

FROM SOLEMNITY TO
CELEBRATION:
THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF
THE DAY OF THE DEAD

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Introduction

As holidays have evolved over the past century many have changed from their original intention of celebrating military victories or certain individuals to focusing more on commercial practices that imitate a false sense of community. This shift in focus calls the authenticity of the commemorations into question. One well-known Latin American commemoration, *Día de los Muertos* - translated as the Day of the Dead - which is typically celebrated in early November, has undergone such transformations. Since its origins, the Day of the Dead commemoration has evolved from its focus on solemnity for the dead to more of a celebration of their memory, consequentially shifting to become more commercialized.

To examine the evolution and transformation of the Day of the Dead and its commercialization, one must first survey memory frameworks in relation to the commemoration. The first section of this paper will cover how crucial memory is, and how malleable it is, when seeking to commemorate or memorialize an event, person, object, etc. Following the analysis of memory and its theoretical frameworks, an exploration of the origins of the Day of the Dead and the devices which are used to represent the holiday will help to connect the frameworks to the topic at hand. Finally, the last section of this paper will evaluate how the commemoration has evolved from previous generations and iterations to become a well-known holiday around the world that has become more closely associated with commercialized practices rather than solemn remembrance.

Memory Frameworks

Before investigating the origins of the Day of The Dead, analyzing how memory functions within individuals and its impact on the societal level is essential to our understanding of memory frameworks. One idea of how memory functions is the idea of memory

reconsolidation. According to authors and neuroscientists Cristina M Alberini and Joseph E LeDoux, earlier notions and theories of how memory was recalled and stored stated that memory had a more linear structure. Essentially, it was believed that a memory starts as a fresh and fragile memory that the brain converts into a long-lasting and permanent memory, impervious to disruption or alteration, through a stabilization process called memory consolidation. However, more recently, studies have shown that upon the remembrance of a “consolidated” memory, the memory reverts to a fragile and malleable state, susceptible to alteration, and may reconsolidate into a slightly different memory than before (Alberini and LeDoux 1). This phenomenon of memory reconsolidation, depicted in figure 1, may help to explain how a memory can evolve and change from its original state. More broadly, this may indicate the lack of reliability that memory can have in terms of recalling something one hundred percent accurately. Within the context of a commemoration, as time passes and individuals recall their experiences, they may remember the commemoration, and perhaps its intention, differently after multiple years or generations of memorialization.

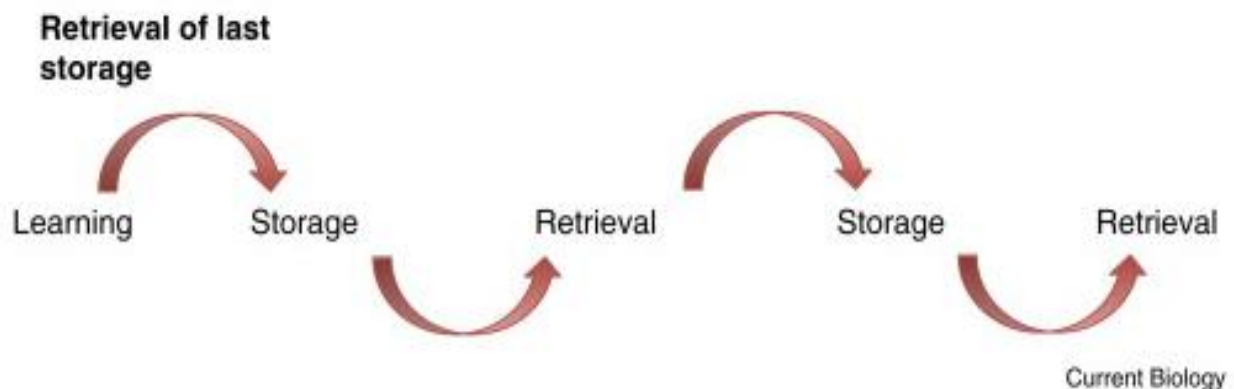


Figure 1: View of the memory reconsolidation process (Alberini and LeDoux)

Another common theory about memory is the theory of Social Memory. Maurice Halbwach, a French sociologist from the 1920s argues that memories are constructed by social groups, which inform individuals as to what to remember and how to remember an event (Burke 98). In

contrast to how memory reconsolidation would impact one's perception of the commemoration, this theory is demonstrating that the social commemorations will inform individuals of events and impact their view of how they should be celebrated. Therefore, a cyclical pattern is observed of memory impacting how commemorations are celebrated and commemorations impacting what individuals remember. Thus, it can be inferred that once a foreign idea or concept enters this cycle, it may alter the original meaning of the commemorations and an individual's memory of the commemoration.

