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A Morenada Dance Costume: An Example of the Interconnection of the Americas, Spain and Africa

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This paper will explore the interconnection of the Americas, Spain and Africa as exemplified by a 19th century festival costume in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, worn for the Moreno or Morenada, a dance developed after Spain's conquest and colonization of the Inca Empire in the 16th century. Two other costumes were also examined, one in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and the other in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore in La Paz, Bolivia.

Today, the Moreno or Morenada is one of the most popular dances performed in Bolivia during fiestas of the Andean Catholic ritual and festival calendar.¹ In Spanish, the term *moreno* signifies "dark" and has been adopted into the Aymara language where it is pronounced "murinu."² Morenada, the Hispanicized version of *moreno*, is used by bilingual Aymaras and Bolivians today.³ For the purpose of this paper, I will use the terms *moreno* and *morenada* interchangeably.

The popular belief among Bolivians is that the Morenada dance depicts African slaves who, during the colonial period, were forced to work in the silver mines of Potosí or to crush grapes in the vineyards of the Yungas, or Bolivian lowlands. This view has been supported by various scholars who cite as evidence the black masks, the sound of the *matracas* or noisemakers that they say imitate the rattling of chains that bound the slaves' legs; and the wine barrel-shaped skirts of the dancers.⁴ However, this paper will disprove this view and show that the dance references black slaves in a more subtle way.⁵ Also this paper will show that the style of the earlier costumes relates more closely to the original meaning of the dance, certain aspects of which have carried over to the costumes of today, such as the elaborate embroidery and wide skirt.

Brief History of Spanish Colonization

The Spanish colonization of Charcas, the region which would become Bolivia, started shortly after the 1532 arrival of Francisco Pizarro and the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire. The Inca had referred to the southern province of their territory as Collasuyu, and its inhabitants provided

¹ María Luisa Soux, "El culto al apóstol Santiago en Guaqui, las danzas de moros y cristianos y el origen de la Morenada. Una Hipótesis de trabajo," *Estudios Bolivianos de Historia y Literatura*, No. 10 (2002), 60.

² David Mendoza Salazar, "Los Morenos: El Rostro de la Identidad Aymara," *Boliviana 100% Paceña: La Morenada*, ed. Simón Cuba and Hugo Flores (La Paz, Bolivia: Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 2007), 62; and Juan de Dios Yapita, personal communication, October 2, 2016.

³ Mendoza Salazar, "Los Morenos," 62 and Yapita personal communication.

⁴ Such as Beltran Heredia (1956), Fortún (1976, 1995), Paredes de Salazar (1976), and Mancilla (1995). Scholars who claim that the Morenada has nothing to do with black slaves include Mendoza (2007) and Soux (2002).

⁵ The idea for this research grew out of a discussion with Radiah Harper, the former Director of Education at the Brooklyn Museum, who questioned the appropriateness of displaying the 19th century costume because the dances today are so racist toward the Afro-Bolivian population, and black people in general.

the Inca state with precious metals and salt.⁶ Today, the two main indigenous groups of the altiplano, or high plains, are the Quechua (descendants of the Inca) and the Aymara. The first Spanish settlement was established in 1535 in Paria, the Inca capital of Charcas.⁷ Then in 1545, silver mines were discovered in Potosí, known as the Cerro Rico or Rich Mountain, which would become the center of Spanish-controlled mining operations until Bolivia's independence from Spain in 1825.⁸ In order to control the mines, the Spanish Crown established the Audencia of Charcas in 1559 as part of the Viceroyalty of Peru, and imposed the *encomienda* system as a means to both Christianize and exploit the indigenous population by forcing them to work in the mines.⁹ Some African slaves were brought to the Charcas with the first Spanish conquistadors, but this will be discussed later.

Morenada Dance Costumes

The Brooklyn Museum costume was collected in Peru in 1941 by Brooklyn Museum curator Herbert Spinden (1879-1967) during a South American expedition, but nothing else is known regarding the circumstances of the acquisition. The three-piece outfit consists of a jacket, skirt and breeches, which are heavily embroidered with gold- and silver-colored metallic threads, which are wrapped around cardboard forms and sewn onto various cotton fabrics.



