the point of the Law and of registering the designs. My production is very little and well here we are used to.... Since we are only family members who work, there is no problem. We are like two [nuclear] families left. Maybe 6 artisans in total" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"I saw that there was a last meeting recently, about a month ago, but they didn't invite us, nor tell us anything about it. And it was only among the Secretary of Culture and all of them, the high ranks. And to the artisans here, well, no one turned to look at us anymore...

I was very annoyed when I saw the press communication, I said, oh now they are going to decide about us! That's how they label us, as someone who doesn't understand if it's a benefit or if it's not a benefit. Like we are just basically ignorant, so as not to be able to include us in a conversation or much less, in order to reach an agreement that is for us...

What bothers me the most, is that at the end of the day, they [politicians] want the spotlights and they just want to be seen supporting the artisans and all that. But when it comes to decision-making, the artisans are sent to hell, and nobody finds out about anything and only they make their collaborations [with brands]... The bad thing was that nothing happened, after all. Only more hate. No help" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

As conveyed by the data, the involvement of artisans from Santa Maria del Cobre and Nahuatzen throughout the management of the controversy with Isabel Marant, followed by the creation and approval of the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities" was non-existent. General perceptions over the role of Governmental instances and political figures were defined with contempt and mistrust, with the interviews revealing a sense of disregard for the interests of those who were directly involved.



Figure 99. Comparative image of the Isabel Marant 'appropriated' piece and a gaban produced in the state Michoacan. (Internet, 2022).



Figure 100. Comparative exercise to denounce the 'appropriation' of the Santa Clara del Cobre gabanes. (Give Credit, 2022).

#### 10.4 Controversies increase sales, but the law won't help: perceived changes

The 'appropriation' polemic initiated by French designer Isabel Marant, instigated a series of changes in the production and commercialisation of the *gabanes* produced in Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen. The participants discussed:

"In the end, the controversy sells... Later, thanks to the help of Natalia Toledo, my grandfather was able to sell quite a few *gabanes*, because he was contacted by FONART [National Fund of Crafts], which promotes handicrafts, and the Artisan Institute, also from here in Michoacán, contacted him. And so, they sold some of his *gabanes*. He makes *gabanes* for two seasons, and my two uncles work for him. Before he used to go to Uruapan, during Holy Week, to the artisan parade. He goes out there, he has a stand there. And then in Patzcuaro for the Night of the Dead, in the main square. And they also put a stand for Easter weekend. But because of the [Covid] situation, I couldn't leave to either of those two places. They had all the accumulated *gabanes*, and that is where the positive side of all this [the controversy] came from. They became known and had the sales that they did not have in the whole year" – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"My sales also increased. Now, sometimes I can't make them. And I have to tell costumers that I am very tired. I have to decline orders" – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"After the designer thing, sales went down a little bit, but it didn't get bigger because... Normally, since the designers tricked them, people didn't ask them for more [pieces]. A piece that they bought from them did not last, only a short time. Because they [designers] do not make *gabanes* like what people have previously bought from us. Those that last for many years" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

According to the content analyses applied to the interviews, participants perceived a positive increase in the selling of *gabanes*, suggesting that the controversy served as a phenomenon that promoted people's appreciation over the crafts, and with it, an increase in their acquisition. However, although the dispute had fostered higher demands and a rise in the price of the *gabanes*, the investigation did not detect the incursion of new individuals in the textile trade. This was confirmed by the data, as participants shared their concerns over the disappearance of the object and trade.

"Here [Santa Clara] they are hardly used anymore, they are hardly used, except for older men... You could say that hardly no one ever uses the *gabanes* anymore ... I think that almost none of them [school classmates] know about them... Many changes in fashion have already happened, and many other different things... I am the only one that knows how to weave among my school classmates... But I don't want to do this by trade... I only want to do it until I get a job, or whenever I don't have a job... But from what I see [in the community] there is a chance that the job [trade] will stop. It is not that I am being pessimistic, but in about 30 years, I do not see how people will buy. More than having one, just because, or because they thought it was nice. But I don't think they will buy them like now or like before" – (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"There were many artisans before. There were about fifteen or twelve, from what I remember, but right now, the oldest ones have already died. And then there are only a few of us left. Unfortunately, the crafts are being lost. People look for other jobs that are better paid and easier. They better go to find another job" – (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"When my brothers finished their study, my older brother is 10 years older than me, they then dedicated themselves to their careers... Right now, we [family] are the ones that mostly manufacture in the entire region. Because there are small families that weave, but they just have one or two looms and that's it" – (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"Now few people use them, but there are also few artisans, eh? Previously I organized a cooperation that was given away on the day of the Virgin, here in town. So we were at that time, thirty-two artisans of textile-wool here in Santa Clara... The biggest reason [for abandonment of the trade] is that their families did not like the work. An artisan passed away, and their family did not work, there was no trade left. And that's how it ended, until we were left with nothing more than those of us who are still working right now" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"Here [in Santa Clara] there were several people who passed away, and their children did not continue [the trade]. They did not continue the work. It disappeared... There are many who took up on studying, and were no longer interested in how to make the *gabanes*" – (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"There was a time when we stopped working, because at that time, when we worked together with my parents, that job was not very well paid. We had to leave the house to find other means to survive. At that time, we suspended, we suspended [weaving] the whole family. That craft was suspended for a few years... It's been about two years that I started weaving again full time... I had to go to the United States, three times I was illegal. I had to go, and all three times, well, it was to pursue life. I worked in construction. And I came back and since I started again to do the job that we already had, that we already know. And well, I'm still here, weaving." – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"Previously, more people dedicated themselves to crafts here, to the making of *gabanes*, blankets and rugs. Previously people dedicated themselves to that. But that was very poorly paid. People had to quit the trade and look for another kind of work. That is the reason why they didn't come back to weave. Unfortunately, the relatives of these generations who made the *gabanes* did not teach the boys. This was lost... That generation, we are talking about the generation from 1950 to 1980, all that was lost. Yes, there are really very few left here, perhaps six or eight people, nothing more, who know how to make crafts. But this is also ending, it is disappearing" – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

Along these lines, the questions delved on the particular concerns and interests of the artisans.

"What we want to say is that they [the Government] worry a little bit more about us, the artisans, because there are many of us. And, that they throw us a little hand here. Because we are thousands of artisans! I have known my artisan friends for years and they are all suffering from the same thing that I am going through... Lack of sales, of costumers... We are not selling. Materials go up in price. If you don't sell... You work just like that, not dropping the trade, for a few clients who come... But this situation [Covid-19] is turning a little bit bad. What is needed, is the movement that there was from tourism. Right now, tourism wants to go out, but with what will they do it? They no longer come out due to mistrust of the disease, and they are right, but what can we do? We are here" – (Scc3, 23 January 2021)

"I think that my opinion is that our government, both Federal, State and Municipal, needs to help us a little... For example, I have never been invited, to say the least, to an exhibition. Although I know I'm going to win one of the best places. First of all, I would like the Government to help me with the raw material. Because the market, the market was already there before help with it was necessary, although it was difficult to get a market, but not today. Now with technology, we have benefited a little bit with it, and it has already given a little more of value to what we make. The governments, unfortunately, focus on other things, they focus on other things, and what we produce goes unnoticed... And it is about to end because, well, there is no support from our authorities. We look for a market, we look for the raw materials, and we have to invest in it. And that's the way we work. And it bothers me when someone *pirates* what I know how to do" – (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

"I do wish that the *gabanes* be somehow protected, more than anything because they have some history, people have been using them for a while now" – (Scc5, 13 February 2021)

"Either way, there's not much that can be done! It seems to me that that is not right, but what can be done about that?" – (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

The information conveyed that although issues of 'appropriation' are considered an issue by some of the artisans, the disappearance of the trade and the disuse of the garments remain as an imminent threat for the artisans. Moreover, the discussion over the reaches of the Law intended to promote the copyrighting of cultural expressions were commented:

"The other part of my cousins, who are not from here, but who are from other States, told me to register with the IMPI [Mexican Institute of Industrial Property]. And that if they gave me royalties, to share them with my grandfather. But I'm not asking for anything... I can't

claim anything as an intellectual property. Everything is a community, and everything has to be done in a group for everyone to reach an agreement, not for one to simply say that it is your own. But it is not seen like this by the authorities" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"They are family designs, we don't have nothing special, or nothing to say "why did you do it?". We work the same, right? The only problem that could exist is for some other State to claim "no, this is my work." And there, they would be lying. But that would not be easy because those people [from other States] have their own style, and they don't get into your style because they don't know how to do it, right? It is difficult for them to make a *gaban* like the ones that one does, because they are in another style, another way of advancing the weave" - (Scc4, 14 February 2021)

"Until now, we haven't had problems with that [artisans copying designs from each other] because no one has registered their designs" - (Scc2, 13 February 2021)

"The designs that other communities have... They do not come to steal what is ours... But among my cousins and uncles, there are almost no new designs. Well lately, I have been in craft contests but I have not seen them do them. And anyway, I would not mind because, in fact, my cousin, this last time... I do not know if you saw the *sobregaban* that I made with many colours. My cousin asked me how I did that *sobregaban*, and he asked me how many threads he needed. And I said, it is not a problem because anyway he's my cousin, and after all he's going to support himself [economically]. So shared him the designs. There is nothing wrong with it. So, between us. I don't think there is no problem, but I think that other people have different ways of thinking" - (Scc1, 23 January 2021)

"Take, for example, me. There are people not only here in the State of Michoacán, but in other places that have pirated my drawings. And those people are invited to compete in some other States of the Mexican Republic, and some have gotten good places with my designs" - (Nah1, 10 February 2021)

The testimonies presented in the Case Study focusing on the *gabanes* from the communities of Santa Clara del Cobre and Nahuatzen, provided information on the particular factors that composed the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon in the localities, as occurrences that are part of transculturation processes.

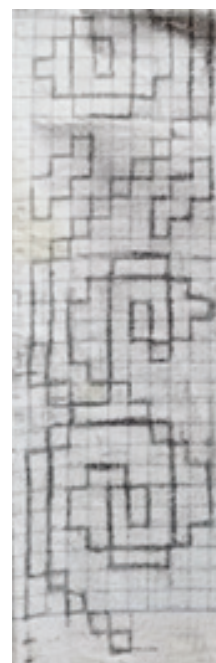
The focus on the *gabanes* provided the answers to the research question: what are the objects involved? Suggesting that the forms and motifs that compose the garment as an expression of material culture and cultural heritage, rely on their organisation and transmission within the family nucleus. The statements of the participants also allowed to discern a large number of actors that inferred in the development of the controversies, further demonstrating the means by which the relationship between the objects of material culture and actors are organised within specific contexts. The interpretations shared over the reconstruction of the controversies, denoted the existence of complex relations and negotiations surging within different sites between different groups of people. Moreover, the Case Study intended to present the particular changes that influenced the artisans, their trade, and the *gabanes*, as the 'appropriation' controversy was processed.











