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CRUZANDO LA FRONTERA:

CHOREOGRAPHING THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

by

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Abstract

This dance project explores the consequences of assimilation on immigrants' cultural practices and identity specifically for Mexican-Americans in Southern California. The dance project explores the crossing of borders through mixed contemporary and Mexican ballet folklorico dance styles in order to tell a story of immigrants trying, failing, and succeeding in crossing the U.S. and Mexico border. By exploring the integration of Western dance styles with Mexican ballet folklorico, this paper will analyze how Mexican identity, as expressed through dance or song, is maintained by immigrants to remain connected their culture, but is changed through the process of assimilation.

Mexican ballet folklorico is at its base a fusion of indigenous ceremonial, social, and dance traditions with European folkloric traditions that has been used as a political tool to create national identity. Yet, until Ballet Folklorico de Mexico's founding in the 1950's, Mexican ballet folklorico, including folkloric songs, was performed in its traditional form, both in the US and Mexico, as a way to establish community and preserve tradition. One such example of this can be seen with the existence of the Mexican Players from Padua Hills in Claremont. However, once ballet folklorico was shared globally, many artists of Mexican ancestry have continuously found different ways to integrate non-folk art forms with traditional Mexican folk practices that often serve to represent a new, mixed identity. Some contemporary artists that have integrated various non-folk art forms with Mexican folk traditions include Alfonso Cervera, Ballet Nepantla, Primera Generación Dance Collective, and Las Cafeteras. For the Mexican-American ballet folklorico dancer, these artists who blend westernized dance styles with folk dance are important because they perform ballet folklorico for audiences with less exposure to folk traditions, and provide new ways of expressing the complexity of Mexican-American identity due to the need to assimilate.

As such, the question examined here is how has the performance of traditional Mexican folk practices evolved over time and impacted the identity of those who have immigrated to the US?

Immigration and the Mexican-American Identity

Immigration between Mexico and the United States has a long and complicated history based on various historical, political, and economic factors that have affected the cultural exchange that occurs as a result of immigration. Since American President Donald Trump's rise to office, there have been several policy changes in immigration that have been enacted via executive orders, policy, or regulatory memos. These changes in policy are important, because they restrict immigration and impact the existing immigrant community in the United States. More specifically, the restrictions in immigration brought about by policy changes impact the existing immigrant community's identity, which naturally changes as a result of the pressure to assimilate after immigration, and is maintained through cultural exchange. As a first-generation Mexican-American, I have seen firsthand the diversity in identity that results from constant immigration. Based on personal observations made in Southern California, representation of a Mexican identity is dependent on the level of assimilation. Some Mexicans express their identity by wearing traditional clothing and integrating Mexican culture into their American lifestyle. This in contrast to Mexicans who do not to integrate any aspect of Mexican culture into their lives and try to blend into the larger American society. For this reason, this dance project will be specifically focusing on exploring how to choreograph a dual Mexican-American that can be expressed outside of the typical Mexican cultural traditions that change due to assimilation in Southern California.

It is natural for the immigrant identity to change from the decision to assimilate, originating from the societal pressure to fit in, although it also means that the cultural traditions practiced by

immigrants evolve. The nature of culture, which is defined as "the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society"[i] is constantly changing. Subsequently, the changes in how cultural traditions are maintained result in the creation of parallel traditions, in addition to the development of a unique dual identity. Specifically for Mexican cultural traditions practiced in the United States, traditions have changed to not only serve the Mexican community, but also to serve those of a non-Mexican background, for whom Mexican traditions provide entertainment and a different aesthetic experience. However, the change in purpose also allows for those outside of the culture to partake in these traditions. In California, where approximately 11 million immigrants constitute the population[ii], there are many cultural events that are not solely restricted to immigrant communities. In Los Angeles County, Southern California's most populous county, approximately 48.6%[iii] of the population is Hispanic. Consequently, this large Hispanic population means that there are several opportunities for Hispanics and non-Hispanics to participate in Hispanic cultural traditions. In particular, one prevalent Mexican tradition in Southern California that serves both the Mexican and non-Mexican community is ballet folklorico.

Ballet folklorico in Southern California exists in multiple spaces with different levels of accessibility that are open to both Mexicans and non-Mexicans. Based on personal observation, there exist more spaces to participate in ballet folklorico on the east side of Los Angeles as opposed to the west side, where there is a lesser concentration of Hispanics. Nevertheless, one way to access ballet folklorico is through free afterschool folklorico programs. Typically, these programs are offered by school districts that have historically had a predominantly Hispanic population; the classes are free for students and fundraisers are often used to help cover costume costs in the event of a performance. This mimics many Mexican's first exposure to the tradition of ballet folklorico in Mexico, where schools teach folklorico to students through afterschool lessons too. However,

unlike in Mexico, ballet folklorico taught in afterschool programs in Southern California demonstrates the existence of a Mexican-American identity. This Mexican-American identity is created because the folklorico taught through these programs is a parallel tradition; the instructors teach in English, and the goal of choreographing dances to perform Mexicanness leads to a loss of context in the language and traditions. Consequently, many students end up learning folklorico from an American perspective- a perspective that emphasizes learning dances with the intent to perform and no knowledge of the significance of the traditions in the dances. Since many of these programs exist at school districts with large Hispanic populations, many of the students participating in the program are Hispanic, usually of Mexican descent with immigrant parents. As a result, the afterschool folklorico programs facilitate an accessible way of representing Mexican-American identity.

In addition to folklorico programs at schools, there exist several other opportunities to dance folklorico in Southern California. In fact, many folklorico dance groups exist at community centers, Catholic churches, colleges, and other dance studios. These groups are more likely to perform various times per year at public events that often include festivals, amusement parks, and yearly recitals- which celebrate public representations of Mexican-American identity. However, these groups are less accessible to the general public when compared to afterschool folklorico classes because of the increased financial cost required to participate. To participate, there exists the requirement of a monthly membership fee, means to get to practices, and dancers are usually fiscally responsible for their costumes. Most dancers are Mexican, or of Mexican descent, and depending on the group, there could exist a large age range that can include dancers as young as two years old. A common trend among many of these younger dancers is that they are being forced to participate in folklorico groups by their parents, often Mexican immigrants, which suggests a

strong desire by the parents for their children to develop a Mexican-American identity. Conversely, it can be inferred that older dancers who participate in folklorico are satisfying their own desire to represent a Mexican-American identity. This can be inferred as the choice to dance as an adult requires the use of personal resources, such as time and money. In the case of a dancer with a demanding career, dancing folklorico after work and on the weekends is a conscious decision of how they want to spend their limited free time. Regardless, most of these groups are identical to afterschool folklorico groups in that dancers are losing contextual meanings as they are also learning parallel traditions in English. Yet, unlike afterschool folklorico groups, participating in a ballet folklorico group is an active decision that leads to a stronger cultivation of a Mexican-American identity. More specifically, this means consciously integrating Mexican culture with American culture. Integrating Mexican culture could include wearing modernized, traditional clothing or listening to traditional Mexican music outside of the context of folklorico. Thus, the choice to participate in a folklorico group is an active decision to represent a Mexican-American identity that is shared with the larger Los Angeles community through performance.

