



Research Paper

## Historiographic approach to Veracruz's dances

Guadalupe Sánchez Álvarez

<sup>1</sup>Anthropology Institute, Veracruzana University, México

**ABSTRACT:** *Traditional dances, such as those performed by the native people of the state of Veracruz in Mexico, work as systems that involve valuable multicultural narratives. This discourse is extremely useful to unravel old identity memories, in territorial, temporary and spatial categorizations, which favor the rescue and transmission of knowledge for the conformation and consolidation of the identity of intercultural communities, executors and maintainers of these artistic expressions, and that are efficiently translated as non-written graphics, result of the historiographic systematization. Hence the importance of rethinking and analyzing them from a deep approach. This article seeks to reevaluate the study from the historiographic approach.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Folk dances have been the subject of extensive and numerous studies because they represent an inexhaustible source of information. In the past, dances were offered to the deities as offerings, celebrations, sacrifices and devotional acts and they became true means of expression and communication with the deities.

In other cultural contexts and according to the Bible, dances were considered to be manifestations of praise and sacrifice pleasing to God. In territories of Europe and America, during the expansion of the German-Roman Empire, dances served as means and instruments to establish ritual and lustful connections with Satan and some church leaders, as a consequence, were banned.

The Holy Inquisition was an institution created by the Catholic Church to ensure the direction that the members of the Church gave and to punish those who resisted its dogmas; it was the perfect instrument to monitor that the rules and prohibitions were fully complied with. The inquisitorial methods forced the world into submission; the opposite meant becoming a heretic, a sorcerer or an idolater and the inescapable punishment was death by fire, the ultimate penalty for acts of paganism. In this way, any dance or ritual that was not offered exclusively to Catholic saints was considered a sacrilegious act. In the annals of the time, in the records of trials of people who were prosecuted, it was recorded that they were executed under the accusation of worshipping the devil through dance.

The violent culture shock that this orthodox vision brought with it forced the pre-Hispanic civilizations of the American continent to adapt their dances according to the Christian-European vision. The cultural configuration that invested the ceremonial dances as authentic ritual manifestations of offering and sacrifice to the divinities was silenced by the persecution.

The European contact broke into the habit of dancing to get in tune with natural phenomena such as solstices and eclipses. Any expression that attempted to undermine the ideas of the old world was banned in order to lay the grounds for the foundation of the Novo Mondo. In order to achieve the building of the "new" Spain it was imperative to erase the traces of the primeval history, so that dance, codices and everything that was intended to go against the project had to be eliminated. From then on, history was recorded following the instructions of those in charge of educating the conquered and those born thereafter. Even the history that was told across the sea, through letters, manuscripts, oral histories, paintings, sculptures or any other representation, was carefully planned. Verbal and visual mnemonics were efficient resources to fix in the minds of the communities the new edges of history and to end de facto the historical continuity of the pre-Hispanic peoples. The association of ideas such as America-Latin America and Caribbean-Canibal worked for those used to trusting the obviousness of the written text. The same was true of the caste paintings that reinforced the image with the text. As a result of these associations, it was possible to think that the pre-Hispanics abandoned their

original beliefs to simply deify the imposed saints, dancing for them and not for the sun or the moon, and that the stories represented in the dances were literal and did not require further interpretation.

Even today, it is ambitious to think of a multifunctional story that, while it magnifies one story, buries many others. Above all, if the protagonists of those narratives that are to be erased are holders of an abstract thought accustomed to visual representations and symbols. It is clear that only a small part can survive centuries of imposed religious practices, punishment, threats and discrimination. At this point it is important to point out that the practice of the dances, together with any act carried out systematically by those cultures, should have had the objective of transmitting and updating the history and the memory of the community; something like adding a bead to a necklace. Apart from the countless interpretations that inevitably appear, and the institutional means involved, today the dances continue to fulfil their mnemonic function.[1].

## **II. METHODOLOGIC PRECISIONS**

In the context I have referred to, traditional dances are considered to be extremely rich and complex objects of analysis. These cultural phenomena undoubtedly entail a broad potential for knowledge that should be explored beyond the usual, with perspectives that refresh the scope of these lines of research. It is precisely from this affirmation that the approach formulated in this work is based.

Beyond the descriptions of the 16th century chroniclers, which are incalculable, it is very certain that the precise details, contexts and spatial - temporal conditions, even mythical, magical or religious, of the original peoples dance performances are unknown. Nevertheless, the general description of the chroniclers shows that the dances were an essential part of the religious and festive life of those societies.

