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Identidad and Mejicanidad: Dance Transference through Mexican Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco Dance

Erica Ocegueda

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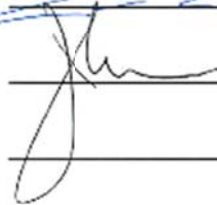
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**IDENTIDAD AND MEJICANIDAD: DANCE TRANSFERENCE
THROUGH MEXICAN FOLKLÓRICO, AZTECA, AND
FLAMENCO DANCE**

BY

ERICA OCEGUEDA

**BACHELOR OF ARTS, THEATER AND DANCE
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
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Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

Identidad and Mejicanidad examines cultural identity and dance through the lens of "owners," "borrowers," and "renters." I examine how non-professional participants of these dance forms are beacons for cultural expression and serve to explore the fringe of the sense of cultural knowing through Mexican Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco dance. Through these dance forms I interrogate how cultural identity frames questions of authenticity and identity.

Ownership of cultural identity and issues of authenticity are a source of ire for many underrepresented groups of people. Maintaining who is "in control" of a cultural expressions' evolution is a common dispute. The legacy of colonization brought many owners, borrowers, and renters as practitioners of identity. These practitioners

then become representative of the perceived fluid *Mejicano* identity, not only by outsiders, but by *Mejicanos* as well.

Looking at the sum of the cultural dance parts of what is a *Mejicano*--Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco--creates an incomplete definition of what is a *Mejicano*. *Mejicano* cultural identity is deeper than the sum of its parts; it is an exponential growth that leads to a new hybrid of *Mejicano* identity. I argue this growth takes the owners, borrowers, and renters and places them at the head of identity evolution. The depth of influence that dance has on identity is comparable to how much consumers of culture think dance is relevant to our personal experiences. The integration of dance and its source material plays an insidious role on cultural development. The introduction of widely accepted cultural icons introduced by innocuous pop culture begins the formation of the adoption of cultural identity. This adoption presents the delineation of active "borrowing" or how cultural identity is awarded to us by birthright. In turn the award of this birthright represents an "ownership." The "ownership" given by birthright is how we come to "own" cultural identity.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Realization of my Owner/Borrower Status.....	4
SECTION ONE: HISTORY OF DANCE FORMS.....	8

Mexican Folklórico Dance.....	8
Imagining the Community.....	15
Danza Azteca.....	17
Flamenco.....	21
SECTION TWO: OWNERS, BORROWERS, AND RENTERS.....	24
Owners.....	24
Borrowers.....	26
Renters.....	28
Authenticity, Hybridity, and Colonization.....	32
Anderson's Connection of Identity to Nationalism..	33
Intent and Commitment.....	38
In Between Cultures.....	39
Realization of My Owner/Borrower Status.....	41
Malefyt's Encounter w/Renting.....	42
Frustrations of a Newly Discovered Borrower.....	44
Hierarchy.....	45
Credentials and Evaluations.....	47
Family Lineage.....	49
CONCLUSION.....	51
Guidelines for Cultural Dance.....	52
APPENDIX.....	55
Review of Literature.....	55
Cultural Politics.....	55
Identity and Nationalism.....	57
Dance Texts.....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62

INTRODUCTION

The expression of tradition through dance exists in all societies. From cultural dance of ballet in the courts of Louis XIV to the expression of Butoh, Bharata Natyam, and New Mexican pueblo dances, people strive to be performative in their relative hemispheres (Kealinohomoku, 545). The sharing of cultural dance forms leads to a different type of cultural understanding. In this essay, I delineate Mexican Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco dance and how these dance forms contribute to the identity of a Mexican through the lens of an owner, borrower, and renter.

I came to these terms through my own experiences in dance. I began to study Mexican Folklórico dance at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the Fall of 1995. I transferred into UCSC and read about the Mexican Folklórico dance group Los Mejicas in the orientation literature. A neighbor in the apartments I lived in was a participant of the group and took me to my first rehearsal. I harbored a deep sentimentality and secret desire from when I was a young girl to perform Mexican Folklórico dance. My parents did not want to spend family resources on dance, so when the opportunity to dance Mexican Folklórico presented itself, I eagerly took it. I integrated with the group immediately and continued dancing with them for five years, including two years after I graduated from UCSC.

My joining of Los Mejicas coincided with my personal political awakening and I was equally drawn to MEChA

(*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán*) and Los Mejicas. I viewed my participation in Los Mejicas as an embodied practice of my politics. I became director of the group in my final year at UCSC and felt fully entrenched in my embodied ideological practice. I had plans to continue this path with Aztec dance. I wanted to explore all facets of *Mejicanidad* through dance and my body. By *Mejicanidad* I mean an exploration of Mexicaness, how it manifests in cultural capital and its embodiment and performance. Although it was 1998, I knew that performance informed something about how I felt as a Mexican in the United States, I just did not have the language to express it yet.

I moved to Albuquerque in September of 2000 and began to dance with *Kalpuli Ehecatl*¹, led by Patricio "Paz" Zamora. I met Paz at a Mexican Folklórico conference, ANGF (*Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos*) in Kansas City in the summer of 1997. At the time I had no aspirations of moving to Albuquerque, however when I met Paz at his home in Albuquerque in the summer of 2000 on a preliminary visit to explore the viability of moving to New México, we recognized each other from the conference years before. I deemed it as more than coincidence and decided that I needed to dance with his group. My decision to dance Azteca was rooted in the same sense of entitlement that I was embodying my

¹ Kalpuli means community. Ehecatl means Wind. Both words are Nahuatl words. Throughout this essay, footnotes will be utilized to clarify, translate or define key terms. Citations to secondary literatures will be cited parenthetically, and a full literature review appends this essay.

culture in order to better perform my *Mejicanidad*. I believed that if I continued to practice this utopia of cultural identity through dance that I would be able to feel an idealized state of *Mejicanidad* (Dolan, 19). I did not know what that looked like, but I believed it existed and that I could attain it.

I did not think much of my position in dancing the cultural dances of Mexican Folklórico or Aztec dance until I began to take classes in Flamenco. Flamenco was the first time I ever had to pay for a class. My previous dance training apart from conferences and special workshops had been free of charge. I only paid for practice accessories and for my dance shoes. My first Flamenco class was in the spring semester of 2004 with Marisol Enciñias at the University of New Mexico and shortly after that is when the articulation of owner, borrower, and renter began to take shape.

Realization of my Owner/Borrower Status

It was not clear to me when I began my Flamenco study that it was something in which I would invest my scholarship. I was interested in exploring other dance forms and chose to dance Flamenco largely because I found myself in Albuquerque and so many people I knew who had gone through the academic program encouraged me to not let the opportunity of studying Flamenco pass me by. A driving reason as to why I decided to take a class in it was I thought that, as a Mexican deeply rooted in all aspects of

Mexican dance, I needed to further examine the connection to colonization that I studied from a colonizers' dance perspective. My initial thoughts were that, because Flamenco originated in Spain and there was evidence of its influence in Mexican Folklórico, that it was the precursor to Mexican dance (Nájera-Ramírez, *Dan.Acr.Bor.* 281). Upon further inquiry I realized the role of *Gitano's* in the development of Flamenco. In Marisol's class, I, like so many people before me, became drawn to Flamenco in a visceral manner and began to study it with more earnest.

I submitted a work-study application to work the annual Flamenco Festival held in Albuquerque in 2004 and listed my stage experience in producing Mexican Folklórico dance shows, as well as not-for-profit concerts. A few weeks later, I received a phone call from Eva Enciñias-Sandoval, the director of the Festival and head of the Flamenco program at the University of New Mexico. She called to offer me the job as the stage manager for the Festival and I, with a severe lack of adequate knowledge of what I was really getting myself into, agreed.

