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Chicano Theatre in Transition:
The Experience of El Teatro de la Esperanza.

by
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Thesis submitted to the Department of Hispanic Studies (Faculty of Arts) of
the University of Glasgow, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
December 1994.

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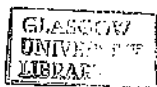
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Abstract

Chicano theatre is the theatrical expression of people of Mexican origin resident in the United States. It emerged in the mid-1960s in tandem with Chicano participation in the American civil rights movement and began to revive and recuperate a long history of theatre in Spanish in North America. Initially, it was a theatre of, and for, the marginalised people of Mexican ancestry who suffered discrimination in the United States and encompassed a rejection of American society and culture and a commitment to the struggle for social justice. Through activism, Chicanos were able to benefit from increased grant support to minority arts but with the waning of the civil rights movement and the loss of this political and social impetus, funding for Chicano theatre became scarce and its practitioners were obliged to find new modes of survival, including the courting of an affluent audience base. El Teatro de la Esperanza of Santa Barbara, California, is one group which has had to make this transition, and this thesis follows their development from amateur theatre group to professional troupe, still aiming to perform for the disenfranchised, but with links to commercial theatre. The historical and social context of Chicano theatre is also studied. Chapter One examines the history of people of Mexican origin in the United States and illustrates that after the Mexican American War of 1846-1848 Anglo Americans invaded and colonized Mexico and subjected her inhabitants to a century of discrimination on the basis of race, language and culture. However, Chapter Two illustrates that far from submitting to this oppression, Mexicans and Chicanos have struggled against it, particularly in the 1960s. Part of this resistance has been cultural, and Chapter Three outlines the development of Chicano theatre. While stressing its achievements, it nonetheless illustrates that while the groups that have survived into the 1990s have developed in terms of artistry, this is often sacrificed to narrow social analyses in terms of content. This criticism is ultimately apt for El Teatro de la Esperanza. Their history is outlined in Chapter Four and the remainder of the chapters, from Chapter Five to Chapter Nine, study their work over a twenty-five-year period. This thesis concludes that they have sought, not entirely successfully, to evolve a model through which to perform left-wing theatre in politically conservative times without abandoning their original working-class audiences.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One:	
Historical Outline of the Chicanos in the United States.....	16
Chapter Two:	
The Chicano Movement	66
Chapter Three:	
Chicano Theatre.....	117
Chapter Four:	
Introduction to El Teatro de la Esperanza.....	177
Chapter Five:	
The Actos, 1971-1973.....	196
Chapter Six:	
<i>Guadalupe</i>	235
Chapter Seven:	
<i>La Víctima</i>	267
Chapter Eight:	
Theatre Through the Vacuum, 1979-1984.....	294
Chapter Nine:	
The Move to San Francisco and <i>Lotería de Pasiones</i>	335
Conclusion	375
Select Bibliography	383

INTRODUCTION

1. Terms and Labels.

The institutions and population of the United States have during the last thirty years become conscious of the presence of minority groups of Spanish-speaking origin in their country, although they often fail to be aware that the presence of these groups dates from much earlier. Subsequently these have become the focus of much study, generally known as Chicano Studies.

When studying Chicano culture a confusing range of terms is used. Chicano culture, studied in this work, is a minority culture present in the United States which is fundamentally derived from cultural, historical and economic links to Mexico, in relationship with North American culture. This is also the case with the term *Mexican American*, with one crucial difference. While the latter affirms an adoption of American citizenship and a pride in Mexican heritage, the former implies a rejection of an assimilated status and a separatist political stance and the conscious attempt to recuperate a Mexican culture and experience perceived as lost.

Inherent in this Chicano politics is a contradiction as Chicanos both despaired of their assimilation and yet protested against their inferior political, economic and cultural status within the dominant Anglo-American, or white European culture. Young people of Mexican origin in the 1960s, primarily in the American Southwest and Midwest, began to seek to remedy these inequalities, as did other minority groups, also suffering from a lack of political effectiveness and representation. Through the formation of cultural, political and student organizations, and in the wake of the example of successful labour organization of César Chávez, leader of the United Farmworkers of America, Chicanos pressurised the

political establishment for increased civil and political rights. The main focuses were political representation, education and cultural expression, all neglected due to institutionalized racism against people of Mexican origin in the USA.

Although some gains were achieved by the early 1970s, particularly in the areas of education and culture, it has become increasingly clear that Chicanos, although still the largest Spanish-speaking group in the United States, have seen the necessity of uniting in a national minority with other, less numerous, groups of Latin American provenance, such as Salvadoreans, Nicaraguans and Colombians living in the United States, to effect real political change by dint of numbers.

Hence the use of the terms *Latino* and *Latin American*. These are virtually synonymous except insofar as the former term is also used in preference to the term *Hispanic*. The Hispanics constitute yet another alliance of Spanish-speaking groups in the United States, again for reasons of political representation. However, the term Hispanic, unlike the other terms mentioned, did not issue from within the Spanish-speaking communities themselves and so it is often regarded as alien and imposed. Thus the preference for Latino, adopted by Spanish-speakers themselves.

The Hispanics include all the groups mentioned previously with two other groups, also of long-time residency as a visible minority in the United States. These are the Cubans, traditionally resident in Florida and the Puerto Ricans, traditionally resident in the New York area. *Hispanic* is also regarded by the American bureaucracy as a convenient catch-all term with which to categorize all of these groups for the purposes of the Census. Therefore those described by it often insist that it blurs important differences between Spanish-speaking groups.

The last term which occasionally appears is that of Spanish itself. Immigrants from Spain are not included in this study as they have little or no bearing on the progress of Hispanic minorities in the United States, and reference to Spanish is to the Spanish language. Given this confluence of Spanish-speaking peoples, it is often necessary to refer to other groups than the Chicanos. However, the focus of this thesis is the Chicanos themselves.

There have been many hypotheses as to the origins of the word *chicano* and these, while interesting, in my view are less important than documenting the re-emergence of the word in the 1960s. Always a word with class stigma, as Chicanos were originally the impoverished workers from Mexico who crossed over to the United States at the turn of the century, it was seized by disenchanted youth of Mexican heritage as a defiant term of group pride in their Mexican culture, long regarded as inferior and worthless by the American dominant society. Young Chicanos bemoaned their loss of the Spanish language, forbidden and punished in American schools, and began to identify with a dehistoricised Mexican Aztec and Mayan cultural amalgam which they regarded as a culture uncontaminated by American consumerism. At first they saw no inconsistency in identifying with pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures through a recuperation of the Spanish language, in effect the language of the conquerors who annihilated the Aztec and Mayan civilizations. Furthermore Chicanos overlooked the imperialistic might of both the Spanish and the Aztec civilizations even as they identified North America as imperialistic and repressive. Gradually this period, typified in the notion that the American Southwest was the Aztlán or place of origin of the Aztecs and their descendants, the Chicanos themselves, gave way to an incipient Marxist analysis of American society, in which Chicanos were regarded as members of an oppressed proletariat under capitalism.

2. Historical Roots.

The Chicanos' roots in America are historically much closer than America's pre-Columbian civilizations. They stem from the mid-nineteenth century when American expansion and war wrested from Mexico half her territory in a bellicose repetition of the invading Spaniards of some 300 years previously. Those caught on the ceded land remained in the United States as second-class citizens despite promises that they would be privy to the same rights and privileges as other Americans. As American finance built cities on the site of former Mexican villages and towns and American statesmen ignored their rights, the Mexicans on North American soil had to struggle to preserve their culture from the ravages of American culture and the English language. As the generations passed, their cultural reference point shifted from Mexico to America itself as the lack of lived experience weakened identification with Mexico. Furthermore, by the 1930s Mexicans in the United States, their numbers increased by many fleeing the Mexican Revolution, had realised that they would not be returning to their ancestral land and by and large sought assimilation - where possible - given the racist bias of institutions in America. It was not until the 1960s, when the young people of Mexican ancestry felt themselves to be distanced from the culture of their forebears that action was taken. This action was possible because of a generalized struggle on the part of many groups in the United States for increased civil rights.

Chicanos were the first people of Mexican origin in the United States to connect radical politics with culture, at a time when the radicalization of American society as a whole was occurring, as were liberation movements throughout the world. In this context the Chicanos rebelled against the complacency of their parents and demanded, a new politics, hereafter referred to as the Chicano Movement (See Chapter 2).

3. The Chicano Movement.

The Chicano Movement sought a model by which Chicanos could overcome the racism directed at them in America. A call to racial pride appeared at first to be the manner through which all people of Mexican origin in the United States could be united to pressurise and lobby for change. Concomitant with this was the understanding that the Mexican border was irrelevant culturally and politically as all Mexicans, given their racial similarity or *mestizaje*, would form a united front for change. By 1974 it was clear, however, that this was an illusion. Race was rejected as the vehicle through which culture was transmitted and it became clear that Mexican national politics and culture differed greatly from political and cultural life in the USA. Therefore, unification was attempted on the basis of class, as Chicanos, of working-class nature, and Mexican workers were both exploited under capitalism. Unfortunately, leftist politics in the United States is not easily accommodated into the American political system and few advances have been made, resulting in a lack of direction and a sense of the futility of political commitment.

Therefore, Chicanos have sought ever-widening links with other groups in the United States to press for change. The perception of a growing Hispanic minority, now national in terms of its numbers and geographical distribution, has been one strategy, yet with this alliance comes a weakening of the working-class commitment and a second, and more complex, refuge in notions of communal roots based on race, provenance and language.

Chicanos also demanded a new culture based on a redefinition of what culture was. Rather than being the expression of central and fundamental concerns found in every social group, regardless of historical moment and social circumstances, culture became, for them, class-related. The assumption was that Chicano culture was the expression of the concerns and perspectives of an oppressed, working-class group and essentially differed from the

expression of other more socially mobile groups and classes. Therefore they sought to legitimise their own culture - in effect being newly revived also - in the understanding that the cultural products of this class were equal in quality and not inferior to the products of other classes.

While useful, this view coincided with and contradicted with a further tenet of the nature of Chicano culture which dictated that it was based on racial superiority. Although perhaps a logical, though extreme, move given the desire to refocus historical blame back to Anglo American conquest and away from notions that Mexican culture was inherently inferior, this resulted in a rather narrow cultural nationalism which held that in a hierarchy of cultures Chicano culture was superior to American culture and indeed to any others as it had unique features.

4. The Spanish Language.

One feature which is indeed unique is the Spanish language. Historically, since the Spanish colonization of South America in the 1500s Spanish has been the official language of the Mexican state although there also exist many indigenous languages. American colonization of the northern half of Mexico in the 1850s brought the English language and little commitment to the perpetuation of Spanish north of the border. Different administrations have embraced varying policies on language but overall the speaking of Spanish has been at worst persecuted and at best discouraged. By the generation of the Chicanos the youth had very real problems with competence in the language and sought to recuperate it, pressing for the most part for bilingual education so that Chicanos might be fluent and literate in both languages. Furthermore they sought to legitimise the Chicano's own linguistic code-switching blend of English and Spanish as evidence of their cultural uniqueness. During the Chicano movement, programmes were set up only to be dismantled during later years,

particularly during the Reagan era, in which, in opposition to and fear of Spanish-speaking immigrants, American citizens voted in favour of retaining English as the official language of California. Despite the creation of Spanish-language broadcasting with its potential of reaching millions of people and reinforcing language skills in Spanish, and with the exception of Florida where much business with Latin America is conducted in Spanish, English is still the language of public interaction. Furthermore, Chicano youth, who receive an inferior quality of education, are often functionally illiterate both in English and in Spanish, although their speech reflects familiarity with both languages. In terms of literary expression by people of Spanish-speaking heritage, English dominates, suggesting that Spanish is no longer - or not yet - the language in which most educated Chicanos feel capable and comfortable.

5. Chicano Theatre.

Chicano theatre also illustrates these patterns of conflict and change. Chicano theatre was born in 1965 when a group of farmworkers, led by graduate and theatre practitioner Luis Valdez, formed a collective theatre group which performed on the picket lines of the United Farmworkers to support their strike. Teatro Campesino, as they were known, had their roots in working-class protest theatre and belonged to an era in which the Living Theatre, the San Francisco Mime Troupe and others, often influenced by the theatre of Bertoldt Brecht, sought to create an alternative to traditional 'apolitical' or bourgeois theatre which they regarded as stale and irrelevant to working class people. Reprising the ideological thrust of the workers' theatres of the 1930s in the United States, these groups sought the advancement of the working-class in general: nonetheless, Chicano theatre further appealed to its own ethnic cultural roots, namely a long tradition of Spanish-speaking theatre in the United States originating in Mexico. Again, however, class concerns were crucial and early Chicano theatre emulated the *teatro de género chico* in Mexico rather than its Spanish classical

tradition of theatre, alien to the experience and purse of the politically unrepresented. A particular influence was the *carpa* or tent show, formed in Mexico's revolutionary era and which brought a loose collection of theatrical skits, dancers, *declamadores*, *malabaristas* and other fairground attractions to Southwest towns. It was the spirit and ethos of the *carpa* which informed Chicano theatre: for the dispossessed, and raucous and subversive in spirit, mobile and able to seek out those for whom theatre was a luxury, it was more in keeping with Chicano political fervour than any other genre.

The *carpa* primarily toured small rural and mining towns and Teatro Campesino revived it - in spirit in any case - in a rural milieu, namely the fields of Delano where thousands of migrant farmworkers laboured under the sun to pick crops for American agrobusiness. It was quickly noted, however, that the essence of the Chicano experience was not to be found in rural life, as they were by now primarily an urban population, and particularly when one considered that farmworkers worked for a billion dollar industry and were in fact akin in status to the industrial workers of the cities. Nonetheless, in the case of Teatro Campesino the connectedness of Chicano theatre to the rural environment has persisted, often resulting in a folkloric, though admittedly highly professional, theatre which misrepresents Mexican experience in the United States and exploits this misrepresentation for commercial gain.

Other groups which were inspired to create Chicano theatre after Teatro Campesino's lead have dealt with the question of Chicano theatre differently, and have evolved in their own ways, particularly with regard to the working-class nature of Chicano culture. For example, the Bilingual Theatre Project in Los Angeles eschews the Chicano's code-switched blend of English and Spanish, performs on alternate nights in English and Spanish and has revived Spanish classical theatre. In contrast to the early products of Chicano theatre which were collectively created many original playwrights now pen plays primarily focusing on individual rather than community concerns. Others such as the Chicago Latino theatre in

Chicago present multi-racial pieces which reflect the ethnic make-up of the United States and seek the similarities therein. Often groups perform in English, or in non-native Spanish learned parrot-fashion. One group, however, has attempted to cling to the class-conscious social theatre of the 1960s, even in the face of political lethargy. This is El Teatro de la Esperanza, the longest surviving Chicano group after Teatro Campesino itself. Given that of the hundred or so Chicano theatre groups active during the early 1970s most are now extinct, this survival is remarkable in itself.

6. El Teatro de la Esperanza.

El Teatro de la Esperanza issued from a very different milieu from Teatro Campesino. Emerging at the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1969, student politics and urban youth were its focus, even as its debt to the early theatrical and political philosophy of rural Campesino is clear. Esperanza began by emulating the *actos* of Campesino, as did most groups which followed, but quickly began to create their own pieces and evolved into a theatre collective, informed by Marxist ideas and Brechtian aesthetics. They sought to perform for, reflect on stage and relate to the concerns of the Chicano community living in barrios in California. At first wary of *chicanismo* due to its association with a lumpen element in the barrios, they eventually defined it and embraced it as supportive both of education and of the Mexican working-class, on both sides of the border. The nature of the group in terms of their philosophy of theatre began to stabilise in 1974, a crucial year for Chicano theatre as it was then when groups were forced to follow either the Marxism of Latin American theatre groups or the mystical, ritual-inspired theatre of Campesino with its divine solutions to social problems based on a syncretism of Aztec and Roman Catholic religious philosophy. Contact with and criticism from theatre practitioners schooled in Marxism from Mexico and Colombia at the Quinto Festival de Teatro Chicano at the Pyramid of Teotihuacán forced groups to reassess their definition of their culture and the validity of

their theatre. Esperanza chose to follow the Latin American lead and have maintained this materialist philosophy to the present.

In the 1990s this is problematic, however, as the dormant nature of the Chicano political movement has meant that the group attempt to perform radical theatre at a time when the working-class is retrenched. The group also maintain a heavily anti-assimilationist stance, clearly at variance with the majority of Chicanos whose main concern is obtaining employment and the material benefits of living in the United States, where available to them. Keen to perform non-sexist, non-racist, working-class theatre, but increasingly finding themselves needing middle-class audiences to sustain them financially, Esperanza have sought to hold on to their earlier audience and embrace new ones. This is becoming increasingly difficult for them. Social messages disseminated through theatre have become stale and repetitive, and yet theatre purely for entertainment value is anathema to the group's principles because in their view the social conditions that produced Chicano militancy, namely poverty and racism, have not been eradicated. In recent years they have cast around for a manner in which to identify new sources of tradition for the Chicano, with little success. One source, namely the Spanish-language has not been exploited for various reasons. Firstly, Esperanza and other groups must attempt to bolster their financial viability by drawing in an affluent Anglo-American English-speaking public and it is to their advantage that their plays be intelligible to monolingual English speakers. Secondly, there is a divergence in competence between Esperanza on the one hand and truly Spanish-speaking immigrant audiences on the other. Esperanza, long-socialised in the USA cannot easily match the competence in Spanish of Mexican troupes such as Mascarones. Nor would they indeed wish to: this is fundamentally because the group regard Chicano speech as a code-switched blend of the two languages. Therefore, for Esperanza the shaping of identity through language is a complex issue, not resolved through the adoption of Spanish only.

7. Theatre and the Chicano Community.

Theatre is as varied as communities but generally is a collective and social forum in which performers and audience confront each other to elaborate and comment on the values and truths of a given community or social group. It is a symbolic space in which actions and perspectives can be experimented with before they are put into practice socially. Chicanos in the 1960s and 1970s felt immensely privileged to have a theatre of their own as only through it were they able to participate in this public symbolic space. Only with Chicano theatre could they hear their own words, watch people who were like themselves and listen to debates on issues which affected them because no other non-literary medium truly represented them. This was the function of Chicano theatre in the Chicano community until the artists involved were no longer performing for their original audiences. Yet, it is in the nature of theatre to evolve, as communities do, in response to social and historical factors. Evolution requires choices and when those choices are primarily conditioned by financial factors, affecting the continued survival of groups, theatre becomes a difficult business. This is even more clear when social support for the arts is thin on the ground as was the case in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The starkest choice which has faced Chicano theatre - and perhaps minority theatre as a whole - is this: how to survive in theatrical terms when the political impetus and support for theatre by Chicano audiences was no longer available. Theatre groups have also had to decide whether to exist as an encouragement to political commitment, in its absence, or make the transition from being worker actors in the Chicano community to being artists performing for audiences who can sustain the performance. In the United States it is the audience which determines the performance: he who pays the piper calls the tune.

Nonetheless, the function of Chicano theatre in the Chicano community has been immensely important. It has served as a forum in which to debate both politics and the politics of art. Its special relevance to the Chicanos has been that it requires no literacy on the part of a traditionally undereducated audience. It therefore taps into a rich seam of experience and delivers a vision of this experience back to the people, present in a collective and interactive forum, unlike in the case of print media. Furthermore it was formed with the ethos of going to where people were to perform for them, rather than waiting for people to come to theatres. In this sense it has kept an experience of theatre alive in the barrios, particularly as in some cases local people were encouraged to become involved with theatre productions.

8. What Future For Minority Theatre?

The persistence of El Teatro de la Esperanza has permitted study of the problems, contradictions and indeed, successes of a theatre for Chicanos. From their experiences it is possible to outline some important underpinnings of minority theatre as a whole in the United States. It still has a role to play in American society, given the superficial manner in which the lives of members of minority groups are reflected on stage. Even at a superficial level, minority groups can project alternatives to the disabling stereotypes, such as those of *West Side Story*, created by those outwith the cultures concerned.

At a deeper level, minority groups can aid in the creation of identity. However, it seems that at present this creation of identity is geared towards individual and not group identity: in short, it is identity divorced from the suggestion of political strategies for change, the least subversive form of identity possible, which is disseminated. Clearly at this time minority theatre cannot achieve full independence, either in political or cultural content or in terms of financing and management. A prolonged establishment backlash has threatened the existence of minority theatre through a reduction on subsidies for arts programmes. Theatre groups

must therefore seek out affluent audiences, rather than the working-class patrons who have borne the brunt of savage cuts in employment. The existence of new audiences is, of course, a feasible prospect in the light of the growing assimilation and social mobility of certain members of minority populations. Yet it is unlikely that such new audiences will share the concerns of the dispossessed, even as they will undoubtedly sympathise with them, through racial identification. It seems unavoidable that their chief concern, going as they are to the theatre as a leisure activity, will be entertainment or a blend of entertainment and social commentary intended to comfort rather than to arouse.

To accommodate this minority, theatre groups, rather than offering plays documenting the historical presence of minorities in the USA and the historical atrocities perpetrated against them as a route to activism, have begun to offer a nostalgic vision of the past. With the future unclear and in the face of insecurity and pessimism, this may seem a logical step for theatre groups to take, but this escapism is clearly at odds with the actual historical experiences of most minority groups. Nonetheless, minority theatre, as all cultural enterprise, is subject to the social and historical changes affecting the United States. Therefore militant theatre exhorting change may emerge, but this will not occur until a new militancy emerges in society. Thirty years passed before the working-class radicalism of the workers' theatres of the 1930s was able to re-emerge and bring new militant groups, including *El Teatro de la Esperanza*, to the fore. When such a movement emerges again, minority theatre will achieve a sharper edge, and Chicanos will no doubt participate to the full.

9. Documenting Chicano Theatre.

In the meantime, the documenting of Chicano theatre is vital. Where possible, I have preferred to analyse this in terms both of performance and of text. Theatre is a visual medium, and all that occurs on stage - and I would argue in the theatre - is part of the

language of theatre. Nonetheless, this dual approach was often taken out of necessity - given the transitional nature of Chicano theatre from the oral to the literary, the texts are not yet produced as a matter of course, are generally not published and are therefore scarce and often incomplete or illegible. Therefore, the performances themselves, which I often recorded, were often the only manner through which to know the works.

In saying this, however, Chicano theatre artists have become aware of the power of the written word and have imbued the dialogue of their plays with semantic depth beyond literal meaning. Therefore, this thesis also pays attention to the texts in response to the fact that Chicanos have begun to desire that their theatre be written down for posterity. In modern culture, literary resonance is prized, particularly by prospective publishers, and the Chicanos aim to meet certain of their standards as they become more literate. I have not, however, wished to focus only on texts, as it is all too easy to divorce these from the social and historical context, which would render much of Chicano theatre, indeed any theatre, meaningless.

Consequently, my own research involved a multi-disciplinary approach and a variety of methods. While seeking out the texts and published critical material - in both cases often scarce and difficult to obtain - in American libraries and theatre archives, I attended as many performances as possible, often seeing certain plays more than once. This took me from California to Texas, New Mexico and Mexico City and in all cases involved interviews with the actors, writers, directors and critics working in Chicano theatre. My understanding of Chicano Studies in general was gained largely through participation in Chicano Studies conferences and attendance at Chicano courses at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Given the indication in this study of the often insurmountable obstacles facing those who participate in the creation of Chicano theatre, I wish to add my admiration for the tenacity of all those involved. Despite their differing perspectives and strategies for survival, they have in common the laudable determination not to relinquish the obligation which they have assumed to represent their culture in American society.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE CHICANOS IN THE UNITED STATES.

The most common misconception concerning the presence of people of Mexican heritage in the United States is that they are recent immigrants. This chapter aims to challenge this assumption by outlining the historical participation and contribution of people of Mexican descent in the United States. Furthermore, it also aims to illustrate that this minority group, fast becoming a national minority, far from being the passive objects of Anglo American domination, have, in fact, always striven against it.

Prior to the American conquest of the area which is today the Southwestern United States much of the land was held under a Spanish mission system whereby Spanish Roman Catholic friars consented to the rounding up of Indians into settlements where they were required to build chapels and cultivate crops.¹ Controlled by the Catholic church, colonial administrators and wealthy ranch owners the twenty-one missions in California, unlike those in Texas, were easily maintained and prosperous, in a large measure due to the peaceful nature of the coastal Indian population and the enterprise of the Spanish friars. Missionization never took place in New Mexico, however, as the population of nomadic Apache and Comanche indians resisted such incursions. Although some Mexican and Pueblo indian inhabitants there shared communal lands, most were driven, not to missions but to *haciendas* where, although protected, they were exploited as *peones*.²

The mission system was undermined after Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821. Its vast holdings were parcelled out to individuals who established extensive cattle ranches in

¹Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1948; repr. 1968 p.30

²McWilliams, op. cit. p.64

response to the opening of the clipper trade with Boston.³ The fate of the Indians released from the missions was not enviable, however. The 1834 Secularization Proclamation had implied the granting of land to former mission Indians but in practice they were deprived of their property and remained on the lowest rung of society.⁴ Instead it was again the ranchers who received the greatest benefits from secularization. These Californios, who, with the provincial administrators made up some 20% of the population, went on to hold political power sustained by great wealth. Far below them in socioeconomic status was the mestizo mass of the population which included small scale ranchers, skilled artisans, workers such as *vaqueros* employed in cattle round-ups and farmers who subsisted on communal lands. Without exception, however, all sectors of this Northern Mexican society suffered economic, social and cultural loss with the influx of Anglo American settlers into the region.⁵

1. Conquest of the Southwest: The Lone Star Republic.

The Spanish conquest of the northern reaches of Mexico, now the American Southwest, had been hindered by mountain-ranges, rivers and desert. Although Spanish institutions were established and did endure, isolation was the lot of the established settlements there.⁶ This rather tenuous hold on the area by first Spain and then Mexico after Independence made the region attractive to its North American neighbours. Indeed, as early as 1767 Benjamin Franklin had earmarked Mexico as territory for expansion.⁷ The United States employed a rhetoric of peace which veiled a less altruistic and aggressive aim of obtaining lands to bolster her economic might. The American belief in Manifest Destiny, a Puritan religious

³Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California 1848-1930*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1979 pp. 8-9

⁴*Ibid.* p.12

⁵*Ibid.* p.103

⁶McWilliams, *op. cit.* p.49

⁷Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 2nd edn' New York, Harper and Row, 1981 p.3

concept which held that America as a nation was predestined for salvation, also justified the conviction that God had entrusted America with the mission of extending democracy.⁸

The United States first set its sights on Texas. Indeed, America regarded Texas, in 1821 part of the state of Coahuila in the Republic of Mexico, as already having been transferred to American ownership through the Louisiana Purchase. Texas was more vulnerable than the other borderland regions as it was not separated by desert from Northern America; indeed, it was situated 1,200 miles from Mexico City and was separated from the heart of Mexico by desert.⁹

Stephen Austin, in response to the Mexican government's policy of permitting a limited Anglo settlement in Texas, founded the city of San Felipe de Austin in 1821 and hastened the process through which two very different cultures began to meet. The 1819 depression in the United States pushed American settlers into the region, and as their numbers were augmented by entrepreneurs it became clear by 1830 that they had no intention of respecting the terms of agreement laid out by Mexico. The host country's call for an end to slavery, allegiance to Mexico and respect for the Catholic church went ignored while the United States put pressure on Mexico to sell Texas.¹⁰ The Americans were already a privileged class in Texas and in 1833 elected Sam Houston to represent them in demanding greater autonomy for the region. Such was their zeal that Stephen Austin was imprisoned in a Mexican jail due to his determination to Americanize Texas. On his release in 1835 he issued a call to arms and a chain of events began which culminated in the battle of the Alamo, a Texan legend later used to justify North American xenophobia towards Mexicans.¹¹

⁸Ibid. p.12

⁹McWilliams, op. cit. p.99

¹⁰Acuña, op. cit. p.5

¹¹Ibid. pp. 6-7

Rodolfo Acuña describes Texas history as "a mixture of selected fact and generalized myth" and such a description befits the legend of the Alamo.¹² The story of Santa Ana's victory at the fortress of the Alamo:

makes heroes of Americans and villains of the Mexicans. In reality, there was little heroism or villainy on either side.¹³

Chicano historians have sought to disseminate a clearer, less biased account of this story of a few courageous Americans who faced General Santa Ana's Mexican army which arrived in San Antonio in February 1836. Americans such as William Barret Travis, Davy Crockett and James Bowie are portrayed in Texan mythology as martyrs who sacrificed their lives to buy time for their fellow comrades. Yet not all those who fought in defence of the Alamo were Anglo American Texans. Indeed, some were Texas Mexicans who died along with the Americans.¹⁴

Santa Ana's army of 6,000 sick and exhausted conscripts marched on the Alamo, a fort which had formerly been a mission built by Spanish friars. Here were housed the 187 defenders of San Antonio. Although better armed and strategically better off, the Texans fell to the Mexican army's superiority in numbers. This has given rise to the legend of their greatness. Yet, they were clearly less brave than they have been portrayed: they had the advantage of being in a fort while the Mexicans were out in the open and they were awaiting reinforcements. Furthermore, while the supposed heroes of the Alamo are believed to have fought to the death, they in fact surrendered and were executed. Nor do their individual profiles suggest the stuff of heroes, as among those taking refuge in the Alamo were adventurers of all kinds, killers, slave runners and men interested only in wealth.¹⁵

¹²Ibid. p.8

¹³David Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican American*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1973 p.91

¹⁴Ibid. p.91

¹⁵Acuña, op. cit. p.9

Despite achieving successes in subsequent battles, the Mexican troops were finally caught off guard and defeated by Sam Houston's forces, - again, some of whom were Texas Mexicans - mindful of the defeat at the Alamo.¹⁶ The war came to an end and Santa Ana signed the territory away. Sam Houston became the president of the Republic of Texas, although the matter did not rest there as hostilities continued over the placing of the border.¹⁷ Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845, and Mexico, which had never recognised the legitimacy of the Lone Star Republic, broke off diplomatic relations.

2. California and New Mexico.

California was also of great interest to the North Americans. In the early years of the century, a hundred or so adventurers of various nationalities had married into wealthy Californio families. They had converted to Catholicism and become Mexican citizens to become eligible for land grants. After 1840, however, newcomers tended to bring their wives and families, and relationships between the Mexicans and Americans changed. There was less intermarriage and the events in Texas filled the Mexican Californians with mistrust.¹⁸

In 1835 President Andrew Jackson had attempted, unsuccessfully, to buy San Francisco Bay. By 1842 new tactics were employed. Thomas Catesby Jones, commander of the American Pacific Squadron, briefly captured the then state capital of Monterey, believing that the United States and Mexico had gone to war.¹⁹ Finally, in 1845 American forces led by John C. Fremont raised the American flag outside Monterey. President Polk sent news that they were to hold in readiness for war and following this:

¹⁶Weber, op. cit. p.93

¹⁷Acuña, op. cit. p.10

¹⁸Ibid. p.95

¹⁹Weber, op. cit. p.94

Anglo-American immigrants in California joined Fremont, and, adopting the symbol of the bear flag, rose in arms to attempt to Americanize California.²⁰

Today the bear flag flies alongside the stars and stripes in the state of California, yet, from Mexican and Mexican American perspectives, it symbolizes the atrocities committed against the native Mexican and Indian population of the state. In 1846 the Mexicans surrendered and the Treaty of Cahuenga was signed.²¹

The process of conquest of New Mexico was more gradual and subtle than the rapid and forceful manner in which Texas and California were conquered. American interest focused on its extensive tracts of land, the area's mining potential and the importance of Santa Fe as a trade centre.²² Due to the isolation and Indian hostility there was not a large influx of farming families and consequently competition for resources did not immediately occasion conflict. At the height of Santa Fe Trail commerce, some 150 American traders yearly journeyed into New Mexico, but they did not remain.²³

Nonetheless, despite this relatively peaceful co-existence, Acuña and McWilliams reject the "the myth of the bloodless conquest" whereby the New Mexican governor Armijo is believed to have been in compliance with the Anglo Americans for personal gain.²⁴ Furthermore, Acuña rejects the assumption that the sixty thousand New Mexicans welcomed the intruders:

Considerable anti-American feeling existed before the United States occupation, and only a handful of merchants saw an advantage to be derived from it.²⁵

²⁰Acuña, *op. cit.* p.96

²¹*Ibid.* p.96

²²*Ibid.* p.53

²³McWilliams, *op. cit.* p.116

²⁴*Ibid.* p. 117

²⁵Acuña, *op. cit.* p.49

Anglo American aggression against New Mexico initially came in the shape of claims by the Republic of Texas that part of the New Mexican territory was rightly theirs. Military means were used in attempts to regain the disputed land, the first of these being in 1841. Two years later, all commerce was suspended due to Texan attacks on Santa Fe caravans and an enclave of American citizens opted for a political route and formed a party in support of Texas near Taos, New Mexico. This American Party was the target of much hatred on the part of the New Mexicans but their aims were achieved when in June 1846 the Army of the West led by Colonel Watts Kearny journeyed down the Santa Fe Trail to occupy New Mexico.²⁶

3. The Mexican American War

When American and Mexican troops were involved in a skirmish in the disputed border territory between the Rio Grande and the Nueces rivers, President Polk seized the moment and declared war against Mexico on May 11th 1846, reasoning that she had shed "American blood upon the American soil".²⁷ Historians have since discovered, however, that President Polk had resolved to declare war on Mexico on May 9th and merely used the skirmish as a justification.²⁸

The horrors and injustices of the fifteen-month Mexican American war, known in Mexico as *la invasión norteamericana*, are well-documented.²⁹ Mexican cities were razed to the ground and the civilian population was indiscriminately slaughtered. Many American citizens condemned the war, and one writer declared that "The god Terminus is an unknown deity in America".³⁰ The Americans reached and occupied Mexico City after their victory over Santa Ana at Churubusco. On February 2nd 1848, Mexico agreed to sign the Treaty of Guadalupe

²⁶Weber, op. cit. p.121

²⁷Ibid. p.95

²⁸Ibid. p. 96

²⁹Ibid. p.88

³⁰Acuña,op. cit. p.15

Hidalgo by which the border was fixed at the Rio Grande, and California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Utah, Colorado and Arizona were ceded to the United States for some fifteen million dollars.³¹

4. After the Conquest.

The Anglo American occupation of the area which is today the Southwest wrought massive changes in the class composition of the region. This was realized through the introduction of a new economic structure which destroyed the livelihood of the conquered Mexican small farmer by divesting him of his land. Many Mexicans were ruined as land went to railroad companies and large farm corporations using mechanization were granted extensive tracts of the territory.³² Many Anglo Americans felt that the Mexicans had done nothing with their land and they had no qualms when it came to acquiring it, legally or otherwise.³³

In Texas, men such as Robert King and Charles Stillman, known as the Robber Barons, joined with the Mexican upper class to establish themselves in power against the mass of the Mexicans.³⁴ After the war, California's population of some 100,000 qualified her for statehood, to which end was held the 1848 constitutional convention. Eight California delegates, lured by "the possibility of prestigious positions within the new order" attempted to maintain the little power left to them and, forfeiting the rights of the mass of the Mexican population in California, voted in their own interest, rather than as a voting bloc for their people. They won little and the constitution was the only important document which they collaborated in drafting.³⁵

³¹Weber, op. cit. p.54

³²Ibid. p.54

³³Ibid. p.29

³⁴Ibid. p.29

³⁵Ibid. p.98

The victorious Anglo-Americans showed an utter disrespect for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which was signed at the end of the Mexican American war. The issue of land acquisition had been a bone of contention in the ratification process of the Treaty. Article X, which was not, in the end, ratified by the United States Senate, had guaranteed the protection of "all prior and pending titles to property of every description".³⁶ As some senators feared that the older Mexican grants might take precedence over the later holdings of American settlers, this was struck from the treaty and a statement of protocol was appended in its place. While this sought to underline that:

the altered wording of the articles would not change the original intent of the treaty or diminish the rights of Mexicans who might remain in the occupied territory.³⁷

The United States never regarded this statement of protocol as legally binding even though the uneasy Mexican legislature which ratified the treaty at Querétaro on May 30th 1848 did take it seriously.³⁸

The land grants were deemed to preserve "the legal value which they may possess" and the Statement provided for the protection of :

legitimate titles under the Mexican law of California and New Mexico up to the 13th of May, 1846, and in Texas up to the 2nd March, 1836.³⁹

The wording of the provision left much room for manoeuvre to the Americans. Differing interpretations of "legitimate" led to the theft of territory legally bequeathed in Mexican terms but lacking in the requisite documentary proof of ownership. Communal lands did not escape the fate of private ranches and the American municipal authorities sold these lands, traditionally used for subsistence farming, to American capitalists.⁴⁰ In California, the 1851

³⁶Acuña, op. cit. p.19

³⁷Weber, op. cit. p.163

³⁸Ibid. p.163

³⁹Acuña, op. cit. p.19

⁴⁰Camarillo, op. cit. p.115

Land Law implied the possibility that the Californios did not own the land they lived on and so armed squatters took it upon themselves to treat the ranches as public land on which they had a right to homestead. The Californios were forced into legal battles to validate the Mexican land grant claims before an American commission. The burden of proof was on the Mexicans and the hearings were held in English.⁴¹ Ranchers, inexperienced in the new economic order, were required to pay a plethora of new taxes and their wealth was further eroded by land speculators who charged usurious rates on loans. Horace Bell also describes the "matrimonial sharks," who preyed on wealthy Californio families for monetary gain, often bringing the women they married to ruin. He wrote of them as:

good-looking and outwardly virile but really lazy, worthless, dissolute vagabond Americans whose object of marriage was to get rich without work.⁴²

Political activity was for the most part restricted to Anglos as Mexican communities were harassed and ostracised by neighbouring Anglo townspeople. Such racist exclusion from political parties, methods such as gerrymandering and the elimination of Mexican representatives to render the Mexican voter powerless meant that through the 1860s in Los Angeles the number of Californio office-holders steadily decreased and Mexican voters lost almost all the influence they had. In any case, Californio office-holders were elected only after they had assimilated into Anglo society and:

there is no evidence of any effort on their part to ameliorate the pressing social and economic ills that plagued the barrios.⁴³

The potential Mexican electorate was unstable due to high rates of transiency brought about by the dispossessions wrought under the new social order. Nor was any provision made for these landless people by the Anglo society which had caused their demise. Indeed, in Santa Barbara in 1856 a law, commonly, and derogatorily, known as the Greaser Law, sought to

⁴¹Acuña, *op. cit.* p.102

⁴²Horace Bell, quoted in Acuña, *op. cit.* p.103

⁴³Camarillo, *op. cit.* p.111

put an end to the problem of Mexican vagrancy simply by clearing these unfortunate people off the streets.⁴⁴

With the conquest of California, Americans were also able to claim the state's gold deposits for their own. Again, American interpretations of the history of the region are less than generous to the vanquished. It is claimed that James Wilson Marshall rushed into Port Sutter in 1848 clutching a nugget, claiming, "Gold! Gold!" In fact the word he used was "chispa" which in Spanish means, "bright speck" or "spangle". This is:

some indication of how widely Spanish mining practices, and the Spanish mining vocabulary, had permeated California prior to 1848.⁴⁵

Gold had long been mined in Mexico, where the "gold rush" there came in 1548 at Zacatecas. The Spaniards fused their own mining culture with elements of Aztec metallurgy and were the first to discover gold in California. For ten years before Marshall's discovery, Mexicans had found gold in considerable quantities along the coast between Los Angeles and Santa Cruz.⁴⁶

Anglo Americans, although initially inexperienced miners, quickly developed a comprehensive mining system, governed by mining law. This was possible due to the presence of Californian Spanish-speaking miners who had been trained in the tried and tested methods of Mexican ordinances. The Anglos adopted "the main principles of the mining laws of Spain and Mexico" and technical mining terms in Spanish found their way into it.⁴⁷ Despite the traditional presence of Mexicans who mined for gold in California, however, after 1848 Anglo-Americans objected to their successes and sought to exclude them through legal proceedings and violence. A movement to exclude those who were

⁴⁴Ibid. op.cit. p.19

⁴⁵McWilliams, op. cit. p.134

⁴⁶Ibid. pp.133-134

⁴⁷Ibid. p.141

perceived as being foreigners from the mines gained support. When a tax was levied on Mexicans to exclude them from the gold mines, two thousand American miners thronged into a mining camp to enforce the exclusion. They burned the camp to the ground, rounded up the Mexicans into a corral and during the week that this rioting lasted, scores of Mexicans were lynched and murdered.⁴⁸ A circular published in 1849 illustrates the sad irony of the situation of the Mexicans and the inability of the Anglos to admit their agency in the conquest of the area:

....nothing can be more unreasonable or unjust than the conduct pursued by persons, not citizens of the United States, who are flocking from all parts to search for and carry off gold from lands belonging to the United States in California.⁴⁹

Every attempt, then, was made, not only to exclude the native occupants of the Southwest from the benefits of the new social and economic order but to remove all historical traces of their legitimate occupancy in the territory.