Despite the lack of knowledge of the original content of the dances, it is clearly observable that this practice has been superimposed on Christian cosmology and has even evolved into true repositories of memory. Through the dance execution, in the form of a performance, moving images reappear and impact the participants; music, masks, colours and costumes update the mythical-magical-religious narratives that the dances by themselves are the custodians of, and revive the emotionality of all the participants, whether as observers or as performers. Obviously, this idea is reinforced through certain archaeological elements that are sufficient to conclude that dance was a cultural practice, through which the heirs of those ancient peoples rescue historical and fundamental aspects of their way of life. Therefore, dance is a semantic complex that substantially conserves its contents today despite having undergone mutations that are to some extent necessary if we consider the historical dimension to which they belong. To paraphrase Guillermo Bonfil Batalla [2], both omissions and additions are vital for the permanence of customs, hence the idea that a substantial part of the dances we know today refer to that remote past. An indisputably hidden past, but symbolically present.

As a means of expression, ceremonial or traditional dances have their own development in relation to the community that maintains and executes them and are not related to institutional histories. As a whole, they are the heritage that the pre-Hispanic world has conserved to this day as a central part of the popular festivals that are celebrated in many territories of the American continent. Together with music and singing, even food and magical thought, they are part of the religiousness of many peoples. Of course, and apart from their international projection as "tourist attractions", "popular expressions" and "cultural heritage", they serve as mechanisms of memory that strengthen the sense of coexistence within the communities, providing identity to the festivals themselves, to the communities and to the territorial entities. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the aspects of identity that radiate out of each community are not subject to the boundaries that we know, nor to linear time, since, conceptually and symbolically, the dances are a vehicle that allows the performers and observers to move between times. These aspects of identity constitute an indispensable dialectical element for the debate when analyzing whether the dances are a product of cultural crossbreeding, whose origin dates back to the sixteenth century when the newcomers joined the original peoples.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that crossbreeding was not a "natural" process without edges, in the first place, because the expression "crossbreed" came up to refer to a genetic mix. Secondly, because the term "identity" does not allude to what is own - individual - unrepeatable or unique; in fact, it refers to those cultural aspects that are shared with others. The locution is derived from the late Latin *identitas*, *-ātis*, and this derived from the Latin *idem* 'the same'. The Dictionary of the Real Academia Española defines it as 'quality of being identical', that means, it does not refer to the essentiality of the person, to the features that make him/her unique. Hence, we mention 'family identity', 'identity of a people' and 'sexual identity', among others, to specify what is shared. On this basis, we can conclude that ancient peoples adapted their dances to serve as cultural containers and guardians of their history, similar to the so-called "exocerebros" proposed by Roger Bartra [3], or as conceptual devices that protect the archives of the memory that preceded the cultural shock known as the conquest, which determined the majority of the tangible aspects that today make up the dances, because they had to conform to the European vision and the norms established by the Holy Office.

It is understood that the cultural mix occurred since, otherwise, Mexico would not be as we know it, and would be made up mostly of the groups that we usually call originals. This is not an allusion to the survival

of certain cultural aspects and a language, but to groups with social and political structures and, in general, cultural systems of their own. In this sense, it is important to note the evident survival and permanence of a great number of tangible and intangible cultural aspects in spite of the fact that 500 years have passed since the arrival in Mexico of Hernan Cortés and his companions, European friars and African slaves, because as we will see later, it is impossible not to take them into account.

The processes of imposition, acculturation, conquest, syncretism, or however they are classified, were not sufficient to exterminate these aspects; permanence is due precisely to the capacity that the ancient inhabitants had to preserve their history and preserve their identity as a people, even at the cost of adoption, superimposition, intricacies, exegesis, and whatever was necessary. Bonfil Batalla reflects on this and maintains that "all individuals, who necessarily belong to some organized social system, also have culture, because society transmits it to them and because it requires everyone to handle the cultural elements that are indispensable to participate in social life (that is, the values, symbols, skills, and all the other features that make up the culture of the group)" (1993, p. 46). In these complex processes, for example, the incorporation of European characters into the narrative of traditional dances is evident, without detracting from the contents themselves. In this way, we can be sure that, even though the dances incorporated European characters, they did not eliminate the intrinsic aspects of their culture. In fact, it would be strange if they had done so, at least completely, since in everything that is preserved from that previous historical past and even from the years of contact (sculpture, weaving, embroidery, etc.) a high dose of their identity and their symbolic world is always present.