When I first met the *Gitanos*², in the summer of 2004, I also met Manuela Carrasco³. It was upon meeting her *músicos*⁴ when I realized how deeply I was out of my league as a

² *Gitanos* is the Spanish word for Gypsy. It is also the name that the Roma use to identify themselves in Spain. It is the word the Romani people in Spain use to refer to themselves.

³ Manuela Carrasco is considered a premier Flamenco performer. She is from a prominent Roma family in Sevilla.

⁴ musicians

dancer and student. I was now the outsider. It was not my right to study Flamenco, but my privilege. Although I could make the colonization argument that connected me to Spain, it did not necessarily connect me to the art form, let alone to *Gitanos*, who are the predominant producers of Flamenco (Leblon, 73). I had to recognize that this culture did not belong to me. There was a whole extensive history with a people that have a language, a flag, and a culture that has very little to do with me, a Chicana from Los Angeles with deep-seated roots in Guadalajara.

Although there are quite a few similarities in Mexican and *Gitano* culture stemming from similar notions of family and religion, we are still two cultures separated by a large ocean. For the first time in my dance career, I had to negotiate the space I was taking up in dance class. Through that negotiation is how I came to the ideas of the owner, borrower, and renter. I needed to articulate the negotiation that I felt and give language to what my fellow dancers also experienced.

In Flamenco, I saw for the first time how much my privileged positioning played a role in how I had not seen the indigenous groups that have kept Azteca dance as a vibrant dance form. I was not an owner and found myself questioning my status. I decided I was a renter of Flamenco because I paid for class, and that I was a borrower of Azteca because I did not pay for the dance knowledge, but I am not an owner, meaning I am not of direct indigenous

descent and my family has no connection with indigenous practices in México. In terms of Mexican Folklórico I was open to being an owner, but that more than likely I was really a borrower to my Mexican brethren, due to my being born outside México, the country of ownership.

Before I unpack the terms of owner, borrower, and renter I will, in the first section, lay out a detailed history of Mexican Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco as dance forms in the United States. Within this section, I will discuss where these dance forms intersected with the larger idea of *Mejicanidad*, especially how it manifested itself in the Chicano movement (Nájera-Ramírez, *Dan.Acr.Bor.*, 282).

In the second section I unpack further the notions of owner, borrower, and renter and how I use them in my discourse not only as categories, but also as polemics in cultural identity as it relates to dance. My hope is that the presentation of *Mejicanidad* through the lens of dance will present the connections necessary to begin a conversation on the tangible ways that cultural dance forms contribute to the performance of cultural identity and help inform and structure cultural identity. This transmission not only occurs within homogenous groups but across cultures as well.

Section One: History of Dance Forms

Mexican Folklórico Dance

Mexican Folklórico dance is an extensive art that took a more organized form in the 1960's with the advent of Amalia Hernández and her company, the *Ballet Folklórico de México*. Prior to the establishment of Hernández's national dance group, this dance form was performed throughout the country in a wide range of methods. Some states performed their dances in private parties others in the public square, and even others did not have an established style of Mexican Folklórico dance (Hutchinson, 215). A dance and region that takes up the Eastern coast of México which includes the states of Tabasco and Veracruz is called *Jarocho*. The region of *Jarocho* has the distinction of being the place of first contact for México with Spain. *Son Jarocho* is a style of music that is an amalgamation of indigenous (mostly *Huasteca*⁵), Spanish, and African rhythms. This style of music and dance is very popular throughout the Mexican states and is a popular representation of Eastern México. How this style of dance and music is performed is of particular importance because of its stature in Mexican Folklore tradition. Next to the state of Jalisco and its

⁵ Huasteca is the large indigenous group that lives in the states of San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, and Hidalgo. Huasteca is a common term for the music of that region, similar to Jarocho music.

mariachis, charros, and women in large skirts, it is arguably the second most popular representation of México.

I concentrate my analysis on Mexican Folklórico on Anita González's *Jarocho Soul*. She depicts how *Jarocho* images take on a different meaning for those who perform them as opposed to the casual observer. These depictions shift according to circumstance:

Because Jarocho is a major identifying symbol of the region, Veracruz artists incorporate aspects of Jarocho mythos into performance works, lacing regional Jarocho motifs through dances and theatrical representations.

To some degree, the Jarocho musician or dancer is the ideal manifestation of mestizaje, and, as such, an iconographic palette for performed identity.(69)

Depending on the locale of the performance, whether in a theater, at a party with relatives, an annual local festival, or whether it be dance or theater, there is different weight of "Jarochoiness" involved by the performer, and expected from the observer. If you are observing in the state of Veracruz, you expect the show to be "more authentic" than if you were watching a *Jarocho* show in Chicago.

González also presents *Jarocho* as a mixture or *mezcla* of African, Spanish, and Native American ancestry. She not only describes the physical combination of these three different ethnic groups, but also discusses briefly how they manifest themselves in *Jarocho* culture. The Mexican

government appears to give large precedence to emphasize the *mezcla* or cohesive blend of these cultures as opposed to their differences. The *Jarocho* presented for consumption by the greater Veracruz public contains this message.

González uses the differences between *Jarocho* as theater and *Jarocho* as dance to display how effectively identity translates to the public. In *Jarocho* dance, the Mexican government has supported the university dance and music groups since the 1960's. However, in *Jarocho* theater, every six year election of governorship in Veracruz affects funding. The risks that theater takes in terms of presenting *Jarocho* identity in a different form, refusing to re-hash the *Jarocho* images that dance has so carefully constructed, does not sit well with the audience or with the government. In *Jaroco* dance, though, the Universidad de Veracruz's dance group has had the same director since its inception in 1964 and continues to be in the good graces of the government due to its constant director, hence the steady stream of funding.

This discrepancy is a common occurrence in the support of the arts in México. The PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) political party that dominated the Mexican political scene for over fifty years left a legacy of static heads of committees. The level of paternalism enjoyed during those years has deep-seated roots, so that a change in the ruling political party has had an extremely difficult time in unraveling.

The structure of González's argument begins with a cultural mixing of Mexican performance. She emphasizes the difference between Afro-Mexican and Afro-American cultural roots. In Afro-Mexican, you have an encouraged synthesis that creates something new, whereas in the United States African-American community clings to the individual pieces of history and expands on their individual contributions. In the U.S., the celebration of Black History Month attempts to show how the contributions of Black Americans were crucial in the forming of the country. In México, to celebrate one ethnic group over another is considered divisive. Contributions are seen as done per state with the absence of ethnic make-up. In the chapter "Roots of Jarocho," González discusses how the costumes and the musical structure came to be and how they have been preserved through active government interference and funding. She concludes with the presentation of traditional fiestas that encourage the identities presented through *Jarocho* dance into the public realm.

On the Mexican side of the border, there has been much financial support to keep this type of embodied practice of identity preserved with limited growth, but in the United States this practice has taken a different shape. These dances did not become popular until the late 1960's with the advent of the Chicano movement. The history of their growth in the United States differs widely from the controlled patriotism México tried to produce (Hutchinson, 217). The

Chicano movement, similar to its use of political messages in the Teatro Campesino to pursue unionization of farm workers, used dance as another form of entertainment for political means (Acuña, 266). Initially dance was used to attract crowds to their events with images and sounds of a country that, for many farm workers and day laborers, felt far away and so their Mexicaness evolved into something else. Once students became more involved in the protests in Los Angeles and through to Texas with La Raza Unida party, they formed a different type of consciousness around dance (Acuña, 271).