5. Racism.

Mexico was troubled by the ignominious fate of the Mexicans ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. When the treaty was signed, Manuel Cresción Rejón, a Mexican diplomat, foretold of the racism to come and warned:

Our race, our unfortunate people will have to wander in search of hospitality in a strange land, only to be ejected later. Descendants of the Indians that we are, the North Americans hate us, their spokesmen depreciate us, even if they recognize the justice of our cause, and they consider us unworthy to form with them one nation and one society, they clearly manifest that their future expansion begins with the territory that they take from us and pushing (sic) aside our citizens who inhabit the land.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid. p.128

⁴⁹Acuña op. cit. p.99

⁵⁰Ibid. p.20

Articles VIII and IX of the Treaty provided the Mexicans with a choice of whether to move to another region of Mexico or remain under conditions in which:

the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution.⁵¹

would be theirs. Although the Mexican government encouraged its subjects to return to Mexico, and between one and two thousand people moved further into Mexico, rather than uproot themselves from their homes, most remained. Those who stayed suffered the consequences of a most brutal racism.⁵²

Arnoldo de León writes that the Anglos in Texas saw a kinship "between Tejanos and red 'savages' and black 'beasts' and, more importantly, a difference from themselves." In the case of all three groups, "violence was inflicted without guilt".⁵³

The Anglo-Americans were the cultural heirs of the English Elizabethans and Puritans. They moved westward with the mission of rescuing order and discipline from the wilds, intent on controlling everything "bestly," that is to say vice, nature, sexuality and coloured peoples.⁵⁴ Instinctual urges had to be repressed and Christian virtues developed. De León affirms that "Americans also needed to see violence in others to conceal the depravity within themselves".⁵⁵

The Protestant settlers were deeply opposed to Roman Catholicism. The source of such opposition dated from the England of Henry VIII and his religious and political break with the Pope. Xenophobic attitudes against Catholic Spain grew during England's conflict with

⁵¹Ibid. p.19

⁵²Weber, op. cit. p.142

⁵³Arnoldo de León, *They Called Them Greasers. Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983 p.63

⁵⁴Ibid. p.1

⁵⁵Ibid. p.63

that country, fuelled by accounts of the atrocities committed by Spain against the Indian population of conquered Latin America. This and allegations of tyranny on the part of the Spaniards in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century, as well as the notoriety of the Spanish Inquisition, "produced an image of the Spaniard as heartless and genocidal". The English also regarded the Spanish as racially impure due to the *mestizaje* which occurred during the Moorish conquest. De León assumes that immigrants from England carried these attitudes with them to America.⁵⁶

English writers also "put together a portrait that turned the people of Mexico into a degraded humanity". Mexican natives:

subscribed to heathenism, and witches and other devilish agents permeated their culture. They partook of unholy things like polygamy, sodomy, and incest and rejected Christianity outright. Furthermore they practised savage rituals like human sacrifice and cannibalism.⁵⁷

North American culture had developed an extensive lore concerning the undesirability and dangers of miscegenation. William H. Emory, who surveyed the boundary between the United States and Mexico for the Franklin Pierce administration, affirmed that the "practical amalgamation" of different races was only carried out when women "of the cleaner race" were lacking. A "law of nature" having been satisfied, or property acquired, "all affection ceases". Warning against emasculation and disease and syphilitic progeny, if any, he concludes:

Such are the favors extended to the white man by the lower and darker colored races...the process of absorption can never work any beneficial change.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid. pp.4-5

⁵⁷Ibid. p.5

⁵⁸Ibid. p.18

Emory also discounted the possibility of fidelity in the case of intermarriage between different races.

Not only did Anglo-Americans despise the Mexicans from a racial perspective but also from a cultural point of view. De León provides abundant examples of remarks made in awe concerning the laziness of the Mexican. Settlers regarded this perceived disinclination to work as resulting in the obvious poverty of the Mexican. Lacking, they believed, an American spirit of enterprise they made no effort to "educate themselves, to excel in the arts of accomplishment in civilized life".⁵⁹ According to the Anglo-Americans, the cultural backwardness of the Mexicans was further exemplified in the *jacal*.

De León writes:

Instead of seeing it as a type of housing made from available materials and one which answered the needs of poor people...Anglos disparaged it. The grass and straw roofs, the mesquite walls, the clay or mud floor...and other aspects of the domicile came in for ridicule. Anglos pointed to it as an object of primitivism and backwardness, not as a product of the Mexican capacity for improvisation.⁶⁰

The Americans were also offended by the Mexican's perceived "inclination for wringing joy from misery".⁶¹ The fiestas, fandango dancing, hunting, gambling and loving, described as "lower pleasures," brought American accusations of immorality. Mexicans in Texas were accused of preferring the gaming table to the church of a Sunday, and novelist Stephen Crane commented in 1899 that although a Mexican may not be able to raise money for his dying grandmother, "he could always stake himself for a game of monte".⁶² No commentator explained how such an indolent people were able to amass so much money to stake at the gambling table.⁶³

⁵⁹Ibid. p.25

⁶⁰Ibid. p.30

⁶¹Ibid. p.26

⁶²Ibid. p.33

⁶³Ibid. p.26

The Tejanos also suffered discrimination because of American misunderstanding of the former's notions of propriety. Just as Native Americans and Blacks had been regarded as licentious, so were the Tejanos. Their enjoyment of mixed nude bathing in public streams caused great confusion. One understanding observer who came across some naked men, women and children in the Medina River in 1861 concluded, "I never saw a merrier bathing party, or a more innocent one".⁶⁴ Nonetheless, others believed the Mexicans to have "a different understanding... of the relations between the sexes".⁶⁵ As women made slight efforts to cover their breasts in public places and children ran naked in the streets, even after attempts in 1836 to introduce taboos on nudity, Anglos concluded that Mexicans were promiscuous and there developed a tendency to fantasize Mexican women as erotic. Nonetheless,

the physical drive of white men wrestled with the discriminating psyche that resisted such relations,⁶⁶

as the women in question were of mixed blood. Anglos were caught between "the sexual drive and the fastidious psyche," so they sought out light skinned Mexican women of supposed Castilian descent. In this, with a few exceptions, they had no success.⁶⁷

In 1825 the Coahuila-Texas state colonization law had offered free land to Anglos who married Mexican women. To overcome the obstacle of the lack of light-skinned women, Anglo men reasoned that Mexican women preferred white men to their own race and that it was only natural that they should oblige them. Therefore, their relations with Mexican women were based on the excuse that they had been lured across the racial line:

The theme of the sexually ardent woman yearning for their attentions provided a fortuitous rationale for having relations with members of a race they otherwise considered so contemptible. If

⁶⁴Ibid. p.38

⁶⁵Ibid. p.38

⁶⁶Ibid. p.39

⁶⁷Ibid. p.40

Mexican women craved their intimacy, it was inevitable that they should yield to the urges of nature.⁶⁸

Despite these rationalizations, accusations of moral decadence persisted. Mexicans, it was believed, were; "oblivious of the criminality of rape and looked upon adultery as almost legitimate".⁶⁹

The words of the Mexican diplomat, then, proved to be prophetic. The Mexicans, despised as worthless by the Anglo-American conquerors, were in fact pushed aside while the land they lived on increased in value. In California, as elsewhere, in the decade after the war, racial conflict "shook the foundations of pueblo society".⁷⁰ Mutual acts of violence increased racial tension and produced new acts of retribution. The Southwest became a *linchocracia* in which Mexicans were accused of crimes and summarily lynched on the spot, receiving no fair trial or due process of law.⁷¹ Vigilante and mob violence against Mexicans was so frequent in Los Angeles in the 1860s that "newspapers scarcely bothered to report the details".⁷²

6. Barrioization and American Cultural Supremacy.

The 1860's witnessed the beginnings of a process of barrioization which by the 1890s amounted to the social and residential segregation of Californian Mexicans into non-Anglo sectors of towns.⁷³ Occupational changes meant that the Mexicans were forced to live in poverty. The decline of the pastoral economy left Mexicans little or no access to their traditional forms of earning a living. By the 1860s they could no longer work as farm hands and cattle herders but became incorporated into the labour market as a cheap work force to sustain the growing Anglo American capitalist economy. Such conditions

⁶⁸Ibid. p.43-44

⁶⁹Ibid. p.46

⁷⁰Camarillo, op. cit. p.108

⁷¹Acuña, op. cit. p.106

⁷²McWilliams, op. cit. p.130

⁷³Camarillo, op. cit. p.117

provoked transiency among the Mexican population and by 1870, the Mexican or Spanish-surnamed workforce "was steadily becoming a downwardly mobile, unskilled, displaced working class".⁷⁴

Mexicans began to fill the gap left in the labour market by Chinese workers who were driven from Southern California in the last two decades of the century by racist xenophobia.⁷⁵ The former replaced the latter as railroad section gang workers on the coastal rail link between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Mexicans were also employed as construction labourers, and as ditch diggers and teamsters for utility companies.⁷⁶ A dual wage system operated whereby Mexicans were paid less than Anglos for doing the same work. As Mexican men began to accept part-time, seasonal, migratory work, the traditional family structure changed as women were incorporated into the workforce. As husbands were frequently absent, the women "assumed the triple responsibilities of head of household, mother and wage earner" and women and children were employed in agriculture and fruit canning, and in domestic services for Anglo women.⁷⁷

As the numbers of Anglos moving into Southwest towns increased and they occupied the towns' residential and business sectors, the Mexicans sought to maintain their own lifestyle round the old part of town in the barrio which was an area where Mexicans were hemmed in by the progress around them. The Los Angeles barrio, known as Sonoratown by the Anglos, was described as "... as truly Mexican as though it had been transported bodily from Old Mexico".⁷⁸ In Santa Barbara, the barrio, in the poorest part of the city, lacked the public services available to other districts. Community health care was totally lacking and so epidemics frequently swept through the barrio population.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the barrio "gave identity and a feeling of being at home for the dispossessed and poor" although it was not

⁷⁴Ibid. pp.84-86

⁷⁵Ibid. p.126

⁷⁶Ibid. pp.96-7

⁷⁷Ibid. p.91

⁷⁸Ibid. p.119

⁷⁹Ibid. p.67

through choice alone that the Mexicans secluded themselves in the barrio away from the turmoil of the rest of the city.⁸⁰ Anglo-Americans were angered by the adobe homes which the Mexicans inhabited. These irregularly located houses, "constructed for maximization of sunlight, drainage, and adaptability to other ecological factors" were demolished, and their inhabitants dislocated, to make way for new Anglo structures.⁸¹ Victorian New England homes were introduced, complete with "turrets and other embellishments".⁸² Anglo Americans established transportation and communication networks and drastically altered the appearance and the way of life of the former pueblo. A visitor to Santa Barbara in 1873 commented:

The native population wear a wondering bewildered look at the sudden change of affairs, yet seem resigned to their unexpected situation, while the conquerors are proud and elated with their conquest.⁸³

Meanwhile, in Santa Barbara a growing tourist industry promoted the city as a health resort due to its climate and by 1871 the first full scale tourist boom in Southern California - "the Italy of America" - was underway. The volume of tourists increased to the extent that

crowds of tourists wishing to come to Santa Barbara and other cities in the south had to be restrained by police on the docks of San Francisco.⁸⁴

Therefore, there was an ambivalence on the part of the Anglo American entrepreneurs who wished to encourage tourism in the Southwest. During the construction of New Town San Diego it was stipulated that it should not be "handicapped by too much historical background" while Old Town San Diego was to be saved as a picturesque tourist attraction".⁸⁵ A further paradox was the fact that as American urbanization swept away the

⁸⁰Richard Griswold del Castillo, quoted in Camarillo, *op. cit.* p.119

⁸¹*Ibid.* p.34

⁸²*Ibid.* p.37

⁸³*Ibid.* p.41

⁸⁴*Ibid.* p.39

⁸⁵*Ibid.* pp.123-6

Mexican's way of life and the traditional skills embodied in their culture, Anglo proprietors of mail-order houses and tourist shops employed small numbers of Mexicans in their leather businesses to make souvenirs. Santa Barbara boasted, "Mexican goods made by old Mexicans now living in and around Santa Barbara" and the skills of *vaqueros* were employed in the capture of sea-lions for sale to distant museums. Homemade Mexican food was sold to Anglos in the streets near the barrio.⁸⁶

Anglo-Americans also introduced their own cultural events into the Southwest, prohibiting those of the Mexicans. The bearfights, and bullfights enjoyed by the Mexicans were outlawed to make way for commercial horse-racing. In Santa Barbara, circuses of clowns and animals replaced the Mexican circus of acrobats and musicians which had traditionally included the town in its itinerary. Community-wide fiestas were replaced by exclusive forms of entertainment.⁸⁷

Divested of land, rights and traditional forms of employment and cultural expression, the Mexican inhabitants of the American Southwest had to struggle for their survival. Mutual aid societies were formed and *juntas patrióticas* met to sponsor Mexican patriotic celebrations. Political clubs were established and Spanish-language newspapers were founded in an attempt to keep group solidarity strong. In this climate two celebrations took on major importance: Mexican Independence Day, September 16th, and the Cinco de Mayo, May 5th.⁸⁸ However, these were not the only forms of resistance.

7. Resistance 1: Guerrilla Warfare and Social Banditry.

Chicano historians have shown that the subjugated Mexicans of the Americanized Southwest resisted the unwelcome social changes which afflicted them. Rather than submit to the new

⁸⁶Ibid. p.94

⁸⁷Ibid. p.60

⁸⁸Ibid. pp.62-63

social conditions, bands of men at first engaged in armed struggle in the hope of repelling the invaders.

Social banditry thrived in the Southwest in an attempt to counteract the injustices of conquest. Crimes of violence had been almost unknown in California prior to the conquest, but after 1846 "a strange metamorphosis took place in the character of the lower classes of the native Californians." A peaceful people with no history of outlawry found itself harbouring bandits who responded to the "Linchocracia" with violence.⁸⁹ Acuña explains that,

When people cannot earn a living within the system, or when they are degraded they strike out.⁹⁰

A Mexican Californian resistance, in the form of guerrilla groups, sought to expel the invaders. Led by Andrés Pico, José María Flores and José Antonio Carrillo, the Californios won two notable victories and for a short time "held southern California from Santa Barbara to San Diego".⁹¹ McWilliams affirms that due to the state's isolated position its inhabitants possessed an independent spirit. "Revolutions" he concludes, "were a matter of more or less normal occurrence in California".⁹²

In New Mexico guerrilla warfare continued into the 1850s. The new Governor, Charles Bent, leader of the American Party, and five other members were killed in an attack led by a Mexican peasant, Pablo Montoya and a Pueblo Indian, Tomasito Romero.⁹³ New Mexico also witnessed resistance to the abuses of the Anglo-Americans in the shape of the Gorras Blancas, who claimed some 1,500 members and who were active between 1889 and 1891, their main intent being to salvage land for the Mexicans. They operated outside the law,

⁸⁹McWilliams, *op. cit.* pp.129-30

⁹⁰Acuña, *op. cit.* p.112

⁹¹Weber, *op. cit.* p.98

⁹²McWilliams, *op. cit.* pp.88-89

⁹³*Ibid.* p.118

cutting Anglo fences, destroying property and attacking the railroad. A member of the Gorras Blancas, Juan José Herrera, also opted for a political route to change by founding the United People's Party which opposed the Santa Fe Ring of wealthy, influential men. Herrera declared a firm anti-capitalist, anti-monopoly and anti-Republican stance, and used the Spanish-language newspaper, *La Voz del Pueblo*, to publish the injustices against the poor. Despite sweeping the 1890 county elections and winning four seats in the Assembly, the rampant corruption in the legislature frustrated reforms at the county level and factionalism finally put an end to the Party.⁹⁴

Nonetheless:

Mexican banditry soon gave a color of justification to the practice of lynching Mexicans which soon degenerated from a form of vigilante punishment for crime to an outdoor sport in Southern California.⁹⁵

Juan Cortina chose the first path. He fought in the Texas border area and unlike the social bandit had:

an organization with a definite ideology that led guerrilla warfare against the gringo establishment.⁹⁶

Cortina was born in 1824 at Camargo, on the south side of the Río Grande. The son of upper class parents, he moved to his mother's ranch near Brownsville on the north side of the river in the 1840s and may have considered himself a United States citizen after the Mexican War.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, in 1859 he intervened as the Anglo sheriff of Brownsville assaulted a Mexican and offered to take responsibility for the offender. The marshal insulted Cortina who shot him in the shoulder and fled.⁹⁸ Before reaching Mexico he and fifty followers raised the Mexican flag in Brownsville and attacked those who had persecuted and

⁹⁴Acuña, op. cit. p.68

⁹⁵McWilliams, op. cit. p.130

⁹⁶Acuña, op. cit. p.33

⁹⁷Weber, op. cit. pp.231-2

⁹⁸Acuña, op. cit. p.34

murdered Mexicans. Cortina later formed a 1,200 strong army which defeated an onslaught of the local militia, the Mexican army at Matamoros and the notorious Texas Rangers.⁹⁹

Cortina envisioned enforcing the guarantees of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, violated by what he called "flocks of vampires, in guise of men" for the benefit of the poor. His activities, which sowed terror among the Anglos, endowed him with mythical status; in the 1870s the Anglos used him as an excuse for a reign of terror against innocent Mexicans. Despite the 1874 Frontier Protection Act which reestablished the notorious Texas Rangers, the Anglos were unable to capture Cortina, but through pressure on the Mexican government he was eventually jailed in Mexico City in 1875. Fifteen years later he returned to the border where he was received by the Mexicans as a hero.¹⁰⁰

California also had its share of social rebels; Juan Flores, Joaquín Murrieta and Tiburcio Vásquez, to name just a few. Flores and his fifty bandits, operating around San Juan Capistrano, terrified the Anglos and split the Mexicans into two groups; *los ricos* who opposed them and *los abajos* who supported them. Vásquez's underlying motivation was self-defence. Observing the imperious manner in which the Anglos conducted themselves at balls given by the native Californians, he told how:

a spirit of hatred and revenge took possession of me. I had numerous fights in defense of my countrymen ... I believed we were unjustly and wrongly deprived of the rights that belonged to us.¹⁰¹

As Vásquez grew ever bolder so did his reputation and manhunts to track him down increased in number and strength. He gained statewide notoriety after a raid on a store in 1873 but was eventually caught and hanged. Vásquez was an outlaw, but it was believed he gave money to the poor and he was regarded by many Mexicans as a hero.¹⁰²

⁹⁹Ibid. p.35

¹⁰⁰Ibid. p.37

¹⁰¹Ibid. p.113

¹⁰²Ibid. pp.113-114

The existence of these bands of men, then, contradicts the image of the Mexicans as a passive malleable people. Their activities and concerns also counter the stereotype of the "comical and oversexed Mexican bandit" portrayed by Anglo-American folklorists.¹⁰³

8. The Twentieth Century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the American Southwest assumed a new importance as its role was to provide raw materials for the factories of the Eastern United States as well as food for the European immigrants who manned them. Eastern and foreign capital flowed into the Southwest and monopolized all sectors of the economy.¹⁰⁴

In this context of capitalist expansion, the proximity of Mexico was at first regarded as a blessing by American industrialists who wanted:

workers who would do work white men would not, who would accept below-subsistence wages, and who would return home to their native lands when they finished their work. It was believed the Mexicans could supply this kind of labor at minimum expense and inconvenience.¹⁰⁵

Mexican labour was indeed available. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, the administration of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz pursued a land development policy which worsened the already intolerable circumstances in which the rural poor lived. Díaz passed vast tracts of land which had been held communally by peasants into the hands of landowners and speculators for commercial production. This policy:

¹⁰³Ibid. p.113

¹⁰⁴Ibid. p.123

¹⁰⁵Ibid. p.123

had the dual effect of swelling the already large number of peasants living in a state of debt bondage and creating a rootless labor force that wandered throughout the countryside and into the cities seeking work.¹⁰⁶

The wage differential between the United States and Mexico was enormous and was therefore the "dominant spur to immigration" from Mexico into the United States for twenty years.¹⁰⁷ Migration in search of a livelihood was made possible by railroad construction carried out by American business interests which reduced the hazards of crossing deserts. Not surprisingly, Mexican immigrants came in their thousands to the United States.¹⁰⁸ They:

transformed earlier and smaller native Mexican communities in the Southwest into expansive and significant immigrant ones.¹⁰⁹

An agricultural revolution was also transforming Texas at the turn of the century. As South Texas possessed a year-long warm climate, it became the "winter garden" of the United States.¹¹⁰ The Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 fomented dam construction to guarantee an inexpensive water supply and so irrigation projects resulted in commercial farming and agricultural expansion.¹¹¹ This change in the mode of production wrought changes in the demographics of the area. As new land was cultivated and new towns grew up, the remaining marginal Mexican enclaves of ranchers, farmers and share-croppers could not compete with agribusiness and the effect on employment of thousands of immigrant wage-workers from Mexico who flooded in to work the new commercial farms as crop-pickers.¹¹² They earned little: indeed, the 1910 Report of the Immigration Commission

¹⁰⁶Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1976 p.14

¹⁰⁷Ibid. p.14

¹⁰⁸Acuña, op. cit. p.127

¹⁰⁹Mario García, 'La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1985 p.196

¹¹⁰Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, Yale Western Americana Series, 36, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1989 p.26

¹¹¹Acuña, op. cit. p.197

¹¹²Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, Yale Western Americana Series, 36, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1989 p.26

stated that Mexicans were the lowest paid of any labourers. It also stated that Mexicans worked in the United States only for a period of a few months. This was a comfort to many Americans as Mexicans were not thought to have "assimilative qualities" because of their lack of education and perceived prejudice towards school attendance.¹¹³ Therefore, when the Mexican Revolution spurred thousands more Mexicans to seek asylum across the border a "brown scare" swept the United States. Despite the fact that many immigrants who fled Mexico were from the middle and upper classes and were fleeing the revolutionaries, North Americans accused them all of being Villa sympathisers. As the First World War approached, and the required Mexican labour entered the country, the "brown scare" reached new heights of hysteria. In Los Angeles there were accusations that German agents recruited Mexicans as spies and saboteurs and Anglo-Americans in Los Angeles blamed Mexicans for social problems which in fact were caused by the rapid expansion of industry.¹¹⁴ The Anglo-American perception of Mexicans was that they were:

introducing crime, illiteracy and diseases and
 mongrelizing the social-ethnic base of American
 society.¹¹⁵

This "brown scare" was most intense in Texas where the number of Mexicans killed by Texas Rangers, local authorities and vigilantes soared into the thousands.¹¹⁶ The United States even stationed troops into Mexico under General Pershing in a year long attempt to capture Pancho Villa. When the revolutionary leader raided Columbus, New Mexico, a public outcry demanded the deportation and isolation of Mexicans in camps.¹¹⁷

Nonetheless, the United States' entry into World War 1 and the passing of the draft laws in 1917 saw the American government reverse their previous policy and take measures to entice

¹¹³Acuña, op. cit. p.128

¹¹⁴Ibid. p.305

¹¹⁵Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, Yale Western Americana Series, 36, New Haven/London, Yale University Press 1989 p.26

¹¹⁶Acuña, op. cit. p.306

¹¹⁷Ibid. p.129

Mexicans into the war effort.¹¹⁸ The war also stimulated a further expansion in the production of food and agricultural raw materials and so large numbers of unskilled immigrant workers were again needed. The Mexicans were the obvious recruitment source.¹¹⁹ Yet this time the Mexicans were not as willing to oblige, fearing, as they did, the draft. Therefore, alarmed by the numbers of Mexicans who had left the United States, unwilling to be drafted into the army, the American authorities waived the sections of the Immigration Act of 1917 which limited the free flow of Mexican labour. The waiving of the head tax and the literacy provision meant that hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers were allowed to enter the country with the 73,000 documented Mexicans.¹²⁰

Once in the United States, however, discrimination reduced the Mexican to second-class status at every level of activity. An example is that of Mexican women in El Paso who filled unskilled jobs while Anglo women occupied the skilled positions. In department stores Mexican women worked hidden away in the basement while Anglo women were employed on the main floor. In laundries Mexican women earned half the amount Anglo women did, the employers' defence being that Mexican women had a lower standard of living and so required less money.¹²¹

As the twenties approached, Mexican workers began to migrate as far as Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska. They served as reserve labour and strikebreakers in the Chicago mills and picked cotton in Arizona. Yet, when unemployment hit the United States in the 1920s, the Mexican workers became "the scapegoats for the failure of the U.S. economy" and the industries which had recruited the Mexicans washed their hands of them.¹²² They did not honour pledges to provide return passage to Mexico and the American government failed to act in their benefit, allowing thousands of Mexicans to be left stranded and destitute.

¹¹⁸Ibid. p.129

¹¹⁹Reisler, op. cit. p.25

¹²⁰Acuña, op. cit. p.129

¹²¹Ibid. p.205

¹²²Ibid. p.130

Many were put into chain gangs and beaten before being thrown out of town. It was left to the Mexican government to aid them and many workers would have starved if Mexican President Alvaro Obregón had not intervened.¹²³

Yet, the dilemma of whether to admit or expel Mexicans remained a headache for American administrations. California's farming areas were becoming the most specialized and industrialized in the United States and the expanding industry was largely dependent on labour-intensive crops. While huge profits allowed for the purchase of machinery and the digging of wells and mechanization displaced many year-round workers, large numbers of seasonal workers were still required.¹²⁴ Thus farming became the leading area of employment for Mexicans - some 65% of the Southwest's seasonal labour was Mexican - and migratory farm labour became "as peculiar to California as slavery was to the old South".¹²⁵ Agribusiness was poised to prosper, particularly as the state's climate permitted year-round production and the federal government provided water at below cost levels. By the end of the decade there was a high degree of monopolization and huge profits, but growers, reluctant to pay higher wages, formed associations to maximise profit by developing a pool of surplus labour, available at the lowest possible rate. They feared the loss of cheap labour if they made accessible the means by which workers could move to the cities, namely through access to the automobile. Rather than countering this labour drain by improving wages to retain workers they found ways of preventing them from travelling. Nonetheless, Mexicans did drive across the country despite growers' attempts to restrict recruitment drives by better-paying northern companies such as steel mills.¹²⁶

Mexican workers, then, by the 1920s were tending to remain in the United States and diversify their sources of employment. Consequently a battle raged in Congress between racist restrictionists who wished to place a quota on the numbers of Mexicans entering the

¹²³Ibid. p.131

¹²⁴Ibid. p.214

¹²⁵Ibid. p.206

¹²⁶Ibid. pp.210-211

United States, and anti-restrictionists in favour of an open immigration policy. The former feared the subversion of the "American way of life" by excessive numbers of foreigners whom they considered to be racially inferior, while the latter, consisting of agribusiness groups who were no less racist, but who were primarily interested in economic gain, called for the free flow of Mexicans for low-cost labour.¹²⁷ Restrictionists described Mexicans as "the most undesirable people who come under the flag" and "not at all qualified for present citizenship or for assimilation into this country".¹²⁸

These forces clashed repeatedly throughout the 1920s until in 1929 Congress decreed it a misdemeanour for an alien to enter the United States without documentation, punishable by a year in prison or a fine of up to one thousand dollars. Not only this but the hitherto lax border patrol began to operate in earnest, increased in size and efficiency.¹²⁹ The Great Depression had just begun, resulting in an immigration decrease, but restrictionists, fearing the return of the Mexicans when the economy recovered, took preventive measures. The following year saw the introduction of a bill citing the Mexican's racial undesirability and un-Americanism. It condemned the growth of the Mexican community in the United States and alleged that it was dependent on welfare.¹³⁰

Meanwhile the lot of the Mexican immigrants in the United States was not an enviable one. During the decade of the 1920s, housing for Mexicans in Los Angeles worsened as many of their housing areas were demolished to make way for civic buildings. The overcrowding resulted in deplorable living conditions.¹³¹ With the Great Depression, white Americans began to take the jobs done by Mexican workers for which they had previously felt disdain. Again, the Mexicans were displaced and they drifted to urban areas in search of work or

¹²⁷Reisler, op. cit. pp.151-152

¹²⁸Acuña, op. cit. pp.132-3

¹²⁹Abraham Hoffman: *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures* Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1974 pp.32-33

¹³⁰Hoffman, p. 35

¹³¹Acuña, op. cit. p.311

welfare.¹³² As the United States government was not willing to provide welfare for Mexicans it began an active drive to repatriate undocumented aliens living illegally in the country. In 1930 President Hoover's Secretary of Labour, William N. Doak, rose to the task before him with zeal. He reasoned, quite fallaciously, that the solution to providing work for the unemployed was to "oust any alien holding a job and deport him." His immigration agents from the Labor Department's Bureau of Immigration:

raided private homes and public places in a search that extended from New York city to Los Angeles.¹³³

These scare tactics drove away many Mexicans who were not even illegal. Between 1931 and 1934 some half a million Mexicans were deported. Around sixty per cent of these were children who had been born in the United States and who were citizens by birthright. The removal of these people to Mexico was officially termed "repatriation", implying that it was voluntary, when it was, in fact, enforced expulsion. Not only this but American welfare agencies failed to question the veracity of offers of land for those repatriated which were publicised in Mexico but seized upon this information as a justification for what was in effect enforced deportation.¹³⁴ Many Mexican families in the United States were also duped by the Mexican government's promises of land on which to work, and opted to leave the country rather than endure the violence of the deportation teams.

The effect of the raids on the Mexican community were traumatic and they often resulted in the separation of entire families.¹³⁵

Documented Mexicans also came under suspicion from local authorities and newspapers sensationalized Mexican crime. Welfare officials employed underhand methods to force their Mexican clients to accept the offer of fare and subsistence to the border. They threatened them with stoppage of relief, enlisted the help of the Mexican consul in their persuasion

¹³²Hoffman, *op. cit* p.37.

¹³³*Ibid.* p.39

¹³⁴*Ibid.* pp.36-37

¹³⁵Acuña, *op. cit.* p.140

strategy and in one case, in Detroit, social workers fed Mexicans unfamiliar food at a local hall in an attempt to accelerate their departure. Officials also stressed that workers were free to return to the United States in the future but their exit cards identified them as charity cases, thus eliminating hopes of return. In Michigan a number of Mexicans were even removed from hospital to be sent back to Mexico.¹³⁶

Despite the deportation drive, by the 1930s a substantial portion of the Mexican population in the United States was second generation. In Chicago, for example, unlike in the preceding decade, when the Mexican community was largely composed of single men, the 1930s saw more family-oriented barrios.¹³⁷

The approach of the Second World War found America again in need of labour to provide food for the country and its allies in Europe. The drafting of the native population of Mexican descent into the army and the internment of Japanese farmworkers in camps forced the government to resort to Mexican workers despite the Mexican government's reluctance given the abuses of the past.¹³⁸

Nonetheless, in order to resolve the problem, the Emergency Labor Program, commonly known as the Bracero programme, was initiated in 1942. On paper, at least, this was unique as contractual agreements of workers' rights were stipulated from the outset. While the United States government required that Mexicans should not displace domestic workers, they agreed that Mexican *braceros* should be exempt from the draft and that housing, transportation and wages arrangements should be formalized. The first *bracero* workers entered El Paso, Texas in September and in 1943 Public Law 45 converted the American government into a labour contractor to carry out the "administered migration" of Mexican workers.¹³⁹

¹³⁶Ibid. pp.140-141

¹³⁷Ibid. p.332

¹³⁸Ibid. p.144

¹³⁹Ibid. p.144

However, as growers were unwilling to adhere to the conditions of the programme, the American Farm Bureau Federation, using an escape clause in the act, applied tactics of its own. They pressurised the commissioner of immigration to open the Mexican-American border and allow a vast supply of unregulated Mexican workers to flood into the United States to seek employment. Farmers provided them with jobs "without worrying about federal regulations" and many abuses occurred. Workers were often left unpaid. They had unsafe transportation and worked in unsanitary conditions. They lived in sub-standard accommodation and suffered cold in the winter. In some cases they had obligatory payments deducted from their wages; one company deducted \$1.50 per day for food from workers, whether they ate or not.¹⁴⁰

Although immigrant workers escaped the draft thanks to the Bracero programme and the war effort, as many as 500,000 Mexican-Americans served in the armed forces during the Second World War. Indeed, Mexican American servicemen were the most decorated ethnic group. This had little bearing on the status of Mexican-Americans in the United States during the war years. Despite their services to their country, they continued to suffer discrimination and be treated as second class citizens. Defence plants refused to employ them and in Texas alone, in 1944:

there were 150 towns and cities in that state which had public places that refused to serve Mexicans - many of whom were servicemen.¹⁴¹

In one instance in California, Sergeant Macario García, who had received the Congressional Medal of Honor, was ejected from a restaurant where he had tried to buy a coffee.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Ibid. p. 146

¹⁴¹Ibid. p. 244

¹⁴²Ibid. p. 323

Two of the most shameful incidents of racial hatred against the Mexican American youth in the Los Angeles area are now known as the "Sleepy Lagoon Case" and the "Zoot Suit Riots." The first of these concerned some Mexican American youths who, as they were forbidden to use the local swimming pool, swam in a dirty swimming hole, ironically named the "Sleepy Lagoon".¹⁴³ At this site in 1942, some members of the 39th Street Club were jumped by another gang. They fled, later returning with their "homeboys", but their rivals had gone. They crashed a party at a ranch at which a fight ensued. The following morning one of the invited guests, José Díaz, was found dead on a road near the house. The entire 38th Street gang was arrested and the press had a field day turning them into "the prototype of the Mexican hoodlum".¹⁴⁴ A report to the grand jury by Lieutenant Edward Durán Ayres of the Los Angeles Police Department attempted to make a case for the existence of racial determinants which were responsible for Mexican juvenile delinquency. He concluded that as Mexicans were descended from the Aztecs, practitioners of human sacrifice, they were inherently criminal and violent, bereft of any regard for human life.¹⁴⁵

The judge presiding over the trial allowed many irregularities which negatively affected the defendants. The prosecutor was permitted to point to the clothes and hairstyle of the accused as evidence of guilt and for the first weeks of the trial no packages of clean clothes were allocated to the defendants.¹⁴⁶ Despite the absence of any shred of proof that the accused had committed murder the court passed sentences ranging from assault to first degree murder.¹⁴⁷

A Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, chaired by Carey McWilliams, was formed. Members were branded as communists, even though Mexican American Hollywood actors

¹⁴³Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1984 p.20

¹⁴⁴Acuña, op. cit. p.324

¹⁴⁵Mazón, op. cit. p. 22

¹⁴⁶Carey McWilliams, quoted in Mazón, op. cit. p. 21

¹⁴⁷Acuña, op. cit. p.325

and actresses such as Anthony Quinn and Rita Hayworth lent their support.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, in 1944 the Second District Court of Appeals unanimously stated that the judge had conducted the trial in a biased manner and violated the rights of the defendants as no evidence linked the death of the victim with the members of the 38th Street Club.¹⁴⁹

In this climate of anti-Mexican feeling the misnamed Zoot Suit Riots occurred. This was in fact racist mob violence against the entire Mexican American community by American sailors, fostered in the national press.¹⁵⁰

Many Mexican American youths, in an effort to reaffirm themselves as a group, called themselves Pachucos and spoke a blend of English, Spanish and border Spanish known as *chuco* or *caló*. They belonged to clubs or gangs bearing the names of their barrio streets and wore the prized and extravagant zoot suit of voluminous trousers and long jacket. This symbol of rebellious group identity was apprehended as a threat by many Anglo Americans who saw Mexican American youth as a criminal underclass.¹⁵¹

Residents of the East Los Angeles barrio had been angered by servicemen on leave who were anxious to pick up Mexican girls whom they equated with the prostitutes they had found in Tijuana. In May 1943 at a dance, and spurred by the rumour that a *pachuco* had stabbed a sailor, a mob of servicemen indiscriminately attacked all Mexicans present. Two thousand people watched, and did nothing, until the police came. Nor did they intervene, except to charge the Mexicans with disturbing the peace.¹⁵²

On June 3rd sailors rampaged in Los Angeles. They "depantsed" and beat up Mexicans wearing zoot suits. Again, the victims were arrested. The following night, the 4th,

¹⁴⁸Mazón, op. cit. p. 24

¹⁴⁹Acuña, op. cit. p.326

¹⁵⁰Ibid. p.326

¹⁵¹Ibid. pp.323-324

¹⁵²Ibid. p.326

confident that the police would turn a blind eye, sailors occupied twenty hired cabs in a motorcade down East Los Angeles' Whittier Boulevard and systematically beat up neighbourhood youths. On June 5th sailors marched four abreast down the streets warning Mexicans to take off their suits or have them removed. They entered bars and abused Mexican clients and despite causing damage to private property the police refused to act.¹⁵³

Events culminated on the night of June 7th. Sailors and civilians in their thousands flooded down Main Street and Broadway in search of "pachucos." Bar stools were broken up and used as clubs in response to press scare reports that the zoot suiters were assembling for battle. The mob left naked Mexicans bleeding in the streets and:

surged into movie theatres, where they turned on the lights, marched down the aisles, and pulled zoot-suit-clad youngsters out of their seats.¹⁵⁴

The police response was to arrest over six hundred Mexicans without cause and call it "preventive" action.¹⁵⁵

The violence was not quelled until military and naval personnel intervened, the latter believing that a mutiny was taking place. The press continued to brand the Mexicans as the villains of the piece with inflammatory headlines. When Eleanor Roosevelt concluded in her column that the rioting had been caused by traditional discrimination against Mexicans in the Southwest she was accused of blindly stirring race discord. The Los Angeles Times added insult to injury by boasting of its pride in the missions and in Olvera Street, - "a bit of old Mexico" - claiming, "We like Mexicans and think they like us".¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³Ibid. p.327

¹⁵⁴Ibid. p.327

¹⁵⁵Ibid. p.327

¹⁵⁶Ibid. p.329

The war years did, however, open up certain possibilities for the Mexican population in the United States. With the return to peace time Mexicans were increasingly able to migrate to other parts of the country. Texas Mexicans migrated to areas such as the Pacific Northwest where they quickly became urbanized, and in Texas itself, workers moved into jobs in the oil industry and in the service sector which the war had opened to them.¹⁵⁷ Entering the 1950s, then, people of Mexican descent in America were no longer a rural population but were primarily urban and keen to carve a niche for themselves in the United States, which was, in fact, their home.