Most communities do not remember, *strictu sensu*, the original contents and meanings contained in their festivals and their elements, however, it is represented symbolically. Oblivion does not imply lack of value or exclusion; therefore, its validation and preponderance should not be signified by Catholicism, much less to exalt and reaffirm as unique and of great value the elements proper to Christianity-Catholicism and the official history that is identified in them. Their content should not be validated by following the traits of archetypes, nor as simple clichés of "the Spanish". This Eurocentric scale, perhaps "Hispanocentric", deprives the original history of its values and, therefore, denigrates the historical and cultural heritage of the American continent. This vision has influenced everything that happened before 1519 to be considered as distant and inert as a fossil, so that it is analyzed as such and not as a living culture.

In the same way, this trend makes it difficult for those of us who are trying to rescue the original values of the communities, which are so necessary today to consciously dignify and resignify the regional history that is paying for the national one. The Catholic religion and its practices are among the main obstacles in this task of cultural rescue and re-signification, especially because Catholic rites have become involved in all cultural areas, especially in rural communities and towns far from urban settlements. The second major obstacle is the institutional history (also called official or monumental) validated by the traditional anthropological vision and its various branches, and which has been distinguished by its tendency to reject customs, the indigenous, the black, and everything that has no place in the construction of the official histories proper to the "modern thinking" of the white man.

Syncretism and crossbreeding have been for decades the great idealized substitutes, however, they have weakened and even disappeared despite the insistence of many researchers who cling to this anthropological discourse considered unequivocal and absolute. Today, it is already possible to analyze dances under the category of "memory", that is to say, as discourses that come from the past through memories to materialize in dances, given that the discourses are implicit in everything that contains them and in all possible forms: tacit, literal, symbolic, abstract, intangible, sound, gestural, object, behind other discourses, and between lines (of another discourse).

This proposal of analysis comes from different views and non-conventional disciplines, in this case it is specifically Historiography and indirectly those that feed it. Thanks to this new approach we will be able to conceptualize the dances as complex systems that, beyond a uniform execution that recreates "passages of conquest", seem to be a device that tells one or more stories. We can even think of them as multicultural elements capable of transmitting, promoting and forging identity - either as entities capable of containing and transmitting memories of spaces and times. In other words, the conceptual corpus of Historiography allows us to study territory and space as if they were cultural constructions. It does not allow me to say that it seeks to avoid the reductionist analysis that labels them as "cultural heritage" because the term implies the politicization of discourses and, therefore, the appropriation of memory. A situation that we believe is against the communities that are dancing, covering the costs of doing so.

This situation does not seek to victimize communities and their dances, but on the contrary; not entering into the economic agenda of local governments gives them dignity and autonomy. The best example of this mention is the Cumbre Tajin, an event designed for tourism, especially international tourism, which includes regional dances performed by professional dancers and not by traditional dancers "without academic training". The costumes and costumes are also not faithful to those used in the regional festivals; they are replaced by pieces designed and made for an event of such magnitude. The same is true of the steps they

perform, because while they refer to the originals and the general choreographic structure of the indigenous dance, their aesthetics depart from the dances that are usually performed in the ceremonial sense by the inhabitants of the communities, the indigenous people who materialize their memory through choreography, their movement, the participation in the ensemble that reacts to the mythical, magical thinking that organizes the reality of which they are a part and the "saving". The professional dancers do not participate in the emotion of the originals that by dancing rescue and maintain the order of the cosmos; the professional dancers develop a very valuable artistic and aesthetic work, but that is at the antipodes of what the traditional dancers do.

The dances are a generous theme that allows approaches from different perspectives, beyond the labels and political agendas (cultural heritage of tourist attraction, cultural manifestations and popular expressions, among others). It is possible to analyze the process of traditional dance from the perspectives of researchers. The label assigned to them depends on the discipline that addresses them, and the conceptual frameworks used when examining them. In this case, Historiography allows us to consider them as a form of unwritten graphics and from this conceptualization it is possible to make their particularities visible and not to perceive them only as fragments of a stereotype, that is, as one more aspect of globalization. The channeling of the phenomenon of traditional dance as a spelling allows the analysis of the discourse of each one from a phenomenological reading and from symbolism for a better appreciation in the communities that maintain the tradition and in the evolution of perception through the generations that have danced. In the same way, it is possible to undo the changes that have taken place in the symbolic content of each dance and, therefore, its discourse. This method makes it possible to go beyond the obvious linear and deepen the discourse, as changes occur differently in each dance since the historical evolution is not the same in all communities. From this perspective it is possible to see that this "conquest told by the dances of the conquest" may be referring to different events, or that their symbols and meanings are not unique to a single reality.