Morenada Dance Costume, Brooklyn Museum, 41.1275.274a,b,d. Jacket: 32 x 3 x 27 1/2 in. (81.3 x 7.6 x 69.9 cm); Skirt: 22 1/16 x 22 1/16 in. (56 x 56 cm); Breeches: 24 5/8 x 13 3/4 in. (62.5 x 35 cm). Photos: Brooklyn Museum

⁶ José Barreiro, "Introduction: Strong in Our Hearts: The Legacy of the Inka Road," in *The Great Inka Road*, ed. Ramiro Matos Mendieta and José Barreiro (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian and Smithsonian Books, 2015), 8.

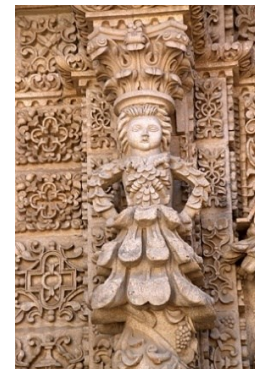
⁷ In 1545, Spanish conquistador Diego de Almagro sent Juan de Saavedra, accompanied by 150 Spaniards and several hundred Indians, to Paria, the Inca capital of the Charcas. See Martti Pärssinen, Risto Kesseli and Juan Faldín. "Paria, The Southern Inka Capital Rediscovered," *Chungara: Revista de Antropología Chilena* 42, no.1 (2010): 236. Paria was located near a silver mine, which the newcomers began mining. See June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 22.

⁸ Tom Cummins, "Silver threads and Golden Needles: The Inca, the Spanish, and the Sacred world of Humanity," in *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830*, ed. Elena Phipps, Johanna Hecht, and Cristina Esteras Martín (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 3; and Elena Phipps, "Woven Silver and Gold: Metallic Yarns in Colonial Andean Textiles," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 29, no. 3 (2010): 9.

⁹ The *encomienda* system enabled Spanish colonists "to draw on native labor in exchange for bringing native souls into the arms of the Catholic church," Johanna Hecht, "The Past is Present: Transformation and Persistence of Imported Ornament in Viceregal Peru," in *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830*, ed. Elena Phipps, Johanna Hecht, and Cristina Esteras Martín (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 44.

The jacket is the most elaborate in its construction and materials.¹⁰ It has a fitted bodice, flared peplum and double sleeves with orange velvet gussets. There are six hooks and loops at the front for fastening. The foundation fabric is primarily red velvet with orange and green velvet on the sleeves and blue velvet on the cuffs. The lining is of pink cotton, and there is an interlining of muslin. Almost the entire garment is covered with gold- and silver-colored metallic thread embroidery that is accentuated with metal sequins. Designs include horizontal and vertical bands of fish spines (*espina de pescado*), checkerboard motifs and undulating bands with raised rosettes. The checkerboard, or Andean square design, alternates gold and silver. Fringes of twisted silver metallic thread ending in loops adorn the hem of the jacket and the cuffs of the outer sleeves.

A design element on Brooklyn's jacket that does not occur on the other two is the depiction of two Indians wearing feathered headdresses and skirts. These embroidered Indians resemble the jungle warriors, or Antis, painted on Colonial Inca keros (cups), but they also strongly resemble the carved caryatid figures on the spiral columns of the Church of San Lorenzo de Carangas in Potosí, Bolivia.¹¹ This Baroque-style church is characteristic of what Teresa Gisbert refers to as the mestizo style in which European and Andean decorative imagery are combined.¹² Gisbert identifies the figures as Sirens, symbols of evil in the Christian tradition because they lured sailors to their death with song,¹³ but images of goodness for the Aymara. In an Aymara story, the fish women residing in Lake Titicaca fight and defeat Tunupa, the god of fire and volcanoes,



(left to right) Detail Morenada Jacket, Brooklyn Museum, 41.1275.241a; detail of Colonial Inca kero cup showing jungle warriors or Antis, Brooklyn Museum, 42.149; and detail of Church of San Lorenzo de Carangas, Potosí, Bolivia. Photo: <http://bolivia.for91days.com/>.