They continued to be discriminated against, however, always having the most back-breaking and unskilled jobs and rejection by the dominant society was never far away.¹⁵⁸ During the recession of 1953-55 Mexicans again bore the brunt of American racist sentiment. In 1953 a new Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioner, General Joseph M. Swing was appointed. This "professional, long-time Mexican hater" began what has been dubbed "Operation Wetback." In the next four years over two million Mexicans were deported, in military style sweeps, although the figures are not accurate as the INS inflated the numbers in an attempt to have their budget increased. The police helped the INS and in Arizona Native American Indians were employed to track down undocumented workers. Every brown person came under suspicion and people were detained illegally.¹⁵⁹ Attorney General Herbert Brownell wanted to turn the army on the Mexicans at the border but growers opposed the loss of cheap labour.¹⁶⁰ "Operation Wetback" was, for a time, successful in warding off the unwanted and undocumented workers, though liberal democrats and most Mexican-American organizations called for fines on employers who hired undocumented workers, regarding this as a better solution to the problem.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷Ibid. p.263

¹⁵⁸Ibid. p.265

¹⁵⁹Ibid. pp.156-157

¹⁶⁰Ibid. p.157

¹⁶¹Ibid. p.156

These policies:

thwarted the development of effective organization both in the barrios and among working class Chicanos by deporting some of its most effective leaders.¹⁶²

The barrios of Los Angeles were also the focus of urban renewal during the 1950s, referred to somewhat sardonically by Acuña as urban "removal".¹⁶³ To make way for the building of freeways the government removed the Mexican American residents from the older, central city barrios with "utter disregard for the lives and welfare of people" while the more wealthy areas of the city remained unscathed. The rationale for such an invasion of the Mexican communities, referred to by Acuña as the work of "neo-robber barons", was that:

The presence of too many minorities in an area depressed land values and discouraged the trade of white, middle-class customers. Urban renewal insured construction of business sites and higher rent apartments which inflated property values.¹⁶⁴

Such was the lack of regard of the American government for the Mexican-American minority. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that members of the Mexican and Mexican American population in the United States continued to resist the demeaning status assigned them by the Anglo-American elite. Throughout the twentieth century they have carried on struggling in the spirit of the social bandits of the previous century but have adopted different methods. The period of armed resistance to conquest is long over and the struggle now involves bargaining for representation as a minority group within the United States. One of the new methods of struggle has been labour unionizing activity which has brought gains, even if ultimately they do not prove to be permanent.

¹⁶²Acuña, op. cit. p.160

¹⁶³Ibid. p.339

¹⁶⁴Ibid. pp.339-340

9. Resistance 2: Labour Organization.

Acuña writes:

The roots of the Chicano labor movement are in Mexico ... The ideas of Mexican radical intellectuals and activists were brought to the United States by many of these early migrants who influenced the struggle of Mexican workers in the United States through the 1930s.¹⁶⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, Mexican land holders, like their North American counterparts, became "less feudal lords and more landed capitalists".¹⁶⁶ Mexican workers reacted collectively in the face of the economic exploitation which accompanied this change and formed groups known as *mutualistas*. The purpose of these was to provide funds for medical expenses, unemployment compensation and funerals, a tradition which was extended into the American Southwest through migration.¹⁶⁷

As Mexican workers settled in the United States they became more able to protest against the appalling working conditions and low wages prevalent in both rural and urban occupations. In the rural setting, relations between agricultural employers and their employees were becoming more distant, resembling urban industrial relations. Growers regarded themselves as equivalent to urban industrialists and regarded farmworkers as equivalent to factory workers. However, while the growers received the rewards of their status, "the rural proletariat was denied the advantages that the urban proletariat had achieved".¹⁶⁸ Opposition was made possible, however, by the sheer force of the numbers of Mexicans who had entered the United States and settled into industries which required year-round employment.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, protest was not easy as the Southwest had a history of antiunionism due to right to work laws, while legislation protecting organizing rights was

¹⁶⁵Ibid. p.190

¹⁶⁶Rodney Anderson, quoted in Acuña, op. cit. p.190

¹⁶⁷Acuña, op. cit. p.191

¹⁶⁸Ibid. p.215

¹⁶⁹Ibid. p.201

lacking.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Mexican workers' reputation as scabs, willing to work for lower wages than other groups, meant their exclusion from Anglo unions. It was also the case that many unions required citizenship for membership and excluded the non-naturalized Mexicans.¹⁷¹

Mexican workers, however, unilaterally undertook strike action and hit construction, smelting and mining industries in the first decade of the century. Many small agricultural unions also existed in California but their efforts were curtailed by the Mexican's vulnerability to deportation.¹⁷² In Santa Barbara in 1903 Mexicans working for the Johnston Fruit Company paralyzed high season work and had their demands met and in 1905 in Laredo, Texas, the Federal Labor Union was formed by Mexicans to represent various skilled and non-skilled workers. A newspaper was published, *El Defensor del Obrero*, to educate workers and the public alike.¹⁷³

Mexican workers were influenced by the Industrial Workers of the World, which had been founded in Chicago in 1905, and by *magonistas* such as the Liga Pan-Americana de Trabajo and the Partido Liberal Mexicano. The Mexican Revolution also had a politicizing effect on the Mexicans in the United States. As the second decade progressed, and the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana was founded in Mexico in 1918, Mexican labour organization in the United States renewed its efforts. Nevertheless, organization was severely hampered; in some areas growers handcuffed workers at night to prevent them from escaping.¹⁷⁴

After 1929 the struggle for decent working conditions intensified:

¹⁷⁰Ibid. p.265

¹⁷¹Ibid. p.209

¹⁷²Ibid. p.199

¹⁷³Acuña, op. cit. pp.199-200

¹⁷⁴Ibid. p.204

An all-out war broke out in which growers used the Immigration Service to deport leaders, pressured state and federal agencies to deny Mexicans relief, used local and state authorities to terrorize workers, killed and imprisoned strikers, and made a sham of any semblance of human rights.¹⁷⁵

Through the 1930s communist-led unions and unions in the United States comprised of workers of Mexican origin met in confrontation. The latter were regarded by the communist unions - undergoing a period of extreme ultra-leftism - as "nationalistic and reformist" while the communist unions often did not understand, and were insensitive to, the history of the people they were trying to lead. This led the Mexican unions to make accusations of Anglo chauvinism.¹⁷⁶ Mexican Americans did gravitate towards leftist politics and did recognise the need to organize around the working-class composition of Mexican Americans but it is clear that this left-wing activity was not geared to revolution. Rather, it concentrated on reform issues against the backdrop of New Deal welfare capitalism.¹⁷⁷

As Mexican rural unions had failed to gain concessions from employers After the New Deal legislation of 1932 and 1933 which helped urban workers, but failed to improve the lot of the farmworkers, one of the largest strikes of agricultural history took place. This was the San Joaquín cotton strike, during which the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) began to interfere in the affairs of the non-trade union *mutualistas*, which were nonetheless gaining credibility as labour organizers among the Mexicans.¹⁷⁸ Over 10,000 workers, 80% of them Mexican, went on strike. The growers were supported by all sectors of business, the press, local authorities and police. Strikers were arrested, deported and labelled agitators and reds.¹⁷⁹ Eventually growers shot and killed three strikers and were acquitted at the subsequent trial. Police issued 60 gun permits to the growers "to protect their way of life" and the strike was eventually lost.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵Ibid. p.218

¹⁷⁶Ibid. pp.218-19

¹⁷⁷Mario García: 'La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1985 pp.145-146

¹⁷⁸Acuña, op. cit. pp.221-226

¹⁷⁹Acuña, op. cit. pp.222-223

¹⁸⁰Ibid. p.226

A drive against the CAWIU after the San Francisco general strike in 1934 and the conviction of its leaders negatively affected the organizing capacities of farmworkers, though several independent Mexican unions were formed. With the collapse of the CAWIU in 1936, the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros (CUCOM) which had been formed in 1933, became the "vanguard in farm labor organizing" and from 1935-1936 the most effective agricultural-labor unions were those organized among Mexicans.¹⁸¹

Small Mexican unions, however, recognised the need to affiliate to the American Federation of Labor. In 1937 the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros (CUCOM) joined the United Cannery, Agriculture, Packing and Allied Workers of America which did its best work in urban areas. One of its champions was Luisa Moreno, the first woman of Mexican descent to serve on its executive committee.¹⁸²

Mexicans also participated in union activity in Chicago where they were greatly influenced by the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos. Mexican workers were also protected by a chapter of the anti-clerical Frente Popular Mexicano. This was regularly attended by over 200 people and its scope of interest extended to opposing Franco's activities during the Spanish Civil War. In response, the Catholic Church countered with the publication of *El Ideal Católico Mexicano* sponsored by the Conservative Sociedad de Obreros Católicos. Mexicans also belonged to the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and, after the 1935 Wagner Act, to unions which had previously excluded them such as the Brotherhood of Rail and Maintenance Workers. While the major force continued to be the *mutualistas*, by 1942 the CIO had 15,000 Mexican members in the Los Angeles area. Luisa Moreno went on to serve as vice president on the California CIO Executive Board to represent the interests of

¹⁸¹Ibid. pp.228-229

¹⁸²Ibid. p.317

the Mexican community and a committee to aid Mexican workers was established and chaired by Bert Corona.¹⁸³

By 1945 then, the Mexican labour movement had rooted itself within the American labour movement. Mexican-only unions became less common and the focus of their grievances was no longer in connection with agriculture. Geographical stability - and by 1950 California's Mexican population was over 760,000 - made organization possible. "Mutualista" involvement in strikes consequently declined to almost nothing.¹⁸⁴

Gains in agriculture were negligible. Farmworkers were not protected under the National Labor Relations Act which conceded the right to strike.¹⁸⁵ During the 1950s the National Farm Labor Union which represented farmworkers were outsmarted by the power of the growers who, regardless of which party held sway:

used the departments of Labor, Agriculture, Justice and State as their personal agents.¹⁸⁶

The main grievance of the farmworkers were the labour contractors, or *coyotes*, of Mexican descent, who operated on behalf of the growers. When a strike was called it was frustrated by the contractors who obliged the growers by bringing in *braceros* or undocumented workers to undermine the effectiveness of the strike action. In this way, Mexican American residents of the United States were forced into clashes with the migrant "wetbacks" from across the border. The *coyotes* were perfect go-betweens as they spoke English and Spanish and undocumented workers relied on them to find them steady work and provide them with transportation. The *coyotes* were also entrusted with the payment of workers and contributed to their exploitation by often absconding with workers' pay. They also charged

¹⁸³Ibid. pp.240-242

¹⁸⁴Ibid. p.256

¹⁸⁵Ibid. p.256

¹⁸⁶Ibid. p.260

excessive fees for transportation, accommodation and food and frequently short-weighted fruit pickers.¹⁸⁷

The McCarthy years of anti-communist hysteria, detrimental to American society as a whole, were extremely damaging to the Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant population. In 1947 Joseph McCarthy's Senate Special Investigative Committee blacklisted or denaturalized and deported many Mexican-American leaders and educators and concentration camps were later constructed for the purpose of holding suspected subversives without trial.¹⁸⁸ Congress sought to neutralize many gains made by labour and the Taft Hartley Act of 1947 protecting the open shop drastically reduced the progressive labour movement and with it Mexican union struggles.¹⁸⁹ As the 1960s approached so too did an increasing trend of moving garment and other factory plants to Mexico, Hong Kong and Taiwan, which further blocked unionizing efforts. Therefore:

while unions have been important to Mexicans they have traditionally served only a minority of the total workforce.¹⁹⁰

The Mexican American population, was however, active in other organizations.

10. Resistance 3: Other Organizations and Human Rights.

In the early years of the century, in response to the discrimination they met at every turn in North American society, Mexican immigrants began to voice their protests. While Mexicans did not consider renouncing their Mexican nationality to become citizens of the United States, they nevertheless sought to improve the conditions of their lives while absent from their native land.¹⁹¹ Therefore, they originally formed organizations which employed

¹⁸⁷Ibid. p.217

¹⁸⁸Ibid. p.158

¹⁸⁹Ibid. p.171

¹⁹⁰Ibid. pp.264-265

¹⁹¹Mario García 'La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1985 p.199

Mexico as their cultural and social reference point. Renouncing provincialism, these immigrants formed national, rather than regional, organizations and united as Mexicans.¹⁹² The organizations founded focused on issues of human rights and called for an end to the lynching of Mexicans. They also encouraged education, the defence of the Spanish language and protection of Mexican culture.¹⁹³ The *mutualistas* led this first approach and were followed by organizations such as La Comisión Honorífica Mexicana which was founded in 1921 in Los Angeles by the Mexican Consul. Its function was to aid Mexican nationals while they awaited attention from the consul and was popular among middle-class Mexican immigrants, though it participated in strikes and urged its members to support unionization. In 1939 in Upland this group challenged the practice of segregation in public facilities. It led a boycott of the Upland Theatre whose manager had humiliated two young Mexican adults by refusing to permit them to sit where they wanted. The boycott led to a positive outcome as the theatre manager agreed to permit complete integration.¹⁹⁴

In 1911 Nicasio Idar convened the Primer Congreso Mexicanista to protest against the loss of Mexican culture and the Spanish language and discrimination in education. This congress resulted in the formation of La Liga Femenil Mexicanista comprised of schoolteachers, and as such vociferous on education.¹⁹⁵ This was an important battleground as:

Education, an important vehicle in the maintenance of class, was in the hands of local business leaders, ranchers and bankers. They were supported by lower-class voters who needed to defend their own status by maintaining the myth of Mexican inferiority.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹²Ibid. p.199

¹⁹³Ibid. pp.202-203

¹⁹⁴Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960* Yale Western Americana Series, 36, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1989 p.87

¹⁹⁵Acuña, op. cit. p.306

¹⁹⁶Ibid. p.303

Mexicans were believed to learn more slowly than whites and were segregated from white children as they were thought to be an impediment to high standards in the classroom. Therefore, in San Angelo, Texas, in 1910, when new buildings were completed to house Anglo American schoolchildren, the old ones were allocated to Mexican children. Mexican parents tried to resist this discrimination and, demanding integration, they boycotted the school for a few years, unfortunately without success.¹⁹⁷

El Centro Hispano de Los Angeles was another of these immigrant organizations although it had a class bias in that its services were available only to leading Mexican families, professionals and intellectuals. It existed in response to the conviction of upper-class Mexicans that if Anglo Americans could be encouraged to appreciate their culture they would accept the new immigrants. To this end their organization sought to preserve Mexican folklore, dance and music, as well as the Spanish language.

In the 1920s, however, the underlying philosophy of these Mexican organizations began to change. A growing number of second-generation Mexicans began to drift away from the nationalistic *mutualistas* to join "accommodationist organizations which resembled U.S. institutions".¹⁹⁸

Many of these groups were middle-class and pro-Americanization. The League of United Latin American Citizens, established in Texas in 1927, is probably the best known assimilationist organization. It was the first to use an English name, and its members were middle-class citizens of the United States.¹⁹⁹ It hoped to develop within its race:

the best, purest and most perfect type of a true and loyal citizen of the United States of America,²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Ibid. pp.303-304

¹⁹⁸Acuña, op. cit. p.309

¹⁹⁹Ibid. p.309

²⁰⁰Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989 p.31

and to this end urged the learning of English. Nonetheless, the organization acknowledged that this was not possible while Mexican Americans suffered discrimination and so it committed itself "to a campaign, if not crusade, against such un-American practices." Nor was Americanization, for them, "a one-way street." Anglo-Americans had to embrace "the best of middle-class Mexican-American life." The tactics of LULAC were not radical. Their aim was to struggle:

within the system not outside it and certainly not against it.²⁰¹

Acuña affirms that LULAC should not be evaluated by present standards. While it is now heavily criticised for its integrationist and middle-class approach, founding members such as J.T. Canales defended the rights of all Mexicans, and the organization "cut reliance on the Mexican consuls and concentrated on U.S. issues".²⁰²

By the 1930s, although the second generation population felt ties with Mexico they were not preoccupied with the hope of moving there. As the urban population in full-time employment increased and settled, their organizations focused on broader issues. Rather than focusing on self-defence and immediate problems of survival they emphasised the obtaining of basic human rights.²⁰³ There was also a concern with politics. In 1930 the Federation of Spanish-Speaking Voters, "perhaps the first political group to organize in Los Angeles," attempted to unite all the Mexican societies and ran candidates for local and state offices in Los Angeles, without success.²⁰⁴

The activism of two women, Luisa Moreno and Josefina Fierro de Bright formed and shaped the Congreso de los Pueblos de Habla Española which organized, despite red-baiting, the first national conference of Spanish-speaking peoples in Los Angeles in

²⁰¹Ibid. p.31

²⁰²Acuña, op. cit. p.310

²⁰³Ibid. p.316

²⁰⁴Ibid. p.319

1939.²⁰⁵ People from all walks of life and classes attended to further the aims of the working-class Mexican in the United States. Unlike LULAC it did not exclude Mexican nationals and therefore non-American citizens, from participating. Its aim was the:

unification between American citizens of Mexican descent and Mexican nationals as well as the friendship between the peoples of the United States and Mexico.²⁰⁶

They sought equality, an end to deportations and discussed civil rights, health, housing and youth. In emulation of the work of Dr. George I. Sánchez, who abhorred the fact that Mexicans in the United States often did not know their own history, given the biased historical interpretation of Anglo American scholars, it also stressed the formation of academic departments in institutions of higher learning to study the "history, culture and society of the Spanish-speaking throughout the Americas" and in this way prevent the depiction of the Spanish-speaking as inferior people.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, and fundamentally, however, it also pressed all agricultural and industrial workers to join labour unions.²⁰⁸

The Mexican American Movement grew out of a number of Catholic youth groups. Its first regional conference was held in Santa Barbara in 1939. Its philosophy was the creation of a Mexican American leadership in education, social work, business and other professions. "Progress Through Education" was its motto and one of its aims was to reduce juvenile delinquency. It survived for ten years.²⁰⁹

After the Second World War, America underwent unprecedented technological and social change. Mexican Americans realised more sharply the injustice of their position as they had just fought in a war and gained little. Their organizations became more aggressive and their

²⁰⁵For an account of the activities of these two women see Mario García *Mexican Americans : Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, Yale Western Americana Series, 36, Yale University Press, 1989 pp.146-153.

²⁰⁶Ibid. p.150

²⁰⁷Ibid. p.151

²⁰⁸Ibid. p.152

²⁰⁹Acuña, op. cit. pp.316-17

tactics more mainstream American. They were not formed to support middle-class concerns nor to work with trade unions. Rather they were conceived of to stimulate political action at grass-roots level in the Mexican communities. Civic unity leagues were founded to focus on poverty while stressing ethnic unity. Their strategy was to appeal to the majority good will, emphasising mass action, bloc voting and neighbourhood protests. Homes, churches and public buildings were used for meetings.²¹⁰

In 1947, the Community Service Organization (previously the Community Political Organization) held forums to discuss community problems in East Los Angeles. Fred Ross of the American Council on Race Relations brought to the CSO his experience in working with the unity leagues. The CSO succeeded in registering 12,000 new voters and this in turn helped elect Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council in 1949. He was the first person of Mexican descent to serve on the Council since 1881.²¹¹

The CIO supported another immensely influential group, the Asociación Nacional México-Americana, which grew out of the Mine Mill union which organized many of the major mining and smelting regions of the Southwest in the 1940s and which included, particularly in New Mexico, Arizona and El Paso, many Mexican nationals. It was believed that ANMA could function as its political arm in the Southwest.²¹² ANMA was formed in Phoenix in 1949 and welcomed anyone interested in the progress of "el pueblo mexicano" regardless of "citizenship, nationality, color, religion, or political affiliation".²¹³ In the face of McCarthyism divisions of these kinds, it was thought, should be overlooked. It fought for human rights and unionization, later becoming a national organization and in operation until 1954.²¹⁴

²¹⁰Acuña, op. cit. p.331

²¹¹Acuña, op. cit. p.331

²¹²Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity 1930-1960*, Yale University Press, 1989 p.200

²¹³Ibid. p.201

²¹⁴Acuña, op. cit. p 338

In 1948 the American G.I. Forum was formed in Texas by World War II veterans. This non-partisan organization eventually spread to twenty-three states and through a strategy of ladies' auxiliaries and junior forums, which involved the whole family, fought discrimination and brought prosecutions in cases of police brutality. It fanned a spirit of nationalism and unity. One of the Forum's best representatives was Molly C. Galván. Despite the fact that the Forum was male dominated, she fought her way up the ranks, to leadership level, avoiding the ladies' auxiliary.²¹⁵

In 1951 Dr. George Sánchez called the American Council of Spanish-Speaking People to work for desegregation in Texas with the Alianza Hispano-Americana. This group had excluded Blacks but on one occasion cooperated with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. This marked a change within "the most traditional and nationalistic of Chicano groups".²¹⁶

In the following years the Mexican American population benefited little from what Acuña calls the "nascent civil rights movement of the 1950s".²¹⁷ Loyalties to one or another organization obstructed a unified stance and fostered competitiveness. Older organizations opposed the creation of new ones, objecting on the grounds that they were either too radical or not radical enough.²¹⁸ Activism among the Mexican American population, then, throughout the 1950s, seemed to be apathetic and lack direction:

Activists, frustrated over the lack of mass response in the face of blatant abuse, thought that it was hopeless and that the people did not have the energy to mobilize themselves. The 1960s proved them wrong.²¹⁹

²¹⁵Ibid. p.336

²¹⁶Ibid. p.339

²¹⁷Ibid. p.334

²¹⁸Ibid. p.335

²¹⁹Ibid. p.342

As should by now be clear from this historical introduction, the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was essentially the most recent of a long series of attempts by people of Mexican descent in the United States to eradicate the abuses and disadvantages of their minority status. The following chapter deals with that Movement.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

1. Background.

Into the 1960's Mexican Americans continued to suffer discrimination in employment and education. Although they were not as strictly segregated as blacks, "No Mexicans Allowed" signs were still common in some states.¹ Despite this lamentable situation, Mexican Americans continued to support the Democratic Party. In 1960 many worked in *Viva Kennedy* clubs seeking to harness the Mexican American vote for John F. Kennedy to the American presidency. This strategy was given force by the conviction of political analysts that the Mexican American vote was gaining importance as a swing vote and, coupled with the fact that the early years of the decade saw the appointment of Mexican Americans to prominent political positions, there existed the illusion that Mexican Americans were advancing politically. This was not, in fact, the case, as those appointed "effectively served the interest of the rich" and did not identify with the majority of Mexican Americans, who were economically disadvantaged.² These politicians did not believe there was any need for the creation of a third party in American politics, but preferred to press the existing party system to allow for greater Mexican American participation.³ The result was that these congressmen, despite their recognition of the historical contributions of the Mexican Americans in the building of the United States and their support for cultural preservation and bilingual education, were unable to rally the entire Mexican American community.⁴

Meanwhile, the Democratic party attempted to illustrate its concern for minority groups. In 1964 the Economic Opportunity Act came into being, followed by the War on Poverty

¹Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, New York, Harper and Row, 1981 p.350

²*Ibid.* p.352

³John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jensen, and José Angel Gutiérrez: *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s*, Westport Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1985 p.113

⁴*Ibid.* p.117

federal programme. These were designed to attack the causes of poverty through community participation in education, neighbourhood youth corps and community-action programmes. These moves raised expectations. Yet, instituted as they were under the presidency of the conservative Lyndon B. Johnson, they were fundamentally a self-serving strategy designed to "insure a coalition of labor and ethnic peoples to support the Democratic Party".⁵ Therefore, the expectations they engendered failed to materialise. Many bureaucrats, ignorant of the problems encountered by Mexican Americans, implemented most programmes within the black community.⁶ It was the breaking of this "black-white syndrome" and the traditional allegiance of Mexican Americans to the Democratic Party, which occupied the new Chicano leaders:

out of the frustrated aspirations of the Mexican American era a new and more militant politics emerged in the 1960's: the Chicano Movement.⁷

The youth of the 1960's, calling themselves Chicanos, rejected the politics of accommodation outlined above and, identifying with Third-World struggles and inspired by the Black civil rights movement, called for political and cultural self-determination.⁸ There followed over a decade of militancy which resulted in some tangible, if short-lived, gains for the Mexican American population as a whole.

⁵Acuña, op. cit. p.354

⁶Ibid. p.354

⁷Mario García, *La Frontera : The Border as a Symbol of Reality in Mexican American Thought*, in *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol.1 No. 2, University of California Press, Irvine, Summer 1985, p.214

⁸Ibid. p.214

2. The Early Years.

The aims of the early Chicano movement issued from primarily rural sectors of the Spanish-speaking population, for whom the issue of a migrant lifestyle due to landlessness and exploitation by agribusiness was central. Two leaders emerged to address the rights of these people; Reies López Tijerina in New Mexico and César Chávez in California. Both of these men were, in different ways, religious, and employed a rhetoric of family, morality and belief in God in their speeches, which appealed to the rural poor. The charismatic López Tijerina was born in 1926 in farm fields in Texas and "lived a marginal existence" following crops.⁹ Although he received only six months of formal education, he nonetheless "possessed natural rhetorical gifts" which were to be invaluable to him.¹⁰ Tijerina spent three years at a Baptist Assembly of God Bible College before beginning to preach. In 1950, having lost his minister's credentials due to disagreement with church officials, he became an itinerant preacher of fundamentalist Christianity. Following a failed attempt to found a "utopian religious commune in Arizona", he wandered into northern New Mexico in 1958, where he discovered a people "more concerned with regaining their land than with securing their souls".¹¹ There he began to study the question of the *mercedes*, or land granted by the Spanish Crown to Spanish settlers, and focus on the violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. American disregard for these legal transactions had resulted in poverty and landlessness for the present-day Spanish-speaking inhabitants. Article 6 of the United States Constitution, in which treaties are described as "THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND," allowed Tijerina to point out the constitutional violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹² He soon concluded that the National Forest in Tierra Amarilla belonged to the

⁹Acuña, op. cit. p.362

¹⁰Hammerback, Jensen and Gutiérrez, op. cit. p.15

¹¹Ibid. p.15

¹²Ibid. p.19

Pueblo de San Joaquín de Chama. As this had previously been communal land it was therefore not legally saleable and the American Government had therefore obtained it fraudulently.¹³

For Tijerina, a landless people become nomads. He held that migrancy had, in fact, been the lot of the Chicanos since 1848.¹⁴ Tijerina was convinced that the Chicanos' future depended on regaining land and so, in 1963 he founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes with the objective of restituting stolen lands to New Mexican Chicanos.¹⁵ Nonetheless, despite his charges against the American government, as he thought the legality of his cause was self-evident, he was confident that the American legal system would make reparation if the New Mexican claimants presented their case effectively.¹⁶ He sought to inform what he called the heirs further by citing Ordinance 99, granted by King Philip II of Spain in the Laws of the Indies. This document prioritized the heirs' right to keep their land over any other economic or political right.¹⁷ Tijerina also went to Mexico to present his case to the government there and travelled to Spain to further his research. He led marches on the state capital and prepared a petition to the United States Senate. Many people placed their trust in him and his Alianza swelled to between 10,000 and 15,000 members. The preacher rallied the rural poor to the cause by speaking wherever listeners might gather. A consummate public speaker, Tijerina, credited as having "the drawing power and persuasive tongue of a Latin Moses", brought new members in through his charisma and dynamic speaking style.¹⁸ Seeking to identify with his audiences, he re-embraced Catholicism and employed parables replete with Bible imagery and moral sentiment. He also displayed a "distinctly rhetorical orientation to

¹³Acuña, *op. cit.* pp.362-363

¹⁴Hammerback, Jensen and Gutiérrez, *op. cit.* p.152

¹⁵Wayne Moquin, Charles Van Doren, and Feliciano Rivera, *A Documentary History of the Mexican Americans*, New York, Praeger, 1971 p452

¹⁶Hammerback, Jensen and Gutiérrez *op. cit.* p.18

¹⁷*Ibid.* p.19

¹⁸*Ibid.* p.14

the workings of the world" and believed that God could control events on earth. He claimed that he, Tijerina, in the form of dreams, received divine blueprints for the future. In this way he combined his religious belief with his political objectives.¹⁹

Tijerina also referred to the question of the identity of the people who followed him. He defined them as *Indo-Hispanos*, a people forged from an Indian union with Spanish blood. He popularized the notion that:

the Chicanos' baptismal papers as a people are to be found in the *Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias*, (sic) documents that legitimized marriages between Spaniards and Native American women.²⁰

To unify his followers he extended the concept of family to his entire race and set the scene for the cultural nationalism which emerged later in the Chicano Movement by arguing that they constituted "a superior new breed of people".²¹ He also appealed to the power of manhood and invoked the power of public opinion and sought to empower the heirs to become persuasive communicators themselves.²² Stan Steiner summarises Tijerina's gifts in the following manner:

He does not make a speech; he enacts the history of the village. He performs all the roles in the historical pageant he recites. He is the lawyer, judge, victim, preacher, sufferer, farmer, oracle, avenger and holy prophet. When he performs the ritual which everybody knows by heart, he embodies all the voices, in falsetto, in basso, in sotto voce, in heroics, in anguish, in English, in Spanish; for he suffers the history of La Raza for everyone in the audience, as they have always told it themselves.²³

¹⁹Ibid pp.16-18

²⁰Ibid. p.152

²¹Ibid. p.22

²²Ibid. pp.20-21

²³Stan Steiner quoted in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p23-24

Tijerina was often arrested, his most publicised act being an entrance into the Tierra Amarilla courthouse to make a citizens' arrest of District Attorney Alfonso Sánchez. Shooting occurred and Tijerina was pursued and caught, although a verdict of not guilty was later reached.²⁴ Although Tijerina never realised his dream of recuperating the land for the rural poor, César Chávez, the only nationally prominent Chicano Movement figure heading a large organization, achieved some success, in the form of civil rights for landless farmworkers, against huge odds. Born in Yuma, Arizona, in 1927, the son of a migrant worker, his family went on the road when he was ten years old and he was forced to eke out "a seventh-grade education in some three dozen farm community schools".²⁵ In 1952 Chávez, who was a Roman Catholic, "found concrete goals for his Christian convictions" when Father Donald McDonnell, who ministered to migrant workers, persuaded him to fight for social and legal justice for farmworkers.²⁶ His starting point was the *Rerum Novarum* papal encyclical supporting labour unions and social justice.²⁷ Chávez, discovering that the clergy lacked organising skills, sought them in the Community Service Organization, set up to help poor people and working class Mexican Americans obtain their rights.²⁸ Believing that organization leads to power, Chávez learned techniques such sit-downs, boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, mass meetings and picketing from Saul Alinsky, CSO leader and author of *Reveille for Radicals*. Alinsky condemned the "third-act mentality" of liberals:

They want to skip the first two acts, all the tediousness of organizing. It doesn't work that way. If you want drama, get a movement; if you want results, you've got to have an organization.²⁹

²⁴Acuña, op. cit. pp.363-364

²⁵John Gregory Dunne, *Delano: The Story of the California Grape Strike*, New York, Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1967 p.5

²⁶Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.36

²⁷Acuña, op. cit. p.269

²⁸Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.36

²⁹Dunne, op. cit. pp.55-56

Chávez was aware of this and was very patient. He also began to gain confidence in addressing people and learned to read and write properly.³⁰ However, feeling that it was "veering too far from its radical origins," Chávez left the CSO in 1962 and went to Delano, California, to build a union with his savings of \$1,200.³¹ He chose Delano as it had a substantial all-year working population, a crucial factor in any organizing effort. On arriving Chávez hand-drew a map of eighty-six nearby towns and decided to visit them all to gain supporters. He recalls: "For six months I travelled around, planting an idea".³² As his family was in financial difficulty, he had to ask the homes he visited for food. The first year was very hard, as Chávez worked in the fields all day and attended house meetings almost every night, but he persevered.³³ Initially his approach was to focus on the nationalistic Mexican farmworkers, both foreign and native born, as he knew the importance of nationalism in solidifying an organization. He put all the workers:

under a red flag with the thunderbird symbol and a banner of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* ³⁴

and created the most lasting symbol of the Chicano struggle for justice. As the Mexican flag bore an eagle, Chávez chose to put the black Aztec eagle in the centre of the union flag, "to give the people something they could identify with". His cousin was charged with the responsibility of drawing an Aztec eagle but, as he had some trouble with it, it was modified "to make it easier for people to draw".³⁵ Although much emphasis has been placed on this Aztec symbolism it is also very clear that Chávez initially rallied support through the depiction of the Virgin of Guadalupe, already a powerful symbol of nationalism in Mexico.

³⁰Ibid. p. 69

³¹Ibid. pp.71-72

³²Ibid. p.72

³³Ibid. p.73

³⁴Acuña, op. cit. p.270

³⁵Luis Leal, *Aztlán y México: Perfiles literarios e históricos*, Binghamton, New York, Bilingual Press, 1985 p.22

As is evident from his care in designing the union flag in such a way as to make it easily copiable, Chávez's watchword was, and remained, simplicity. In his work, although he relied heavily on statistics, he also used simple language, having learned from experience that clear illustrations and examples worked better than philosophising - "you have to draw a simple picture and color it in".³⁶ When speaking to Chicanos he used *dichos* and *cuentos* from Mexican and Chicano oral culture, as had Tijerina, and even more so than Tijerina, he proved himself to be a member of the group he was aiming to represent.

By 1964 Chávez's National Farmworkers Association was self-supporting and by 1965 it had enrolled some 1,700 families. The union won the enthusiastic support of civil rights activists, many of whom left the South to join it in Delano. Chávez, however, proceeded with caution, reasoning that:

You can't strike and organize at the same time (...) If you don't have the organization, the strike is going to be broken.³⁷

Chávez believed that his workers would be ready for the kind of strike he had long envisioned "in the fall of 1968". Nonetheless, the strike began three years ahead of schedule.³⁸ September 8th, 1965 was the key date. Filipino members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee struck the grape growers of Delano in the San Joaquín Valley. Their leader, Larry Itliong, sought the support of Chávez, but due to the racial antagonism which had tinged both groups, Chávez was reluctant to commit his ill-prepared forces to such a situation. The NFWA members, however, wanted to strike and so Chávez, backed into a corner, decided that to ignore the strike would be worse than to join it. The

³⁶Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.37

³⁷Dunne, op. cit. p.74

³⁸Ibid. p.76

strike vote was unanimous and leadership, due to the preponderance of Mexicans in the strike body, fell into Chávez's hands.³⁹

From the outset Chávez sought outside support from church and civil rights groups, and spotlighted the situation in Delano as a moral issue.⁴⁰ The California Migrant Ministry (an adjunct of the National Council of Churches) had long been involved with farmworkers' labour problems and lent their support, but as the Mexican strikers were Catholic, Chávez also wanted the support of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the Delano clergy did not back them up and rejected the notion that the strike was a moral issue. Members of the Catholic clergy from other areas did, however, support Chávez, despite censure from higher church authorities.⁴¹

Meanwhile the picketers continued to strike ranch after ranch, keeping scab labour away from the fields. Chávez worried about the conflicting exercise of union building and maintaining a strike as he lacked the trained organisers to do both. The strike was costing \$25,000 a month by the summer of 1966 and urgently needed the contributions being received from the United Auto Workers and other unions. The proceeds from a Pete Seeger concert also went to Delano.⁴²

The first breakthrough for the union was in 1966 when grape growers and other corporations capitulated and met union demands that they provide contracts.⁴³ A second, no less central issue of the strike, that of union recognition, was also successful. The farmworkers' union succeeded in achieving the promise of union elections from growers

³⁹Dunne, *op. cit.* pp.79-80

⁴⁰*Ibid.* p.80

⁴¹*Ibid.* pp.81-82

⁴²*Ibid.* pp.93-94

⁴³Acuña, *op. cit.* p.270

and, despite intimidation, the NFWA was to compete with the Teamsters in August 1966 for the farmworkers' vote.⁴⁴ As the elections approached, Chávez was under pressure to feed the strikers and to keep eligible voters in Delano and so he reluctantly merged the NFWA with the Agricultural Workers' Organising Committee to form the United Farmworkers Organizing Committee. The UFWOC countered the circulation of right-wing John Birch Society pamphlets with copies of Robert Kennedy's indictment of the Teamsters, *The Enemy Within*. The United Farm Workers won the election.⁴⁵

Apart from the strike, the union's principal weapon was the grape boycott. This was employed due to its effect on the two biggest ranches in Delano, the Di Giorgio Corporation and Schenley Industries Inc., which had sales outlets throughout the nation as well as scores of contracts with other unions. Holding a strike in a rural area meant fighting the growers in their own setting, where they were able to call on powers from the police and courts to break the picket line. The boycott, on the other hand, meant getting the strike out of Delano.⁴⁶ Not only this, but Chávez's use of the boycott fell into line with two of his fundamental convictions. Just as Tijerina had believed in the American legal system, Chávez believed in the goodwill of the American public and one of the main reasons for the boycott was that he thought the American public would respond affirmatively. This was because:

not only the American public, but people in general throughout the world will respond to a cause that involves injustice. It's just natural to want to be with the underdog.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid. p.270

⁴⁵Ibid. p.271

⁴⁶Bob Fitch: 'Tilting with the System: An Interview with César Chávez' in F. Chris García, (ed) *La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1974 pp.361-2

⁴⁷Ibid. p.360

The boycott strategy involved the general public in a practical way; by refusing to buy grapes, they were helping the cause. Public opinion was his "human arbiter" in the struggle for justice.⁴⁸ The boycott was also an expression of Chávez's belief in the effectiveness of non-violence. On the first morning of the strike the union leader told workers to leave behind "a gun or a knife or anything sharp" and took a vote to strike non-violently.⁴⁹ Chávez attributed this stance to the *dichos* used to explain non-violence by his mother, an "illiterate pacifist". He believed violence to be "highly out of the ordinary".⁵⁰

Chávez's heavy reliance on the public meant informing them and he did so by seeking a broad audience that would receive his message. By 1965 he was speaking to "the campesino and college students alike",⁵¹ adapting his rhetoric to the immediate audience:

If you were a church group, I would tell you it's a struggle for social justice. And if you were a group of labor I'd tell you it's a struggle for economic justice. And you're a group of students, so I tell you plainly, very simply, it's a struggle against the power structure.⁵²

This broadening of the cause frequently meant emphasizing union issues over ethnic questions and regarding union issues as part of the struggle for civil rights. Therefore, Chávez's desire for justice extended far beyond Chicanos and his cause championed needy people regardless of race.⁵³ Therefore, the UFW was not conceptualized as just another union but as a family bound together in a common struggle to change the conditions of human life.⁵⁴ The boycott was "an extension of love from one human being to the other"

⁴⁸Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.38

⁴⁹Dunne, op. cit. p.80

⁵⁰Fitch, op. cit. pp.364-5

⁵¹Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.36

⁵²Ibid. p.41

⁵³Ibid. p. 42

⁵⁴Ibid. p.37

creating a chain reaction with "tremendous consequences for good".⁵⁵ Optimistically, Chávez believed that once a boycott was in motion:

nothing on this good earth will stop it - except a signed contract.⁵⁶

The grape boycott was stepped up in 1967 when companies illegally re-labelled their products to escape it. European and Canadian consumers had obliged the UFW by stopping buying American grapes and so, to compensate for the losses, the United States Defense Department bought huge quantities of grapes to ship to soldiers in Vietnam, thus reducing the pressure on the growers. By 1970, however, by which time almost all of the striking farmworkers had lost their homes in the five-year battle, most of the California table grape industry had signed three-year contracts and gains included the provision of a fair basic wage and a health insurance system. Clothing to protect workers from pesticides was to be provided and safety regulations were to be displayed in Spanish and other native languages. The exploitative labour contractor system was replaced by a hiring hall method.⁵⁷ The union built on its gains "coordinating its administration of contracts and its boycott activities" until 1973, until which time its activities resulted in "tangible progress for the workers of the soil" and contributed impetus to the Chicano movement.⁵⁸ Yet, while the UFW inspired Chicanos everywhere, it was:

a trade union that promoted the interests of a specific interest group rather than Chicanos as a whole.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Ibid. p.42

⁵⁶Ibid. p.44

⁵⁷Acuña, op. cit. pp.271-272

⁵⁸Ibid. p.268

⁵⁹Ibid. p.360

Therefore, it was left to other groups, many of them involved with Chicano youth, to fill the organizational void in urban areas. While concerned with civil rights, as Chávez and Tijerina had been, and inspired by their activities in Delano and New Mexico, these groups were also keen to determine the nature of the Chicano's identity in the United States. Unlike Chávez, they believed that the question of the Chicano's race was fundamental and like Tijerina they were drawn to indigenist definitions of the Chicano. Common to the groups which emerged - the Chicano student movement, the Crusade for Justice, the Brown Berets and the Raza Unida Party - was a preoccupation with politics, education and culture and an initial radicalization of politics which cut across class, regional and generational lines.⁶⁰ The beginnings around 1966 of this movement reflected the mobilisation taking place within American society as a whole. The growing social protest by young people in general was given impetus by the Cuban Revolution and the very unpopular war in Vietnam.⁶¹ The first issue addressed was that of education, as this was seen as the best hope for a politically powerless, landless and often migrant population.