It is not seeking to confront the disciplines that have been commonly used to analyze dances, but to propose a methodological approach based on historiographic theory and, therefore, the disciplines that support it. It is true that proverbially, historiography specialized in the analysis of written texts, later incorporated into its own film discourse as an object of analysis. It also dealt with music, as it possessed messages that could be intuited, discovered, rescued and analyzed. Later, in some countries, he urged the inclusion of memory to study events that, despite being recent, occurred without leaving any palpable traces. From this development, the diverse historiographic currents derive, among which Argentina, Spain and Mexico stand out, each one having its own characteristics and particular to its own becoming. Precisely this methodological instrument is useful for our study, since each dance has its own discourse, understanding its wide meaning that is not limited to orality and writing, but to the symbolic level, which is in a subtle, topical and implicit way, almost invisible to the traditional look. It is worth mentioning that this work coincides with the definition of the concept of discourse proposed by Michel Foucault:

I think I have in fact added to its meanings, sometimes considering it as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as a group of individualizable statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice expressing a series of statements. [4]

In short, this method of analysis recognizes that dances are not only signs of identity, but vehicles to ensure the transit and permanence of identity in a space-time-historical and timeless. Dances are the memory full of unique identities of the communities that practice them. We have argued that both dances and memory are vehicles, but also identity, which in turn is memory. That is to say, they are dynamic elements that play various roles and have more than one function, they are capable of containing themselves, and over the centuries, they have admitted changes and updates that have made them subsist and contribute to the subsistence of others. Each element that intervenes to make a dance possible acquires the function of container and content, but also of meaning and significance. At this point we can say that, in addition to their own becoming, the dances safeguard the historical processes of the communities from which they emanate.

In this context, it is not only a multidisciplinary work but also a transdisciplinary one, since, in spite of following the methodological rigor required by Historiography, history, anthropology, hermeneutics, phenomenology, semiotics and discourse analysis are constantly used. The intention of this combination is to formulate a new method of ad hoc analysis of the dances of Veracruz that will eventually serve the study and systematization of the typical dance demonstrations of other geographical entities in our country.

The background to this methodological proposal emerged between 2008 and 2011, recognizing that a pilgrimage is a living text, a deference that matured into the title of unwritten orthography (in the Western sense). From this conceptualization, an analysis with the rigour required by the treatment of a document was possible, which found that it is not only in orthography (writing) that history is inscribed. Following this experience, in this study I propose that dances are also constituted as non-written spelling and as discourses from memory. This is a proposal that invites us to go deeper into the mechanisms that combine to achieve the

validity and permanence of the dances, apart from the paradoxical contrasts that are generated by contextualizing them with the territorial delimitations and everyday links of the current era, the linear measurements of time and the conception of modernity. To test the approach, in this paper I analyze widely known dances, including some less referenced ones. I intend to highlight those elements that make them relevant to explain their nature and meaning, since these elements allow them to remain in force.

### **III. VERACRUZ: A PAST DANCE**

The study of the dances motivates the delimitation of times and spaces since, at the moment of executing them, the space of the memory is revealed before the look of the spectator, it enters in force and it dignifies the physical space where they are carried out. This is an aspect that becomes imperative because due to modern geographical delimitations, the heirs of these pre-Hispanic peoples inhabit fragmented territory that finds no links or correspondence with memory. This phenomenon is due to the physical spaces, where they currently dance, are the product of delimitations derived from historical disputes led by groups of power and that, in the end, these delimitations are empty labels, namely Alta Huasteca, Baja Huasteca, Totonaca area, Nautla area, Centro area, Centro Norte area, Sotavento area, Papaloapan area, Montaña area, Tuxtla area, Olmeca area. The latter is special because it does not refer to the communities and peoples who live there today, but to a culture which is considered extinct, i.e. which has no heirs to give continuity to its customs.

This delimitation is pragmatically formulated to "organize" the cultural universes that coexist, but in practice it is the opposite. It is even confusing for those who do not work in academic and professional fields that require them to specialize in the geo-cultural field. Let us remember that the Huastecan zone extended into the now adjacent states of Puebla and San Luis Potosí, while the Olmecs extended into Tabasco and Oaxaca. Veracruz did not exist as such at the time when its dances originated; it was once a larger area that housed various cultural groups that individually experienced different processes. Olmecs, Huastecans and Totonacs have inhabited this territory since 1200 B.C. We consider that these boundaries contain sacred spaces, since within the cosmovision of those groups that inhabited them, it was essential to have a close relationship with the gods, which manifested themselves in their daily lives. In these spaces' rites were performed in which dances were part of their structure; dance was a common practice and the comedies, codices and chronicles offer news in this sense. Unfortunately, the delimitations have fragmented these spaces and as a result there is confusion in the memory of the current inhabitants, descendants of those groups.