¹⁰ Kathy Francis Conservation Report, December 6, 2015. Francis' report is only for the jacket with fiber analysis done with microscopy. The fibers of the skirt and breeches still require analysis.

¹¹ I am grateful to Simón Orellana, an archivist at the National Archives of La Paz, for pointing this out. The church was initially built in the 16th century but the main structure and ornate entrance was not completed until the 18th.

¹² The caryatid figures have double-headed Hapsburg eagles carved on their chests. Teresa Gisbert, "Potosí: Urbanism, Architecture, and the Sacred Image of the Environment," in *Potosí: Colonial Treasures and the Bolivian City of Silver*, ed. Pedro Querejazu and Elizabeth Ferrer (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 35; and Teresa Gisbert and José de Mesa, "El Estilo Mestizo y la Arquitectura Simbólica," in *Historia del Arte en Bolivia, Período Virreinal* (La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Gisbert y Cia S.A. and Fundación Simón I. Patiño, 2012), 59-60.

¹³ Sirens are first mentioned in Greek mythology (Homer), and the Catholic Church appropriated them as symbols of evil, which is why they appear on churches as a warning, see Gisbert and Mesa, "El Estilo Mestizo," 77.

and peace is restored.¹⁴ The figures on the jacket may represent Sirens connecting the costume not only to music but also to an Aymara story about the battle between good and evil.

The embroidered designs on the back of the jacket include a vase containing a large flower framed by a horseshoe form of bands of checkerboard squares, rosettes, and fish spines. The skirt, with a drawstring waist, repeats the same embroidered motifs, however the foundation fabric is muslin and only areas that would be visible are embroidered. Velvet is also resourcefully used with a blue band at the top and a green band in the middle. The breeches are of blue velvet and muslin, with the embroidered velvet located where it would be visible. Its decoration in gold-colored metallic thread is a circular floral motif surrounding a padded red velvet disk.

In keeping with the Andean tradition of economy of materials, the metallic threads used on all three garments are wrapped just beyond the edge of the cardboard and then sewn down with cotton thread in groups of four, before they are looped back over to cover more cardboard.¹⁵ The heavy metallic embroidery on all three garments is supported with an interlining of muslin.

The costume at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) was collected by explorer and writer A. Hyatt Verrill (1871-1954) in Bolivia sometime before 1929, the year he delivered it to the museum for purchase consideration.¹⁶ It consists of a jacket and skirt that are embroidered with gold- and silver-colored metallic threads and multi-colored cotton threads wrapped around cardboard forms.¹⁷



Morenada Dance Costume, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 41.0/5761a,b.
Jacket: 37 13/16 × 26 in. (96 × 66 cm), Skirt: 25 9/16 × 19 11/16 in. (65 × 50 cm). Photos: Nancy Rosoff

¹⁴ Gisbert and Mesa, "El Estilo Mestizo," 77. Johanna Hecht says that the Siren motif may have also served a heraldic function. She adds that there are variants such as when the fish tails have been converted to vegetation, known in Spanish as *hombre* or *mujer follaje* (foliate man or woman) or when a Siren's transition from human being to fish is camouflaged by a leafy skirt, see Johanna Hecht, "The Past is Present," 52.

¹⁵ Special thanks to Julia McHugh for this observation.

¹⁶ Note from A. Hyatt Verrill to Dr. Clark Wissler, November 23, 1929; letter from Verrill to Whistler, February 13, 1930; and letter from Whistler to Verrill, March 3, 1930. In his handwritten note, Verrill writes, "Here is the Bolivian (Chuta Indian) dance dress I mentioned. I think that it is worth about \$20 if you want it," Anthropology Department Archives, American Museum of Natural History.