## **SECTION 5**

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### **Analysis and interpretation of results**

## Chapter 11 – Analysing the results

The following chapter presents the final phases of this research, involving the practical approaches and forms of categorization applied to the data, and the examination and interpretation of the results obtained from the qualitative analysis applied to three Case Studies. The process for this examination was defined by completing three main actions: the synthesising of the information into units of analysis and categories, the exposition and finding of meaningful data, and the extraction of conclusions.

The main proposition of this research aimed at understanding the phenomenon of the 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles within the Mexican territory, by identifying the main actors, objects, sites, relationships, and dynamics that affect and shape the development, perceptions, and consequences of the controversies as they emerged in different Case Studies over time. This was achieved through the application of a number of investigative tools that relied on semi-structured interviews – both in the field and through online ethnographies – observation, and the support of audio-visual recordings. After completing the transcription of the open-ended interviews, the data was then processed with use of the computer program ATLAS.ti, which allowed the coding and categorization of the qualitative information derived from the conversations with participants to be carried.

### 11.1 The objects of material culture, the objects of cultural heritage

The theoretical propositions on the analysis of material culture previously addressed throughout Chapter 4, suggest that historical processes are carried out, not only by human beings but by things. This framework inferred that objects, artifacts, and/or merchandise, simultaneously act on people and on social groups while being used by them; with the relationship between inanimate objects and people, providing and carrying social functions, as well as processes of meaning adscription which direct human activities. Supported by these theoretical positions, one of the main resolutions for this research intended to answer the research questions: what are the objects and the actors involved in the 'cultural appropriation' controversies? Therefore, this thesis first intended to examine the processes of elaboration, meaning construction, transmission, and commercialisation of the objects, regarding the perceptions that characterise the main aspects and processes of value adscription among different people, as identified and defined by the participants themselves, in order to assess the relevance of textile crafts and their relationship with the actors involved in the 'appropriation' occurrences.

The methodological and theoretical analysis of the data corroborated that internally, value was placed on functionality and utility of the *xaam nixuy* blouses, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes*, regardless of whether or not the present-day items were identified with its original purposes by the actors. This indicated that the values of textiles crafts are not fixated, and that their categorization and definitions remain far from being immutable.

The examination of the data denoted that the crafts originally surged in context of agricultural systems of subsistence, providing utilitarian functions that primarily assisted with daily activities. Primordially destined for their use within community life, the textile garments were used for dressing according to the needs of everyday activities, all of which were clearly delimited by gender roles and their associated responsibilities and activities. The two garments analysed, the *xaam nixuy* blouse and the *gabanes* were used to cover and protect the body during outdoor activities (collecting wood, horse riding) or at home (sleeping), further assisting with the completion of household/family chores (keeping and transporting food, maintaining farm animals warm). As a female attire, the *xaam nixuy* had specific characteristics that enabled women to breastfeed.

However, the results indicated that over time, the objects had changed their uses and status as mundane implements, transforming into festive and/or ornamental products that began to be commercially sought. The *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenangos" and the *gabanes* had achieved a relevant role in the celebration of special events within the communities, becoming objects that were vital in religious happenings such as weddings and baptisms, in ritual dances, and in official services, like community concerts and traditional changes of authorities. Thus, the presence of these objects in special occasions ensured their reproduction and continuity, as part of established but simultaneously changing customs. Likewise, some of the objects – particularly the Otomi "Tenango" embroideries – had reached a status as objects of art, appreciated for their aesthetic characteristics, the quality of the embroidered work, and the mastery and fame of their authors.

The data exposed that the origins of the crafts in the Ayuujk, Hñuhú and Hñahñu communities responded to the acquisition of commercial prime materials, exposing that the textile production did not rely on the exploitation of the natural environment nor on local farming. The obtention of the fabrics, threads, and technologies to produce the *xaam nixuy* and the "Tenango" embroideries had depended on external trade and commerce beyond the communities' geographical boundaries. As described by the participants, both expressions had originated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the introduction of sewing machines and/or commercial threads to the communities.



Figure 101. Sewing machine used for creating the motifs. (Sienna Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

On the other hand, although no information over the origins of the *gabanes* from Santa Clara del Cobre was provided by the participants, historical accounts suggest that the use of pedal looms and of wool had been present in the central regions of Mexico for Centuries, representing a legacy of European influence. However, local production had been abandoned in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with artisans preferring to purchase cheaper, finished, commercial wool threads instead.

Likewise, the data confirmed that even the origins and prime materials used to produce the *xam nixuy* and the “Tenangos” embroideries had been predisposed by the market’s preponderance and reaches. Economic exchanges had encouraged the disappearance of other textile expressions (the *nētse’et* blouse in Tlahuitoltepec), while further promoting changes in the materials and production technologies in the communities, after industrial threads and electric digital machines had become commercially available in Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, Tenango and San Nicolas.

The information reveals that the adoption of the textile objects had undergone a number of sociocultural and economic processes that had shaped the objects and the artisan trade over the decades. The introduction of new materials and products to the communities – even those considered to be geographically remote like Tlahuitoltepec and the territories located in the Otomi-Tepehua Mountain range – played a relevant part in the conception and production of the cultural expressions themselves. Changes in the working conditions and forms of living among Indigenous communities had also altered the use and function of the textile crafts, implying that the objects adapt to new circumstances as long as they remain relevant to the groups.

The evidence suggests that the textiles are part of the construction of the history, material culture, and cultural heritage of their communities of origins. The tangible elements relating to their production and consumption are accompanied by significant values and meanings; simultaneously conferred by the artisans and the community at large to contain and provide the materialization of cultural identity and heritage among the groups. Participants conveyed that the objects made certain aspects of their culture tangible, implying that the objects serve as a mean to materialize and visualize their culture.

Although some of the dominant aspects shared by the participants in relation to identity were immaterial – including symbols, expressions, behaviours, ideologies, and attitudes – the textiles crafts served as a mean to concretize them, making these constructions substantially visible. The materialization of identity as interpreted in the content from the interviews further serves as mean to measure representativeness and authenticity among the groups. Thus, recognised as cultural attributes, the examination of the crafts suggested that the textile objects were employed to represent regional identities, further complying with the institutional agendas and historical discourses that contribute to the formation of identities on individual, communal, regional, national, and international levels.

The content examination suggests that the textiles analysed in the Case Studies were mainly attributed with their ‘traditional’ characteristics due to their relationship with ancestors, and the procedures of intergenerational transfer of knowledge and continuity. In the majority of the cases, the production techniques were transmitted from grandparents to parents, and subsequently to the youth within the domestic unit. These interpretations connect the objects to notions of kingship, filiation and identity, as relevant factors involved in

the processes of personal development, socialization, and individualization among the contributors. Thus, the relationship of crafts in the foundation of the actors, adding to their social, political, and cultural positions within the communities – evidenced through configurations that appeared in different segmentations, including geographic (community, region, state, nation), demographic (Indigenous, mestizo, gender, age) and/or socioeconomic (forms of work organisation: individual artisan, family workshop, cooperatives, etc) – appeared as categories that were both recognizable through relational perspectives, and used to by the participants to define themselves.

Likewise, the limits that were used to describe or convey belonging to different groups, emphasised notions of collective and/or intergenerational cultural continuity, as well as the recognition of common social categories, values, customs, and practices that were shared by the participants with others on different levels. These contrapositions further allowed the participants to define those who were considered different to themselves – creating boundaries on the conception between who they are, while simultaneously using the conceptions to delineate the constellation of cultural traits which they consider their own. This was particularly relevant when expressing the differences between the categories of community, and those recognised as external actors, coming from the outside.

The qualitative analysis suggested that the adscription of values were mainly established by the collective imagination on an internal level, but reinforced by the inference of other external actors, factors, and discourses. The information infers that the textile objects become representative of the 'traditional' within the groups as a concept that was associated to the idea of the *authentic*, the *rural*, the *Indigenous*, the *mestizo*, and also the *national*. These notions of identity construction surged in contraposition to opposing concepts, including the categories of *inauthentic* when relating to questions of origin and continuity, the *urban*, the *modern*, the *industrial* when contrasting to local conditions, as well as ethnically through the constructions of the *non-Indigenous*, the *non-Mexican* and the *foreigner*. Equally, the data suggests that the continuity of the *gabanes* was influenced by their adscription to narratives of *miscegenation* and national cultural heritage, suggesting that the artisan trade ascribes to the discourses of national identity construction. The objects associated to Indigenous communities were similarly compatible with internal and institutionalized narratives.

Moreover, the findings propose that the meanings and values ascribed to the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes*, were not solely constituted within the symbolic realms, as their value and circulation as social products were substantially affected by their exchange value. This suggests that the number of effects on the production, circulation, and consumption of the objects varied depending on the level in which these were introduced into the marketplace. The dynamic circulation in different commercial sites – local, national, and/or international; virtual or presential – also allowed artisans and communities to highlight certain extrapolated values: the *traditional* vs. the *modern*, the *old* vs. the *new*, the *Mexican* vs. the *foreign*.

The analysis of the results allowed to identify specific forms of consumption that distinguished the symbolic value of the *xaam nixuy* blouses, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes* over their functionality with the prevalence of cultural values contributing to their function and adaption as products of capital exchange. The analysis confirmed that the crafts had experienced processes of revaluation that had transformed them from being objects used on a daily basis within specific contexts of production and consumption, into goods with value for exchange within expanded mercantile sites.

According to the interpretations, the textiles in the Case Studies circulate in different production and commercial ranges. These extended from the creation of single pieces to the medium and large-scale manufacturing of garments and objects, and from the retail to the wholesale of them as goods. Conceived as commercial products, the objects were promoted by highlighting different traits: *uniqueness*, *quality*, *design*, *innovation*, etc. Some of the textiles were regarded as valuable *decorative* or *fashion* pieces, underlining characteristics of *exceptionality*, and the efforts and *expertise* of the artisan's manual work in a manner that resembles fashion and art discourses. Additionally, the value of individual authorship was relevant for the marketing of the pieces was also highlighted.

Noticeably, the textiles analysed usually remained within the realms of the cultural artifacts. However, in certain instances the objects were considered expressions of greater value due to their singularity, or to the perceived risk over their possible disappearance. Usually consumed by experts and/or collectors, some of these crafts circulate within the mechanisms and reaches established by the art market system itself. Likewise, through the processes of political and economic validation, collectors, Government agencies, and museums, had provided the expressions with a 'fine art' status by including them in the categories of *masterpieces*, highlighting with this the principles of *artisan geniality* and inventive *creativity*.



Figure 102. Promotional event “the Sarape of Mexico” where gabanes from Michoacán were presented. (Participant’s Personal Facebook, 2021).

Additionally, the commodification of the *xaam nixuy* and the “Tenagos” showed the transformation of their status as seasonal mementos, and other forms such as souvenirs that follow economic strategies for survival: enhanced production was only directed towards increased commercial consumption. Some textiles were also ascribed with notions of *authenticity* and *national value*, enhancing collective interest in their production and use as part of the expressions of cultural identity. This was particularly obvious in the objects that were used for celebrating special occasions; and particularly in the production of artisans who had engaged with Government programmes and initiatives including regional and national craft competitions, representing institutionalized opportunities to showcase their skills and promote the commercialisation of the objects as a collaborative strategy to enhance tourism in their regions and communities.