Folklórico dance was now an outlet of creative and political expression. After the rise of MEChA, a political organization that was rooted in community service in high schools and universities, various incarnations of Mexican Folklórico groups followed. These groups made a point of differentiating themselves from the original group based in México City by Amalia Hernández by taking the dance form out of the theater, taking ballet technique out of the dance, and preceding their group names with the phrase *grupo folklórico* as opposed to *ballet folklórico*. There is a whole possible discussion on the political implications of using *grupo* vs. *ballet* in the Southwest where Folklórico groups became prevalent (Nájera-Ramírez, *Dan.Acr.Bor.*, 279). This conversation was more dynamic in the 1970s and into the 1980s when fighting over government money for operating budgets was more active. In the state of California, once

government funding for dance and theater began to dry up in the late 1980s, these battles over *grupo* vs. *ballet* became moot. *Grupo*, of course, means grassroots-oriented where these Mexican cultural dances came from and *ballet* refers to the extraction of these dances and placing them on a theater stage.

Government money from the United States that supported cultural arts in public schools came later, and aided many dance groups until the mid-1980s when public policy towards "ethnic programming" began to shift and wane in California. Although the amount of Mexican Folklórico groups in the United States grew, recognition from Mexican Folklórico groups formed and based out of México has never been forthcoming. This lack of acknowledgement created a shadow of how Chicanos in the United States feel that their fellow Mexican dancers do not take them seriously, a sentiment that, unfortunately, is not completely without merit. Although the amount of government spending on dance has waned in the U.S., in México it is still quite active and can be used in a study of how, in *Jarocho's Soul*, they strive to keep dance and culture the same.

The crux of González' investigation is how government spending shaped *Jarocho* identity:

One byproduct of the evolving, post-revolutionary approach to nationalist art was the emergence of folklore as a means of inculcating into the Mexican proletariat a sometimes- revisionary Mexican history

and heritage. Folkloric music and dance appealed to a broad sector of the populace and informed them about heroic historical deeds, "traditional" local customs, and revolutionary heroes both real and imagined.(25)

This political agenda that the Mexican government actively takes towards their dance leads to a different product, and therein lies the complexity of comparing these different types of identity that eventually lead to a Mexican.

There is a great resistance for the acknowledgement of *Mejicanos* that live on the American side of the border once they have had children on that side. This is largely, I believe, due to how much nationality takes precedence over ethnicity in México. There is a sense that inside México is the only time and place that you can be Mexican, it doesn't exist outside the country; the encapsulation of Mexican identity is in these tangible political borders. The construction of nationalism is also found in *Jarocho's Soul* as well as in Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

Imagining the Community

Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, discusses how nationalism constructed nation-states, then empires, and how it then morphed into colonialism before finally taking a turn into the realm of post-colonialism. The notion of taking nationality with you is part of the diasporic journey that does not adhere to political boundaries when applied to the *Mejicano* reality. People move in and out of borders and

nations constantly. You cannot contain people physically for very long, so it is no surprise that culture is also uncontainable in one nation. Culture in the form of nationality spreads is part of the diaspora.

In order to better understand how national identity forms represent themselves, I look to Anderson to deconstruct what comprises a nation. Anderson proposes the question, "Why are people ready to die for these inventions?" (141). People heavily invest in the invention of cultural identity that Anderson discusses. He gives a chronological explanation of the history of nationalism by first deconstructing what is a nation:

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.(5-6)

Anderson then defines his terms and proposes his thesis:

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.(7)

Identity links to these notions of imagined communities due to its conception in the mind of those that possess it, that find a way to define it for themselves, and that eventually share it with others. This identity construction is similar to the imagined community. It is how we put together pieces that we think define who we are and coalesce it first as an

idea, and then potentially as a materialist reality. Cultural dance connects to the idea of diasporic identity by being the physicalization of cultural identity (Nájera-Ramírez, *Dan.Acr.Bor.*, 285). Movement, attire, music, and other material signifiers capture the intersections of dance, culture, and national identity. My decision to use Mexican Folklórico, Azteca, and Flamenco dance as the components of Mexican identity according to Anderson is my contribution to a new imagined community--one based on a recorded historical timeline and dance forms.

Danza Azteca

Azteca dance has a variety of subgenres and styles that are still performed both within and outside of México. According to Patricio "Paz" Zamora, who has spent over twenty years studying and performing Azteca in and around Albuquerque, claims there are three different types of Azteca dance: *Concheros*, *Danza Guerrera*, and *Danza Xicana*. *Concheros* style *danza* is the general grouping for *danza* pre-Conquest. This dance style is the slowest of the three and the costuming is the least ostentatious with few if any feathers worn or used by the dancers.

Danza Guerrera is the most popular style in México. The dancers that have kept this tradition of *danza* alive are *Danzantes de Tradición*, or traditional Azteca dancers. These are dancers whose whole family lineage is devoted to maintaining the tradition of Azteca dance. They not only

dance, but also create costumes, make drums, collect and trade feathers, in short anything and everything that maintains Azteca dance tradition. This is the style after which *Kalpuli Ehecatl* modeled itself. It is a spinoff from a larger group from México City, *Kalpuli Unión y Conquista*⁶.

Danza Xicana is a dance form that started after Azteca came to the United States. The most common held story of how Azteca came to the United States is through the indefatigable efforts of Florencio Yescas, *en paz descanse*⁷ (Huerta, 8). According to Paz, Florencio became inspired by the Chicano movement in the late 1960s, and in 1971 brought a couple of Azteca dancers through El Paso and to Albuquerque with the idea of starting Azteca groups in the Southwest. Paz met these first *danzantes*⁸ at García's Restaurant in Old Town Albuquerque and invited them to his brother's home since they had no place to stay and Florencio had left to *Ciudad Juárez* to help bring in a couple of more *danzantes* having difficulties crossing the border into El Paso. Florencio had the idea of starting Azteca dance groups in the Southwest, leaving one of his chosen *danzantes* from México in charge while he would move on to another town to start another group. Florencio would then tour through

⁶ Unite and Conquer

⁷ May he rest in peace. It is customary to say *en paz descanse* after referring to Florencio Yescas as a sign of utmost respect for the founder of Azteca in the US. I will not write it every time his name comes up, but it is implicit each time his name is written or spoken.

⁸ dancers

México and through the United States periodically to check on the progress of the Azteca dance groups.

He was successful in establishing Azteca dance groups in the Southwest. Florencio emulated some of the traditions of how groups are created from México to the United States (Huerta, 9). The creation of Azteca dance groups in México is a highly structured and systematized practice. After Florencio's death in the early 1980s there was no longer the presence of one person looking over the groups in the United States. Consequently, groups began to spring up throughout the Southwest and in other parts of the United States as the needs of the community changed. This new branching of groups is the start of what Paz and other *danzantes* refer to *Danza Xicana*.

The main difference between *Danza Guerrera* and *Danza Xicana* is location. *Guerrera* is based in México and *Xicana* is based in the United States. Stylistically, there are few differences. Both groups are quick-paced with lavish and bright costumes usually adorned with colorful feathers from various macaws. *Danza Guerrera* is more in line with Catholic Church practices and *Danza Xicana* usually sidesteps Church practices and tries to recreate a link with *Mexica*⁹ tradition. It is expected that *Danza Guerrera* groups foster a link to a group or groups in México, usually displayed by having members travel to México at least once a year, if not

⁹ The name the Aztecs use to refer to themselves. It is also the origin of where México gets its name.

more often. *Danza Xicana* groups do not have this responsibility.

