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The Role of Folklorico and Danzantes Unidos in the Chican@ Movement

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

In World Cultures and History

By

Eve Marie Delfin

Master Thesis
WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE,

HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS

The Role of Folklorico and
Danzantes Unidos in the Chican@ Movement

By

Eve M. Delfin

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May 2016
To The Darlings for who are my inspiration and reason for beginning and completing this endeavor and to my Mom and beloved friends past and present who motivated me and supported me through this journey

And to my professor, Sean Malloy, thank you for your continued enthusiasm for learning and confidence in me

I dedicate this thesis in memory of my Tío, Ernest T. Acevedo, a true Chicano
Introduction

During the Chicana/o Movement, many arts organizations were formed to support each other in the struggle against white hegemony. Numerous folklorico groups that practiced and performed traditional Mexican dances were formed in schools and communities throughout California and the Southwest United States. The formation of The Ballet Folklorico de Mexico under the direction of Amalia Hernandez in the early 1950’s marked the beginning of this movement. ¹ This phenomenon has been cited as needing “further exploration” in its impact on the “politically transforming self-image” of Chicanos.² As a first hand witness of the affects that folklorico has had on the Chicana/o community, I have embarked on this research in order to connect the political, artistic, and cultural aspects of this movement.

Dance has commonly served as a form of political statement and as Anthony Shay has pointed out, it is particularly meaningful for diasporic populations. This was true of the Mexican Revolution, in which thousands of immigrants and refugees fled the ravages of war after 1910. While mainstream U.S. society strove to erase an “unacceptable” culture and its practices, Chicanas/os committed to the resurgence of folklorico sought to preserve their cultural while challenging the logic of assimilation and erasure. In post-Revolutionary Mexico, meanwhile, the Mexican government sponsored art as a way of subsuming people in the rhetoric of a national identity. Later, as the offspring of those fleeing or immigrating to the United States began to realize and understand the injustices against them in the United States, they used different methods of reclaiming history and expressing pride in their heritage. During the 1960s, many Chicana/os were politically motivated to mobilize in various ways to combat discrimination and

²Ibid, 34-35
the erasure of their culture and history in mainstream society. As part of this struggle, some become involved in folklorico as a way of creating a link to their history and culture and as a survival strategy in a hostile environment.

Through the arts, Chicana/os and other groups began to exhibit their identity, recover their history, and express cultural pride. Protests, boycotts and demonstrations ensued against the U.S. government and its policies, many of which and contained an artistic component. Murals, poetry, posters, and music were evidence of political views championing self-determination and pride in culture, history and community. Folklorico, traditional Mexican dance, has been largely overlooked within the history of the Chicana/o Movement, despite the evidence of hundreds of groups that were formed in schools and communities. Over the years, folklorico groups began to form organizations characteristic of the Chicana/o Movement and its many political groups. One of these organizations was Danzantes Unidos, which began on the University of California Los Angeles campus to honor the “danzante” and promote pride in the Chicana/o community. Beginning with approximately 300 dancers, a grassroots festival bloomed into an annual event with an estimated 1,500 dancers and musicians at its peak. Over the years, Danzantes Unidos brought together dancers from all over California in the tradition of the indigenous Totonaca Festival system, further solidifying the idea that Chicana/os were resolute in the reclaiming their history and culture in the spirit of self-determination.

This thesis strives to situate the role and significance of folklorico within the larger trajectory of the Chicana/o Movement through the organization Danzantes Unidos. There continues to be a tremendous amount of attention given to other genres of art that began during the Chicana/o Movement. Given that this occurred amidst the many folklorico groups both in schools, communities and churches it is interesting it has not been included in that historiography. It was during this era that my experience as observer and participant began. In one of the first federally funded bilingual education programs in Berkeley, California a man with
a drum came to my kindergarten classroom to teach dance and my experience as witness to the power of folklorico began. While practicing, performing, and touring all over the Southwest and Mexico, folklorico became an integral part of my life and I eventually became part of the Danzantes Unidos steering committee. As an active member of this statewide organization as well as my own group in Merced, California, I observed how dancers began to discover who they were and where they belonged in the world through the cultural practice of folklorico. It is for those that this research is being undertaken in honor of the ideals of the danzante. Their determination to keep history and culture alive and their political resolve was exhibited through the visual and expressive performance of folklorico.

Currently underexplored within the relevant literature, folklorico in general and Danzantes Unidos in particular hold a unique place within Chicano/a historiography. As a practitioner, part of the mission of the folklorista is what Diana Taylor calls “a transfer and transmission of social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity.” Other academics agree that further study in explaining the “powerful emotional response of diaspora populations” is especially relevant with respect to folklorico. Anthony declared that the “electrifying and politically transforming” practices of folklorico “deserves a full length study.” Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines the definition of different aspects of the folklorico community, grappling with an understanding of folklorico as a ballet, grupo and compañía. In the beginning of the folklorico movement, the group name directly symbolized the philosophy of the group. More recently, that is not strictly true, although each group does have certain philosophies which determine how close to “traditional” they wish to adhere.

Chapter 2 offers a general outline of Chicana/o Art Movement. Critical to this chapter is the history of TENAZ, the Teatro Nacional de Aztlan. This among other organizations

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such as Quinto Sol Publications and the Royal Chicano Air Force played an important role in the Chicana/o Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Included in this chapter is a timeline by Tomas Ybarra-Frausto tracing the shifting local and global attitudes of these organizations over the course of the movement. This chapter also wrestles with the definition of Chicana/os and Chicana/o identity. Obviously, there are important differences and disputes over the definition of this particular term, but for the purposes of this study a Chicana/o is a person of Mexican descent born and raised in the United States. Not all persons of Mexican descent born in the United States self-identify as Chicanas/os, as this term comes with a political connotation stemming from active participation in political and artistic movements rooted in the 1960s.

Chapter 3 traces the history of folklorico in Mexico and California. In order to fully understand the impact of folklorico in California, we must first understand how it first became important in Mexico. The Mexican government sought to use cultural and expressive arts such as folklorico to blend its people and unify a fragmented nation. In this way, the many indigenous groups native to Mexico became subsumed in the rhetoric of a unified country, especially after the Mexican Revolution. Amalia Hernandez and her Ballet Folklorico de Mexico became a symbol of a “traditional and authentic” Mexico both inside and outside its borders. In California, those who escaped the ravages of the Revolution brought the dances of Mexico (sometimes referred to as Spanish dances) to the United States and California. This chapter profiles a number of those involved in the practice and development of folklorico as we know it in California. Directors, who are also the main maestros (teachers) for folklorico groups are the chief vehicle through which groups function. Many of these directors are also the main teacher and have considerable knowledge of folklorico. Among many others, these include persons such as John Estrada, the founder of Danzantes Unidos, as well as Graciela Holguin, director of Mexicapan (Santa Ana), Carlos Moreno Sr. and Carlos Moreno Jr., the directors of Ballet Folklorico Mexicano de Carlos Moreno (Oakland), Virginia Diediker and Javier Verdin,
directors of Ballet Folklorico Ollin (San Fernando) and Tony Ferrigno, director of Los Lupeños (San Jose). These directors represent the largest and most prominent folklorico groups in California.

Chapter 4 explores the history of the organization Danzantes Unidos and the impact it has had on the folklorico community in California. Honoring the danzante, as a ceremony patterned after a festival of the Totonaca Indians, John Estrada began the Festival held every year on Palm Sunday weekend. Although Estrada did not begin the Festival for political purposes, it inevitably became political as public officials came part of the ceremony. This organization brought together many folkloristas with different philosophies of what direction Danzantes as an organization should take. Also examined is the “split” that resulted in the creation of two separate Danzantes.
Chapter 1

Most folklorico dances are regionally represented, exhibiting cultures and histories unique to each region or state. Many of the dances blend components of indigenous, European, and even African influences into one performance. These dances are important in preserving cultural history and traditions, particularly for diasporic populations in the United States. Diana Taylor asks in her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, “Whose memories ‘disappear’ if only archival knowledge is valorized and granted permanence?” Taylor suggests that the evidence of cultures gone by is preserved by dances still performed. For example, dances from the state of Veracruz are usually danced with a white dress made of organza and trimmed with many yards of lace and are clearly Spanish influenced. The dress is accessorized with gold, earrings, necklace and fan. As a folklorista learns the repertoire, they also learn what costumes accompany which dances as well as the history and cultural context for each regional dance and its corresponding wardrobe.

**Definition of Folklorico**

Most dance groups name their group “ballet,” “grupo,” “companía,” (company) or “danzantes” (the dancers). In order to understand the decision to name a group, we must first explore the philosophy from which this decision is made. More than just “traditional Mexican dance,” folklorico refers to the folk art of dance derived from the life and experiences of the people of Mexico and “the richness of the Mexican cultural heritage.”

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6 Ibid, 36
vary depending on the circumstances.

Folklorico has its roots in both the indigenous and the colonization of the Spanish conquistadores (conquerors). The term “ballet” in “ballet folklorico” came into existence when Amalia Hernandez, director of the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, began her “ballet” or group in 1952. In doing so, she combined elements of Mexican folk dance traditions with classical ballet, and modern and contemporary dance to create a genre of dance that became wildly popular, especially in the United States. As her group gained international recognition in the 1960’s, the term ballet folklorico was used more frequently. In Hernandez’s group, classical ballet is studied as much as folklorico. Now deceased, Hernandez and her ballet are sometimes criticized by folkloristas for the license she took when creating some of her pieces.

Because the general public sometimes equates this style of folklorico with “high art” as opposed to those folklorico groups that do not incorporate classical ballet into their repertoire, some groups have rejected the term “ballet folklorico.” To these groups, “ballet” implies that they do not attempt to maintain the purity of traditional dances, thus casting doubts on their legitimacy. Deborah Smith suggested in her Master’s thesis that the term grupo (group) in their name would cause confusion as to whether the group was a performance group but I suggest that this is no longer true. Most folklorico groups whether they call themselves ballet, grupo, compañía, or danzantes strive to impart history and culture through public performance. It is

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11Ulrich, Allan. "Ballet Folklorico de México de Amalia Hernandez."

the group philosophy and artistic license in repertoire that differentiates folkloricos from each other.