The information implied that some of the objects had been adapted to market seasonal demands, adjusting the designs and forms to suit ongoing trends. In the particular case of garments, since the objects were considered as visually and symbolically representative of the cultural community, the textiles served the distinct purpose of communicating identity and belonging to the group. Moreover, the results indicate that textiles can be provided with a *status of prestige*, usually displayed during official events. Similarly, special religious or social occasions mandated the use of the garments.

The perceptions over the talent and intuitive skills of the artisans, varying in the quality and mastery of the craft production, suggest that the work and the objects are adapted in function to the satisfaction of the market, primarily responding to the demands, preferences, and expectation of consumers. This was unequivocally evidenced by the fact that all the artisans interviewed produced the crafts with the main intention of selling them.

However, the qualitative content suggested that the internal markets in Tlahuitoltepec, San Nicolas, Tenango de Doria, Nahuatzen and Santa Clara were overpopulated, with artisans primarily focusing on the supply of products in commercial sites located outside of the communities’ geographical borders. Although some of the localities had permanent spaces for the sale of crafts (small stores) and temporal, weekly markets; most artisans marketed their products internally, hand to hand, or through individual requests. On the other hand, external markets were reached through friends or acquaintances living outside of the communities, by contact with intermediaries, by the influence of family and cooperative brands that marketed and use digital communication technologies and social media to sell the textiles online, or by official invitations to join craft markets and fairs outside of the communities.

According to the participants, the scarcity of sales in Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec, once affected by the abandonment of the garments but eventually enhanced after the rise of the ‘appropriation’ controversies, responds to the lack of a stable market, the increase in the number of artisans practicing the trade, and the absence of consumer flows from outside the community, since the locality is not considered a popular tourist spot within the State of Oaxaca. The situation in Santa Maria del Cobre points to a stall in commercialisation mainly due to the abandonment of traditional garments and of agricultural activities. In contrast, both the municipality and the communities in Tenancingo were recognized by the participants as tourist routes within the State of Hidalgo, allowing the direct and stable sale of handicraft to visitors (noticeably halted by the Covid-19 pandemic).

According to the data, attracting and retaining consumers was regarded as a challenging task, with younger artisans (those under 40) adopting new communication technologies and selling strategies to introduce their creations into external markets in an attempt to increase sales. As a result, consumers were provided with a great range of products and innovative alternatives, as artisans continually transform the forms of the textiles, exploring new possibilities in the designs and materials, or finding inspiration in trends to increase sales.

The analysis conveyed that today's instant information and communication systems, combined with rapid accessibility to the internet, resulted in an intensified use of social media platforms by younger artisans. The data implied that the favouring of social networks responds to the perceived efficiency and inexpensiveness of the tools, serving as instruments to enhance the promotion of their creations and brands outside of the community, while procuring direct communication and commercial relations with customers. These technologies were also associated to the need to eradicate the influence of intermediaries; further assisting in the circulation of objects into national and international markets, through direct contact with costumers. In all Case Studies analysed, the textile crafts had reached the confines of local boundaries, reaching consumers as far as the United States, Canada, Europe, and even the Middle East.

The examined results propose that although the crafts were not initially produced as merchandise for commercial purposes and contexts, the concomitant processes involved in the expansion of the crafts markets allowed for their proliferation as cultural assets, increasing their circulation due to the demands of both national and international consumers. This suggests that the commercialisation of the objects represents some of the communities' transition from self-sufficient economies to that of competitive, globalized trade.

The analysis further suggests that the survival of the textiles crafts as cultural assets depended on the ability of the artisan to properly organize - independently or in groups, cooperatives, brands, etc - in terms of the production, marketing, and sales channels. The informants also commented on the abilities to innovate the forms, colours, and designs of the expressions to suit consumer demands and ongoing trends accordingly. The expansion of the external markets and the increasing commercial demand for crafts, encouraged artisans to continue producing textiles with alternative purposes than those originally associated to internal, self-consumption. In this sense, the data suggested that the artisan trade has been diversified over the years, allowing domestic units to simultaneously function as workspaces, and generating new business models that allowed artisans to structure the trade into family brands to increase production and improve marketing strategies.



Figure 103. *Women buying threads in Tenango by Celia Talbot Tobin. (The New York Times Magazine, 2019).*

Additionally, the rise of cooperatives and the appearance of capitalist-workshops indicate that the organisation of the trade has also left the confines of domesticity, resulting in new forms of productive and work relationships that function through professional association and/or paid labour. Artisan cooperatives have surged within the communities organised as productive and commercial support systems, where members commit to different activities, investing time, resources, and efforts equally. The responsibilities of overseeing the operations, as well as the costs and profits of commercialisation are evenly distributed among members.



On the other hand, the surge of small-capitalist workshops in Tlahuitoltepec positioned individuals as the providers of the technical means for production, recurring to the employment of labour forces under wage-labour relationships. Employees perform under the direct authority of the workshops' owner throughout the entire processes, recurring to digital and/or industrial technologies to manufacture larger quantities in less time and at a reduced cost. According to the data, the introduction of this type of automated machineries was regarded as a topic of high concern among the Ayuujk artisan community.

The analysis of the aspects and contrasts in the conceptions of craftsmanship and the artisan trade, allowed the reconstruction of their different intersections as productive, recreational, and expressive activities, with different variants emerging from the characterisations shared by the participants. This positioned the production of crafts in several dimensions. Firstly, the artisan was recognized as the creator and producer of culture, established as a figure who is responsible for the preservation and continuity of the textile crafts, and with it, the culture, expressions, customs, and practices of the groups and/or communities. Secondly, the artisan activities, described as a series of processes, practices, knowledges and skills necessary to master and elaborate the textiles, representing an occupational activity with the potential to provide economic income or extra resources for the individual, the family unit, or the artisan group.

According to the data, artisanal activities involving the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries and the *gabanes* were also described as recreational endeavours, providing a pleasant opportunity to delve on psychosocial aspects of well-being and self-expression, practiced by artisans to explore and express their inner worlds. As time consuming activities, the intense and constant efforts required for carrying manual labour resulted in the association of the activities to a sense of fulfilment and pride: a recognition in the artisan's own abilities for mastering the craftsmanship and creating the objects.

The analysis revealed that multiple interactions were also reflected in the transmission of knowledge, which in all of the Case Studies, began at an early age. Although the elaboration of textiles included intergenerational connections within family units, the data also revealed that transmission occurs in other social settings. These included small-capitalist workshops inside and outside the communities, religious and scholarly educational contexts, and Government funded and/or privately promoted training courses, as instances that have the strategic objective of promoting, preserving, and marketing textile crafts as part of Federal subsistence programmes intended to boost socio-economic development in the country. The information is consistent with the strategies for the economisation of cultural expressions established by the State, as explained in Section 3 of this thesis.

These results indicate that the textile crafts involved in the Case Studies had been simultaneously influenced by the incidence of public institutions and/or programs implemented by the State and/or Federal Government agencies attempting to promote and safeguard the expressions. The information revealed that over the years, national public institutions had implemented programmes dedicated to the training of young artisans, as well as a range of activities that promoted the commercialization of textile objects in external urban and tourist centres.

The collected data points that textile craft production in the communities had been motivated through the organisation of training courses and workshops, regional and national craft competitions, and commercial fairs, organised by State Government agencies such as the FONART (National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts), multiple Institutes of Crafts, and/or the *Casas de Artesanía* (Craft Houses).

According to the data, the agencies follow national policies that aim to solve a number of economic problems affecting the population of the country, coinciding in the vision that the promotion of artisanal work reduces extreme poverty and its incidence in rural and Indigenous groups, while simultaneously assisting in the capacitation of vulnerable populations, the development of women, and the valuation of cultural heritage, among other issues. The existence of State programmes and approaches also suggests that official discourses consider the double characteristic of textile crafts as both economic and heritage/cultural assets of value. The content analysis reveals that this complies with the political strategies intended for the revaluation and enactment of artefact histories for the economisation of society. The incidence of the Mexican State and its cultural and development institutions over textile crafts follow the historical tactics that construct and communicate the nation's unique identity, while providing economic and productive possibilities for the population.

The data indicated that the artisan trade can represent a full-time economic activity, or a supplementary occupation to obtain additional income. This proposes that the activity of producing and commercialising crafts represents an instrument for achieving economic autonomy. Therefore, as a social articulator with economic dimensions, the practicing of the trade and its related economic activities – from the obtention of materials, to the organisation of production, distribution, and other related services for marketing and selling the products – may provide people with financial means for survival – not only on the individual and/or family levels, but as one of the main economic engines within the communities. Similarly, the content analysis also revealed that the teaching of the creative and productive processes since childhood or early youth are not solely conducted with the intention of transmitting culturally rooted activities, but that the learning of the crafts remain strongly associated to the possibilities of increasing or generating family income.

Moreover, the qualitative process also inferred that the transformation in the functions and purposes of the textiles positioned them into spaces of cultural and economic resistance as well. In this sense, the information inferred that the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes* textile support the emancipation and independence of vulnerable members within the communities including women and retired men. The data revealed that the production and commercialisation of the *xaam nixuy* provided women in Tlahuitoltepec with the economic autonomy to escape situations of intrafamily violence, alcoholism, and abuse. Similar positions were detected in the testimonies involving the *gabanes*, as their production allowed men with age related physical limitations to obtain family income. The cases for the "Tenango" embroideries also assisted women with generating economic retribution.

The research also detected that in some cases, textile expressions and their production were perceived as an ongoing effort to resist more than 500 years of cultural and economic oppression against Indigenous communities. In this sense, crafts are not only seen as means for surviving with dignity through productive work and the acquisition of economic income, but as an extension of communal efforts to protect vulnerable members – particularly women, orphans in mestizo groups, and people of older age – as well as the historical and cultural values of Indigenous traditions and ways of living.

## 11.2 Experiences, senses, and meanings: results in the reconstruction of the controversies

The reconstruction of the controversies in the three Case Studies that compose this thesis had the purpose of analysing the actors, relationships, actions, experiences, behaviours, and perspectives surrounding the events. This had the intention of finding responses to the questions: what are the relationships and related ideas implicated in the 'appropriation' events? Where and when do the controversies surge? These sections were presented through the narratives of the participants – as well as support from other documents – in order to understand the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' as it intertwined with other actors, particular experiences, subjective senses, and meanings that individual episodes generated throughout different times and contexts.

The beginning of the analysis was established in the year 2015, coinciding with two points of inflection on the issue of 'cultural appropriation': the 'plagiarism' of the *xaam nixuy* by French luxury designer Isabel Marant, and the printing of "Tenangos" motifs on a mug marketed by Swiss company Nestlé, as the two main occurrences that positioned the phenomenon on national agendas. The completion of this thesis was achieved at the beginning of the year 2022, coinciding with the approval of the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities", which signified the first formal State initiative intended to halt the 'appropriation' of cultural expressions in the country.