¹⁷ Special thanks to Judith Levinson, the head of AMNH's Anthropology Department Conservation lab for testing the organic fibers and confirming that they are cotton.

The jacket has a fitted bodice, flared peplum and double sleeves with green velvet gussets. The foundation fabric is muslin, and is lined with a printed commercial cotton cloth. Four metal hooks and loops are used for fastening. The embroidered designs include rosettes, diamonds, fish spines and checkerboards. On each sleeve there is a vertical band of rectangles in red, yellow and green, representing the colors of the Bolivian flag. The back of the jacket is decorated with a large rosette embellished with appliqué flowers. Below it, are rows of checkerboard squares, among which three large red and green squares stand out. Each design area is outlined by a row of sequins. The fringes on the sleeves and hem are made of twisted silver threads that end in loops.

The jacket has non-matching shoulder pads made of repurposed silk material¹⁸ sewn onto the garment with beige thread. The other jackets do not have shoulder pads suggesting that this may be a regional style, or perhaps the creation of a particular costume maker inspired by military uniform epaulettes.

The top of the drawstring skirt is made of a commercial flannel-like fabric that is maroon with beige and black vertical stripes. The embroidered designs are the same as those on the jacket including representations of the Bolivian flag, and there are twisted metallic thread fringes along the bottom of each embroidered panel.

It is possible to see how the garment is constructed and embroidered because one side of the skirt is not sewn together. It is composed of two horizontal, embroidered panels that are attached with a strip of the same maroon fabric used at the top. The interior shows elaborate hand stitching of each thread-wrapped cardboard form sewn onto the foundation fabric.

The provenance of the costume in the Ethnographic Museum in La Paz (MUSEF) is unknown, including when it entered the collection. It consists of a jacket and skirt, both embroidered with gold- and silver-colored metallic threads and multi-colored organic threads wrapped around cardboard forms, accentuated with sequins and large glass beads.



*Morenada Dance Costume, Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (MUSEF), La Paz, Bolivia (11463 and 25773).
Jacket: 25 9/16 × 35 13/16 in. (65 × 91 cm), Skirt: 21 1/4 × 26 3/4 in. (54 × 68 cm). Photos: Nancy Rosoff*

The jacket is cut and decorated in the same way as the other two. Distinctive features include spiral forms resembling snails; the extensive use of organic colored threads; outer sleeves with scalloped hems; and a blue velvet peacock on the back decorated with silver embroidery and two half-circles in red, yellow and green, referencing the Bolivian flag. In addition, there are five

¹⁸ This fabric was visually identified by the author as silk due to its shattered condition.

large red, green and blue glass beads in the shape of long arrow points. The drawstring skirt of blue and red velvet has the same design elements.

The three costumes are similar in style and construction, utilizing the same embroidery technique of metallic and organic threads wrapped around cardboard forms. The extensive use of colored threads on the AMNH and MUSEF costumes suggests that they are of later date than Brooklyn's, especially with their reference to the Bolivian flag. Based upon 19th century sources and photographs, Brooklyn's costume probably dates from the latter half of the 19th century, while the other two likely date from the first half of the 20th.

Spanish Court Fashion

The Morenada costumes are very similar in style to 16th and 17th century Spanish men's court attire depicted in paintings and illustrated by surviving costumes. For example, in a portrait of the Spanish king Philip II by Anthonis Mor, the king wears a black velvet doublet with short sleeves on top of a white satin shirt. Both garments are elaborately embroidered with gold and silver thread. The tight-fitting doublet of rich velvet, first worn with hose and later with breeches gathered at the knee, became the height of fashion in 16th century Spain, communicating power and status by its opulence. This fashion caught on and spread throughout the royal courts of Western European due to Spain's status as a leading world economic power.¹⁹ Amalia Descalzo sums up the significance of court attire: "Dress thus became a perfect ally of power and the most powerful visual vehicle for transmitting the ideal of the monarchy."²⁰



(left to right) Anthonis Mor, *Philip II*, ca. 1550, oil on panel, Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao, Spain © Bilboko Arte Ederren Museoa-Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao; Alonso Sánchez Coello, *Prince Carlos*, ca. 1558, oil on canvas, Museo de Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Spain; and Spanish Court Outfit of Nils Nilsson Brahe, 1665, Göran Schmidt, Skokloster Castle (CC BY-SA).