In 1966 the Fourth Annual Chicano Student Conference, composed primarily of high school students and their adult counsellors, was held in Los Angeles. With a focus on community work, it proposed group action led by students, resulting in food drives and fund raising for the Delano farmworkers.⁶² At the Piranya Coffee House, (sic) high school teacher Sal Castro addressed students on issues such as quality education and their right to learn. Also discussed were walkout strategies to be carried out in high schools in order to articulate student demands.⁶³ A focus of concern among college students was the 1965 Higher Education Act, intended to provide disadvantaged students with educational opportunity

⁶⁰Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Mexican Students Por la Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California 1967-1977*, Santa Barbara, Editorial La Causa, 1978 p.13

⁶¹Ibid. p.11

⁶²Ibid. pp.17-18

⁶³Acuña, op. cit. p.357

grants. This had not been properly implemented by many colleges and Chicano students advanced this issue as a major grievance.⁶⁴ By 1967 only "a handful of Chicano students" were enrolled at colleges and universities in Los Angeles but despite their scarcity, and influenced by the United Farmworkers, they founded student organizations.⁶⁵ A conference at Loyola University allowed Chicano students from 15 campuses to discuss many issues, as well as their ethnic identity, and a central organization, the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) was formed.⁶⁶ This activity attracted some attention. The late senator Robert Kennedy met with Chicano students to discuss the Chicanos' new positive sense of identity, based on racial pride, and their political aspirations for their community. Kennedy's response to the students' emphasis that they were Americans and Chicanos but not Anglos, (or white European middle-class) was that he was aware of this, and of other issues, but that Mexican Americans had not made use of their political potential to create reform. They themselves would have to make real changes happen as these would not come from Washington.⁶⁷ Chicano students also heard more radical messages from López Tijerina and another major Chicano activist, Corky González and the Black leader Stokely Carmichael, speaking at an anti-war rally in East Los Angeles and:

were left with lasting thoughts on the similarities of Black and Brown oppression.⁶⁸

However, in the meantime, for the students, educational issues were of the highest priority. Chicano students and Black Student unions united to push for the creation of the Educational Opportunity Program, which was established on the principle that everyone should have the

⁶⁴Ibid. p.356

⁶⁵Ibid. p.355

⁶⁶Marguerite Viramontes Marín, *Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1980, pp.154-5

⁶⁷Ibid. p.156

⁶⁸Ibid. p.157

opportunity to attend college. It sought to circumvent the admissions requirements that often discriminated against minority students whose high school education had not been of sufficient quality to realise student potential. High school students lent their support. In 1969 a series of high school "blowouts" or walkouts in East Los Angeles was led by the United Mexican American Students.⁶⁹ Some 10,000 barrio high school students faced police aggression to protest against the 50% dropout rate among Chicanos, due to expulsion, or transfers, or because they were functionally illiterate and had thus failed their courses.⁷⁰ Students wanted racist teachers removed, and attacked a curriculum designed to erase their culture and prepare them to accept low-skilled jobs. They demanded bilingual education by Mexican American teachers and Chicano Studies Programmes where their culture and history might be taught.⁷¹ Important gains were being made. In 1968 the first Mexican American Studies programme was established at Los Angeles State College and by end of the following year some fifty programmes were in operation in California.⁷² Chicano youth sought to persuade the university to serve the same functions for the Chicano community as it did for the Anglo community, that is, to better the human condition.⁷³ In 1969 the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* was drawn up at the University of California at Santa Barbara. This Chicano plan for higher education was formulated in part by UMAS members who had become more radical and renamed their organization the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA). With an emphasis not only on education and claiming a right to self-determination as a people, the Chicano drafters, including faculty and community delegates from all over the state, recognized the importance of higher education for the development of the Chicano community. They reaffirmed the call for the admission of Chicano students, faculty administrators and staff, and a curriculum relevant to the Chicano experience. They

⁶⁹Ibid. p.157

⁷⁰Acuña, op. cit. p.357

⁷¹Ibid. p.357

⁷²Ibid. pp.356-357

⁷³Marín, op. cit. p.169

demanded tutorial, research and publication programmes and community cultural and social action centres.⁷⁴ The conclusion of the Plan quoted Mexican educator and philosopher, José Vasconcelos:

At this moment we do not come to work for the university, but to demand that the university work for our people.⁷⁵

Chicano students, then, fought to make education accessible and relevant to their people, as a first step towards improving their social and political standing in the United States. It is from this student sector that the philosophy of *chicanismo* emerged. Nonetheless, non-students were also active and it is through reference to the leader of the Crusade for Justice, dedicated to urban youth, that the philosophy of *chicanismo* can most clearly be illustrated.

Corky González's militant rhetoric resulted in his being credited with making the greatest contribution to "the spirit, ideology and philosophy of the Chicano movement".⁷⁶ Rodolfo "Corky" González was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1928. In his youth he worked in the fields and lived "in the city slums".⁷⁷ He became a successful boxer and when he left the ring he opened a free boxing gymnasium in the barrio and became active in politics, and successful in business, by the age of twenty-nine. He was regarded as a hero by the barrio youth, as he:

beat the Anglo with his fists, then he outsmarted them with his brains.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Ibid. p.174

⁷⁵*Plan de Santa Bárbara*, Santa Barbara, La Causa Publications, 1970.

⁷⁶Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.76

⁷⁷Stan Steiner, 'The Poet in the Boxing Ring' in F. Chris García (ed) *La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1974 p.323

⁷⁸Ibid. p.323

He was the first Chicano to be a district captain in the Denver Democratic Party and in 1960 he was the Colorado coordinator of the *Viva Kennedy* campaign. In 1965 González became a director of one of the War on Poverty programmes and was tipped for state or national political office but he became disenchanted with the poverty programmes and party politics and scorned the "brave words, promises, motions - and no action".⁷⁹ He was fired a year later for being too outspoken and realised he had been used by the Democratic Party because he had a rapport with his people.⁸⁰ In 1966, in the barrio of downtown Denver, González founded an organization which he called the Crusade for Justice. Sickened by American political practice, leading to "the destruction of moral man in this society", he believed the American two-party system to be "the same animal with two heads that feeds from the same trough" and regarded Chicano leaders as "castrated" when co-opted by the establishment.⁸¹ The Chicano, he believed, was always "a pawn in the political game" and that participating in the political system as it was would lead only to defeat. The Democratic strategies of presenting an attractive philosophy to Chicanos, without implementing it, and of giving a few of them jobs which sounded important but were not, were rejected by González as insulting. Thus he sought to establish an organization independent of paternalistic private agencies controlled by the establishment.⁸² Somewhat similar in mission to the mutual aid societies of previous decades, the Crusade for Justice emphasized community and family participation and provided educational, legal, medical and financial services for Chicanos. Also included were the School of Liberation classes, a library and a barrio newspaper. In 1967 González published the immensely influential epic poem "Yo soy Joaquín",⁸³ which identified with "the frustrations of the *vato* and the barrio youth," who were alienated from

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.324

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.325

⁸¹ Hammerback et. al., op. cit. pp.60-61

⁸² Steiner, op. cit. p.325

⁸³ Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.54

the Spanish language as they had been punished for speaking it at school.⁸⁴ The Crusade for Justice was, then:

a vehicle by which the objectives and priorities of the Chicano movement could be articulated and carried out.⁸⁵

González offered an elaborate analysis of the Chicano's unenviable position in the United States. Like the students, González attacked the American educational system for conditioning Chicanos to identify with the Anglo image of success based solely on the acquisition of money and material goods. He believed Chicanos to lose their true sense of identity in the pursuit of this image. This was because the achievement of success on the Anglo's terms necessitated the rejection of their own values, language and heritage. González further argued that in the United States the Mexican-American had become associated with defeat. He argued that this was a negative distortion reinforced through the teaching of American history. The legal system also make the Chicano "the bad guy". By supporting police attacks on Chicanos, and excluding them from participating in juries, the legal system prevented them from having recourse to justice.⁸⁶ Not only this, but negative stereotypes disseminated through the American media reinforced the image of Chicanos as bandits, pimps and prostitutes, and helped condition them into accepting an inferior social status. González believed that such brainwashing created a desire on the part of the Chicano to escape the barrio and his past and attempt to receive social acceptance and material prosperity from the Anglo dominant society. To combat this flight from the barrio, which divided Chicanos and prevented them from organising within their culture, - or perhaps more accurately, given the focus on the barrio, their cultural enclaves - the Chicanos had to have a

⁸⁴Ibid. p.54

⁸⁵Meier and Rivera in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.55

⁸⁶Hammerback et. al., op. cit. pp.61-63

pride in their own heritage which would contribute to a strong and positive self-image.⁸⁷ González also highlighted the process carried out by Anglo society of mainstreaming cultural artifacts it found pleasing for its own benefit; he accused it of "robbing" from Chicano culture what it considered positive, belittling the rest. Nonetheless:

the materialistic Anglo unwittingly left intact the heart of the Chicano culture, the spirit and soul of Chicanismo, and thereby ensured the beginning of a new Chicano nationalism.⁸⁸

In fact, González called his Crusade for Justice "the philosophy of nationalism with a human form" and sought to tap the Chicano nationalism he claimed already existed in the Southwest. He believed that even the "vendido," or cultural and political sell-out who had flown from the barrio, would come home to La Raza if centres of nationalism were created to embrace him.⁸⁹ This Chicano nationalism, or *chicanismo*, was a response to the perception by some Chicanos that the barrios were internal colonies within the United States and the Chicanos therefore a colonized people.⁹⁰ Writers such as Barrera argued, like González, that as racial discrimination and exploitation at the hands of the dominant society lay at the root of their unenviable social status, and not debilitating "factors inherent to Chicano culture", the politics of accommodation and cultural assimilation were consequently seen to be irrelevant.⁹¹ Chicanos therefore blamed their failure to integrate, not on their "inferior" culture, but on a racist society, and refused to accept that there was anything in their own culture which made them unable to participate in American society.⁹² They held that, unlike in the case of white European immigrants, social mobility and integration were simply not

⁸⁷Ibid. pp.63-64

⁸⁸Ibid. p.66

⁸⁹Steiner, op. cit. p.326

⁹⁰Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz and Charles Ornelas, 'The Barrio as an Internal Colony' in F. Chris Garcia, (ed)*La Causa Política*, Indiana, Notre Dame Press, 1974, p.282

⁹¹Barrera, et. al., op. cit. pp.284-285

⁹²Ibid. p.287

available to Chicanos. Because of their race the Chicano population in its totality was seen to be dominated and exploited, with all its distinct classes, by the American population which also had distinct classes.⁹³ Integral to Chicano life was, firstly:

an experience of being managed and manipulated by outsiders in terms of ethnic status⁹⁴

and, secondly, the experience of racism:

a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in terms of alleged biological characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and psychically by a superordinate group.⁹⁵

A Chicano, "one sufficiently Caucasian in appearance", might escape this colonial status by assuming Anglo values and renouncing his own. This, however, would produce a "non-colonized non-Chicano" and set the Chicanos on the path to cultural genocide.⁹⁶ Chicanos, according to these writers, believed in the value of their culture and wished to see it develop "according to its own internal logic". They did not wish to trade "a genuine human culture" for:

a bland, dehumanized, consumer-oriented, made-in-America mass culture.⁹⁷

It should be made clear, however, that in fact, Chicanos did *not* simply cling to the notion that they should stay in cultural enclaves or colonies in the barrio and turn their backs on social mobility, as González's rhetoric would imply. Barrera's thought illustrates that Chicanos *were* desirous of achieving greater material prosperity, but without the loss of their

⁹³Ibid. p.288

⁹⁴Ibid. p.288

⁹⁵Ibid. p.288

⁹⁶Ibid. p.290

⁹⁷Ibid. pp.295-296

cultural uniqueness, their language and their customs. It was this cultural purpose which was uppermost in the minds of the Chicanos at this point, and a crucial step in the direction towards affirming Chicano cultural values was the 1969 First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference convened by the Crusade for Justice in Denver's barrio. Its purpose was both cultural and political as it was to give direction to young people, disinclined to "identify with these old políticos, those old figureheads",⁹⁸ yet cultural change, through cultural, rather than political, nationalism, was seen as the bedrock of advancement.

The Denver Conference was an uplifting affair. Over 1,500 young campesinos, activists, graduates and gang members attended workshops in philosophy, self-defence, poetry and identity. *Actos* and music formed a backdrop.⁹⁹ Chicano cultural values were to strengthen their unity and identity and provide the moral backbone of the movement.¹⁰⁰ Cultural awareness through racial pride was to lead the Chicano to political liberation through the acquisition of political power. During the conference, young Chicanos aimed to redefine themselves in their own terms away from those issuing from "the Anglo-Saxon, male, Protestant state", which was conceived to "keep Mexicans in their place".¹⁰¹ To this end emerged the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, intended to combat divisiveness among Mexican Americans. Nationalism, transcending all political beliefs, meant that Mexican Americans had to be Chicanos first and everything else second; nationalism was to be the key common denominator in the struggle.¹⁰² Among other requirements, it meant that the youth were to be taught the contributions of their people to the building of the Southwest. They had to be

⁹⁸Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.56

⁹⁹Steiner, op. cit. pp.327-8

¹⁰⁰Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.67

¹⁰¹Alurista, 'Cultural Nationalism and Chicano Literature: 1965-75', in Renate von Bardeleben, Dietrich Briesemeister and Juan Bruce-Novoa (eds), *Missions in Conflict: Essays on U.S.-Mexican Relations and Chicano Culture*, Mainz, Germany, Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, UC MEXUS UCSB and Johannes Gutenberg Universität p.41

¹⁰²Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.73

fully aware that, unlike other immigrant groups, Chicanos did not put down anchor on the East coast and had to know where they had come from. To this end the concept of *Aztlán* became a "contemporary metaphor for a nation in the making".¹⁰³

3. *Aztlán* and La Raza.

The Chicano poet Alurista was responsible for the beginnings of the revival of the Aztec myth of *Aztlán* as a symbol of Chicano nationalism. He spoke of it in a class for Chicanos at San Diego State University in 1968 but, generally:

antes de marzo de 1969, fecha del Congreso de Denver, no se hablaba de *Aztlán*.¹⁰⁴

Alurista was:

the originator and main exponent of the Amerindian ideology of *Aztlán*, which synthesizes a Chicano identity, drawing from the Mexican indigenous heritage and the actual realities of barrio living in the United States.¹⁰⁵

Aztlán is first and foremost a term pertaining to origin. The name of the Aztecs themselves derives from the term *Aztlán* as, according to the Nahuatl myth, it was the place from where their original ancestors had set out to find the promised land. According to mythology, the god Huitzilopochtli told them that they would identify their destination by the sight of an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a serpent. In this manner the Aztecs occupied the central Valley of Mexico and built the great city of Tenochtitlán.¹⁰⁶ The settled and civilized Aztecs

¹⁰³Alurista, op. cit. p.43

¹⁰⁴Luis Leal, op. cit. p.24

¹⁰⁵Alurista, op. cit. p.47

¹⁰⁶Leal, op. cit. p.23

later associated Aztlán, the place of their origin, with an earthly paradise and, indeed, in the fifteenth century, Moctezuma Ilhuicamina sent his priests, in vain, in search of it.¹⁰⁷ Although the Aztecs believed Aztlán to be a place of whiteness, of herons and of primeval caves, where their ancestors found rest and happiness, as in the case of the myth of Atlantis, the locus of Aztlán remains unknown. This has not prevented many scholars from offering possible geographical sites, such as Nayarit in Mexico. Some have written that California was the location; indeed, one scholar in 1969 presented a case for the fixing of the site in Santa Barbara. Whatever the case, Luis Leal stresses that the contemporary task of the Chicano is to document the renaissance of the myth in Chicano thought, rather than to determine the site of the mythical paradise.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, those who drafted the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, not content with the metaphorical import of the term, *did* attempt to locate Aztlán geographically. They affirmed that in Nahuatl Aztlán meant "the lands to the north" and concluded that its site was in the American Southwest, the part of Mexico ceded to the United States in 1848. Therefore, the Chicanos in the 1960s embraced their Aztec Indian origins and regarded themselves as inhabiting the ancient land of their forefathers.¹⁰⁹ Although apparently neatly apt, this theory overlooked the simple fact that not all Mexicans were descendants of the Aztecs.

The *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* went on to address a further matter of importance to Chicanos. It echoed the importance of land to the Mexican American community, as Tijerina had done, and reaffirmed one of the principles of the Mexican Revolution; that the land belongs to those who work it.¹¹⁰ With the Plan, the definition of "land" as a small plot sustaining a family, expanded to be equated with the concepts of country and national territory. Therefore, in

¹⁰⁷Ibid. p.23

¹⁰⁸Ibid. p.24

¹⁰⁹Ibid. p.25

¹¹⁰Ibid. p.25

Denver, Chicanos reclaimed Aztlán and took upon themselves, as their cultural and political destiny, responsibility for the self-determination of their people. Deeming themselves "free and sovereign", and appealing to the notion of a rural idyll - unencumbered and unsupported by facts - they declared that:

Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields and gather the crops, and not to the foreign Europeans.¹¹¹

Therefore, although Aztlán symbolized the spiritual union carried in the hearts of Chicanos regardless of their place of residence,¹¹² many militant nationalists sought complete political control of their communities, and in response to the logical political overtones of Aztlán, dreamed of achieving a separate state, drawn up according to the principle of the Chicanos' racial uniqueness.¹¹³ In the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlan* there was an attempt to combine the nationalism of Aztlán with Chicano racial pride. The Plan heralded "a pride in being brown" to counteract the Anglo equation of brownness with inferiority.¹¹⁴ This was to allow the individual Chicano to develop a new image of himself and an increasing solidarity with his community and his ethnic group.¹¹⁵ The *Plan de Aztlán* reaffirmed the independence of "a Mestizo Nation" and described Chicanos as "a Bronze People with a Bronze Culture".¹¹⁶ As we have seen through the metaphor of Aztlán, the redefinition of the Chicano identity meant a search for the historical self which preceded the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Chicanos, however, further sought "a continental identity" as they understood that:

¹¹¹'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán' in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner (eds) New York, Vintage Books, 1972 p.403

¹¹²Leal, op. cit. p.27

¹¹³Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.170

¹¹⁴Ibid. p.166

¹¹⁵Ibid. p.170

¹¹⁶'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán' in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, Luis Valdez, Stan Steiner, (eds) New York, Vintage Books, 1972 p.403

The United States was a country. America was a continent, a continent where mixed-blood Spanish-speaking people constituted the majority.¹¹⁷

These "mixed-blood Spanish-speaking people" were La Raza. Literally translated into English, "La Raza" means "The Race". In Spanish, however:

a conceptual expansion of the term means the birth of a new civilization. La Raza is the confluence of civilizations, a meeting of East and West, North and South in the Americas. La Raza is the family name of all mestizos, the children of European Spanish fathers and indigenous American mothers.¹¹⁸

At the time these two concepts empowered the Chicanos, as they made it clear to them that the creation of a Chicano third political party in the United States was the only solution to their oppression.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, the concepts of *Aztlán* and La Raza were, culturally and politically, fundamentally contradictory. The contradiction lay in exalting Aztec origin and a separatist Chicano state situated in the Southwest, while proclaiming the existence of a continental-wide unity of *mestizo* peoples. As this approach excluded politically Chicanos outwith the Southwest, not to mention most Latinos and Latin Americans, the subsequent political strategy for bringing about *Aztlán*, was confused.¹²⁰

Nonetheless, and in accordance with the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, in January 1970 the Raza Unida Party was founded in Texas. A founder member was José Angel Gutiérrez, a Chicano leader who was younger than Chávez, Tijerina and González and from a more privileged background. Born in Crystal City, Texas, in 1944, the son of a doctor, he was a school champion debater and:

¹¹⁷Luis Valdez in Alurista, op. cit. p.42

¹¹⁸Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.122

¹¹⁹Ibid. pp.60-61

¹²⁰Alurista, op. cit. p.44

the kind of student Anglos like to point to as an example of how a bright and ambitious Mexican American could get ahead.¹²¹

While still a university student in 1963, he successfully campaigned to have five Mexican Americans elected to the Crystal City Council. In a city which had been politically dominated by Anglos, despite a majority Mexican American population, this victory was, to Gutiérrez, a "revolution" as, for the first time, Mexican Americans in Texas had used the political process to exercise social change.¹²² Encouraged by this success, Gutiérrez went on to found the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) in 1967 and maintained that traditional Mexican American organizations were not developing young leadership.¹²³ Its goals were to gain control of the educational systems in Chicano communities; to end Anglo economic domination by fostering Chicano businesses and cooperatives and, importantly, to form a third political party.¹²⁴ The resultant La Raza Unida Party, which was to be an independent local, regional and national political party called for "a nation autonomously free", and as such, able to determine:

the usage of our lands, the taxation of our goods, the utilization of our bodies for war, the determination of justice (reward and punishment) and the profit of our sweat.¹²⁵

Clearly the confusion over the local siting of Aztlán and the use of the continent-wide term of La Raza led to a confusion over the use of the term "national" and "nation." The RUP could not reconcile the contradictory aims of canvassing, on a national basis, on behalf of Chicanos throughout the United States while at the same time establishing a separate new nation in the Southwest, specifically in Texas. This was the attempt, however. In March

¹²¹Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.82

¹²²José Angel Gutiérrez in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.83

¹²³Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.83

¹²⁴Ibid. p.84

¹²⁵'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán' in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature* Luis Valdez, Stan Steiner (eds) New York, Vintage Books, 1972 p.406

1970, Corky González founded the Colorado RUP and by 1971 there were indeed talks concerning the formation of a national party. This was due to some success. In California, by 1971 there were some 10,000 registrees in the party. The editor of *La Raza* magazine ran for the assembly in the 48th district and won sufficient votes to allow victory to go to the Republican candidate. This in turn forced the Democratic Party to run Chicano candidates in other districts. By 1972 in Crystal City, the RUP was in control of the Board of Education and had swept city and county elections. It had some 20,000 registrees in Texas and intended:

to produce constituencies to elect Mexican Americans to office who will promote the interests of Mexican Americans only.¹²⁶

Apart from this obviously racist stance, from the outset, however, there had been differences between Gutiérrez and González. At the first RUP Convention in Texas in 1972 a power struggle, won by Gutiérrez, emerged. González's "no compromise" attitude against the two major parties, and his desire for an independent national party, ran counter to Gutiérrez's desire to stay out of national politics until the RUP had consolidated at the local and state levels. The difference lay in the fact that Gutiérrez was a pragmatist "working within the Texas reality" whereas González had begun to evolve a class stand in his politics. Acuña writes:

González hated capitalism and the gringo, whereas Gutiérrez questioned who had the power and criticised the Chicanos' access to it.¹²⁷

The two men differed, then, in their approaches to support for the Chicano movement's goals. While González often alluded to analogous international struggles and the Crusade for

¹²⁶José Angel Gutiérrez quoted in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.95

¹²⁷Acuña, op. cit. p.389

Justice established working relationships with Third World peoples in the United States,¹²⁸ González nonetheless attacked Gutiérrez's negotiations with Mexico for cultural exchanges and scholarships as collusion with a "fascist" Mexican government.¹²⁹ José Angel Gutiérrez described the debate as follows:

González offered the delegates the classic, traditional Marxist position that La Raza Unida party ought to be a vanguard, elite, revolutionary vehicle for the masses of the Spanish-speaking community within the United States. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, proposed a pragmatic and strictly electoral approach to organizing the Chicano community.¹³⁰

It is clear, however, that neither sector of the organization evolved a clearly discernible class analysis and strategy in its activities, as is true of the Chicano Movement as a whole. Interestingly, also, despite the professed interest in the question of identity at this early stage, neither Gutiérrez nor González dwelt to any great extent on the definition of the appellation of *chicano*. Gutiérrez used the term as a "cohesive" label for Mexican Americans. Acknowledging the difficulty of tracing the origin and definition of the word, he suggested that Mexican Americans accept whichever definition suited them. His analysis of how the term worked for Mexican Americans was often overly simplistic. He believed that, as in the fifties when Mexicans who were different in terms of their lifestyle, language and aspirations, were called Pachucos, in the sixties and seventies those different and militant Mexicans, aggressive in pursuit of what he called their self-interest, were Chicanos. Gutiérrez concluded, "we know what a Chicano is because we are one".¹³¹

In this way the term Chicano is defined as a label of difference, but of what nature of difference remains undefined. Corky González in *I am Joaquín* uses many terms to refer to

¹²⁸Hammerback, et. al. op. cit. p.135

¹²⁹Acuña, op. cit. p.389

¹³⁰Hammerback, et. al. op. cit. p.157

¹³¹Ibid. p.87

the Chicano. These include, *La Raza, Mejicano, Español, Latino, Hispano, Chicano*, "or whatever I call myself".¹³² Therefore he also embraces an imprecise appellation. It appears, then, that the lack of definition in terms of cultural and ethnic identity was later reflected in the unclear and ultimately conflictive political analysis of the Raza Unida Party. While one's choice of identity was immaterial on a personal basis, when it came to political identity, accuracy was, conversely, crucial.

In the light of this equation of Chicano liberation with difference, in racial terms most radically expressed by Gutiérrez, in stark contrast to the UFW's approach, Gutiérrez's rhetoric of violence, again in contrast to the UFW's pacifism, was negatively received by the dominant society and more conservative Mexican American elements. Though he regarded Chicanos as reluctant to engage in acts of violence, Gutiérrez recognised the value of such actions, believing as he did, that threats were sometimes necessary. He lamented the fact that protest marches and other non-violent tactics were often not enough to publicise the cause.¹³³ He was not the only Chicano leader to hold such views. There was in existence a Los Angeles paramilitary organization which attracted Chicano "street youth". Advocating a cultural renaissance and change "by all means necessary", unlike other Eastside groups, the Brown Berets regarded themselves as "the liberation army of the Chicano people".¹³⁴ They reserved the right to use arms against any threatening elements from outside their community and traitors within.¹³⁵ Followers of Tijerina, fundamental to their actions was the issue of land, as they sought to regain control of Aztlán, of the Southwest, for Chicanos. The Brown Berets was founded by David Sánchez, who chose the brown beret as a symbol of the group's "pride, strength and cultural heritage".¹³⁶ Sánchez recruited "from the rebels

¹³²Corky González, *I Am Joaquín* in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.72

¹³³Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.93

¹³⁴Marguerite Marín, op. cit. p.123

¹³⁵Ibid. p.133

¹³⁶Ibid. pp.124-125

without a cause" to make them "rebels with a cause"¹³⁷ and by 1969 the organization had some ninety chapters.¹³⁸ The group stressed discipline, professionalism and service to the Chicano community and prohibited drugs and alcohol, but by 1968 this "quasi-military organization" was regarded as dangerous by the Los Angeles Police.¹³⁹ The Brown Berets, like the Raza Unida:

aroused a fear in Anglo-Americans that a Chicano group would counter US oppression with its own violence.¹⁴⁰

The Brown Berets were influenced by the ideas of third-world liberation movements and linked the struggles of Latin Americans and other peoples to their own.¹⁴¹ Therefore they demanded that the Mexican American border be an open one.¹⁴² They were also influenced by the Black Power Movement and had the full support of Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. Together, they attempted to end violence between Blacks and Chicanos.¹⁴³

Significantly, the Brown Berets were further founded on the belief that the "capitalistic mind" was the true oppressor of Chicanos and all peoples and had to be destroyed.¹⁴⁴ Businessmen, even Chicanos, - the *vendido* of Corky González's rhetoric - who exploited for benefit in the barrio, were to be expelled from the community as enemies of the Chicano. Therefore, like González, with their cry of "Chicano Power," they not only called for Chicano self-determination through the return of stolen lands and an end to police occupation of the community, but regarded the Chicanos as an exploited class as well as a race of people

¹³⁷Ibid. p.126

¹³⁸Ibid. p.129

¹³⁹Ibid. pp.127-128

¹⁴⁰Acuña, op. cit. p.359

¹⁴¹Marín, op. cit. p.130

¹⁴²Ibid. p.132

¹⁴³Ibid. p.140

¹⁴⁴Ibid. p.131

discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour.¹⁴⁵ This crucial understanding and others of a similar importance took the Chicano Movement into a second, more mature phase, in which it undertook to criticise and revise its early beliefs.

4. A Revision of Nationalism and Cultural Nationalism.

By the end of 1967 there was a growing awareness among Chicanos of the division between moderation and militancy as far as tactics and identity were concerned. This manifested itself as a conflict between accommodationists (or Mexican Americans) who wished to integrate into American society, and Nationalists (or Chicanos), who called for self-determination, with separatist social and political goals.¹⁴⁶ During the years of active Chicano protest there were five establishment Mexican American politicians who served as members of Congress. These men, aware that they were the target of accusations of selling out, scorned *chicanismo* and in turn severely criticised the tactics of the young Chicano militants.

Henry B. González, who defined himself as "an unreconstructed fighting American liberal of the old school," believed that he had consistently challenged white racism and regarded his work in Congress as defending the interests of "the poor, the middle-income earners, and small business people".¹⁴⁷ He was in agreement with many of the goals of the militants but not with the means employed. He accused them of reverse racism by calling for allegiance to race above all else and maintained they wanted "to get even - not to get equal".¹⁴⁸ Therefore,

¹⁴⁵Ibid. p.131

¹⁴⁶Gómez Quiñones, op. cit. pp.21-22

¹⁴⁷Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.102

¹⁴⁸Ibid. pp.104-105

he criticised the Ford Foundation for providing a \$630,000 grant to the Southwest Council of La Raza to create a national organization.¹⁴⁹

Henry González rejected *chicanismo* and maintained that such a disparate group as the Mexican Americans could not be defined by race alone or "brought under one large tent any more than could Blacks or Anglos".¹⁵⁰ He accused MAYO and especially José Angel Gutiérrez of a lack of responsibility and of ineptitude and of providing jobs for friends.¹⁵¹ One of the old *políticos* of the kind attacked by his namesake, Corky González, Henry González held the impossibly optimistic view that "the impetus of racism is spent, or very nearly so." He, unlike the Chicanos, had faith in the possibility of achieving justice within legitimate means and regarded social progress as coming at last "at a satisfactory rate." He warned that success must not be jeopardised by extremism.¹⁵² Senator José Montoya, while praising the "religious-oriented nonviolent Union of Farmworkers," attacked Reies López Tijerina as a purveyor of false hopes and criticised his ties with other minorities. He stressed that Spanish Americans would:

make no alliance with black nationalists who hate America. We do not lie down in the gutter with Ron Karenga, Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown - who seek to put another wound in America's body.¹⁵³

Criticism did not, however, come only from these conservative quarters. Chicanos themselves questioned the validity of their assumptions. It was clear that a certain lumpenism afflicted the philosophy and membership of many Chicano organizations, particularly the

¹⁴⁹Ibid. p.106

¹⁵⁰Ibid. p.106

¹⁵¹Ibid. p.106

¹⁵²Henry González quoted in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.110

¹⁵³José Montoya quoted in Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p108

Brown Berets.¹⁵⁴ Some students were criticised for their cultural excesses, which meant that they rejected as worthless anything they did not perceive to be Chicano. They further glorified *indigenismo*, equating it with drug-taking, and upheld as a cultural icon the figure of the *vato loco*:

the crazy dude on the corner, dressed in his baggy khakis, speaking a mixture of English and Spanish and heavily into drugs and gang activity.¹⁵⁵

While the *vatos* were, in many ways, members of the most oppressed sector of society and this compelled identification with them as "true" Chicanos, for cultural advancement to occur, their sub-culture of violence would have to be, not imitated, but eliminated. How to achieve this, and other aims, was not clear, although nationalism was no longer seen as the solution. Despite the advances made then, nationalism was seen as, in fact, politically, intellectually and culturally stifling as it did not explain or address class contradictions among people of Mexican origin in the United States. The Chicano Movement became aware that the evolution of a cultural and political identity could not be isolated from the recognition that most Mexicans in the United States were predominantly working class. Cultural nationalism, with its narrow focus on racial difference, was politically inept.¹⁵⁶

Juan Gómez Quiñones defines culture away from nationalist interpretations. He is of the opinion that culture is composed of both positive and negative aspects and is malleable to conscious action. Rather than being static and homogeneous, as many American writers, and some Chicanos such as Luis Valdez have assumed of Mexican and Chicano culture, it is linked to the endeavour of people and is the context in which struggle takes place. It is, then,

¹⁵⁴Gómez Quiñones, *op. cit.* p.19

¹⁵⁵Acuña, *op. cit.* p.356

¹⁵⁶Mario García, 'La Frontera : The Border As Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Summer 1985 p.215

an expression of class relations.¹⁵⁷ During the Chicano Movement it was natural for those who perceived themselves as having lost their culture and identity to develop initially a need for "overt cultural identification and paraphernalia" as well as:

often merely decorative artistic and literary forms, themes, and styles which exalt culture as transcendent.¹⁵⁸

With the goal of counteracting the effects of "an ersatz culture, ... a superimposed culture of domination" they repeated the errors of American history by confusing culture with its artifacts and by elaborating a static, idealized vision of their historical culture.¹⁵⁹ It became clear, however, that heightened cultural expression:

is not of itself political or an act of struggle ... The principal, most potentially subverting resistance is that against economic exploitation and political hegemony.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, class-based struggle, not the search for identity had, ultimately to be the central theme, as a search for identity without class identification and political participation was:

at best neutral. At worst, it becomes deceptive, diversionary and conservative, thus supportive of the status quo.¹⁶¹

This coming to awareness eventually led to a more concrete left-wing element in the Chicano Movement, which was however unable to consolidate the gains of the earlier activists. By the early 1970s a wing of the Chicano movement:

¹⁵⁷Juan Gómez Quiñones: 'Toward a Concept of Culture' in Joseph Sommers and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (eds) *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979 pp.54-56

¹⁵⁸Ibid. p.65

¹⁵⁹Ibid. p.56

¹⁶⁰Ibid. pp.56 57

¹⁶¹Ibid. p.65

gravitated toward a synthesis of nationalism and working-class struggle.¹⁶²

One of the Chicano left's leading groups was the Centro de Acción Social Autónoma - Hermandad General de Trabajadores (CASA-HGT) which had initially been formed for the protection of undocumented workers. By the mid-1970s it was comprised of young radical activists and intellectuals and had been influenced by the anarcho-syndicalist Ricardo Flores Magón and ANMA (Asociación Nacional México-Americana).¹⁶³ CASA-HGT rejected the term Chicano and the narrow nationalistic term of *Aztlán* and focused on the national and class character of Mexicans north and south of the border:

Mexicans because of conquest were an oppressed nation and as a fundamentally working-class people they also formed an exploited class under capitalism.¹⁶⁴

By 1970 some students had also begun to reevaluate themselves, their community, their movement and the oppression of third world peoples. Having believed that on achieving educational opportunity social change would follow, they doubted this once concrete programmes were in place. The student movement fell into decline when it found itself unable to develop viable goals once the Chicano Studies programmes were in place. Administrative opposition to student activity had increased. Therefore students began to discuss class power and the workings of the system with regard to working class people. Many of them "saw the necessity of abolishing the capitalist system".¹⁶⁵ Many Chicanos also united in calling for an end to the war in Vietnam. This was due to the disproportionate number of Chicano casualties in comparison with the national average. Families below the poverty line, many of them Chicanos, were hardest hit by the inflationary war economy

¹⁶²Mario García, 'La Frontera : The Border As Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Summer 1985 p.215

¹⁶³Ibid. p.215

¹⁶⁴Ibid. p.217

¹⁶⁵Marín, op. cit. pp.175-6

during which military spending was prioritised over budgets for poverty programmes.¹⁶⁶ The anti-war posture confronted the "mainstream thinking" of Mexican American organizations such as the American G.I. Forum and LULAC. These latter groups were proud of what they regarded as Chicano valour, as, for them, patriotism during the Second World War and the Korean War had been regarded as a pre-condition for demanding justice at home. Young Chicanos rejected this stance and argued that patriotism in fact called for opposition to the war and claimed that "dying for the flag was nonsense." It was known that few benefits had accrued to those who had fought in previous wars.¹⁶⁷ The national anti-war movement, accused of class bias, was also criticised by Chicanos as racist. As it sought to free white middle-class youth from military service, the result was that more minority youth went to war. MECIA attacked imperialism and, identifying with the Vietnamese, declared that Chicanos would no longer fight in a war against "their brothers in far off lands".¹⁶⁸