It has been copiously written about the dances of Veracruz; as an example, they are composed of two volumes of Veracruz: Fiesta Viva [5] and *Las Danzas de Conquista en México Contemporáneo* [6], where Jesús Jauregui and Carlo Bonfiglioli write. The first title consists of 2 volumes composed of the descriptions of the image and complemented with some data. The second source presents a detailed analysis of the dances; hence the authors consider the number of characters, the roles they play, the details of the costumes and the movements that define their performance.

These authors group the dances into two major archetypes: conquest dances and Moorish and Christian dances. They consider that the first was brought to America by the evangelizing monks of the 16th century and that the second is a version of them. This is a biased view because it perpetuates the belief in a dual-global world formed by Moors and Christians. On the other hand, it ignores the original cultural groups that since the arrival of Hernan Cortes lived together with the African slaves that arrived and with those who coincided in the habit of dancing to worship the gods. Ignoring these groups denies their past and ignores the long histories and cultural confluences of being placed and protected in dances. While most authors who write about dances have a similar opinion to Jauregui and Bonfiglioli, Sonia Marroquin Rojas [7] states that these dances were performed for the first time in Guatemala.

In general terms, the most renowned dances in Veracruz are those whose origin dates back to ancient cultural boundaries that do not correspond to the current boundaries, a situation whereby we find dances that carry the same name and have conceptual similarities in other territorial entities of the country. The analogies are due to the cultural-religious exchange that took place in times before the so-called "encounter of two worlds", that is, they are due to the veneration of the deities that crossed the borders of different cultural groups, either by reciprocity or by imposition.

It is probable that the dynamics of influence were the same during the aforementioned "encounter" and the consecutive "conquest", times accused by the appearance of a new god of an incomparable nature, unique and disqualified from the original gods:

Idolatría: "Quiero romper (porque este es mi caisa) / en una admiración y llanto extraño, / porque soy la generosa Idolatría / a quien todo el daño se desata / ¿Cómo tendré un punto de alegría / en una confusión y mal tamaño, / que sufre el cielo cristiano quel crecer / y mi pueblo querido se desmaya? / Un pueblo importante tan pesado / que con tener su Dios no está contento / que con nuestros dioses es adorado, / pero que todos deben hacer afrenta / diciendo que es uno que ha levantado / el mundo y nuestros dioses tormentos / [Idolatría: "I want

to break (because this is my caisa) / in a strange admiration and crying, / because I am the generous Idolatry / to whom all the damage is unleashed / How will I have a point of joy / in a confusion and bad size, / suffering the Christian sky that is growing / and my dear people faint? / An important people so heavy / that with having their God is not happy / that with our gods is worshipped, / but that everyone must make affront / saying that it is one that has raised / the world and our gods] [7].

This is how things are, for a new god new dances, or the incorporation of new characters and elements to the existing ones; this idea arises when reflecting on the work of Eric Van Young [8]. The extensive and rich Introduction to the book is a text that allows us to understand that traditions were a form of indigenous resistance before and after the Independence of Mexico. The author highlights the long process of cultural resistance of rural communities involved in the struggle against the forces of change, both internal (the head of Independence) and external. The scheme used by the author comes from a trail of unpublished sources well applied to the indigenous world, so it does not lose validity when applied to other categories such as current rural settlements and their dances. Thanks to him we can consider that the structure and performance of dances and other expressions, such as pilgrimages and their stewardships, were part of a rebellion hidden behind the mask of submission and acceptance of the new religion. Based on these general considerations, he held that the adaptations of the conquest imposed, employed or staged by the friars, should have been accepted by the cultural groups consciously, with the idea of making adaptations to their own dances and thus safeguarding their history, memory and customs.

Certainly, in Europe too, people have danced since time immemorial, but it should be noted that the meaning of those dances did not coincide with that given by 15th century Europeans, not with the vision of the Mesoamerican peoples. In both cases the dances experienced a mutual spurting, a process well known in the Iberian Peninsula at the time since they performed a dance of Moors and Christians that resulted from the transformation of others that were danced centuries ago and reminiscent of the then recent expulsion of the Moors and Jews that inhabited Hispania.