Argentine sociologist Dr. Elizabeth Jelin supports the idea of an everchanging memory and commemoration. She argues that social memories develop through societal practices that gradually become ritualistic and form a tradition. Eventually, through popularity and repetition, these social practices become officialized and recognized within societal and institutional bodies, being inscribed within official documents and calendars. She clarifies that although shifts from one year to the next do occur, the repetition allows for the occasions, dates, and anniversaries for remembrance and commemorative events to occur (Jelin 55). Therefore, the idea of social memory which evolves, depending upon the composition of individuals in the group, their recollection of a memory, and the repetition of a commemoration, is strongly supported by various academics and scholars.

One question that can arise from this theory of memory and commemorations is how does a society initially decide what to commemorate? Peter Burke, a British Historian, and professor at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* answers this question indirectly by introducing another type of social phenomenon: social amnesia. In his article "History as Social Memory," he claims that social memory, just like individual memory, is selective, meaning that there are some parts of memories that are forgotten, whether on purpose or because of its lack of significance (Burke

100). He further explains social amnesia by stating that history is not only written by but also forgotten by the victors. "They can afford to forget, while the losers are unable to accept what happened and are condemned to brood over it, relive it" (Burke 106). Although this understanding is applied to a militaristic victory, this view of what gets remembered can also apply to which things are considered worthy of memorial and celebration within a commemoration.

Burke elaborates on this topic of selective memory by listing five ways in which social memory "transfers" the memory from the group to the individual. Burke argues that one method, transmission of memory through written and archival data, is not as seemingly innocent of an act as it would appear, but rather attempts to influence and mold the memory of others (Burke 101). Diana Taylor, an American academic and professor at New York University, agrees with Burke's claim and expands upon it. She argues that during the colonialization period, colonizers were able to effectively "silence" indigenous populations by enforcing the prioritization of their archival accounts of information over the natives' embodied practices. Diana Taylor concludes this by stating:

"What changed with the conquest was not that writing displaced embodied practice (we need only remember that the friars brought their own embodied practices) but the degree of legitimization of writing over other epistemic and mnemonic systems. Writing now assured that Power, with a capital P, as Rama put it, could be developed, and enforced without the input of the great majority of the population, the indigenous, and marginal populations of the colonial period without access to systematic writing. Not only did the colonizers burn the ancient codices, but they also limited the access to writing to a very

small group of conquered males whom they felt would promote their evangelical efforts.”
(Taylor 18).

This quote emphasizes Diana Taylor’s belief in the impact that colonization had on the preservation of indigenous records and rituals. Her analysis of the erasure of indigenous history, and thus indigenous society, infers that eradication occurs because of the selectivity of archives.

Yet another author who affirms this belief is Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot. He confirms that “silences enter the process of historical production during four distinct crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of the sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of the archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)” (Trouillot 26). Essentially, Trouillot’s four “crucial moments” of historical production falls in line with Taylor’s notion of science through archival memory. Overall, these authors collectively establish a notion of exclusion and silencing of voices through the use and prioritization of an archive and archival data over other forms of memory.

Another method in which memory is transferred according to Burke is through images and pictures, either still or moving. From pieces made during the Renaissance to today’s contemporary Chicano art, the use of images to emphasize an event that one wants the collective society to remember is clear (Burke 101). Claudia Feld builds upon this notion by examining how television, a system of transmitting visual images and sounds, acts as an “entrepreneur of memory,” activating memory through captivating the public eye and redirecting their attention towards specific events (Feld 31). Because of a television’s accessibility and immediacy, its potential to emotionally connect with an audience allows it to be a vehicle of intergenerational transmission, passing on memories from older generations to the next with relative ease (Feld

35). Cynthia E Milton, the Canadian Research Chair in Latin American History at the Université de Montréal, further supports Burke's claim with her views on how art can act as a form of expression for those who are silenced and underrepresented in history and social memory. She states, "artistic forms of expression are of fundamental importance, for it allows a much broader swath of society to participate in the reconstruction and re-presentation of the past—often marginalized groups who would otherwise be excluded from mainstream media and modes of communication" (Milton 3). Therefore, although silences and erasure may occur through selective processes, images - whether it be television or art, act as a form of expression which may be utilized to combat social amnesia that seeks to irradicate memories and cultures from a society's past.