Another positive outcome of participating in Mexican ballet folklorico is that it serves as a way to remain connected with Mexican culture and become a part a Mexican community that practices cultural traditions in Southern California. This community consists of Mexicans and those of Mexican descent who actively represent their Mexican identity. It is not limited to folklorico dancers alone; musicians, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican business owners that participate in cultural events make up this community such that relations between these different members in the Mexican community are developed. However, individual ballet folklorico groups also form their communities as a function of the amount of time spent together. It is not uncommon for dancers to develop close relationships beyond rehearsal, yet these relationships are not limited

to the dancers. Notably in the case of younger dancers, it is their parents who enable their participation and thus, it is common for parents to stay to watch practices. In addition, many parents become actively involved in prepping for performances by aiding in the costume and overall production process. Consequently, many parents develop closer relationships as well, and this contributes to the development of a folklorico group as a tight-knit, intergenerational folklorico community. Therefore, participating in ballet folklorico results in being a member of the ballet folklorico community, in addition to the larger Mexican community that celebrates Mexican culture in Southern California.

My Mexican-American Experience

As a first-generation Mexican-American dancer who has grown up in Southern California, I began actively representing my Mexican-American identity when I started to dance folklorico over 12 years ago. Over the course of these 12 years, I have danced in multiple groups across the Los Angeles area. None of the schools I attended offered an afterschool folklorico program so my experience consists of autonomous groups at community centers, churches, and dance studios. In fact, I discovered the existence of folklorico in school groups through my family business that sold folklorico costumes. Through my experience working at my family business and dancing in various groups, it was clear that the majority of dancers in ballet folklorico groups in Southern California are Mexican, or of Mexican descent, but I have occasionally encountered non-Mexicans in folklorico groups. This is significant because as a cultural practice, ballet folklorico is most appealing to Mexicans who want to maintain and represent their culture. Hence, the existence of non-Mexicans participating in Mexican cultural practices shows how immigration has altered folklorico into a more inclusive activity. Additionally, most of the instructors I have encountered

are Mexican immigrants, or first-generation Mexican-Americans. This suggests that instructors have a strong desire to convey Mexican identity, but also suggests that restrictions in immigration can impact folklorico groups over time. Since many existing groups in Southern California are established by Mexican immigrants or first-generation Mexican-Americans, restrictions in immigration could result in less existing folklorico groups over time. Accordingly, immigration is crucial for the establishment of Mexican cultural practices in Southern California.

For the past four years, I have been a member of Pacifico Dance Company, a ballet folklorico dance company based in East Los Angeles. As the name of "company" suggests, the training is more intense compared to other groups, and is not limited to folklorico alone. Although more information on the significance behind the traditions is provided, conversation with other dancers has informed me that many are still unaware of the history and significance of ballet folklorico dances. Therefore, although a company is more likely to encourage the development of a more informed Mexican-American identity, the typical Mexican-American identity developed through folklorico is less informed based on the norm of folklorico groups in Los Angeles. Because I researched folklorico extensively, and my childhood was spent travelling Mexico, I gained considerable exposure to the diversity of cultural practices in Mexico that influenced my knowledge of folklorico perhaps more than the average participant. As such, my knowledge of ballet folklorico in Los Angeles and a Mexican-American identity is informed by firsthand experience, prior knowledge, and ethnographical observations, as little data exists on these groups.

In order to begin choreographing a Mexican-American identity, it is important to break down which factors facilitate the creation and preservation of this identity. For this reason, the different types of folklorico groups and their structures available in Southern California are important to analyze. As has been established, choreographing folklorico is a clear way of

representing a dual Mexican-American identity. Group structure, choreographies, and the change in purpose establishes folklorico in Southern California and create an American identity. As a choreographer, this encourages the exploration of using tradition outside of its intended purpose. Furthermore, the tight-knit folkloric communities formed bring to mind concepts of unity, support, and social interactions as a choreographer. Lastly, it is apparent that immigration is required for ballet folklorico to exist in Southern California as many of those who participate, whether as a parent or a dancer, are immigrants. As such, without the existence of immigration in California, there would be no ballet folklorico, and no dual Mexican-American identity. Thus, choreographing the Mexican-American identity includes the tradition of folklorico, in addition to the concepts of immigration, unity, structure, and social interaction.

Existing Representations of Mexican and American Identity

Mexican folkloric dance, or *baile folclórico*, is best described as a fusion of indigenous[iv], African, and European dance traditions that are ceremonial or celebratory in nature. These dance traditions vary across regions in relation to the demographic of the settlers, resulting in distinct differences in the music, dances, and outfits. Due to the differing traditions and lack of unification in Mexico, there was no codified folkloric form until the Mexican Revolution highlighted the need for a universal Mexican identity. Consequently, the Mexican Secretary of Public Education, Jose Vasconcelos, focused on the construction of an identity that included teaching folklorico in public schools from 1920-1924. In this way, *baile folclórico* became a political tool and representation of Mexican identity. As has been established in multiple papers, traditional Mexican *son* and *baile folclórico* serve as a way to remain connected with Mexican culture outside of Mexico[v]. In analyzing artists who fuse folklorico with non-folkloric art forms, it is possible to ascertain

different ways of expressing Mexican American identity that maintain a connection to Mexican culture.

Baile folclórico has always held a political role in Mexican culture, even before Mexico's colonization in 1519. Prior to colonization, dance held a vital role in indigenous rituals that included the Mayan and Aztec people, such that a mistake during performance led to execution. These indigenous dances were both ceremonial and celebratory in nature, and were typically performed as an offering to a deity. Although these choreographies were never recorded, many folklorico groups often choreograph adaptations that include numerable jumps and fast footwork. Following the colonization of present-day Mexico, there was a fusion of indigenous dance traditions with the folk traditions of the European settlers and their slaves. Initially, European settlers in Mexico was limited to the Spanish, who integrated dance traditions into Catholicism in order to convert the indigenous Mexican populations. But with time, French, German, and Eastern Europeans settlers arrived and settled in different regions of Mexico. Based on regional areas, indigenous dance traditions already differed as a function of the tribe present, but the subsequent settlement of European settlers across Mexico led to varying influences in *baile folclórico*. For this reason, there exists variety in folklorico across Mexico. Depending on which European settlers are influencing a particular reason, dances might include flamenco steps, polka steps, or another European folk step. However, what is most important to note about *baile folclórico* is that it has always held a political role since its origins as an indigenous dance tradition.

To further highlight folklorico's role as a political tool, one can look to *Choreographic Politics,* where Anthony Shay discusses how politics altered folklorico in the 1950s. In 1959, Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos requested "the director-general of the National Institute of Fine Arts organize [Ballet Folclórico de Mexico] into an official national company" (Shay 93).

This was significant because Ballet Folclórico de Mexico did not represent folklorico in its traditional form. Instead, Amalia Hernandez, the choreographer, created a new form of folklorico that incorporated ballet technique, theatricalized costumes, and choreographed dances that portray "popular and positive images" (Shay 83) of Mexico. This resulted in ballet folklorico, a government-sponsored form of folklorico with incorporated ballet that has thus served as a standard since 1959. Consequently, Ballet Folclórico de Mexico's continuation of theatricalized folklorico and national sponsorship have allowed for international recognition of ballet folklorico that continues to this day.

However, the creation of stylized folklorico resulted in a defined split between folklorico dancers, who choose between dancing stylized or traditional folklorico. While performances of stylized folklorico consist of colorful costumes, larger ballet-influenced movements, and constant audience engagement, traditional folklorico consists of less colorful outfits, natural hair styles, and smaller movements. As such, Shay exposes how politics played a large role in supporting the first choreographer to fuse folklorico with a westernized dance form. Prior to Ballet Folclórico de Mexico, folklorico existed on a community-level, both in Mexico and the U.S. More specifically, ballet folklorico in the U.S. can be traced back to the 1930s, when Mexican immigrants began teaching folklorico in Mexican public schools.