Therefore, a mass demonstration against the war was held in East Los Angeles on August 29th 1970. Supporters attended from all over the United States and the Chicano Moratorium against the war in Vietnam grew to a throng of some 20,000 people. Despite the fact that the march and picnic to follow were peaceful some one thousand policemen entered the park wielding clubs and firing tear gas to make mass arrests.¹⁶⁹ Three deaths ensued, the most controversial of which was that of a Chicano news director on KMBX-TV, the Spanish-language television station.¹⁷⁰ Also a Los Angeles Times columnist, Rubén Salazar had been shot through the head by a ten inch tear gas projectile as he sat in the Silver Dollar Bar on Whittier Boulevard. Salazar had been the recipient of threats from the Los Angeles Police

¹⁶⁶Charles Ornelas and Michael González, 'The Chicano and the War: An Opinion Survey in Santa Barbara' *Aztlan*, Vol. 2 No. 1, Spring 1971 p.34

¹⁶⁷Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.156

¹⁶⁸Marín, op. cit. pp.205-206

¹⁶⁹Acuña, op. cit. pp.367-368

¹⁷⁰Albert Herrera, 'The National Chicano Moratorium and the Death of Rubén Salazar' in Edward W. Ludwig and James Santibáñez (eds) *The Chicanos: Mexican American Voices*, New York, Penguin Books, 1971 p.238

Chief for exposing the inconsistencies in police reports of shootings involving policemen.¹⁷¹ Despite a hearing the verdict was that his death had been caused by accident. A committee for the proceedings organized by the Congress of Mexican American Unity described the inquest as a sham.¹⁷²

Clearly the establishment was fighting back. After 1970, with the end of the Civil Rights Movement, Chicano protest became more muted. Government attempts to compromise leaders with federal funding and their promotion of factionalism in militant groups made it harder for Chicanos to rally. Due to inflation and unemployment, affirmative action and equal opportunity programmes were cut and minority groups lost out in competition for jobs.¹⁷³

The Brown Berets suffered constant police surveillance and harrassment and members were arrested under the slightest provocation. Their headquarters were bombed and the assailants never discovered. Eventually, police infiltration resulted in their disbandment in 1972.¹⁷⁴

Rudolfo Acuña further argues that new causes such as womens' rights, gay's rights and ecology:

took the focus from the central issue which affected Chicanos, and other poor folk - that of unequal distribution.¹⁷⁵

Yet, in the case of Chicana feminists in the Chicano Movement, their aims were neither diversionary nor divisive. They did however, revise elements of the movement, and their

¹⁷¹Acuña, *op. cit.* p.369

¹⁷²Marín, *op. cit.* p.214

¹⁷³Acuña, p.369

¹⁷⁴Marín, *op. cit.* pp.137-149

¹⁷⁵Acuña, *op. cit.* p.385

thought resulted in the fusion of nationalism and class-struggle mentioned above. Women began to demand an equal voice and role in the Movement. At the First Chicano Youth Conference in Denver 1969 workshops had been held to discuss the role of women in the Movement. Nonetheless, as the women felt under pressure, particularly as feminism was regarded as an Anglo strategy to divide Chicanos and not organic to Chicano or Mexican culture, the conclusion reached was that Chicanas did not want to be liberated.¹⁷⁶

By the early 1970s this passivity had changed. Chicanas had become aware of the extent of the oppression they faced within their own culture and, embracing an analysis of culture as dynamic, they refused to accept that they were betraying it by demanding birth control, abortions, child care and other rights believed by the men to be white women's issues.¹⁷⁷ Women realised they had subordinated their own aims for the good of the movement, resigning themselves to carrying out menial tasks and allowing the men to assume important jobs and the concomitant prestige. The women were the victims of sexual pressures in that, while sexual constraints were relaxed during the Movement, women who indulged in sexual relations with Movement companions "ran the risk of being labelled whores".¹⁷⁸ Even the rhetoric of Chicano nationalism had been imbued with appeals to manhood and many of the symbols employed excluded women from identifying with them.¹⁷⁹

Chicanas further recognised the existence of a long tradition of participation by Mexican and Chicana women in struggles to improve their lives. Therefore, while Chicana feminism was not impervious to Anglo feminism, and was inspired by it, it considered that it had its own

¹⁷⁶Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*, Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1979 p.235

¹⁷⁷Ibid. p.236

¹⁷⁸Ibid. p.234

¹⁷⁹See Stan Steiner, 'The Poet In The Boxing Ring' in F. Chris García, op. cit. pp.324-325

wellspring to which to turn.¹⁸⁰ Chicana feminists argued that they were not *agavachadas* as they had a legacy of heroines in social movements, such as the Mexican Revolution, to emulate. Therefore, far from being traitors to their culture, they were supporting it by following the ideals of their historic forebears.¹⁸¹ Chicana feminists eschewed participation in the Anglo women's movement and followed the nationalist dictum of "con mi raza todo, fuera de mi raza nada".¹⁸² Yet, as the Anglo women's movement had shown itself to be indifferent to poverty and racism, Chicanas saw that the question of class was crucial. Anglo women were also insensitive to the Chicanas' special needs as bilingual, bicultural minority women and so Chicanas concluded that they had "no more faith in white women than white men".¹⁸³

Chicanas had, then, a clear concept of their triple oppression from the outset. They stressed the fact that as women and Chicanas they were oppressed by sex and race but they were also aware of a third factor, that of class, as they were workers. Furthermore, although the more radical Chicanas believed that the way to their liberation lay in the creation of a unique Chicana movement, working in close conjunction with the larger movement, they recognised that Chicano men were their natural allies and that they, as women, would not achieve liberation until all Chicanos were free.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, they supported, rather than contested, class politics in the Chicano Movement as a whole. Chicana organizations such as the Comisión Femenil Mexicana and the campus-based Chicana Forum were founded in 1970. The latter, uniting under the cry of *hermandad* set about creating Chicana leadership and clarifying Chicana identity. As well as educational issues they were also active in securing

¹⁸⁰Mirandé and Enríquez, op. cit. p.237

¹⁸¹Ibid. pp.237-238

¹⁸²Ibid. p.238

¹⁸³Velia G. Hancock quoted in Mirandé and Enríquez, op. cit. p.239

¹⁸⁴Mirandé and Enríquez, op. cit. p.241

welfare rights and health care for women.¹⁸⁵ The issue of involuntary sterilization of Chicanas became prominent. Doctors encouraged Chicana women to consent to sterilization while they were still in the delivery room and not quite aware of what was happening. This was particularly true in the case of women who only spoke Spanish. Protests by Chicanas led to restraints being placed on hospitals.¹⁸⁶

Despite - or indeed, because of - the awareness of the complexity of the issues facing Chicanos, and the growing awareness that the real oppression of Chicanos and other minorities was class-based, the Movement was in fact in decline. The two major American parties attempted to make up the ground lost. Into the 1970s Chicano bureaucrats began to make their presence felt at state and federal levels and served as a "system of brokers" between the establishment and those who protested against it, as their jobs depended on serving the system, and not the people, as they worked within the two major parties.¹⁸⁷ Due to the existence of a small Mexican American middle-class, the Republican party developed a Chicano strategy. Dollars were directed to programmes aimed at Chicanos in an attempt to effect the "Republicanization of the Mexican American." By 1972 Richard Nixon had appointed some fifty Mexican Americans to high ranking federal posts but there was in his actions little real commitment to improving the lot of the Chicano. After Nixon received 31% of the Latino vote he fired many of his Chicano loyalists and in 1973 appointed an Anglo American woman as the white House Aide on domestic Latino affairs as she and her husband:

own a large ranch at Armstrong, Texas, an area populated extensively by Mexican-Americans.¹⁸⁸

185Marín, op. cit. p.170

186Acuña, op. cit. pp.404-405

187Ibid. p.385

188Ibid. pp.386-387

The Democratic party began to make its influence felt on the UFW. 1973 was a key year as the contracts previously won by the UFW expired. The growers were not prepared to permit the signing of new contracts and opposed the practice of the hiring hall, as it had rendered contracting labour less abusive, and therefore less lucrative, than the system which preceded it. Growers united with the Teamsters in an attempt to defeat the UFW. When the Farmworkers responded with a renewed boycott, the Teamsters were paid daily to violently intimidate the picketers. Deaths and mass arrests occurred.¹⁸⁹ Membership of the Union fell drastically and the union was forced to call off the picketing as its resources dwindled. In this climate Chávez further alienated support by calling in 1974 for the deportation of Mexican scab labour. This policy was reversed in 1975, the year in which Chávez and Governor Edmund G. Brown succeeded in having a compromise bill passed, the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which provided for union elections. While the UFW went on to outpoll the Teamsters, they were criticised for their support of:

the Democratic Party that represents the growers' interests, not theirs.¹⁹⁰

The fortunes of the Raza Unida party also changed. In 1973 Denver Police stormed into the Crusade for Justice and shot a twenty year old RUP member and wounded nineteen others.¹⁹¹ The following year all hopes of a national RUP ended when the Colorado group left the organization. Corky González devoted himself to his Crusade for Justice duties with the purpose of educating Chicano revolutionaries.¹⁹² By 1974 in Texas, despite four years of seeming invincibility, the party lost momentum. A two-party initiative to stop grants to Chicano-controlled cities meant a loss of funds. In 1975, after a visit to Cuba, Gutiérrez and

¹⁸⁹Ibid. p.274

¹⁹⁰Olga Rodríguez (ed), *The Politics of Chicano Liberation*, New York, Pathfinders Press, 1977 p.110

¹⁹¹Acuña, op. cit. p.413

¹⁹²Ibid. p.391

the RUP were accused of creating a "Little Cuba" in Texas, and the following year the party lost a \$1.5 million grant for economic development. By 1978 it was almost impossible to qualify La Raza Unida as a third party on the California statewide ballot.¹⁹³

Students did, however, hold some protests during the 1970s. By 1975, with the activities of CASA-HGT, and in the wake of Watergate, students sought to defend the rights of undocumented workers and workers in general. Around this time study groups were formed to take a scientific approach to ideology and to Marxist concepts such as historical materialism. Yet, on the education front, the situation was less than hopeful. Cuts in the programmatic and admission gains of the previous decade forced students to:

struggle to defend what earlier they had struggled to achieve.¹⁹⁴

The student movement was nonetheless mobilised for at least a year in the face of a Supreme Court Decision which threatened to curtail further the access of Mexican Americans to further education through the erosion of the principle and practice of affirmative action. The case of *Bakke v. The Regents of the University of California* centred round the application of Allan Bakke in 1974 to a University of California special admissions programme for disadvantaged students.¹⁹⁵ When rejected, he took the university to court and the finding was that Bakke had unconstitutionally been denied equal protection under the law because of his race. This was further upheld by the California Supreme court, which ruled in 1978 that affirmative action was acceptable as long as it did not use quotas setting specific numbers.¹⁹⁶ Acuña writes that:

¹⁹³Ibid. p.390

¹⁹⁴Juan Gómez Quiñones: *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977*, Santa Barbara, Editorial La Causa, 1978 pp.39-40

¹⁹⁵Acuña, op. cit. p.416

¹⁹⁶Ibid. p.418

the Bakke decision encouraged racist administrators of graduate schools to severely cut back on the admissions of minorities.¹⁹⁷

The patriotic fervour of the 1976 American Bicentennial afforded minorities across the United States an opportunity to question the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. At the time of the Bicentennial preparations in California:

there was 1 Anglo lawyer for every 530 Anglos, 1 Asian lawyer for every 1,750 Asians, 1 Black lawyer for every 3,441 Blacks, 1 Latino lawyer for every 9,482 Latinos and 1 Native American lawyer for every 50,000 Native Americans.¹⁹⁸

Chicanos doubted that they should celebrate an independence which was not yet theirs, and rejected the notion that such events should seek to emphasize only the nation's accomplishments, avoiding its national guilt.¹⁹⁹ A final setback was to come, however. Proposition 13, passed in 1978, further threatened the gains made by Chicanos. This limited the taxing of property to a set percentage and benefitted property owners, large farms and industry. Proposition 13 was responsible for many layoffs, particularly among Chicano teachers. Acuña concludes:

Proposition 13, even more than **Bakke** has the potential of wiping out a generation of public servants which the Chicano community has produced over years of struggle.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Ibid. p.417

¹⁹⁸Ibid. p.417

¹⁹⁹Jesús Chavarría, *Si Se Puede'*, May 30th 1975, Vol. 1 No. 6, p.4

²⁰⁰Acuña, op. cit. pp.418-419

5. The Hispanics.

With the end of the Chicano Movement as an effective political forum, a new term has come into being to describe the Spanish-speaking peoples of the United States and their political aspirations. Like the Chicano Movement before it, Hispanic politics is a politics of identity and ethnicity rather than class, and as such, perhaps destined to fail. Yet, the appeal of Hispanic politics to the concept that Spanish-speaking people constitute a national, rather than merely a regional, minority population, is an attractive one.

During the 1970s many Hispanic organizations attempted to create a presence in Washington and to work together. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, a bi-partisan group, aware of the necessity of working through the two-party system, was formed in 1975. It rejected government funding and the dangers this posed. In 1976 the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, an "informal grouping" was formed by Congressman Ed Roybal. Due to its small membership it met only irregularly to promote legislation beneficial to Hispanics. In 1980 it began to develop a legislative office as there were more Mexican Americans in Congress and during the eighties it helped to place new Hispanic congressmen on committees of their choice and prevent the Reagan administration's inclusion of bilingual education into a block grant.²⁰¹

This activity was in response to the growing awareness that around some 20 million people of "Hispanic ancestry" live in the United States. Slightly more than half are of Mexican descent, while a sixth are of Puerto Rican origin. Cubans comprise some twelve percent, while Hispanics from other nations make up the remaining fifth.²⁰² Given these numbers of

²⁰¹Joan Moore and Harry Pachón, *Hispanics in the United States*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985 p.197

²⁰²Ibid. p.1

Hispanics the eighties were described as being the decade of the Hispanic but Chicanos rejected the term as bureaucratic and the idea as ill-conceived and stressed that Hispanic:

encompasses only the white, European (Spain), Castilian (Spanish-language) heritage, and ignores and erases the indigenous and subsequent African heritage in the Americas.²⁰³

A paradoxical term, it signifies only a part of a common heritage and is therefore too narrow, and simultaneously erases legitimate and individualizing differences between Spanish-speaking peoples in the United States and is therefore too broad. In the face of institutionalized incapacity to recognise the non-white racial elements of Spanish-speaking people, evident from bureaucratic acceptance of the term Hispanic, Chicanos are therefore forced to continue to emphasize racial factors over others.

It is indeed true that Hispanics vary immensely from group to group. They became part of American society in different ways and each group has a different sense of its own identity. As has been seen in the case of the Chicanos, within each group there are cultural and class divisions and the Spanish spoken varies from population to population.²⁰⁴ These differences are by no means frivolous. Like Chicanos, Puerto Ricans were not found to be desirable as prospective emigrants to the United States, due to their history of slavery and their "mixture of blackness and Spanishness".²⁰⁵ Unlike Chicanos, they were fully socialized into American history and an expectation of being treated as citizens, only to be rejected as foreigners. The Chicano preoccupation with the border has no real parallel with the Puerto Ricans who, as American citizens with no controls on or records of their movements, can move freely between the mainland and the island.²⁰⁶ Cubans, on the other hand, have a very

²⁰³Hammerback et. al., op. cit. p.122

²⁰⁴Moore and Pachón, op. cit. p.1

²⁰⁵Ibid. p.7

²⁰⁶Ibid. p164

different relationship with their island. For the most part settled in the city of Miami, their anti-Castro feeling coincided with American foreign policy in that both wanted Fidel Castro overthrown. Therefore, travel to and from Cuba was, until very recently, prohibited.²⁰⁷ Cubans are unique in other aspects also. Although there was prior immigration of Cubans to America, the first waves of exiles from Cuba after the 1959 revolution were the immigrants to exert a "considerable measure of political power", particularly as they were regarded as fleeing communism and were successful in business.²⁰⁸ Indeed, by 1970 immigrant Cubans owned and operated almost a third of all businesses in Miami.²⁰⁹

As a consequence of these differences, then, it is unlikely that a collective designation would evoke the power of symbols of national origin:

Very few Hispanics would choose a collective term of self-designation (either "Hispanic" or "Latino") even though this may be the term by which the rest of the nation generally knows them.²¹⁰

A feasible concept, perhaps applicable to Spanish-speaking groups in the United States, however, is that of "primary" and "secondary identity." This is a practice observed among native American Indians. While wishing to maintain their primary tribal identities of Navajos or Oneidas, they developed the generalized secondary identity of "Indian" for political purposes.²¹¹ This approach, then, is the other side of the Hispanic coin. As was seen during the Chicano Movement, one's personal label of identity was not, ultimately, problematic. The problem lay in defining a political identity around which Chicanos could rally. Even with its contradictions and unresolved issues, the political identity of Chicanos which

²⁰⁷Moore and Pachón, *op. cit.* p.36

²⁰⁸*Ibid.* p.36

²⁰⁹*Ibid.* p.45

²¹⁰*Ibid.* p.12

²¹¹*Ibid.* p.13

evolved was fundamentally a separatist one and as such, it foundered. Likewise, the Hispanic identity is not a personal appellation of identity but a political one, signifying, not separatism this time, but precisely what the Chicano Movement rejected - electoral advance through the two party system.

Hispanic political power in the United States carries two contradictory images. One is that of a community with growing political force and a huge potential. The second is that of a group which does not participate politically as other groups do.²¹² This latter fact may be in part the result of the Chicano movement which eschewed participation in the American electoral two-party system. Yet, as Chicanos have seen, an increase in the numbers of Hispanic representatives in government is no guarantee of real political advancement. The narrow ideologies of the two major parties often means that only the most conservative of Hispanic politicians can be co-opted into the system. Not only this, but the lot of Hispanic Congressmen is not an easy one. Not only are they expected to represent their districts but they are also expected to be sympathetic to and understand Hispanic concerns far outside their own constituencies.²¹³

Nonetheless a hopeful note may lie in the fact that:

the life situations of all Hispanic minorities in the United States are converging. In fact, they are converging with other racial minorities as well.²¹⁴

Since Hispanics have dispersed outside their traditional areas and increased in number Hispanics themselves have begun to accept that they do have much in common. This is

²¹²Ibid. p. 169

²¹³Ibid. p. 188

²¹⁴Ibid. p. 2

further strengthened by the fact that immigrants from other Latin American countries which have not seen immigration to the United States in large numbers are having "the meaning of their ethnicity" established by the groups of Hispanics already in place.²¹⁵ Yet, there are several factors which limit Hispanic electoral impact. Hispanic population growth is still regional and confined to a few key states. Within these states, Hispanics are concentrated in certain congressional districts with the result that many elected representatives have few Hispanic voters in their districts. Many Hispanics are foreign born or recent immigrants and therefore not American citizens and not entitled to vote. Class bias in the political system, manifest through such stipulations as residency requirements, harms Hispanic political participation in the case of migrant workers.²¹⁶ There is a further problem. Cuban Americans, realising in the mid-sixties that they were going to be remaining in the United States sought naturalization.²¹⁷ In some communities this made Cubans a local and state electoral force. The strong business community adds its influence and financial support to politics.²¹⁸ Yet, Cubans are among the most conservative sectors of the Hispanic population and:

The amalgam of socialist and revolutionary symbols of the 1960s did not influence Cuban Americans as it did other young Hispanics. Cubans fled a regime that utilized many of the same symbols so attractive to young militants.²¹⁹

While Cuban Americans share a generalized Hispanic concern for bilingual education and racial questions, they nonetheless supported the *contras* in Nicaragua and other conservative

²¹⁵Ibid. p.2

²¹⁶Ibid pp.172-173

²¹⁷Ibid. p.192

²¹⁸Ibid. p.193

²¹⁹Ibid. p.193

causes in Latin America and the United States. Although Hispanic, they do not identify with the majority of other Hispanics who do not share their level of economic autonomy.²²⁰

In 1980 the Hispanic community still lacked the political representation to match its numbers. This is due to the fact that many national issues are considered by Congress with little or no Hispanic comment. Moreover, the rate of increase of Hispanics in the federal bureaucracy is so slow that parity for Hispanics will not be achieved until 2025.²²¹ Therefore many Chicanos cling to their contempt for the establishment. Rudy Acuña is one writer who no longer expects change to come from within the system. He attacks Latino professionals who believe they help the community just by being professionals:

an awful lot of the identification with the term "Hispanic" and the movement for many Latinos is opportunistic. It's not based on ideology or a feeling of commitment.²²²

Latino politicians have failed to educate their community on a whole range of issues such as undocumented workers and the involvement of the American government in Central America and have failed to provide "moral leadership." Acuña also indicts Hispanic Congressmen who take a stand against apartheid in South Africa yet do not do so with respect to Central America because the latter is a direct criticism of their own, and not the South African, government.²²³ Furthermore, Acuña, described as feeling "moral outrage at a time when outrage is out of fashion," stresses that Chicanos in the eighties must be realistic in their aims. Those who assume that Latinos are going to achieve real power are living in "a political Disneyland".²²⁴ Despite the Chicano Movement and unlike Black Americans,

²²⁰Ibid p.191

²²¹Ibid. p.189

²²²Max Benavides, 'The Raza's Edge,' Interview with Rodolfo Acuña, *L. A. Weekly*, Los Angeles, January 10th-16th, 1986 p.18

²²³Ibid. p.18

²²⁴Ibid. p.17

Mexicans in the United States have no sense of their own history and suffer from a lack of identification "with any type of revolutionary figures," apart from the Mexican Revolution's Zapata and Villa. They do not know about the Crusade for Justice and José Angel Gutiérrez. Less than one percent of high school students of Mexican extraction have ever taken a Chicano history class and the bilingual education which they receive fails to emphasize political or social image.²²⁵ Not only this, but only one third of Mexican Americans are employed in expanding industries. The remainder are working in industries that "might not be around in the next twenty years." A third of all Americans are functionally illiterate and, in his opinion, the real danger represented by Cuba and Nicaragua to the United States is as follows:

The big lesson is that if governments really want to, they can teach people to read and write.²²⁶

César Chávez in 1987 continued to share Acuña's scepticism about the American political system. Of the farmworkers, he admitted, "we can never say that we really make progress politically".²²⁷ Therefore, Chávez continued to use the boycott as an economic form of pressure and seek out, not simply Chicanos or Hispanics, but what he called "the society-conscious people" who he believed to comprise some 20% of the American population. The product of the political activism on American campuses around 1965, they are now found in labour unions, some religious congregations, minority groups especially Blacks and Hispanics, ecologically aware people and university groups. Chávez also highlighted his campaign as a consumer issue. He appealed to the public to boycott grapes by explaining how the use of pesticides in those grapes is harming the American public.²²⁸

²²⁵Ibid. p.17

²²⁶Ibid. p.20

²²⁷M. Dolan, recording of César Chávez speaking at University of California at Santa Barbara, March, 1987

²²⁸Ibid.

Corky González, on the other hand, remains more optimistic. Given the ultra right-wing policies of the Reagan administration, particularly with regard to funding for the *contras*, he believes the Chicano movement to be "starting a rebirth and a renewal of itself".²²⁹ Certain facts provided by Acuña would seem to support this optimistic analysis. The Mexican American population is a very young one and has a youth unemployment rate as high as 25%. Given the concordant weakening of social control Acuña predicted that activism could ensue. Nonetheless, this came in the early 1990s in the form of riots born of desperation, and not in a coordinated political strategy. Nor does the change in government bode particularly well. The early endeavours of the new Democratic Clinton administration do not suggest more than a token responsiveness on the part of the State to minority demands. It is safe to say that unless there is, again, a generalised social protest on the scale of the Civil Rights Movement, but with an emphasis on class rather than race, Chicano activism will achieve little, which is in fact what Chicano analysts accept was achieved the first time around. The Chicano Movement was, then:

a creative and revivalist cultural surge, it was a civil rights struggle, it was an effort for political recognition and economic rights by middle-class elements and it had intimations of an incipient national liberation struggle ... it involved nationality and class. The first was more readily visible but class was at the core. ²³⁰

²²⁹ Steve Elzer, 'Civil Rights Activist Speaks On Rebirth of Chicano Movement' *Daily Nexus*, Santa Barbara, May 2, 1986 p.1

²³⁰Gómez Quiñones, op. cit. p29

CHAPTER THREE: CHICANO THEATRE

1. Antecedents.

With the beginnings of the Chicano theatre movement in 1965, Chicano historians began to unearth and document a theatrical tradition relevant to the Spanish-speaking peoples of the American South-west.

They discovered that, in fact, the very first play known to be performed in the region was in Spanish, when in 1598 Spanish explorers in Juan de Oñate's party enacted near El Paso an improvised play dealing with their adventures in New Mexico.¹ The Spanish conquest in the years that followed brought religious and secular drama to the area of New Spain which centuries later would be the American Southwest.² The religious drama was intended, not for the Spaniards, but for the native population, as the conquering Spanish Crown wished to form a centralised empire through conversion to Catholicism. Catholic friars aided this process by employing, in the absence of a common tongue, pantomime and mimicry to instruct the indians in the Catholic faith through the easily adaptable religious play or *auto*, common in Europe at the time. The indians took to pageantry and ritual easily and acted out the autos with aplomb.³ Although the Spaniards continued to hold their own presentations side by side with the religious plays, the latter, written by missionaries, were "much simpler and in the main confined to Biblical stories".⁴ Two cycles of religious plays dealt with the Old and the New Testaments. The second cycle included one usually called *la pastorela*

¹Charles M. Tatum, 'Contemporary Chicano Theater,' *Chicano Literature*, Boston, Twayne's United States Authors Series, 1982 p.13

²Nicolás Kanellos, 'An Overview of Hispanic Theatre in the United States' in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984, p.7

³Arthur Campa, 'Spanish Religious Folktheatre in the Spanish Southwest (First Cycle)', *University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Language Series, Vol. 5 No.1, Whole Number 238, February 15, 1934 pp.7-8

⁴*Ibid.* p.8

which focused on the shepherds who arrived at the manger where the child Jesus lay and which was performed over the Spanish Christmas season, from December 16 until January 8.⁵ The *pastorela*, derived from the Castilian *Auto de Navidad*, is still found all over the Southwest United States and Latin America and is a favourite of Chicano theatre.⁶ (A further piece of folk drama, which is of importance for later Chicano theatre, was the story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the indian Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City.) Nonetheless, the purpose for which these plays are performed, however, has changed, as have the plays themselves. As no attempt was made to transmit them from generation to generation intact, they were liable to be confused. Ad libbing filled gaps in manuscripts and musical interpolations furthered the action. Using allegorical characters and "written in verse interspersed with good poetry" in the present century the comic roles have become very prominent and go to the best actors.⁷ Far from being regarded only as a religious ceremony, they are also played for their entertainment value.⁸

The folk drama was not the only theatre to which Chicano historians turned their attention. They also began to document the emergence of a professional theatre in Spanish in the Southwest. By the middle of the 19th century, professional companies of Mexican and Spanish performers were touring a circuit of Californian port towns by steamship. The 1840s and 50s saw the construction of theatres in Los Angeles and San Francisco which were used to house Spanish-language productions for the Mexican population of the, until recently, furthest outreaches of Mexico.⁹ In the 1860s, groups which had toured Mexico

⁵ Arthur Campa, 'Spanish Religious Folktheatre in the Spanish Southwest (Second Cycle)' *University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Language Series, Vol. 5 No. 2, Whole Number 235, June 15, 1934 p8-9

⁶ L.H. Quackenbush, 'The Other Pastorelas of Spanish American Drama' *Latin American Theatre Review*, Spring 1973 p.55

⁷ Arthur Campa 'Spanish Religious Folktheatre in the Spanish Southwest (First Cycle)', *University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Language Series Vol. 5 No.1, Whole Number 238, February 15 1934 p.18

⁸ Arthur Campa, 'Spanish Religious Folktheatre in the Southwest (Second Cycle)' *The University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Vol. 5 No. 2, June 15th 1934, Whole Number 245, University of New Mexico Press, 1934 p.6

⁹ Nicolás Kanellos, op. cit. p.7

became Repertory companies in Los Angeles and San Francisco. One example is La Familia Estrella, directed by Gerardo López del Castillo, which became resident in San Francisco.¹⁰ It presented melodramas by Spanish authors such as Zorrilla and Bretón de los Herreros but despite its commercial nature, its members participated in the affairs of its Mexican audiences in the Southwest. López del Castillo himself was president of the Junta Patriótica Mexicana and held benefit performances to raise funds for Benito Juárez's liberation forces in Mexico.¹¹ Clearly the theatre-going public still regarded itself as Mexican and interested itself in Mexican politics. As Anglo-American companies did not travel through the Southwest until they could go by rail, before the advent of theatre in English in the Southwest, again:

The Hispanic stage had already set down deep roots and was serving as entertainment and high culture for Spanish and non-Spanish speakers.¹²

Bringing theatre to the region was not easy. Many areas remained isolated due to bad roads and the threat of hostile indians. Yet, by the 1890s other circuits were opening up as the advent of the railway and the automobile allowed theatre companies access to smaller population centres.¹³ Indeed, a few Mexican companies took advantage of rail travel to bring larger productions such as opera.¹⁴ The coming of the railway was a mixed blessing for Spanish-language theatre, however, as, although it permitted access to new circuits, it meant competition from English-speaking troupes, serving the growing numbers of settlers who also took advantage of the more convenient mode of travel. As small Mexican villages grew

¹⁰Nicolás Kanellos, 'Two Centuries of Hispanic Theatre in the Southwest' *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Revista Chicano-Riqueña Year 11, No.1, 1983 p.20

¹¹Ibid. p.21-22

¹²Nicolás Kanellos, 'An Overview of Hispanic Theatre in the United States', in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984, p.7

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Rosemary Gipson, 'The Mexican Performers: Pioneer Theatre Artists of Tucson' *The Journal of Arizona History*, 13, Winter 1972 p.249

into larger American cities, and the bulk of the Mexican population in many areas were isolated from this growth in barrios, Spanish-speaking theatre was bereft of a public, although touring companies left in their wake amateur *cuadros dramáticos*, *orquestas típicas* and folkloric dance groups.¹⁵ One example of this American cultural ascendancy was in Tucson, Arizona, where, in 1880, the Southern Pacific tracks reached Tucson from California, and shortly after, the Star Novelty Troupe, featuring Ethiopian specialties, German songs, a one-man band and clog dancing arrived. After this, Mexican companies were no longer in demand as the railroad and mining discoveries had reduced the percentage of Mexicans in the town and the new American audience preferred the spectacular railroad circus.¹⁶

In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the exodus provoked by the Mexican Revolution created a demand in Southwest cities for a Spanish-language theatre for immigrants which would reinforce customs and values under threat in alien surroundings.¹⁷ As audiences demanded plays written by Mexican authors Spanish language theatre reached something of a Golden Age in the 1920s. Los Angeles and San Antonio supported more than twenty houses which showed everything from melodrama and *zarzuela* to vaudeville.¹⁸ By 1923 Los Angeles had become:

a center for Mexican playwriting probably unparalleled in the history of Hispanic communities in the United States.¹⁹

¹⁵F. Arturo Rosales, 'Spanish-language Theatre and Early Mexican Immigration', in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984, p.18

¹⁶Rosemary Gipson, *op. cit.* pp.246-247

¹⁷Nicolás Kanellos, 'An Overview of Hispanic Theatre in the United States' in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984 p.8

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.9

¹⁹Kanellos, 'Two Centuries of Hispanic Theatre in the Southwest' in *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1983 pp.27-28

It is nonetheless clear, however, that the provision of theatre was a "supreme entrepreneurial opportunity for Mexican immigrant merchants".²⁰ Having established retail businesses in Mexican foods curios and printing and publishing, many Mexican merchants ventured into the theatre business sometimes, "for no other reason than a profit motive".²¹ This led to profit-hungry impresarios often producing classical Spanish plays such as those of Benavente and the Quintero Brothers, rather than the newly-penned works of local writers who based their plays on California's Mexican history and Mexican immigration, to avoid paying royalties.²²

This was not true of all cases, however. The Mexican actress Virginia Fábregas encouraged the development of local playwrights in Los Angeles by buying the rights to their works and performing them on tour.²³ In any case it was the plays by local writers which brought record attendances.²⁴ Four playwrights were especially successful. These were the actor Eduardo Carrillo, the novelist and prolific playwright, Adalberto Elías González, the newspaperman and theatre director Esteban V. Escalante and the poet and columnist Gabriel Navarro. Among others, they served "a public that was hungry to see itself reflected on the stage"²⁵ and one ready to consume works dealing with current events, politics, sensational crimes and the "real-life epic" of their people.²⁶ Carrillo's **El proceso de Aurelio Pompa** documented the factual and contemporary unjust execution of a Mexican immigrant,²⁷ although:

²⁰I. Arturo Rosales, *op. cit.* p.18

²¹Ibid. p.19

²²Kanellos, 1983 p.28

²³Ibid. p.24

²⁴Ibid. p.28

²⁵Ibid. p.29

²⁶Ibid. p.30

²⁷Ibid. p.32

the greater part of theatrical fare served purely entertainment and cultural purposes, while obliquely contributing to the expatriate community's solidarity within the context of the larger, English-speaking society.²⁸

It was left to the vaudevillians to perform somewhat more political work. They performed satirical *revistas*, or short one act burlesques with music and comedy, derived from the Mexican *teatro de género chico*. In Mexico these ridiculed the Mexican government despite censorship and indeed, the stage satire of actor Roberto Soto, led to the downfall of the corrupt labour leader Morones.²⁹ In the United States, these performances, invested with a cosmopolitan spirit, dealt with the conflict of Spanish with English and of Mexican culture with Anglo American culture. Popular *revista* authors such as Don Catarino and Antonio Guzmán Aguilera penned works criticising both the United States and Mexico. The titles prefigure later Chicano works; **Los efectos de la crisis**, **Los repatriados** and **México para los mexicanos**.³⁰ Significantly, the hybrid Mexican American culture was contrasted with a perceived "purer" Mexican one, as was to occur in the early years of the Chicano movement. However, during the 1920s and 1930s the children of Mexican immigrants and Mexican American natives of the Southwest assumed a:

bisensibility that transformed and re-contextualized cultural elements from both cultures in a new synthesis.³¹

The politically-motivated repatriations of Mexicans carried out during the Depression "devastated Hispanic theatre in the Southwest and Midwest".³² Theatres which had housed Spanish-language productions were bought by Hollywood and converted into cinemas.

²⁸Ibid. p.33

²⁹Miguel Covarrubias, 'Slapstick and Venom: Politics, Tent Shows and Comedians' *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Vol. 22 August 1938 p.588

³⁰Nicolás Kanellos, 'Two Centuries of Hispanic Theatre in the Southwest' *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1983 p.30

³¹Tomas Ybarra Frausto, 'I Can Still Hear the Applause. La Farándula Chicana: Carpas y Tandas de Variedad' in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984 p.55

³²Kanellos, 1984 p.10

Some of the artists who had filled the theatres moved to New York where the influx of Puerto Ricans allowed them to make a living on the vaudeville stage which survived until the 1960s.³³ Others formed cooperatives such as the *Compañía de Artistas Unidos* and attempted to buy or rent theatres or organized non-professional companies. These and other companies, often tied to mutual aid societies or the church, were responsible for the survival of theatre arts in Spanish, on a voluntary and community basis, until the renaissance of Spanish language theatre in the 1960s.³⁴

While professional Spanish language theatre met with its demise, theatre in Spanish did not die out. Not only did it survive in amateur groups but it also moved off the professional stage and into the *carpa* or tent of circus tradition. Although some Mexican tent shows had travelled the Southwest in earlier periods, the *carpa* which was found on the border fundamentally grew out of the Mexican nationalistic, proletarian consciousness which was a consequence of the Mexican Revolution.³⁵ Unemployed actors enlisted the aid of beginners to tour the countryside with popular tent shows rooted in the tradition of circus, village fair and carnival.³⁶ Focusing on agricultural communities and mining towns these tent-show ensembles of versatile performers combined dancing, singing and acrobatics and performed humorous skits and tight-wire walking.³⁷ Before the show the *convite* or invitation took place in an attempt to secure an audience. A truck full of children with clown faces would parade noisily through the barrio announcing the forthcoming performance through a loudspeaker.³⁸ The subsequent variegated public - usually vociferous and unruly - seated on wooden benches, were then privy to a series of acts, accompanied by a very basic orchestra

³³Kanellos, 1983 p.36

³⁴See Nicolás Kanellos, 'Fifty Years of Theatre in the Latino Communities of Northwest Indiana' *Aztlán*, Vol. No. 2 Summer 1976, pp.255-263

³⁵Covarrubias, *op. cit.* p.595

³⁶Ybarra Frausto, *op. cit.* p.47

³⁷Rosales, *op. cit.* p.18

³⁸There is a similar scene in Luis Valdez's biopic *La Bamba*, 1987.

and lit by a single naked light bulb. Each show lasted for about twenty minutes and was a "fluid, open, semi-structured presentational" event with direct audience feedback.³⁹ Its:

overlay of literary respectability was subverted by the insolent and aggressive spirit of *picardía* based on sexual and political allusions that informed the *carpa* sketches.⁴⁰

Therefore, although the fare included *corridos*, or ballads, telling of traditional heroes, and *declamadores*, or orators, steeped in a tradition of *buen hablar*, who wove proverbs, anecdotes and jokes and other forms of speech play into everyday discourse there was also a *top banana* who told blue jokes and engaged in dialogues of innuendo with the *vedette* who also danced for the men in the crowd. However, the piece of drama known as the *sketch cómico*, which employed humour as a cultural weapon in order, symbolically to overcome oppression, was central to the *carpa*.⁴¹ Its content, dominated by crude humour and jibes at *agringamiento*, was presented with type characterizations, mimic acting and slapstick. Jokes based on linguistic misunderstandings were well received but the *sketch cómico* allowed the code-switching Mexican in the United States to show off his bilingualism.⁴² The feisty underdog or *pelado* was the star of the *carpa*, featuring as he did in these sketches to make ironic comments on social reality in a blend of English, Spanish and *barrio caló*. Also found in the *revistas*, the *pelado* was the naïve, ragged immigrant who suffers culture shock in the American city. With his "low-class dialect and acerbic satire" he again prefigures the Chicano "everyman" of later works.⁴³ Many respected actors started out in the *carpa*, including the great Mexican comic Cantinflas. Often attacked for his low humour and scandalous language, Cantinflas was the voice of the "class-conscious man of the city's lower classes"

³⁹Ybarra Fausto, op. cit. p.47

⁴⁰Ibid. p.46

⁴¹Ibid. p.53

⁴²Ibid. p.51

⁴³Kancillos, 1983 p.31

who attempted to overcome his feelings of inferiority by affecting a "meaningless wordiness." The genius of his character lay in his mastery of the vernacular language, offering "relentless dribble that never achieves a phrase with sense".⁴⁴

The aesthetic of the *carpa* - or its lack of one - is the single most significant element bequeathed to contemporary Chicano theatre and the one most hotly debated. Called *rasquachismo*, a way of confronting the world from the perspective of the downtrodden, the rebel, the outsider:

To be *rasquachi* is to possess an ebullient spirit of irreverance and insurgency, a carnivalesque topsy turvy vision where authority and decorum serve as targets for subversion.⁴⁵

Fundamentally, this defines the *carpa* as theatre for a mass audience. It is crucial that, apart from the "fossil religious theatre," mentioned above, until the *carpa* the Mexican lower classes, on both sides of the border, did not have a theatre of their own. Bourgeois Spanish farces and operettas were clearly too remote and inaccessible, both culturally and financially. Moreover, the *carpa* travelled to the audience, rather than the audience having to go to the theatre.⁴⁶ While the *carpa*, then, was not overtly political theatre, it was and is the cultural predecessor of the early Chicano political theatre of the 1960s.

