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## Guatemalan traditional dances in Alter Globalization

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If the reader has paid close attention to the title of this text, he/she will be aware of a social phenomenon that is beginning to interest the curiosity of Latin American intellectuals with the relevance it deserves: alter globalization.

In order to understand them, we must analyze precisely what their counterpart means: the globalization of neoliberalism in all its forms of expression in the world and especially in Guatemala.

It has been demonstrated that globalization is an economic phenomenon that began in European countries and North America after the fall of the Cold War, as the products of capitalism began to be consumed throughout the world without nationalist and particular distinctions. The laws of the market, those of supply and demand and of use and exchange values prevail from that historical moment with world preponderance. The consumption of products coming from monopolistic factories and industries becomes with more insistence now in consumerisms that lead societies to strengthen the profits of the owners of the capitalist means of production all over the world by means of an intense technologization of the Mass Media. These communication techniques

have been the most effective means for the consummation of consumerism through educational, informative and commercial or mercantilist advertising messages.

Given the degree of massive consumerism in Western societies and Western dependence, the same has been effectively taken to non-Western societies as well, thus producing at the level of internationalism the well-known globalization of consumption of what the international and national capitalist market produces to the detriment of nationalisms and national states.

It is because of these effects that, for example, in pre-capitalist or capitalist-dependent countries, also known as third and fourth world countries, consumption becomes the norm of social life. “Almost” because there are still resistant strata, although in reduced numbers, such as certain ethnic groups in their most intimate and profound traditions carried out in the central cores of their ancestral rites and ceremonies.

However, even in those rituals that are more in line with tradition, there are few elements, whether in material, social relations or spirituality, that belong to the globalized world of international capitalist industry (for example, plastic waste containers, collective public transport, a mixture of prayers of different religious beliefs and languages, among others).

In this regard, I quote Dr. Mario Roberto Morales in an interview published in 2005 in the electronic magazine of discussion and social proposal **Albedrío**: ... *the problem with marginality is that it is excluded from work and consumption, but, ideologically, the invasion of the audiovisual media has managed to create in the marginalized a mentality that makes them fight for work just to be able to consume. The*

*marginalized have become a potentially consumerist mass. Look at what happens with piracy. Piracy is subversive because it makes the market tremble by taking away its profits, but it is not subversive in the revolutionary sense because it is consumerist, the triumph of the market has been that: to eliminate from the ideological horizon an alternative society to that of capital. And it has succeeded in doing so in all social strata. That is why there are televisions everywhere and now, cell phones. Car washers have them, maids have them, everyone has cell phones, and it has been this globalized mass consumption (often of first world waste) that have given people the illusion that they can be part of a modern world by consuming. Therefore, those who aspire to work, aspire to do so in order to consume, and those who join organized crime or gangs, also do so in order to be able to consume. There is no approach to change the world, to change human beings, and this is the great triumph of the market. The collapse of socialism propelled this in the 1990s. This is the state of the world today. I believe that the only institution that is looking for alternatives is the Porto Alegre World Forum and those who are called alter-globalizers, that is to say, alter-globalization, which means, globalizing ourselves under other parameters than neo-liberal ones, and in that space there is theorization, in that space there are people who are making proposals. But naturally, all the current struggles are inside the system, not outside it, because there is no outside. That is the current conflict in the world, and the consequent lack of awareness of the workers, because on the one hand you have corrupt syndicates or with a truly irritating rhetoric of thirty years ago. And on the other hand, you have workers who are collaborators of capital itself and of the bosses, because ideologically they have been co-opted by the market for consumerism. People's*

*ambition is to dress fashionably, to have a cell phone, to have a car, to have everything. And this is also a feature of marginality, of those who live in poverty and misery. This is the ideal of all social classes, and globalization has succeeded in generalizing certain consumption items: household appliances, televisions, and so on. The message arrives, the message of the market reaches the most remote places; cable television is in the indigenous communities, for example. That is the current state of affairs. And the left in general is paralyzed or co-opted. Here the left stopped its activity when the Soviet Union collapsed; after the collapse of the socialist world the left stopped thinking and acting or sold itself out. So, the only dynamic space I see is that of alter-globalization, that of the Porto Alegre World Forum and perhaps what is being done in some academic niches. But these are individuals in Europe, in the United States, in Latin America, who are thinking, without being part of an organized movement, about how to get out of this. And in this task, civil society is part of the problem, not part of the solution, as we said before.*

In the case of Guatemalan traditional dances and their brotherhoods, all of the above is now the cause of conducts and behaviors that work in favor of the custom and the practice of the mythological beliefs that ideologically sustain these traditional practices, but which are now imbued with new elements induced by the advertising formulas of market consumption. In this way, masks are now being made of fiberglass or vinyl, perhaps definitively abandoning the white wood or other woods from which they were made, and therefore the paints to be used suffer from the same circumstance. The designs of the costumes remain the same although some modern fabrics are now added. "Caïtes" or closed shoes are no longer worn, but more comfortable tennis shoes of modern

commercial brands are being worn. Hats are still the same, although now with more feathers and ornaments. With the passage of time the musical sounds and the literary texts that accompany them have changed a little, because the musicians have been disappearing due to different circumstances, like from old age, or the earthquake of 1976, the thirty-year internal war and its massacres, the disinterest of the youth for these rhythms and melodies, the sects of different denominations, the tourism that buys their instruments, among other aspects. And the overwhelming influence of the mass media with its foreign melodies and rhythms of public, massive and youthful taste. By such virtue, the economic and cultural globalization has made a dent in the traditional taste of yesteryear.

