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UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS OF GUATEMALA
CENTER FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES

INGUAT
BIBLIOTECA

TRADITIONS OF GUATEMALA

9-10

Guatemala, Central America

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EXPLANATION

With the same title, we announced in issue 3 of **Traditions of Guatemala** that this magazine would become a biannual publication. And we kept our promise, since throughout 1975, 1976 and 1977 we published issues 3, 4, 11, 6, Z and B.

Due to financial limitations, which we face today and which may persist in the future, we have been forced to consolidate numbers 9 and 10, both corresponding to 9 and 8, into a single volume. Hence we anticipate to inform that very soon we will have to go to the people and institutions interested in the defense of the cultural heritage of Guatemala, to obtain from them the help that may allow us to save a magazine that intends to disseminate studies, documents and other testimonies related to our popular traditions. We believe that only thanks to this collaboration we will be able to move forward

Readers of **Traditions of Guatemala**, who reiterate that we are motivated by the purpose of ensuring the future of the journal of the Center for Folk Studies of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, please accept the excuse implicit in this note.

The Director

ACTIVITIES AND NEWS
FROM CENTER FOR
FOLKLORE STUDIES



INAUGURATION OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CENTER FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES

At the end of his four-year term (1974–1978) as Rector of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Dr. Roberto Valdeavellano Pinet inaugurated, among many other works of great academic significance, the new facilities of the Centro de Estudios Folkloricos.

As a token of recognition for someone who, together with his team of collaborators, understood the significance and scope of traditional culture and its scientific research, we hereby reproduce the speeches delivered during the aforementioned inaugural ceremony.

SPEECH BY THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS OF GUATEMALA, DR. ROBERTO VALDEAVELLANO PINOT

It is with great satisfaction that I am present at the inauguration of the headquarters of the Centro de Estudios Folkloricos. Even though I am still serving as Rector of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, the physical work that I am handing over today has gone through a series of challenges, which led me to fear that it might not be completed during my term as Rector. Throughout the past four years, we have dedicated all our efforts. Durante los cuatro años pasados, hemos prestado *toda la*

possible collaboration to the Centro de Estudios Folkloricos, firmly believing that the study of Guatemalan folklore is a fundamental aspect of our social values. In fact, folklore...

Scientifically considered, it is an integral part of the cultural anthropology of the peoples, teaching us to understand and identify our own human condition within the scope of our historical tradition.

Since April 1974, when the activities of the Center for Folkloric Studies of the Universidad de San Carlos began, the research work carried out has been intense. This is evidenced by the large number of works and journals published during this period, works that have been recognized not only nationally but internationally.

It is with great pleasure that I hand over this physical work to its researchers, staff, and especially to its Director, Licenciado Roberto Díaz Castillo, convinced that in this environment they will be able to carry out their activities with greater dedication, freedom, independence, and autonomy.

This building housed the "Doctor Pedro Molina" library for a time, and it was chosen as the location for the Centro de Estudios Folkloricos precisely because of its position within the university facilities surrounding the Botanical Garden.

Due to its specific needs, the special layout of the Centro de Estudios Folkloricos was designed with the aim of combining the very different tasks it carries out, such as research, material preparation, administration, information, and exhibitions.

Before us is the physical response to the needs of the Center, which provides a flexible relationship between the spaces designated for each specific function, allowing the possibility of assigning multiple functions to some of the spaces. The integration of the spaces was achieved with a minimal use of partitions and enclosures.

The structure of this old building had to be reinforced, with many parts deteriorated by time and natural elements replaced. The details of the coffered ceiling were restored and covered with a suspended ceiling that matches the texture, color, and proportions of the entire space. Partition walls were added to define the spatial distribution, and fixed furniture was designed to suit the functionality of the spaces. Additionally, the necessary furnishings for the Center's staff office work were acquired.

The exterior was designed to maintain its sobriety, highlight the character of the building, and integrate it into the context of the Botanical Garden. Thus, the finishes were chosen directly based on function, ensuring that contrasts form an organic backdrop without distractions for exhibition and research activities.

The entirety of the work, including furniture, equipment, and other elements, was completed at a cost of slightly over Q27,000.00.

Inauguration ceremony of the new facilities of the Center for Folklore Studies. Rector Roberto Valdevellano Pinto delivers his speech. Researchers from the Center and senior academic officials from the University of San Carlos of Guatemala look on. (Photo: Antonio Reyes)



New headquarters of the Center for Folklore Studies in Guatemala City. (Photo: Manuel Guerra Caravantes)

I reiterate my satisfaction in delivering this building to the members of the Center for Folkloric Studies, who, through their work, dedication, and sacrifice, serve as an example within the University for the excellent efforts demonstrated in their activities and research.

