

A SHORT REVIEW OF “CHAMARREO” FOLK DANCE FROM MEXICO

Angela María Vela Hernández
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
E-mail: angelavdancer@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article talks about the traditional-folk dance from Mexico which name is “Chamarreo”. In order to understand where the Chamarreo dance comes from, this work explained the historical background of Mexican dances. There is also a short review of some traditional-folk dances from north, central, and southern Mexico. It is a summary to understand some of the characteristics of the Chamarreo dance, such as choreography, costume, object, music, form, and when its performances take place.

Keywords: traditional-folk dance, Mexico, Chamarreo, choreography

ULASAN SINGKAT “CHAMARREO”— TARIAN RAKYAT DARI MEXICO

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tarian rakyat tradisional dari Meksiko yang bernama “Chamarreo”. Untuk memahami dari mana tarian Chamarreo berasal, karya ini menjelaskan latar belakang sejarah tarian Meksiko. Terdapat juga ulasan singkat tentang beberapa tarian tradisional rakyat dari utara, tengah, dan selatan Meksiko. Ini adalah ringkasan untuk memahami beberapa karakteristik tarian Chamarreo, seperti: koreografi, kostum, objek, musik, bentuk, dan ketika pertunjukan tariannya berlangsung.

Kata kunci: tarian rakyat tradisional, Meksiko, *Chamarreo*, koreografi

INTRODUCTION

Dance in Mexico has changed. Nowadays some dance companies and art schools are teaching how to focus on the concept and not on the movement. The concept is more important than the dance itself. But the “Ballet folklórico de Mexico” (folk-ballet dance company) of Amalia Hernandez founded in 1952, have kept the European tradition in combination with the Mexican traditions. The dance in Mexico has been influenced by ballet (classic European dance) practices. And most of the types of dances in Mexico are based on ballet. We strongly believe that the technique of ballet builds a dancer’s body because it trains

the muscles to have strength and flexibility and follow the aesthetics of the body.



Image 1. Chamarreo Dance

Companies around Mexico perform our traditional dances showing the culture of the places along the time. Chiapas is located in the south of Mexico. Chiapas is famous for the amazing scenario of nature and for their culture. Chiapas is the capital of the Chamarreo dance. The next lines are going to introduce you to this amazing dance and to its characteristics.

DISCUSSION

Historical Background of Mexican Dance Understanding

The reason that we understand a dance is because it is related to a tradition that we know. The meaning of it is connected to us, to our own present. So our historical sense of what dance in our present is, in this case, an ideological conception. “...in fact, history does not belong to us, but we belong to it” (Gadamer, 1975). Understanding is not only the connection of a tradition with the meaning of a dance; “... understanding is based on universal past-present-future temporality” (Brooks, p.3).

In order to understand the philosophical and transcendental differences between the dances in Mexico, this article explains the beginning of the dances found in Mexico. The first evidence of dance in Mexico was the paintings that archeologists found in caves. This paintings reflect what humans were practicing and experiencing in old times. Basically the paintings show rituals. So, the first dances began with rituals.

In the time of the colonization in Mexico (approx. year 1520), when the Spanish people conquered New Spain, now Mexico, they found papyrus. This papyrus is paper with written codes, (located in The National Museum of Mexico City), that shows the different rituals and religion practices that they used to dance and represent. One of the most famous codexes is “Codex Ramirez” which shows people playing gongs and dancing around.



Image 2. Codex Ramirez

The codex also has a script in “nahuatl” dialect that explains the representation. So this is what we call pre-Hispanic dance which is more a representation of a ritual offered to specific gods. They were also the tribe of the Aztecs and for them, there were two levels of dance, one for the common people, often related to the agricultural cycle and those for the elite and other for the gods.

After the conquest, the Spanish people initially worked to eradicate indigenous dances, considering them “too pagan” and succeeded with a number of forms, especially those associated with the priest and ruling classes.