However, all is not yet lost. In Guatemala there are people and institutions that consciously persist in defending and promoting all those cultural expressions of Guatemalans that represent identity with the historical past and with the ancestors, in protection of all those who in their traditional practices maintain in their customs and beliefs these identity authenticities that give foundations of personality and nationalism in the most affected societies such as those of the third and fourth world, as it has been said.

In this sense for our country, people are recognized as all those who have graduated from universities with this awareness and work individually in their intellectual work for these objectives. Among them we find anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, artists, writers, journalists, culturologists, museologists and restorers, university professors, specialized researchers, among others, who every day or frequently make their analyses and opinions known through the written press, radio, television and the publication of books.

There are several institutions working in this area, such as the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Government of Guatemala and its dependencies. Universities such as the Universidad de San Carlos and its specific dependencies, the Universidad Rafael Landívar and the Universidad Francisco Marroquín. Autonomous institutions such as Aporte para la Descentralización Cultural, ADESCA for its acronym in Spanish. Private institutions such as the Foundations, among them G&T Continental, the Popol Vuh Museum, the Ixchel Museum of Indigenous Costume and other independent institutions such as the Houses of Culture of different municipalities in the country. In other words, the will, the good intentions and the efforts exist, atomized as always, but they are there.

Now, all this effort exerts without deliberately intending it, an alternative action to the globalization of culture: to the **alter globalization**. When this effort becomes deliberate and authentic is when, for example, all or part of it is financed and traditional customs with their authentic expressions of tradition are allowed to participate in popular celebrations in which globalizing factors are present. Thus we have the crystallized efforts of the Society of Amigos de la Cultura Laura Mazariegos García, residents of Amatitlán who, conscious in the rescue and promotion of the cultural elements of the Guatemalan nation and with the support of the Municipality of Amatitlán, managed to finance in 2007 the transportation and maintenance of several traditional dance groups from different communities of the interior of the country, with the objective of participating in the inaugural parade of its famous Feria de La Cruz that is celebrated on the third of May of each year. In this parade, where the *amatitlanecos* show off different cultural expressions of their society, until the last few years only expressions

typical of a highly capitalized and globalized society such as alienating bourgeois expressions such as floats with queens for everything, floats with commercial messages of industrialized products with female models, musical bands of both types, musical bands of both martial and orchestral types, student bands with teenage cheerleaders included, equestrian groups, electronic transmission units of commercial messages with strident music to the current fashions, all financed by commercial houses of wide national and international prestige subsidized to the Municipality in these matters and in few cases exalting the cultural values of the *amatitlaneca* traditional social history such as the Mengalas as sellers of their famous collation sweets, the famous customs of La Pepezca and the already expired era of the Railroad that crossed its lake in previous decades in the direction of the south coast. The Amigos de la Cultura made an effort in 2007 to lessen the force of commercial promotion of all kinds and include traditional dance and dance groups such as:

- 1) The traditional dance of Moors and Christians *Celin Rogel*, from the village of Las Trojes, in the same municipality of Amatitlán, Department of Guatemala.
- 2) The traditional dance of *La Legión or De Los 24 diablos* from the Municipality of Ciudad Vieja, Department of Sacatepéquez.
- 3) The traditional dance of *Toritos* from the village of Lo de Bran, Municipality of Mixco, Department of Guatemala.
- 4) The traditional dance of *Toritos* from the Municipality of Sumpango, Department of Sacatepéquez.
- 5) *The Dance of Giants* of the Municipality of Sumpango, Department of Sacatepéquez.

6) *The Dance of Giants* of the Municipality of San Juan Comalapa, Department of Chimaltenango.

7) Dance *La Punta* of the Garifuna group from the Municipality of Livingston, Department of Izabal.

8) The traditional dance of *Venados* from the Municipality of El Estor, Department of Izabal.

The groups of dancers arrived in full traditional attire and made a splurge of music and processional dance throughout the parade, constituting the attractions that the amatitlanecos knew and recognized with astonishment and with enthusiasm as authentic expressions of Guatemalan nationality.

They were there executing, in the midst of the commercial and civic globalization of the famous inaugural parade, an alternation in the face of this globalization: The **alter globalization**. At the end of the parade all the groups were offered lunch and at two o'clock in the afternoon several of them began to perform their dances in spaces adjacent to the beach of Lake Amatitlán for the delight and enjoyment of a large audience that came to witness them.

These are the “alter-globalizing” spaces that are beginning to constitute a response of resistance to the alienating onslaught of globalization. It is the way that all of us united, intellectuals, culture lovers and related institutions can do to once again shape a new country, more humane, less consumerist and identified with the authenticity of the country's history in terms of its authentic past of full Guatemalan identity and ownership.