Azteca dance has altered its presentation in an attempt to find a place in post-colonialist México, finding a lasting resurrection within United States popular culture. The Chicano movement of the 1960s set the stage. The student demonstrations of Tlatelolco in 1968 and the discovery of Azteca ruins in the México City subway system in 1967 lay claim for Azteca to come to the United States (Meyer & Sherman, 667). In the world of post-colonialism and post-NAFTA, which many consider neo-colonialist legislation (Harvey, 159), identity winds tightly through dance. Because of this "closeness," dance as an expression of identity manifests a hotbed of complexity and controversy.

The scholarship on Mexican Folklórico and especially Azteca is grossly inconsistent. I draw most of my information on Azteca from my personal interactions with the art form both in the United States as a member of *Kalpuli Ehecatl* under the direction of Paz and from my experiences dancing in México. Elisa Diana Huerta and María Teresa Ceseña in *Dancing Across Borders* have helped me contextualize how to view Azteca in the grander scheme of identity and cultural politics. Huerta and Ceseña attempt to locate Danza Azteca as a form of cultural expression within the Chicano community in California. I attempt to locate it in a more nuanced type of argument that views how not only how race and ethnicity play out in performing Azteca, but

how Azteca exemplifies the tension between owners and borrowers.

Flamenco

Flamenco history in the United States is a difficult history to pin down. Flamenco's history in Spain is still in debate, too. Scholars do generally agree that Flamenco began as a dance form that came to fruition in Spain during approximately two hundred years ago (Cisneros-Kostic, 139 & Leblon, 66). There is debate as to how much influence the *Gitanos* or Roma¹⁰ people have had on the development of Flamenco. Most *flamencólogos*¹¹ and Flamenco historians are split as to where they believe the origin of Flamenco to be. The two camps are those that see Flamenco as a strictly Spanish art form that belongs to the region of Andalucía. The second point of view sees the roots of Flamenco as coming with the Roma when they migrated to Spain and it was a combination of place and timing that created Flamenco, but that the *Gitano* influence was crucial for its development. Both of these points of view mark the beginning of Flamenco as when Flamenco cante originated, and later the integration of Flamenco dance. The *flamencólogos* William Washabaugh, José Blas Vega, and Manuel Ríos Ruiz invest in the idea that Flamenco is an Andalusian art form that *Gitanos* happen to be

¹⁰ I use Gitano to refer specifically to the Gypsies in Spain and Roma to refer to the greater Romani people.

¹¹ Flamencologists or Flamenco connoisseurs

successful at performing, but their contribution is not considered central to the art form. I, along with Bernard Leblon, Rosamaría Cisneros-Kostic, Gretchen Williams, and Donn Pohren agree with the second point of view, that Flamenco was introduced to Spain from *Gitanos* and their contribution has been vital to the development of Flamenco.

Michelle Heffner Hayes's recently published book, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance* illuminates a bit how Flamenco left Spain and began its popularization elsewhere. She mentions that Flamenco began to spread outside of Spain during the Franco regime in the 1940s. She points to a resurgence of Flamenco due to the attention from Hollywood in the form of films that feature Flamenco artists, throughout the 1950s (Heffner Hayes, 40). She further describes how "*flamenco puro*" is under the threat of cultural appropriation, a topic I unpack further in my discussion of renters.

Section Two: Owners, Borrowers, and Renters

The drama of authenticity in dance has multiple facets mainly because of the personal investment in topics of authenticity and identity. In order to parse out the various claims performers have towards cultural dance, I denote owners, borrowers, and renters. Owners are the originators of cultural identity, which in dance are the definers of culture. Borrowers are not originators of the cultural identity they study, but learn the culture through the generosity of an owner or a more experienced borrower. The renter is not an originator of the cultural identity they study either, but they pay for class in order to become versed in the art form. They obtain their knowledge by purchasing it, usually from borrowers or other renters, but occasionally from owners.

Owners

The group of dancers I consider owners are those members of the cultural group whose dance is performed. Blood or birth typifies this cultural application. For example, my mother is Mexican because she was born in a tiny town called Atotonilco el Alto in the state of Jalisco. However, she has not lived there or in any other part of México for over thirty years. Yet, in my model, she would still be considered an owner of *Mejicanidad*. At any moment, if she so desired, by referencing the circumstances of her birth and heritage, she could pull her "ownership card" and

speak with ready authority about Mexican dance, even though my mother has never studied Mexican Folklórico. Speaking from her place of knowing and brandishing her "ownership card," renters would look to her to be the definitive authority and possess "inside" information of which they are not privy. My mother's sense of authority comes strictly from being born and raised in a particular geographic location. The idea of birthplace becomes crucial with the attachment of opinions about cultural ownership (Ceseña, 82).

Geography plays a large role in the perceptions by other owners. The concept of authenticity exists in how someone else examines and evaluates credentials. Those on top of the authenticity chart are deemed the owners, the source of information about a culture. The owners have the responsibility of mandating what constitutes as authentic in that particular culture. There can be self-regulation within owners, allowing for some leeway in their opinions, but they are ultimately free to be expressive in the confines of the culture they "own." In this way, Indian people own Kathakali, Liverpool owns the Beatles, France owns ballet. For *Mejicanos*, Mexican Folklórico dance is their domain, whether they perform it, like it, or know anything about it.

In México and Spain, dance critics specific to those particular art forms are the only ones allowed to write publicly about these forms. Everything else is considered

uneducated opinions. Critics from each form devote their lives to the study of history and trends in Flamenco and in Mexican Folklórico dance as well and are sought after for opinions in the press. *Flamencólogos* such as Pohren, Blas Vega, and Leblon can comment freely about Flamenco in Spain and may go further to publish books, which all of the above *flamencólogos* have. These men take the place of owners in the dance form and critique Flamenco performances for the larger public.

Borrowers

Borrowers are those in the periphery of cultural dance who decide to place it temporarily on their bodies. Perhaps they will not borrow it forever, but only until it no longer interests them. They, of course, have to contend with the owners, especially if borrowers harbor any sentiments of some day wanting to become integrated in the community from which they borrow. This integration can mean the ability to speak from the chair of knowing. Credibility is measured by how high you sit in that chair of knowing. Credibility is crucial in establishing rapport around cultural studies.

There are some that would say, as an American citizen, that I borrow Mexican Folklórico dance. Although both of my parents are born in México, I was born in the United States. When I first began to dance Mexican Folklórico, I did not concern myself with my geographical place of birth, though owners pointed out my birthplace to me. Mexican citizens

questioned my attachment to their dance form (Ceseña, 87). Where one is born and from where they hold citizenship is a detail that is not overlooked by looky-loos in the process of determining who is a borrower, an owner, or a renter, or just someone that is a casual observer.

Borrowing is something that at first was not appealing to me. Borrowing culture sounded too close to cultural appropriation, an action I did not want to be associated with and something I tend to incessantly critique in others. It was a sobering moment when I realized my own borrower leanings, requiring me to give this status more thought, and I found a new respectability for myself as a borrower, divorcing it from its cultural vulture¹² status that I had originally prescribed to it.