In Southern California, Mexican culture was also maintained through pastoral pageants and ethnic theater. One example of a successful ethnic theater is Padua Hills, the longest-running Mexican-American theater established during the Great Depression, and situated in the successful citrus-town of Claremont. Specifically, Padua Hill's significance to Mexican-American relations is discussed in Matt Garcia's "Just Put on That Padua Hills Smile." As Garcia explains, Padua Hills was not a typical ethnic theater because the Mexican Players, the Mexican immigrant staff

and theater troupe, “hosted a variety of traditional plays in Spanish and yet still managed to have a mostly English-speaking, white audience” (Garcia 123). This was uncommon, but speaks to the owners’ belief that performances of Mexican culture “would lead to an appreciation of Mexican culture and people, and improve relations between Mexicans and whites at home and abroad” (Garcia 123). As a result, Garcia highlights how the Mexican Players were significant in exposing members of white society to Mexican culture to erase “prejudices held against Mexicans” (130). In addition, the owners of Padua Hills hoped “to reverse the damage caused by the deportations and repatriation [from the expansion of citrus groves], as well as create better relations between Mexicans and Anglos” (Garcia 130). Accordingly, Garcia emphasizes that the “ability of [the] performers to showcase their talents in front of Anglo audiences outside the *colonia* expanded the space of Mexican lives” (124). Thus, the existence of Padua Hills allowed for recognition of Mexican culture in California, and enabled those of Mexican descent to maintain and connect to their culture, even when the Great Depression called for repatriation and restricted immigration.

As the existence of Padua Hills shows, Mexican culture has existed for a long time in the U.S. and has always called to Anglo audiences. Yet, it was not until the founding of Ballet Folclórico de Mexico’s, which fused ballet with folklorico, that many Mexican American artists were inspired to integrate Mexican folkloric traditions with other non-folk dance traditions to explore new forms of representing Mexican American identity. Some of these artists include Las Cafeteras, Primera Generación Dance Collective, Alfonso Cervera, and Ballet Nepantla, all of which are located in Southern California, except for Ballet Nepantla located in New York. Collectively, these artists demonstrate various ways of fusing different folkloric traditions with western influences and styles while individually representing their own version of a Mexican-American identity.

Las Cafeteras is a Chicano band from East LA first established in 2005. They are significant due to their use of *son jarocho*, traditional folk music from Veracruz, Mexico, to challenge "folklorico traditions from Mexico"(Navarro 448). Specifically in "La Bamba Rebelde," José Navarro states that Las Cafeteras' song, "La Bamba Rebelde," "produces counternarratives to anti-immigrant, racist discourses in the United States"(431). To accomplish this, Las Cafeteras reinterpreted the lyrics of "La Bamba" to specifically identify locations in East LA and reference the journey of crossing the border, while also negating the existence of a border. In addition, "La Bamba Rebelde" repurposes the myth of *La Llorona*: it relates *La Llorona* killing her children because her husband left her, to the United States and Mexico. In this instance, the U.S. is the husband who has left his wife, Mexico, and their kids. The song itself remains true to its original structure, and further includes lyrics pertaining to other issues specific to Chicanos. As a result, Las Cafeteras succeed in expressing their Mexican American identity by rewriting the lyrics of a traditional folkloric song to express an "immigrant-focused narrative"(Navarro 448) many Chicanos have experienced. Even if they have not made physically made the journey of crossing the border, the journey to assimilation while also maintaining the Mexican identity is experienced by every Chicano in some capacity. As a whole, Las Cafeteras' songs express Mexican American identity through contemporary reinterpretations of songs, such as "La Bamba Rebelde," that allow for relevant interpretations, and a "continual engagement with traditional Mexican music" (Navarro 433) for Mexican Americans.

More recently, Primera Generación Dance Collective was established in 2015 by first-generation Mexican Americans dancers in Southern California. Through the integrated use of improvisation, postmodern, contemporary, and Mexican folk forms, Primera Generación exposes "el desmadre, or messiness, that is their first generation, Mexican American experience" (*Primera*

Generación Dance Collective). In particular, Primera Generación's piece, *Cambio*, successfully embodies this goal. For instance, there was a consistent use of talking- either to cue a movement ("camina hasta el centro" or walk towards the center), interact with each other, or the audience. The majority was in Spanish, and they often integrated references to Mexican culture that included the singing of a popular folk song, "Cielito Lindo." *Cambio* also switched between partner sequences, group sequences, and individual movements that juxtapose contemporary and postmodern dance with movements based on Mexican culture or folklorico steps. For example, one of the dancers calls out to make tamales, and all of the dancers form a line to dance out the making of tamales- the making of tamales is a common event that occurs in preparation for Christmas. Furthermore, some of the movements and phrases were comical- "se quemaron los frijoles" translated to "the beans got burned" resulted in audience laughter. Lastly, there was no music until the last 2 minutes of the piece, when short clips of a traditional folk song and an old English childhood song played. Overall, this created an effect of *desmadre* (messiness), but also lightness throughout the piece as it constantly switched between expressing a Mexican or American identity in a comical way. As such, *Cambio* expressed Mexican American identity through movements from modern and contemporary dance that were influenced by experiences from Mexican culture.

Similarly, Alfonso Cervera, a member of Primera Generación, is a choreographer who integrates ballet folklorico and postmodern dance techniques in a technique he has established as *Poc-Chuc*. More specifically, Cervera's dances aim "to explore what it means to be a bicultural body that negotiates the relationships between ballet folklorico communities, family histories, labor, homoeroticism, and the Mexican-American identity" (Cervera 2019). This can be seen through Cervera's piece, *Poc-Chuc*, named after his emerging technique. Unlike *Cambio*, *Poc-*

Chuc had an almost constant drumming throughout the series of small pieces that included a variety of folklorico-influenced steps. In the beginning, a clear influence to Ballet Folclórico de Mexico is seen when the dancers march around in the style made famous by Amalia Hernandez's *Adelita* choreography. Throughout the piece, there is constant travelling across the space, and coming into and out of the space, with a clear center. This leads to dancing in a circle later on, which creates a communal and tribal feel. Many of the steps are influenced by postmodern technique, but in later pieces, there is a clearer folklorico style in the footwork that leads to dancing on a *tarima*, wooden platform, for a fandango dance off. At this point, the stage is dark except for a spotlight, where the piece ends with a rhythmic dance-off between the drummer and a dancer on the *tarima*. Thus, Cervera's *Poc-Chuc* explores Mexican American identity in a more integrated style of modern and folklorico, with a less explicit juxtaposition of culture, but a clear relation to its roots in Mexican folklorico.

Founded in 2017, Ballet Nepantla is similar to Ballet Folclórico de Mexico in their incorporation of contemporary and ballet technique. However, Ballet Nepantla is unique in their integration of pointe shoes and clear ballet technique seen in various choreographies in order to speak to the "narrative of being Mexican, Mexican American, immigrant, and trans-cultural"(Guajardo & Rodriguez). This was partially achieved through the recruitment of dancers with a strong contemporary training, or a strong folklorico training. Unlike Ballet Folclórico de Mexico, Ballet Nepantla either uses traditional contemporary costumes, or traditional folklorico outfits. One piece in particular that highlights their integration of contemporary ballet and ballet folklorico is "La Bruja."