A final way that Peter Burke notes that the transference of memory occurs is through one's use of space. Burke explains the findings of previously mentioned Maurice Halbwach, concluding that social groups find value in "placing" images that one wishes to remember in specific locations (Burke 101). This mode of transference can be expanded upon to include not only images but other significant objects that may represent something or someone. Additionally, it can be concluded that an individual who is placing the objects themselves may then be selective in the process, thus shaping the memory through selectivity of what to include.

Thus, upon examining memory and its associated concepts and theoretical frameworks, it can be concluded that an individual's memory is shaped by societal pressures, developing with each iteration of remembrance. Furthermore, on a societal scale, the repetition of a practice may evolve into a commemoration. Moreover, the decision of what to commemorate depends upon the methods of memory transference which can be subjective in the process of which memories are passed on to future generations.

Origins of the Day of the Dead

Since 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has officially recognized the Day of the Dead and its associated festivities and cultural practices as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Day of the Dead, in Spanish known as *Día de los Muertos*, is a term that has become synonymous with the pan-Roman Catholic holiday *el Día de Animas* [All Souls' Day] which is closely associated with Mexico as one of their most well-known traditions. The commemoration itself typically falls on November 2nd with the purpose of remembering the souls of those who have passed on, but in fact, often is associated with the activities that span a period of days. Incorporated within the grouping of the holidays is All Saints' Day [*el Día de Todos Santos*], which occurs on November 1st, remembering the saints who died as martyrs or in service to the church. Although two separate days, over time the commemorations have become merged as the Day of the Dead, celebrated from the night of October 31st to the morning of November 2nd (Brandes 271) The common agreed-upon belief is that the barrier which separates the "spirit world" and the "real-world" is lifted and this short 48 hour period, allowing the souls of the dead to return to visit their families. Rather than being a time of mourning for the loss of loved ones, it is said to be a rather festive and joyous celebration of their short-lived return and remembering their legacy (Kingma 7).

Living family members layout decorative flowers, candles, and offerings to form a path that leads their deceased loved ones from their gravesite to their homes. To further appease their ancestors, families place dishes of food, pictures, and artisan products around an altar dedicated to the individual, commonly known as an *ofrenda*, or offering (depicted in figure 2). Because of the belief that the dead can either bring great prosperity or great misfortune upon their living

family members based upon the *ofrenda*, those making the altar are meticulous in their performance of the ritual (*UNESCO - Indigenous Festivity Dedicated to the Dead*). Symbolic items that are often integrated include the arch, representing a portal into the underworld, candles, to illuminate the path, *pan de muerto* or ‘dead bread’, and most importantly, a photograph of the departed soul that is placed on the altar (Kingma 8; Brandes, “Iconography in Mexico’s Day of the Dead” 187). This use of an altar to place images, gifts, and other iconography being used to prevent the “forgetting” of individuals who have passed on is a prime example of



Figure 2: Traditional altar for the Day of the Dead in Milpa Alta, Mexico City, (Troya)

Burke’s last method of memory transference: space. As family members remember the legacy of those who have passed on, they create the altars which are themselves spaces for the deceased legacy and memory to be transferred from one generation to the next.

Although the Day of the Dead is a commonly known holiday worldwide, according to Dr. Stanley Brandes, a Professor at the University of California, Berkley, as well as many other academic researchers and anthropologists, the origins of the commemoration are disputed. Brandes claims that the origins of the commemoration are more of an amalgamation of different cultural food practices from indigenous communities and Spanish religion rather than originating in one specific location from a particular ritual (Brandes 287). Brandes explains that Pope

Gregory III, supreme Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in the early eighth century, instated a sacred occasion and feast to honor Christian Saints on November 1st, what is now known as All Saint's Day. Furthermore, the Church had encouraged members to pray for all who were deceased and their final purification throughout the Middle Ages. This led to the November 2nd feast and commemoration of All Souls Day being instated as a celebration during Mass, which wasn't official until Saint Odilo, the 5th abbot of Cluny who had a large influence over the Latin Church as a whole, decreed it in 1030 A.D. (Brandes 271). The church's involvement in the establishment of the formal dates and names of each commemoration connects with Claudia Feld's notion of individuals or institutions acting as entrepreneurs of memory and could imply that family members themselves are also entrepreneurs.