Renters

Then, there is the more nebulous role of renter. The main difference between the renter and the borrower is that the borrower participates in cultural dance and has the possibility of being an owner, depending on the circumstances, and who is doing the observing. A borrower's ownership is tenuous and fleeting, depending on who evaluates it. Borrowers can be possible owners because they have a context of framework in a biological or cultural connection that, dependent on the evaluator, is considered

¹² Culture vulture according to urbandictionary.com is someone who steals traits, language and/or fashion from another ethnic or social group in order to create their own identity.

ownership or borrowing. Although I speak Spanish, am born of Mexican parents who spoke no English, and lived in a house with a steady influence and flux of Mexican music and food and visited México quite often, I am not a clear-cut owner of Mexican Folklórico dance because I was born in the U.S. This distinction is unfair perhaps, but the lines, though seemingly arbitrary, are drawn somewhere, usually by self-designated owners. A point of departure provides a reference enabling appropriate progress assessment and allows us to know where we stand in the cultural process.

A renter exchanges payment in order to receive knowledge of the cultural dance. Renters' typical access to the form is through class payment. Such payment may be in the form of instructional classes, videos, or literature. Perhaps the most popular rented dance form is ballet. It grew out of the French courts during the time of Louis XIV (Cohen, 16). The majority of Americans engaged in Ballet rent. It is a cultural dance from France and most Americans' only exposure to it is participating in the art form through purchasing classes. Although, in France, if someone would like to study Ballet, the chances are extremely high that they would have to pay for classes as well, but since Ballet came out of France, there is an underlying belief that somehow the French have license to it and therefore own it.

Attempts at different Ballet styles have emerged and taken important places in dance as in, most famously, the

Ballet Russes and Balanchine's attempts to create an American Ballet tradition through the American Ballet Theater. However, the language and origin of Ballet continues to be predominantly French, regardless of where in the world you study.

The monetary value placed on classes is not necessarily the defining factor as to whether or not a dance form is owned, borrowed, or rented. Renters typically pay for their classes, and usually come to the art form in a haphazard way, and the paid class is their only link to the cultural art form. As stated in Maira's article, "Belly Dancing," people who choose to perform in a cultural art form is often attracted to it for interpretive reasons:

Some of the women I spoke to had begun studying belly dancing before 2001, and all of them said that they were drawn to it primarily as a dance form or because of the spiritual, communal, or feminine qualities they associated with it. (327)

In her article, she discusses how common it is for Anglo women to take classes in and perform Middle Eastern dance. Many of these women dance for fitness and for female empowerment. The intent of why renters dance cultural dance forms is an important motivational factor that may become a point of contention between owners and renters.

The dialogue between a vanguard style of dance and its newer dancers is further complicated by how renters use this new style. The representation of these new styles is

central to the notion of dance as identity. This notion affects all types of cultures, such as in Kathakali. It is not only important to those practicing it in the state of Kerala, but it is also seen as a representation of identity of the state of India. Aztec dance can be a binding force not only for those Aztecs that still live and survive in post-colonial Mexico, but it also can be an intermediary with other indigenous cultures across the border (Ceseña, 92). In addition, it attempts to unite Chicanos and *Mejicanos*. The *Danza Guerrera danzantes* and *Danza Xicana danzantes* that developed on the American side of the border are in the midst of a continuing dialogue through dance that attempts to build bridges with two groups long divided by a complex political and social border. The goals of these cultural performances are to preserve a cultural heritage and to establish their relevance and validity in the current world order. (Shea Murphy, 198)

The purpose of each dance varies with the venue. The different venues of cultural dance can be in community centers, as well as common public spaces such as parks and stage productions. In mounted stage productions, the complexities of cultural dance with dancers that are not of that culture begin to show how fragile this relationship can be.

Authenticity, Hybridity, and Colonization

When the creators of culture alter ritual, does authenticity as commodity devalue? When you are a hybrid and colonized people with a variety of influences, at what point can you cease claiming ownership? I am not a *Gitana*, I grew up with Mexican Folklórico dance. In addition the rhythmic and movement patterns in Flamenco are similar to patterns that appear significantly in the regional music of Veracruz, the location of first contact between Spain and México. Evidence of this is the six rhythm patterns of *Jarocho* music. Because of this connection is it appropriate to claim Flamenco as a heritage culture? Or do I have to have a stronger connection with Gitano culture before I can do that, and, if so, how much is enough? Who decides whether or not I have sufficient remnants of a Gitano culture in order to claim Flamenco as a heritage culture?

In order to best prepare for tackling such a difficult subject as cultural dance identity, I looked towards the scholarship of Jacqueline Shea Murphy. In *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, Shea Murphy brings a rich historical background to try and place Native American dance in the historical context to their political reality. Shea Murphy's attempt to bring contextualization to the forefront is a step in the right direction to clear up the identity muddiness endemic in the questions I posed. Beginning with the information of another facet of history, in light of the political and social ramifications of what could be considered as benign a subject as the trajectory of Modern

dance, Murphy enlightens the discourse by giving an effective outline of how to tackle an ethnographic history of an oppressed peoples' dance expression. In order to better contextualize the links between identity and nationalism I look again towards Anderson.

Anderson's Connection of Identity to Nationalism

Identity is interwoven in the political agendas of many nations enmeshing its citizens in a variety of internalizations with many manifestations. Anderson also proposes that nationalism arose after the effects of the popularity of the vernacular languages and the decline of older and austere languages such as Latin (Anderson, 13). Furthermore, the decline of monarchical societies with the election of governments and the explosion of "print-capitalism" created the conditions for nationalism to rise.

With the expansion of vernacular languages, languages spoken by the majority of people in a location in order to communicate and do business, the printed word begins to have more prominence and importance. After colonization, which Anderson addresses in much more detail later in his book, is where the power dynamics of which languages survive and how survival takes place, whether in written form or if it is the official language of trade and business delineates which civilizations are more successful and achieve longevity. The expansion of these languages initially came from various locations.

The monarchical systems aided in the rise of vernacular languages; in Turkey and in Russia, Anderson claims that there existed families of spoken languages that were similar enough to bunch together and have a common ruler, de-emphasizing the importance of the traditional academic languages in favor of the local vernacular. An example of the transition from one world to the next is the formation of America:

Out of the American welter came these imagined realities: nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems, etc., and the liquidation of their conceptual opposites: dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, absolutisms, subjecthoods, inherited nobilities, serfdoms, ghettos, and so forth. (Anderson, 81)

These signifiers are used when denoting identity politics, later becoming the building blocks of cultural ideas by Chicano communities in practicing Mexican Folklórico dance and Azteca dance within the United States.

Anderson follows a historical materialism, calling attention to key occurrences throughout the world: the popularity of the newspaper, or "print-capitalism," the availability of the printing and purchasing of inexpensive books, and the revolutions of 1776 and 1789 and what he terms the second wave of nationalism in 1810-1850. He presents the Industrial Revolution's effect during the turn

of the nineteenth century and the Russian Revolution. After the World Wars, with colonialism fully entrenched, he explains the examples that bring the history of nationalism to the present day.

Anderson's critical voice comes from the perspective of a political scientist. He bases much of the structure of his argument on a historical account of world events, but the lens he uses is set in a Materialist theoretical framework. This framework plays an important role to aid in the understanding of the phenomenon when Mexican Folklórico dance groups begin to sprout in the United States in the 1970s.

He takes great pains setting up the world stage for the onset of colonialism and then spends significant energy parsing out colonialism on a global level and discussing power dynamics. In his chapter, "Census, Map, Museum" (163), he introduces the various forms that colonial powers used as a sheath of control over their colonies. Although he does not specifically address México, his wealth of examples make assertions that speak to Mexican history. He rarely discusses even Latin America, and his sweeping declarations of the power of colonialism on the world stage, does not take into consideration individual cultural issues, but his groundwork of political inequality through a nationalist construct is a great springboard for my discussion of dance as identity.