"La Bruja" begins as a contemporary ballet pas de deux that portrays the story of a man being seduced by *la Bruja*, a mythical witch in Mexican culture who seeks to seduce married men

into being unfaithful. While *la bruja* is wearing a red leotard dress indicating a contemporary style, the man is only wearing white pants traditional to Veracruz fishermen. Two minutes into the work, an ensemble of dancers in traditional Veracruz dress (all white dresses) join the stage with folklorico shoes to dance a more traditional "La Bruja" choreography. Namely, this means dancing at an even level, with small footwork and skirt work as a result of balancing a candle placed on the head to keep away evil. Consequently, this results in *la bruja* leaving the stage, with the man continuing a contemporary ballet choreography among the folklorico dancers until the end, when the folklorico dancers leave with their candles and allow *la bruja* to return. The song used is the traditional "La Bruja," but reinterpreted in a flat key to create a more haunting feel. Hence, Ballet Nepantla's version of "La Bruja" integrates contemporary ballet with traditional folklorico dance and music to convey a popular Mexican myth. This results in a unique expression of Mexican American identity, as contemporary dance training is more popular in the U.S., while ballet folklorico has a key role in Mexican culture.

The fusion of ballet folklorico with other dance styles is important not only because it allows dancers to express their Mexican American identity, but because it also enables a form of assimilation. At a time when there is increased political focus on immigration, it is necessary to be able to represent the unique identity that forms from immigration. However, it is still difficult for folk dance traditions to be able to access the same stages non-folk dance styles do. It appears that the fusion of folklorico with non-folk dance styles is necessary to appeal to a larger audience, but it also indicates the presence of a dual-identity as folklorico rarely exists outside of its traditional form in Mexico. It is for this reason that Ballet Folclórico de Mexico's fusion of folklorico with westernized dance to create ballet folklorico was so important- it allowed folklorico to reach global stages and influence later artists. This is especially evident in the works of Ballet Nepantla or

Alfonso Cervera, where their work has clear influence from Ballet Folclórico de Mexico, but influences from other dance styles as well. Nevertheless, the artists Las Cafeteras, Primera Generación Dance Collective, Alfonso Cervera, and Ballet Nepantla are equally significant in their diversity of expressing Mexican American identity. For Las Cafeteras, this means rewriting lyrics of folk music to fit Mexican American identity, while for Primera Generación Dance Collective, speech is a large factor. On the other hand, Alfonso Cervera accomplishes his expression of Mexican American identity largely through integration of postmodern technique with folklorico, and Ballet Nepantla fuses contemporary and ballet with folklorico dance. As such, immigration allows for the integration of Mexican folklore dance and song with westernized art forms to preserve Mexican culture outside of Mexico. This was first done with the existence of theaters like Padua Hills, and continues to exist through the existence of folklorico groups across Southern California. At the same time, the integration of Mexican folk dance with non-folk art forms expresses a multi-cultural identity that can only be accomplished in an outside country, and leads to the creation of new, integrated styles.

Exploring Mexican-American Identity

Since my dance project's conception, it was important that the inclusion of a ballet folklorico song would serve as a traditional form of representing Mexican identity. However, *Cruzando la Frontera* needed to include different ways of representing both Mexican and American identity, with other existing artists to serve as inspiration. Thus, based on inspiration from artists such as Primera Generación Dance Collective and Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, and personal experience as a member of Pacifico Dance Company, I intended to focus on choreographing movement based on my own style that mixes ballet folklorico elements with

modern and contemporary dance movements as a form of representing Mexican-American identity.

As a dancer with extensive experience in folk dance genres, a common trend I draw from is the portrayal of a story and the social interactions that exists within folk dances. For this reason, choreographing a story seemed the most natural course to approach my representation of Mexican-American identity. Thus, the story of portraying a border crossing from Mexico to the US as a clear way of showing how identity changes was born- the story of a border crossing was largely influenced by the prevalence of Latino immigration within US politics. As an artist, the choice to incorporate immigration into my piece was important not only because immigration shapes the Mexican-American identity, but also to connect my piece to ongoing political issues. I hoped to expose the audience to a different perspective on immigration than the typical depiction of immigration in the media. Once the story was established, it was simple to separate the project into sections via the narrative: there would be a failed border crossing and a return trip to Mexico, and a second attempt to cross the border would be successful, resulting in an altered sense of identity due to the pressure to assimilate. In this way, the inclusion of a ballet folklorico choreography would serve as a clear representation of Mexico, and Mexican identity. Furthermore, inspiration from Las Cafetera's repurposing of the myth of *La Llorona* resulted in the incorporation of a Mexican myth, specifically *La Bruja*, to represent Mexican-American identity, which would be further explored through the intentional integration of folklorico movements in the choreography. Conversely, a more apparent American identity would manifest in the later parts of the project through less folklorico-influenced movements. Unfortunately, deeper exploration of American identity through movement was in the process of being conceived, but was cut short due to the events brought about from the spread of COVID-19.

Cruzando la Frontera

The Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process for *Cruzando la Frontera* was an unfinished six-month long process that began with finding the cast, performing the work in progress at *In the Works*, and ending abruptly due to the pandemic. Throughout this six-month process, close relationships that had not previously existed were developed between myself and the dancers. Accordingly, the collegial relationships that developed facilitated the rehearsal process for the choreographer; it allowed for ease in choreographing and the generation of new ideas throughout the choreographic process.

The casting process for the first half of the project that culminated with four performances after three months of development was relatively simple: two dancers were cast from the schoolwide auditions, and a fellow dancer with flamenco and aerial circus experience asked to be in the piece. Due to the high skill set required for ballet folklorico, it was already planned that the choreographer would be in the piece- this allowed the other dancers to feel more comfortable performing the piece and better execute the folklorico steps.

For the first auditions held in September, a short combination of basic folklorico steps common to multiple regions of folklorico was taught to the group of approximately 45 dancers present. At this point, the *son* (folklore song) for the project was still undecided, resulting in the steps taught not being necessarily specific to the choreography. One of the steps taught included *zapateado de tres con tacón*, or footwork of three counts- a step present in almost every region, but *con tacón* (with heel) is a variation danced especially in the Western regions of Jalisco, Colima, and Aguascalientes. Some other steps taught included a *cruzado con cepillado*, or a cross with a brush, *doble remates*, or double stomps, and *vueltas con tacón,* or turns with a heel. After teaching the combination to the dancers and allowing them to practice within the fifteen minute slot allotted,

dancers performed the combination in groups of eight. From each group of eight dancers, the dancers who were better able to execute the steps with the proper rhythms were noted to be considered for the project. Due to the short amount of time to teach the combination and the complexity of the steps, the standards for choosing were low and particular focus was given to dancers who had noted tap experience on their audition sheet. This resulted in about 20 dancers being noted from the small groups, but this greatly decreased once their availability was compared against that of the choreographer and the other dancer who had already asked to be in the project. Thus, from the auditions, ten dancers were contacted in the weekend following the audition, and two dancers were confirmed from the ten.

In order to further develop the project, the decision to cast two more dancers at the spring concert auditions held in February was made. More specifically, it was desired to cast at least one male dancer to make *La Bruja's* role as a temptress and dark presence clearer, in addition to the incorporation of traditional folklorico partnering in "El Huizache." Similar to the first round of auditions, a short combination of folklorico steps was taught. Yet unlike last time, this combination consisted solely of steps already in the choreography. Thus, the steps taught were *zapateado de tres con tacón*, *cruzado con cepillado* with *remates*, and airplane turns *con tacón.* Like the prior auditions, small groups of dancers performed the combination, but this time, particular interest was given to the male dancers present at the audition. Based on the execution of the combination, two female dancers and two male dancers were contacted to join the piece- one female and one male dancer agreed. Now, the cast of the project came to be six total performers.