In the portrait of *Prince Carlos* by Alonso Sánchez Coello, the young prince is depicted wearing an ermine-lined cloak, doublet and slashed trunk-hose of embroidered red velvet.²¹ The short, pointed peplum attached to the bottom of the doublet will get longer and straighter in the 17th

¹⁹ Ruth de la Puerta, "Sumptuary Legislation and Restrictions on Luxury in Dress," in *Spanish Fashion at the Courts of Early Modern Europe*, vol. 1, ed. José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014), 209.

²⁰ Amalia Descalzo, "Spanish Male Costume in the Hapsburg Period" in *Spanish Fashion at the Courts of Early Modern Europe*, vol. 1, ed. José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014), 17.

²¹ de la Puerta, "Sumptuary Legislation," 216-217.

century. The shape of the rounded and bulky trunk-hose may have been an inspiration for the Morenada dance skirts.

The mid-17th century costume, which belonged to the Swedish nobleman Nils Nilsson Brahe (1633-1699), was made in Spain and worn by him for his audience with the Spanish King Philip IV. When Brahe arrived in Madrid, he had the outfit made for him in accordance with Spanish etiquette.²² Notice the longer peplum and the knee-length breeches.

But what were nobles in the Viceroyalty of Peru wearing in the 17th and 18th century that may have inspired festival dance costumes? In the late 17th century Cusco School painting of the double marriage of Don Martín García de Loyola to Doña Beatriz Ñusta and of Don Juan de Borja to Lorenza Ñusta de Loyola, the men, members of the Creole²³ elite, are wearing doublets and breeches of sumptuous fabrics embroidered with gold thread. The outer sleeves of their doublets are slit so that the interior sleeves of grey fabric, possibly silk or velvet are visible. These luxurious, elegant garments in the Spanish style, were undoubtedly the inspiration for the Morenada dance costumes.



Cusco School, *The Marriage of Don Martín García de Loyola to Doña Beatriz Ñusta and of Don Juan de Borja to Lorenza Ñusta de Loyola*, late 17th century. Oil on canvas, 107 1/2 × 179 1/8 in. (273 × 455 cm). Church of the Society of Jesus, Cusco, Peru.

Metallic Threads

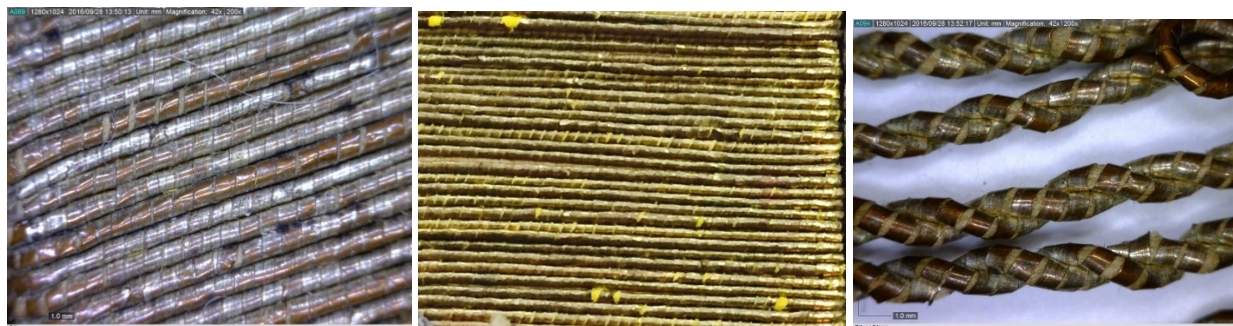
The metallic threads used in all three costumes consist of metal strips wound around organic core fibers, but only the metal threads of Brooklyn's costume were analyzed utilizing optical microscopy and x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy.²⁴ According to the analyses conducted by Lisa Bruno, Chief Conservator, the metal threads on all three garments are made of copper wire that has been flattened and wrapped around a cotton fiber core, with yellow fiber used for gold-colored threads and white fiber used for silver ones. The silver-colored threads show evidence of plating but much of the silver coating has worn away. The gold-colored threads however are