Chicanos in the United States tout their Mexican flags and celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* perhaps going even farther in their commitment and involvement to Mexican culture than their Mexican resident counterparts living in the U.S. As illustrated in Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*, *Mejicanos* or more to the point Chicanos on the U.S. side of the border rarely exist to those on the Mexican side. He discusses the *pachuco*¹³ in the opening chapter of *Labyrinth*, a significant stride in the acknowledgement of the Chicano existence by people on the Mexican side of the border early on in the movement. Defining *pachuco*, a Chicano term, by an established Mexican author was a surprising inclusion in his book defining Mexican cultural practices. There is great resistance for the acknowledgement of *Mejicanos* that live on the American side once they have set up familial units there, complete with offspring and mortgages. Admitting that *Mejicanos* have formed communities in the United States that hint to setting up roots in the United States is an uncomfortable reality. Nationality takes precedence over ethnicity in México, as found in *Jarocho's Soul* by González.

The idea Mexican identity lives only within México causes discomfort for some. As a Chicana living in the United States, this is a difficult concept to accept. It puts to question the very idea of performativity in a culture outside of its "natural habitat." Cultural expression and identity deeply intertwined, but it is

¹³ a Chicano zoot-suiter, see also *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez

inappropriate to state that the relationship of expression and identity cannot exist outside México (García Canclini, *Hyb.Cul.*, 155). The performance of culture happens outside of the country of origin all the time. Many festivals celebrate Japanese history in California, Ethiopian culture in Washington, D.C., and innumerable *Cinco de Mayo* celebrations happen throughout the United States. The performance of national identity outside the nation of origin gives space for the questioning and representation of nationality, questions that probe what does it mean to be from that nation when you have not visited in decades? Which country do you show cultural allegiance to, the nation you live in, or the nation you learned to walk in? What does it do for the community you live in to continue to perform your identity of your home nation amidst your neighbors? Do you share it or do you keep it to yourself?

Intent and Commitment

My friend wanted to know how to measure someone's intent and commitment level. I do not claim to be able to do that, but it is clear to me that when placed in inconvenient situations, or when people become displeased with the process, it is easier for individuals who do not have a deep cultural connection to dance, to simply walk away from it mid-stride, guilt-free. They can exert their privilege of being able to behave as if they were in a cafeteria of culture: they can pick and choose what they

want, and leave out what they do not (Yúdice, 83). To act upon this privilege has severe consequences and can cause serious rifts between dancers. It is difficult to express and form community bonds when you feel you cannot trust those you are dancing with, because you feel that at the end of the day, they will place their own interests ahead of the interests of the group.

Therefore, those who study cultural dance who are not of the culture that they are studying should not be surprised when they are looked upon with apprehension, suspicion, and sometimes contempt. Respect and trust are earned, not given, and it is not the role of those in the culture to work towards making those that are not comfortable. Rather those that have reached outside of themselves should recognize that they will most likely have an uphill battle for acceptance.

In Between Cultures

Physical and cultural dislocation characterizes the daily lives of many, if not most, of the people of the world. . . . Diasporic cultures rival those of the homelands in size and complexity. (Fusco, 26)

As doers of performance, how many roles can we play during the project and still be cognizant of where we are in the scholarship and how our own identities play into our perceptions? My point of departure is a first generation Mexican female that did not begin dancing until college.

As a Mexican Folklórico dancer and then later an Azteca dancer, I did not think twice about my legitimacy of being in the room and learning such dances. I always felt that I had more than a right, never needed to ask permission to be there, or that it might be inappropriate for me to learn these dances. My connection to the art form was clear to me from my Mexican heritage given to me by my parents. Therefore, deciding to study Flamenco in a rich Flamenco landscape was an easy step to broaden my dance repertoire. However, grounding cross-cultural dance proved more difficult in spite of its prevalence.

Cross-cultural performance is common and becoming more so in this shrinking world. To think, however, that the world is a seamless meld of people coming together to create beautiful art with the same intent is grossly naïve (Fusco, 15). There is the theory of the melting pot versus the salad bowl, with dance coming out more like a melted salad. Dance becomes a combination of blending traditions that fit seamlessly together like a melting pot and others that will not give up their autonomy as easily and will maintain their unique flavor like in a salad bowl, hence the melted salad. I envision this image when studying Flamenco.

Realization of my Owner/Borrower Status

I had to begin with humility and realize that, no matter how hard I tried, I was an outsider and I had to constantly reassess my own personal ego in the process. My

Flamenco experience was challenged early by my involvement in the Flamenco Festival. Stage-managing the Festival, not only viewing the shows, but also interacting with the artists, provided me with the opportunity to experience humility on an annual basis. I would never voluntarily tell the *Gitanos* that I studied Flamenco. I could never bring myself to tell them, and I still do not. Occasionally the *músicos* will ask, and I begrudgingly admit that I take a class or two. My reluctance derives, in part, from my fear they may either ask me to dance for them (full scale PANIC!), or they will judge me for being another tourist of their culture that wants to prance around with a flower on my head. I do not pretend to "know how to dance Flamenco" from just taking a few classes a week, whilst it has taken them generations and a lifestyle commitment to ascertain their knowledge of the art form.

The first time I performed in front of a *Gitano* guitarist, I was so nervous that I almost did not want to dance anymore. It's one thing to muffle your way through and try your hardest with musicians that are born and bred in the United States, it is something completely different to do it in front of someone who has never taken Flamenco classes because he *is* Flamenco. Malefyt discusses the negotiation of the personal ego in studying Flamenco as an outsider in his article, "'Inside' and 'Outside' Spanish Flamenco."

Malefyt's Encounter with Renting

Malefyt's article brings a few key points into sharper focus. These points primarily include the perspective of the researcher and the culture on which they base themselves. They are viewed as outsiders by those practicing the cultural expression and also from themselves.

I gather information through a performative body experience via the different dance forms that I learn and I do not censor my experience due to a lack of credibility or ownership. I did not question my motivations when I studied Mexican Folklórico and Azteca. Then, I went into the very established world of Flamenco and my role became muddled. I was not able to clearly delineate where my own cultural ownership started and where I was falling prey to a variety of Flamenco stereotypes that, regardless of my own personal intent, I was not able to reconcile. Studying Flamenco has been very humbling, similar to Malefyt's experience in the *peña*,¹⁴ and finding where one fits within a culture in order to contribute critical scholarship to it continues to be very challenging, almost to the point of immobility.

Malefyt's description of the *peña*, the sights and sounds, display a man afraid of crossing a line. The *peña* is a location for the community to gather together and participate in community events:

I was going deep inside, from one enclosed setting of the *peña* salon, to an even more private inner chamber.

¹⁴ a traditional *cueva* or cave in Granada

And there, about a dozen people gradually gathered in the small room, roughly fifteen feet square. With short wooden benches all around, we sat up against the wall. (Malefyt, 68)

La *peña* is a source not only of merriment but also for community meetings to take care of funeral arrangements within the community and to take care of community governmental matters. Malefyt does not want to give the impression of personal ownership of a culture, yet he still places himself dead center in the article by speaking at length about how it is through chance and luck that he is even witnessing the *peña* up close. By giving us this "insider information," we are able to begin to look critically at the Flamenco consumed by the general public in *tablaos*.