The concise analysis of the data indicated that in the first instance, all of the occurrences that would later be depicted as acts of 'cultural appropriation' had initially gone unnoticed by the participants of this thesis. The data suggests that it was not until certain points of inflection occurred that the narratives surrounding the events were transformed, consequently shifting perceptions over the events. These points of inflection marked the moment in which the events began to be colloquially referred to as 'plagiarism' and/or 'thefts' by the participants, implying the usurpation of the work, creativity, culture, or ideas from the people and their communities.

According to the analysis of the testimonies, the negative associations and perceptions implied by these words and shifts in meanings had not been originally present in the early discourses of participants when news of the events first emerged in 2015. The initial assessments in the two first Case Studies analysed – the *xaam nixuy* and the "Tenango" embroideries – had ranged from indifference to feelings of pride, and thus, the 'appropriated' objects had been initially regarded as a display of admiration and/or recognition to the creative abilities and culture of the artisans and their communities. However, this was not the case in the 'appropriation' of the *gabanes*, occurring in the year 2021, as narratives over the phenomenon became pervasive in official and media outlets, with State efforts against 'plagiarism' and news agencies influencing general perceptions and discourses. This indicates that it was not until the simultaneous intervention of external actors and/or the circulation of certain ideological positions through social networks and other media, that the controversies began to be shaped as such.

The data suggests that certain points of inflection transformed the narratives of the events into acts of 'appropriation', as the occurrences begin to be colloquially referred to as 'plagiarisms' and/or 'thefts', implying the usurpation of the work, creativity, culture, or ideas from the people and the communities. According to the analysis, these descriptions and accompanying perceptions over the occurrences that had not been originally present in the discourses of participants when the news of the events first were known.

The examination of the content revealed that the shifts in the understanding and implications of the events were the result of increased levels of public outrage – both inside and outside of the communities. According to the testimonies of the two initial Case Studies, concerns were heightened as the incidents became viral, with results identifying the proclivity of social networks in the dissemination of discourses that altered the assessment and perceptions surrounding the events. The propagation of the negative associations to the occurrences on digital media – providing a node of social interaction between otherwise disconnected groups on communal, national, and international levels – demonstrated that the preponderance of certain understandings, opinions, and perceptions shared by individuals, media and State institutions over the incidents influenced the eventual progression and valuation of the polemics.

The chronology of events, as described by the participants, inferred that collective influence increased once messages from external actors with higher levels of social and/or political capital disseminated. The first Case pointed to the participation of an artist with major digital impact and online followings, while the "Tenangos" vs. Nestlé controversy was influenced by an actor with legal status. The analysis evidenced a clear preponderance of actors with major political standing and resources on the thoughts, feelings, and actions surrounding the episodes. Accordingly, the content examination suggests that these actors had significantly influenced the successive perceptions and developments of the events by providing and integrating a series of discourses – on the value of the textiles as expressions of *national heritage* and notions over *individual authorship* – that would guide the behaviours and opinions of larger groups such as the community and/or the country.

The content examination evidenced that the preliminary reactions of the participants coming from the communities that had been first involved in viral cases of 'appropriation' as early as 2015, that is Tlahuitoltepec and Tenango, had been generally positive by involving feelings of pride, to neutral, as the events were recognised with general indifference. The discovery of luxury and commercial design products created and commercialised by foreign brands had prompted a sense of self-recognition, as the products that resembled the traditional

*xaam nixuy* blouse and the embroidered motifs of the "Tenango" textiles, had been originally perceived as an unequivocal appreciation for the characteristics of local cultural objects, the creativity, and abilities of the cultural community and the artisans that produce them. However, the reconstructions very clearly revealed the manner by which people's attitudes and behaviours eventually shifted.

As previously presented, the content analysis of the interviews indicated that changes in the assessments resulted from the involvement of external actors in positions of major political and/or social capital. However, the analysis further revealed that negative connotations over the occurrence had not reach generalised internal attention, until internal groups – local academics, artisan cooperatives and artisan families – began to directly address and engage with the topic. In the case of Tlahuitoltepec, the results suggest that the participation of members with internal political and social capital, who had completed academic degrees outside of the community, prompted general interest within the community, further encouraging local authorities to organise a General Assembly to discuss the issue. It was through this internal process of consultation and debate that the events began to raise general concerns in the community at large, exposing narratives that are consistent with a number of discourses. The descriptions highlight the construction of opposing concepts to define the events, including contrapositions between the notions of the *foreign* vs. the *national*, of *corporations and industrial manufacturing* vs. *Indigenous cultural production*, of *commercial objects* vs. *objects of tradition and/or cultural heritage*. However, according to the information, it was not until rumours over the supposed indictment of fashion brand Antik Batik claiming ownership to the intellectual property of the *xaam nixuy*, that the episode generated widespread outrage on an internal level, months after Isabel Marant had been first publicly denounced on social media. According to the interviews, the possibility of the brand having legal rights to the use and commercialisation of the garment provoked a sense of dispossession among the community. These were described by participants as a 'theft' that disregarded both the symbolic and economic values of the object, and the people from Tlahuitoltepec, entailing a sense of "stripping" of their own cultural identity and culture by others.

On the other hand, the analysis evidenced that in Tenango de Doria, changing perspectives had responded to a private conversation with an external actor to the community, who initially introduced the ideas of *consent* over the *use* of cultural expressions/creations, as well as the possibilities of claiming *economic retribution*, by recognising and constructing the event as a case of 'plagiarism'. Unlike the other Case Studies, the content analysis from these interviews suggest that the controversy was primordially developed after philosophies of *possessive individualism* were introduced, since the event was described as the reproduction of a creation elaborated by a single artisan. Comparatively, these two Case Studies demonstrate how perceptions over occurrences of 'cultural appropriation' can vary depending on the ideals over the ownership of cultural objects.

Further content examination suggested that general perceptions over the 'appropriation' incidences in San Nicolas, occurring after the initial 'appropriations' of the *xaam nixuy* by Isabel Marant and the Nextlé "Tenango" controversy surged by similarly contrasting notions of *authenticity* and *origins*, with those of *piracy* and *plagiarism*. The reproduction of the "Tenango" motifs by commercial actors external to the community raised concerns over changes in the cultural meanings and narratives contained in the objects of material culture, as it is believed that non-members of the Indigenous communities formulate new narratives about the objects, their origins, and significances.



Figure 104. Propaganda for an embroidery workshop organised outside of San Nicolas. (Facebook, 2016).

The results from San Nicolas also detected that the main concerns were not directed towards the *use and/or reproduction* of the embroidered motifs, but to the *transmission of the knowledge* to embroidery them, as the participants declared that the activity has become *capitalized* by external actors (Figure 104). Altogether, the reproduction of the embroideries 'appropriating' both the objects and the knowledge to produce them others, who were not considered part of the community nor the ethnic group, generated feelings of sadness, anger, and discomfort among the *Hñuhú* participants. The data also evidenced that similar worries were present in the testimonies from the community of Tlahuitoltepec, as it was highlighted that external member learn the production and embroidery processes while visiting the community or watching online videos to *reproduce* the garments using the traditional knowledge and techniques.

According to the data provided in the reconstruction of events involving the *gabanes* from Michoacan, news of the event were first publicly denounced and disseminated by an actor from the community of Tlahuitoltepec through social media (albeit the message linking the garments to the village of Charapan, and not from Santa Clara del Cobre/Nahuatzen). Although the analysis of the results suggested that the initial general reactions in the community had remained neutral, the participants later implied a series of discourses that contrasted the *values of manual vs. industrial work*, as well as narratives that contrasted the idea of the *foreign vs. the national* (France vs. Michoacan/Mexico). A sense of unfairness was present in the testimonies as the recognition over *life-long dedication and pride over the creative skills of artisans* surged in opposition to that of *industrial production coming from factories*. However, noticeably, some of the artisans from Santa Clara and Nahuatzen interviewed for this analysis ignored the existence of the events and of the controversies altogether. The examination of the interviews further identified that the incident, being relatively recent in the chronology of 'appropriation' events in Mexico, had been immediately addressed and condemned by the Secretary of Culture. This suggests that at that point, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' had become a matter of political interest and public policing.

The content analysis showed that the participation of external figures with a higher degree of political and social capital, supported by media outlets and/or different State institutions with direct or indirect incidence in the management of national cultural heritage, had incorporated particular visions to the 'cultural appropriation' debates, encouraging the dissemination of public narratives that linked the protection of cultural expressions to national and particular interests.

According to the assessment of the data presented for this thesis, the incidence of external actors in the development of legal initiatives intended for the protection of communities in face of 'appropriation' acts were negatively perceived by the extensive majority of participants in this thesis. External political actors were generally described as individuals who maintained personal interests, since sustained interaction and consultation with the communities had been absent during the entire process for the development of the legal policies, even though this were supposedly intended as a protection mechanism for the crafts, the artisan trade, and the interests of the cultural communities. The content suggests that the political figure's concern over the issue of 'cultural appropriation' were regarded with generalized distrust, as the number of relationships and efforts to promote legal tools were perceived as a political performance to gain personal prestige, or as part of the efforts to gain political leverage and/or electoral support.

Equally, the examination suggested that the plausible exercising of the Law had generated concerns in regard to the subject of retribution. with participants conveying worries over the suitable administration and distribution of resources. The decisions to allocate the rights to the creations, as well as de managing of the funds, would fall into the responsibility of serving political authorities. On one hand, the participants described Municipal entities as prone to maintaining clientelist relationships, allowing for the exchange of services, goods, and favours in exchange for fidelity, political assistance and electoral support; while communities with authorities exercising within respective structures of Indigenous cultural organisation, this prospect inferred bureaucratic limitations in terms of human resources and the abilities to register communal expressions.

Moreover, the data conveyed that the legal proposition raised gender and occupational concerns, since the informants suggested that authorities would have inherence in the decision to allocate resources over the social figure and work of the artisans. This was rendered as particularly problematic situation in Tlahuitoltepec, as the instance where the production of the textile crafts represented a mean of income among vulnerable minorities, particularly, groups of women. Within this cultural setting, informants highlighted the fact that the authority positions within the community were mainly comprised by males. Similar concerns were detected in the analysis of the other Case Studies, as individual participants considered representational disadvantages against organised cooperatives and groups with major political incidence and/or with better political connections with State authorities.

The data indicated that the approaches and interests of the State and its institutions over the issue of 'appropriation' were generally condemned by the communities. Participants not only highlighted the absence of consultation processes but further underlined that legal policies and protective programmes - such as the launching of the "Tenango" collective brand by the State of Hidalgo - were created and applied around logics that are alien to their own systems of social and cultural organisation.

The analysis also revealed that the incidence of governmental agendas also generated internal issues within the communities, as it is believed that the discussion privileges certain people, artisan cooperatives, or associations; further granting them with an unwarranted designation and responsibility to act as the main interlocutors of the interests, needs and demands of the artisan sector and the community at large. The data also found that the repercussion of National schemes in artisanal activities had enhanced associated participation among artisans, particularly through the organization of cooperatives. However, the information revealed that in some instance this was perceived as a detriment to individual and/or ununionized artisans, as their position proved an inability to influence policy making and other processes on official levels. Likewise, the information revealed a number of concerns regarding the agency of individual artisans in the processes for negotiating and commercialising designs to third parties, if this were mediated by the Government.