²² Lena Rangström, "Swedish Lions of Fashion in Spanish Costume," in *Spanish Fashion at the Courts of Early Modern Europe*, vol. 2, ed. José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014), 190.

²³ Creoles are American-born persons of Spanish descent.

²⁴ Special thanks to Lisa Bruno, Carol Lee Shen Chief Conservator at the Brooklyn Museum for doing the technical analysis on the costume.

100% copper, and Bruno thinks that the bright yellow cotton core is what makes them look golden.



(left to right) Photomicrograph of silver thread embroidery on the jacket showing copper thread where silver plating has worn off (notice the white cotton core), Photo: Lisa Bruno; iPhone photograph of gold-colored copper thread embroidery on the skirt showing the yellow cotton core, Photo: Nancy Rosoff; and photomicrograph of jacket fringe, Photo: Lisa Bruno.

The use of metallic threads in South America was introduced by the Spanish in the 16th century.²⁵ Spanish fondness for gold and silver embroidery is illustrated by the elite garments worn by nobles. Elena Phipps writes, “Spain particularly favored the use of silver and gilt-silver... [in]... luxury textiles, such as the silks, velvets, and brocades used for royal garments and to clothe the officiates of the Catholic church.”²⁶ The Spanish colonists continued this tradition in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Color matching of metal and fiber was also practiced in which white fiber cores were used with silver thread, and yellow fiber cores were used with gold.²⁷ Maya Stanfield-Mazzi located documentary evidence of gold and silver thread being made in Cusco in 1686 in which a goldsmith named Blas de Aguirre was contracted to “pull gold and silver into the state that it can be woven in silk or on thread.”²⁸ According to this contract, Aguirre was performing the first stage of metal thread production, and Stanfield-Mazzi believes that the finished threads were likely produced in Cusco as well.²⁹

Regarding the use of copper for the production of metal threads, Anna Karatzani writes that this European tradition dates back to the 15th and 16th century, and that the copper threads “were cast, drawn and rolled in the same manner as silver and gilt silver filaments and are typically spun around cotton core threads.”³⁰ What is particularly relevant is that copper threads were cheaper to produce because they required less precious metal. Karatzani continues, “During the earliest period of their introduction gilt or silvered copper threads were only used for the decoration of vestments by less wealthy people who could not afford the cost of precious metal threads. Some countries had introduced laws against the use of copper based threads, allowing their use only for

²⁵ Vanessa Muros, et al., “Characterization of 17th-19th Century Metal Threads from the Colonial Andes,” *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 46, no. 3 (2007): 230; and Elena Phipps, “Woven Silver and Gold: Metallic Yarns in Colonial Andean Textiles,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 29, no. 3 (2010): 4.

²⁶ Phipps, “Woven Silver,” 10.

²⁷ Muros, et al., “Characterization,” 238.

²⁸ Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, “Weaving and Tailoring the Andean Church: Textile Ornaments and their Makers in Colonial Peru,” *The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History* 72 (2015): 91.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Anna Karatzani, “Metal Threads: The Historical Development,” in *Traditional Textile Craft – an Intangible Heritage?*, ed. Camilla Ebert, et al. (Copenhagen: Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen, 2016), 182.

the production of theatrical costumes and second quality objects.”³¹ Karatzani does not identify the countries, but if Spain was one of them, this may explain why a tradition developed in the colonial Andes of embroidering dance costumes with gilded and plated copper thread. In addition, the Morenada costumes were commissioned by indigenous and mestizo people who likely could not afford pure gold and silver.