From the above reflections we can see that the dances that are renowned throughout Mexico maintain their origins in a space-time that does not coincide with the territorial boundaries that we know today. This is another reason why similar dances exist in different entities; it is not a question of influences transmitted between peoples, nor of historical coincidences of "conquest" because it is a question of communities that descend from the same origin. I mentioned earlier that the original territory was fragmented and therefore, due to this condition and with the passage of time, the peoples diversified their customs, including their dances. According to the above and the process of "Christian" evangelization that became Catholicism, it is not strange that the dances are replicated in name and have surprising similarities. This phenomenon occurs precisely with the dances of the State of Veracruz and the contiguous entities mentioned above. Almost all of them perceive conceptual similarities that are generally considered natural phenomena typical of "conquest" and "cultural crossbreeding", without being so. This happens, in the first place, because despite sharing a common pre-Hispanic past, each possessed distinctive features among which the deities stand out, each with its own character and name, although with attributes like those of the others. Secondly, because the processes of conquest were not the same and, thirdly, because each community has experienced a unique development that is materialized in such concrete and specific aspects as dance expressions.

It is clear that the analogies are also due to the proclivity of the standardization of history, a situation that, from our perspective, is the nervous point of the confusions that arise when analyzing dances and other events such as pilgrimages. They are based on generalities and are validated by the "meeting of two worlds" and the consecutive "spiritual conquest", as the "key moments" that promoted the custom of dancing in religious festivals in honour of the patron saints, displacing the dances dedicated to the primeval gods.

In relation to this, some of us assume that it was not an annihilating spiritual conquest, but a dynamic of mutual influence, an unwritten negotiation that consisted of silencing the names of the original deities and not forgetting them. The new god simply possessed a different nature, so much so that he was called unique. Therefore, it might seem natural that dances in his honour would be different from the usual, but not obligatory, dances embracing the new religious vision, at least not at the beginning of the change.

It is implausible to erase centuries of culture in a few years, especially since dances were not the only way the pre-Hispanic world had to be in contact with its deities. Pilgrimages and other cultural phenomena were another elemental way of relating to them and in their structure, many include a moment reserved for the dances. In short, we declare ourselves against European thought, which claims as its own all cultural and religious expression using as a weighty basis the works "of evangelization carried out by the friars". I believe that this vision is a bias that establishes the existence of a dual-global world made up of "Indians and Spaniards", as a version of the "Moors and Christians" duality. This reductionist view ignores the Mesoamerican and African cultural groups that lived together at the same time and therefore influenced the Mexican

indigenous world; this approach ignores the long histories deposited and protected through mechanisms such as dances that, for many, may seem unusual.

We will often find works that indicate that the origin of the "Moors and Christians" dances can be found at the time of the "conquest" of America; such a statement confirms the existence of dances already in the 16th century, although the contradiction implied by the title: Moors and Christians is evident. We reiterate our opposition to the idea that they emerged as an evangelical exercise, not only because the name they bear is contradictory, but also because it is illogical to think that it was an exercise in conversion when the subjects are not biblical passages and therefore were not part of the catechesis. As far as the "Dances of the Conquest" or "Dances of the Conquest" are concerned, we have rescued the information that they were regional creations, although we do not consider that they emerged as versions or derivations of those supposedly brought by the friars.

It is clear that a profound approach from phenomenology is required to detect the changes, adhesions and forgetfulness that have been committed to a dance, in terms of the forms of execution, dress, structure, days of performance, etc., and to contrast the findings with regional and particular histories. We believe it is not appropriate to refer to them generically, even though they are known by the same name in several communities. I work on the idea by taking the case of the dances called "Danza de la Conquista" as an example, since, as I mentioned earlier, Sonia Marroquin Rojas contributes to the fact that they were performed for the first time in Guatemala; on the basis of this evidence, it is argued that they are not typical of the current communities of Veracruz, nor are they precedent. From these contributions by Sonia Marroquin we highlight the following: there is a text written in verse, and in Spanish, which describes the conquest of the indigenous K'iche' by the Spaniards. The argument begins with the arrival of the Spanish ambassadors to King K'iche' who, concerned about the invasion of their lands, ask for the support of the governor of Xelaju, Tecun Uman. Finally, the confrontation between the two armies takes place, culminating in a hand-to-hand struggle between the two chiefs: Pedro de Alvarado and Tecun Uman. In the battle the Quiche hero dies, and his successor declares the end of the war and accepts conversion to Christianity.