Tablaos are intimate performances with soloist dancers and Flamenco musicians in a space that accommodates approximately fifty people, typically with small tables encroaching onto the dance space. The *tablao* "Los Gallos" has been a running *tablao* since 1966 in Sevilla. It is the premiere place for flamenco artists to perform, make a name for themselves, and to try out new productions. It is a small, intimate space as is the custom of *tablaos*. The *tablao* "Los Gallos" that he presents reminded me of my *tablao* experience in Madrid, however I still felt that although the *tablao* was definitely geared towards a tourist culture "*todavía era flamenco*", it was still Flamenco. The

replication of flamenco culture across *tablaos* or *peñas* whether they are in Madrid or Sevilla and captured by an "outsider" or I would say a renter other than myself speaks to Malefyt's position reporting on the phenomena.

The Frustrations of a Newly Discovered Borrower

As I get older, my American citizenship becomes more significant in my relationships with people from México. Whether or not I have an American passport makes a bigger difference at border crossings and with my family as a demarcator that divides family unity (Fusco, 104). The fact that I was born outside of México means that my *Mejicanidad* will be in constant question from other *Mejicanos*. I cannot be considered an owner, no matter how flawless my Spanish is, no matter how many Folklórico dances I know, there will always be a limit as to how close I can get. I'll always be a *pocha*¹⁵. Even though I have commenced the application process to obtain dual citizenship, the question posed in my cultural dance career is still: where was I born? The question immediately following is where did I grow up. Neither of those answers has México in it. Therefore, I am a non-Mexican, a *pocha*, a borrower. There will always be an owner reminding me that I am still an outsider. However, there are already contexts where my alignment of identity has a space: in the Azteca dance circle that I am a member

¹⁵ Someone born in the United State from Mexican parents.

of in Albuquerque, and in my participation in Alma Flamenca, the student dance group at the University of New Mexico.

The Hierarchy

Owners and borrowers often place themselves tacitly "above" renters in an unspoken hierarchy that structure the social space of cultural dance. This desire of wanting to be an owner can be consuming getting to the point that the renter may feel that if ownership is not possible then they are wasting time in class. If a renter wishes to continue in the art form, they have to prove their worth in order to surpass their renter status.

Renters are sometimes viewed with disdain by owners and borrowers. However, in the argument of authenticity and of who is allowed access to the performativity of cultural dance in the larger part of the world, it is a widely held belief that paying for instruction in a cultural dance form is an acceptable method of learning that particular form of dance (Maira, 318). But the paradox of whether or not the renter can interpret the dance form "correctly," even if they have invested money and time in the dance form, does not keep the exclusion of renters from participating in the dialogue of the future of the selected cultural dance form. Ironically, everyone has been an owner, borrower, or renter at different points, and sometimes versions of all three at the same time, but the division of each of these categories in your personal experience can be quite complex.

I have been at different times and in different contexts an owner, a borrower, and a renter- as have many aficionados of cultural dance. I have been an owner and borrower simultaneously with Mexican Folklórico and Aztec dance, and have been the renter with an occasional borrower tendency when it comes to Flamenco. I have considered myself a renter in terms of Ballet, Jazz, Salsa, and Modern dance. Although I have never paid to receive a dance lesson in Salsa, I still consider myself a renter because I came to the dance form as an adult and with no previous experience or knowledge in that style of dance and have relied on the aid of others to help me in my stumbles through steps and timing.

Credentials and Evaluation

A very close friend who I used to go Salsa dancing with was once asked to dance by a young man who I would consider to be a very good dancer. He had excellent rhythm and danced in an understated style, no flashy lifts, turns, or gestures, he just kept the rhythm going and led a partner well across the floor. My friend agreed to dance with him and about halfway through the song he asked my friend if she spoke Spanish, which she did. He spoke very little English, stating he was originally from Cuba. He asked her if she was Caribbean, and she replied she was not. He then asked again, she laughed and said no that she was Mexican. He, however, was not satisfied with this answer and pressed even

further and asked her if she was sure. She finally said that her mother was from Honduras, and he replied that he knew that she had to be from somewhere else in Latin America because she was such a good dancer there was no way she could just be Mexican.

My friend, although born in México City, grew up and lived in Chicago from the age of eight to twenty-eight. She grew up exclusively with her Honduran mother and her mother's side of the family, but she has never visited and her mother has not visited the country since the mother's early adulthood. None of this makes any difference to an owner insistent in finding at least a borrower's connection to the interpretation of dance.

This anecdote demonstrates how easily notions of authenticity inform how acutely owners/borrowers look at credentials. This notion of credentials runs deep in delineating owners from borrowers. These credentials influence how seriously a dancer will be taken in a particular dance form (Shea Murphy, 114). The "in" group is the one that is the most clearly defined by being predominantly made up of owners. The goal of wanting to be considered an owner of a cultural tradition is such that it even encourages participants to search in their family lineage to suss out a possible connection.

Family lineage

My mentor and Flamenco teacher, Marisol Enciñas, once told me that she was practicing her solo for her musicians

and in front of the *Gitana* wife of the guitarist. The wife was intensely observant of her dancing and afterwards told her that there were parts of her solo that she didn't like, but there were other parts that she liked very much; that she felt Marisol embodied Flamenco well. The *Gitano's* wife then asked her about her family lineage. Marisol stated that she was born and raised in New México. The *Gitana* pressed further and wanted to know about her mother.

Marisol stated again, where she was from, it was not until she admitted that her great grandmother had emigrated from Spain to New México that the *Gitana* was satisfied. She said that she knew Marisol must have some *Gitana* in her, because that would explain her ability able to interpret Flamenco so well.

Marisol shrugged off the supposition that she is good at Flamenco because of a great grandmother. Although she considers herself a Chicana from New México, is it completely up to her to decide what group she belongs to? How much input does an owner have in influencing the outcome of perception? Does the owners' interpretation of one's own dance performance trump what we may think about ourselves?

People are so concerned with the preservation and protection of a culture and that it can turn into possessiveness. This notion of who is an owner and who is a renter, who is more hardcore, who is more down, and who can claim something with more fervor than others is an antiquated argument. I think that I have more of a right to

it than you do, because I have a great-great grandfather that is laying claim to that dance form, therefore by extension I can have a legitimate claim to that dance form as well.

The quantification of blood transformed to access is a polemic topic. Blood quantum in dealing with cultural dance gives a much more nebulous (assuming blood quantum is even precise) ways to establish connection. Owners, borrowers, and renters is one way to interpret the complex structure of who has the right to what type of dance and who can speak publicly about where that dance is going.

Conclusion

The terms owners, borrowers, and renters seem to create more questions than answers and I do not know how effectively they delineate the argument of cultural dance forms and the identities that they perform. The performativity of cultural identity and how it plays out through dance remains a phenomenon that requires further inquiry. Unpacking the complexity of how cultural dance forms frame the discussion of how performance affects identity necessitates more investigation.

There is a tendency to shy away from the difficult questions of how to approach the formation of cultural identity and the performativity of nationalism. A possible furthering avenue of this research is the application of citizenship and how it is performed through cultural manifestations. Nationalism and citizenship as performative possibilities can help answer how these new lenses can illuminate different aspects of the debate. Although *Mejicanidad* is not reducible to a formulaic recipe, there are aspects that aided my conclusion in the form of guidelines for cultural dance.

The many questions that arose from this investigation lead me to pursue a response for how to best deal with the occasionally uncomfortable issues associated with performing cultural dance. Using my terms of owners, borrowers, and renters as a lens, I propose the following guidelines for dancing cultural dance as a borrower or renter.

Guidelines for Cultural Dance

1. *Know why you are doing it.* This is not as simple as it sounds, as reasons are usually in flux. Many times we will say it is by accident, I just really like it, and ask if a reason is really necessary. If you are going to respectfully study cultural dance forms, then you need to know why you are there, acknowledging of course, that these reasons are not set in stone.