History of the Morenada Dance

The origin of the Morenada dance is highly contested among Bolivian scholars, and I am not going to review the various theories here.³² Rather, this study is concerned with identifying who the Moreno character represents, and if it is associated with black slaves. Also, how does the distinctive style of the costume relate to this history?

The oldest known account of a Moreno dance was recorded by the French doctor H.A. Weddell when he visited Bolivia in 1851 and observed the dances during the fiesta of Nuestra Señora de la Paz, in the city of La Paz.³³ Weddell writes:

“The artisan tailors who almost all belong to the mestizo or cholo class, dress with an aristocratic elegance... and they stroll all day with black masks. Under this form, they call themselves morenos. There are some who carry enormous rattles, others rifles and guns, but the majority do not have weapons but common musical instruments. I saw once – it was the day of the assumption – a troupe of these beautiful tailors on the patio of the Palace, where they serenaded the President.”³⁴



*Morenada Dance Troupe, Caiza, Dept. of Potosí, Bolivia, 1896 or 1906. Photo taken by J.F. Fowler.
PH1/178 Fowler, J.F. Courtesy AMNH, Division of Anthropology Archives. Notice the shoulder pads on some of the costumes.*

³¹ Karatzani, “Metal Threads,” 183. Use Ibid.?

³² Some scholars claim an Aymara/lake region origin (Maidana 2004; Mendoza 2007); a mestizo/colonial origin (Soux 2002); and an urban origin in La Paz (Cuba 2007) or in Oruru (Valeriano Thola 2004).

³³ Hugues Albernon Weddell, *Voyage dans le Nord de la Bolivie*, Paris: Chez Bertrand, 1853.

³⁴ Quoted in Eveline Sigl, *No Se Baile Así No Más... Danzas autóctonas y folklóricas de Bolivia*, Tomo II. (La Paz, Bolivia, 2012), 209, translation Nancy Rosoff.

In this context, the dancers are described as mestizos, people of indigenous and Spanish descent, who belong to an association of tailors and were dressed in elegant costumes and black masks. They also were of elevated status to be permitted on the patio of the presidential palace and sing to the president.

But what was the tone of these dances when they were performed in the 19th century? An 1875 article in the newspaper *La Reforma* describes the morenos as comical, wearing wigs, sequins, two-colored stockings, three-cornered hats, and jackets and frock coats of the Fernando VII period.³⁵ Adolph Bandelier, writing about his travels in Bolivia in 1894 and 1895, refers to them as clowns who appear at every festival. He describes them as young mestizo men who frequently were paid for their performances and wear expensive costumes in an 18th century style with “bright-colored frocks of velvet or silk, richly embroidered with gold and silver, vests to fit, knee-breeches, hats, and low shoes and masks, hideous rather than comical.”³⁶



*Morenada Dance Troupe, location and date unknown but probably ca. 1900.
Photographer unknown. Archivo de La Paz, Colección Fiesta Popular Paceña.*

These two accounts, highlighting the comical nature of the Morenada dance, challenge the popular view that the dances represent the misery of chained African slaves who were forced to work in the mines. The history of slavery in Bolivia also supports this argument.

African slaves accompanied the first Spaniards who founded the city of La Paz in 1552, and their numbers greatly increased based upon the needs of the Spanish crown. For example, throughout the 17th century, slaves were brought to colonial cities such as La Paz and Potosí and then transferred to haciendas, Catholic parishes, or Spanish homes, where they worked as laborers and domestic servants.³⁷ The slaves never worked inside the mines because their labor was not needed or permitted since the Spanish crown was able to exploit indigenous labor by force

³⁵ Sigl, *No Se Baile*, 210. Use Ibid.?

³⁶ Adolf F. Bandelier, *The Islands of Titicaca and Koati* (New York: The Hispanic Society of America, 1910), 116.