In the last twenty years, the term company has begun to be incorporated into dance group names. Groups with names such as Compañía de Danza (Dance Company) or Danzantes show that groups that are more modern have grown to become commercialized and packaged for the mainstream audience in order to market themselves as “legitimate” and authentic dance companies. Many groups whether they are called ballet, grupo, compañía or danzantes have gained federal non-profit organizational status and have been awarded grants from funders such as the California Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Not all companies have an administration of this magnitude, but many have been able to secure funding from local agencies and city governments.14

Most dancers and directors who maintain groups are grassroots activists who dance as amateurs, semi-professionally, or professionally and wish to maintain their culture, language and identity and maintain relationship with a community through dance.15 Here the notion of what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community” is enacted, in which folkloristas come to create a familia (family) and lasting relationships via the medium of dance.16 Through this practice, folkloristas craft lasting relationships as part of the folklorico dance community.17 Folkloricos have chosen a variety of names for themselves but for most the purpose is the same: to reclaim and maintain their Mexican roots amidst a hegemonic society wishing to erase or alter their history. In making these distinctions, we should not to exclude groups who exclusively

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13The titles of Ballet, grupo and/or danzante are now seen as somewhat interchangeable with the understanding amongst folkloristas that the titles is a personal choice and not solely an indicator of the type of dance or philosophy of the group.
14Dance companies such as Ballet Folklorico de Carlos Moreno, Ballet Folklorico Ollin and Los Lupeños as well as smaller companies have received funding from the California Arts Council and local agencies such as local arts councils according to their websites and programs.
15In interviews with subjects of this thesis, directors informed that in general dancers in their prospective groups of Ballet Folklorico Ollin and BFM de Carlos Moreno as well as in my own experience have other occupations outside the dance studio. This is not only due to the difficulty in making a living in the performing arts but it is also indicative that many dancers dance for enjoyment and to maintain their heritage and not necessarily dance in order to make a living. I was also informed that dancers have many levels of expertise and are incorporated into the repertoire as the dancer improves and acquires more dance skills.
17Anderson, 6-7
perform indigenous dances since their focus is the preservation of dances and traditions of pre-conquest music and dance. Most folklorico dance groups in the United States specialize in folkloric but occasionally include indigenous dances. Though many subscribe to names which also carry different philosophies of folklorico, the terms ballet, grupo, compañía and danzantes indicate a Mexican dance group in general. The dance groups described throughout are called folkloricos.

**Regionality of Folklorico**

Usually performed regionally, each folklorico performance represents a people with a particular history and traces their subcultures and their influences through the dance. These dances capture the cultural norms and practices unique to that region including dress, bodily movement, rituals, identity, and politics. While most dances practiced and performed are European influenced, there are also aspects of indigeneity. These dances depict the different subcultures and histories of the states and regions of Mexico. Some Chicana/os see folklorico as coming from the “Old World” but others believe that it is reflective of their own past and as such should be preserved for the future. Many of those who choose to participate in folklorico do so for the conscious reason of remaining connected to their culture. As persons migrated across the border between Mexico and the United States, the dances of folklorico took on a different connotation. No longer the nationalistic dances which the government of Mexico envisioned as a unifying tool for nation building, they became a life line for a people with “restricted social space and histories of conquest marginalization.” This politicizing of dance is at the heart of this study.

**Dance as folklore and history**

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The “folk” aspect of the dance is what Americo Paredes called “knowledge.”²¹ It is the knowledge of ethnic culture and tradition passed down from generation to generation. “Folk” is also an all-encompassing term which refers to music and dance, but also includes art and artesanía (a market, usually held outdoors, where cultural hand crafted art is sold including jewelry, hand sewn clothing and other items).²² As a consequence of the colonialization of Mexico, dances were altered and appropriated and in this way the natives were “attacked” through their traditions.²³ Nevertheless, folklórico dances are layered with history and meaning.²⁴ The dances and the movements of folklórico in the United States offer a connection of sorts to the distant past derived from the many regions and subcultures of Mexico. When folklórico dances are rehearsed or performed, the history carried within the dances are distinctive. The duality of being indigenous and European at the same time comes into play, as do the negotiations within the dominant society in which Chicanas/as are forced to contend with their duality of being Americans of Mexican descent. Folklórico dance is a thus a cultural expression that has colonialist aspects while simultaneously affirming a form of ethnic identity and building transnational connections between immigrants and the country they left behind.²⁵

**Folklórico Philosophy**

The performance of dance, as Diana Taylor suggests, acts as a learning tool which stores social memory and transmits knowledge.²⁶ Dance is the movement of the body that imparts knowledge not attainable in the accepted traditional written form.²⁷ Within the folklórico community there is a philosophy which, taken from an anthropological approach, holds that the “traditional” dances of Mexico are not traditional because they have been removed from their

²⁷Ibid, xix
original context. In fact, there are many folkloristas (persons who dance folklorico) who believe that presenting dances on the stage for the public makes folklorico a commodity and therefore compromises its original purpose and significance. Folklorico, in this interpretation, should be staged only for educational value within the community. Many folklorico organizations have mission statements indicating that their main objective is to impart the rich traditions and culture of Mexico, to dispel stereotypes, and to create a positive image of Mexicans and Mexican dance. This politicization of folklorico began with the creation of folklorico groups linked to the Chicano/a Movement in the 1960’s and continues to be one of the main objectives of groups throughout California and the United States.

29 Moreno, Carlos Jr., interview by Eve Delfin, Oakland, CA, 7/3/09
Chapter 2

The Chicano/a Movement and Identity

A general definition of the term Chicana/o used here is that persons of Mexican descent born and raised in the United States. The term, however, is fraught with symbolism and historical significance. Beginning as a derogative word for persons of Mexican descent, it was during the Chicano/a Movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s that it took on a more political connotation. Even today, many Americans of Mexican descent self-identify with terms such as Mexican-American, Latina/o, or Hispanic. While not all Americans of Mexican descent self-identify as Chicanas/os, it is usually accepted that those who do embrace the term are seeking to reaffirm and reclaim a hidden history and demonstrate a level of political consciousness. Americans of Mexican descent who refused to be erased from U.S. history and society (re)claimed and a (re)defined themselves in part by embracing the term Chicana/o.  

From the Spanish conquest through the Mexican-American War and the Mexican Revolution, Mexicans have tried to maintain as well as reclaim their traditions, culture and history. The blend between Spanish conquistadores, indigenous peoples, and African slaves created a mixed people in Mexico now known as mestizo. Mestizaje denotes a blending and subsuming of indigenous groups and the varied ethnicities inhabiting Mexico, creating a shared identity among Mexicans. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, the states of Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and California as well as parts of Colorado and Nebraska were taken forcibly by the United States. By the stroke of pen, persons who were Mexican one day became U.S. residents the next. The adage “we did not cross the border, the border crossed

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35Reed, 103
us” became a reality for those who found themselves strangers in their own land, treated as foreigners and second class citizens. What ensued were marginalization, racism, and corresponding acts of resistance throughout the history of Chicana/os in the United States. 

Caught between worlds, it has often been difficult for Chicana/os to maintain their cultural heritage while navigating the American social, political and educational system. Over a century and a half after Guadalupe Hidalgo, being “American” remains difficult for persons whose ancestry comes from the history traditions and culture of Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution, thousands of Mexican nationals fled to the United States to escape from oppression and violence.  

This influx of immigrants drastically changed the political connotations for Mexican people living in the United States. Previously identified as foreign nationals, Mexicans were now immigrants and part of a class of marginalized people within the United States. Their descendants have had to contend with an emerging negative collective identity that came from daily experiences in the United States. This began to change as the Chicana/o community organized in order to protest their treatment and negotiate equal opportunity in American society. 

In the 1960's, Chicana/os collectively acted against the oppression and discrimination they had been subjected to for generations. They rose in numbers to fight for equality and justice in education, social, and civil rights. The Chicano Movement began with the marches of Cesar Chavez and the fight for unionization with the United Farm Workers (UFW) and the “blowouts” of young Chicana/o students in East Los Angeles aimed at combating discrimination within the school system. 

Chicana/os collectively decided to take action against the oppression they faced and to forge an identity and a community with which they could align themselves to create

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36 Muñoz, 32  
38Sanchez, 32-33  
39For more on Cesar Chavez and the Blowouts see Gutierrez (1995), Muñoz (2007)
change. These action took many forms including marches, rallies, boycotts, sit-ins and a rise in expressive cultural art forms illustrating and/or performing the Chicana/o experience.  

Responding to the disparities within the civil, social, political and educational systems of the United States, Chicana/os began to develop strategies for combating racism. The Chicana/o movement also rejected assimilation into the dominant American society. Ultimately, this led to a pursuit of a separate identity within American social system, including a push for political power and Chicana/o self-determination. The assertion of a Chicana/o identity was both an act of defiance and a self-declaration of identity. This idea was key in the development of solidarity and common ideals of “national identity, dignity, self-worth, pride, uniqueness and cultural rebirth which led to a common goal between people who were proud of their heritage and culture.” Organizations such as TENAZ and Quinto Sol Publications were formed and maintained around a common set of ideals and a shared discourse born out of similar experiences of marginalization. For those involved in the Chicana/o Movement, there was a need to reclaim their history, a heritage and political and social autonomy lacking in society at large. Out of this resistance came a pride and an effort to preserve customs and traditions that were fading as a result of years of erasure in American society. Some of these traditions were manifested in art and expressive culture. Organizations were formed in order to reclaim traditions and traditional ways. One of these organizations was Danzantes Unidos; formed in the same spirit of cultural pride and reclamation of heritage.

The Chicana/o Art Movement

40Resistance came from different parts of the Southwest United States. Reies Lopez Tijerino led a land grant movement in New Mexico, Corky Gonzales and his struggle for land in Colorado and the farmworker movement under Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta with the United Farm Workers were all separate but related struggles of the same fight for social justice and equality. Many of these political organizations like the student organization, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan or MECHA, still exist today but others like the political party La Raza Unida have not survived. These organizations were important to the Movement because they served to organize and empower Chicanas/os with the similar ideals and to create a community of solidarity.
41Muñoz, 26
42ibid
44Gaspar de Alba, 85
Born of a history of many injustices and the struggle for equality, the Chicano Art Movement, in its many genres began in earnest during the 1960s. An abundance of scholarship exists on the many aspects of art created as a result of this part of the Chicanas/os struggle. Many of those involved in the Movement used art as a form of self-expression and as a collective effort to educate others in the community. Although the Movement began with the ideas put forth by Cesar Chavez and others in rural areas towards the end of the 1960’s, the Chicano Movement and its art brought awareness of urban problems as well. According to Ybarra-Frausto, the Chicano Art Movement is divided into two periods. The first period, from 1968-1975, was focused on community oriented and grassroots issues. These artists targeted audiences who had a more political outlook of the art in keeping with the ideals of the Movement. Their works focused on the themes of self-determination, identity, community, and a higher sense of idealism.