According to the testimonies, positive perception over the creation and application of the Law were also present. Some participants expressed confidence that legal mechanisms would be able to protect the community's creative domains. These discourses indicated a trust for Government efforts, and a recognition of their State's responsibility and position over the plausible negotiation with companies and individuals who showed interest in working with the communities in the future. In most of these positive assessments, participants conveyed that their vulnerable economic position would be considered an encouragement for companies and designers to collaborate directly with them.

According to the data, the Case Studies involving the "Tenango" embroideries and the *xaam nixuy*, also expressed notions of individual cultural ownership, and thus, the possibility of claiming legal copyrights and royalties over objects. The analysis disclosed that among some participants, ideas over the property of motifs and garments are recognised on individual levels, with notions of *individual creative authorship* being emphasised over the idea of *communal proprietorship*. The information revealed that the perspectives were particularly distributed among younger artisans (under 40), and those individuals who perceived their textile crafts as *objects of art*.

Relevantly, the analysis of the data further encountered that notion of 'cultural appropriation' not only applies to foreign or commercial brands, but to other individual members of the same cultural group, as well as to other artisan communities within the country. The analysis of the discussions involving the origins of the textile objects exposed a series of narratives that highlighted problems with the identification of cultural expressions, denoting that the roots of cultural objects may be disputed among neighbouring communities – as it was the case with Tlahuitoltepec and Yalalag, as well as San Nicolas and Tenango, and other Otomi-Tepehua communities across the mountain range. Some participants also conveyed that the motifs were shared throughout the region – Santa Clara, Nahuatzen, Patzcuaro, Charapan, etc. while participants producing the *xaam nixuy* emphasised the existence of similar motifs in garments produced in the communities of Tama, Yacochi, Ayutla, and Alotepec in the State of Oaxaca. One of the participants from the Tlahuitoltepec Case Study commented on a request to embroider a woven fabric from Tama with the motifs from Ayuujk community; while another participant claimed to have denounced the existence of instances of 'appropriation' against the villae of Tama to official organisms, considering that origins of crafts and their place of production should be regulated.

Participants from the three Case Studies perceived a positive increase in the selling of their crafts after the controversies. According to the data, the phenomenon had served to prompt people's appreciation over the textile expressions, and with it, a boost in the acquisition by different consumers and markets. However, this had negative connotations in the community of Tlahuitoltepec, as the data suggests that the external demand had generated a rise in the price of the *xaam nixuy*, and that as a result, the garment could no longer be acquired by many within the community.

Risk of disappearance due to higher costs was also detected as a concern in the content analysis; with some participants further claiming that the commercial boost had flooded the craft market with competition, affecting the artisans who did not have the tools to promote their crafts. Noticeably, the repercussion of the 'appropriation' controversies did not always encourage a rise in the incursion of new artisans into the trade, as it was the case with Santa Maria del Cobre and Nahuatzen, since the disappearance of the *gabanes* was considered an irrevocably dying tradition, due to the absence of intergenerational relay.









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## Conclusions

## Chapter 12 – Conclusions

The following chapter presents an organised assessment of the entire doctoral project, focused on the 'cultural appropriation' of traditional textiles in Mexico, compiling the examined results obtained through the conceptual and empirical analysis of three Case Studies. For the sake of organisation, this section will present first a brief review of the investigation approaches, followed by the series of conjectures deduced from the considerations of the methodological and theoretical frameworks, providing the general conclusions that were analytically derived for this thesis. Subsequently, the considerations regarding the assessment of the achievement of the objectives and working assumptions raised at the beginning of this research, as well as some considerations over the possibilities in future investigation will also be presented.

### 12.1 Methodological and theoretical considerations: 'cultural appropriation' as a transculturation event

The previous analysis on the objects and actors involved in the controversies – as well as the identities and values that are associated to them – denoted their mutable conditions. The artisans, as well as the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes*, were influenced and transformed by a series of transactions and dynamic processes which constructed the meanings, understandings and values related to them through time and space, by means of their classification and categorization in different sites. Thus, the identification and examination of the objects, actors and relationships composing the Case Studies allowed for the eventual location of different aspects presented in the 'cultural appropriation' events, enabling the differentiation of a number of processes of cultural exchanges and negotiations that occurred as the objects, actors, and information moved across sites.

As exposed in this investigation, the particular historical patterns that compose the cultural relevance of textiles within the Mexican context are the result of a series of developments, relationships, and factors, in which a number of causal processes and interactions intertwined. Predisposed by the influence of Western visions and practices, the general understanding of textiles and the artisan trade in the country have allowed the domains to remain conceptually separated from the realms of art and design. Nevertheless, the discourses and narratives shaping common national interpretations of the objects and their producers diverge from the realities and characteristics that textiles and artisans experience today.

This work revealed that the objects and the trade, as well as the communality and individualities of the people who produce them, cannot be considered static domains, solely associated to the notions of tradition, nor to the forms of production of pre-industrial eras. The textile culture of Mexico is framed by different historic processes, cultural traditions, and transformations, that among many factors, were influenced by historical shifts in the modes of subsistence, the various dynamics experienced through the domination and subjugation of the population by European/Western powers, the processes of cultural exchange enabled by commerce, as well as the neoliberal strategies and narratives produced by the Nation-State, including their eventual incorporation into modern-day global capitalist markets.

The regimes of value of crafts and textiles are systems with limited meanings, located under historical dimensions and temporal spaces, where objects enter and leave unbounded sites, experiencing a constant (re)assigning of values. Likewise, the objects, agents, relationships, meanings, and practices involved in the 'cultural appropriation' controversies assessed were impacted by a multitude of connections and crossings, complexified by the constant circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities.

The manners by which objects of material culture and their values were negotiated, legitimized and re-contextualized affected their social life. The cases of 'appropriation' represented instances where different movements, dislocations, and dynamics occurred, as values were ascribed by diverse regimes developed before, throughout, and after the events happened. Therefore, the detection of the social instances – the levels and contexts of relationships and variables – through which the objects circulated, became vital to the understanding of their biographies, and thus, the means by which their socially defined values were changed, acquired, accumulated, or lost – before, during and after the controversies occurred.

Traditional textiles and their production are not only located within geo-localized nor territorially bounded cultural settings, but dispersed into different domestic, institutional, or commercial spaces, with utilitarian, ornamental, or collectible functions. These dispersions respond to their commercialization, enabling the diversification of their circulation through different paths and consumptions. The materiality of traditional textiles, and related activities of the artisan trade, are subjected to various valuations and social uses which in context of the 'appropriation' controversies can be rapidly transformed. This mobility, therefore, should not be addressed only in terms of temporal and spatial dislocations – moving solely between places and time periods – but further displaced between regimes of value belonging to the spheres of identity, creativity, and the market.

A central approach to the question of 'cultural appropriation' addressed in this thesis, considered that cases surged in different sites or spaces, affecting different objects and correlated activities, under different contexts. Thus, the content analysis intended to reconstruct the trajectories of the objects, agents, and relationships involved in the controversies in order to understand and account for the shifting physical and symbolic realities. This evidenced the manner by which objects, actors, relationships, and sites are able to create, reinforce, change, deviate or incorporate new values and meanings, circulating between different sites as an 'appropriation' phenomenon develops.

The three selected Case Studies were dissected and analysed by applying an ethnographic approach, with the transcriptions being assessed through the identification of units of analysis and categories that enabled the documentation of relevant data. These were representative of the characteristics and contexts encompassed within each particular case, in which different objects and actors are inscribed, organized, and related, producing meanings, and changing practices. The cultural biographies of the objects presented revealed their material, economic and social profiles. This exercise had the intention of visualizing the dialogues and tension between diverse instances, and how they

impact the circulation and direction of the objects throughout their life histories, including other processes such as commodification and singularization. The traceability of their trajectories as cultural artefacts or as objects on the realms of art and/or design are consistent with the methodological observations of Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai in the "Social Life of Things" (1986) allowing to unravel the multiple interactions and regimes by which textile objects transit, and through which agents, relationships, markets, and institutions function as adjudicators of values, meanings, and practices.



Figure 105. *Gaban produced in Michoacan for consumption in the American market. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2021).*

## 12.2 Exchanges and negotiations: the global and the local in 'cultural appropriation' occurrences

Another of the relevant elements considered in the efforts to analyse the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' relayed on the significance of the relationships formed between actors and objects, since their trajectories served to cast the flows and networks through which different meanings are produced, guiding the discourses that affect the organisation and understanding of the elements and aspects involved in the phenomenon, as well as the discourses and practices that guided responses and actions.

The actors involved in the 'cultural appropriation' controversies could be arranged into diverse groups, differentiated in terms of their geopolitical scopes and reaches. Although associated through multidimensional relations that involve and are manifested within cultural, economic, and political settings, the Case Studies presented the existence of local and regional/national actors, who occasionally or consistently participated in transnational and global networks. Artisans had the ability to reflexively structure and restructure their culture and relationships to other actors, with the objective of enhancing competitiveness in the commercialization of their textiles, recontextualizing and transferring with this, their crafts into other territorial environments to access external markets.

The results from the trajectories reveal that the production and transmission of the knowledge to elaborate the *xaam nixuy*, the embroidered "Tenangos", and the *gabanes* tended to be governed by interpersonal relationships within the communities, most noticeably, through direct family ties within the domestic unit. However, the results also showed that some of these connections had been locally created through marriages with members from different cultural communities, as well as through bonds with extended relatives living outside of the cultural groups' perceived boundaries. Some of the artisans had also migrated, bringing their local traditions to different destinations – e.i. Oaxaca City, Mexico City, the United States – while equally transferring new ideas and expertise to their communities when they returned. The data suggests that the capacities for mobility and undertaking multiple paths, allowed artisans to study academic

degrees outside of their communities, further introducing new ideas, technologies and means producing after spending time or working abroad.

The existence of transnational regional and/or national actors was also evidenced through the participation of State and Municipal political figures / institutions, whose spheres of action remain circumscribed to the Mexican territory. The results denoted that the social connections and networks promoting the continuity of the textile traditions were also governed by connections with individuals and institutions that provided artisanal training within local communities, including schools, missionaries from Church, Government funded programmes, etc. Likewise, regional and/or national actors had the ability to affect the production and valuation of textiles as expressions of cultural heritage, and their relationship to notions of economic development, further providing discourses that shaped and provided meaning to the events of 'appropriation'.

Moreover, the work also identified designers and commercial brands/corporations - Isabel Marant, Antik Batik, Nestlé, retail brands - as supranational entities characterised by their actions and reaches within global environments. Functioning within world systems and influencing international fashion trends, these global actors induced 'cultural appropriation' occurrences through their positions beyond the local and/or national limits, circumscribed by differing systems of organization, cultural boundaries, and authorities.