Feedback from a showing for the planned final performances of the project showed the value of adding a seventh dancer, at least for the initial border crossing section. After making the necessary changes for the choreography, it was determined that the seventh dancer would only be

needed for one minute of the piece. As it would be difficult to find a dancer able to attend the set rehearsal times to only be in one minute of the piece, the twin of the choreographer was asked to be in the piece because she had the availability to attend rehearsals and provide feedback on the future development of the piece. However, the choreographer's twin had to complete two weeks of domestic isolation upon her return from Italy prior to being integrated into the piece-unfortunately, this isolation was not completed before social distancing laws were enacted and she was never fully integrated into the piece.

The dancers of the project came from a diverse movement background; movement experience among the dancers included aerial circus, flamenco, ballet, and for two of the dancers, only one semester of modern dance completed in college. As a choreographer with nontraditional Westernized dance experience, the range in experience was ideal in providing varied forms of movement when improvising to choreograph a new section. Furthermore, the expertise in aerial circus allowed for consultation and proper teaching when integrating lifts into the choreography.

However, the range in movement experience also meant specificity was required in teaching every movement. This included basic ballet steps and the application of ballet technique that often crosses over into other styles of dance because of the disparity in training. For example, there was a constant need to remind certain dancers to turn out or point their feet. As the choreographer, it meant isolating and repeating every movement to be able to demonstrate every detail and being prepared to answer questions about these details.

As a ballet folklorico dancer of over 12 years, teaching ballet folklorico to dancers with no experience in *zapateado* is always a challenge at first because it requires explaining what has become intuitive. At my own company rehearsals, steps are mostly taught through watching and listening because dancers in the company have a strong background in ballet folklorico.

Consequently, going from learning steps with experienced folklorico dancers to teaching steps to inexperienced folklorico dancers is an adjustment that consists of a trial-and-error process to find the most effective way of teaching the dancers the steps. For the cast of *Cruzando la Frontera,* teaching folklorico steps went as follows: demonstrating the step as it should be executed before breaking it down to what each foot was doing, where the weight was, and then putting it together slowly. For the two dancers with tap experience, the process was usually a little faster due to similarity in tap steps- this allowed for the choreographer to focus on helping the other three dancers without tap experience. For the female dancers, the steps were taught with the hands on the waist and the corresponding *faldeo* was not taught until the dancers were able to consistently execute the step at the proper rhythm and speed. As the relationship between the choreographer and dancers developed, it became easier to correct the technical details, and for the dancers to feel comfortable asking for clarification on a step at any time. For the dancers that were added later in the project, it was helpful to have dancers who had already mastered the steps be able to help the new dancers. This was because the new dancers had to learn the choreography at a quicker pace, in addition to changes as the project developed. Thus, if the new dancers were not able to master a step, the experienced dancers of the piece were able to explain the step in a different way than from someone with over 12 years of ballet folklorico experience.

The Choreography

Over the course of the choreographic process, practices ranged between 90 minutes to 120 minutes. Rehearsals usually began as follows: dancers stretched on their own before everyone worked together to pull out the tap tiles to protect the Marley from the nails in ballet folklorico shoes. After stating what was hoping to be accomplished in the rehearsal, the cast was asked if

there were any sections they wanted to review, or receive clarification for, prior to learning new choreography or changes. If the requested sections were not already intended to be focused on, they were reviewed. Afterwards, the new material, changes, or cleaning occurred, with the intent to run the piece at least once at the end of every rehearsal.

As the director, working within the time constraints of rehearsal was the most difficult part. During the fall semester, there was limited studio availability which led to the establishment of a 90-minute rehearsal where at least 10 minutes was spent setting up the tap tiles. In reality, a two-hour weekly rehearsal would have been preferred in order to account for the amount of time that was anticipated to teach folklorico. As a result, the ballet folklorico section of the piece was choreographed and taught first. Even so, the amount of time needed to perfect the folklorico was underestimated and it ended up being a focus for many of the rehearsals. Indeed, there was considerable improvement from the beginning to the performances at *In the Works*, but watching the videos showed there was still more cleaning needed for that section. Fortunately, studio availability in the spring semester improved and a two-hour rehearsal was now established. In addition, the month-long break and integration of new dancers allowed for reteaching of the steps and further cleaning without the initial cast feeling like they had not yet mastered the steps.

While most of the choreography was developed outside of rehearsals with the dancers, some of the choreography was developed in conjunction with the dancers. This included the discussion of ideas and the intended messages behind the piece. Excluding the beginning section of *Cruzando la Frontera* where the initial border crossing occurs without music, the remaining choreography was developed only after a song was determined to fit the concept of the piece. As a result, much of the choreography was made to fit the music- if it did not fit the music, it was an intentional choice.

As previously stated, the ballet folklorico section with the song "El Huizache" was choreographed first as it would require the most time to teach and for the dancers to master its execution. It was unclear where in the piece this section would fall, but it was still taught first. Since ballet folklorico is a musicality-based dance form where the *zapateado* matches the music, the choreography could not be developed until a song was picked. As the region of Jalisco is one of the most well-known of ballet folklorico, special care was taken in picking a song the choreographer had never performed in any of her prior dance groups. This was to avoid unintentionally incorporating steps from an already existing ballet folklorico choreography, which is how the song "El Huizache" was picked. Once the song was established, it was relatively easy to choreograph the movements. As a dancer with expertise in folklorico, it was simply a matter of dancing out which combination of steps specific to the region of Jalisco fit musically and transitioned easily. For inspiration, I would watch videos of old performances where I performed songs from the region of Jalisco and researched the steps incorporated in the choreography. In this way, I was able to ensure that the steps incorporated into the choreography were truly those from the region. This was important as stylized folklorico has led to steps in choreographies that are actually from a different region.

In general, most steps from Jalisco are repeated in groups of 4, 8, or 16 and it is often repetitive with the formations making the configuration more complex and appealing to watch. In addition, the repetition of the steps are often due to repeated phrases in the music. This was the case for "El Huizache," which led to a portion of the song being cut. Furthermore, for the performances at *In the Works*, the "El Huizache" choreography was danced in place after it was determined that the cast would be too overwhelmed if formations were added on top of the folklorico choreography. It should also be noted that the original interpretation of the song was too

fast. While it was possible to execute the steps at the initial speed, it would not allow for proper *faldeo* and required considerable stamina to execute. For this reason, the song was edited to be at ninety percent of its original tempo.

In order to convey a border crossing for the first performances, the cast was split in half: two of the dancers would represent and delineate the border, while the other two dancers would represent immigrants trying to cross this border. Thus, the movements of the two dancers representing the border would have to clearly mark a border, and represent aggression and immobility based on current associations with the border. These associations are negative, and based on multiple instances of border patrol attacking immigrants trying to get across the border. Consequently, the choreography for these two dancers could be described as consisting of pedestrian movements as it involved strong poses and marching to represent the border. On the other hand, the movements of the two dancers attempting to cross the border would have to convey the journey of a difficult border crossing journey. To establish their choreography, the two dancers improvised based on the directions to incorporate partnering and movements that conveyed "crossing" and "struggle." Consequently, this resulted in the dancers incorporating the use of the ballet folklorico skirts outside of their normal use and establishing their own movements for this section with the appropriate changes given by the choreographer. Once the new dancers were added to the cast, they were added to the border group in order to establish a more threatening border through the physical creation of a wall. In order to create this more threatening wall, the dancer with aerial circus experience was consulted to incorporate a lift appropriate to the cast's skill level. As a result, the first section consisted of movements partially choreographed in conjunction with the dancers, and movements partially given to the dancers to perform.