The second period, from 1975-1981, focused on more polished and commercialized work that could be considered “high art.” It also marked a shift towards the inclusion of broader themes from Latin America rather than solely focusing on the struggles of the Chicana/os of the United States. In 1975-1981 and beyond, art was subject to the larger shifts in both the political climate and the attitude of Chicana/os within the American fabric. In keeping with these trends in philosophy, folklorico beginning in the earlier periods attempted to keep dances as traditional as possible and those in the second period began to incorporate ballet styles in order to appeal to a wider audience.

Folklorico, and dance more generally, has not received as much attention from scholars who have examined the Chicano/a Arts Movement in either period. An exhibition at UCLA

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47 Ibid, 84, 86
48 Ibid,84
focused on Chicano Art. C.A.R.A., Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation published a book of the artwork and artists in 1991. In this book, there was little mention of dance as part of the movement even though there have been numerous accounts of Movement activities where folklorico was performed.\textsuperscript{49} In San Diego, artist Vincent Ochoa depicted Geronimo and other symbols of Chicana/o art within a mural painted on the side of the building that houses Casa de la Raza. On the far right are various figures of musicians beginning with a woman dressed in a calavera (skeleton) bodysuit. In the center is a very large figure of Geronimo, the epitome of resistance against hegemony, situated under a blazing sun which sits at the top center of the mural. Written across the middle of the mural are the words “Casa de la Raza” and on the far left is a large bundle of feathers protruding over to the right and representing indigenous roots. Coming into the center is a couple dancing folklorico. The couple is dressed in a traditional Jalisco Ranchera outfit, the male in a black Charro with silver medallions running down the sides of his pants, his partner dressed in a yellow Jalisco dress (a full skirt and blouse adorned with lines of colorful ribbons around the bottom of the skirt). The couple is positioned as if they have just finished a dance with the woman poised with skirt outstretched and looking over her shoulder at her partner who is bending towards her. In the mural it appears that the folklorico dancers are set in the background and not an integral part of the Movement. It does however indicate that folklorico was at least acknowledged as part of the Chicana/o community. In a political sense, this mural represents the attitude towards folklorico as seen but not heard in its efforts at recognizable inclusion in the Movement.

The theatre El Teatro Campesino (ELC) of Luis Valdez is one of the most recognized theatre troupes of the era. His company used theatre to expose the exploitation of farmworkers and as an extension of the Chicana/os Movement. In 1970, ELC and other grassroots Chicana/o teatros were so popular among community groups and college campuses that the collective

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid 86
organization El Teatro Nacional de Aztlan (TENAZ) was formed in Fresno, California. The official founding of TENAZ was in 1971 in Santa Cruz, California and it went on to serve as a “national coalition of teatros.” From this organization came a support system that spawned other festivals and workshops to further the cause of resistance through the medium of Teatro. In 1976, the ELC stepped down and Teatro Esperanza assumed responsibilities of the TENAZ organization. Two other organizations were formed with similar purpose as TENAZ, the Asocacion of Grupos Folkloricos (ANGF), a national organization, and Danzantes Unidos in California. A national conference on Hispanics in the United States acknowledged in 1979 that folklorico functions as a tool of “ethnic unity, identity and cultural expression.” The popularity of folklorico, in addition to this presentation, caught the attention of National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), leading the organization to award grants to deserving folklorico groups.

There have been other mention of folklorico as part of the community, but none have been in depth. In C.A.R.A., the narrative mentions that dance was incorporated into the Fiesta de los Barrios, an event whose purpose was to raise awareness of the Chicana/o struggles at Lincoln High School in East Los Angeles in 1969. Included in the exhibit were photos of indigenous dancers the Geronimo (c. 1980) mural located in Balboa Park in San Diego, California. At this renowned art exhibit, however folklorico dance was largely overlooked as a space where the Chicana/o Movement lived. Throughout the scholarship on the Chicana/o Movement and the Chicana/o Art Movement, there are mentions of dance being performed at various festivals or events, but seldom is it identified as a significant component of the movement with goals of resistance and reclamation. Rather, folklorico is generally portrayed as little more than a hobby

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51Ibid
52Ibid, 5
54Ibid, 1
55Goldman, Shifra M., Ybarra-Frausto, Tomas. 86
56Gaspar de Alba, plate 6
or social activity.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{58}Sanchez (1993), Alaniz and Cornish (2008)
Chapter 3

History of Folklorico

In order to better understand the significance of folklorico and the work of Danzantes Unidos in the United States, we must first look at the history of folklorico in Mexico. Folklorico began as the Spanish Conquistadores landed in what is now Yucatan in 1519. Before this time, natives of Mexico practiced specific religions and rituals such as Azteca and Concheros. With the integration of Spanish culture came a new genre of dance—folklorico. This Euro-influenced dance combines aspects of indigenous and European styles. While there continue to be indigenous dances (danzas) those that are European influenced (bailes) have received most of the attention and are performed more often. The most well known dance, El Jarabe Tapatio, the national dance of Mexico was first performed in public on July 9, 1790 in the Coliseum in Mexico City. The reaction to this dance was so overwhelming that it continues to be an symbol of Mexican nationality.

The colonial regime sought to preserve power by through the imposition casta system. Other racial groups, such as Africans, were also included in this system but for the purposes of this thesis the Indian-Spanish dichotomy will be the focus. Over time, the caste system lost its importance and class was used as marker of social status. After generations of miscegenation, racial divisions became less distinguishable and there was a need to create an identity with which the country could cling to. This was difficult given the regional differences as well as the distinct indigenous groups within the country. One possible solution was the idea of mestizaje, which created to unified mixed-race identity.

Due to the international reputation of dictator Porfirio Diaz, Mexico was challenged to

60 Ibid,45
61 Ibid, 47
62 Ibid, 48
64 Ibid:72
find an alternate way of demonstrating that it was on its way to becoming a first world nation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. 65 One strategy to pursuing progress and “civilization” was to employ dance and art in the service of the state. The aim was to glorify Mexico’s indigenous past while ignoring the current repression of the indigenous. 66 Tenorio-Trillo, a noted professor of history stated that “the Diaz regime strove to make order, classify and civilize the pre-Hispanic history available and [make it] worthy of respect.” 67 While this strategy had mixed results in advancing Mexico’s reputation internationally, it did lay the groundwork for the creation of a common “Mexican” identity. This identity involved “civilizing” and legitimizing the indigenous in a manner that was non-threatening to the Diaz regime. 68 Dance was included in the educational system as part of a domestic and international effort to consolidate Mexican nationhood. 69 The folkloric and folklorico were an integral aspect of the transformation and incorporation of the indigenous as “respectable” and “accepted”; absorbing them into the fabric of the dominant elite with the idea of encouraging cultural belonging. 70

Mexico had already begun using dance choreography with nationalistic themes such as a dance called La Coronela (also known as Las Adelitas encompassing a national symbol and pride) in 1940. 71 Indeed, in the 1930’s and 40’s the Mexican government began mandatory dance lessons in schools to promoting pride and to promote solidarity and cooperation. 72 The governments under President Miguel Aleman (1946-1952) built on these earlier efforts to create an alternative identity for Mexico by promoting artistic expression. 73 As a result, these years saw a resurgence of artistic expression in the form of folkloric representation. Other genres of art that

67Ibid
68Ibid
69Ibid,237
70Ibid,237
72Ramirez (1989), 20
73Ibid
were used in this manner were murals, especially those by Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco as well as music by Manuel Ponce. Along with Amalia’s Hernandez’s Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, these strategies attempted to give Mexico an image of legitimacy and prestige. This resurgence helped to idealize indigenous culture while bringing to the forefront certain aspects of mestizo culture as emblems of national belonging and part of a shared identity among all Mexicans. Mulholland invoked Jose Vasconcelos, Secretary of Education during the early revolutionary movement, in arguing that the combination of Indigenous and European races “created a cosmic race of mestizos that were destined to be the greatness of Latin America.” Although rural culture was still rejected and seen as inferior, the project was to use folkloric images as nostalgia including dance as a celebration to that end. The indigenous was celebrated as a distant and exotic past. Accordingly, there came a respect and an appetite for art forms which served the purpose of romanticizing indigenous culture. Folklorico dance became a hegemonic tool for Mexico’s ruling class.

In the 1950s, Mexico continued to use folklorico as a way to build identity and nationality. In the anthology *Fragments of a Golden Age*, which traces the politics of Mexico after the Revolution, Alex Saragoza and Eric Zolov discuss the Mexican government and its use of folklorico in shaping a national identity and sense of patria. They examine the standardization of Mexican dance for use in the educational system and as a way of changing the image of Mexico domestically as well as internationally. Standardized folklorico dances were implemented in the curriculum for this purpose. To this end, the government of Mexico

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75 Zolov (2001), 237
76 Mulholland, 252
77 Zolov (2001), 241
78 Ibid
79 Ramirez (1989), 18
81 Zolov (2001), 242
commissioned Amalia Hernandez to found the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico in order to help create a national identity. The Ballet which perform all over the world, has come to be internationally known, complete with a professional dance school feeding into their domestic and international dance companies. The aim of the famed Ballet Folklorico de Mexico under the direction of Hernandez was to project the image of the “Other,” exoticized and commodified, in order to craft a vision of harmony and a national identity. The Ballet has been associated heavily with the political ideals of the Mexican government. Mexico used folklorico as a “marketing approach” during the Cultural Olympiad at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Though marred by a massacre on the eve of the games, the Mexican Olympic committee attempted to use folklorico on an international level to showcase Mexico as an exotic land and a “peaceful meeting of humanity.” The committee also used folklorico domestically as rhetoric of a distant heritage but with a modern twist. Folklore in this sense was used not only as a symbol of peace, but as a symbol of common heritage and community.