Although the Day of the Dead is held in honor of two Roman Catholic feast days and Masses, Dr. Stanly Brandes states that "most observers would agree that Masses are the least salient part of the celebration" (Brandes, "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death" 272). The activities and artistic displays that are more closely associated with the holiday (food offerings, alters, skulls, etc.) seemingly derive from folkloric origins rather than the religious background (Brandes, "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death" 272). Multiple academics, such as authors of *Vive Tu Recuerdo: Living Traditions in the Mexican Days of the Dead* Robert V. Childs and Patricia B. Altman, note that the Day of the Dead celebrations combines peculiar elements from various ancient indigenous and Catholic practices and beliefs. They claim that ceremonies that form the basis of the Day of the Dead can be traced back to pre-Hispanic and pre-Columbian origins, which were slowly disintegrated because of western influences (Brandes, "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death" 274). The differences noted by various academics and scholars which have developed over the years are supported by Elizabeth Jelin's claim of a more fluid

commemoration, changing from one year to the next. Moreover, Alberini and LeDoux's theory of memory reconsolidation can also aid in understanding the shifts, being that an individual's memory, and thus a society's recollection of a commemoration and its traditions, isn't always consistent. The confusion surrounding the origins of the traditions behind the commemoration can also be attributed to the silencing of the indigenous community and the erasure of their culture during the colonization era. As both Diana Taylor and Michel-Rolph Trouillot explain, archival erasure that occurred through the colonization process may have altered how the larger society viewed and remembered the holiday.

Shawn D. Haley, an anthropologist who specializes in Latin American and urban anthropology supports these claims and connections through his contextualization of some of the indigenous beliefs which the commemoration is based upon. Haley explains that pre-Hispanic cultures, like the Aztec civilization, consider death as a natural phase of life. He elaborates that the Aztecs held two annual month-long celebrations, dedicated to *Mictecacihuatl*: the Queen of the Underworld. The first, *Miccaihuitontli*, honored deceased children, while the second, *Hueymiccalhuitl*, was devoted to adults. He also claims that the Spanish colonization and inquisition during the sixteenth century caused the festival to be moved from the beginning of August to November to align with the Roman Catholic celebrations of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (Kingma 7). Although the interpretation of the Day of the Dead being of Aztec origins is also supported by many other academics, such as Mexican poet and Nobel prize winner Octavio Paz, the exact rituals and traditions of origin are still debated today (Brandes, "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death" 273). Regardless of the true origins, through this hybrid of traditions, the modern Day of the Dead celebration emerged, often centered around *ofrendas* that offer up

an abundance of food and extravagant items dedicated to the souls of dead individuals who are being remembered.

Devices of Commemoration

Examining the devices that are used to commemorate the Day of the Dead aids in the understanding of how the indigenous population, and Mexico as a whole, have fought against the erasure of their cultural practices and beliefs. Furthermore, the transformation and development of the devices provide insight into how the commemoration has become commercialized. The most well recognizable device that is associated with the Day of the Dead is *la calavera* - the skull - as a symbol or icon. Because of its popularity, the skull icon is often displayed in various art forms: paper-mâché masks, wood carvings, costumes, and most famously as decorated edible white sugar skulls. The sugar skulls, which are often placed on altars to embellish *ofrendas*, are also exchanged between living friends and family members with their names written across the forehead (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 23; Brandes, “Iconography in Mexico’s Day of the Dead” 181). Their smiling expressions, which mock the living and their mundane behaviors, are meant to be a reminder of life’s short duration and the certainty of death, “urging people to appreciate life today, because death may be just around the corner” (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 24). Another form that the skeletal icon takes is the previously mentioned *pan de muerto*, also known as dead bread, signifying the body and bones of the deceased (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 23; Brandes, “Iconography in Mexico’s Day of the Dead” 182; Brandes, “Sugar, Colonialism, and Death” 275).

The skull and its popular association with the holiday have also led to its use in modern art. Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), used skeletal figures within his art - primarily lithographs for newspapers - to make political commentary on the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz

(1876–1880 and 1884–1911) (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 27). His reputation and art made him well known within the artistic community, albeit posthumously, allowing him to have had an immense influence on Mexican art and culture. In 1910, he created *La Calavera Catrina*, an elegantly dressed skull woman, who has become symbolic of the Day of the Dead. Argued as the most famous of Posada’s creations, the “female dandy” is portrayed as a fleshless skeleton with a floppy hat filled with feathers and flowers.