The relocation of the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries and the *gabanes*, outside of their cultural and geographical boundaries sustains the assertion that in context of globalization, symbolic elements circulate while being recontextualized and transplanted into other places and territories. The analysis resolved that their reincorporation into these new contexts promoted their reinterpretation, as external actors - consumers, collectors, Government agencies, designers, and corporations - adopt and adapt the objects, its associated values and traditions to novel circumstances, cultural norms, socio-political regimes, and values. The circulation of the objects and their 'appropriation' evidences the global scope in which actors and textiles crafts circulate, providing a resignification of the objects among particular social segments. The networks and events through which the 'appropriation' controversies manifest suggest that the phenomenon provides spaces for cultural exchanges and disputes that touch on issues of social representations, ideas, and understandings, that simultaneously arise through the phenomenon itself.



Figure 106. 'Modern' style dress in Tlahuitoltepec workshop. (Sierra Iracheta Personal Archive, 2020).

The relationships between the textile objects and artisans inferred that their association to questions of cultural identity represented a continuous process of construction. Although influenced by national hegemonic discourses and policies, both instances were also affected by broader processes that surpassed territorial locations and nationalist narratives. The analysis of the actors and objects, as entities with

agency capable of mobility revealed that their association to questions of cultural identity and social relations which were transformed by transcultural and historical processes – not only transcending national discourses/boundaries, but further allowing individuals, cultural groups, national institutions, state projects, social media, technologies, and markets to overlap generating different sites that enable intercultural encounters.

According to the testimonies, the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon is characterised by its complex and multidimensional nature, providing a site for contestation through which intercultural conflicts arises. The analysis recognised the implications of emotional vulnerability when discussing the conflicts, the evaluation of 'others' from an ethnocentric perspective, the development of the occurrences as a process determined by different actors and factors, and the emergence of consequences that depended on how the conflicts were addressed, changing their definitions through time.

This thesis concluded that episodes of 'cultural appropriation' produce different emotions, feelings, attitudes, behaviours, and actions among the actors involved in the controversies, suggesting that the conflicts are interpreted or judged – as well as experienced – in different ways throughout different spans of time. Constructed through social relations, the events of 'appropriation' affected and generated disputes on personal, group, organizational and/or national levels, all of which were simultaneously determined by contextual, situational, historical, and cognitive-affective elements. Simply put, the notion of conflict and potential reactions to the phenomenon surged through the different ways in which individuals and larger groups interpret and determine their world vision; confirming the working assumption that proposed that the occurrences of represent a zone of cultural friction in which a diversity of values, norms, beliefs, economic differences, and social inequalities – at the same time sustained and evidenced by the conflict itself – emerge.

In this sense, the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' represents a dynamic manifestation of transcultural processes which facilitates the interaction between local, translocal, national, and global entities. The analysis of the relationships that surged between the textile objects and the actors evidenced that their association to questions of cultural identity represented a continuous process of mutual construction. Although affected by historical developments and national hegemonic discourses, both instances were also influenced by broader processes that transcended territorial boundaries and nationalist narratives, allowing individuals and groups to coincide with national institutions and state projects, social and normal media, as well as markets, all of which provide spaces for intercultural exchanges and encounters.



Figure 107. Amuzgo woman admiring a gaban. (Participant's Personal Facebook 2020).

Similarly, the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon surges and functions within Arjun Appadurai's 5 '-scapes' frameworks (Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, Ideoscapes, Financescapes, and Mediascapes) (1998), concurrently determining the terms in which the relationships and episodes developed. In this sense, the analysis confirmed that the encounters between local and external actors did not occur through diametrical confrontations between civilizations, but through the overlapping of the cultural dimensions that conform the processes of intercultural/transcultural exchange between entities. This suggests that the phenomenon rises as a point of contestation, through which the interaction of culturally diverse people and groups – characterised by their own frames of reference and behaviours – are faced.

Although the creative origins of the 'appropriated' pieces were not addressed in this research, the simultaneous incidence of Ethnoscapes, Mediscapes and Ideascapes was detected as a motor for the dissemination of the occurrences, with social media and the position of external actors with major social and political capital impacting public opinion. The generation of discursive currents, surging from the exchange of information and ideas between local, translocal and global groups, influenced the trends that articulated the interpretations and meanings shaping the cultural and political dimensions of the events.

In first place, the testimonies associated the active participation of external social actors, their contribution to social networks, and the incidence of media coverage, in the detection of the 'appropriated' objects. The products created and commercialised by fashion designers (Isabel Marant, Antik Batik), marketable brands that followed the trickle-down effect, and/or corporations such as Nestlé, were located beyond the communities' local milieus, with the objects circulating in different markets to those of the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes*. The position of the media and the influence of external actors and discourses performed a primordial role in the recognition of the objects, its associated realities and dynamics which were located beyond the communities' immediate geographical or physical reach. It was in the intersection between these translocal and global sites through which people, objects and information circulate, that allowed and sustained the diverging positions that constructed the phenomenon as a controversy.

Figure 108. Secretary of Culture led project #BuyOriginalNotCopies. (Internet, 2022).

This thesis confirmed that the social and political organisation of the events were primordially prompted by language, as influenced by media coverage and external systems of meanings and classifications that disseminated the idea of 'appropriation'. This work highlighted that the notion and associated perspectives were originally inexistent within the communities when the first occurrences initially emerged. These points of infliction transformed the narratives surrounding the other objects and actors into acts of 'appropriation', once the events began to be locally and nationally referred as instances of 'plagiarisms' and/or 'thefts'.

Moreover, access to external information and ideas presented discursive narratives that provided the objects and the actors involved - as well as the acts themselves - with assumed social positions and political attributes. The exchanges in the categories of social representation and socio-cognitive terminologies associated to questions of cultural identity shifted to constitute new systems of knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs used to describe the events. The transformation of these understandings, responses, and attitudes towards the occurrences, affecting general deliberations and the coordination of actions, denoted that the episodes emerged as transactional and dynamic processes. These were constructed by practices of classification and categorization of oneself and of others, surging strategically to differentiate groups of people and objects.

The conceptualisation and narratives over the phenomenon of 'cultural appropriation' found in the Case Studies encouraged the emergence of a sense of 'us' - *cultural groups, nationals, traditional producers* - vs. 'them' - *foreigners, Westerners, designers, and corporations* - through which actions and relations were demarcated, following notions that mainly relayed on ethnic, racial, and national

political constructions. The discourses predisposed the existence of a shared identity among local and national actors, prompting solidarity in the face of conflict with antagonistic, foreign cultural and political global figures/entities. These modes of representation between the local and the global were capable of integrating specific meanings and configurations into separate events, even though their consequences and collateral effects had diverse levels of influence on internal cultural organization.

Moreover, the analysis conveyed that the 'appropriated' items contradicted local and national interpretations. Even though the objects remained integrated into diverging systems of production and economic markets, sustained by alternative values – *cultural production, traditional objects, objects of cultural heritage vs industrial production, commercial objects* – the discernment of differences influenced the perception of inequality, injustice, and dispossession, raising anger and resentment among the groups. The episodes raised awareness over asymmetric power relations with most differences being assessed through binary constructions of dominance and exploitation. This confronted the notions of Western, capitalist dominant groups and systems, against non-Western, subordinates governed by tradition.

Nevertheless, although the conditions in which contact between members of Central-Peripheral groups occur are often defined by the experience of oppression and deprivation resulting from historical structural conditions, the 'cultural appropriation' controversies remain defined by their development and outcomes. As such, the episodes were defined by specific histories, temporalities and contexts, as subjective experiences that do not necessarily had a constant objective basis, since perspectives changed throughout the development of the events. This denoted that the conflicts and potential reactions to the phenomenon were differently sustained as the groups changed their interpretation of the occurrences and the relationships involved within them, confirming the working assumption that proposed that the episodes represent a zone of contestation, in which a diversity of values, norms, beliefs, economic differences, and social inequalities are simultaneously sustained and evidenced by the conflicts themselves.

In this sense, episodes of 'appropriation' tend to be perceived as negative occurrences due to the tensions they generate, emphasising inherent anxieties that are present within certain socio-historical relations and contexts. Some of these result from the changes prompted by globalisation in the structural and conjunctural contexts that affect the economic, political, social, cultural and identity dimensions and other peculiarities that had previously rooted actors and objects to historical traditions and other defined, essentialist identity inscriptions. Nevertheless, the analysis demonstrated that the occurrences had increased the sales of the *xaam nixuy*, the "Tenango" embroideries, and the *gabanes*, further promoting production and the practicing of the trade as demands for the crafts increased.

Additionally, both the actors and the objects involved in the controversies do not represent stable points bounded within the limits of their own community and networks. Although ascription to identity groups and institutions (families, communities, work, academia, political parties, etc) provide regimes of value, outlining boundary frameworks that collectively delineate the interactions among them – further organising life through the position of ethnicity, gender, age, class, occupation, etc – the analysis demonstrated that agency of movement and exchange represent the main qualities that define them.



Figure 109. Skirt and blouse ornamented with "Tenango" embroideries. (Participant's Personal Facebook, 2020).

Thus, the constant movement and circulation of people, objects, and ideas that encouraged the transformation and creation of new identities, ideologies, and symbols, as well as their meanings and interpretations, also affected the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of 'appropriation' internally, as it began to be subjected to external influences. Therefore, changes in the hegemonic interpretative frameworks and relationships that used to compose the limits of internal and global groups were able to modify the organizational structures, forms of action, and ideological ethos surrounding the events.

### 12.3 Final considerations: State intervention and the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon in Mexico

The 'cultural appropriation' occurrences position different elements and relationships in a sensitive scenario characterised by cultural diversity – representative of the multitude of actors and identities involved – revealing the absence of intercultural competence, as well the lack of mediation strategies and regulatory frameworks to approach complex issues within cultural scenarios.

Therefore, the analytical implications of this thesis serve to argue that the focus on constitutional or legal approaches present limited assessments on the full comprehension of the phenomenon. The evolutionary schemes through which episodes of 'cultural appropriation' surged suggest that the events and its components should be regarded as a process and not as an inalterable fact. The application of legal and/or regulatory mechanisms for the protection of cultural expressions and cultural groups is problematised by the complexities of contemporary cultural and social dynamics involving transcultural and intercultural actors and objects.

The concept and definition of cultural heritage, elevated into a legal category, has been intrinsically related to the criterion value that conform prerequisites within legal systems. However, the delocalization and/or deterritorialization of the crafts and the artisans – as a consequence of new relationships articulated between a plurality of diverse social actors, simultaneously influenced by social mobility, the circulation of global information and technology, the marketplace, and the incidence of digital media in combining time and space – erodes these traditional paradigms of interpretation, challenging outmoded conceptual logics. The principles that had over the decades accompanied official approaches, institutional and legal figures, organised and bounded by notions of territoriality and national rights, have been altered by the globalisation processes.