Once the beginning and “El Huizache” was choreographed, “La Bruja” was developed. The physical representation of *La Bruja* was crucial, which led to making of a solo for myself. *La Bruja* was envisioned as the physical pull back to Mexico for the dancers who failed to cross the border. It was a new take on her role in Mexican culture, where *La Bruja* is known for seducing men. Instead, she is seducing the dancers back to Mexico, and was meant to represent the negative aspects of immigration. This is why the choreography involved pushing a dancer down, and dragging two other dancers offstage later. To reference the origins from Veracruz and traditional ballet folklorico choreography “La Bruja” normally has, *zapateado* from Veracruz that required a high level of expertise was incorporated. However, there was no need for the movements of the other dancers to include *zapateado* as they are returning to Mexico, resulting in choreographing modern-contemporary movements. Due to *La Bruja*’s role as the bad character, the choreography was developed so *La Bruja* interacted both directly and indirectly with the dancers through the movements and position on the stage. While taking all the dancers except for *La Bruja* on stage was in accordance with the storyline, it also built in time for the other dancers to change. It is worth noting that the length of this section changed throughout the process in response to how much time the dancers needed to change.

At the first showing for *In the Works*, only a section of “El Huizache” was shown. This did not allow for considerable feedback, but it did facilitate discussion of the piece and the transition between “La Bruja” and “El Huizache.” This is how the transition of a social scene to denote a change in the mood with “Ay Jalisco, No te Rajes” was developed. I told the dancers to improvise with their skirts and incorporate the movements they enjoy, while interacting within the space and with each other. From the second showing, most of the feedback concerned questioning movements and the role of *La Bruja,* which was not yet clear. As a result, this feedback led to the

changing of certain movements in the beginning to convey more aggression and the position of *La Bruja* was changed so that her role as the bad character would be clearer. Lastly, feedback from the second showing led to the incorporation of wind as a temporary background noise during the beginning, with the intention to add a voiceover track for the anticipated *Scripps Dances* later.

After *In the Works*, there were a number of changes incorporated based on review of the *In the Works* performance videos and showing for the anticipated *Scripps Dances*. One important development was adding in formations for “El Huizache.” Since “El Huizache” is a social courting dance in folklorico, the formations included circles, and having the male dancer partnering with two to three female dancers throughout the song. Another development in the choreography made possible by the addition of a male dancer, was the development of a duet with *La Bruja* to make her role as the seductress more apparent. From the showing, the decision for the patrolling dancers to incorporate flashlights in the beginning was made after receiving feedback to push the choreography to convey more fear. In this way, the border patrol could search out the two dancers attempting to cross the border.

Before COVID-19, the next section of the choreography was in development to the song “Alingo.” It consisted of A-B group work: half the dancers were to dance folklorico, while the others had folklorico-influenced modern movements. Since “Alingo” is from the region of Guerrero, dancers with stronger skills in *zapateado* were required because \Guerrero is known for having fast, intricate steps. Accordingly, the two dancers with considerable tap experience and myself would form group A, while the other dancers would execute less *zapateado* heavy combinations. Unfortunately, only about one minute of this section was choreographed prior to COVID-19.

As a choreographer in my own piece with consistent exposure to Mexican culture throughout my life, it was hard to ensure an outsider with less contextual information would receive the intended message and correctly interpret the storyline. It was important that *Cruzando la Frontera* convey a clear representation of Mexican-American identity through the storyline of a border crossing from Mexico to the US. This was apparent through the use of traditional Mexican music, or *sones*, even when the movements of the dancers were not traditional ballet folklorico steps. However, the beginning of *Cruzando la Frontera* does not have any music, and results in a less apparent representation of Mexican identity. Thus, in isolating the beginning section of *Cruzando la Frontera* where a border crossing is represented, it is possible to analyze if the use of a delineated border and Mexican ballet folklorico skirts begins to create a distinct representation of Mexican-American identity for the piece.

As previously stated, *Cruzando the Frontera* begins in silence, with 4 dancers bathed in blue light on stage- two dancers sit upstage back to back in partial darkness, and 2 dancers stand separated on the downstage stage left corner, facing the dancers upstage. Although the use of the space is not evident, the blue light and background wind sounds that begin to play in the background create a cold atmosphere, and the dancers' beginning poses in contrasting levels suggest a dynamic where the downstage dancers hold the power. This suggestion is furthered by the movements of the downstage dancers, who begin the piece with large acrobatic movements. They then transition into travelling with loud, marching steps along a diagonal line perpendicular to the upstage dancers. These steps are significant, as their sound conveys strength, and this creates an image of a solider via the rigidity and structure of the movement. Simultaneously, the loud steps seemingly trigger the upstage dancers to commence a partner-based phrase where their slow, heavy movements convey dependency and struggle. In this way, the initiation of the upstage dancers'

movements as a result of the downstage dancers moving makes it evident to the audience that there is a direct relationship between the two groups.

This connection between the dancers is maintained even as the movement of the upstage dancers begins to expand and take up more space. More specifically, the upstage dancers begin to traverse the stage diagonally towards the marching dancers. One can infer that their travel downstage is unintentional, because the upstage dancers are now consumed in executing large, carving motions with the large skirts they are holding. Although the significance of the skirts is yet unknown, the dancers' ease at maneuvering suggests the skirts are a familiar object. While the two dancers continue to explore their range of motion, the two downstage dancers suddenly stop marching and face upstage on the diagonal. Shortly after, the dancers with the skirts seem to forget their skirts as one of them seems pulled by what is beyond the downstage dancers. However, this dancer is pulled back by the other and they quickly run offstage when the downstage dancers stomp directly towards the dancers with the skirt- once again establishing the power dynamic between the two groups where the downstage dancers have control over the other two dancers.

Although the dancers with the skirt run away upstage, they soon return downstage and make evident the impenetrability of the barrier the two downstage dancers have formed. When one of the dancers with a skirt attempts to cross the barrier, they are physically stopped by the soldier-like dancers and thrown back. From there, the dancers with the skirt crawl off stage, and one of the dancers from the barrier is left with their back to the audience, watching the other two drag themselves off with their skirts in hand. These moments in the choreography are significant, as it continues to develop a clear power dynamic between the two groups. It also establishes what is beyond the created barrier to be desirable and unattainable, leading to clear tension between the dancers. Upon reflection, this perceived tension and power dynamic may not make it clear to the

audience that what occurs in the beginning is a failed border crossing between the US and Mexico. Even so, the struggle to reach the other side is evident in the movements and travel patterns of the dancers. For this reason, the use of the folklorico skirts by the dancers who portray Mexicans attempting to cross the border is notable, because the skirts symbolize Mexican ballet folklorico, and subsequently reference a representation of Mexican identity.

It is worth further analyzing the movement of the dancers in the piece. For example, the dancers forming the barrier integrate continuous, rhythmic stomping early on in their movement sequence. Although stomping is a pedestrian movement, the intentional rhythm kept by the dancers evokes the rhythms of *zapateado*. As such, when the rhythm stops, the audience is left to focus on the use of the ballet folklorico skirts outside of their normal usage by the other dancers. The use of folklorico skirts in the carving motions by the dancers can best be classified as modern dance; it is both intentional and playful in its exploration. It is in this way that the beginning section of *Cruzando la Frontera* begins to subtly indicate the presence of a Mexican identity through the influence of *zapateado* and the use of folklorico skirts. Meanwhile, the American identity manifests in the all of the movements due to the classification of the movements as modern dance.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the creation of a barrier imposed by the downstage dancers without skirts. Since the beginning, there is a desire to travel downstage to cross the barrier, but it is never reached. This barrier is significant because it establishes a path of travel, which is seen to continue throughout the entirety of piece. To establish this barrier, the downstage dancers generate a large physical presence through their strong movements, with their loud, marching steps adding to this display of strength. However, the true force of the barrier created by the dancers is not apparent until the dancers with the skirt run, and later crawl away. Therefore, the rhythmic stomping at the beginning, and single stomp in the middle makes evident the

downstage dancers' positions as authority, and solicits the appropriate response of fear from the other dancers when they are preventing from crossing.