Yet, there is another important element of the tradition which has not, in this writer's view, been fully recognised by Chicano theatre historians. Just as Mexicans in the Southwest struggled to come to terms with their urban lifestyles in American cities, the American working class in general was facing similar challenges. The First World War and the maturity of American capitalism rendered the possibility of a return to traditional rural

⁴⁴Covarrubias, op. cit. p.594

⁴⁵Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. pp.52-53

⁴⁶Ibid. p47

lifestyles ever slimmer. Instead, society was composed primarily of workers who sold their labour to large companies based in the cities. In the face of this cut and thrust industrial capitalism and in the wake of the Great Depression, workers presented their own political skits and pageants in conjunction with various strikes. In the early 1930s there emerged the Workers' Theatre, consisting of hundreds of troupes.⁴⁷ The goal of this movement was that worker-actors would perform for their fellow workers and create a "distinct working-class culture" which would inspire economic and political struggle. Significantly, rather than having a commitment to an aesthetic which dictated that universal culture transcends social class, these groups embraced the concept of class culture which:

presupposed that the conflicting economic and political interests between workers and their employers necessitated a different cultural expression by the conflicting classes.⁴⁸

This is essentially the *rasquachismo* mentioned above, although present in a different cultural milieu. These performers elaborated a style and form of theatre which reflected their political goals and met the physical and logistical limits they faced as amateurs performing in spaces not equipped for theatre, such as factories and meeting halls. Therefore, the political content of this agit-prop theatre was radical and the sets were simple and mobile for the purpose of taking theatre to the people. As circus techniques were used, the acting style was physical and the characters archetypal.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, after 1934 the concept of a universal culture began to dominate over the concept of class culture. Realism and stationary theatres returned and the movement began to concern itself more with the theatre professional than with the worker actor. Agitprop, best suited to revolutionary or potentially revolutionary situations, faded as it was regarded as out of place when the international working class, rather than

⁴⁷Bruce A. McConachie and Daniel Friedman, *Theatre for Working Class Audiences in the United States. 1830-1980*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1985 p. 9

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 112

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 113

finding itself on the brink of revolution, saw its aspirations thwarted. The rise of fascism in Europe forced all parties to effect a united front as a defensive policy against it and the workers' theatre movement was forced to seek alliances with liberal theatre professionals. Its aesthetic was eroded and this resulted in imitations of conventional theatre. The major talent of the independent workers' theatre was attracted to the Federal Theatre Project of the Roosevelt administration. Therefore:

The American workers' theatre movement emerged, flourished and died in less than a decade. Its most talented artists and most innovative techniques were absorbed by the mainstream theatre.⁵⁰

Such a cycle began again in the 1960s against the backdrop of the growing civil rights movement. Theatre troupes picked up the thread of this theatrical tradition and attempted to dedicate themselves to performing theatre for working people. The first, and probably the most influential group to attempt to perform non-elitist theatre and revive the tradition of performing theatre for working class audiences was the San Francisco Mime Troupe founded by R.G. Davis in 1959. Beginning by performing silent mime, the troupe, by the mid-1960s, was performing *commedia dell'arte* theatre, updated to confront contemporary social issues. They performed free in the parks of the San Francisco Bay area. By the end of the 1960s:

through a combination of their exciting and highly skilled performance, the radical content of their plays, police harassment that turned many of their shows into demonstrations, and extensive touring of college campuses - the Mime Troupe had become *the* theatre of America's left-wing community.⁵¹

Yet, this left wing community was made up of white students and "counterculturalists," not workers. Through studying socialist theory the group came to the conclusion that it was the

⁵⁰Ibid. p.117

⁵¹Ibid. p.201

working class rather than students who had the potential to "profoundly alter American society along more humane and democratic lines".⁵² They attempted to build a working-class audience by exploring popular American theatrical forms such as vaudeville, melodrama and circus and developed a working class stand in the content of their plays. They also worked to achieve a multi-racial troupe and attempted to link up with working class social, political and trade union organizations to reach a working-class audience. The groups which followed in the wake of the Mime Troupe held that the American working class was bereft of a culture giving them a positive image of themselves or providing them with an accurate reflection of their history. They believed that greater economic and political power should rest with the working class and that culture especially live theatre, was an important part of the process of "empowering the working class". Rather than "bringing" culture to the working class, they sought to engage in a "collaborative process of creation with their audience".⁵³ Most of these groups extended their belief in democracy to the organization of their own work. Committed to a collective process, which would democratize the "traditionally hierarchical and autocratic field of theatre", it meant that:

all members participate, on one level or another, in all aspects of the theatre's work, both administrative and artistic.⁵⁴

The goals of the San Francisco Mime Troupe were to a large extent the early goals of contemporary Chicano theatre also, as exemplified through the activities of one man, the founder of El Teatro Campesino and the Chicano Theatre Movement, Luis Valdez.

⁵²Ibid. p.201

⁵³Ibid. p.225

⁵⁴Ibid. p.231

2. Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino.

Valdez was inspired by the San Francisco Mime Troupe and indeed, worked with them for some months.⁵⁵ Although born into a migrant *campesino* family in the San Joaquín Valley in 1940, and despite an interrupted schooling, he was able to attend San José State University, having won a scholarship. He studied English and Dramatic Literature and excelled as an actor. After graduation he made a trip to Cuba with the first "Venceremos Brigade" and returned with an enthusiasm for socialism and Fidel Castro, who he regarded as "the real voice of Latin America".⁵⁶ He was able to put what he had learned into practice in 1965 when he was invited by César Chávez to keep up the morale of his strikers in Delano and explain the more complicated analyses of the strike. Valdez decided to form a theatre group and took masks and signs to the farmworkers and asked them to act out scenes from their own daily lives.⁵⁷ None of the workers had ever been to a theatre and so Valdez set about creating "a bilingual community farmworkers' theatre project" of, by and for the striking families, and put in motion a renewed workers' theatre.⁵⁸ Importantly, as the single purpose of the group was to win the strike, Valdez did not wish the group to be judged as theatre at this point. He did not, then, from the outset, adhere to a belief in class culture, as has been clear from his subsequent trajectory in which he has consistently moved towards universal definitions of culture, but with a Chicano flavour. He did, however, provide an early definition of Chicano theatre which gave the impression that he might be committed to creating working-class culture:

⁵⁵Ibid. p.203

⁵⁶Jorge Huerta, 'The Influences of Latin American Theatre on Teatro Chicano', in *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1983 p.69

⁵⁷Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today' in Francisco Jiménez, (ed) *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.91

⁵⁸Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, *The First Twenty Years, The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc. 1985. Reproduction of text of first leaflet announcing the first gathering of farmworkers to create El Teatro Campesino, November 2nd, 1965 p.7

Chicano theater must be revolutionary in technique as well as in content. It must be popular, subject to no other critics except the pueblo itself; but it must also educate the pueblo towards an appreciation of social change, on and off the stage.⁵⁹

Here we might define the term "popular." The *pueblo*, rather than consisting of the totality of the inhabitants of a place, region or country, corresponds to the "gente común y humilde de una población".⁶⁰ A play may be regarded as popular when it presents "la perspectiva transformadora del pueblo".⁶¹ It deals, then, with the working class, farmworkers, Indians and the lower middle class, socioeconomically less privileged and historically marginalized from the political process. This includes students, artists, and intellectuals who have placed their understanding at the service of the groups mentioned:

el teatro popular es el teatro que existe por y para las clases populares y que presenta los conflictos dramaticos de acuerdo a su perspectiva o vision del mundo; o sea, la que refleja sus necesidades e intereses colectivos, tanto espirituales como materiales.⁶²

These definitions, although broad, serve for the moment to describe what was thought to be the approach of Valdez and his Teatro Campesino. One other element must be added, however, this being the understanding that the *pueblo* for Valdez and the Chicanos at this stage did not include people, however humble, of other races. Whites, or Anglo Americans were excluded, but more surprisingly, the Phillipino workers who shared the Delano strike, did not figure either.

The *acto* was the theatrical form which was initially chosen to achieve the group's objectives. This received its name out of expediency as there was little time to discuss semantics or

⁵⁹Luis Valdez, *Actos* p.2, quoted in Tatum, op. cit. p.52

⁶⁰Donald Frischman, 'El Nuevo Teatro Popular Mexicano y Su Contexto Social' XIII Festival de Teatro Chicano Latino, Cuernavaca, Mexico, 27 July - 3 August, 1986, unpublished paper, p.1

⁶¹Augusto Boal, quoted in Frischman, op. cit. p.2

⁶²Ibid. p.3

labels given that all the available energy was being channelled into the union. Nonetheless, for Valdez, the word *skit* seemed too light and the word *entremés* too literary.⁶³ Given that the farmworkers spoke Spanish, the term *acto* seemed more appropriate for these pieces.⁶⁴ The creation of the *acto* was also straightforward. The actor/farmworkers of Delano took real life incidents characters or ideas and improvised round these in *commedia dell'arte* fashion, with neither scripts nor scenery. A highly portable theatre, props and costumes were only introduced when they were necessary to reinforce characters or situations, although the union flag served as a backdrop. Technically, a flatbed truck and some car headlights were all that was needed.⁶⁵ The participants, under Valdez's direction, made no attempt to disguise the fact that they were strikers in the same cause as their audience; Valdez sought to create "unbourgeois" theatre by having unbourgeois people do it, as the Workers' Theatre had done thirty years previously, and the theatre group appealed to its actors for the same reasons it appealed to its audience.⁶⁶ Valdez attempted to avoid alienating the farmworkers by not requiring any political or theatrical sophistication:

the actors always appealed directly and simply to the immediate experience of the striking farmworkers.⁶⁷

A learning experience with no formal prerequisites, many farmworkers-turned-actors were illiterate. The *acto* then, was "the perfect form of expression for non-theatre people".⁶⁸ It was a ten or fifteen-minute piece of improvised theatre, created with a number of purposes.

⁶³Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985 p.3

⁶⁴Tatum, op. cit. p.52

⁶⁵Luis Valdez, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company 1965-1985* San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985 p.3

⁶⁶Huerta, 1982 p.17

⁶⁷John Harrop and Jorge Huerta, "The Agitprop Pilgrimage of Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino" *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 5 No. 17, 1975 p.31

⁶⁸Huerta, "From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today, in Francisco Jiménez, (ed) *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.92

It was to inspire the audience to social action, illuminate specific points about social problems, satirize the opposition, show or hint at a solution and express what people were feeling.⁶⁹ Yet, when the *acto* had a point to make - as it invariably did - the message:

is just a step ahead of the audience, and the audience takes the step easily.⁷⁰

As in the *carpa*, farce and physicality were also employed to help make the message clear. Although the work of El Teatro Campesino was clearly indebted to earlier forms of theatre created for working class audiences, its creators took pride in its culturally unique aspects. Theatre for Chicanos, the *acto* dealt solely with Chicano experiences and, given the racial make-up of the farmworkers, had to be linguistically versatile and reflect Chicano bilingualism and biculturalism. The character types it elaborated were not the Arlecchinos and Pantaleones of the *commedia dell'arte* but characters associated with the strike. These included the poor, exploited *campesino*, or farmworker; the *esquirol*, or scab, imported from Mexico to break the strike by crossing picket lines; the hated *contratista*, or labour contractor, also known as the *coyote*, who exploits his fellow Chicanos for profit; the *patroncito*, or greedy, wicked grower, and the heroic, committed *huelguista*, or striker. Good guys and bad guys, these types, clearly identifiable to the audience through the use of signs hung round the actors' necks, were combined in dozens of ways.⁷¹ In one dramatic instance, for example, which typifies the core and *raison d'etre* of the *acto*, in the space of turning round, the *esquirol* becomes a *huelguista*, "which has actually happened in hundreds of cases".⁷²

⁶⁹Tatum, op. cit. p.52

⁷⁰Valdez, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985 p.4

⁷¹Ibid. p.3

⁷²John L. Wasserman, 'The Man Behind El Teatro Campesino' *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mon. May 2, 1966 p.10

Like the *carpa*, the *acto* did not employ the theatrical convention of the "fourth wall," or illusory divide between actors and audience. This was not only logical, as there were no walls as such, unlike in traditional realist drama, which took place in a conventional theatre, but also the farmworker audiences had not learned how to observe in silence and effect complicity in the illusion that the events on stage were real. They felt, and were, free to indulge in exchanges with the actors, particularly since most of the early *actos* were comic, indeed slapstick, in nature. Given the circumstances of the theatre, Valdez reasoned that this was for the best as, "you can't do tragedy on the back of a truck".⁷³ Valdez considered this early process revolutionary, particularly as the *acto* itself was a result of the "collective creative effort" of himself, the farmworkers and other interested participants, such as a few students.⁷⁴

These early Teatro Campesino works dramatising the conflict between farmworkers and the doyens of agrobusiness provoked great interest and attempts were made to define them:

As in the old Everyman morality plays, each character has a clear identity, is caught in a sharply defined situation, and is presented with a clear choice of destinies.⁷⁵

Yet, with public and media interest, changes came for the group. Participation in a march north to Sacramento in April 1966, during which they performed nightly, led to their first commercial engagement in San Francisco on May 2nd, 1966. A year of touring Chicano population centres in California to raise support for the strike followed, as did a national tour in the summer of 1967 in which the group performed in union halls, university campuses

⁷³Valdez, quoted in Harrop and Huerta, op. cit. p.31

⁷⁴Tatum op. cit. p.53. Authorship of the early *actos* was later credited to Luis Valdez.

⁷⁵*Newsweek*, 31st July, 1967 p.43

and for the Washington Senate Subcommittee on Migrant Labour.⁷⁶ The group received an Obie and Valdez, still claiming that Campesino was a people's theatre reflected:

The strike in Delano is a beautiful cause, but it won't leave you alone ... it's more important to leave a rehearsal and go back to the picket line. So we found we had to back away from Delano to be a theatre. Do you serve the movement by being just kind of half-assed, getting together whenever there's a chance, or do you really hone your theatre down into an effective weapon?
77

Valdez and the group made the decision to sever their direct link with the UFW and devote all their time to theatre. Having established El Centro Campesino Cultural in Del Rey, California, the group's *actos* began to focus on non-farmworker related Chicano problems and the wider social perspective. Valdez, freed from the constraints of the union, began to focus on the history of the Chicanos. Believing El Teatro Campesino to be:

part of a total thrust by humanity struggling towards something, a new world, a new society⁷⁸

he wished to apportion the Chicanos a measure of cultural and historical pride. Aware of the double pattern of conquest -Spanish and Anglo-American - relevant to Chicanos, and basing their concept of cultural pride on racial factors the group began to search for the identity of La Raza.⁷⁹ They also dealt with social issues, such as the selling out of one's Mexican heritage in **Los Vendidos**, the war in Vietnam in **Vietnam Campesino**, and the failure of the educational system with regards to Chicano youth in **No Saco Nada de la Escuela**.⁸⁰ To deal with these broader abstract issues which were related to, but not a direct

⁷⁶Harrop and Huerta, op. cit. p.32

⁷⁷Valdez, quoted in Harrop and Huerta, op. cit. p.32

⁷⁸Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985 p.11

⁷⁹Harrop and Huerta, op. cit. p.32

⁸⁰Ibid. p.33

part of, their immediate experience, the ex-farmworkers had to develop technically and underwent a training programme devised by Valdez, such as the kind that "new" theatre groups in the sixties were following.⁸¹ Without compromising the improvisational basis of the creative process this involved, among other techniques, trust and sensitivity exercises and physical movement. They claimed that these changes did not signify a move away from doing people's theatre as "aesthetics never got in the way of direct communication"⁸² and the new consciousness of the group was rooted in social questions, proclaiming, as it did, its brotherhood with the anti-war movement and "all colonized peoples".⁸³

Yet, further developments were afoot. In 1969 El Teatro Campesino relocated to the town of Fresno where urban distractions and frictions within the group led Valdez to de-emphasize sloganeering in favour of "a greater spirituality".⁸⁴ In response to this, in December of 1971 the group, having made a definitive move to rural San Juan Bautista, adapted a traditional *pastorela*, which they entitled **La Virgen del Tepeyac** for contemporary Chicano audiences. Based on the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the baptized Indian Juan Diego in Mexico city in 1531, this piece was chosen to reach a Catholic public which Valdez believed had remained distanced from the Chicano movement.⁸⁵ Valdez respected - and later claimed to share - the Catholicism of the Chicanos but he altered the *pastorela* to reflect the "present colonization of the people." Thus he shrewdly endeared the troupe to the public and local priests through a sensitive, respectful portrayal of the Virgin while at the same time illustrating the true economic nature of the Spanish conquest and colonization under the

⁸¹Ibid. p.32

⁸²Ibid. p.32

⁸³Ibid. pp.33-34

⁸⁴Theodore Shank, 'El Teatro Campesino: The Farmworkers' Theatre', in Bruce A. McConachie and Daniel Friedman, *Theatre for Working Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980*, p.188

⁸⁵Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.193

pretext of religious conversion.⁸⁶ Significantly, the performance of the *pastorela* introduced what was to be a fundamental philosophical strain in the group's work to the present. The Roman Catholic deity of the Virgin of Guadalupe was presented as analogous to the Aztec earth mother Tonantzin, given that the appearance of the Virgin took place on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City on the site of the Aztec deity. Valdez argued that:

The Chicano can discover his true roots and spiritual identity through the symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe-cum-Tonantzin. That same mother earth from which we must all derive our inner strength, a sense of unity and universal love.⁸⁷

This syncretism of Roman Catholicism and indigenism was further developed in what Valdez called a new form for Chicano theatre, namely the *mito*. The newer form was not to replace the older one; rather, both were to co-exist. Theatrical twins or *cuates*, they were to:

complement and balance each other as day goes into night, el sol, la sombra, la vida la muerte, el pájaro, la serpiente. Our rejection of white western European (gavacho) proscenium theatre makes the birth of new Chicano forms necessary - thus, los actos y los mitos; one through the eyes of man; the other through the eyes of God.⁸⁸

The form of the *mito*, essentially a parable which unravelled "like a flower indio-fashion to reveal the total significance of a certain event" had its genesis in ritual.⁸⁹ Its content was Valdez's understanding of the cosmic vision of pre-Columbian Indian civilizations.⁹⁰ In 1971 Valdez began to disseminate his new ideas in a document entitled *Pensamiento Serpentino*. This put forth the contention that the Chicano had to be liberated:

⁸⁶Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today, in Francisco Jiménez, (ed) *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.111

⁸⁷Harrop and Huerta, op. cit. p.36

⁸⁸Luis Valdez, *Actos* p.5

⁸⁹Francisco Jiménez, 'The Dramatic Principles of the Teatro Campesino' in *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature* Francisco Jiménez, Bilingual Press, New York, 1979, p.123

⁹⁰Ibid.

BY HIS POPUL VUH
 HIS CHILAM BALAM
 HIS CHICHEN ITZA
 KUKULCAN, GUCUMATZ, QUETZALCOATL.⁹¹

Valdez appealed to the Maya's and the Aztec's cosmic vision as the way to understanding rather than through intellectual philosophy. He held that the Mayas "really had it together" and overlooked the imperialistic thrust of their society and that of the Aztecs. He wanted Chicanos to see that they were "neo-mayas" and dwarfed the significance of the Chicano Movement by holding that for cosmic man:

racial distinctions
 no existen
 limites materiales no existen
 nations, wealth, fashions,
 hatreds, envidias, greed,
 the lust for power
 no existen

 not even the lust for
 CHICANO POWER.⁹²

He further minimized the Chicano struggle and illustrated his own ignorance of Chicano history by affirming that:

Compared to the Vietnamese,
 our life in the hands of the gringo
 has been
 a tardeada con pura música de acordeón".⁹³

Despite the affirmation that the *mito* was not to displace the *acto*, it is palpably clear that Luis Valdez's contribution to popular Chicano theatre ended at this time. Valdez attempted to

⁹¹Luis Valdez, *Pensamiento Serpentinao*, Cucaracha Press, San Juan Bautista, 1971 p.2

⁹²Ibid. p.4

⁹³Ibid. p.9

isolate the cultural from the historical and failed to understand the symbiotic relationship between the two. This soon resulted in theatrical works which misrepresented and disfigured the Chicanos, although this was not immediately evident as El Teatro Campesino, in terms of theatrical skill, were still unsurpassed.

In 1971 Valdez alone penned **Bernabé**, which he called a contemporary *mito*.⁹⁴ Composed of realistic and allegorical characters and historical and mythical elements in which the Aztec ritual of offering the human heart to the sun god was paralleled with the work of the *campesino* under the blazing sun, the *mito* led to the group's epic culmination of all they had done, **La Gran Carpa de los Rasquachis**.⁹⁵ First performed in 1973 this was initially welcomed as totally innovative theatre. It was a combination of the *acto*, the *mito*, and a newer element, the *corrido*, or sung narrative derived from oral ballads.⁹⁶ With very attractive costumes, dance-like stylized movement, pantomime and an almost continual musical accompaniment, this politically less direct *corrido* form was:

designed to depart from realism; for the *corrido* is lyrical, satirical, lightly philosophical, and somewhat reminiscent of ballet.⁹⁷

Given such complexity this extravagant work was a theatrical tour de force. Two *mitos* framed a central *acto* and together told of the life of trials and tribulations of the Mexican immigrant central character, Jesús Pelado Rasquachi, obviously consciously derived from the *carpa*.⁹⁸ Yet despite the epic proportions of the play and its complete exposé of the

⁹⁴Huerta, 1982 p195

⁹⁵Huerta, 1982 p199

⁹⁶At the first Chicano directors' conference Valdez offered a workshop on the dramatization of the traditional *corrido*. See Jorge Huerta, 'Chicano Teatro: A Background,' *Aztlan*, Vol. 2 No. 2, Fall 1971 pp.70-71

⁹⁷Nicolás Kanellos, 'Folklore in Chicano Theater and Chicano Theater as Folklore' in Gerardo Luzuriaga (ed) *Popular Theatre for Social Change in Latin America*, Latin American Center Publications, Los Angeles 1978, p.168

⁹⁸Yvonne Yarbro Bejarano, 'From *acto* to *mito*: A Critical Appraisal of the Teatro Campesino' in Sommers et. al. *Modern Chicano Writers*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall Inc., 1979 p.178

issues affecting the Chicanos, in a departure from the *acto*, it advocated no solutions other than religious ones. The actor who had originally played a crucified Christ figure in the opening *mito*, returns in the concluding one dressed in the plumed splendour of Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent and Mesoamerican god of wisdom and redemption. This deity joins with the Virgin of Guadalupe onstage to recite the Mayan "In lak'ech" or, in Christian terms, the philosophy of "Love thy neighbour as thyself." A unity of Christ with Quetzalcóatl was proffered as Valdez, employing the Mayan calendar, maintained that Quetzalcóatl, the god of the positive force would be born again near the end of the century when the world would enter a time of peace. Therefore, the group's task was to prepare Chicanos spiritually for his return.⁹⁹ In 1974 Valdez, believing the realism of the dominant American theatre as being too focused on the material aspects of human life, commented:

We are still very much the political theatre, but our politics are the politics of the spirit - not of the flesh, but of the heart.¹⁰⁰

Despite the use of the word "politics" Valdez in fact believed that the Chicano had to grasp his indigenous heritage or culture as the spiritual key to his existence and purpose in life. He sought to "really open up the word Chicano" and to "include all of its human potentiality," in effect, away from political and social definitions.¹⁰¹ To do otherwise, he felt, was to leave Chicanos as "just a minority group, a minority experience".¹⁰² At this stage, however, while Valdez sought to uncover the universal characteristics of the Chicano and his culture he - and many Chicanos - rejected the Anglo or white European elements which were inextricably a part of them. Through their use of the *mito*, apart and distinct from the *acto*, the group also

⁹⁹Harrop and Hucra, op. cit. p.38

¹⁰⁰Ibid. p.38

¹⁰¹Luis Valdez, 'Pájaros y Serpientes: A Conversation with Peter Brook', *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985, p.16

¹⁰²Ibid. p.16

illustrated their assumption that political understanding is not inextricably linked to culture. Valdez's own definition of culture was becoming clearer. While he eschewed *commedia dell'arte* as a European form he chose to embrace other theatrical forms which he defined as part of the Chicanos' culture. The result was a tussle between an approach to culture as something universal, good for all times and all circumstances, and cultural nationalism, in which cultures can be arranged hierarchically according to perceived merits. At the top of this latter hierarchy came, not Anglo American culture or hybrid culture, but Aztec and Mayan culture. In 1974 Teatro Campesino performed **El Baile de los Gigantes**, derived from the Mayan sacred book, the *Popul Vuh* to achieve "social efficacy through ritual purification" away from American materialism.¹⁰³ Again, in Valdez's next work, **El Fin del Mundo** (1975), no special issue was in focus as Valdez deemed the farmworkers to be better organized and therefore he did not acknowledge the existence of an acute political cause. Valdez's understanding of culture, then, while "universal" in that it ignored particular historical struggles, was cultural nationalist in that morally, Aztecs and Mayas were deemed to be superior to white Europeans.

It was because of, and not in spite of this blend, that Valdez was able to gain access to commercial theatre in the United States. In 1975 Teatro Campesino comprised some thirty people in a family of families whose total income was some \$3,000 a month. Group members were receiving less than government welfare amounts and so the need to be economically viable mingled with Valdez's new commitment to bringing his theatre to a larger audience, given his recent study of the Anglo-Hispanic relationship.¹⁰⁴ In 1977 Valdez's economic need was expressed in messianic terms. He wrote:

¹⁰³Theodore Shank, 'El Teatro Campesino: The Farmworkers' Theatre', in *Theatre for Working Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980*, Bruce A. McConachie and Daniel Friedman, p.190

¹⁰⁴Charles Pelton, 'Zoot-Suiting to Hollywood: Teatro Campesino's Luis Valdez' *Arbeits* Dec. 1980 p.28

We must produce for the millions of people in our popular audience. Our message - as particular as it may seem or actually be - must also make sense to ALL the people of this country. We must produce works with an eye towards vast consumption ... Go beyond performing for a small circle of friends. Sympathetic audiences. Go for the national audience. The international audience.¹⁰⁵

Clearly Valdez had again redefined for himself the term popular. Frischman differentiates popular culture from the "cultura de masas." Although the latter might appear to be popular, or of the people, due to its proliferation and its occasional "apropiación estratégica de algunos elementos formales del arte popular" it is in fact an imposed mass media culture in the hands of the dominant classes through which:

difunden su ideología y se plantean (...) separar al trabajador de sus intereses de clase y propagar en él modas y costumbres que se le inducen desde temprana edad al consumismo.¹⁰⁶

This definition is borne out in *Zoot Suit*, although this approach was to bear its finest fruits when Valdez became a film-maker in 1987. Valdez wrote the play himself in 1978 under commission to the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. In receipt of a writer in residence grant from the Rockefeller Foundation the grant was conceded to Valdez as an individual and not as a director of a group.¹⁰⁷ The play, based on the violent events of the 1940s in Los Angeles was a great success and established a precedent in Anglo-American theatre.¹⁰⁸ It broke all records as part of the theatre's vanguard series, passed to the regular subscription season, sponsored by subscribers who represented "la crema y nata de la burguesía de Los Angeles".¹⁰⁹ Part of this audience was the Chicano middle class, although:

¹⁰⁵Luis Valdez, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985, p.23

¹⁰⁶Donald Frischman, op. cit. p.4.

¹⁰⁷Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano and Tomás Ybarra Frausto, 'Zoot Suit y El Movimiento Chicano,' *Plural*, Mexico (2a. época), Vol. 9-7 No. 103, April 1980 p.49

¹⁰⁸See Chapter 1, pp.34-37

¹⁰⁹Yarbrow Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.52

el gran esfuerzo de promover la obra usando los medios masivos de comunicación hizo que asistiera un grupo de "la raza" que jamás había frecuentado el teatro.¹¹⁰

With the removal of the play to the Aquarius Theatre in Hollywood it became a true example of "teatro vinculado a intereses económicos", grossing some \$100,000 weekly. Huge adverts appeared in the Los Angeles Times, smaller adverts in Chicano community newspapers and T-shirts and posters were sold. Ticket prices ranged between thirteen and twenty dollars, too much for barrio audiences to afford, except as a very special treat.¹¹¹ In this way, Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, evolved their own model for Chicano theatre, which has continued to the present. Nonetheless, while they helped sow respect and pride in the Chicano community, many other Chicano theatre groups emerged and held their own debates, often with Teatro Campesino, and sought their own definitions and models of Chicano theatre.

3. The Chicano Theatre Movement.

By the late sixties there were more than fifty *teatros* in the United States which had followed Teatro Campesino's lead and were continuing and "transforming an established and vital theatrical tradition".¹¹² Therefore, TENAZ was formed in 1971 to coordinate communication among groups and make of Chicano theatre a tool for social change.¹¹³ At the outset the intention was to form a national company, the Teatro Nacional de Aztlán, incorporating different members of independent groups, to pool resources. Initially Luis Valdez was to

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Tomás Ybarra Frausto: 'El Teatro Libertad: Antecedents and Actuality,' Unpublished article, Chicano Studies course book, Yolanda Broyles González, (ed) University of California Santa Barbara 1986 pp. 123-136

¹¹³Jorge Huerta, 1982 p.2

direct this company but, given his busy schedule, this never materialised. Nonetheless, TENAZ, particularly through its theatre festivals, has existed as an invaluable forum for debate. Although Emilio Carballido, as recently as 1980 could write that "el chicano es un teatro que cumple sus propias metas," given the Chicanos' roots in two cultures and two languages and the historic discrimination against them, they are constantly forced to make choices on many aspects of their existence.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the "metas" spoken of with reference to theatre have not merely to be attained, but defined in the first place. Whether to perform in Spanish or in English, in the community or on the commercial stage; whether to develop traditional themes and forms or experimental ones, and ultimately whether to frame questions or offer solutions, Chicano artists have constantly had to question their reasons for doing theatre and the best way to do it, in the light of their circumstances. There has been no better forum for the airing of these questions than TENAZ.

The First TENAZ festival in 1970 was a relatively small affair, involving thirteen groups. Teatro Campesino was the only Chicano group there doing theatre on a full time basis. The other groups were part-time, many of them student oriented, and clearly suffering from a lack of training and material.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, there were also some Latin American groups present, willing to share their experience and expertise. Chicano groups, then, from the outset of TENAZ, began to develop a formal relationship with Latin American theatre groups.¹¹⁶ The Second TENAZ festival in Santa Cruz in April 1971 was an enthusiastic affair which generated much constructive criticism.¹¹⁷ The question of the Chicano theatre

¹¹⁴Elda Peralta: 'Emilio Carballido: El Teatro Chicano, La Política y La Censura' *Plural* (2a época), Vol. 4-5 No.100, January 1980 p.64

¹¹⁵Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today, in *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, Francisco Jiménez (ed), New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.93

¹¹⁶Jorge Huerta, 'The Influences of Latin American Theater on Teatro Chicano' in *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Revista Chicano-Riqueña Year 11, No.1, 1983 p.70

¹¹⁷Marcos Contreras, *The Aesthetic-Political Development of the Chicano Theatre Movement and the Political Contradictions in the Artistic Evolution of the Teatro Campesino*, M.A. Thesis, University of California at San Diego, 1984 p.46

worker's audience was discussed. A writer for *La Raza* magazine, noting the faithful copies of Teatro Campesino *actos*, underlined the fact that Chicano audiences were diverse and not all rural in composition. Questioning the relevance of these *actos* to urban Chicanos he wrote:

Teatros that contain actors that can't speak Spanish, that never picked a grape or plum in their life, and only relate to land when they sit at the park on a Sunday afternoon should not attempt to portray the essence of campesino life.¹¹⁸

This writer also condemned Teatro Campesino for satirizing the campesino in **La Quinta Temporada** by portraying him as a buffoon. Adding that Chicanos do not "drink wine, smoke pot or fuck" at the drop of a hat, he commented that Chicanos were too often the butt of derision by "racist gabachos" because the latter have an image of the former that looks "too much like characters or types in the Campesino actos".¹¹⁹

This criticism pointed to a fundamental difficulty in Chicano theatre, that of Chicano theatre groups being free and able to criticise fellow Chicanos on stage. If Chicano communities possess a communal, popular self-image which theatre troupes must respect, even as their commitment to engage theatre compels them to criticise values which issue from that self-image, careful techniques have to be employed to achieve a change in that self-image.¹²⁰ Groups had therefore to show themselves to be "insiders" or participants in Chicano culture and not "outsiders." A *teatro* must tread a fine line:

proving itself part of the traditional Chicano community while at once signalling the need for and path towards social change.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *La Raza*, Los Angeles, Vol. 1 No. 6, 197? p.10

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹²⁰ Juan Bruce Novoa and David Valentín, 'Revolutionizing the Popular Image,' *Latin American Literary Review* Vol. 5 No. 10, Spring, Summer 1977 p.43

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

The spectator, then, should go home with "the seeds of change locked within the image of a traditional type" but clearly, as early as this, Chicano commentators saw the need to progress away from such types and create more complex characters on stage. Central to this question is that of the creation of theatrical material. Early Chicano theatre had a didactic mission and so the politicization of children through Chicano theatre was also of special concern. An *acto* entitled **Caperusita Roja** (sic), although "cute," was defined as a *gabacho* story, although performed by Chicanos. Therefore it also fell short of the aims of Chicano theatre, and illustrated that Chicanos had to create their own material. Another *acto* by the Teatro Pioja, **La Llorona**, based on a well-known Mexican folk-tale and performed as a puppet show, was criticised for omitting to use the content in a political way and show why the children in the story were dying of hunger.¹²² Early on, then, the important question of the use of folk culture in Chicano theatre was raised:

Simply to preserve cultural traditions for the sake of preservation is a reactionary concept. Culture is not sacred in and of itself. Culture, which includes our traditions and folklore must be adjusted to meet the reality of Chicano existence in this pig society.¹²³

Importantly, this writer defines Chicano theatre away from the cultural nationalist Campesino brand by illustrating that cultural manifestations often do not transcend historical change but instead must be sacrificed to it. This debate was to continue in the years to come; in the meantime, the vibrant Chicano theatre movement celebrated festivals on a yearly basis. The Third Festival in 1972 saw the participation of 25 groups¹²⁴ and the Fourth, which took place in San Jose, California, June 1973, opened up the debate on artistic quality in Chicano theatre, rather than mere political efficacy. Some thirty groups took part and in some cases,

¹²²*La Raza*, Los Angeles, Vol. 1 No. 6, 197 p.10

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.11

¹²⁴ Contreras, *op. cit.* p.48

such as *El Teatro de la Esperanza* and *El Teatro de la Gente* there was a clear attempt to "desarrollar el nivel artístico y claridad de contenido en las obras presentadas".¹²⁵ An example of a play consisting of artistic skill and content based on effective political analysis was **Máquinas y burgueses**, by the Mexican troupe, Mascarones. This was a collective creation in the style of Brecht, dealing with the exploitation of the forces of production by the dominant class throughout periods of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. In the last section Marxist ideas, the development of unions and the French Revolution were presented and, significantly, the play presented people as capable of shaping their own destiny. Of good quality with the ideas clearly laid out, the play impressed the Chicano groups present.¹²⁶ The use of a Brechtian style, however, was not new to Chicanos although Chicano theatre had emphasised different aspects of it. While Brecht's theatre originally attempted to interrupt the symbiotic audience-theatre relationship and produce a distanciation to allow the middle-class spectator to develop his critical consciousness, this relationship of trust did not exist for the Chicano spectator, historically marginalized from the theatre in general and mistrustful of it.¹²⁷ Therefore, early Chicano theatre employed the presentational aspects of Brecht's style but with immediately recognizable types to cross this breach of unfamiliarity. A further, and more fundamental, aspect of Brecht which was used was his appeal to the intellectual and the rational, through Marxism, embraced in the Chicano social movement at the time. It became clear, however, that there existed a challenge to this aspect of Brechtian theatre by none other than Teatro Campesino and their **Gran Carpa de los Rasquachis**. Valdez, stressing the importance of different theatrical currents for Chicano theatre, cited his work as having been influenced by a long list of theatrical styles, among them *commedia dell'arte*, Symbolism, Old Comedy, Artaud and, significantly, Brecht.¹²⁸ Yet, he was beginning to reject the

¹²⁵Ibid. p.50

¹²⁶Tatum, op. cit. p.62

¹²⁷Bruce Novoa and Valentín, op. cit. pp.42-43

¹²⁸Tatum, op. cit. p.61

Marxist ideology accompanying the work of Brecht. His appeal was becoming much simpler and more visceral, and ultimately, less intellectual, which resulted in a narrow cultural nationalism:

For our political and personal salvation we don't have to scurry to Marxism or Socialism. We can go to our own roots.¹²⁹

Proceeding in a monolithic fashion and regarding certain European and indeed, international, currents of thought as unoriginal and culturally alien to Chicanos, Valdez began to disseminate philosophical and theatrical ideas completely antagonistic to the work of, for example, Mascarones and many Chicano groups. He began to disseminate his understanding of a Mexican indigenist culture intermingled with Christian thought which was ultimately Roman Catholic, and therefore Spanish European, in nature. His focus shifted from the social to the spiritual and he began to stress the gaining of understanding through processes of the body and soul rather than through intellectual endeavour.¹³⁰ Due to the group's stunning visual and innovative style and perhaps their own lack of awareness, Chicano groups did not seriously question Campesino at this point. There was also another reason. The Fourth Festival had an important agenda, namely the drafting of a TENAZ manifesto, from which it is clear that the organization was already influenced by indigenist rhetoric. The code-switching page-long document which was drafted made certain important definitions of Chicano theatre at the time. Chicano theatre was deemed to have been born of the social struggle of the workers of La Raza and to be a community theatre which was :

la voz de los barrios, de la comunidad, de los de abajo, de los humildes, de los rasquachis niños, jóvenes, viejos, mujeres, estudiantes, obreros, campesinos, y hasta para los tapados.¹³¹

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹*Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Fall 1980 p.6

By appealing to La Raza, Chicanos were defined in terms of race and the members of TENAZ, designated as "trabajadores" were to commit themselves, as workers, to helping people to understand social problems and to search for solutions. This definition was unhelpful to Chicano theatre insofar as it, in theory at least, limited the theatrical aims of the group to the *acto*. Yet, importantly TENAZ proclaimed itself as interested in developing a "humane revolutionary alternative to commercial theatre and mass media" and aligned itself with Latin America. The rhetoric of the manifesto illustrates that Chicano theatre was clearly influenced by both the cultural nationalism and the Marxism of the social Movement as Chicano theatre:

debe nutrirse de las raíces culturales de nuestros antepasados para sembrar semillas de liberación en el presente y para cosechar en el futuro la victoria de nuestros pueblos.¹³²

The antagonism inherent in these ideologies was not to become clearly manifest until the next, most controversial Chicano theatre festival, the Quinto Festival.