³⁷ Simón Cuba, “La Ciudad de Nuestra Señora de La Paz de Ayacucho (Chuquiapu Marka). Origen de la Danza de los Morenos Siglo XIX,” in *Boliviana 100% Paceña: La Morenada*, ed. Simón Cuba and Hugo Flores (La Paz, Bolivia: Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 2007), 16; and Mendoza Salazar, “Los Morenos,” 2.

through the *mit'a* system.³⁸ However, black slaves were used to tend the furnaces of the National Mint in the Casa de Moneda in Potosí.³⁹

According to David Mendoza, the social relations between black slaves and the Aymara was one of conflict. Both populations were subjected to control and domination by the Spanish crown and they suffered the consequences of colonial racism due to the dark color of their skin.⁴⁰ When black slaves started working on haciendas in the yungas at the beginning of the 19th century, they were cultivating coca not grapes. In fact, grape cultivation and wine production took place further north in the valleys of lower Peru so the wide dance skirts had nothing to do with wine and wine barrels.⁴¹ In any event, some slaves were ultimately given positions of authority over indigenous laborers who were forced to work for hacienda owners as part of the colonial *repartamiento* system that required indigenous people to hire themselves out weekly for little or no pay.⁴² This situation created even more tension between the two ethnic groups, further acerbated by the Spanish crown's prohibitions against blacks living with Indians.⁴³

It is possible that the Morenada dance emerged as a mockery of the black slaves who received preferential treatment from Spaniards and Creoles during the colonial period. Indigenous people may have perceived the power and status of blacks as equivalent to that of their owners, the Spanish colonizers and oppressors. As property, black slaves when outside the home were dressed finely. For example, during religious fiestas indigenous people would have witnessed parades of elegantly dressed household slaves such as the ones described by Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela during the fiesta of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in Potosí in 1622:

“...12 black men entered astride good mules, all dressed in green and red satin, the covers for the mules or blankets were made of mother-of-pearl cloth, the kettledrums covered with blue brocade and with many strings of pearls at the borders.”⁴⁴

This tradition also continued into the early 19th century for the governor of Potosí, Francisco de Paula Sanz, had a group of “ten young black slaves dressed with meticulous etiquette with a white center [shirt?], short pants, stockings with buckles and a large dress coat the color of sand” that he used for ceremonial occasions.⁴⁵

What does this colonial history have to do with the Morenada dances performed in the 19th century? As Eveline Sigl points out, satire was not restricted to blacks but also included the

³⁸ Indigenous people provided the forced labor, under the *mit'a* system, an Andean form of labor recruitment based upon traditional community obligations, which the Spanish usurped for their own needs, see Cummins, “Silver Threads,” 4.

³⁹ Teresa Gisbert, “Masks and Symbols,” in *Masks of the Bolivian Andes*, ed. Peter McFarren (La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Quipus, 1993), 16.

⁴⁰ Mendoza Salazar, “Los Morenos,” 52.

⁴¹ Cuba, “La Ciudad,” 16.

⁴² The *repartamiento* system replaced the *encomienda* system that ended in the late-17th century so more colonists could have access to Indian labor and the Crown could regulate it more directly. The system required a certain number of Indians from each community to hire themselves out weekly for little or no pay to Spanish employers.

⁴³ Cuba, “La Ciudad,” 16-17; and Mendoza Salazar, “Los Morenos,” 52.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Sigl, *No Se Baile*, 213, translation Nancy Rosoff.

⁴⁵ Alberto Crespo R., *Esclavos Negros en Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Librería Editorial Juventud, 1995), 25-26, translation Nancy Rosoff.

whites in power.⁴⁶ The three historic-period costumes clearly reference the fashionable male attire of the 18th century European nobleman. The quote mentioned earlier from the La Paz newspaper *La Reforma* that refers to wigs, stockings, three-cornered hats, and frock coats of the Fernando VII period is particularly relevant because he was the Spanish king during the war for independence. The Morenada dances from this era, which were likely performed by Aymaras as well as mestizos, were therefore a mockery of colonial power and colonists, as well as their African slaves, all represented in costumes of the Spanish style.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ Sigl, *No Se Baile*, 215.

⁴⁷ Sigl, *No Se Baile*, 215-216.

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