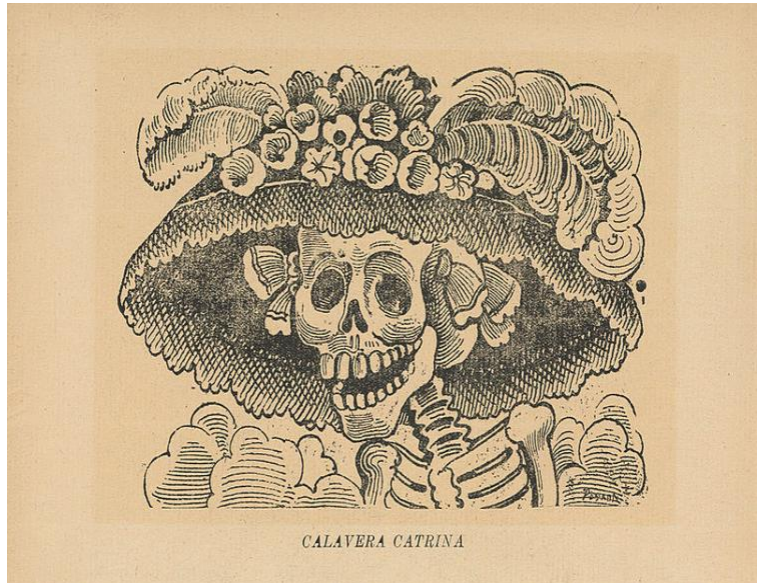


Figure 3: *Calavera de La Catrina (Skull of the Female Dandy)*, (Posada) , 1910

He specifically used Catrina to comment on the upper-class Mexican women who imitated and preferred the European fashion and way of living, mocking them for the abandonment of their true indigenous and Mexican culture, just as Porfirio Díaz himself had done (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 27; Brandes, “Iconography in Mexico’s Day of the Dead” 202).

Furthermore, *Catrina* herself, as well as other skeletal figures depicted within Posada’s artwork, are said to be based upon skulls on a *tzompanli*, an ancient type of skull rack displayed on the walls of Mesoamerican temples (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 28). Professor Jacques Lafaye, a French historian from the early 1960s, believed that “Posada was one of the first modern artists to include Aztec imagery into his pieces: ‘Posada’s *calaveras* [...] mark [...] the emergence of the Aztec past into modern Mexican art’” (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 28).

Another Mexican artist who was inspired by Posada and *La Calavera Catrina* was Diego Rivera (1886-1957), a famous anthropological muralist during the Mexican Muralist Movement (the 1920s-1970s). As Aztec culture and indigenous art rose in popularity in the 1920s, Rivera studied some of Posada's past *calavera* work and was commissioned by the government to paint *The Day of the Dead* in 1924 at the National Ministry of Education in Mexico City (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 28). In 1947, twenty-three years later, Rivera directly copied Posada's *Catrina* within his mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Park*, also depicting Posada and a young version of Rivera himself (Brandes, "Iconography in

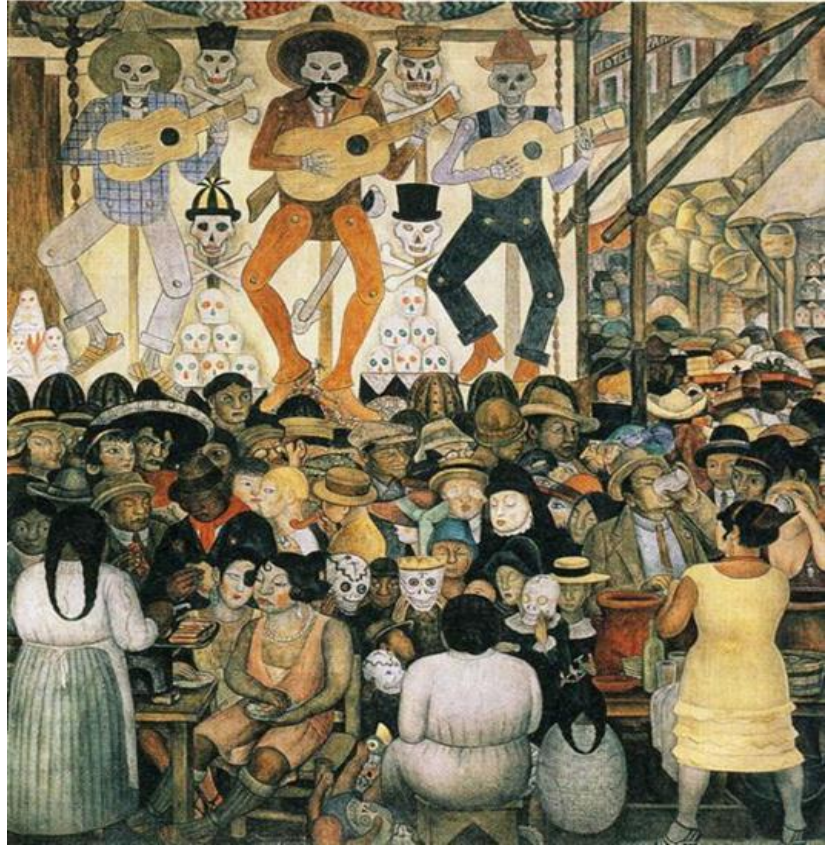


Figure 4: *The Day of the Dead*, Diego Rivera, 1924, fresco, Secretariat of Public Education Main Headquarters, Mexico City, Mexico.