Although legal perspectives have been a vital instrument for resolving social issues and disputes, the existence of laws for the protection of objects and expressions of culture and cultural identities runs the risk of halting cultural change and exchange by inhibiting the development of novel ideas and their dissemination. The discussions over the legal protection of cultural property of groups by external parties have introduced notions of *individual intellectual property* within the communities analysed in this research, presenting notions that may hinder the organic reproduction and transmission of culture, as artisans begin to claim individual rights over their creations, transgressing previous philosophies of *communal cultural property*.

Further tensions upsurged on individual levels, particularly on regards to the cultural rights of female artisans in instances where community authorities and/or artisan collectives were dominated by males. The plausible instauration of legal and monitoring mechanisms represents a detrimental device for underrepresented social segments within the communities or groups over the collective, and over those who possess higher levels of social and political capital.

Regulations intended to protect objects of material culture may also alter processes of knowledge transmission and interchange, by inferring that the learning process and production techniques are constrained by territorial and/or ethnic demarcations. The Case Studies detected instances of 'cultural appropriation' not only among members of the communities, but among neighbouring cultural groups, with the analysis further revealing the existence of disputes over the assumed origins of the textile expressions. The applications of laws through the allocation of legal rights by geographical location, and/or cultural adscriptions represents a constrictive measurement that disregards the mobility and circulation of people and objects in broader intercultural and transnational global networks.

Moreover, since cultural forms can be produced outside specific territories, as well as imitated, or elaborated with commercial industrial materials and techniques, the concepts of *authenticity* that are implicitly or perceptibly presented on the categories that define cultural objects within the 'appropriation' narratives can be rendered as highly problematic. Currently, the limits that defined the borders between the *old* and the *new*, the *traditional* and the *modern* or the *innovation* of the textile objects with the communities are constantly distorted. In this sense, legislative responses may isolate producers and communities from mainstream markets by conferring protection to those specific forms that will be rendered as *genuine* or *representative* of the group, limiting the degree of creative autonomy and innovation among the artisans and communities.

The prospective of the "Federal Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities" is explicitly directed towards the protection of cultural expressions from ethnic minorities within the country, further denoting a neglect of the objects, people, cultures, and identities that do not ascribed to these categories. The Law disregards the protection of expressions of 'mestizo' culture – representative of the homogenization processes that combined cultural and social aspects from Indigenous and European communities in the pasts – such as the *gabanes* from Santa Clara del Cobre.

Although the Mexican State and its institutions accept certain local and transcultural legal practices within the territory by oscillating between autonomy and state supervision, the proposed regulatory system and its practice underscored cultural self-governance within Indigenous communities. The testimonies revealed the lack of consultation processes, as well as a rejection to Western legal perspectives as a disregard to the figure of the artisans, their needs, and traditional systems of organisation. The creation of categories predisposed by legal figures are intended to regulate relationships that without concern to a number of human and cultural elements and dynamics. Moreover,



since the 'appropriation' controversies present the crossing of transnational borders and sites, the figure of the nation-state will remain incapacitated to legally address those conflicts, as they correspond to foreign cultural and socioeconomic actors and entities, located in spaces that are situated on an international, global sphere.

The testimonies presented in this thesis also alluded to the segregation of artisans and textile crafts through limited access to markets and broader commercial dynamics. Among the problems that were highlighted, artisans recognised the reduced inference of institutional promotion and subsistence programmes for the acquisition of materials, the absence of channels for commercialization, the incidence of intermediaries, as well as the social devaluation of the objects resulting in the lack of sales, and consequently, in the abandonment of the trade by younger generations. Accordingly, participants emphasised that the artisan trade was conceived by Government authorities as any other productive industry, disregarding with this, the differential values and characteristics of the trade, the people that conformed the occupation, and the cultural communities, values, and norms from which they surge.

Different issues and concerns were evidenced among the different Case Studies, with the perceived risks over the disappearance of the *xaam nixuy* and the "Tenango" embroideries being latent within the communities. However, after the rise of the 'appropriation' controversies, participants recognised an increase in their demand and sales, resulting in an increased number of artisans producing the crafts. On the other hand, the analysis corroborated that a major threat was present in the disappearance of the *gabanes*. Although the controversies had increased demands for the garments, the expressions are only being produced by members of one family in the communities of Santa Clara and Nahuatzen, the majority of which are over 50 years of age. The absence of intergenerational relay, as well as communal interest in the safeguarding of the expressions, was noticeable.

The purpose of this research had the finality of expanding the study and comprehension of the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon, positioning a broad range of politically frail, socially sensitive, and scientifically fascinating topics as the main focus of an analytical examination involving objects of material culture and of cultural heritage. The interests that motivated this investigation led me to discover more about the realities of artisans in Mexico, as well as the aspects and dynamics transforming the historical, social, economic, and cultural scenarios in context of the transculturation and globalisation processes that affect them. The issue of power relations and inequalities that surged represent an issue of significance in the continuity, transformation and prosperity of the objects and artisan trade. Therefore, I believe that this research can be used as a starting point to further analyse the sites, agendas and actors that play a determinant role in the future of cultural expressions, their producers, and users, as well as the transformations that are linked to commercial and patrimonialization practices implicating creative cultural communities.

Altogether, the reflections presented in this work intended to highlight the relevance of the transmission of knowledge and practices associated to the production of traditional textiles, trying to present an analysis on how actors and objects of material culture – providing different relationships and thus, combinations of meanings, values, and forms – circulate through different sites of exchange. Some of the presented premises therefore serve as a cautionary notice to avoid collective traps that objectify textiles, the artisan trade, and culture – its underlying relationships and experiences – highlighting the importance of incorporating transformative processes and narratives to the analysis and comprehension of both the material and immaterial dimensions of culture and of cultural expressions.

Likewise, this thesis was developed in line with the attempts to promote a visibility and recognition of academic works presenting the perspectives of social and cultural actors from the Global South. The exercise was intended as a valuable effort to reduce contextual gaps in research, by adding the experience and understanding of the phenomenon from the standpoints of Latin American contexts – and specifically from Mexico – adding to the pool of intercultural, transnational studies and discussions over issues of contemporary cultural relevance.

Considering these motivations, this thesis detected aspects that should be addressed in future research involving the controversies of 'cultural appropriation' and the advancement of regulatory initiatives. This work regards the prospective of analysing the phenomenon through the perspectives of the commercial and fashion brands and individuals involved in controversies, as a valuable subject of research, in order to detect and address the motivations, discourses and dynamics that surge through the transcultural processes which allowed them in the first place, to identify and recreate the objects of material culture which were later 'appropriated'.

The expansion of the research into transnational Case Studies also surges as a significant area of interest, as the differences in the number of actors, perspectives and dynamics evidenced in this thesis, suggests to a multiplicity of differences when cases are compared among other regions and/or cultural groups around the world. In this sense, claims and processes of 'cultural appropriation' would present different objects, actors, relationships, developments, and narratives among different countries and/or cultural groups, proposing that the Case Studies analysed in this work, would differ from other cases, such as the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania<sup>34</sup>, or the community of Bihor in Rumania<sup>35</sup>.

In this sense, much has to be addressed in respect to the conformation of contemporary legal categories and policing notions stemming from Western imaginaries and conceptions, which remain strongly associated to the construction of heritage and the art/culture systems which dictates official discourses and perceptions over the management and understanding of art, culture, and identities.

The ethical and social implications and responsibilities of commercial and fashion systems should require further analysis in order to

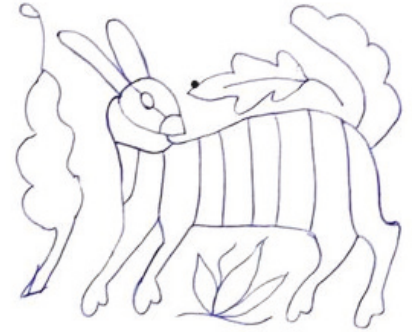
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<sup>34</sup> Louis Vuitton reproduced a traditional African blanket cast in colourful shades of red and blue, inspired by the Maasai Shuka (Young, 2018).

<sup>35</sup> In 2018, Christian Dior fashion house was criticised after 'appropriating' the traditional Romanian sheep-coat designs from the northeaster region of Bihor (Euronews, 2018).

open inclusive discussions over the establishment of collaborative relations and strategies involving the creative populations that identify with cultural objects. Along these lines, it is essential that future investigations propose projects that scrutinise the relations and inference of external political figures, national Government programmes and projects functioning under *etic* criterion, through which external entities voice and interpret the needs, traditions, objects of material culture, etc. of cultural groups, pinpointing these as properties that remain culturally specific, through conceptions of ethnic or racial notions. The changes derived from globalization, currently arising in the modern world-system, evidenced throughout the development of this thesis – including territorial displacements and mobility, delocalization and/or deterritorialization, digital participation, marketplace flows, etc.— confirm that the reorganization of culture and cultural relationships appertain to new understandings, scenarios and dynamics that should be continuously assessed, challenging the paradigms of contrasting of cultural models, cultural transformations, and value systems.

Cultural heritage remains an unstable and contingent category, traversed by and infinity of discourses, meanings, and relationships, which generates and underly tensions and conflicts. However, the 'cultural appropriation' disputes can surge as a scenario capable of creating spaces for the development of possibilities among political actors, social and cultural innovation. The position of the State and its inherence in legal mechanisms would be more pertinent if the processes were thought and constituted around the communities that integrate those multiple and different identities that result from the transcultural/transnational domains. This conciliatory proposition advocates for the recognition of both relational and intersubjective identities, which embrace the different, and at the same time dynamic and evolutionary, trajectories of people and objects.



## **SECTION 6**

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## **Bibliography and Annexes**

## Bibliography

The following section presents the bibliographic and documentary resources that were cited and consulted throughout the conducting of this study, serving to broaden the examination of the themes explored. These have been listed in alphabetical order and may include scientific articles, books, research projects, and other online resources, as well as authors that may have not been references, but whose investigation was pertinent to the analysis of the 'cultural appropriation' phenomenon, the examination of cultural heritage, and transcultural processes.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1 - Model Format Semi-structured Interviews / Model Guide Research Questions

<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>
Date: Time: Place (Village/City/State/Country): Medium (Presential, Call, Electronic medium, etc):
<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION</b>
Name: Gender: Age: Ethnic affiliation: Occupation: Place of Origin: Address/Locality:
<b>GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH INTERVIEW</b>
Purpose of interview:  Comments on participant:  Reasons for selection of participant:  Objectives for use of data:
<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEW</b>
Confidentiality status: Estimated duration:

<b>PERSONAL QUESTIONS</b>
Who are you? Where do you live? What do you do? What is your job/profession/function? What do you work on? Where do you work? How did you start doing this work? How long have you been doing it? Who do you work with?
<b>CULTURAL AFFILIATION AND TEXTILES</b>
How do you identify as a? What does (ethnic group/nationality affiliation) mean to you? What makes you part of the group? How do you define someone who is not part of the community? What are the traditional textiles of the community/country? How do you define a textile that is from the community? What do they mean to you? What is your relation to traditional textiles in (location)? Why are they important? Who wears them? Do people still wear them? If not, why did they stop? What are the biggest problems for the existence of your traditional textiles?