After reading the document, we can deduce that the structure obeys the Euro-centric vision because the drama concludes with the triumph of Christianity and, given that the result is always the same despite the centuries that have passed, analyzing and confronting them with historical and archaeological information, we note that both Iberian and Mesoamerican dances are the result of the process of mutual spoliation. The resource of repetition was used by those monks who organized the staging for the K'iche' to accept submission and pass it on to subsequent generations as something conclusive, executed and irrefutable.

We appealed to the dynamics of conscious adoption, as it meant a tactic to preserve the dances themselves. Therefore, that implicit origin in which they are currently found in Veracruz does not prevent them from remembering their ancient pre-Hispanic gods. It is not possible to completely identify the elements that belong to one past and the other (Guatemala and Veracruz before the Conquest), nor can those that have left in the future be listed to ensure their permanence. In the dances, those primary pre-Hispanic dances converge with the conquest dances used in the European Middle Ages; therefore, their structure does not correspond in its totality, nor with each other. The dynamics of adoption meant not only saving lives, but also developing a strategy that was effective enough to preserve the customs between the dances.

Given this reality, it is appropriate to ask how to interpret the dances whose name refers to indigenous identities and not to the mestizo world or the "Moors and Christians dances" or "of the conquest"? The proposal, without a response, consists of considering a reconceptualization that allows us to approach them, without the prejudice that a label implies, to unwind the contents and means that, they imply, looking for correspondences that detonate the systematic coherence between these new data and those we already know.

Let us remember that the pre-Hispanic past hardly left things to chance; its main characteristic was the harmony between the constituent elements of its cosmovision. To cite an example, it is worth remembering that Mexico has dances of Morismas, Sonajas, Tlacuilos, Concheros or Alchileos, names that refer to 100% indigenous identities and yet are considered as "Dances of Moros" or "of Santiagos"; labels that refer to the names of some characters that are represented in them and the fact that they subsist in a world outside the one that supposedly gestated them and thanks to the union with the local, precisely what is commonly known as mestizaje. This assigned label and temporality is not logical in any sense, since both the nomenclature and the structure itself have no relation to the historical moment attributed to them.

In fact, in some cases the true meaning of the dances has been lost; it was lost in the memory of time since its transmission was mainly oral; and due to the European invasion, the time count that was carried was interrupted and, therefore, its own becoming was fractioned. Therefore, we approach them by intuiting the conceptual meaning and the nature of the characters; that is, we do not make a literal reading of them, but a hermeneutic exercise that reveals their symbolic content. The "Dance of the Old", which is common in the centre of the country, specifically the one performed in Michoacán, serves as an example to represent a part of the vision of the older adults within the communities, the recognition of origin, wisdom, ancestral roots, at the

end of a cycle, memory and time. Clarity is essential to being an elder; there are elements that give us clues that it addresses certain values that better explain the permanence of the character-symbol beyond religious imposition and mestizaje. In the face of ancestral customs, these do not seem to be sufficient reasons to dance; and even less so in an era like the present, when the elderly are valued and respected and where stories of conquest have been left behind as if they were chapters in a book that in no way reflect the historical reality of each people and community. Although in today's everyday life they dance to celebrate the Catholic deities, let us not forget that they worshipped the original gods, especially in the case of the people of Michoacán, descendants of the Purepecha, the master sculptors who specialized in creating light gods from another deity: the corn plant.

Multiple factors explain the validity and conceptual importance of the dances, which go beyond the Catholic festivities that are adorned as a fragment of them. Behind the idea that these are their primary customs and that performing them involves a significant expenditure of time, money and effort that is incomprehensible to many, for example, Demetrio and Brisset, who in their study on dances conclude that it is a "commercial exchange" (Jauregui & Bonfiglioli, 1996). Instead, we consider it an offering, or a "mandate" made to thank for favours received, to ask for them, or for simple devotion, and the whole justifies the sacrifice. The dances have a great value beyond this "commercial" approach. The Vatican's vision does not perceive a reality that goes beyond this: the communities make an offering that translates into an act of joy for the gods - called saints or Catholic saints - and for themselves.

It is not a commercial transaction or a simple representation, it is an act that even goes beyond the liminal state. The dancers ensure that the dance becomes the god, animal or character they represent. This phenomenon occurs in other situations and religions, where the believer is possessed. One of the most popular cases is that of the "Niño Fidencio", a Catholic personality who possesses people, mainly women, colloquially called "matter". Through them, the saint performs miracles of healing, this practice and belief being accepted by the local Catholicism, despite being opposed to Christian theology.