4. El Quinto Festival: Milestone or Millstone?

A change of site in 1974, to the pyramids of Teotihuacán and Mexico City itself, was crucial for the subsequent development of Chicano theatre. Under the call for:

One continent, one culture, for a free theatre and for liberation,¹³³

¹³²Ibid. p.7

¹³³Theodore Shank, 'A Return To Mayan and Aztec Roots,' *The Drama Review* , Vol. 18 No. 4, (T-64), December 1974 p.57

some thirty five Chicano troupes, anxious to go to "their ancestral land" joined seventeen Latin American groups for a festival hosted by Mascarones.¹³⁴ The festival statement illustrated the broad aims of the participants:

We recognize our common cultural struggle as a people of one continent. That is why, as *trabajadores de la cultura* (cultural workers) we will unite in our effort to bring about the social, political and spiritual liberation of "La Raza" throughout the Americas. Therefore the emphasis of this festival will be on our common indigenous roots and traditions, as well as current political and social realities facing Chicanos and Latin Americans.¹³⁵

The festival participants did have some knowledge of the social vision of pre-Columbian indigenous groups. Most of the theatre pieces were collectively created by the groups performing them as this was believed to be in keeping with the indian's vision of art as an entity not separable from other activities of social utility. In the culture of the Chicanos' indigenous ancestors man was regarded as part of a collective culture, not a society of individuals, and craftsmen, unlike in contemporary North American culture, were not aggrandized through their work. Nor were their products regarded as commodities or mere objects of beauty as everything had a social function, that of maintaining an ordered harmony.¹³⁶ The *teatristas* saw their work as having a similar utility, and given this egalitarian, communal approach, not at variance with Marxist thought, groups were intent also on deconstructing the traditional, hierarchical theatrical structure of text-director-actors-public in which the text engenders the show, the director interprets the text, the actors carry out his interpretation, which is consumed by the public. While this utilitarian approach to artistic output did not yet lead to conflicts, other aspects of the festival did. Despite the

¹³⁴Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today, in *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, Francisco Jiménez (ed), New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.94

¹³⁵Theodore Shank, *op. cit.* p.57

¹³⁶Theodore Shank and Adele Edling Shank, 'Chicano and Latin American Alternative Theater' in Gerardo Luzuriaga (ed), *Popular Theatre for Social Change in Latin America*, Latin American Center Publications, Los Angeles, 1978 p.214

intention of recognising the cultural and historical homogeneity of the peoples of America, and despite the location of Mexico where Chicanos believed the indigenous culture of the continent to be preserved, the festival was from its inception the scene of great confrontation and division. The festival opened with a Mass at which an Indian group of Concheros performed ritual dances. Some participants, particularly those from Latin America, felt that giving recognition to the Church was inappropriate as it had been "one of the chief means of oppression by imperialist Spain".¹³⁷ Many Chicanos, however, who supported the United Farmworkers and the Roman Catholic *campesinos* considered the Mass :

meaningful recognition of the beliefs of the people whose cause they support.¹³⁸

The Concheros, who sang in Nahuátl and played indigenous instruments on the altar with the priest drew comparisons with Teatro Campesino. Descendents of the Aztecs, the Concheros' mission had been to perpetuate the ritual dances of their American ancestors and do so, not for entertainment purposes, but according to strict guidelines, to harmonize man and nature.¹³⁹ Valdez and Teatro Campesino adopted an indigenist stance and recreated a Chorti indian dramatization of Mayan myths, believed by the Chorti to be revealed truth, entitled **El Baile de los Gigantes**. Performed by eight dancers, a narrator and musicians who played drums, cymbals, flutes, rattles, guitars and conch shells, the piece emphasised the power of solar energy over conscious energy. Its purpose was also to "harmonize the individual with mankind and the cosmos" and combat the internal conflict and disunity brought about by the struggles for social justice. The group in fact stressed that the greatest cause unifying mankind is "the first cause and that is God".¹⁴⁰ Teatro Campesino also

¹³⁷Theodore Shank, op. cit. p.57

¹³⁸Ibid. p.57

¹³⁹Ibid. pp.58-59

¹⁴⁰Ibid. pp.65-66

emphasized that they regarded myths not as folklore but as practice valid for contemporary Chicanos. While, then, Campesino did not exploit the ritual as entertainment, as they might have done, this expression of faith and Valdez's adoption of this arcane religious practice as culturally relevant to Chicanos, drew the criticism that Chicanos were not *indios* but workers. Similar beliefs were again manifest in **La Gran Carpa de los Rasquachis**. Valdez revealed that the use of the Virgin of Guadalupe was not in fact a tactic to make the work more acceptable to campesinos. The group expressed their belief in her and in Jesus Christ-Quetzalcóatl, believing them to be manifestations of the same worldwide cosmic spirit. The Virgin, in their view, represented mercy and compassion and "self-sacrifice for others".¹⁴¹ Valdez affirmed:

Yo sí creo que Jesús revivió de muerto, creo en los milagros y ninguno de ustedes me puede quitar esa creencia, ninguno de ustedes le puede quitar esa creencia a su pueblo".¹⁴²

The play's advocacy of non-violence angered theatre practitioners such as Augusto Boal, Luis Cisneros and Guillermo Loo, the last involved in Chicano theatre. They scorned the political naiveté of the concept of non-violence against the forces which had carried out the 1968 Mexican massacre of Tlatelolco and attacked the play's offer of a solution to the Chicanos' problems through divine intervention.¹⁴³ The group was accused of idealizing the indigenous past by overlooking its imperialistic aspects and Enrique Buenaventura questioned whether Campesino had veered from its original objectives to dwell excessively on its own identity.¹⁴⁴ Latin American critics, then, were of the opinion that although Chicano theatre had perfected its style and technique, it had not evolved a true protest theatre

¹⁴¹Theodore Shank, Adele Edling Shank, op. cit. pp.224

¹⁴²Contreras, op. cit. p.87

¹⁴³Ibid. p.88

¹⁴⁴Tatum, op. cit. p.57

due to its lack of ideological sophistication.¹⁴⁵ Clearly, Valdez's uncritical, romantic cultural nationalist adoption of Mexican indian culture had, at its core, a similarity to the very cultural imperialism which the Chicano Movement and groups in Mexico opposed, as both are based on an assumption that cultures vary in terms of their superiority to one another. Meanwhile, Enrique Buenaventura was concerned that the festival had become bogged down in the debate between cultural nationalism and marxism, leaving the question of theatre to one side.¹⁴⁶

The Quinto Festival was a culture shock for all concerned but Chicano groups returned to the United States eager to continue their theatre.¹⁴⁷ Nicolás Kanellos called the festival:

the milestone that marked the beginnings of a maturity that hopefully would allow Chicano theatre to survive and continue to grow even after many of its primary issues are solved.¹⁴⁸

Yet, Valdez was not of the same opinion. He believed that the 1974 festival had set the Chicano theatre movement back ten years. In his opinion the Latin American accusations of a lack of militancy shook the confidence of young teatros and without a vibrant social movement in the United States to motivate them, many groups never regained it.¹⁴⁹ Fundamentally, the Quinto Festival illustrated to Chicanos that their movement differed in ideology from the political activity of Mexico and other Latin American countries and groups on both sides found they had less in common than they had supposed. There was not, in

¹⁴⁵Ibid. pp.62-63

¹⁴⁶Contreras, op. cit. p.58

¹⁴⁷Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena: Teatro Chicano Today, in *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, Francisco Jiménez (ed), New York, Bilingual Press, 1979 p.94

¹⁴⁸Nicolás Kanellos, 'Chicano Theater to Date,' *Tejidos: A Bilingual Journal for the Stimulation of Chicano Creativity and Criticism*, Austin, Vol. 2 No. 8, Winter 1975 p.40

¹⁴⁹Luis Valdez et al, *The First Twenty Years: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985*, San Juan Bautista, El Teatro Campesino Inc., 1985, p.20

fact, a common culture between them. While they were all *indios* or *mestizos*, it was now abundantly clear that one's race did not determine one's culture. Importantly, then, Chicanos discovered that they could not continue to define themselves in terms of their race alone and began to become aware of the North American aspects of their culture. Luis Valdez also discovered this, and, characteristically, was the first to capitalise on it, by seeking alliances with Anglo finance.

Chicano theatre was, in fact, facing financial problems. Between 1974 and 1976 the number of *teatros* fell by half, as, with the decline of the student movement, many Chicano Studies Departments were axed after 1974 and many of the groups which depended on them for sponsorship folded.¹⁵⁰ The need to create audiences to sustain the *teatros* was becoming clear.

Nonetheless, TENAZ had other questions on its agenda. To heal the wounds of the Quinto Festival the 1975 Sixth Festival in San Antonio, hosted by the Teatro de los Barrios, had the theme of "Encuentro con el barrio." It was hoped that this would give direction and cohesiveness to Chicano theatre.¹⁵¹ The presence of an all-white group from Minnesota, the Alive and Trucking Theater Company posed no problem as there was a trend of acceptance of non-Chicanos in the theatre movement. The divisions lay elsewhere. Despite the participation of some 30 groups from the United States, a satirical play by Teatro Mestizo illustrated the divisive effects of new questions on Chicanos, both in the Movement and in theatre. The play dealt with four young Chicanos who attend University in order to return to their barrio and aid in the struggle for social justice. They are, however, frustrated and split by the debate on cultural nationalism and Marxism as well as the women's movement and

¹⁵⁰Contreras, op. cit. p.163

¹⁵¹Tatum, op. cit. p.63

opportunism in the Chicano Movement.¹⁵² The Seventh Festival in 1976 took a different tack. Rather than focusing on the barrio, it broadened its focus to take in the nation, taking place in four sites in order to orchestrate a national response to the American Bicentennial. During the three month travelling spectacle which visited Seattle, Denver, San Jose and Los Angeles, the Marxist camp made ground, but the hoped for national impact did not occur. This was due to a lack of organization and a lack of theatrical fare relevant to the event.¹⁵³ In 1976 also, Valdez, tired of the lack of professionalism and eager to make money from his theatre, left the TENAZ board and Teatro Campesino resolved not to participate in any more TENAZ festivals.¹⁵⁴ In response to this, TENAZ resolved in 1977 with the Eighth Festival to present a showcase of the best of Chicano theatre. This initiated a new debate. Denver's Su Teatro responded to the organization's selectivity by calling it elitist and stressing:

if we are judged primarily on an aesthetic level it would be eliminating the importance of bringing politics to the people and leaving it at a level of entertainment.¹⁵⁵

The organizers, while they did not welcome an art for art's sake approach, desired that groups should be capable of defending their work from both an aesthetic and political position. Indeed, the productions reached a level of quality never before achieved, with ten full-length plays being presented in a variety of styles. There were *actos*, *corridos*, docudrama, social realism, surrealism and mime.¹⁵⁶ There were more human multidimensional characters; Bruce Novoa pointed out the need for these when he asked:

how long can a "typical" image remain in view before the spectator begins to question it; how long can you look at yourself as an archetype, or stereotype,

¹⁵²Contreras, op. cit. p.60

¹⁵³Ibid. p.64

¹⁵⁴Jorge Huerta, 'Luis Valdez's Zoot Suit: A New Direction for Chicano Theatre?', *Latin American Theatre Review*, 13/2 Summer 1980, p.73

¹⁵⁵ Contreras, op. cit. pp.148-149

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

before you start wondering where the rest of your individualizing characteristics are?¹⁵⁷

Among the works which attempted to deal with this problem were **La Víctima** by El Teatro de la Esperanza, by **El Vávil del '76** by Teatro Libertad and **La Familia Moreno** by Teatro Mestizo.¹⁵⁸ Despite these developments, however, many groups which had been involved with political organizations such as CASA-HGT, La Raza Unida Party, the Brown Berets, the Crusade for Justice and the UFWOC, folded once these groups, in crisis or defunct, could offer them no support.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, due to the pressing need for audience-development strategies, the definition of Chicano theatre began to broaden and change. For example, a number of Spanish plays and American works, some adapted for Chicano audiences, were being performed around this time. The Bilingual Foundation for the Arts presented Fernando de Roja's **La Celestina** and Romulus Zamora and his company presented Alfonso Sastre's **Muerte en el barrio** and a version of Lorca's **Bodas de sangre** set in the American southwest in the early 1800s, in which most of the original Spanish remained.¹⁶⁰ Zamora's approach to this classic, and to the debate on art, was not, however, merely to transpose it. Instead he placed theatrical "greats" originally part of an elitist culture in a context with which Chicanos could identify more easily. Students and barrio members were involved to help cross the cultural barrier between the university and the barrio. The result was often a "linguistic, visual, technical, dramatic and artistic delight".¹⁶¹ Accompanying the increasing debate on art was the emergence of many Chicano literary critics involved in Chicano theatre and attending TENAZ festivals. Affirmative Action programmes and Educational Opportunity Programmes in American universities had

¹⁵⁷Bruce Novoa and Valentín, op. cit p.44

¹⁵⁸Contreras, op. cit. pp.149-150

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Jorge Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 2 No. 4, Fall 1979 p.5

¹⁶¹Jorge Huerta, quoting local newspaper Sacramento Bee, December 9 1979 Section B, p.5, in *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Winter 1980, p.6

produced a core of such critics, among them Jorge Huerta, who was of the opinion that the growing complexity of dramatic offerings by Chicanos made analysis and qualified criticism necessary. He affirmed that:

As more and more Chicanos adapt plays to the ambiente Chicano, we will have to broaden our interpretation of what makes a play "Chicano".¹⁶²

The inclusion of Chicano theatre in University drama courses aided the emergence of single playwrights such as Carlos Morton. Whereas Chicano theatre had begun in Chicano Studies Departments taught by teachers lacking knowledge of drama, by 1977 it was being taught in Drama Departments by qualified drama graduates who were interested in producing full-length plays. This was a new avenue of academic training for prospective actors and directors, the result being that single dramaturgy and directorship became acceptable.¹⁶³ Collectivity, in some quarters, began to be regarded as synonymous with amateurishness.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, not all plays by single writers were acceptable. The "dramatized lecture" which was "short on drama and long on debate", as in the case of the works of Nephtalí de León, were regarded as being as unaccomplished as the earlier collective *acto*.¹⁶⁵ Clearly, however they were created, Chicano plays were now expected to place emphasis on dramatic conflict rather than on social or ideological conflict. Perhaps as a result of this, and Valdez's foray into commercial theatre, the theatre produced by Chicanos was beginning to gain greater institutional acceptance. The California Arts Council had changed its policy towards "so-called ethnic and political artists" and had members such as Luis Valdez and Peter Coyote of the San Francisco Mime Troupe.¹⁶⁶ TENAZ, although recognising the need for funding, was loathe to follow Valdez's lead into commodity theatre. Instead, in 1978, in keeping with

¹⁶²Jorge Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 2 No. 4, Fall 1979, p.5

¹⁶³Contreras, op. cit. p.146

¹⁶⁴Carlos Morton, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Spring 1978, p.3

¹⁶⁵Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Spring 1978 p.3

¹⁶⁶Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Spring 1978 p.4

its manifesto, it achieved non-profit status to enable groups to seek funding from a wider range of sources. That year there were approximately thirty five teatros in existence which sought funding from CETA, the California Arts Council Tour Programs, contracts with school districts, the NEA and, a new avenue, private foundations.¹⁶⁷

A TENAZ seminar was held in Mill Valley, CA, in 1978 to discuss the changes facing Chicano theatre. The rhetoric of previous meetings dissolved into a more mature discourse between members of some fifteen *teatros*, and terms such as "aesthetics" were no longer thought to belong to bourgeois art.¹⁶⁸ No overall consensus on defining Chicano theatre emerged: TENAZ was entering a period of indecision. Yet, agreement was reached to some extent. Chicano theatre was deemed to be a tool for the intellectual development of young Chicanos and for the creation of a theatrical tradition in the barrios. Being popular theatre it was still placed firmly outside commodity theatre. Groups were, however, aware of the problem of calling for social change without being able to offer practical solutions.¹⁶⁹ Broadly, there were two camps. Some believed Chicano theatre to be moving away too far from the *acto*, the Movement and the masses. In their opinion Chicano theatre was thematically dictated by environment and required work on local issues, for example, how Proposition 13 was affecting Chicanos, urban renewal and womens' struggles. Others wished to court greater realism, without pamphleteering, and show the human complexity of Chicanos. They believed Chicano *teatristas* had to learn from the history of theatre as they lacked the training which would enable them to experiment.¹⁷⁰ The majority of groups, however, were still clinging to some form of collectivity, some with:

¹⁶⁷Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Spring 1978 p.2

¹⁶⁸Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 1 Nos. 3&4, Summer and Fall 1979 p.3

¹⁶⁹Ibid. p.2

¹⁷⁰Ibid. p.3

democratic centralism, rotating chairs, and various responsibilities delegated to different members of the group.¹⁷¹

The growing crisis in Chicano theatre was reflected at the Tenth Festival in June 1979, hosted by El Teatro de la Esperanza in Santa Barbara, CA. Although the performances were disappointing and of the forty plus groups present none was as successful financially, prolific, or self-sufficient as Teatro Campesino, Esperanza described the festival as the culmination of Chicano theatre's first decade and a sign that:

Teatro Chicano has come of age as a recognised and respected art form. It is a time for celebrating our rich diversity and artistic development and calling to mind our vocation: that of reflecting artistically the struggles of our people.¹⁷²

A number of respected critics, such as Emilio Carballido, R. G. Davis, Victor Fuentes, Tomas Ybarra Frausto, Romulus Zamora, Diane Rodriguez and Luis Valdez participated in lively critique panels. Valdez offered his own recipe for success in a workshop entitled "Chicanos in the New American Theater," which came on the heels of his smash hit *Zoot Suit*.¹⁷³ As before, the major polemic of the festival centred on Valdez. Affirming that he was not "afraid to sell tickets" even as this might be regarded as being at variance with his "radical theatrical origins" he pointed out the financial reality of having to pay rent and taxes and provide actors with a living.¹⁷⁴ He summed up his expedient approach, which critics such as Davis blasted as selling out to commodity theatre, as follows:

In the sixties it was a political way to do theatre. In the seventies a religious way to do theatre, and in the eighties I'm trying to find an economic way to do theatre.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. I Nos 3 and 4 1978 p.2

¹⁷²Information document, Esperanza archives, Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara, p.6

¹⁷³Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 2 No. 3, Summer 1979 p.2

¹⁷⁴Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. II No. 3, Summer 1979 p.2

¹⁷⁵Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, op. cit. p.33

Many critics at the festival analysed such an approach and attacked the money-making exercise which **Zoot Suit** had been for many Anglo and Chicano business people. Thousands of dollars were invested in the play and the "jet set" attended night clubs dressed in fashionable zoot suits. Supermarket shelves bore Coca Cola bottles with **Zoot Suit** tags offering discounts on the expensive ticket prices.¹⁷⁶ Amidst all this the spectator was made to feel distanced from the theatre; rather than being greeted by a friend of the group at the performance, the spectator was confronted with a programme thanking institutions "al que antes se ridiculizaba y combatía." (sic).¹⁷⁷ In terms of form and content, as Valdez was aiming to cultivate a middle-class paying audience, the play resulted in a form very similar to the "melodrama social de los años 20 y 30" with all its clichés.¹⁷⁸ The vital techniques of Teatro Campesino were combined with more conventional elements. As in the *mito*, salvation for the main characters also came from above "del abogado gabacho, de la heroína judía".¹⁷⁹ The female characters were stereotyped and an "invención amorosa" weakened the historical veracity of the play. Critics also questioned the seemingly popular cultural elements of the play. With regard to the language familiar to Chicanos, Víctor Fuentes asked if it was there:

para combatir la cultura oficial, clasista y racista, o para darle sabor, servirla de adorno y vender mejor el producto comercial.¹⁸⁰

The most severe criticism, however, was reserved for the zoot suit-clad *pachuco*. Despite the fact that the play was a docudrama the *pachuco* was cast as a mythical character, this

¹⁷⁶Yarbro Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.53

¹⁷⁷Víctor Fuentes, 'Luis Valdez: De Delano a Hollywood,' in *Xalmán*, Santa Barbara, Vol. 2 No. 2, Spring 1979 p.7

¹⁷⁸Yarbro Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.55

¹⁷⁹Víctor Fuentes, op. cit. p.8

¹⁸⁰Ibid. p.8

dimension overshadowing and subordinating the historical one. In turn, in terms of the historical dimension, the *pachuco* was equated with the Chicano's search for his identity and cultural pride. This presentation was not well-received by critics. They were of the opinion that to present the *pachucos* as the first people of Mexican origin to celebrate consciously their cultural heritage is to romanticize and falsify them. One writer commented that these members of society:

representaban los segmentos mas reaccionarios de la comunidad méxico-norteamericana y que su orgullo cultural se limitaba a la violencia criminal y un vestuario estrafalario.¹⁸¹

While this was not the case with all young men in zoot suits, this was the aspect of the *pachuco* to which East Coast audiences reacted also, and negatively. The play was also attacked as badly written and the innovative blend of dancing, music, political diatribes and love scenes, it was held, failed to create an integrated work. Valdez had also to bear personally the brunt of racist criticism bearing no relevance to the play.¹⁸²

Given the hype of Hollywood, one of the fundamental tenets of Chicano theatre, its *rasquachismo* was not so much eroded, as annihilated. Jorge Huerta, defending Valdez's decision to do commercial theatre, described the performing conditions still faced by many groups as:

parks and community centres and funky conditions that even our own people are not proud of.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹Richard García, in Yabro Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.56

¹⁸²Yabro Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.54

¹⁸³Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3. Nos. 2 and 3, Spring and Summer 1980 p.7

The concept of being *rasquachi* then, rather than being a source of pride, had become a source of shame, as indeed, it always had been for Valdez. At the outset Chicano theatre had embraced an aesthetic and conceived a dramatic theory around conditions which were a given. With new heights possible, and with a foot in the door of Hollywood, for some *rasquachismo* lost its gloss of desirability to become mean, sad and enforced. Chicanos in general, however, became aware through Valdez's successes that no-one prefers the shabby to the lavish. *Teatristas* asked themselves whether poor people deserved only a poor theatre. The answer to this was clear; they deserved better, but the real problem lay in the fact that Valdez's kind of theatre was not taking his previous audience with it. Nor was his drama expressing the aspirations of working-class Chicanos, another fundamental element of *rasquachismo*. Chicano theatre groups had an unenviable dilemma:

o entrar dentro de la cultura oficial, como producto exótico, ganando un privilegio que hasta ahora se le negaba o seguir, por arduos caminos, luchando por la visión alternativa y una nueva comunicación más humana que, hoy por hoy, no pasan por las salas de Hollywood ni de Broadway.¹⁸⁴

TENAZ decided to opt for the arduous route. At the Tenth Festival it was decided, long overdue, to support the equal participation of women in TENAZ and to develop women playwrights. Women had long criticised the negative portrayals of women in Valdez's work. In **Los Vendidos** the ultimate sell-out is the one female character. In **Bernabé** a brother is cast as the keeper of his sister's virginity.¹⁸⁵ **Zoot Suit** and **Corridos** were guilty of presenting sexual stereotypes based on the perceived traitress *malinche*, and the perceived redeemer of the female sex, the *virgen*.¹⁸⁶ Teatro Campesino's actresses had attempted to combat this approach by creating new sexless roles for themselves, such as **La Muerte**.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴Fuentes, op. cit. p.8

¹⁸⁵Margarita McIvillie, 'Female and Male in Chicano Theatre,' in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Houston Arte Público Press, 1984 p.72

¹⁸⁶Yarbro Bejarano and Ybarra Frausto, op. cit. p.55

¹⁸⁷Yolanda Broyles González, *Tenaz Talks Teatro* Vol. 7 No. 2, Summer 1984 p.3

Women, then, had been active in Chicano theatre. A network called Women in Teatro, (WIT) was functioning at this time, led by Carolina Flores and Rosa Campos. Its purpose was to rally women to write plays with strong roles for Chicanas, dealing with problems relating specifically to women, and to pursue practical support such as childcare. WIT also won a permanent seat for women on the TENAZ Coordinating Council.¹⁸⁸ It also produced a six-member Chicana women ensemble, Valentina Productions.¹⁸⁹ These women chose to form an ensemble even though the collective structure of early Chicano theatres had been a mixed blessing for women. Although able to participate in decision-making, they were also expected to carry out childcare during rehearsals and tours. Arizona playwright Silviana Woods solved this by writing children's roles into her plays.¹⁹⁰ WIT did not find theatre for women any easier than Chicano theatre in general but they did evolve their own approach. As few women had had the opportunity to fully develop theatrical skills, they came up with *teatropoesía*, a blend of theatre and Chicana poetry. This allowed them to avoid:

scripts that are geared to men's perspective and relegate women to minor or stereotypical roles¹⁹¹

and was a response to the scarcity of Chicano plays. Necessitating less technical training than theatre and dealing well with the expression of emotions and experiences *teatropoesía* exploited:

the beauty and power of words, a dimension often neglected in Chicano theater, combining the compact directness and lyrical emotion of the poetic

¹⁸⁸Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Winter 1980 p.3

¹⁸⁹Yvonne Yarbrow Bejarano, 'Teatropoesía by Chicanas in the Bay Area: Tongues of Fire,' *Mexican American Theatre: Then and Now* Houston, Arte Público Press, 1983 p.80

¹⁹⁰Joanne Pottlitzer, *Hispanic Theater in the United States and Puerto Rico: A Report to the Ford Foundation*, New York, 1988 p.28

¹⁹¹Yvonne Yarbrow Bejarano, 'Teatropoesía by Chicanas in the Bay Area: Tongues of Fire,' *Mexican American Theatre: Then and Now*, Revista Chicano-Riqueña Year 11, No.1, 1983 p.79

text with the physical immediacy of the three-dimensional work of the theater. In this fusion of two media, the verbal, private word of the printed text is translated into action in time and space, directly experienced as sight and sound. The silent dialogue between lone reader and poem has been replaced by communication that is collective, social and public in nature.¹⁹²

The culmination of this approach was the 1981 staging of **Tongues of Fire** as part of the Cultural Heritage section of the Chicano Literature Conference. The piece was a combination of theatrical experience, literary training and "familiarity with recent publications by Chicana feminists".¹⁹³ Scripted by poet Barbara Brinson Pineda, a loose grouping of poems around various themes by various writers was unified by the idea of the Chicana writer. Fragments, whole sections, dialogue, repetition, interlocking monologues, choral recitation and complete poems were employed to illustrate the Chicana's struggle with the constraints of her sex, her race and her class. As in Chicano theatre in general, pantomime and slapstick were employed.¹⁹⁴

Yvonne Yarbrow Bejarano argued that this approach might serve as a model for the beleaguered Chicano theatre. To avoid the problems of a permanent company, part-time *teatristas* might come together in the context of economic support, such as a funded conference, to perform for a ready-made audience, and disband thereafter. Shows could be repeated by the same, or different, "hit-and-run" group. Although not feasible as a long-term strategy Yarbrow Bejarano stressed:

not so much the superiority of one way of doing theatre over the other, but the necessity in these hard times of diversifying our strategies with the goal of exploiting our potential to the maximum.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Ibid. p.79

¹⁹³Ibid. p.82

¹⁹⁴Ibid. p.87

¹⁹⁵Ibid. p.93

The Tenth Festival was also the scene of another important decision as the TENAZ manifesto was overhauled to remove the outdated indigenist rhetoric. The manifesto phrase on commercial theatre was also of pressing concern but it was deemed that social circumstances had not improved, despite the Chicano Movement, and so, Chicano theatre's basic popular and protest commitment had to remain. This was the case even though Campesino were now only interested in changing theatre and not society, dedicated as they were to using commercial profits to help young Chicano actors gain access to theatre. TENAZ decided against becoming involved in commercial theatre and reaffirmed its status as a popular theatre organization.¹⁹⁶ This ideological decision almost cost TENAZ its survival. Although it voted in 1980 to remain a national organization despite financial problems, and to involve more theatres in TENAZ, its national representation had been at an apex in 1973 and non-Californian participation began to fall away after 1979.¹⁹⁷ Although it had a democratic electoral process, and engaged in criticism and ideological debate, there were no paid members on its board and so organization was consistently problematic.¹⁹⁸ The plight of its members was clear at the Eleventh Chicano Latino Festival in San Francisco in 1981. TENAZ added the "Latino" appellation in an attempt to welcome more and diverse groups. As it was, only six of the fifteen performing groups were Chicano. The theme of the festival reflected the organization's concerns. Although it called for the political liberation of Latin America, Mexico and the Chicanos and Latinos in the United States, the focus lay on the figure of the artist. TENAZ called for:

the artistic freedom of the artist who has been tortured, exiled and killed for taking part in the struggle; of the artist who is denied educational opportunities ... only offered stereotypical roles to perform ... who tries to live within a society which promotes art forms based on consumerism.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Fall 1980 p.7

¹⁹⁷Ibid. p.2

¹⁹⁸Ibid. p.6

¹⁹⁹11th Chicano Latino Festival Official Programme

A perceived solution was to embrace successful revolutionary movements in Cuba and Nicaragua which had resulted in government stances against consumerism in art. To this end TENAZ gained a place on the Coordinadora Continental, formed in Havana in 1981 to promote cultural exchanges among different theatre organizations on the American continent such as the Corporación de Teatro de Colombia, Brazil's Federação de Teatros Independentes and other groups from Cuba, Ecuador, and Nicaragua.²⁰⁰ In 1981 a Chicano theatre delegation, headed by El Teatro de la Esperanza, visited Cuba and the Cuban Teatro Escambray toured the United States in April of 1982.²⁰¹ There was, therefore, an attempt to make TENAZ and its theatre groups popular again in a meaningful sense through the influence of socialism. Nonetheless, this approach failed to generate revenue, in effect the real problem facing Chicano theatre. The Twelfth TENAZ Festival, scheduled for 1983 was postponed until the following year due to economic problems and the Thirteenth, held in Cuernavaca, Mexico in July of 1986, hosted only four Chicano theatre groups as the cost of travel for many groups was prohibitive. TENAZ continued to be funded annually by the National Endowment for the Arts to the tune of some \$12,000 and had some twenty to twenty-five member groups, and in 1987 received an endorsement by Stanford University in the form of a living archive in perpetuity for TENAZ.²⁰² Yet, in 1987 the prospects for the continued survival of the organization were grim. Faced with virtual extinction, Chicano theatre had to explore revenue-creating strategies, and ultimately deal, once and for all, with the question of commercially mainstreaming their theatre.

²⁰⁰Contreras, op. cit. p.186

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²M. Dolan, recorded interview with Hank Tavera, San Francisco Aids Foundation, San Francisco, June 27th, 1986

5. Hispanics in the Mainstream.

Although a term rejected by many Chicanos, the term *Hispanic* is pleasing to North American consumer society. In the first instance this is because the latter coined it, and secondly because it is a catch-all term which therefore combines efficiently with the concept of *mainstreaming*. In short, the business world is eager to cash in on a Hispanic market it can no longer ignore. Time Magazine enthuses that, due to demographics:

Nowadays the mainstream is receiving a rich new current. More and more, American film, music, design, dance and art are taking on a Hispanic color and spirit.²⁰³

This Hispanic influence can apparently be seen in designer clothes, and Santa Fe style homes. Haute couture seeks the folkloric influences of Spanish peninsular and Latin American origin as do the "hot" West Coast designers immersed in Mexican "themes".²⁰⁴ Adobe huts, originally built by the Mexican poor because they were cheap, were systematically razed to the ground with the influx of Anglo American enterprise. Now only the rich can afford to buy new adobe homes which Frank Dimster at the University of Southern California describes as:

cinema architecture - an ultimately escapist style designed to comfort rather than to challenge.²⁰⁵

As this trivialization of what is known as Hispanic culture progresses unchecked, Richard Rodríguez observes, by way of explanation, that "America transforms into pleasure what it

²⁰³Richard Rodríguez, 'The Fear of Losing a Culture,' TIME, July 11, 1988 p.58

²⁰⁴TIME, July 11, 1988 pp.47-48

²⁰⁵Ibid. p.47

cannot avoid".²⁰⁶ He also notes that American consumer society shifts its focus from the Hispanics in the United States to embrace Latin America:

it reaches past a fledgling, homegrown Hispanic American culture for the darker bottle of Mexican beer, for the denser novel of a Latin American master.²⁰⁷

A further term which is in vogue is *crossover*:

the chartmaker's term for the record or film that reaches beyond its expected audience.²⁰⁸

It is into precisely this medium that El Teatro Campesino has gone. For other Chicano theatre groups, the question, then, which lies at the core of the debate on mainstreaming is whether the financial gains would compensate for the staggering and obvious losses and therefore justify the painful and difficult transition to the mainstream stage. Central to this is the question whether Chicano theatre could continue to be an entity in itself, and maintain any vestige of its cultural and ideological integrity and autonomy, if it were to join the confluence of other Hispanic theatres moving into the mainstream. The term Hispanic encompasses, in the field of theatre, groups founded in the 1980s which are more diverse in "style, mission and structure" than earlier ones.²⁰⁹ The Ford Foundation, which supports this variety and has expended almost three and a half million dollars on strengthening Hispanic theatre, defines Hispanic as follows:

Hispanics derive from countries in the Americas where Spanish is the dominant language and Roman Catholicism the major religion. This includes people of African descent from the Dominican Republic and Cuba, those of

²⁰⁶Rodríguez, op. cit. p.58

²⁰⁷Ibid. p.58

²⁰⁸TIME, July 11, 1988 p.33

²⁰⁹Pottlitzer, op. cit. p.21

American-Indian background from Mexico and Central America and others of European roots from Chile and Argentina.²¹⁰

A Hispanic Translation Project, carried out by the Theatre Communications Group and funded by the Ford Foundation, was further at pains to include "all Hispanic cultures at all historic times", even Portuguese and Catalan.²¹¹ Such a nebulous definition allows casting directors to overlook differences between groups and cast actors interchangeably. Also, given the breadth of this definition, Chicano theatre, despite being the protest theatre of a recognised North American minority group, may only occupy a very small space within it, if it has to compete with the elitist products of cultures from overseas. The danger, then, is that a mainstreamed Chicano theatre may in fact remain in "a little category" - which, ironically, is how Huerta defines groups which decide *against* mainstreaming. These, for him, remain at the level of community theatre, synonymous in the United States with amateur theatre.²¹² The mainstream, for many, however, has:

associations of grandeur, of being on the inside of powerful institutions, of being relevant and in the center of things. That which lies outside the mainstream would appear, by contrast, insignificant, minor or invisible, virtually nonexistent.²¹³

The discourse of this mainstream forum is often euphemistic. Mainstreaming in theatre, as in any other field, "obscures a relationship to profit" and "conceals corporate interests".²¹⁴ Consequently it exists either to obliterate difference, or, conversely, highlight it unnaturally, rather than foster it in the form of unity within cultural diversity. Although it is less

²¹⁰Ibid. p.1

²¹¹Jim Leverett (Director of Literary Services, Theater Communications Group), quoted in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Dads?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*, February 22, 1987 p.16

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Yolanda Broyles González, 'What Price 'Mainstream? Luis Valdez' *Corridos* On Stage and Film,' in *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 3, October 1990, p.281

²¹⁴Ibid. p.281

Hollywood and Broadway and more the decentralized, subsidized, regional, repertory theatre found in almost every state, and it prides itself on serving the community, part of which is Hispanic:

with an extremely pragmatic perspective, the theatre-going audience in the United States is a middle class audience (...) we have to put butts in the seats, therefore they have to be people who can afford the price of a ticket.²¹⁵

Therefore, class differences in the "Hispanic community" are not catered for, as in the mainstream theatre it is not a question of theatre going to the people; rather it is people going to the theatre and paying handsomely for the privilege. A major loss, in terms of Chicano theatre, then, would be the remaining barrio audiences who cannot afford theatre tickets in mainstream theatres. In short, just as has been the case traditionally, and despite the rhetoric, the American mainstream continues to ignore Chicanos. Not only this but it involves an obliteration of the historical processes affecting Chicanos. Romulus Zamora stresses that audiences in these mainstream theatres must know that:

this land was Mexican and that the California Constitution was written in Spanish and in English and I would just like that to be included in all this mainstream knowledge that we all assume that we all have ... this whole place owes its heritage and nurturance to Mexican culture.²¹⁶

Works of Chicano theatre are often designated merely "teatro" in this mainstream theatre forum and its publicity. This was the case when Teatro Esperanza's **La Víctima** was performed by another cast at the LATC, directed by a previous member of the group.²¹⁷ This stripping away of the specific term to open the play up to a broad audience is, of

²¹⁵ Bill Bushnell, in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Badges?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*, February 22, 1987 p.48

²¹⁶Ibid. p.40

²¹⁷Marlene Meyer, 'La Víctima and El Teatro de la Esperanza,' *Los Angeles Theatre Center*, January/February 1987 Vol. 1 No. 2, p.4

course, pragmatic, but it also wipes the fact of the endeavour of Chicano theatre and the Chicano movement off the record. Jorge Huerta classifies the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, El Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Campesino as three major mainstream Hispanic theatres on the West Coast despite the radically different political and theatrical ideologies of all three.²¹⁸ One might ask, then, what they have in common to make them mainstream. The answer has nothing to do with content; rather they are categorised together because they are professional companies which can draw in an Anglo public. The use of the term mainstream, or writing mainstream, therefore serves to obliterate differences, differences which matter to Chicanos, if not to Anglos.

As mentioned above, mainstreaming also often serves to highlight differences between cultural and racial groups. The mainstream stage employs an impressive rhetoric of professional commitment to multi-cultural and multi-racial non-traditional casting. While Actors' Equity took this initiative to promote the casting of Hispanic, Asian, black and other minority actors, Jim Leverett, of the Theatre Communications Group betrays a paternalistic stance by explaining that the TCG Hispanic Theatre Project is not a project for Hispanic theatre but for non-Hispanic theatre. He believes that non-traditional casting must in fact become the traditional mode of casting:

to bring in material into our theatre to enliven it, from all of these countries, of these cultures around the world that were, and ever will be, becoming a more and more important part of our lives. It's the least we could do, but it's also the most we could do for us.²¹⁹

²¹⁸Jorge Huerta, quoted in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Badges?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*, p.10

²¹⁹Jim Leverett, quoted in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Badges?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*, p.18

Therefore, not only is Hispanic theatre not a theatre for Hispanics, but one created and destined for Anglos, but those involved in the management side of the mainstream stage further regard Hispanic theatre and Hispanics as foreign, and other. This is to deny the long historical presence of Hispanics, and Chicanos in particular, in the United States. It also perpetuates the notion that these people have another country to go to and do not fully belong in the United States. In this vein of discourse, Chicanos, a native minority group, again become invisible. This does not bode well for minority actors, particularly when one considers the frequent use of the word "project" in discussing Hispanic theatre initiatives, pointing to uncertainty and an absence of long-term planning. Veteran Hollywood actress Carmen Zapata of the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts (already designated as "mainstream" by Huerta), echoes the concern for the artist, that TENAZ had earlier. Speaking of Hispanic actors, she affirms:

What happens is that they are not given an opportunity on your so-called mainstream stage. And by an opportunity I'm not talking about putting them into a little Hispanic play which you have thrown in as an additional treat. I'm talking about an actor's, an artist's, being part of the repertory of the entire season, being treated as artists, being respected as artists, being hired as artists. Not as Hispanics, or blacks, or Asians, but as artists to play roles in any one of the theatrical productions that come to this theatre or ... any other mainstream theatre in this country.²²⁰

There is no reason to suspect that this relationship of dependency on the part of Chicano theatre on mainstream theatre organizations would evolve into theatre on a big scale for Hispanics. The whole *raison d'être* of mainstream theatre is not based on providing theatre for Hispanics but is for Anglos interested in a good night out. Should the Anglos tire of the fashionable Hispanic flavouring in their theatrical fare, the projects will be terminated, the

²²⁰Carmen Zapata, quoted in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Badges?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*, p.55

actors paid off and the plays thrown out with the trash. And the Hispanics themselves will be expected to go back to wherever they came from.