<b>ON APPROPRIATION</b>
<p>Do outsiders use your textiles? Have you seen them? Where? What happens when someone who is not part of the community buys/wears your textiles? Who are these people? What do you feel? You like/dislike people from outside the community using your textiles? What have outsiders said about them? Who buys them outside of people from the community?</p> <p>Can people from other ethnic groups/communities use your textiles? Why not/yes?</p> <p>What do you think of people from outside the community using motives/designs that look like yours (ethnic group/community)? Do you think this directly affects you as a member of the group? And the community? How? Does it affect your production/selling? How?</p>
<b>ON THE OBJECT</b>
<p>How does the object relate to you? To your daily/ceremonial life? What does the object mean / represent to you? To the people of the community? What are their symbols and their meanings? Where and who taught you the meaning of the symbols?</p>
<b>USES OF THE OBJECTS</b>
<p>Why do you wear/use the object? How long have you been using/wearing the object? How do you feel when you wear/use the object? Who else uses/wears it? (Family, community)? When is the object used/worn? Are there any rituals related to it?</p> <p>How many objects do you own? Do you buy new objects? How often do you buy new ones? When do you buy new ones? How do you select a new object to buy and use/wear?</p>
<b>PRODUCTION</b>
<p>Why do you produce? Is it your only job? How long have you been producing the object? Who taught you to make it? Where do you produce it? How do you produce it (processes and techniques)? How do you select the designs/motifs? Do you come up with new motifs/designs? How do you come up with them? What is your inspiration? What happens when people see your new designs? Can other producers from the community use your new designs? Do you share the designs with them? How?</p> <p>What other products with the motifs/designs do you make? When and why did you start making new products? Where do you make the objects? Do you have assistance in making it? Where do you get the materials? How long does it take to produce a object? Do you sell the objects?</p> <p>COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS</p> <p>What happened to your production after the incident? Did you increase/decrease the production of the objects? Did more people buy the objects in the community/outside?</p>
<b>COMMERCIALISATION</b>
<p>NOW: Where do you sell the objects? Who buys the objects? How much does your objects cost? How many objects do you sell in a week/month?</p> <p>(BEFORE THE CONTROVERSY): Who was buying the objects before? Has production or sales increased inside and outside the community? What was the cost before?</p> <p>FUTURE: Do you have future commercial plans?</p>
<b>ON THE CONTROVERSY – NO USE OF ‘CULTURAL APPROPRIATION’ TERM TO AVOID BIAS</b>
<p>When did you first hear about the controversy? How did you hear about it? What did you think of the occurrence? What was your reaction? Did you see pictures of the other objects? What did you feel/think at the moment? Do you think the affair affected you in anyway (emotional, economic, etc)? (What would you ask, in case the person did not hear about the affair? Why do you think you hadn't heard about the events?)</p> <p>What happened in the community/town after the controversy was known? What was people's reaction? Did people talk about it? If so, what was their thoughts/feelings? Did you organize meetings to discuss what had happened? Who were involved in the meetings? Did you decide to do something about it? What? Has anything changed (personal, family, community, authorities) after the controversy?</p> <p>Who got in touch with the community to talk about it (other communities, media, politicians)?</p> <p>What happened with them?</p>
<b>LAW</b>

What do you think of protecting your designs with laws?  
Have you heard of the new law intended to protect cultural/heritage from third parties? What do you think of it?  
What do you think it is intended to do? Do you think it will work for you? For the rest of the community? Do you think it's going to affect you use/wearing/producing/selling? How?  
Were people in the community consulted about it? How has the law been received? Do you have to register the designs? Who can register the designs (individuals/community)? Where do you have to register them?

**CONCLUDING QUESTIONS**

What do you think were/are the biggest problems with the controversies? With the legal situation of the new law? Do you think there are differences between different groups in how they want their textile expressions to be protected? What do you think would be a good way to solve future controversies/conflicts? What do you wish could happen in the future for the objects? What are your main concerns?

### **Hoja resumen proyecto de investigación**

Título del proyecto: 'Apropiación cultural de textiles tradicionales en México'

Investigador: Mtra. Estibaliz Sienna Iracheta

Programa de Estudios del Patrimonio Mundial

Universidad Técnica de Brandemburgo, Cottbus, Alemania.

Por medio de la siguiente solicito su participación en un estudio de investigación sobre el tema de la 'apropiación cultural' de textiles tradicionales en México. Antes de decidir si acepta participar, es importante que comprenda los motivos por los que se lleva a cabo esta investigación, cómo se va a utilizar la información que se recopilará, así como en qué consistirá el estudio.

#### **Resumen**

En la actualidad existe una importante discusión alrededor del llamado 'plagio' o 'apropiación cultural' de los textiles tradicionales en México. La comprensión de este fenómeno, así como de las influencias, expectativas y límites del comportamiento social derivados de los mismos, son de suma importancia para los ámbitos culturales, artesanales, patrimoniales y legales tanto del país, como de las diferentes comunidades que habitan en el territorio.

Este trabajo de investigación pretende sumergirse en una serie de controversias recientes con el fin de identificar a los agentes, voces y percepciones de los involucrados en los hechos; así como los factores, fuerzas y dinámicas que dieron forma a los diferentes casos de 'apropiación', sus procesos, dinámicas, efectos y consecuencias a nivel social, nacional, mercantil y de movimientos socioculturales.

El objetivo de esta investigación resultará en una tesis de Doctorado, mediante un estudio multi-sitio ajustado a un diseño cualitativo con perspectivas etnográficas. Estos datos serán recogidos mediante observación y aplicación de entrevistas semiestructuradas con participantes.

#### **Objetivo**

Entender el fenómeno de la 'apropiación cultural' de textiles tradicionales en México, su percepción, procesos y dinámicas en marcos transnacionales (forma de vida, estado, mercado y movimiento).

#### **Procedimiento**

Las entrevistas se realizarán entre la investigadora y un colaborador, con el objetivo de obtener información sobre lo que es importante y significativo desde su punto de vista (usted). La información de las entrevistas será grabada con ayuda de una grabadora de audio, para ser transcrita y analizada posteriormente. En caso de que haya más de un participante, la discusión será llevada en grupo. Los involucrados podrán expresar su opinión de forma abierta respecto a las preguntas que se realicen.

#### **Contacto**

Mtra. Estibaliz Sienna Iracheta

Celular/Whatsapp Alemania: +49 ...

Celular/Whatsapp México: +52 1 ...

Correo personal: estibaliz.sienra.iracheta@hotmail.com

Correo institucional: sienrest@b-tu.de

### **Formulario de consentimiento de entrevista**

Título del proyecto de investigación: 'Apropiación cultural de textiles tradicionales en México'

Investigador: Mtra. Estibaliz Sienna Iracheta

Programa de Estudios del Patrimonio Mundial

Universidad Técnica de Brandemburgo, Cottbus, Alemania.

La entrevista tomará un tiempo aproximado de \_\_\_\_\_. No se anticipa que haya cualquier riesgo asociado con su participación, pero usted tiene derecho a detener la entrevista o retirarse de la investigación en cualquier momento.

Los procedimientos éticos para la investigación requieren que los participantes acuerden explícitamente ser entrevistados e informados sobre la forma en los que el contenido e información de sus entrevistas se utilizará. Este formulario de consentimiento es necesario para asegurarnos de que comprende el propósito de su participación y que acepta las condiciones abajo establecidas. Se le otorgará una hoja resumen de información sobre este proyecto de investigación y se le pedirá firmar este formulario para certificar que aprueba lo siguiente:

- Esta entrevista será grabada en audio y/o video y se producirá una transcripción de la misma.
- Se le enviará una copia de la transcripción y se le dará la oportunidad de corregir cualquier error.
- La transcripción de la entrevista será analizada por la Mtra. Estibaliz Sienna Iracheta como parte de su proyecto de investigación de Doctorado.
- El acceso a la transcripción de la entrevista se limitará a colegas académicos e investigadores con los que se podría colaborar como parte del proceso de investigación.
- En caso de que así lo desee, cualquier contenido resumido de la entrevista o citas directas de la entrevista disponibles a través de publicaciones u otros medios académicos será anonimizado para que no pueda ser identificado, teniendo cuidado de que la información proporcionada no facilite su identificación.
- La grabación original será guardada por la investigadora.
- Cualquier variación de las condiciones anteriores solo ocurrirá con su más explícita aprobación.

También entiendo que mis palabras pueden ser citadas directamente. Al firmar este formulario, acepto que:

1. Estoy participando voluntariamente en este proyecto. Entiendo que no tengo que participo y puedo detener la entrevista en cualquier momento;
2. La entrevista transcrita o extractos de la misma pueden usarse como se describió con anterioridad;
3. He leído la hoja de información;
4. No espero recibir ningún beneficio o pago por mi participación;
5. Puedo solicitar una copia de la transcripción de mi entrevista y puedo hacer ediciones en caso de considerarlo necesario, para asegurar la efectividad de cualquier acuerdo hecho sobre confidencialidad.
6. He podido hacer cualquier pregunta que pueda tener y entiendo que soy libre de contactar al investigador con cualquier pregunta que pueda tener en el futuro.



<b>Marque las casillas correspondientes</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>NO</b>
Participación		
He leído y entiendo la hoja resumen de información sobre el proyecto con fecha _____ / _____ / _____ .		
Se me ha dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.		
Acepto participar en el proyecto. Participar en el proyecto incluirá ser entrevistado y grabado (audio y/o video). Se generará una transcripción de la misma.		
Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria; puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento y sin tener que dar ninguna razón por la que ya no quiero participar.		
Deseo revisar las notas, transcripciones u otros datos recopilados durante la investigación relacionada con mi participación.		
Acepto ser citado directamente con mi nombre.		
No quiero ser citado directamente con mi nombre publicado. Quiero que se utilice un nombre inventado (pseudónimo).		
Estoy de acuerdo en que la investigadora pueda publicar documentos que contengan mis citas.		
Uso de la información que proporciono para este proyecto.		
Entiendo que mis datos personales, como el número de teléfono y la dirección, no serán revelados a personas ajenas al proyecto.		
Entiendo que mis palabras pueden citarse en publicaciones, informes, páginas web y otros resultados de investigación como ponencias académicas.		
Uso de la información que proporciono más allá de este proyecto.		
Acepto que los datos que proporciono se archiven en audio, video, transcripciones.		
Entiendo que otros investigadores tendrán acceso a estos datos solo si aceptan preservar la confidencialidad de la información como se solicita en este formulario.		
Entiendo que otros investigadores pueden usar mis palabras en publicaciones, informes, páginas web y otros resultados de investigación, solo si acuerdan preservar la confidencialidad de la información como se solicita en este formulario.		
Uso legal de la información.		
Acepto asignar los derechos de autor que poseo en cualquier material relacionado con este proyecto a Mtra. Estibaliz Sierra Iracheta.		

Nombre del colaborador(a): \_\_\_\_\_ Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigadora: \_\_\_\_\_ Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