Figure 5: *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Park*, (Rivera), 1947. Posada (to the right of Catrina) and a young version of Rivera himself (to the left of Catrina).

Mexico's Day of the Dead" 204). Because of the international recognition that Rivera's art received, anthropologists began producing academic accounts of the Day of the Dead which strengthened the claims that commemoration was derived from the ancient Aztec culture, creating a sense of unity and cultural pride for Mexicans of indigenous heritage (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 29). This reaction by the public is suggestive of Cynthia E Milton's memory framework stating that social art can be used as a voice for those who are excluded. Also, these artists acted as "entrepreneurs of memory," shifting the focus of the celebration back onto its indigenous roots, as Feld would conclude.

Although this period of the "Mexican Renaissance" aided in Mexico's recognition of the commemorations pre-Hispanic origins, scholar Regina M. Marchi, a professor at Rutgers University and former journalist, argues that uplifting the indigenous elements over European elements also had negative consequences. She claims that overcorrecting for this social amnesia may decontextualize the holiday from, "the effects of five centuries of colonization, forced loss, and the resulting alienation from Indigenous languages and practices" (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 29). Additionally, Marchi explains that although the government promoted the ethnic rituals and customs, racism towards the native peoples and their practices was still prevalent, causing indigenous people who aspired for middle-class lifestyles to distance themselves from their culture (R. M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA* 30).

More recently within the last twenty years, film has become a more widespread method in which the Day of the Dead has been commemorated. Films like *Coco*, released in 2017 by Walt Disney Pictures, and *Spectre*, released in 2015 have acted as "vehicles of intergenerational transmission", providing younger audiences with a representation of the indigenous culture (Unkrich and Molina; Mendes). *Coco* is a film about the Day of the Dead itself, as it follows

Miguel, an aspiring young musician, who finds himself trapped in the Land of the Dead as he searches for his great grandfather, a famous singer (Unkrich and Molina). On the other hand, *Spectre* is a film by Columbia Pictures about the famous James Bond. Although not directly about the holiday, the first five minutes include an opening scene that depicts an extravagant and elaborate celebration of the Day of the Dead in the streets of Mexico City (Mendes). The Mexican Tourism Board, the promotional government-run agency tasked with marketing Mexico to generate tourism, sought to use Mexico City's short air time to promote a positive global view of Mexico as a whole, detracting from the negative immoral stereotypes of the time (Rühse 12). Overall, both films' popularity, proven through three combined academy awards and an excess of well-received reviews from international audiences, has led to an increase in the commemoration's recognition within the wider global community (Unkrich and Molina; Mendes) Simply because these films are moving images which portray the commemoration, they cement indigenous cultural knowledge within new generations as noted by both Peter Burke and Claudia Feld. Furthermore, directors of the films, just as creators of an archive, shape how they want the audience to remember the film meaning that the directors may have been selective in what they chose to incorporate in the final product.

In all, these devices used to commemorate the Day of the Dead demonstrate how individuals, and societies, choose to remember the holiday. The examination of devices reveals the subjective process that impacts the transference of memory for a collective group, and thus an individual's memory, for better or for worse. Additionally, through the devices described (iconography, art, and film), the reversal of social amnesia can be seen through the increased recognition of the holiday and its indigenous heritage, giving an outlet for expression to the previously excluded community.

Evolution Towards Commercialization

According to Dr. Stanley Brandes, “even though All Saints' and Souls' Days are pan-Roman Catholic holidays, nowhere in the Catholic world have they reached such lavish proportions as in Mexico” (Brandes 271). Mexico has become a hub for tourists to flock to during any time of the year. Due to its reputation as being a country full of “diversity, ethnicity, and culture,” Mexico has been consistently ranked within the top ten most visited places in the world (Kingma 9). During the “Season of the Dead” (October 31st through November 2nd) Mexico experiences an economic boost of nearly 3.9 million pesos (equivalent to 200,000 dollars) in the tourism industry. The holiday attracted over 7.5 million tourists in 2019 alone (Kingma 10; Rühse 3). Through the use of their pop culture’s visibility, Mexico hoped to build a positive image for tourism to thrive (Rühse 23).