I suggest that Mexican folklorico, from the conquest to the standardization of dances and uses in school, with the success of The Ballet Folklorico de Amalia Hernandez and as a unifying tool used to create a sense of patria, has carried over into the consciousness of Mexicans who immigrated to the United States. Instilled is a sense of pride and heritage passed to their children even if this heritage was a unification of the different peoples of Mexico in mestizaje. Susan Stewart suggested that “distressed genres” or altered expressive forms often emerge “when nostalgia is juxtaposed with upheaval, revolution and cultural distress.” We see this with the upheaval occurring in Mexico and again as Chicana/os within the mainstream society began to

82Ibid
85Zolov (2004), 168
86Ibid,169
87Ibid.170
88Ibid
forge actions for identity and social justice.

Gloria Anzaldúa describes a borderland as “psychological conflict and dual identity.”

The heritage of immigrants coming to California did not change as they migrated but what did change was the society in which they were entering. As such, the meaning of folklorico changed crossing the border making folklorico part of a borderland. Chicana/os struggle with this when they exert agency in trying to reclaim some semblance of their ancestral history and culture. This struggle stems from conflicts in the history in Mexico and also the conflicts that occur as a result of the dominant culture in the United States. As we see in the history of folklorico in California these ideas and themes carry over into the 20th century with the political and social climate of the time. As Mexicans began to migrate to the United States they took with them the fragmented ideas they had been taught and used folklorico to regain the “roots” they were denied as a result of inequities in the United States.

**History of Folklorico in California**

Traditional Mexican Dance, or folklorico, is a social expression of the people of Mexico. After the Mexican Revolution, bailas y danzas began to be performed outside of Mexico. In the early 20th century in Mexico and the Southwest folklorico dances were incorporated in carpas (traveling vaudeville shows). As early as the 1930’s, there are examples of people teaching folklorico dancers in United States communities. The older generation lamented the fact that the children were forgetting the traditions of Mexico, and used dance as a vehicle for cultural maintenance and transmission. Over the next few decades folklorico began to be danced more frequently in restaurants and theatre type settings. A Master’s Thesis by Ruth Maureen Kenefick from the 1930s contained a description of the origins of folklorico dance.

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92Najera Ramírez, 24
93Ramírez, 25
including music and description of steps.\textsuperscript{94} The author focused on the Padua Hills Theatre as well as other venues such as Old Spanish Days and the Spanish Club of San Juan Capistrano where the focus was on Spanish dance with “some” Mexican dances “sprinkled” in.\textsuperscript{95} The author betrayed a largely dismissive attitude towards Mexicans and folklorico as a genre of dance, declaring that “Spanish blood improved the standing of the pueblo, and a distinctive society began to develop.”\textsuperscript{96} In general, folklorico was seen as exotic and yet improved by colonialist influence.

A 1941 master’s thesis by Loes Madalynne Solomon chronicled dance history and connected the history of the Spanish conquest of Mexico to the later migration to Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{97} Solomon’s focus was on the history of the regional dances and festivals. Her main objective was to chronicle dances, music, steps and choreography to be available as a resource for educators and social workers.\textsuperscript{98} Efforts like this kept folklorico from becoming a lost art as elders strove to preserve folklorico from Americanization.\textsuperscript{99} Solomon generalized the population and there are numerous references of Mexicans as low status when she writes, “these Mexicans are, for the most part, of peon class bearing predominance of Indian characteristics, both in the ways of living and thinking.”\textsuperscript{100} Discrimination prevailed throughout the next decades until the 1960’s. Respondents interviewed indicated that there was no relevant cultural education at this time. Javier Verdin, co-director of Ballet Folklorico Ollin, in describing his experience attending school after immigrating to the United States as a youth, realized he was a “second class citizen in this country”.\textsuperscript{101}

Shay, a dance scholar, who wrote a study about Mexican American dance, touches on the

\textsuperscript{94}Kenefick, Ruth Maureen, \textit{The Power and Position of the Spanish and Mexican Folk Dance in Southern California} (Master’s Thesis, Claremont College, 1931)
\textsuperscript{95}Kenefick, 26
\textsuperscript{96}Kenefick, 15
\textsuperscript{97}Solomon, Loes Madalynne, \textit{Some Mexican Folk Dances as Found in Los Angeles, California}, (thesis, UCLA, 1941), 8
\textsuperscript{98}Solomon, 15
\textsuperscript{99}Solomon, 10
\textsuperscript{100}Solomon, 7
\textsuperscript{101}Verdin, 4/06/09
same folklorico groups as Smith. Smith wrote a Master’s thesis about folklorico through the
1990's, but does not go much beyond the same few informants as Shay. 102 Although Shay does
mention Graciela Tapia he does not mention the wealth of other groups who were very involved
in the folklorico movement nor does he mention Danzantes Unidos. 103

One of the reasons that Smith cites as to why there were “practically no groups” was
because women were not allowed to dance. Graciela Holguin and other folkloristas dispute the
idea asserted by Smith that women did not dance. 104 Holguin related that women were always
involved because dance was a social aspect of society and widely accepted. 105 Ironically, and
contrary to Smith’s contention, the model for some of the first folklorico groups as we now know
them and from which many interviewees agree was directed by a woman, Amalia Hernandez.
The role of women in the formation of groups and the genre of folklorico in California is an area
of study to be further explored. Women played a vital role in the maintenance of Danzantes
Unidos and in the promotion of folklorico in general.

Smith characterizes the Padua Hills Theatre as the “only group in California that
performed Mexican folk dances” previous to 1960. 106 The studies mentioned illustrate that
Mexican dances were performed previous to 1960 in carpa. In addition, one informant Carolina
Russek related that her family had a dance studio and danced mostly Spanish but also Mexican
carlarico dances since the 1920’s. Russek began her career in the studio of her aunt, who was a
former vaudeville dancer, teaching and performing throughout Southern California. Carolina
danced with Florencio Yescas, “who was already established by 1960,” when she began to dance
with him and a California heritage organization. 107 Garcia, in her Master’s thesis, attempted to

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102 Shay, Anthony. Choreographing Identities, Folk Dance, Ethnicity and Festival in the United States. London:
McFarland and Co, Inc. 2006, 88
103 Ibid
104 Smith, Mexican Folk Dance, 46
105 Holguin, Graciela. Interview by Eve Delfin. Panorama City, Ca. 4/09
106 Smith, Deborah L. “Mexican Folk Dance in California: A Summary of the cause and effects of the rise in popularity of
107 Russek, Carolina. Interview by Eve Delfin. Panorama City, Ca. 4/09
describe folklorico and what it means to Mexican-Americans.\textsuperscript{108} She focused specially on folklorico as a source of Chicana/o pride while recounting the ways in which it influenced other modern creation including her own pieces based on her experience with folklorico.\textsuperscript{109} This kind of individuality and exploration is in keeping with folklorico after the 1990s, but her study fails to mention any organization association with folklorico.\textsuperscript{110}

Solomon’s study and the others demonstrate that there were settings where folklorico was danced, mainly in school playgrounds, and calls into question Smith’s suggestion that there were “practically no groups in California” previous to the 1960’s. Perhaps it is the definition of “group” that is the question. As informants have confirmed, there were school and church groups prior to the 1960s, but these were not necessarily formal groups as we now know them.\textsuperscript{111} I agree with other studies that state that “groups” existed in schools where dances were done in playgrounds and as part of school activities. In fact, in an interview with several folkloristas who were dancers in some of the first groups in California described it this way, “groups as we know them did not exist [in a regional suite presentation]. Yes, there were restaurants and places that danced folklorico [such as that in Padua Hills Theatre group described by Smith and Carolina Russek] but really they danced mostly Spanish dances because they [dancers] didn’t know what folklorico was. And at that time Spanish dance was more respected.”\textsuperscript{112} In response to the suggestion that there were little or no groups in California, Graciela Holguin responded that there was always dancing in California.\textsuperscript{113} She and other prominent folkloristas such as Francisco Javier Verdin, co-director of Ballet Folklorico Ollin in San Fernando, California and Carlos Moreno, Sr., general director of Ballet Folklorico Mexicano de Carlos Moreno in Oakland, California, have commented that it was the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico directed by Amalia

\textsuperscript{108}García, Rosa Maria, \textit{Mexican American Dance and Cultural Identity}, (thesis, UC Irvine, 2002), 2
\textsuperscript{109}Garcia, 13
\textsuperscript{110}Shay, \textit{Choreographing Identities}, 89
\textsuperscript{111}Smith, \textit{Summary of Mexican Folk Dance}, 68
\textsuperscript{112}Verdin, Javier. Interview by Eve Delfin. Panorama City, CA. 4/27/09
\textsuperscript{113}Holguin, Graciela. Interview by Eve Delfin. Panorama City, CA, 4/6/09
Hernandez that was the first folklorico group with the format we now understand.\(^{114}\)

**Modern Folklorico Migration**

In the 1950’s, Amalia Hernandez founded her famous Ballet Folklorico de Mexico. When she began to tour her company in the United States in the 60’s folklorico groups began to emerge all over California. Many prominent folkloristas who founded groups in California either danced together in Escuela de Arte Plásticas or had been part of Amalia Hernandez’s company prior to immigrating to the United States. In fact many founders of prominent folklorico groups danced together for several years before emigrating. Florencio Yescas, Graciela Tapia and Rafael Zamarripa, Graciela Holguin and Emilio Pulido had been dancers with Amalia Hernandez as well as with Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.\(^{115}\) Zamarripa came to the United States on several occasions to teach workshops and give lectures but was left in charge of Plásticas when his friend and colleague, Pulido, acquired an Ethnic Dance position at UCLA.\(^{116}\) Emilio Pulido a well known teacher and choreographer had a great impact on folklorico in California.\(^{117}\) Many of Pulido’s students went on to forge folklorico groups in California, including Danzantes Unidos.

Verdin related “everyone wants to be like Amalia. They don’t exactly want to dance like her but they want to be that popular.”\(^{118}\) Prominent folkloristas concur that regardless of the position of folklorico previous to the 1960’s, The Ballet Folklorico de Amalia Hernandez, ”gave us the model we needed to put into action our kindling cultural awareness as it had been sparked by the Chicano movement.”\(^{119}\) Folkloristas also agree that many directors and choreographers chose not to follow her style but instead opted to “define and accurately present the dance as it is

\(^{114}\)ibid
\(^{115}\)Diediker, Virginia. Interview by Eve Delfin. Panorama City, CA 4/09
\(^{116}\)Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 21
\(^{117}\)Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 23
\(^{118}\)Verdin, Javier. Eve Delfin. Panorama City, April 27, 2009
\(^{119}\)Smith, Summary of Mexican Folk Dance, 70
(or was) done within its regional setting.” As Carolina Russek characterized it, folklorico “was not folklorico of the same intensity that everybody knows of today.”