Apart from the original, European and "mestizo" content of the dances, we must consider them as if they were a historical record of events. Before the "mestizaje" some dances reproduced passages from myths and stories, beautiful fables, legends, mythological stories, or simple aspects such as the birth of a "bird". They represented an important moment of daily life such as the sowing, the harvest or the rain; other dances staged the bad omens that the indigenous lords received in visions or dreams. In today's dances we can see that, by means of names, reference is made to those themes of the past. For example, in the "Danza de los Huehues", which belongs to the Totonaca group (which also extends to Puebla), the man and woman who went to worship their gods in the days when they lived in the mountains are also embodied, but the characters who marched from the hunt (to the mountains) are also embodied. Revised historical content, we can say that the name contains a concept and a vision of the world.

The name "Dance of Moors and Christians" defines at first sight directly its characters, situations and the temporality that contextualizes it. Jesús Jauregui and Carlo Bonfiglio (1996) describe the composition and development of this dance in one of its various forms: it represents the moment of contact and what happened with the main characters, namely Hernan Cortes, el Malinche and, of course, Moors. From the Historiography we can say that talking about Moors and Christians leaves room for interpretation because it refers to stereotypes and meanings. Furthermore, three types of representations are made: the Indians represent the Moors, and the Indians represent themselves, the Indians represent themselves and the Moors.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The validity of the dances lies precisely in the fact that they are not structures that can easily be reduced to some kind of "rule", but rather they are set up as thought made dance; dance as cultural action and action of reaffirmed identity. Dances cannot be seen either as rhetorical or popular pieces that arise in the face of the emergencies of the moment, but rather as the form of culture that a population considers to be its own and constitutive of its tradition. These phenomena have been silent pendulums of time that anchor communities with their roots and identities, cultural interpretations that link Mexicans with the different faces of the past, even with those mistakenly called "Spaniards", but - above all - root the Mexican with the African, the so-called third root which, in real terms, was the great protagonist of transculturation, as defined by Fernando Ortiz since cultural or racial crossbreeding involves the contribution of two parties, while syncretism and acculturation involve a friendly version of imposition and annihilation [9].

The dances are the product of a successful transculturation, as stated by Marshal Sahlins [10] thanks to the creative reorganisation that the communities made of their own systems. So, they should not and need not coincide with the significance that another group makes in re-examining their belief systems. With this postulate we understand the reason why the Veracruz dances we have analysed do not mean the same thing despite agreeing on several aspects. They do not even contain the same information since the historical content, of memory and identity, is not and has not been the same for all the social groups that dance, even though it was



verified that the representation refers to the same historical event (Conquest) since the context and mental or reworking process is not the same for all. In the words of Sahllins, "by acting from different perspectives, and with social powers to objectify from different perspectives, individuals reached different conclusions, elaborating societies, different consensuses" [11].

I have been very interested in the way traditional dances have managed to remain, since the time of the Conquest, a mode of hidden rebellion. From this approach I can propose that the dances have made themselves an armour of meaning, of symbols, keeping as if in a chest innumerable sensations and experiences that are modelled through the resources of music, the handling of space, of the body and the construction of referential elements such as costumes, support instruments, masks, and an endless number of resources that complement a complex discursive that continues to narrate. The narration, the story told by the dances, is a simulation, it is a putting of one story into another, a legitimate and forbidden story within the institutionalised and legal history.

The dance walks proudly carrying a secret in its entrails. That is why it is so important for the study that I propose here, but I hardly manage to place the points as a theodolite does in front of a future path. Each dance is full of elements that connote a treasure of knowledge yet to be discovered, they are graffiti, beads of a long necklace, or crumbs of bread that are placed on the dust on the paths to take back to the origin, a journey to the seed as Carpentier intuit; the secrets that the dances entail are like timeless signs to return home.

Historiography offers this refreshing vision from the enormous power of its transdisciplinary, the methodological loan of the sciences from which it emanates and the constant vocation of its updating. The historiographic approach is proposed as a beginning the amazement, the need to recover and systematize the past through the images, the graphics. Letters that are represented in the spatial dimension, as if they were living monuments, moving to the monotonous rhythm of the plain violins. Dance is a spatial art like architecture, it is constituted as heritage and, precisely, it resists being seen institutionally as "only heritage". This methodological approach vindicates the symbolism of dance as non-written graphics, the result of historiographic systematisation. In this effort I try to mark a route that begins.

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