One of the biggest impacts on tourism to Mexico has been films like *Coco* and *Spectre*.

Due to the popularity of the film *Coco*, the Mexican Tourism Board collaborated with various travel tours (such as Mexitours) and created what is called “La Ruta de Coco” (Kingma 4; Rühse 4). Three different tours take tourists through several locations across Mexico that were sources of



Figure 6: Cemetery at Leon Guanajuato, Mexico during Day of the Dead on November 2, 2012 (Tomascastelazo).

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inspiration for the places seen in the animated film: Mexico City - the Grand hotel and the Pyramids of Teotihuacán; Santa Fe De Laguna - where Miguel lives; and Paracho - where Miguel's guitar was "created" (Rühse 24). This phenomenon, known as "film-induced tourism" or "set-jetting" has become more popular within Mexico and acts as a new strategy within the film industry to attract tourists (Rühse 5). According to Roberto Monroy García, Mexico City's tourism secretary, tourists have come from all over the world - Korea, Australia, and New Zealand - to witness the Day of the Dead celebrations in person. He boasts that although there were no special advertising campaigns for the celebration in certain countries, *Coco*'s widespread popularity had raised awareness of the holiday so much that these "non-targeted" countries have had tourists attend the commemorative events in Mexico City (Rühse 26).

Another example of film-induced tourism is demonstrated by how the Mexican tourism authorities hoped to host "*Ciudad Bond*" (Bond City) in Mexico City for the short opening scene of *Spectre*, to garner positive global visibility for Mexico. In the year after the film's release, they succeeded, as the number of international tourists increased by 9.4%. However, the parade depicted was only a fictional event, being that Mexico City had never held annual parades before that were as extravagant as the one displayed in the film. Thus, the Mexican Tourism Board and Mexico City created a real-life parade starting in 2016. The official explanation given was that the board didn't want to disappoint tourists who had seen the festival in *Spectre* and expected to see it in reality (Rühse 12). Within three years, the number of spectators had grown from 425,000 to over 2,000,000 (Rühse 15). Although there were smaller parades and celebrations within Mexico, such as the 20-year-old "*Calaveras Parade*" in Aguascalientes and "*La Calaca*" in San Miguel de Allende, none had reached the level of fame and international popularity as *Spectre*'s (Rühse 14)

Although the depictions portrayed by *Coco* and *Spectre* were extravagant, many felt as though the Mexican Tourism Board put on performances for the money which were unauthentic, causing the spread of misinformation about the holiday (Rühse 27; Kingma 15). Furthermore, the use of the American film industry to accomplish achieving a Mexican national identity also was unsettling for some of the Mexican population (Kingma 36). The shift in focus from a solemn commemoration to a more global celebratory form of remembrance can be seen as a divergence of what the initial memory of the commemoration is about. As Dr. Irma Cecilia Perfecto states in her dissertation, “...*A Critical Analysis of Children’s Books about Día de los Muertos*...”:

“The harmful effects of misrepresentations in explanations, images, and text are real, lasting, and damaging. Cultural preservation is under attack... Commemorations, cultural observations, and holidays are about remembering events. As people move away from the remembrance, all that gets recalled are the bigger things, such as parties, food, etc., and the details are forgotten. Over time, commemorations have moved from the effort to be faithful to the true meaning of the holiday to the aesthetics because people forget or move away from details and focus on the more colorful and fun aspects that become associated with the celebration” (Perfecto 147).

As multiple different groups lay claim to celebrating the Day of the Dead, its origins and true purpose seem to have become “lost” to some groups of society. Therefore, it is important to correct misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the holiday, disabling the perhaps unintentional “social amnesia” that occurs.

Author Regina M. Marchi, who has written multiple articles on the Day of the Dead and its memory within the U.S., explains some of the differences within the U.S. customs and celebrations of the commemoration. The commemoration of the Day of the Dead rituals within

the U.S. has aided the suppressed Chicano community allowing them to express their beliefs by adding their own twists to the traditional rituals. She clarifies that the community has transitioned from making altars to honor a specific family member who was personally known to them to also incorporate iconic pop culture figures with whom they may have no direct relation. Furthermore, the community has used the rituals and traditions of the Day of the Dead, like the making of an altar, to bring social and political issues to light and educate their wider communities on the history of important Mexican pop culture and historic figures like Frida Khalo, Cesar Chavez, and Diego Rivera (R. M. Marchi, “Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations” 283; R. M. Marchi, *Altar Images* 276). As discussed by Jelin, Alberni, and LeDoux, these shifts aren’t surprising as memory, and thus commemorations are malleable.