The importance and significance of folklorico was becoming more apparent as there began to be academic studies and journals which promoted folklorico and the impact it was having on the Chicana/o community and the world of dance. In 1974, the Asosacíon Nacional de Grupos Folkloricos (ANGF) was formed. This organization promoted folklorico at a national level. They held conferences similar to the Danzantes Unidos Festival but alternated venues between the United States and Mexico. They also produced a national newsletter called the ANGF Journal which featured scholarly publications about Mexican dancers and culture. Syllabi began to be published which included statistics and general information about ANGF conference and folklorico in general. ANGF has not had the popular response that Danzantes Unidos has experienced in terms of annual participation, but this could be due the cost and travel expenses associated with participating in ANGF activities. In the 1990s, a website called Alegria (joy) was founded which gave information about upcoming folklorico events and groups and listed an international directory of folklorico groups. Folkloristas could chat and network, post events and research information about dances, costumes and music. Since the works by Smith and Shay, there have been limited studies on folklorico and ethnic dance. Smith’s thesis briefly mentions Danzantes Unidos. Previous to the impact of this organization the perception of folklorico was seen as a frivolous activity. Verdin states, “we had to form an organization for ourselves because nobody else was going to do it.” Folklorico continued the ideals of activism

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120Ibid
121Russek, Carolina. Interview by Eve Delfin, Panorama City, Ca. 4/27/09
122Trujillo, Lorenzo A., History and Significance of the Hispanic Dance Expression (presentation to the Presidential Task Force on Hispanic American Arts, San Antonio, TX, April 1979), 9
123Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 42
124Ibid
126Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 43
127Others have greatly contributed to folklorico in California including Juan Rios, Ernesto Martinez and Gema Sandoval which have been discussed in other studies but a further and in depth study of the history of folklorico in California needs consideration in order to fully understand the contributions of folkloristas and folklorico after 1990 to the continued popularity of folklorico
and the spirit of el Movimiento. Folklorico became the medium and Danzantes Unidos was the vehicle that put “cultural awareness in action” \(^{128}\)

\(^{128}\)Smith, *Mexican Folk Dance Thesis*, 51
Chapter 4

Danzantes Unidos

Chicana/os have long had to deal with the fact that much of their history is lost to them. As Diana Taylor observed, what is known about “authentic dances were also limited as many dances are adapted for stage presentation.” 129 As a result, many Chicana/os in the 1960s sought to reimagine and recover a spirit of community, identity, belonging and affirmation and respect. What began as “imagined community,” as defined by Benedict Anderson, became a reality through folklorico. 130 For Chicana/os in the United States, this community must sometimes be “imagined” as not all have familial ties to Mexico and the communities in which they live was created in the United States. This connection to community within a community, or culture within a culture, created ideals of cohesiveness and sharing and served as an anti-hegemonic tool. 131 The creation of Danzantes Unidos allowed folkloristas to a place to exercise their ideals of community and social justice. Stewart as suggests that “distressed genres” or altered expressive forms often emerge “when nostalgia is juxtaposed with upheaval, revolution and cultural distress.” It was in precisely such an environment that Danzantes Unidos began. 132

The need for connection to heritage and identity was evident by the ardent reaction of the Chicano/a community when the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico under Amalia Hernandez, came to the United States. When the Ballet came to the United States, Mexicans and Chicana/os began to form dance groups all over the United States. 133 Many of these groups were in colleges and universities where much of the Chicano Movement was being forged. The University of

129Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press, 2003, 46. I use the term “authentic” loosely since there is much philosophical debate about this and the subjective term “pure.” Additionally, the fact that some choreographers, as Amalia did, now use creative license in which dances are based on traditional steps and music but incorporate modern styles of dance also complicate these terms.
130Anderson, 6-7.
133Gonzalez ,33, Shay 2006,85
California Los Angeles has an ethnomusicology program that began an ethnic dance component in the 1960s. It was Arturo Gerst who began traveling to Mexico during summers and establishing relationships with dancers and musicians to bring repertoire and resources that would be incorporated into the curriculum at UCLA. The fact that universities had folklorico groups was significant. Universities were the most active spaces in the Movement for civil rights and their attempts to recruit others to college and were a symbol of activism.

One of the dancers that remember the delegation from UCLA coming to Guadalajara, Mexico was Graciela Holguin. She danced with Artes Plásticas, a small company of painters, welders and fine artists founded by Emilio Pulido. Artes Plásticas is now a famous art school in Guadalajara, Mexico, which became affiliated with the University of Guadalajara. Pulido, his friend Rafael Zamarripa who became director of the Ballet Folklorico de Universidad de Guadalajara, and Holguin traveled to UCLA to teach and perform folklorico at UCLA in what is called an “intercambio,” an exchange between groups where they teach and share dances and dance knowledge. At the time Arturo Gerst began his intercambio with Artes Plásticas, Emilio Pulido was asked to stay and teach at UCLA. Among the many students that Emilio Pulido taught were Susan Cashion and John Estrada, who together danced at UCLA in the mid-1960s.

Susan Cashion met Ramon Morones in Guadalajara while studying folklorico. In 1969, when she moved north to attend Stanford University, Cashion and Ramon Morones, who came to the United States, founded Los Lupeños in San Jose, California. Cashion became employed at Stanford University and founded a group on campus while continuing to direct Los Lupeños

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134 Holguin, Graciela, Telephone Interview by Eve Delfin, 7/8/09
135 Ibid
137 Ibid
138 Ibid, 23
139 Ibid, 23
140 Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 24
In founding the dance group Morones stated, “There was a need for this kind of dance form (Mexican folk) within the Chicano community. We started at the right time.” Folklorico met the need within the Chicana/o community by creating a dance community which Chicana/os could identify and relate.

Cashion and Morones brought together several California groups to perform folklorico dance concerts in San Jose, California in 1977. Cashion and Morones also brought maestros from Mexico for performances and workshops. The concerts featured performances by local groups Los Lupeños and Mexicapan, a group founded by Patricia Barrágan and Benjamin Hernández. These gatherings were held for several years, but not under the auspices of Danzantes Unidos and were mainly for already established groups. The concert event was characterized as a collaborative effort which, according to Smith was moved to UCLA under the direction of John Estrada. The purpose of these gatherings was to “create a feeling of harmony and interaction among the groups, while trying to discourage rivalry and competition.” The workshops were limited to those who were maestros or directors. Smith characterized these as gatherings as “joint concerts.” Verdin agrees that there were workshops at Stanford University but that these workshops were only for maestros (teachers). Others have acknowledged that there were joint concerts in 1978-79, but there were no ideas of expansion and the concerts were not seen as precursors to other events. Smith recounts that there were several prominent maestros from Mexico who came to Stanford to teach and dance with other directors in the United States as well as groups coming together in a single venue. But this joint concert is a completely different format than what is now known as Danzantes Unidos. Though both events promoted

141 Ibid 27, Verdin, 4/6/09
142 Ibid, 24
143 Ibid, 27
145 Ibid, 43
146 Verdin, Javier. Interview by Eve Delfín. Fresno, CA, 4/6/09
147 Ibid
148 Verdin, Javier. Interview by Eve Delfín. Fresno, CA, 4/6/09
149 Ferrigno, Tony. Interview by Eve Delfín. Telephone 7/19/09
150 Smith, Mexican Folk Dance, 43
cultural pride and history, the concert was a joint venture that brought groups together for a onetime event whereas Danzantes Unidos Festival was an annual festival that promoted sharing knowledge as well as cultural pride.

By the 1970’s, folklorico groups as we know them today were well established. Student groups such as M.E.C.H.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) joined with other students groups to perform dances and theatre pieces. Many students on campuses all over California began to use folklorico as a means of cultural expression and pride. Such was true of John Estrada, a student of UCLA, a member of a folklorico group Relámpago del Cielo who attended workshops at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. He along with Sue Welsh felt that there was a need for the youth of California to learn more about folklorico. The purpose of his focus in folklorico was to “enhance young people” and to help preserve cultural aspects that were slowly being forgotten. Credit is usually given to Susan Cashion and John Estrada for the concept of bringing together folklorico groups to collaborate in performances but Danzantes Unidos in its format today, according to programs and websites was founded by Estrada. Graciela Holguin, a dancer with the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico under Amalia Hernandez and Guadalajara’s Escuela de Artes Plásticas in the 60’s a founding member of Relámpago de Cielo where she took over as director in 1989. As a member of her company Estrada attended the workshops at Stanford and San Jose and she recalled, “John saw the need for the moms and the dads and came with the ideas to do this for youth.” According to Smith, Danzantes Unidos began in 1977 in San Jose under the guidance of Cashion and Morones. Although there were already workshops being held in California, the idea to have Danzantes

152Verdin, Javier, Interview by Eve Delfin, Fresno, CA 4/6/09
153Estrada, John, Interview by Eve Delfin, Reseda, CA. 8/14/09
154Verdin, Javier, Interview by Eve Delfin, Fresno, CA, 4/6/09
155Holguin, Graciela. Interview by Eve Delfin, Fresno, CA 4/6/09
156Verdin, Javier. Interview by Eve Delfin. Fresno, CA, 4/6/09
157Smith, Mexican Folk Dance Thesis, 43
 Unidos for youth was by Estrada’s. Verdin, who participated in the first Danzantes Unidos Festival, related that this event was intended for, “anyone that wanted to take part and to learn different aspects of folklorico. They didn’t know that much about folklorico at that time so in order to expand the folklorico we needed to teach the youth.” Estrada and Sue Welsh organized the first Danzantes Unidos Festival at UCLA on April 1st, 1979.

Smith’s study of folklorico in California from the 1960’s to the 1990’s, mentions Danzantes Unidos only enough to criticize its organization. Although she did interview several people in the folklorico community, the study omitted interviews with past officers or those directly connected with the organization at the time. According to Smith, Cashion began Danzantes Unidos at Stanford University and later gave the workshop ideas over to John Estrada. Stakeholders agree that she began workshops at Stanford. But Verdin stated and others concur that Danzantes Unidos as we know it now was not the same as the festival at which it originated. Verdin argued that “we give credit to Cashion for bringing maestros to the United States to teach dances and choreography but the actual Danzantes Unidos known today was started by John Estrada.” In fact, Estrada himself credits Susan Cashion with bringing together groups for a performance which was named Danzantes Unidos, and while there were workshops the main format and what Estrada calls the “spirit” of the present festival was not formed.