The study of Guatemalan folklore, whose importance lies not only in the understanding of our cultural values but also, and primarily, in the social values it inherently embodies, will find in this environment the ideal setting to continue surpassing the achievements accomplished thus far.

Before formally handing over this building to its custodians, I would like to extend my congratulations for the work accomplished thus far. I commend its Director, Licenciado Roberto Díaz Castillo; the researchers, Licenciado Celso Lara, Licenciada Ofelia Deleon, and Mr. José Manuel Juárez Toledo, the Ethnomusicologist of the Center; as well as the researchers Miss Anantonia Reyes Prado and Mr. José Ernesto Monzón. I also acknowledge the administrative staff of the Center, Miss Blanca Adriana Marín Bonilla and Mr. Oscar Eduardo Alvarado.

With these words, I hereby hand over this facility to the staff of the Center, confident that they will continue the fruitful work they have carried out to this day."

Guatemala, February 21, 1978

SPEECH OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS OF GUATEMALA, LICENSED ROBERTO DIAZ CASTILLO

When the rectoral term of Dr. Roberto Valdeavellano Pinot is coming to an end, the Centro de Estudios Folklóricos receives from the university authorities, as an irrefutable testimony of a promise fulfilled, its new and comfortable facilities. However, the fact that this handover occurs at the end rather than at the beginning of that period, further satisfies the staff of an institute that, throughout these four years, has doubled its efforts to deserve it. Of an institute that, even as recently as last week, placed in the hands of the university rector numerous books, journals, and bulletins printed between 1974 and 1978. I must confess that, for the Director of the Centro de Estudios Folklóricos, this handover represents the fulfillment of a dream.

Long cherished. And it becomes a propitious occasion to recall how, in 1953, together with a group of young people with whom he directed the Association of University Students (AEU) - some of whom are here present - he managed to found the Institute of Historical and Social Research, a remote antecedent of this center. The names of Mario Monteforte Toledo, Janos de Séczy, Roberto Irigoyen, Dagoberto Vásquez and others were linked to that enterprise, in the same way that it became the first university initiative in this field and, therefore, it stammered out what is now becoming an objective and unobjectionable reality.

Today's inauguration closes an immediate stage of work that can be summarized as follows: nine printed volumes by various authors, published within the collections **Problems and Documents**, Brief and **Folkloric Projection**; four issues of the magazine **Traditions of Guatemala**, now systematically divided into sections of varied and extensive content; and fifteen issues of **The popular tradition**, our illustrated bulletin, which is celebrating three years of punctual appearance. In the field of promotion, it is worth mentioning conferences, short courses - among these, the one given last year to 96 secondary school teachers stands out -, bibliographic advice and guidance provided to students of all levels, including university, in addition to many other tasks carried out with care.

I would like to emphasize that, thanks to the support provided by The Higher University Council to the research programs, last year a specialist in literary folklore transcriptions joined the activities of this Center. He has managed to complete nearly 200 versions of traditional tales scattered in different areas of the country (Escuintla, San José El Ídolo, Río Bravo, La Gomera, Sipacate, Guanagazapa and Guatemala City), and an ethnomusicologist, whose work has been oriented, in a first phase, to the ordering of the phonograms already existing in the Center for Folklore Studies, according to the international standards used in this field and then to collect traditional music in the Kaqchiquel area. Likewise, the specialist in ethnomusicology has proceeded to organize the sound laboratory of the institution.

I would not have wanted to allude here to a situation that, more veiled than openly, has been occurring against this Center. But it seems unavoidable to me. I am referring to the attitude of those who still do not understand how the existence of Folklore studies is possible and, consequently, that of our institute. With the mistaken criterion that

Popular traditions are expressions of colonialism and cultural alienation—or under that pretext—these people insist on maintaining that folklore and folkloric research are nothing more than the leisure pursuits of the dominant social classes. These detractors of folklorology and folklorists forget or ignore that it is Lenin and Gramsci to whom historical materialism owes substantial contributions in this field. Lenin because he discovered how, within each national culture, there are elements, albeit undeveloped, of a democratic and socialist culture. Or, equivalently, a culture of exploited workers whose living conditions determine their own ideology. And Gramsci because, more precisely, he realized that traditional culture—that is, folkloric culture—is precisely the culture of the exploited classes, the cultural expression they oppose to official culture.