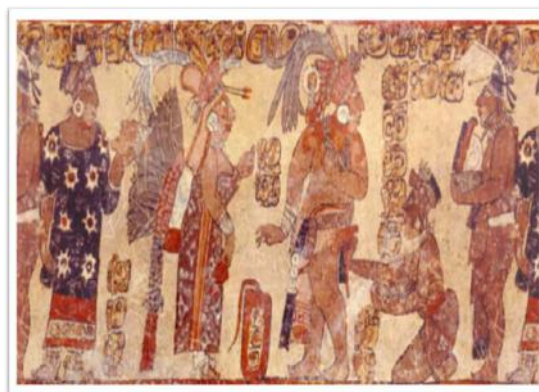


Image 3. Pre-hispanic dance in Mexico

European dances, music, and instruments were introduced in Mexico but they were not part of the cultural identity after some time. Some of the dances were: *Moros y Cristianos* (a mock battle between Moors and Christians brought the central states), *Los Archos*, *Las Escadas*, *Los Machetes*, *El Paloteo*, *Las*

Cintas, and *Los Doce Pares*. Other European dances include *La Zambra*, *La Zarabanda*, *La Contradanza*, *seguidillas*, *fandangos*, *huapangos*, *jotas*, *boleros*, *zambras*, and *zapateados*. In some cases, these dances were modified or given entirely new choreography adapted to Mexican traditions. Most of the traditional dances performed today, took on their forms during the colonial period and also we can see that they come from Spanish culture.

The second dance after the pre-Hispanic is the Ritual dance. The Ritual dances are still alive in the streets all around Mexico. If you are walking in downtown of Queretaro, the fifth biggest city of Mexico, you can find people dancing The Ritual dance and they are easy to recognize, because the costume will draw your attention. This costume is full of colorful bird feathers. The dancers put a crown of feathers in the head. They usually wear short skirts with geometric design patterns which they take from the architecture of the pyramids. Most of them

also wear jingle bells made from dry fruit. But why is this dance called Ritual? As the name refer to, this dance comes from the rituals that they replay from the ancestors. The ancestors used to live in caves and did rituals to pray to the God of water, the God of the crops, and the God of the rain between others.

The ritual dance has important characteristics, like dancers strongly believe in the power of animals, in magic, and nature. The movements are taken from animals. They wanted to take the dance to an ecstasy of magic and supernatural power. The Ritual dance is located in every region and city of Mexico. In every place there are different movements of choreography but they keep the same focus, “the magic of the nature”.

The Ritual dance was discovered mostly in the south of Mexico with the “Mayas” tribe, between other tribes. In the picture below you can see a part of the south of Mexico. The names that are written in the picture are the different tribes of that area.



Images 4. *El Son de la Negra* from Jalisco



Image 5. Tribes of Mexico

The third kind of dance that we are talking about in this work is the indigenous/native traditional dance. This dance comes from the different tribes of different cities in Mexico. This dance also finds itself in rituals.

The costume is colorful and the style depends on the location (region). Usually the man wears long pants and the woman wears skirts, but this may vary. The tribe dance has as an objective to adore the gods and the nature. The “Quetzales” is one the dances practiced in the south of Mexico, in the mountains of Puebla, village of Papantla. In the “Quetzales” dance, the dancers (around 4 people) climb a pole of ten meters approximately and they do a ritual on the top of the pole. After the ritual they tie up a rope and jump to slip down their bodies upside down. The dancers go down by turning with the rope tied up and it looks like they are flying. The “Quetzales” dance is one of the dances that survive relatively intact in areas that were remote from colonial authorities. However, their “purity” is under debate.

Some Folk-Traditional Dances from North, Central, and Southern Mexico

Traditional folk dance is popular and supported by government sometimes. Those considered representative of the country and popular outside their home region, such as the “Jarocho” receive regional and federal support. Those without that type of popularity are performed mostly in local places and regional religious events. While much support is geared to preserving and keeping tradition dance forms, art forms outside of Mexico still have influence. Outside of Mexico, people think about Salsa dance but this is not our traditional dance, it is just another type. Traditional dances from Mexico have much more meaning and without remaining that they are part of our cultural heritage.