The name Danzantes Unidos itself has been somewhat in dispute. But according to Estrada and Danzantes Unidos websites, the narrative of the Totonaca indigenous group in describing their own festival and its meaning uses the words “danzantes unidos” to describe the work that they do. The intellectual property of the name of Danzantes Unidos was not coined by any one person. The logo of a sun sitting within cupped hands, created by Estrada, has been

158 Holguín, Graciela, Verdin, Javier, Moreno, Carlos. Interview by Eve Delfín, Fresno, CA, 4/6/09
159 Verdin, 4/6/09
161 Verdin, Javier, 4/6/09
162 Estrada, 8/14/09
163 Ibid
changed and enhanced over the years on the way to becoming a symbol of recognition for Danzantes. Each Festival has a program and in each program and website(s), John Estrada is credited with the founding of Danzantes Unidos. As he is quoted Danzantes Unidos was started to “unify the growing folklorico movement in California by providing dancers and musicians with an opportunity to meet, study and perform together.”\textsuperscript{164} All Festival websites, programs and newspaper articles reviewed for this study state that Estrada is the founder of Danzantes Unidos Festival.\textsuperscript{165}

**Danzantes Unidos Festival**

As groups began to gather for the first Danzantes Unidos Festival (DUF), there was much apprehension at what they would find. There were very few groups in California and there had never been a gathering of this kind. As Tony Ferrigno, director of Los Lupeños characterized it, ”We were really nervous. We didn’t know if they (the other groups) were going to be mean.”\textsuperscript{166} According to the *Los Angeles Times*, there were to be 25 groups in attendance but in actuality there is consensus that there were about 10 groups with about 300-400 participants.\textsuperscript{167} Sponsored by the UCLA dance department, groups came to UCLA to participate in this unique event. Part of the mission of the first Danzantes Unidos Festival was also to bring youth to a university setting. This was in keeping with one of the main goals of the Chicana/o Movement in creating opportunities and access to higher education.\textsuperscript{168} The UCLA Department of Dance was able to lend their support in hosting the Festival for the purposes of recruitment.\textsuperscript{169}

Javier Verdin and Carlos Moreno Jr. both agree that they were not sure what they were

\textsuperscript{164}Cariaga, LA Times, 4/1/79
\textsuperscript{166}Ferrigno, 7/19/09
\textsuperscript{167}Cariaga, Daniel. 1979. Music, Dance News. L.A.Times,1 April, L68. None. 1979. Dance Groups in Festival. L.A.Times. 5 April. SF6, This article incorrectly cites John Estrada as “Jorge”.
\textsuperscript{168}Ferrigno, Tony. Interview by Eve Delfin. Telephone.7/19/07
\textsuperscript{169}Verdin, 4/6/09,
going to find when they arrived at UCLA. 170 Both were surprised that there were other groups that did what they did (folklorico). 171 According to Verdin, Graciela Tapia knew several groups and their directors, presumably from her contacts as ambassador for the Mexican consulate. She helped John Estrada to bring together several groups. 172 The majority of the research about dances and choreography, origins of dances and wardrobe and history was done by long-time dancers and directors who were much respected in the folklorico community because of their knowledge, talent and commitment to folklorico. Estrada invited these persons and their groups to the first Festival in Los Angeles.

In the spirit of in bringing together folklorico groups to share with each other, the Festival was free to the danzantes and to the public. Groups that came to Los Angeles were given host housing. 173 Free housing was made available to the dancers in the homes of other Los Angeles based groups. In this way, the dancers could get to know each other and begin to form relationships without competition. As advertised in the Los Angeles Times, the host housing tradition continued and the public was invited to provide host housing as the Festival began its fourth year. 174 The networking strategy was in keeping with the format of Danzantes Unidos that Estrada envisioned; an indigenous form of teaching in which elders pass knowledge to younger generations.

Indigenous Roots

From the tradition of the Totonaca Festival in Veracruz, Mexico, the Danzantes Unidos Festival was created. 175 Estrada was interested in indigenous roots and found ways of formatting

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170 Moreno Jr., Carlos. Interview by Eve Delfin, Oakland, CA. 5/30/09., Verdin, 4/6/09
171 ibid
172 Verdin, 4/27/09
175 Verdín, 4/27/09
the festival with a modern twist in order to keep indigenous traditions alive.\textsuperscript{176} Taken from the Danzantes Unidos de California website and concurring with programs from Danzantes Unidos, Inc. the format of the festival follows that of the Totonaca Festival (see Appendix 2 for details).\textsuperscript{177} Given that this indigenous form is different from folklorico itself, according to founder Estrada, this format would help to bring together danzantes in a communal spirit. The main goal was for everyone, including the community members, to participate in whatever capacity they could. There was a common goal in which everyone worked towards and enjoyed. The main purpose of the festival was a ceremonial type of celebration. When speaking about the success of the festival Estrada stressed that “we are not talking about a theme - ours was a major event. We had the heavies from the North and the heavies from Central and the heavies from the South… it was a beautiful thing.”\textsuperscript{178} The Festival had “nothing to be compared to--- it was not just for fun—it was cultural enlightenment.”\textsuperscript{179}

This format has remained consistent throughout the time Danzantes Unidos (DU) has remained in operation.\textsuperscript{180} The program has expanded to include two days of workshops in which dancers learned from dance masters from Mexico and the United States. In keeping with the mission of the Danzantes Unidos Festival (DUF), it was the responsibilities of the instructor to have all dancers introduce themselves and relate where they came from in order to create a sense of community during the workshops.\textsuperscript{181} The instructors related the format and purpose of DUF to the participants so that dancers would understand the importance of what they were about to experience. During the dance portion of Danzantes, groups were expected to split up and for two days they had a “new” group with which to bond.\textsuperscript{182} Dancers did not know which

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176}Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{178}Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{179}Estrada, 8/14/09
\item \textsuperscript{181}Ferrigno, 7/19/09
\item \textsuperscript{182}Ibid
\end{itemize}
region, maestro/o (teacher) or other danzantes they were to dance with until they received their registration packet on site. 183 This was done in order to create a new experience in which everyone was on the same footing and learning new material with their new group. On the morning of the third day of workshops dancers performed in a muestra (demonstration) of what they were taught in their workshop. This created a sense of pride and was designed to share what was learned. Everyone was on an equal footing as new dances were learned in a safe learning environment rather than in a form of competition. 184 A community was important, the planning committee made efforts to ensure that resources and accommodations were donated. 185 Estrada would solicit organizations to donate meals and other services. Fast food restaurants as well as food by the host group which would enhance comradery. Everyone would sit together after workshops talking and sharing their experiences. 186

The evenings of the festival were reserved for “showcase” performances by participating groups. Friday evening of the first day of DUF, a children’s concert was performed. 187 On Saturday night was a special performance by the host and Sunday afternoon and evening was reserved for a marathon performance of adult groups which lasted for hours. 188 At the end of the festival, groups were recognized as participants with certificates that were signed by the host and other political officials such as Governor Jerry Brown. 189 As John Estrada pondered, “we celebrated with a lot of important people because I thought young people needed to see – I wanted to have it at UCLA – to enhance young people.” 190 Among guest were actress Carmen Zapata who was “mistress of ceremony” for the second annual Danzantes Unidos Festival. 191 The participation of famous and politically prominent persons enhanced the importance of the

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183 Ibid
184 Estrada, 8/14/09
186 Virginia Diediker, 4/27/09
188 ibid
189 Danzantes Unidos certificate, owned by BFM Carlos Moreno, April 9, 1979
190 Estrada, 8/14/09
festival and its mission of bringing validation and recognition to Chicana/os active in the community and in the state.\textsuperscript{192}

Those who participated in the first few years of the festival were amazed at the atmosphere of sharing and caring.\textsuperscript{193} The creation of a community centered around the “honoring of the danzante” was one of Estrada’s main objectives.\textsuperscript{194} Consequently, dancers became close to their host families. They became friends and stayed in touch in an era before the internet and cell phones which required considerable effort in creating lasting relationships between dancers and groups.\textsuperscript{195} The reason many came was to see what the new popular regional dance variation was that year, to reacquaint with friends and, of course, to dance. As one participant recalled, “We came to see our extended family and to catch up from the last year’s events”\textsuperscript{196} Folklorico groups came from all over California and beyond for this annual dance festival.\textsuperscript{197} Groups came from Oregon and Arizona to participate in an event not available to them locally.\textsuperscript{198} Ferrigno related that in later years they would send one mass mailing and there would be hundreds of calls asking to be able to participate. Groups from hundreds of miles away would show up at the registration table and beg to be able attend.\textsuperscript{199}

Ironically, not all directors were warm to the ideas of DUF. According to Tony Ferrigno, there was a lottery held and only three dancers from his group were allowed to go to DUF each year.\textsuperscript{200} One reason may be that there was skepticism about the true spirit of DUF where directors would not allow their dancers to attend. Out of respect, dancers usually did not rebel against directors in an unspoken rule of conduct.\textsuperscript{201} In any group, the director’s wishes are generally respected and for the most part followed. There are exceptions in which there is a
protocol of disagreement, but for the most part, and in my own experience, directors are the chief
decision maker of the group. It was not until years later after I had left the group Ballet
Folklorico de Carlos Moreno that I attended my first Danzantes in Fresno, CA in 1990.
Although the spirit of competition was not to be part of DUF, directors in any case did see part of
the festival as a venue to “showcase” their group and their abilities. Those who attended DUF
described their experiences as “eye popping” because many knew groups in their own areas but
did not realize there were similar groups around the state. Ferrigno related that “there were many
groups with some great dancing- dancing things we had never seen or danced before.”

After a few years, folkloristas in the north offered to host the DUF. Folkloristas in San
Jose and the group Los Lupeños wanted to host the festival in a university setting at San Jose
State University; one of the requirements of being host. Because hosting the Festival was a large
undertaking, Estrada reluctantly passed on the Festival to San Jose. Not knowing if the hosts in
San Jose were going to implement DUF “correctly,” Estrada planned another Festival the same
year at UCLA in 1984. According to participants interviewed, Danzantes in San Jose
dramatically changed the spirit of the festival. Where the first few years of the festival were
offered for free, in San Jose there was a charge to participate. Understandably, the charge was
needed to offset the expenses related to the festival; venues, dance space and other related costs
needed to be considered. But, according to Estrada, this was the end of his involvement with the
festival he founded. The Danzantes Unidos Festival was a labor of love, implemented with
the ideas and philosophy of honoring and recognizing the danzante. To Estrada, the Danzantes
Unidos Festival was a ceremony with each aspect planned for the recognition and appreciation of

\[202\text{Ibid}\]
\[203\text{Estrada, 8/14/09}\]
\[204\text{Ibid}\]
\[205\text{Ibid}\]
\[206\text{Ibid}\]
\[207\text{Ibid}\]
the folklorico dancer. The changes that occurred in later Festivals were not in the spirit of what Estrada envisioned.