I think that if this were not enough, we should tell these detractors That it was precisely a Guatemalan labor leader, an exemplary revolutionary and a martyr of the liberation struggle, who pointed out the importance of our people's traditions. I am referring to Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, to whom these words emphasized the importance:

“...We must reach out to the indigenous people with their language and cultural heritage and not force them to fictitiously adapt to modalities that can never be theirs.”

And these others:

"If the basic objective of this policy—he was referring to the policy of the Guatemalan Workers' Confederation—is to elevate indigenous nationalities to the level of the nation's white inhabitants, at the same time it is advisable to respect their origin, their communal unity, their customs, and their languages."

I have stated on other occasions, following Yuri Lotman, that

"Culture preserves and synthesizes the collective experience that a people accumulates throughout the vicissitudes of its history; in this sense, it is a collective memory that is transmitted to new generations as a social (not biological) heritage and enables, through its acquisition, individuals to integrate as

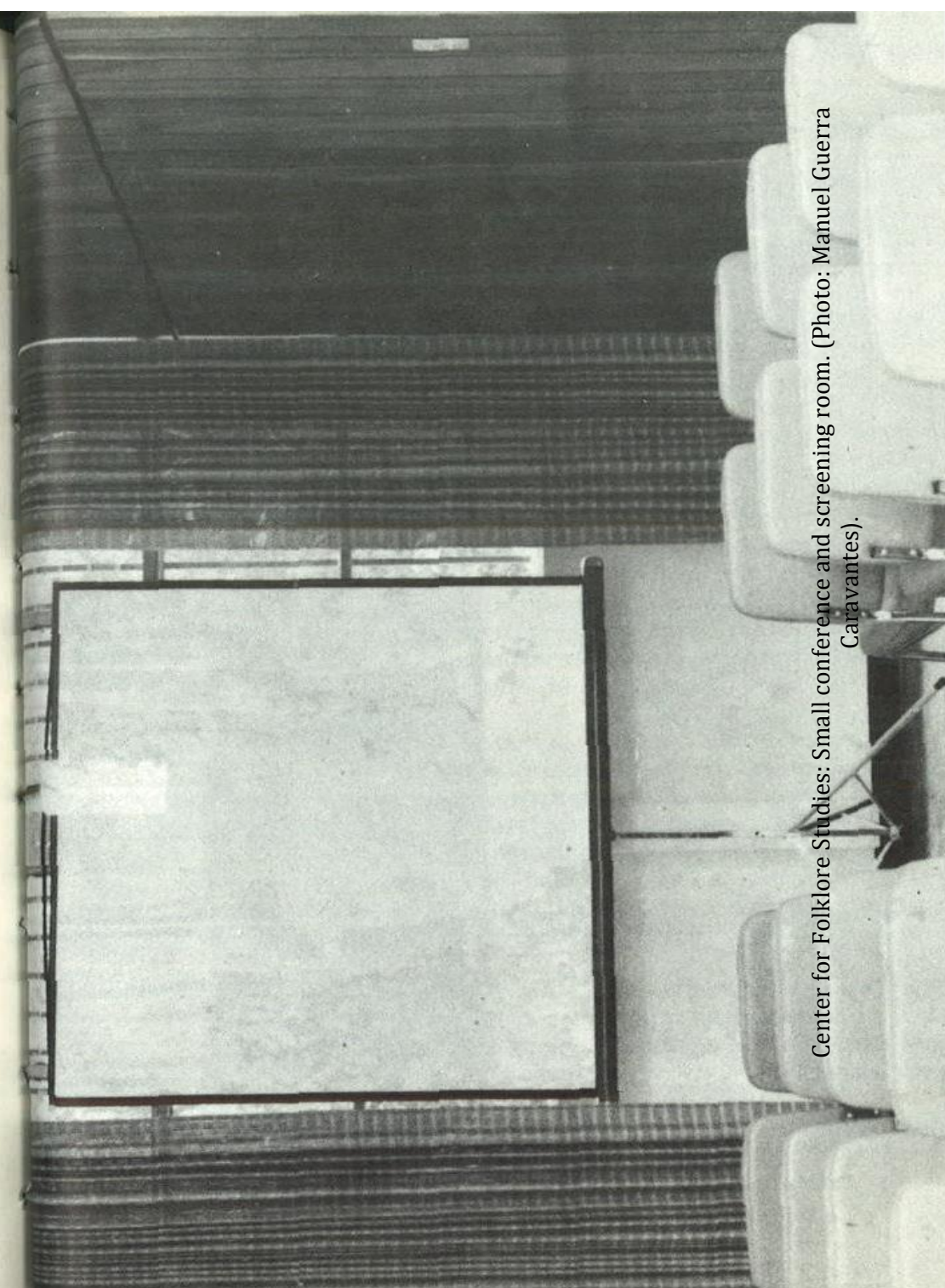
Ordinary members of the community, instilling in them patterns of behavior, values, knowledge, skills, and so on. Each society inherits and restructures the cultural legacy accumulated through its past history. It selects, hierarchizes, and sanctifies its elements according to the needs and aspirations of its social practical presence, determined by the established production relations. In this way, its culture is the synthesis of the material and spiritual values it has achieved. As a set of forms and results of human activity, disseminated and consolidated within the community through tradition, means of instruction and education, and the imitation of the realization of common models, it extends both to the realm of material production and the organization of social life (material culture), as well as to all genres of intellectual and aesthetic creation (spiritual culture).

