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Cultural Anthropology

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Huaraches from Mexico to NYC

Fashion means more than just a piece of clothing or material. Fashion has a deeper meaning behind it but since we look at it wear every day; we do not happen to think too much of the meaning. Looking deep into the significance of a certain piece of fashion helps us understand the culture in a different perspective. Mexico for example has a lot of staple pieces that represents its culture. To others it may look like just a regular outfit, but to the other half they know the reason why they wear it. The following paper will be focusing on one of Mexico's popular style of sandals called Huaraches. Even though Huaraches are just pair of shoes, it connected to me because my father owns a pair which hold a very special meaning to him. His huaraches have taught me a lot of our culture and which I will now be sharing it in the following paper.

Huaraches are traditional hand-made sandals originated from Mexico, specifically from the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Yucatán. They are originally from the Indigenous natives in Mexico, but they have passed down generations.

“Huarache” literally means “sandal” in Spanish. But the name is derived from the word *kwarachi*, from the indigenous Purépecha people of Mexico. Fittingly, “huarache” refers to a specific type of sandal worn in Mexico (Ellis 2020). The process of creating the sandal is far more interesting. A lot of labor time and hand-made work is what makes the sandal. Huaraches are handmade of leather that is woven together and has a durable sole made out of leather as well. The leather sole of the huaraches is filed down and flattened to create a shape that fits a size, after that they are nailed together and then threaded to the crossed cross shape leather top part of the sandal. Every upper consist of a single woven strip of vegetable tanned leather that’s woven uninterruptedly into the insole, going in and out of each hole until the leather gradually covers the surface of the last (Guy 2016). At first the sandals feel very hard when they are brand new, but the more they are worn out, the more that the leather start to loosen up and fit more comfortably to the feet. It is important to point out that the duration of a pair of Huaraches can last you a couple of years. My dad has owned his pair for almost 10 years. The duration is all behind the making of the Huaraches. The strings and leather are what makes the huaraches last a very long time. When I first seen my father’s huarache sandals that were send to him from a family member straight from Mexico, I noticed a difference than the sandals that were and sold here in the U.S. I mention to my dad that they look hard and painful to walk in and his response was “yes, they do feel

hard, but it is a feeling that his feet are accustomed to. The streets in Mexico are rockier which is why the soles are hard and are made for". Wearing Huaraches reminds him so much of his culture and the times he was in Mexico. It brings back childhood memories and he enjoy wearing them.

Social relationship is involved in huaraches exchange. They started in the 1960's and passed down generations and also modernizations. The Spanish occupation of Mexico at least allowed for new materials in the sandal. Before the conquest, sandals had been made from untanned deer leather, but with the introduction of cattle and European-style tanning, light-colored cow leathers became the most popular choice (Muzquiz 2018). After that huaraches were known and popularized for their leather. The change of the the material were made to survive any changes in the environment. For example, some huaraches with hard leather soles were changed to rubber soles to fit those living in city streets. Likewise, my father wears the huaraches here in NYC during the summer. When he goes to the park, he wears them. When he has to run quick errands, he wears them. It's a piece of fashion that is definitely worn in the hot weather. Another cool thing about it is that you can dress it up or dress is down, for both women and men. The simple huaraches that were handmade with leather and rope were worn by the poor population, while the more modern fancy woven huaraches were worn by the middle and upper class.

Huaraches has developed a lot throughout time. Now there are a lot of small business who manufacture huaraches and sell them all around the world. For instance, Francisco Alvarez and Oscar Yapor run their business called “Espiritu”. They were inspired after coming back from a trip from Mexico. They did not think that the huaraches were going to blow in the United States out and they did. "They bought their first batch of huaraches – about 100 – from the *huarachera* in Sahuayo, a city nicknamed Ciudad de los Huaraches, and sold them in artisan market around Denver”(Writer 2020). The average price for Huaraches in the state is \$50 dollars to \$100 dollars depending on the brand and quality. Big companies such as Nike have released sneaker Air Huaraches. They were inspired and influenced by the traditional sandals design.

Huaraches have created identities and relationships across different borders. The average people who wear Huaraches are not only the people from Mexico. But there are many countries who have similar type of sandals. Of course, they all have a different name to it, but they are still similar in some way. Today you see huaraches worn all over the world. After doing research and learning the history of Huaraches, I learned the value of the sandals due to the quality and how they are made. Observing my father’s huaraches and trying them on my feet, gave me a better understanding of the fashion item. I am proud to have also learned more about my culture throughout this research. What is most important as well, is that

the Huaraches are not only worn by men, but also for women. The women style huaraches are more on the colorful side and some styles are closed toes. I will soon own a pair of Huaraches and carry on my father's tradition.

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