The change in leadership inevitably brought additional changes to the festival. Charging dancers for what was supposed to be a grassroots gathering for the common goal of imparting knowledge for the preservation and continuance of folklorico dance was symbolic of the change in philosophy and began a trend that still exists today. This included the creation of several tiendas (stores) where goods such as costumes and music began to be sold at each festival. While this did add interest in participation, it also created a climate of product and service in an arena that was originated on ideals completely different from this commercialization. The focus changed from the community oriented activity and evolved into a more globalized and commodified model. It seems that in later years, the festival’s emphasis was less on the danzante and more on the spectacle of the dance and the bottom line.

In 1985, John Estrada decided to withdraw from his involvement with Danzantes Unidos. In San Jose, the group Los Lupeños took over control of the festival and later there were other groups to host such as Ballet Folklorico de Carlos Moreno in Hayward, California as well as Tonatiuh Danzantes del Quinto Sol in Salinas, California. In 1992, a host and venue could not be secured for the Festival. For this reason, according to archives, the steering committee was organized to ensure that the Festival would be implemented each year without fail. But Estrada chose not to be involved with that steering committee and ended his tenure as festival host because he felt that the integrity of the event was not being preserved.

Although John Estrada has not been directly involved with the festival and its proceedings since 1985, he has had a profound effect on folkloristas all over California and

\[208\] Ibid
\[209\] Ibid
\[210\] Ibid
\[211\] Ibid
\[213\] Estrada, 8/14/09

41
beyond. Still very popular today despite its difficulties and inner conflicts, folkloristas look forward to attending Danzantes and plan their year around it. Estrada has not been involved with Danzantes for several decades, yet has been recognized on several occasions. In the last decade, I have personally witnessed his recognition on at least two occasions in Fresno, California. Estrada continues to direct his group, Ballet Folklorico de West Los Angeles, and believes in the work that Danzantes Unidos does on a basic level, though he thinks the important “traditions are gone.”

According to the bylaws of Danzantes Unidos as revised in 2002, the steering committee is to include persons from all over California by creating positions that represented various regions of the state. The steering committee was to be totally voluntary with no compensation for travel or expenses related to participating on the committee of Danzantes Unidos. The six regions included: Gold Country (Sacramento and above), Bay Area (San Francisco Bay Area), Central Valley (Sacramento to Bakersfield), Central Coast (Salinas Valley and below), Greater Los Angeles area and San Diego. The committee started strong with a five-year plan including a touring arm of the organization called Danzantes Unidos de California where dancers from all over California and from different groups could come together to practice and perform.

Over time, different opinions and philosophies of the parties involved in Danzantes Unidos grew behind the scenes. From minutes taken at the quarterly meetings, there was a difference of opinion as to the expansion of the activities of the organization. Included in this was how to better further the organization in terms of funding and expansion programs and the direction of the organization and the Festival in general. According to John Estrada the organization was incorporated and held a bank account in 1979. In 1994, the organization was

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213 Ibid
213 *Danzantes Unidos Inc. By-Laws. 2002. Print*
214 Ibid
215 Moreno, Carlos, Jr., 7/09
216 Estrada, 8/09
reincorporated under Tony Ferrigno, who was president at the time. In 2001, there was and continues to be a dispute between different factions of the folklorico community leaders who claim that the entity of Danzantes Unidos “belongs” to them. Unfortunately, there was much confusion with folklorico groups and individuals who did not understand the legal disagreement within the organization of Danzantes Unidos. Even such areas as who the logo and history of the organization “belonged” to became the subject of controversy despite the fact that all agreed John Estrada was the founder.

Amid internal conflict, accusations of lack of transparency, a struggle for leadership, the committee that began as with the goal of insuring that the festival would always go on became instead a source of confusion. Since 2002, there have been two Danzantes Unidos Festivals, both claiming to be the “original and authentic” festival. There have even been accounts that dancers registering for one Festival had actually registered and paid for workshops at another festival in another part of the state. This confusion led to anger and resentment among folkloristas in the state, many of whom have decided not to participate in either Danzantes Unidos Festivals. Some folkloristas did not care who “owned” or who was the “original”—they simply wanted to dance. The disagreement has hurt the folklorico community and limited its growth. Because both parties do not want to concede and claim to have copyrights to logos and names, there has been a stalemate that does not allow either organization to progress. In 2001, the last time the festival was united, there were over 1500 participants. In 2005, the numbers of participants fell to 700, in large part due to the divisions within the organization. Unfortunately, the rift between Danzantes parties has given rise to leadership in both steering committees that have similar ideals and hopes for the future of folklorico but who do not

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217 Ferrigno, 7/09
218 Anonymous, Personal communication, 4/01
219 Moreno, Carlos, Jr., 7/09
220 Ibid
221 Ibid
communicate. Between both steering committees there is a wealth of information about not only the history of folklorico but about the knowledge of its history and culture. For the past several years, folkloristas have felt that there should be a way of reconciling the different philosophies and bring together the folklorico leadership and “at least get in a situation where we could say we are honestly trying to work together with the interest of expanding folklorico to more people and the opportunity to be part of it” would be more beneficial to the folkloristas and the future of folklorico. Nevertheless, Danzantes Unidos de California and Danzantes Unidos, Inc. have both survived and continue to hold festivals on a yearly basis, indicating that interest in folklorico continues despite these internal divisions.

\[222\] Ibid
Chapter 5

As a number of dancers and directors have commented, folklorico existed in California well before it became more formalized in the model of dance group that we see today.\(^{223}\) As the Chicana/o Movement began to flourish, Chicana/os began to look to ways that they could express their culture and pride, much in the same way muralists, dramatists and graphic artists did. Folklorico has continued to thrive and created a space where Chicana/os can explore and negotiate aspects of their cultural diversity, identity, and history. In doing so, the Chicana/o community was validating an identity, exerting agency, and creating a collective memory in their pursuit of recognition of their culture and art.\(^ {224} \) There were lessons to be learned for those who were becoming politically aware and exploring the identity that had been denied them by mainstream America.

This thesis has explored the wide spectrum of group philosophies associated with folklorico. Across all of these various groups, with their different notions of cultural “traditionalism,” folklorico has provided a space that linked activism and identity. Included and danced in a wide variety of settings, folklorico was a visual and aesthetic reminder of the Mexican heritage of the Chicana/o people. Tracing the inception of the organization Danzantes Unidos within the larger narrative of folklorico in the Chicana/o Movement assists understanding how dancers used folklorico to illustrate their commitment to each other as dancers and their community as a whole. The survival of Danzantes Unidos, despite its internal divisions, attests to the fact that the folklorico “movement,” as was described by Ferrigno, remains an integral part of the Chicana/o Movement despite its omission from the existing historiography.

In comparing Danzantes Unidos with the abundance of scholarship done on, say

\(^{223}\) Verdin, 8/27/09, Holguin, 8/27/09

Chicana/o Theatre, it becomes evident that there was a lack of understanding of the importance of folklorico within the Movement. Folklorico was left out of the account of the Chicana/o Movement mainly because it lacks the material or archival records associated with other aspects of the movement. This is further illustrated in photos of the C.A.R.A. display where documentation of Azteca dancers and folklorico dancers were included in some aspect of murals but are not depicted as a main venue where the Movement lived. Because one cannot tangibly “read” dances, audiences may not understand all the nuances of the dances and so folklorico has been routinely dismissed from the historical record. In contrast, we see that other areas of art were valued and preserved in exhibits and books. Scholars, meanwhile, have focused a great deal of attention on the theatre, music, murals and graphics of the Chicano/a movement.

From the beginnings of Teatro Campesino through the hundreds of theatre groups that cropped up all over California and the country, theatre has received considerable attention. One of the main achievements of the Chicana/o theatre movement was the organization Teatro Nacional de Aztlan (TENAZ). This theatre collective was an original of its kind in collaborative work and its purpose. Scholarship about how this organization inspired even more participation in theatre is tremendous as workshops and a marathon of theatre shows ensued. Unfortunately, though it was very successful, TENAZ did not survive. Danzantes Unidos has survived for over three decades and yet the amount of attention given to this organization is scant compared to theatre in general and TENAZ specifically. In Appendix I we see a timeline of some of the different aspects of the Chicana/o Movement, including political art. Included in this are organizations that also existed but have not continued nearly as long as Danzantes Unidos. ANGF has also

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225Taylor, Diana, xix
226Gaspar de Alba, 42
227For more on TENAZ see Huerta, 2000
survived but received little scholarship. Folklorico groups were thriving throughout the
Chicana/o Movement and beyond. In fact, the groups listed on the bottom of the timeline
are still in operation today compared to the many areas of activism included on the top of
the timeline. This confirms that though folklorico was not given the credence it deserved
in the Movement, folkloristas did understand the work they were doing and continued in
their efforts to keep dancing and performing despite the difficulties of keeping a group in
operation.

As a practicing folklorista, I had heard the stories of the first festivals at UCLA and was
anticipating more. But as my subjects began to speak, I realized that the events this organization
implemented were more than just a folklorico display. It was a life changing event for many who
participated, especially in those early years. What most people see as a Festival and the bringing
together of many groups and individuals to dance was really the brainchild of John Estrada who
saw Danzantes Unidos Festival as a ceremony—a ceremony to honor the danzante. As Javier
Verdin so succinctly stated, “no one else was doing it, so we had to do it for ourselves” and their
efforts gave credence to the dance and the dance movement. Estrada was emphatic in his
assertion that Danzantes Unidos was not a concept or a theme. It was in fact a ceremony in
which each detail had its place which paralleled the indigenous Totonaca model. (Appendix II)
Everyone in the community has its task in ensuring that the Festival was a success. Taking from
this model and applying it to the folklorico community was in direct agreement with many of the
Chicana/o Movement charges to itself. Those ideals did not only include reclamation of history
and culture but also resonated in the inclusion and education of the Chicana/o.