Around the Mexican Republic, dance as cultural heritage has been kept from the people and the government. The image below is an explanation about some central, northern dances, between the big repertoires of Mexico. It also shows the location of these dances, so we can have a clear idea of what we are talking about.

a. Deer Dance in Sonora

The deer dance “Danza del Venado” is performed in Sonora and Sinaloa located in the north of Mexico and also in the very far south of Arizona, now United States of America. The



Image 6. Some central, northern dances, between the big repertoires of Mexico

Yaqui Indians harness a deer in the dance to pay tribute to the deer's enduring spirit after it's been hunted. This dance is most associated with these peoples' Lent and Easter celebrations, when indigenous beliefs mixed with the Catholicism introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries. Originally the dance was performed the night before hunting to ensure success, but nowadays it means to communicate with other worlds. The deer dancer costume is similar with a deer. The dancer wears a shawl wrapped as a skirt with a belt traditionally made of deer hooves. He carries a gourd in each hand and ties rattles to his ankles, also red ribbons wind around the horns to represent flowers.

b. *Jarabe Tapatío* in the traditional China Poblana dress in Jalisco

The Jarabe is considered Mexico's "national dance" and is the best known outside the country, often called the "Mexican Hat Dance". The dance was performed for the first time in 1790 at the Coliseo Theater in Mexico City. During the 60s it was part of a high society culture. The dance symbolizes the courtship of a woman by a man, who at first is refused but accepted in the end. The two dancers are a man in a charro suit and a woman in a "China Poblana" outfit, as part of the costume. It was popularized internationally in the 20th century by Russian dancer Anna Pavlova who visited Mexico in 1919. Pavlova made the dance part of her permanent repertoire to be performed.

The charros outfit is a well known tradition outside of Mexico; and the China Poblana clothes are based on the dress of an Asian woman who became famous in the city of Puebla in the colonial period. The Jarabe is danced with Mariachi music and is performed at Mexican national holidays such as Las Fiestas Patrias, Cinco de Mayo, and El Diez Seis de Septiembre.

c. The *Danza de los Viejitos* (Dance of the Little Old Men) in Michoacan

This dance is performed in Michoacán central Mexico, especially presented in the Lake Pátzcuaro. The dance was created in the mid

of 20th century. It is based on ancient rhythms and steps and accompanied by traditional instruments. The dancers basically imitate old men, dressed in traditional indigenous clothing, and carrying canes. The dancers costume is: wood-soled shoes and this accentuate the noise made while stomping. Other dances from the region and state of Michoacán are *Las Iguiris*, *Mariposas*, *Danza de los Tumbis*, *Paloteros* and *Pescado Blanco*, between other, but the most popular is "the dance of the little men". Now we are going to show some dances from the south of Mexico. From the states of Oaxaca, Yucatán and Veracruz, there are a lot of dances depending of the region or state but this article just wants to show a general review of them and conclude with the Chamarreo from Chiapas, which is also from the south. Now in the image below, also as part of our cultural heritage, it shows southern Mexico.

d. *Danza de los Voladores*, (Dance of the Flyers) in Veracruz

This is a dance/ceremony/ritual which still performing in Mexico today, best known in the Totoncapán area of northern Veracruz and also in northern Puebla states. It is believed to have originated with the Nahua, Huastec and Otomi tribe in central Mexico, and then spread throughout most of Mesoamerica. The ceremony was named an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, to help the ritual survive in the modern century.

e. *Guelaguetza* festival in Oaxaca

Guelaguetza does not refer only to one dance, it is the representation of all the dances and culture from Oaxaca state. The *Guelaguetza* festival is one of the most popular celebrations in Mexico. This traditional festivity held in July can only be defined as a mix of cultures, from indigenous heritage and Catholic influences. The *Guelaguetza* dances, plays, and offerings originally honored Centéotl, the goddess of maize (main dish food dish), but after the Spanish conquest, it also became a way to commemorate the Virgin of El Carmen.