Although beneficial for some communities and causes, these celebrations within the U.S. have been said to be controversial due to the cultural appropriation and ethnic devaluation of the holiday and its practices (R. M. Marchi, “Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations” 296). Regina Marchi argues that the famous commercialized version of All Souls Day, Halloween, uses many of the Day of the Dead icons and motifs without the solemn commemoration of the departed (R. M. Marchi, *Altar Images* 252). Moreover, Marchi explains three ways in which the commemoration is commercialized within the US: the mass selling of the Day of the Dead art and products; for-profit commemoration workshops, exhibits, and performances; and Day of the Dead tourism strategies - similar to Mexico (R. M. Marchi, *Altar Images* 278, 283). Thus, because of the benefits of cultural expression and the detrimental potential for misunderstanding the commemoration, those within the wider Latino community have fought to emphasize the intentions behind people’s ritualistic practices—a spirit of solemn remembrance for the deceased—as being more important than the structure of their traditions or

ethnic/racial background when considering what is and isn't appropriate (R. M. Marchi, "Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations" 296). In all, the extraction of the Mexican holiday from its solemn origins to a global celebratory practice has seen the commemoration become commercialized within the United States.

Dr. Tetiana Haievaska, a Ukrainian Senior researcher at the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, draws similar conclusions as to why certain key shifts in society lead to the commercialization of a holiday. Haievaska argues that holidays have become more "routine" and common rather than a sacred events for three reasons: the coexistence between religious and state holidays, a societal shift from producing to consuming material goods, and a transition of values (from valuing work to our free time) (Haievaska 104). She concludes that these three factors have led to holidays becoming more commercialized, specifically shaming the United States for its partial responsibility. Additionally, She claims that because of the consumeristic and open culture of the U.S., which has infected other countries, modern society has become more united by consumption and happiness than common ideas and beliefs. Thus, she reasons, that when commemorating something, individuals would rather unite over their common consumption of goods through celebration rather than their shared ideals and their significance (Haievaska 100). In all, Haievaska's general theories of the commodification of commemorations can be certainly applied to the commercialization of the Day of the Dead. As Marchi also noted, when a commemoration becomes more about celebrating than actual solemn remembrance, especially when a holiday is taken outside of its cultural context and country of origin, it can effortlessly be commercialized because of said generational changes. Overall, the deviation of commemoration from its origins and religious solemnity toward cultural celebration can facilitate its commercialization.

Conclusion

Since its origins, the Day of the Dead as a commemoration has progressed, shifting from primarily focusing on solemnity for those who have passed on, towards more of a celebratory event in their honor, transforming into a highly commercialized holiday. Through the survey of multiple memory frameworks and theories in relation to the Day of the Dead, it can be concluded that an individual's memory is highly influenced by the collective society and susceptible to changes with each iteration of remembrance. On a long-term, perhaps generational, scale, the repetition of a practice may aid in its evolution into a commemoration. Additionally, the decision of what to commemorate depends upon the methods of memory transference which can be subjective in the process of which memories are passed on to future generations.

Furthermore, applying the memory frameworks to the origins and devices used to commemorate the Day of the Dead reveals how methods of memory transference can be subjective, as an artist's selectivity impacts the memory of the collective society. However, the longevity of the indigenous traditions and rituals acts as a way for the community to express their beliefs, countering the silencing of their social voices. So, being that societal pressures also shape an individual's commemoration experience, individuals and a society can combat social amnesia and the exclusion of the indigenous population, or general exclusion, through expressive and excessive commemoration, as seen through the Day of the Dead rituals, artworks, and film productions.

Finally, the analysis of how the Day of the Dead commemoration has evolved in popularity, in Mexico and abroad, from its solemn religious background to become a celebratory cultural practice, has demonstrated how the holiday has become more commercialized. Known for its cultural tourism, Mexico has reaped both the benefit of increased commerce and global

reputation due to the holiday's commercialization, but also experience the detriment of losing contextualization of the holiday and political issues within Mexico (Rühse 22). Nonetheless, through my research, it can be concluded that the faithful representation of a holiday and its accurate origins, in their entirety, is crucial to a society's memory and an individual's memory, and the commemoration's solemnity. Thus, correcting misinformation, educating others, and securing records of the origins of holidays, traditions, and rituals are vital for the survival of accurate commemorations.

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