In Anderson’s, Imagined Communities, he states that nations or communities are:

*Imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most
of their fellow-members. . . . *limited* because even the largest of them, . . . . has
finite, if elastic boundaries . . . Finally it is imagined as a *community*, because

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228 Verdin, 4/26/09
regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. In the case of the folklorico community, their comradeship and consistent practice with the same group week after week created a community that I suggest transcended the imaginary. Out of necessity, Chicana/os created a community where they felt accepted. Furthermore, in creating this community locally, participants forged links with other groups and organizations with those dancing throughout the state and beyond. In creating and participating in Danzantes Unidos Festivals, folkloristas were going beyond the confines of their own geographical space and reaching out to others they did not know existed. This is illustrated by comments made by Tony Ferrigno who described that first Danzantes Unidos Festival as “eye-popping” and nothing he had ever seen before. It was a congregation of folkloristas who, because of their passion and commitment to the art of folklorico, braved the unknown to travel to a place that delivered an experience they did not expect. Additionally, as Anderson suggests, members of the folklorico community did not know that others throughout the state danced folklorico as well. Danzantes Unidos brought together all these aspects in a model that had indigenous roots.

In response to the observation by Smith in her thesis on the history of folklorico in California and the fact that the festivals were disorganized, Tony Ferrigno stated that “it wasn’t that it was disorganized, it’s that nobody expected that many people.” Verdin agreed that it was the increase in participation and the fact that they were so surprised at the turn out in Fresno in 1990. Since there had only been festivals in Southern and Northern California, there was a community of folkloristas in the Central Valley that had

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229 Anderson, 6-7
230 Ferrigno, 7/19/09
231 Ibid
232 Verdin, Fresno, 4/6/09
not been able to afford to participate in Danzantes.\textsuperscript{233} This participation and interest in folklorico continued and in the last two decades there has been a large geographical diversity that participates in the Festival.

Interestingly, in the case of my subjects, of the eight subjects that were interviewed for this thesis four were Mexican nationals, born and raised in Mexico, two were European-American, and two fit the definition put forth in the introduction as Chicana/o. The common thread amongst the subjects interviewed is that they all understood that folklorico was an understudied and undervalued aspect of not only the art community, but the Chicana/o community as well. In fact, all the interviewees related the importance of preserving Mexican history brought through the dances to the youth of Mexican heritage in the United States. Indeed, one of John Estrada’s goals was to bring young Chicana/os into a space where they could celebrate being a folklorist—a danzante.\textsuperscript{234} Regardless, of their own heritage, whether Mexican national, European heritage, or Chicana/o, all subjects had an appreciation for folklorico and understood that the Mexican history and culture of Chicana/os needed to be reclaimed and that the medium of folklorico did so in a manner that other genres of art did not. Further evidence of this phenomenon in my experience is that of parents, either of Mexican or Chicana/o, who would come to my own dance company, Danzantes de Merced, and related that they wanted their children to learn about their history. Parents understood that through the dances of folklorico was a wealth of history and culture that could be learned from participating in not only folklorico but in the Danzantes Unidos festivals as well.

A recurring trend demonstrated by the many youth participating at Danzantes Unidos festivals is that many of the Chicana/o youth that dance today do not speak Spanish. Nonetheless, they understand and strive to gain knowledge of their history

\textsuperscript{233}Ferrigno, 7/09
\textsuperscript{234}Estrada, 8/09
through their involvement in folklorico. Danzantes Unidos directly affects this since the Festival has for several years produced a monografía (manual). This manual outlines where dances come from historically and geographically through a narrative and a description of the costuming associated with the dances. 235 For the most part, these manuals were produced only in Spanish but recently they were produced in English after the leadership found that dancers were requesting the information in English since they did not speak, read or write Spanish. In this way, Danzantes Unidos has made progress in its efforts to impart a history to its participants.

The commodification that John Estrada tried to avoid has grown not only in folklorico in general, but at Danzantes Unidos festivals as well. Vendors who carry and cater to the costume needs of folklorico groups come to the Festival, in many instances specifically to buy whatever costumes they are in need of. Not only that, but the Festival itself has become quite expensive to attend and excludes the population of folklorista for which Danzantes Unidos specifically was begun. In charging for not only registration to attend, but for each performance, the Festival excludes dancers and groups from lower socio-economic status and defeats the original purpose of John Estrada’s vision.

Based on the evidence put forth in participation and interviews of folkloristas, folklorico has had a significant impact on the Chicana/o community in California. Feelings of loss of culture and history and the struggle to realize or reclaim an identity is a major theme of the subjects’ reasons for participating in folklorico. Additionally, the longevity of Danzantes Unidos Festivals only solidifies the importance and place of folklorico in the greater Chicana/o community. One can only hope that folklorico will be further recognized as an important aspect of cultural art and takes its place of importance among other genres of art and within the greater Chicana/o Movement historiography. Folklorico has continued to gain recognition and

acceptance in the performance arts arena. Folklorico dance companies have increasingly performed in major venues to sold-out audiences in the last few years. As folklorico is acknowledged and appreciated there is room for more research on this subject. Other areas that could be explored but were impractical for this length of study are: women’s role in the keeping of the folklorico tradition, a historiography of ANGF and its role as a national folklorico organization, and a more in depth study of the “heavies” of folklorico and their role in the folklorico community. As this project came to a close, there were publications that focused on expressive art and the powerful work that folklorico does within the Chicana/o cultural community. Folklorico is a genre of performance that still struggles to gain recognition but has made some gains to that end. The importance of the role of Danzantes Unidos by virtue of its longevity and folklorico in general as evidenced by the thousands of people that continue participate cannot be denied.
Appendix 1

Chican@ Art Movement

1968-1975 Community-Oriented

1965
Teatro Campesino Begins

1967
Quinto Sol Begins

1967
BFM Carlos Moreno
San Francisco Bay Area

1967
I am Joaquin Poem

1969
Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

1969
Los Lupeños San Jose

1970
Self Help Graphics

1970
BF Ollin
San Fernando Valley

1971
TENAZ Begins

1971
ANGF Asociacion de Grupos Folkloricos

1975
Quinto Sol Ends

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

1975-1981 and late Globalized

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins

1979
Danzantes Unidos Continues

1980
TENAZ ends Mid-'80s

1980
1969
Ro
Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

1970
Self Help Graphics

1971
TENAZ Begins

1975
Quinto Sol Ends

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

1980
TENAZ ends Mid-'80s

1980
Zoot Suit Premieres

1980
Zoot Suit Premieres

2011
Danzantes Unidos Continues

1969
I am Joaquin Poem

1967
Quinto Sol Begins

1967
BFM Carlos Moreno
San Francisco Bay Area

1967
I am Joaquin Poem

1969
Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

1970
Self Help Graphics

1971
TENAZ Begins

1975
Quinto Sol Ends

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

1975
Quinto Sol Ends

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

1975
Zoot Suit Premieres

2011
Danzantes Unidos Continues

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins

1979
Danzantes Unidos Begins
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Totonaca Festival System</strong></th>
<th><strong>DU Festival</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organization of the religious festival of the Indians was designed to encourage the entire pueblo to take part in the celebration. It was known as the Mayordomia. Preparation for the festival began four months prior to the event with the assignment of ranks, titles, and specific duties.</td>
<td>Our Mayordomia encourages Mexican Folklorico dancers and the general public to partake in a united celebration. Dancers study together, perform in public concerts and are honored in the traditional parade of participating groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mayordomos</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Mayordomos</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greatly respected persons who make all plans and preparations for the festival and are the promoters responsible for arranging groups of dancers, food, drink, and housing.</td>
<td>The Festival Director assigns specific duties to fellow Mayordomos, including the host group, workshop instructors, group directors, and volunteers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Los Fiscales</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Fiscales</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elders of the pueblo who decorate the church with flowers and keep the candles burning for five days.</td>
<td>The Danzantes Unidos Board of Directors who through their year-round work keep the light of Danzantes Unidos burning as a beacon for all folkloristas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Danzantes</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Danzantes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dancers invited by the Mayordomo to take part in the festival. They might be a part of any of more than twenty groups.</td>
<td>The Mexican Folklorico Dance Companies who heed the call and come together in the largest gathering of folklorico dancers in the world.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Campañeros</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Campañeros</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons responsible for ringing the bells each hour during the festival.</td>
<td>Music makers and strolling musicians who provide the music for the people and the dancers.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Totiles</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Totiles</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Nahuatl word meaning &quot;helper&quot;. These are the assistants to the Mayordomos.</td>
<td>Volunteers who assist the Mayordomos in such tasks as stage production, decorations, food preparation, and housing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mandones</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Mandones</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistants to the Mayordomos who are sent to do the special tasks during the actual festival.</td>
<td>Ushers, festival workers, clean-up committee are all essential to the smooth working of the festival.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>La Colecta</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Colecta</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An event which occurred on the four Mondays preceding the festival wherein the Mayordomos and Fiscales gathered in one house to take up a collection to defray the costs of the festival.</td>
<td>DUF funds come from registration fees, grants, awards and corporate and local businesses. Monies from early registration allow us to contract for services that will benefit the festival.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Tatitas Principales</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUF Tatitas Principales</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most respected viejos and viejas of the pueblo who are the honored guests of Mayordomos.</td>
<td>Workshop instructors, honored guests, sponsors, officials and invited artists. Not necessarily viejos and viejas, but certainly folks who have toiled in the field.</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Manda</td>
<td>DUF Manda</td>
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<td>A sacred honor bestowed upon the Mayordomo to take care of the physical and spiritual needs of the danzantes.</td>
<td>Our Festival Director is charged with the responsibility of caring for the participating danzantes, their directors, maestros, festival staff, attending community and invited guests during the festival.</td>
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</tbody>
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<th>Mayordomo's Post</th>
<th>DUF Mayordomo's Post</th>
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<td>A time frame of one year was stipulated for the post of Mayordomo and a jail term was called for if the designated person refused the position. At the close of the festival a meeting of Mayordomos was held to determine who would accept the honor of organizing the following year's festival.</td>
<td>Yes, it's a big responsibility and one that we gladly take on to honor the work of our community and to avoid serving time. Perhaps, YOU would like to host next year? Please make plans to attend our board meeting on the Monday immediately following the festival.</td>
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</tbody>
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