Overall, the movements of the beginning section of *Cruzando la Frontera* can be classified as modern dance, as the movements are more pedestrian and exploratory in nature. However, there is a clear influence of folklorico in this section seen through the loud, rhythmic stomping and integration of ballet folklorico skirts. Based on the existence of modern dance and folklorico dance influence in the movements, it can be stated that the border crossing section begins the development of a Mexican-American identity in *Cruzando la Frontera.* The establishment of the barrier is important as it can be determined to represent the path from Mexico to the US. More specifically for this section, the barrier is important because the process of immigration is significantly tied to Mexican-American identity. Even so, it must be acknowledged that the storyline of a border crossing is not completely clear based on the movements of the dancers and lack of music- only a pattern of tension and desire is seen. It is for this reason that changes for *Scripps Dances* would have incorporated the use of flashlights and a recording of immigration headlines to make the connection to crossing the border more distinct, and convey more fear.

In the Works Production

The costumes from the initial performances in December to the anticipated performances in April would have changed drastically as I was awarded the Holmes Performing Arts grant in February. However, due to the pandemic, those costumes were never realized. Thus, the costumes for *In the Works* were limited to what existed in the Scripps Dance Department costume, and my own closet of old folklorico costumes. For the failed border crossing section, the use of the folklorico skirts outside of its normal use was naturally incorporated through improvisation, and

made wearing the skirts impractical. The significant amount of dragging, falling, and lifts in the choreography thus made it practical to wear pants. Consequently, leggings were chosen for their versatility, and to create uniformity among the dancers- less fitted pants would create too much bulk when worn under a skirt. In addition, since the skirt for *La Bruja* is white, organza, the choice of black leggings would not distract from the *falda jarocha* (Veracruz costume skirt).

Moreover, the use of the existing royal blue and black practice skirts was not the intended aesthetic preferred for *In the Works*, but it was a cost-efficient solution. This resulted in both the bottoms and skirts being in a darker color palette. In order to represent the liveliness of Mexican culture seen in its brightly colored artisan, brightly colored tops were needed. Ideally, there would be *tricolor* tops, or the colors of Mexico's flag (red, white, and green), but due to the limitations of the existing costume closet, red leotards and yellow tops were selected. In this way, there would be some color. In order to create distinction in the roles of the dancers, the dancers representing border patrol wore red leotards, and the dancers who tried to cross wore yellow tops.

The lighting choices for *Cruzando la Frontera* were easily chosen with the help of the *In the Works* lighting team by sharing the storyline. Namely, the lighting for the beginning half that included the border crossing and "La Bruja" needed to convey a darker mood. This led to the implementation of blue lighting. For the second half, warm red lights were chosen to convey the happier atmosphere of the piece. For *Scripps Dances*, the intended incorporation of flashlights in the beginning would have led to the piece beginning in the dark, with dimmer lighting to create more discomfort from the audience perspective. Overall, the lighting choices were heavily driven by the storyline.

The goal of *Cruzando la Frontera* was to explore Mexican-American identity, which was easily represented by the choice of music. For this reason, the traditional *sones* that included "La

Bruja," "El Huizache," and "Alingo" were chosen; all of these songs were already in my music library as I regularly listen to traditional *sones* outside of my dance practice. The use of *sones* was also important in the choreography as even when the movement was more modern, there was a connection to Mexican culture through the music. However, as previously discussed, the beginning was initially silent, until the suggestion of background wind during one of the showings was given. However, it was always planned to have a voiceover play, and at the last rehearsal, the whole cast participated in recording a collection of headlines pertaining to immigration at the US-Mexico border. In this way, the spoken headlines would more clearly connect the movements on stage to that of a border crossing. Thus, the sound picked for *Cruzando la Frontera* included traditional *sones* as a way to represent Mexican-American identity, even when the movements were not necessarily folkloric.

Conclusion

There are many ways to choreograph representations of Mexican-American identity. The existence of other artists such as Ballet Nepantla and Primera Generación Dance Collective prove that Mexican-American identity can be choreographed through the extremes of purer modern or ballet choreographies. Specifically, as explored in *Cruzando la Frontera*, some ways to choreograph Mexican-American identity, that more evenly integrate folklorico with non-folkloric dance traditions, include the use of a narrative, *sones*, and *zapateado* in conjunction with modern dance. This resulted in a piece with traditional Mexican music and nontraditional choreography for the music following a narrative of immigration. This was a logical decision, as immigration is crucial to ballet folklorico's existence in Southern California and a current political focus. In this way, I was able to explore how to relate my piece to a political topic, and provide a different

perspective to audience members of a different political opinion. Based on feedback from participants in the process and audience members I spoke with, I know that *Cruzando la Frontera* was successful in representing Mexican-American identity.

Although the performance of *Cruzando la Frontera* at *In the Works* was a satisfying performance that successfully portrayed Mexican-American identity, there were many changes that were never implemented to make the representation of the dual identity more evident. Moving forward, I would implement the following changes to the *Cruzando la* Frontera choreography to expand the Mexican-American identity portrayed. As a significant component of Mexican-American identity, the immigration narrative would be made more obvious through the use of flashlights and a voice clip of news headlines playing in the background. In this way, the role of immigration as a formative factor of Mexican-American identity would have been more apparent. In addition, *La Bruja*'s role as the physical representation of pulling the immigrants back to Mexico would be made clearer by incorporating her into the piece from the beginning. Her choreography would integrate stronger movements to portray a direct relationship with all of the dancers on stage. A choreographed trio or duet would be added to convey *La Bruja's* role as a seductress. However, this would only possible with a larger cast. I would still incorporate the use of travelling formations in "El Huizache," but I would ensure that a future performance of *Cruzando la Frontera* had enough rehearsal time to isolate that section and achieve a clean execution. Most importantly, I would continue the exploration of a dual-identity through the continuation of the "Alingo" choreography that had been in progress prior to COVID-19.

Overall, if I were to replicate *Cruzando la Frontera* in the future, I know that it is possible even without an experienced ballet folklorico cast. Even though this would require more effort to achieve a clean performance, a diverse cast for *Cruzando la Frontera* allowed for different

explorations outside of my typical styles. Furthermore, I would ensure sufficient funding to obtain the costumes that include traditional Mexican ballet folklorico outfits. Thus, if I were to re-choreograph this piece, I would hope to work with a diverse cast to further my exploration of how to choreograph Mexican-American identity outside of a Mexican-American perspective. As such, immigration is vital to choreographing complex multi-cultural identities that would otherwise not exist.