In line with these ideas, Nils Castro asserts that the village community provides the foundation for harmonious national unity, a factor capable of uniting the entire population, including national, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, in struggles for liberation.

Similarly, Nguyen Linh, a researcher at the Institute of History of Vietnam, explains that in his country.

Each village and town possesses its own distinct traditions, customs, and practices. There are villages where the entire population is dedicated to a specific profession or artistic craft. For instance, the village of Ho is renowned for its exceptional skill in painting folkloric artworks. Similarly, the village of Linh is distinguished by its unique folkloric culture expressed through traditional singing. Likewise, certain villages, such as those in the province of Hai Tuong, are recognized for their expertise in statue-making, while the village of Nga So has a long-standing tradition of crafting bronze items. These towns and villages serve as cultural hubs where rich folkloric traditions are both created and preserved, authentically reflecting the essence of popular culture.

Perhaps for this reason, as Nils Castro mentioned when he requested from a...



Center for Folklore Studies: Small conference and screening room. (Photo: Manuel Guerra Caravantes).

group of young Vietnamese to sing a traditional song and a revolutionary one, they responded somewhat perplexed:

..we cannot distinguish between the two concepts; all our songs are both things at once. A song that does not speak of our national values, our lives, and our struggles would be neither revolutionary nor traditional.

And he immediately adds:

"Against this, imperialism launched its waves of electronic music. Music for drunks and for madmen."

But the popular response was eloquent:

"When the NLF groups approached the occupied towns or even gathered in Saigon, the neighbors defied patrols, barbed wire, and bombings to enjoy the national performances. In contrast, when the show was sponsored by the puppets— invariably featuring foreign music and dance— soldiers had to storm into homes to fill the audience at bayonet point."

The recent Cuban so often referenced in this Centro de Estudios Folkloricos, also confirms the scientific prominence achieved by folklore studies.

The academic Rogelio Martínez Furé, to cite just the most famous of contemporary urban theorists, distinguishes between positive folklore and negative folklore (such as superstitions, antisocial behavior habits, ignorance, erroneous perceptions of reality, etc.), and recommends that positive traditions..

They must be made known to other sectors of the population, which were ignorant of them due to the pre-existing class division, and also allow their further evolution, since they are living forms of the culture of a people, subject to the processes of change of the society. Folklore is not synonymous with a museum of fossilized culture. Its organic development should be encouraged, directed towards the goals of socialist construction, improving its techniques in this case.

"for example, whether it is the manufacture of musical instruments, or scientifically analyzing the true virtues of traditional pharmacopoeia, or enriching indigenous choreographic forms; in short, purging it of harmful ideas and habits contrary to a materialistic conception of the world and integrating all this national heritage into the great current of universal and revolutionary culture."

Many other concepts that are still fully in force in Cuba today could be cited in support of the thesis that recognizes the scientific character of folklore. The new political constitution, promulgated at the end of 1976, defining the society and culture of that country as Afro-Hispanic, underlines the value of popular traditions and emphasizes the possibilities that these have of contributing to the definitive forging of nationality. Just a few months ago, the Cuban Minister of Culture, Doctor Armando Hart, demanded that

"In each municipality, a study of popular festivals and their traditional expressions must be carried out; based on these studies, we can develop a broad artistic movement to promote artistic activities with popular roots."

It is clear, then, that because we believe in this culture accumulated by the people over the centuries, and because we are sure - Plekhanov - that in addition to **general causes, particular** and singular causes also play a role in history, we have resolved to work in this beautiful field of popular knowledge and we have constituted ourselves, under the protective wing of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, in this small bundle of wills, which is its Center of Estudios Folkloricos.