Image 7. Southern Mexico

Every year, thousands of dancers and locals gather together to represent their state through different performances. The festival offers visitors the experience of concerts, parades, and gastronomic fairs that showcase Oaxacan legacy. But the main attractions are the dances. As a way to reinforce the meaning of *Guelaguetza*, dancers also throw presents chocolate, fruit, food, and other traditional products to the audience, in order to preserve the culture.

f. Jarana Yucateca in Yucatan

In the Yucatán Peninsula state of Quintana, there are various folkloric and traditional dances. Usually dances are accompanied with music called *Jarana Yucateca*. The Jarana dance is done in pairs that consist of footwork without distinguished steps nor differentiation between women and men. The Jarana is performed by a winds band ensemble.

This music and dance of the Jarana have a long history, dating back at least two centuries. Since the arrival of the Spanish, many other groups have made the beautiful Yucatán Peninsula their home forming part of their culture and costumes. As a result, the Jarana is also a blend of Cuban, African, and other influences.

Chamarreo Dance from Chiapas

One of the states in Mexico that preserves its culture almost untouched is Chiapas. Chiapas is a beautiful old style town, rich of dress, food, music, dance, language, costume, and traditions. The culture of the place is colorful, bright, and elegant. As the state capital of Tuxtla you can witness all the variety of dances re-practiced every day. Dances of Chiapas can be divided into three groups: those of pre-Hispanic origin, those of the Meztizas, and those that are of the colonial era.

One of the most traditional dresses is a wide skirt that is throughout the territory of different colors embroidered with silk threads. The skirts are colorful and the threads are usually flowers. This is the costume of a traditional dance named “Chamarreo”.

Some of the traditional dances located in Chiapas can be seen during local festivals, fairs, or in religious and popular celebrations: *El Rescapetate*, *El Torito*, *The Chapanecas*, The Dance of Carnival, *Tongoetzé*, The Sleeping Child, *El Piri*, *La Tuxtlequita*, *El Cachito*, *El Nicté*, *El Aclaraban*, *Yomoetzé*, *La Marucha*, etc. But the Dance of the Parachicos, is the one who accompanied the Chamarreo Dance.



Image 8. *Parachicos* and *Chiapacorceanas*

This article explains about the *Parachicos* dance in order to understand *Chamarreo*. The *Parachicos* dance comes from an ethnic group named *Chamulas*, which means red head bird. This group of indigene people is divided in two groups: *tzoltziles* and *tzeltales*. The symbol of the dance is usually represented by a snake and a tiger. The dance is accompanied with music made by harmonica, guitar, and violin. It can also be played with *marimba*, which is like a traditional *gamelan* or similar to it because both are about percussions.

Similar to other dances, *Parachicos* started as a ritual offered to gods. In *Chiapas* they still keep the tradition the same as in the past. The dancers visit the saints in the church walking and dancing all along the street and their dance is an offering to the saints. During the procession along the streets, the *parachicos* are accompanied with the *chiapacorceanas*, as they called female dancers, and the *parachicos* flirt with them with the *sarape* (traditional costume from Mexico; piece of cloth that the dancers wear up the t-shirt).

This is how the *Chamarreo* existed. Despite being related to male dancers, *Chamarreo* also has their own choreography danced by women only. They flirt with men and interact with a handmade plate representing the traditions of the village. The costume is full of flowers also handmade by the dancers and they wear ribbon of all colors between the braids hair.

The *Chiapacorceanas* includes clapping to include the participation of the spectators. Their movements are full of forms. They create horizontal, vertical, and diagonal line formations. They also turn and interact with poses in the first level and second level (up and down). After they finish with their own choreography, they dance with the male team. This performance is usually performed in entertainment celebrations. But the real tradition is when they walk to the church praying and offering the dance to the saints.

CONCLUSION

Folkloric dance is becoming more popular throughout the United States due to the increase of Hispanic population and in all around the world. Knowledge of the country and people of Mexico will enhance the understanding of the dances.

Dances representative of Mexico's southeastern region, *Chiapas*, includes intricate foot stomping, partner choreography, and soft, waltz-like tempos. The authentic technique style requires basic *zapateado* (footwork), skeletal alignment, and skirt work, a mix between Mexican culture and Spanish old styles.

The State of *Chiapas* is located in the south of Mexico, bordered by the states of *Tabasco*, *Veracruz*, *Oaxaca*, and *Guatemala*. The state is extremely rich in water and other natural