Appendix A: Timeline

Cruzando la Frontera Timeline

Date	Time	Project Task
06-Sep	4:00 -6:00 pm	In the Works Auditions
09-Sep		Casting Decisions
13-Sep	12:30-2:15 pm	First Rehearsal- Folklorico basics
20-Sep	12:30-2:15 pm	Rehearsal- El Huizache
01-Oct	9:00 -10:30 pm	Rehearsal- El Huizache
04-Oct	4:30 - 5:00 pm	First Showing- ITW
11-Oct	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal- Crossing the Border
25-Oct	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal
01-Nov	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal
08-Nov	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal- Choreo Done
11-Nov		Program Copy Due
13-Nov		Working Abstract due
15-Nov	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal- Cleaning
	4:30 -5:00 pm	Second Showing- ITW
22-Nov	12:30 - 2:15pm	Rehearsal- Cleaning
01-Dec	5:45- 6:45 pm	ITW Tech Rehearsal- Meet with lighting designers
04-Dec	6:00 - 9:00 pm	ITW Dress Rehearsal
05-Dec	6:15 - 10:00 pm	In the Works Performance
06-Dec	6:15 - 10:00 pm	In the Works Performance
07-Dec	12:15 - 4:00 pm	In the Works Performance
	6:15 - 10:00 pm	In the Works Performance
19-Dec		Thesis Background due
______________________	Winter Break	______________________________
28-Jan	8:00 - 10:00 pm	Rehearsal- Review & Cleaning

31-Jan	5:00 PM	Holmes Performing Arts Fund Application due
01-Feb	3:00 - 5:00 pm	Scripps Dances Audition
02-Feb		Casting Decisions
04-Feb	8:00 - 10:00 pm	Rehearsal- reteaching El Huizache
11-Feb	8:00 - 10:00 pm	Rehearsal- reteaching El Huizache
16-Feb	7:00 - 9:00 pm	Ballet Nepantla Performance
18-Feb	8:00 - 10:00 pm	Rehearsal
21-Feb		Holmes Performing Arts Decision
21-Feb	8:00 - 9:00 pm	Rehearsal- La Bruja
25-Feb	7:00 - 7:30 pm	Scripps Dances Showing
28-Feb		Thesis Outline due
03-Mar	8:00 - 10:00 pm	Rehearsal
10-Mar		Rehearsal- Might change date. Have at least one minute of new choreo
	Spring Break	*Costumes/ skirts*
20-Mar		*Partial Draft due*
24-Mar	*8:00 - 10:00 pm*	*Rehearsal*
28-Mar	*7:45 - 9:00 pm*	*Primera Generacion Dance Collective Performance*
29-Mar	*11:00 - 2:00 pm*	*Second Showing* *Rehearsal*
07-Apr	*8:00 - 10:00 pm*	*Rehearsal*
13-Apr	*TBD*	*Tech Rehearsal*
16-Apr	*6:00 - 10:00 pm*	*Dress Rehearsal*
17-Apr	*6:00 - 10:00 pm*	*Scripps Dances*
18-Apr	*12:15 - 4:00 pm*	*Scripps Dances*
	6:15 - 10:00 pm	*Scripps Dances*
01-May		*Thesis Due*

***All dates after spring break were disrupted as the piece was left unfinished due to the events brought about by COVID-19.**

Appendix B : Program Copy Info Sheet

In the Works Copy

TITLE OF DANCE: Cruzando Fronteras (Crossing Borders)

CHOREOGRAPHER: Chloe Vich CMC 2020

MUSIC - COMPOSER/ARTIST & TITLE OF TRACK:
La Bruja by Conjunto Jardin
Ay Jalisco No Te Rajes by Mariachi Pablo Olmedo
El Huizache by Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán

MUSICIAN(S): (if music is live)

DANCERS: (Please alphabetize by last name and indicate school and year of graduation)
Lauren Froelich SC 2020
Nadia Schwartz Bolef SC 2023
Marissa Singh PZ 2023
Chloe Vich CMC 2020

CHOREOGRAPHER'S BIO: (Please write in 3rd person)

Chloe's movement experience began with hula from age 4 until 11. At age 9, she transitioned into Mexican Ballet Folklorico and was a part of Claremont's colorguard team for 6 years. Since 2016, she has been a member of Pacifico Dance Company, a professional ballet folklorico company based in LA.

Appendix C: Voiceover Script

Immigration Headlines dating from April 29, 2018 to March 9, 2020

1. Sama: Migrant Caravan of Asylum seekers reaches U.S. border
2. Lauren: US border authorities block Central American migrant caravan
3. Nadia: Caravan of migrants tests Trump's anti-immigrant policies
4. Chloe: Hondureños inician caravana desde San Pedro Sula rumbo a Estados Unidos
5. Marissa: Trump Threatens to Punish Honduras over Immigrant Caravan
6. Emily: Caravan of more than 1,000 migrants moves north, triggering outrage from Trump
7. Sama: Donald Trump threatens to shut US-Mexico border with troops
8. Lauren: Thousands of caravan migrants stopped at Mexico border with Guatemala clash with police
9. Nadia: Central American migrant caravan continues march toward US
10. Chloe: Reportan más de 14 mil hondureños en la caravana migrante
11. Marissa: Migrant caravan members refuse Mexico's offer of temporary asylum
12. Emily: A new migrant caravan from El Salvador is making its way north
13. Sama: Migrant caravan converges on Mexico City after three weeks on the road
14. Lauren: Trump Administration seeks to limit asylum-seekers with new rule
15. Nadia: Trump signs immigration order to curb asylum claims
16. Chloe: First Central Americans arrive at the US-Mexico Border
17. Marissa: The first waves of the migrant caravan have arrived at U.S.-Mexico border; thousands more expected in coming days
18. Emily: Tijuana shelters reaching capacity as migrant caravan continues to stream into border city
19. Sama: More than a thousand migrants waiting in Mexicali, plan to go to Tijuana on bus or by foot
20. Lauren: Shouting 'Mexico First,' Hundreds in Tijuana March Against Migrant Caravan
21. Nadia: District judge blocks US from enforcing Trump asylum ban
22. Chloe: Mexico: Caravan migrants shun Tijuana jobs, hoping to get to the US
23. Marissa: Humanitarian crisis develops in Tijuana
24. Emily: US border agents fire tear gas as some migrants protesting slow asylum process try to breach fence
25. Sama: Mexico deports group that stormed US border
26. Lauren: President Trump calls caravan immigrants 'stone cold criminals.'
27. Nadia: Mexico's New Leader Faces Clash with Trump over Migrant Caravan
28. Chloe: Trump defends tear gas on Mexico border
29. Donald Trump's 'asylum ban' highlights dysfunctional US Congress
30. Caravan women launch hunger strike, putting pressure on U.S. and Mexico
31. Caravan migrants at US-Mexico border begin hunger strike
32. Girl dies after being taken into custody at Mexico-US border
33. A new migrant caravan is forming in Central America, with plans to leave next week
34. Chloe: Mexico detains hundreds of Central Americans in migrant caravan
35. Migrant caravan on the 'Beast' train to avoid Mexican police raids and make it to U.S. border
36. U.S. announces asylum deal with Honduras, could send migrants to one of world's most violent nations
37. This is not racism': Protesters march against migrant caravan in Tijuana
38. Migrant Caravan Crosses River into Mexico in Standoff with Security Forces
39. Trump Pushed Mexico to Block its Border. A Migrant Caravan Tests it.
40. Chloe: Guatemala impedirá el paso a migrantes con coronavirus

Appendix D: Photographs

Rehearsal on Septermber 27, 2019

Rehearsal on October 11, 2019

In the Works Dress Rehearsal. Photo by David Torralva.

In the Works Dress Rehearsal. Photo by David Torralva.

La Bruja section of *Cruzando La Frontera* at In the Works Performance.

El Huizache section during In the Works Dress Rehearsal. Photo by David Torralva

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[i] Culture." In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture
[ii] Statistic is according to https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/
[iii] Population estimate is as of July 1, 2019 according to census.gov

[iv] Indigenous dances refer to dances from various groups that include, but are not limited to, the Mexicas, Mayas, Olmecs, and Aztecs.
[v] Explored in a previous paper- Immigration & Culture: How does immigration's impact on the practice of cultural traditions for Mexican immigrants change the Mexican immigrant's identity? by Chloe Vich. Also explored in Morales' Mi Flor De Piña.