Mr. Rector:

On behalf of all the comrades who received these facilities to continue our struggle in a climate of peace, dignity and freedom, I would like to express the recognition that we owe you. Please pass it on to each of the collaborators who helped you conceive and complete this work that honors our school and that we promise to honor.

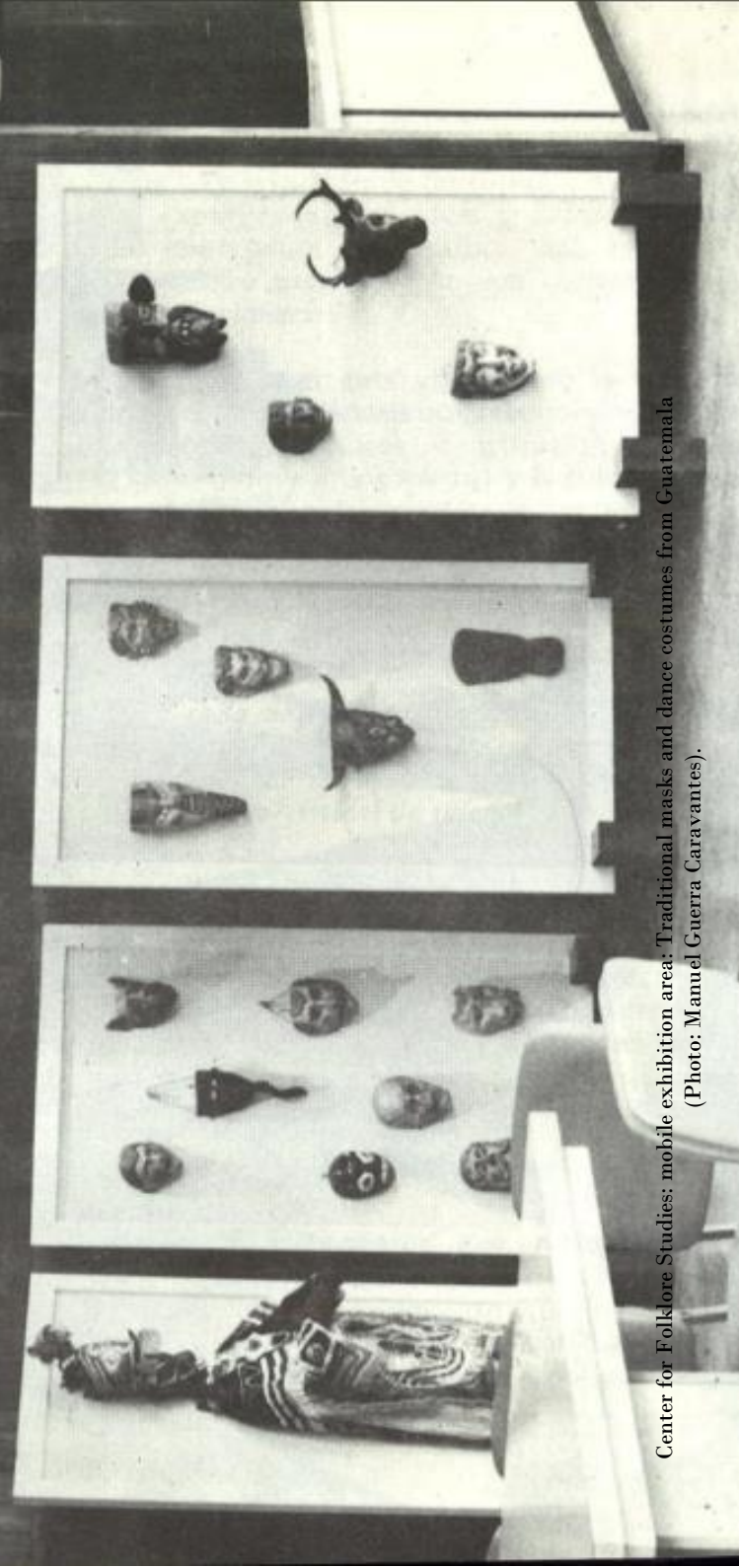


Center for Folklore Studies, research office (Photo: Manuel Guerra Caravantes).

Finally, I would just like to express our gratitude to the architect Francisco Piloña and his brilliant team of specialists, thanks to whom the projects became a reality

To Mr. Mario Dary Rivera, director of the Botanical Garden and his esteemed colleagues our usual hosts - a fraternal

Guatemala, February 21, 1978



Center for Folklore Studies: mobile exhibition area: Traditional masks and dance costumes from Guatemala
(Photo: Manuel Guerra Caravantes).