2. *Know your limits.* No matter how much empathy one can muster, there is a limit as to how much you can "place yourself in their shoes." No matter how much you feel you live and breathe the culture, you were not born into it and you will more than likely always be seen as an outsider by someone. That role is not a negative. The feeling and desire of imitating an owner comes from a point of privilege and is a disrespectful goal for anyone studying a cultural dance form. Privilege manifests itself in a variety of insidious forms and can be an insurmountable barrier if not constantly negotiated by the dancer.

3. *Know your goals.* What do you plan to achieve? Are you looking to validate a part of yourself? Would you accept a leadership position in this cultural dance group? Any time a position of power is introduced, it is the responsibility of the renter to understand how accepting such a position would reflect on the group, on themselves, and on the interpretation of them as an artist. To do this you must have a solid understanding of your own privilege. When marginalized groups form organizations, such as dance groups, use these groups for empowerment it can be a hindrance if they are run by dancers that are not of that culture. You can avoid this by not only knowing your own personal goals, but knowing the goals of the organization as well.

4. *Do not assume you know anything about a culture that is not yours.* To assume leads to a slippery slope of

misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and potentially volatile and awkward situations. Humility of body and spirit is one of the finer assets when studying cultural dance.

Lastly, your personal ego needs constant reassessment. It is a privilege to study cultural dance, especially if you are studying it from people who are of that culture. No matter how long you invest in a dance form, it is paramount to remember that you can choose to walk away from the dance form at any time and go on with your life. Those that are of that culture do not have the same options as you and, if they were to choose to walk away from their cultural art forms, the consequences would be very different than yours. Therefore, you are not on the same footing, although you may very well be on the same foot.

Appendix

Review of Literature

Deciding what type of books to use to cover the subject matter that looks at dance as a form of identity was quite difficult. There is no specific literature on the subject. I chose references that can be divided in three sections: cultural politics, identity and nationalism and dance texts.

Cultural Poltiics

México Profundo: Una Civilización Negada by Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla forms the background of how to look at what he argues is an unexamined side of México. The profundity that he speaks of is the identities of the forgotten people of México. According to the *CIA World Factbook*, México's indigenous make up thirty percent of its population, 33 million total. Bonfil-Batalla is a Mexican scholar that has devoted his studies to furthering the visibility of México's poor, which largely make-up its indigenous population. He claims that modern México has been formed on the backs and silent suffering of México's extensive indigenous population.

Coco Fusco in *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* fosters inspiration for my voice on how to approach such a complicated topic as identity when you are yourself a person of color. Fusco's fearless approach to her scholarship constantly holds people accountable for their assumptions. Her style of holding others to task is what I found extremely useful in placing that mirror in front of me and breaking down my own preconceived notions about identity.

Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity by Nestor García Canclini continues García Canclini's seminal work in *Transforming Modernity*. In both works, there are significant strides similar to Bonfil-Batalla of bringing to the forefront the invisibility of the plight of the indigenous population of México. The roots of Mexican dance within Azteca directly relate to the status of indigenous people in México and their status in larger Mexican society. Much of Folklórico dances are a combination of indigenous, Spanish, and French court dances.

George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* continues his research in *On Edge*. He explicates how the commodification of culture molds the global transmission of culture. García-Canclini and Yúdice both approach cultural commodification through a lens not of judgment, but of how messages about culture can be misconstrued and passed on with blatant disregard for how they originated. Yúdice and García-Canclini are Latin

Americanists who specialize their examination of the effects of globalization on culture with a specific view of Latin America.

Identity and Nationalism

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* forms the foundation of my argument of the rise of nationalism and how it becomes important in societies. Anderson gives extensive examples of how identity links to nationality and the notion of the nation-state capitalizing on people's sentiment and connection to identity.

Anita González's *Jarocho's Soul: Cultural Identity and Afro-Mexican Dance* directly discusses Mexican dance and the African influence that dance has on Mexican Folklórico dance in the *Jarocho* regions, which covers the state of Veracruz. González's work provides a rare in depth analysis of a genre of Mexican Folklórico through a performative lens that is not strictly descriptive and anthropological in its presentation. *Jarocho* defines a specific type of indigenous people, music, and style of dancing. Its popularity blossomed significantly through Amalia Hernández's *Ballet Folklórico de México* repertoire. The counterbalance that *Jarocho* creates with dances from Jalisco, heavy with mariachi and colorful dresses, differ greatly from the predominantly white clothes of *Jarocho*, as well as the guitars, harp, and harmonies of *Jarocho* music.

The Invention of Tradition edited by Hobsbawn and Ranger covers what many scholars consider a wide range of writings similar to Anderson's connection with nationality. Hobsbawn's work deals with collecting writers that bring questions such as why do we do what we do? What makes a tradition, tradition, and why do we follow it? Why do we stick to it with so much fervor? Hobsbawn's writes in his last chapter about the invented traditions of Europe that have been repeated throughout the years leading to the continued repetition of behavior which turned into tradition.

Octavio Paz's seminal work, *Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in México*, displays the contradictions of what it is to be a *Mejicano* in a contemporary society, albeit a 1960s one. Paz captures the complexities of a *Mejicano* on both sides of the border. His approach in establishing the indigenous experience in México is critical to try and bring a complete style of dialog between *Mejicanos* living in México and those living in other countries, particularly the United States. He brings the indigenous side as well as Spanish, French, and African in his attempt to discuss *mestizaje*. Paz's internal dialog to try and decipher from where *Mejicanidad* stems originates in a long and tawdry tale that goes from the *pachucos* in Los Angeles to the Maya and the Zapotec in Oaxaca.

Dynamics of Folklore by Barre Tolkien is the cornerstone of folklore anthropological research. Tolkien's

approach to the documentation of folkloric and anthropological research takes the storyteller's experience to the forefront as opposed to treating it like a commodity. His analysis of how to portray people who have not been written about favorably or whose individual stories have not been previously written has been invaluable to my personal approach in this work.

Dance Texts

Bernard Leblon's *Gypsies and Flamenco* is my main Flamenco text. He provides some Roma history and is key in factoring how *flamencólogos* have helped shape the discourse of Flamenco and illustrating the tension between *Gitanos* and Spaniards performing Flamenco. Leblon goes through an extensive history of laws against the Roma people in Spain and how that helped form the current ghettos of Roma people, that later fostered the growth of Flamenco. Leblon also argues for the responsibility of Flamenco's creation on the unique Roma cultural traditions while in Spain.

Dancing Across Borders edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero was just released this year. It is a poignant compilation that has two articles from which I was able to base a significant amount of Azteca dance. "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca" by Elisa Diana Huerta and "Creating Agency and Identity in Danza Azteca" by María Teresa Ceseña helped guide my framing of the argument of the utilization of

Azteca in the United States as a ritualistic dance form. That, coupled with my personal interviews of Patricio Zamora, the head of *Kalpuli Ehecatl* in Albuquerque, was the source of Azteca dance history in the United States.

There are a couple of articles in *Dancing Across Borders* that served as touchstones for my conversation with Mexican Folklórico. "Staging Authenticity: Theorizing the Development of Mexican Folklórico Dance" by Olga Nájera-Ramírez is her newest contribution to the field of Mexican Folklórico dance. She is one of the few scholars writing in English on the topic of Mexican Folklórico dance. Syndey Hutchinson is another author also found in *Dancing Across Borders*. Her article "The Ballet Folklórico de México and the Construction of the Mexican Nation through Dance" helped provide context on Amalia Hernández group. I supplement information on Hernández's group with *Jarocho's Soul*.

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