In essence, then, the process of mainstreaming, in these circumstances, is one of removing from working-class people what was theirs, namely Chicano theatre, to a middle-class audience in need of fresh entertainment to keep Anglo commercial theatre from going stale. Someone who has observed this process is José Luis Valenzuela, formerly of El Teatro de la Esperanza, and in 1987 the LATC Hispanic theatre link person. Much of the thrust to have **La Víctima** staged there came from his initiative. A long-time political theatre activist, he acknowledges that he is now working for commercial reasons at the LATC. He raises a crucial point concerning his own and his actors' predicament. The actors in his Latino Lab, all experienced people, had to work for a year without knowing if their efforts would lead to a production. Therefore, they were held in abeyance until it was deemed profitable to use them. He also stresses the central question of the *content* of a play. If he wants to do a play "it has to be something that has something very important to say".²²¹ Thanks to his efforts Teatro Esperanza's **La Víctima** was staged at the LATC, rather than one of the other three Latin American plays which were also under consideration. On this occasion Valenzuela avoided offering the paying public, whether Anglo American or Hispanic, a Hispanic version of the same clichéd "American way of life" vision that American audiences often get. He further avoided putting on stage the work of a Latin American foreign national which might only foster a public impression that Hispanics are not from the United States. An optimistic assessment of this situation would hold that Valenzuela's personal integrity and background would ensure subsequent concern for content. Yet, he does not have an easy task - he is not the one putting up the money but is in the pay of the people who do.²²² We

²²¹José Luis Valenzuela, quoted in transcript of Los Angeles Theater Center panel discussion, *Do We Have To Show You Our Stinking Badges?: Mainstreaming Hispanic Theatre in the 1990s*.

²²²M. Dolan, recorded interview with José Luis Valenzuela, Los Angeles Theater Center, February 1987

might ask if it will not be long before he is obliged to stage works like Valdez's **I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges**, also performed at the LATC, in which in a grotesque parody of socially committed protest theatre the main character, having descended into the well of his Mayan ancestry, decides to fight for justice for his people in showbusiness by becoming a showbiz lawyer.²²³

This, then, is the approach to Hispanics in the mainstream in Los Angeles. While the Los Angeles panel adopt a treading-on-eggshells approach to dialogue which hides something less benign, San Francisco has a model of its own which aggressively pulls no punches. Although partially based on commodity criteria, it seeks control for theatre groups over the acquisition and deployment of their own resources. The locus of this approach is the multi-cultural Mission Cultural Center which serves a target population of some 140,000 Latinos. Some 35% of the population of the Mission district is Chicano, with many Central American political and economic refugees from Nicaragua and El Salvador.²²⁴ Considering itself to be "at the forefront of arts advocacy in the state" the MCC generates its substantial budget in three parts. One third is from the NEA and corporate supporters and another comes from city and local sources. The last third is self-generated through a revenue producing graphics workshop, Misión Gráfica. In the words of its Development Director, Juan Pablo Gutiérrez, their model is neither a "rhetorical or an academic or a lefty model" but one which is "coming up with options for organizing and for developing and for joint-venturing." The Center aims to change the "kamikaze" approach to grant funds with an agenda of short and long term goals and a "strategic management approach." The aim is to train Latino management people in Anglo business techniques to work in cultural arts management. Latinos, however, must overcome the "capitalistic, oppressive and patriarchal" ideology

²²³*I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*, by Luis Valdez, Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 South Spring Street, Los Angeles.

²²⁴M. Dolan, recorded interview with Juan Pablo Gutiérrez, Dolores Park, San Francisco, June 27th, 1986.

which accompanies them. In San Francisco, this does not mean working alone. Anglo and Latino groups are uniting to form a:

cultural enclave of socially conscious theatre and arts companies and galleries that are very anti-establishment.²²⁵

Growth is the MCC's byword. Small maintenance grants are no longer applied for; rather it is development grants which are targeted. Groups affiliated to the MCC are trained in a six-month "fast capacity-building programme." Audience building is also crucial to its strategy and the MCC targets a "low, middle and up" audience. This means that not only must theatre be taken to parks and schools but the middle-class must be approached for audience revenue as must the upper classes for arts sponsorship. In short, the MCC aims to serve all of San Francisco.²²⁶

The Center's mission is to provide programmes which focus on consciousness for Latinos uprooted from their cultural milieu, having lost their cultural identity and the functions they previously had within a community. Therefore it deals with an immigrant population which it aims to protect from marginalization and mainstreaming and hopes to define a "wider concept of self and of culture and the way that it functions within a given community." Gutiérrez stresses that this approach moves away from both the cultural nationalist and Marxist models of the past, although again, there exists the danger that Chicanos are also defined as recent immigrants. Nor is the struggle confrontational; rather it is a thrust towards professionalization, but not in the Valdezian mode. Gutiérrez contends that many Chicanos *have* come to understand their own identity, but not through resorting to the "false concepts of what culture is" of a Luis Valdez locked in his "Aztec state." While mainstreaming is not,

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Ibid.

then, desirable, Chicanos, however, must amass the sorts of resources which Valdez has. This, argues Gutiérrez, can be done through socially-conscious investment which results in revenue and benefits for the Latino community.²²⁷

Unlike the LATC, which had *La Víctima*'s Spanish translated into English, the MCC is committed to preserving the Spanish language as the reservoir of culture, and to this end provides affordable bilingual classes in drama, music, literature and art. Part of its philosophy is that culture is inseparable from politics and that contact with the community is crucial. In Gutiérrez's view, however, contact has still to be made. Despite the real achievements of Chicano theatre he affirms:

The contact with that community and that base (...) up until now has been a myth.²²⁸

This chapter has, however, attempted to show that, rather than Chicano and Hispanic theatre's contact with the barrio and other sectors of the Hispanic population being a myth, it has been sporadic rather than sustained and in borrowed theatres with money from non-Chicano sources rather than in permanent institutions. To overcome this Chicano theatre has to reach its targetted public, or more precisely, publics, on a frequent basis through permanent ownership of theatres and a rich variety of performances to appeal to a broad cross-section of the community. The MCC is an example of this approach, and follows other Latino operations which have their own theatres, such as the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio and the Latino Chicago Theatre Group, housed in an old fire station in Chicago. In this way, theatre groups might be able to hire administrative help to leave them free of this to concentrate on the quality of their theatrical productions, as without artistic

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Ibid.

skills Chicano theatre, like any, will die. To this end, local writing talent must also be tapped and the productions must be as lavish as the budget will allow.

The watchwords of this model, then, are frequency and permanence, with clear policies on income. The political thrust of Chicano theatre is not forgotten, however. Given the clear rejection of mainstreaming, and a commitment to culture as inseparable from political ideas and practice, the political education of the community can proceed, albeit in a less direct fashion than in the *actos*. No doubt Chicano theatre will survive through these lean times of competition for grants and the lasting effects of a particularly right-wing political culture in Washington. However, Chicanos have to generate their own funding, partly by sponsorship from more affluent Hispanics to allow them to perform for the less affluent. With careful planning they will not have to resort to the misrepresentations of their people, as Teatro Campesino has done, as they will both live in the community and know it. Therefore, Chicano theatre must attract the Hispanic middle-class (or more accurately, the educated professional and creative elements of it) and be an alternative to mainstream productions. Ironically, this audience must not be neglected or it is safe to assume that Chicano theatre for the working-class will go to the wall as did the working-class theatre of the 1930s.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCTION TO 'EL TEATRO DE LA ESPERANZA'

El Teatro de la Esperanza grew out of the climate of general cultural and political awareness among Chicanos and other groups on Californian campuses in the late 1960s. Fundamentally, these Chicanos wished to see their numbers in higher education increase and so in the wake of the Educational Opportunities Program and the Plan de Santa Barbara a number of student groups in California joined ranks to form the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, MECHA.¹ They adopted a "town and gown" policy intended to promote the interaction of University staff and students with local barrios. The students associated their scarcity on campus with the eradication of their culture by American society and so a great emphasis was placed on cultural activities. At Santa Barbara by 1969 the hundred Chicano EOP students there had formed a Mexican folkloric dance group. Some students followed up with improvised dramatic pieces or *actos* which explored the cultural conflict between Chicanos and non-Chicanos, such as **The Dream** and **Manifest Destiny**. Gene Seamons, a graduate student in the Drama Department, assisted them and Teatro Mecha was born as the didactic arm of MECHA. This fledgling group attended the First Chicano Theatre Festival in Fresno California in 1970, but did not perform.²

The *Plan de Santa Bárbara* helped usher in a climate more favourable to the hiring of Chicano educators and so when Seamons left the group, Jorge Huerta, the only Chicano in the United States in possession of a Master's Degree in Drama, was recruited on campus to form a theatre group. Huerta found that the young theatre group had notions which he did not share. Wishing to distance themselves from all they perceived as *Anglo* they regarded punctuality as *agavachado*, or Americanized. Having clarified this confusion, Huerta

¹Marguerite Marín, *Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1980 p.153

²Jorge Huerta, *The Evolution of Chicano Theater* Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1974 p.350

disciplined the group to create and perform a repertoire of works. These included a "counter fiesta" in a local barrio park to protest against the city's omission of a Mexican/Chicano content in the traditional fiesta celebrating the romanticized "Old Spanish Days." The group also performed at Lompoc Federal Correctional Institution in support of Chicano and Mexican inmates who had organized themselves to demand improved conditions and the preservation of their cultural heritage, perceived to be almost lost. The Chicano Movement itself was explored in short pieces such as **La Vida de Juan Masa** and **War Skit Number Two**. The group also commemorated the East Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium against the War in Vietnam. Huerta assumed the role of director and the group recruited one of the mainstays of their organization, José Saucedo.³

In 1971 the Santa Barbara campus was host to another Chicano student organization, La Raza Libre which had split from the ranks of MECHA. The two groups differed in their interpretation of the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* with respect to involvement in a new community centre in the Santa Barbara barrio. MECHA deemed that such involvement was unnecessary, while La Raza Libre felt this to be imperative. Liaison with the new Casa de la Raza was, they felt, in keeping with the Plan which stated:

The Chicanos on campus are an organic, integral part of the Chicano community (...)Working in the Barrio is an honor, but it is also a right because we come from these people and as such mutual respect between the Barrio and the college group should be the rule.⁴

Teatro Mecha was also divided on this issue and so, tired of the internal conflict, Huerta and six members left both student organizations in June 1971 to devote their talents to the Santa Barbara Chicano community. Huerta and the six, Estella Campos, Joey García, Salvador Ortiz, Emiliano Peña, Diane Rodríguez and José Saucedo went on to become the

³Ibid. p.355

⁴*Plan de Santa Bárbara*, Santa Barbara, La Causa Publications, 1970 p.61

autonomous *El Teatro de la Esperanza*.⁵ They took part in the remodelling of the Casa de la Raza and acquired their own small performance space. This accommodated some seventy people, the stage being only twelve feet by sixteen, and so it was appropriately christened "El Nido." The Casa itself offered many programmes to the barrio community including a free health clinic and an office of information for undocumented workers.⁶

The group again addressed the failure of the city to recognise the culture of the Chicanos and Mexicans who lived there. They organised an open air event, the "Fiesta de la Casa" with a view to replenishing group funds and performed Teatro Campesino *actos*, including **Los Vendidos**, in "El Nido." Success led to the group's acquisition of a bigger performing space, with an audience capacity of one hundred and forty and a twenty-six foot wide stage. This received the grand title of "El Auditorio" and was officially opened in 1972.⁷ Nonetheless, as a result of the tussle between MECHA and La Raza Libre which continued on campus, *El Teatro de la Esperanza* remained short of funds. They accepted one thousand five hundred dollars from university coffers via MECHA but emphasised their non-affiliation to either group.⁸ Teatro Esperanza continued to condemn the confrontation between rival Chicano student groups and stressed the importance of unity. A student on campus at the time observed:

Political confrontation was a daily occurrence and students went to the extreme of packing firearms to meetings (...) confrontation was supposed to take place with the establishment and not among movement groups.⁹

⁵Huerta, *op. cit.* p.370

⁶Jorge Huerta, 'El Teatro de la Esperanza: Keeping In Touch With the People,' *The Drama Review*, Vol. 21 No. 1, March 1977 p.38

⁷Huerta, 1974 p.381

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Arnulfo Casillas, 'Symposium: UCSB Chicano Political Development - The Roots of El Congreso,' unpublished paper presented at University of California, Santa Barbara, May 2, 1986 p.8

Teatro Esperanza wished to express their view of the Chicano Movement but generally, there was a lack of appropriate material for them to use, despite Teatro Campesino's valid series of *actos*. Adaptation of existing theatrical texts not penned by Chicanos was rejected in keeping with the group's, and indeed the Movement's, expressed lack of identification with Anglo-American culture. Chicano culture was regarded as having too many unique features for it to be cast in an existing mould. Therefore Teatro Esperanza sought to create some original *actos* of their own, such as **Trampa Sin Salida**, performed on the Mexican holiday of Cinco de Mayo 1972 at Santa Barbara High School. The ten group members learned an important lesson here as the school principal cut short the performance due to the use of expletives in this *acto* on police brutality. They resolved never to allow adherence to linguistic realism to impede their access to an audience again.¹⁰

In 1973 one of the group's major writing talents became a part of the company. Rodrigo Duarte Clark emerged from a Chicano Theatre course taught by Huerta at the University of California at Santa Barbara, set up to train bilingual students to create and perform theatre.¹¹ The class was also a potential solution to Chicano theatre's lack of plays. Duarte Clark, a political science student who wished to develop his writing skills, penned **Brujerías**, one of Teatro Esperanza's most popular works to this day.¹²

While the campus environment did produce Chicano students who were able to develop theatrical skills, conflict among rival Chicano organizations meant that Teatro Esperanza forged ahead with its own development as an independent company. Many MECHA chapters in California lost their militant stance and suffered ideological cleavages and a loss

¹⁰Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.165

¹¹Huerta, 1974 p.285

¹²*Ibid.*

of purpose after the initial drive to establish Chicano Studies programmes.¹³ In the autumn of 1973 MECHA was dissolved at UCSB and their funded projects were handed over to La Raza Libre who supported positions unpopular with Chicanos on a number of issues. One of these involved the administrative "mainstreaming" of the Chicano Center, ostensibly to fully utilize its resources for the good of the whole university. Chicanos in general perceived this as nothing other than an attempt to dismantle it. Arnulfo Casillas writes:

The only real benefactor of mainstreaming was the administration that was trying to regain the resources it had been forced to provide Chicanos six years earlier when it was pressured to break with its historical denial of University resources to the Chicano community...¹⁴

Therefore, while *Esperanza* did receive funding via *La Raza Libre* and shared premises with the organization at the *Casa de la Raza*, they were forced to discover other financially viable ways of making theatre away from University funding. The financial relationship was finally dissolved when *Teatro Esperanza* returned to *La Raza Libre/Associated Students* funds they had received.¹⁵ The group acted on advice offered by Luis Valdez at the first TENAZ Directors' Conference and decided to seek the benefits of non-profit status. This would render donations received tax deductible, monies could be applied for from federal and private foundations, and group profits would be tax deductible if channelled back into the company. On achieving status as an educational organization property purchased to that end would be tax exempt and group members could also be paid salaries. *Teatro Esperanza* opted for this package, aided by the local legal aid collective, but regretted that State and Federal grants were subject to conditions which undermined the group's autonomy. Although the group at times had to use grant money to meet needs other than their most pressing ones,

¹³Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977*, Santa Barbara, Editorial La Causa, 1978 p.35

¹⁴Casillas, op. cit. p.10

¹⁵Huerta, 1974 p.358

such as teaching over performing demands, to survive they simply had to come to terms with such limitations.¹⁶

The group soon followed in the wake of Teatro Campesino's collection of published *Actos* with the publication of the second Chicano theatre anthology of its kind. *El Teatro de la Esperanza; An Anthology of Chicano Drama* was distributed to libraries and Chicano Studies departments all over the United States. Profits from the anthology were returned to the group but royalties were not charged in order to stimulate performance of the *actos* and songs by other *teatros*.¹⁷

In 1973 Teatro Esperanza were invited to march in protest against the imprisonment of several people from the town of Guadalupe, in Santa Barbara county. Their story, one of conflict between Chicanos and non-Chicano townspeople, interested the group and as they were keen to create a new play they investigated the matter further. A published document entitled *The Schools of Guadalupe: A Legacy of Educational Oppression* which was a report by the California State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights was a useful aid to the group during the five months period of research and writing which resulted in **Guadalupe** premiered on Cinco de Mayo 1974 in Santa Barbara. This docudrama mapped out a web of oppression against Mexican and Chicano fieldworkers in Guadalupe and served to educate the group in the use of Brechtian dramatic techniques. During the eighteen months of touring, the piece the group went to Mexico in the summer of 1974 where **Guadalupe** was taped for Mexico's national television station. From dialogues with audiences after each performance, the group judged the reaction to the play to be favourable.¹⁸ The play was also performed at the Quinto Festival of Chicano Theatre in

¹⁶Ibid. p.358

¹⁷Ibid. p.365

¹⁸Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.142

Mexico City and Teotihuacán in 1974. This festival was highly significant for the Chicanos who attended, as contact with Mexican culture caused them to reflect on the nature of their own culture and consequently on theatre.

After Jorge Huerta left the group in 1974 to further his academic career, Teatro Esperanza set out to become a full-time theatre company, travelling further down the road towards the day when they would choose theatre as a way of life. The group began to develop a local audience by establishing a Programming Committee to foster an organized series of events, replacing the hitherto sporadic approach, to offer exposure to Esperanza and other Chicano theatre groups. San Jose's El Teatro de la Gente, Los Angeles' Teatro Urbano, and the successful El Teatro Campesino graced the stage at the Casa and spawned further theatrical events.¹⁹

This growing professionalism was praised, a decade after the beginnings of Chicano theatre, by Nicolás Kanellos during the Sexto Festival de los Teatros Chicanos, in San Antonio, Texas, in 1975. **Guadalupe** was, he wrote, an example of the group's discipline and dedication.²⁰ Notwithstanding, Esperanza continued to lend their support to the struggle for student rights by leading a 1,500-strong march on the Santa Barbara campus on May 5th, Cinco de Mayo, to protest against the arrest of a group of nineteen students, many of them Chicanos, who had staged a takeover of the campus computer centre. The takeover helped save the Centre for Chicano Studies from closure.²¹

¹⁹'Programming Committee,' Esperanza Information Sheet, Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara, p.1

²⁰Nicolás Kanellos, 'Sexto Festival de los Teatros Chicanos' *Latin American Theatre Review*, Fall 1975 p.81

²¹Arnulfo Casillas, 'This Spring's Demonstrations,' *Sí, Se Puede*, Vol. 1 No. 6, May 30th, Santa Barbara, 1975 p.8

That same year Teatro Esperanza made one of the most important choices of their careers and decided to become a collective theatre group, structured so that all decisions, including artistic direction, would be made by the entire group. While José Saucedo and Jocy García took over the general administration of Esperanza, by the end of the year the group was operating on a totally collective basis on all other fronts, with the goal of eliminating a hierarchical management approach to their company.²²

In 1976 the national celebrations of the Bicentennial of the Independence of North America provided Esperanza with a theme for their second docudrama entitled, **La Víctima**. They perceived it as ironic to celebrate independence while many workers, particularly the undocumented, lacked independence from the constraints of poverty.²³ Therefore the new collective creation, which was based on a fictional family but was supported by documented facts, dealt with illegal Mexican immigration into the United States. Esperanza were studying Marxism at the time and concluded that the Mexicans crossing the border who were being blamed for the country's economic problems were no more than scapegoats for the inherent inability of capitalism to provide for all.²⁴ The play took several weeks to study, improvise and script, and premiered on Cinco de Mayo at the University of California at San Diego. The public were enthralled by the play which, like **Guadalupe** has continued to be performed by other theatre groups.

At the beginning of January 1977, El Teatro de la Esperanza participated in the California Arts Council's Theatre Tour Project for 1976-77, which meant State funding in the region of \$18,000. During the tour, the group reached some 4,000 people and both performed and held workshops on collective creation. Officially they regarded the move as:

²²Jorge Huerta, 1982, p.70

²³Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *Santa Barbara News and Review*, Thursday, September 14, 1978 p.12

²⁴Jorge Huerta, 1982 p.70

an excellent opportunity which afforded El Teatro de la Esperanza an innovative and exciting approach of (sic) working for the State.²⁵

Historically Teatro Esperanza had had to ensure a paid performance in a college to allow them to perform free for urban and rural barrios. When the paid performance was not forthcoming, as could occur in isolated areas, the local Chicano and Mexican barrio communities missed out. The CAC grant alleviated this problem to a considerable extent and allowed them to reach their targetted audiences of college and university students, prison inmates, and low-income, predominantly Chicano/Mexican, communities. Areas previously excluded due to lack of funds were now host to Esperanza.²⁶ The group could also afford to pay its own members a salary and half of them became full-time theatre artists.

Despite this step towards group stability, all was not well. Esperanza, despite their optimism on official documents, were keenly aware of drawbacks to this arrangement. They felt that the CAC tour coordinators did not appreciate the operational methods of non-traditional groups such as themselves. They observed that the tour coordinator did not know how to set up community performances and they felt hampered by an imposed selection of performance sites. Esperanza required greater autonomy to ensure that their work reached "the non-theater going low-income peoples of all colours".²⁷ The California Arts Council tour brought a new Esperanza play to the public, entitled, **Hijos, Once A Family**. The group chose to deal with the theme of the dissolution of the traditional Chicano/Mexican family in the United States. While this theme was of great interest, and the play was enthusiastically received by

²⁵Esperanza document, 'Report on the California Arts Council Tour' Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara, 1977 p.2

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Esperanza document 'Report on the California Arts Council Tour', Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara, 1977 p.3

audiences, many critics felt the group lacked a progressive perspective on the major issues tackled.²⁸

Esperanza were also suffering the exhaustion that accompanied their lifestyle of constant touring but were as yet unable to maintain both a resident company in Santa Barbara and a touring component, as they continued to be funded via touring grants. In 1978, however, they carried out one particularly memorable tour as representatives of the United States. At the behest of the Polish government they performed at the Meetings of Theatre and Open Art in Wroclaw in part funded by the International Communications Agency. The I.C.A. also recommended that Esperanza perform at the Belgrade International Theatre Festival in Yugoslavia. The eight members found the tour invaluable, both personally and as a group, and for Chicano theatre as a whole and felt it was "probably the most important event in the history of the company to date".²⁹ Esperanza went to Europe as representatives of the United States but were in the pioneering role of Chicano theatre workers offering a play outlining the Chicano's struggle within the United States. Esperanza could do little about the language barrier, although they translated parts of *La Víctima* into the host languages, with limited success, but they had greater success in a week-long run in Sweden, working closely with Theater 9. The Swedes' competence in English encouraged Esperanza to translate more of the bilingual play into English. Some exiled Latin Americans also present in the audience were much heartened to hear their native language.³⁰

On their return to the United States, Esperanza performed at INTAR, New York City's oldest Hispanic American theatre, on off off Broadway, funded by city and state grants.³¹

²⁸Carlos Morton and Mario Barrera, 'Hijos: Once Upon A Family' *Revista Literaria El Tecolote*, San Francisco, 1979 p.6

²⁹Information document on Programming Committee and Organizational Structure, Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara

³⁰Huerta, 1982, p.78

³¹'Intar Oldest Hispanic Theatre In N.Y. Will Play Host to Chicano theatre Group,' *El Diario/La Prensa*, Friday, September 1 1978 p.18

The broadening of the group's experience and reputation led some members to desire the transition to a full time operation. Those who did not feel able to cope with the demands of a full time theatre group left Esperanza thus destroying the cohesive unit which had existed until then. Those who remained wished to rebuild an ensemble group comprising actors sharing similar political and artistic beliefs. To do so, they drew upon TENAZ to establish a core of six members willing to work in accordance with the methodology of the group's collective creative process, already under strain. Despite the small core group Esperanza attempted to divide itself into three components; an administrative staff, a resident company and a touring group.³² An added burden was placed on the group with the complexity of planning the Tenth Chicano Theatre Festival. Consequently the planning of the group's 1979 First National Tour suffered and they lost revenue. A variety of new areas were, however, covered, including Chicago, Denver, Boston and Detroit.³³

Although still primarily a touring group, Esperanza were able to mount their first repertory in residence in the summer of 1980 at the Casa de la Raza. They performed **La Cantata de Santa María de Iquique**, **Brujerías**, and **La orgía** by Colombian playwright Enrique Buenaventura. This last play was directed by José Vacas, the first in a series of "guest directorships" arranged by the group, motivated by the need to learn from other directors and because collective directorship was not proving feasible.³⁴ Although the experience allowed the group to strengthen their relationship with the local barrio, particularly as community members participated in the **Cantata**, the choice of plays and a guest directorship illustrates that years of touring had resulted in the alienation of the group from its former audience. Esperanza were keen to experiment with new theatrical styles but audiences were not particularly receptive to this. **La orgía's** symbolic text was not well-received. The group

³²Esperanza information document, Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara..

³³Jorge Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 1979 p.5

³⁴Mark Weinberg, *Performance Generation: The History and Evolution of Collective Theatre In America*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1988 p.112

appear to have turned to Latin American plays rather than create Chicano works as their creative method had become increasingly hampered by a lack of both time and ensemble cohesiveness. They had no new plays to offer.³⁵

Following on from the repertory experience Esperanza did tour a new play, but one which had been penned almost entirely by one member, Rodrigo Duarte Clark. Entitled **The Octopus**, (and often referred to in Spanish as **El Pulpo**), it was performed during the group's 1981 first Binational Border Tour, organized by San Diego's Centro Cultural de la Raza, and funded by the California Arts Council. Reaching audiences in both the United States and across the border in Baja California, the play dealt with the worker, particularly the Chicano worker, in the United States, and his relationship to international struggles.³⁶ Jorge Huerta directed the play which departed from the group's customary documentary and social realist approach to a symbolist one. **The Octopus** of the title was an allegorical figure, played by a female member of the cast, representing the power of American multinational corporations.³⁷

1981 also saw Esperanza collaborate with Los Angeles' non-Chicano Provisional Theatre to produce a "tortillas and white bread" production entitled **The Tecolote Visions**. With funding scarce and grants harder to compete for, the project was designed as a "crossover" experiment to bring the audiences of both groups together and increase audience figures. There was much excitement about the collaboration as it was believed that no such project had taken place since the 1930s.³⁸ While the play attempted to show,

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Victor Guerra, interview with Rodrigo Duarte Clark in the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, No.1 1983 p.115

³⁷Jorge Huerta, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Fall 1980 p.10

³⁸'Tortillas and White Bread,' Esperanza document, Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

how to get along in a world where human need takes a back seat to human greed.³⁹

- certainly topical at the time - it did not turn out to be an accomplished piece. This was primarily due to a conflict of method in the development of the play. The Provisional Theatre members expected to work on stage from a finished script and found it hard to cope with Esperanza's method of improvisation on the stage to elaborate a scenario out of the actors' experience, which was then scripted. While the play received good reviews for generally good performances, Esperanza did not regard the play as an accomplished piece.⁴⁰

Given the relative lack of accomplishment in theatrical terms which had dogged the group since 1979, Esperanza entered a period characterised by an increased emphasis on forging links between themselves and Latin American and Caribbean cultural organizations. Rather than follow Teatro Campesino's lead into commercial American theatre, Esperanza sought inspiration from the national and independent theatre companies of Cuba and Nicaragua, where the gains of revolution catered for the arts. Rodrigo Duarte Clark, a member of the Board of Directors of TENAZ, was active on the Coordinadora Continental, a coalition group of national theatre organizations founded in 1981 in Havana, Cuba, at the first Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe.⁴¹ Esperanza collaborated with TENAZ in coordinating the first Luis Pales Matos Brigade of cultural workers, particularly theatre practitioners, to Cuba. The group's energies were also employed in achieving a cultural exchange with Cuba, a daunting task during the Reagan Administration. Nonetheless, in February of 1982 the Teatro Escambray made the first visit to the United States by a Cuban theatre group since the revolution. Esperanza were responsible for the entire operation, down to the security of thirty visitors. Escambray performed a play on *machismo* entitled **Ramona**

³⁹El Teatro de la Esperanza, proposed programme for *The Tecolote Visions*, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

⁴⁰M. Dolan, recorded interview with José Saucedo, Santa Barbara, December 1986

⁴¹Nina Miller, 'Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos, La Habana,' *Latin American Theatre Review*, Fall 1981 p.85

and were welcomed by appreciative audiences up and down the West Coast.⁴² The following summer Duarte Clark attended the second Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe in Nicaragua. The highlight of the event was the presence of Tomás Borge, Nicaraguan Minister of the Interior,

who gave a moving address on the role of the teatrista in the social struggles of Latin America. A man of breadth, his knowledge of theater and his command of aesthetic principles was impressive.⁴³

Esperanza returned to the touring circuit in 1983, reviving **La Víctima** and **Hijos** but introducing an original collage of songs, dance, poetry and drama aiming to tell the story of the Chicano-Mexican American people. **Y La Muerte Viene Cantando**, performed at the National Association of Chicano Studies Conference, Ypsilanti, Michigan, brought to the public *corridos* from Mexico and the Southwestern United States, music from Latin America, and a *banda calavera* in the style of the early Teatro Campesino.⁴⁴ The piece focused on women, from the Adelitas of the Mexican Revolution to the Bolivian leader Domitila, but avoided the sexual stereotyping evident in Luis Valdez's earlier commercial success entitled **Corridos**.⁴⁵ The performance marked a renewed interest by the group in Latin American folk culture, to be exploited in their next play, **Lotería de Pasiones**. Esperanza were the hosts of the May 1984 TENAZ festival, at which the new play was premiered. Over 128 teatristas representing part and full-time companies, from student-campus ensembles to professional companies took part, as well as a number of academics, welcomed "for their role as critics, researchers, writers and scholars of teatro".⁴⁶ Some awaited guests had been denied visas by the United States Department of State, notably the

⁴²Esperanza document, Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara

⁴³Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 6 No. 2, October 1983 p.2

⁴⁴See Huerta, 1982, introductory illustrations, No 4, and Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, *The First Twenty Years*, p.55

⁴⁵Rodrigo Reyes, 'Los Corridos: Mexican Curios' *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Vol. 5 No. 1, December 1982 p.2

⁴⁶Hank Tavera, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Summer 1984 p.2

Italian playwright Dario Fo and representatives from the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Esperanza's elaborate and complex play based on the Mexican game of *lotería* and a *corrido* entitled **El Corrido de Anselma Guzmán**, was quite well received but put aside by the group until its rich potential could be exploited fully.⁴⁷

In 1984 there were doubts over Esperanza's continued existence as a company. Burnout due to constant touring and financial worries, personality clashes and problems with individual ideologies all had a part to play. It was also patently obvious that the ensemble structure which Esperanza had found artistically and ideologically adequate in the earlier part of their career was evidently no longer feasible or useful. The group could not continue to limit themselves to choosing and creating plays according to the individual qualities of the actors in the group and still survive. They as a company had to adapt to the material available, and not vice versa. Nor could they integrate actors into a core ensemble over a long period of time and create successfully. The group in 1984 was attempting to teach new members its operational methods, yet Rodrigo Duarte Clark was on a leave of absence and unsure of whether to return and there were no actresses in the rapidly crumbling ensemble. In the wake of Proposition 14 the city of Santa Barbara was unwilling to continue to support Esperanza and some members were considering a move to a larger city such as Los Angeles or San Francisco. As José Saucedo struggled to keep the company afloat, Nicaragua's First National Theatre Festival in November 1984 awaited Esperanza.⁴⁸

Esperanza both survived the crisis and made the festival. They began to implement a five year plan to consolidate the group's position as a theatre company and fully acknowledged that financing was their most pressing problem. They wanted to present and promote politically and socially relevant arts activities in accordance with the political and cultural

⁴⁷M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Santa Barbara, September 1986

⁴⁸M. Dolan, recorded interview with Jose Saucedo, Santa Barbara, July 1986

philosophy of the group, but without a stable audience this was not possible. They had to develop a base of support from other organizations and, most importantly, create effective publicity, attractive events and subscription sales series - in short, they were obliged to attract a paying audience into their shows. They began to seek a new location in which to function as a resident theatre company.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the visit to Managua and the struggle of the Nicaraguans to protect their revolution greatly encouraged Esperanza, as the theatre they saw reminded the group of the First TENAZ festival.⁵⁰

The Spring of 1985 not only saw the group's strangest tour but one which underlined their desperate need of a theatrical home. Due to a hurriedly arranged schedule, the group lacked the time to drive around the United States but instead flew into performance destinations at weekends and flew out again to hold down jobs during the week. Most of the \$18,000 dollars made went into flight tickets, but one success was achieved amidst the chaos, namely the highly acclaimed **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!**⁵¹ Esperanza had been approached by the Haymarket Centennial Committee before the 1986 centennial of the Chicago steelworkers' riots, remembered for the Haymarket Martyrs. They wanted Esperanza to perform a play dealing with Chicanos and labour. The group was seeking out a new work and, time being of the essence, they decided to adapt an existing non-Chicano play rather than attempt to create a new one. Therefore a "chicanoization" of Dario Fo's farce, **Non si paga? Non si paga!** was begun and eventually performed at the Ensemble Theatre Project's theatre in Santa Barbara. Esperanza were able to benefit from the theatre's excellent technical facilities for the staging of the play, which was voted "The Best Production of the Year" by the Santa Barbara News and Review.⁵² Following on from that success Esperanza collaborated with a *pastorela* entitled **Las Cuatro Apariciones de la Virgen del**

⁴⁹Programming Projections, Esperanza archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara

⁵⁰M. Dolan, recorded interview with José Saucedo, Santa Barbara, July 1986

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Esperanza information document, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara

Tepeyac, written by Yolanda Broyles González, who worked with various scripts including one provided by El Teatro Campesino. José Saucedo directed the play and Francisco González, formerly of Teatro Campesino, provided the musical direction. Community and campus acting talent enthralled the local audience gathered in the city's restored Presidio Chapel and the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation acknowledged the importance of the Chicano and Mexican contribution to the city.⁵³

Chicano theatre, then, was recognised in Santa Barbara as vital, artistic and important. Much had changed since Esperanza mounted their counter *fiesta* to challenge the romanticised portrayals of the Chicano Mexican population in the local Old Spanish Days. Yet, as was pointed out in newspapers at the time, for Esperanza it was a case of 'We Can't Stay, We Won't Stay'.⁵⁴ Borrowed theatres were not good enough as Esperanza needed a theatrical home of their own and indeed, believed they had found one. A farewell performance in a city park told the story of a Chumash indian princess during the struggle for Mexican independence in the *pueblo* of Santa Barbara. As the group had done with **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** they adapted an existing play - a historical operetta and the only play ever written about Santa Barbara - to create **Natoma**.⁵⁵ Tired of their nomadic existence, financial insecurity, and the difficulty of creating a stable audience and aware that they did not care to continue to adapt existing plays, after sixteen years as a theatre company, El Teatro de la Esperanza left Santa Barbara for San Francisco early in 1987.

The group left in pursuit of a new hope provided by the Mission Cultural Center, in the Mission district of San Francisco. They hoped that this would be the institution which would take all the administrative weight off their shoulders to allow them to get on with the business of creating theatre. With a target population of some 139,000 Latinos, the Mission

⁵³Kerri Burton, 'Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,' *Santa Barbara Independent*, December 17, 1986 p.46

⁵⁴Russ Spencer, 'We Can't Stay, We Won't Stay,' *Santa Barbara News and Review*, July 16, 1986 p.11

⁵⁵Ibid.

Cultural Center is the largest Latino-based and focused cultural institution in the north of the state of California. Functioning on the premise that it is no longer feasible for Latino cultural organizations, such as *Esperanza*, to proceed without training in management skills, it acts as a parent institution providing assistance, through contractual agreement, to developing resident companies. *Esperanza* hoped to receive, not small maintenance grants, but larger development-based grants which would enable them to grow into a resident company with their own theatre building. Administrative support would be available in the form of secretaries, accountants, advertisers, and promoters with funding gained by the MCC from city, state and national sources as well as through socially conscious investment and commercial ventures such as the *Misión Gráfica* printshop. The possible gains would include study leave for members as well as paid leave to ward off exhaustion. Transference of management skills was envisaged and *Esperanza* would have the support of informed constructive criticism by theatre practitioners.⁵⁶

Esperanza, then, having spent many years attempting to maintain a collective approach to theatre, finally accepted that a diversification of tasks was the only way forward. With their next play, the last one to be studied here, they faced a diverse audience made up of economic and political refugees from the countries of Central America, including Mexicans, and Chicanos. They employed a diverse group of actors from different national and theatrical backgrounds in the manner of a production company. They saw no alternative but to appeal to the dual and sometimes triple identity of both actors and audience, and were obliged to exploit in their publicity the media term currently in vogue to refer to their audiences, namely, *Hispanic*. Their opening play in San Francisco at the Mission Cultural Center reflected this attempt to cast their net as widely as possible. A revived **Lotería de Pasiones**, written by Rodrigo Duarte Clark, was set in the timeless world of folklore, of a folk past common to their audiences. No national or historical point of reference was made in

⁵⁶M. Dolan, recorded interview with Juan Pablo Gutiérrez, Dolores Park, San Francisco, June 27th, 1986

this play which had to reach such a varied audience. A lyrical and symbolic piece, it was well-received and Esperanza sought to uncover the personal motives leading to acts of solidarity. Yet, it remains to be seen if Esperanza, aided by the practical skills of the Mission Cultural Center, can exist to be the theatrical mirror of a cultural identity which is fragmented and fraught.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ACTOS, 1971-1973

The first two years of El Teatro de la Esperanza's existence amounted to an exploratory, optimistic apprenticeship in which the group studied both how to do theatre and what to say with it. The beginning of the period reflects the group's move out of the campus and into the community at a time when Chicano activism was strong. Esperanza focus on the barrio in a number of *actos* which were later grouped together and published.¹

These short *actos* were written by individual authors, for the most part Chicanos who had grown up in the Los Angeles area, with input from group members. Although they are rudimentary theatre pieces they illustrate a progressive development both theatrically and in terms of the political and cultural viewpoints expressed by the group. For this reason seven *actos* are discussed in detail in this chapter.²

The *actos* have much in common. In general they employ few and simple props and costumes. What was not available for use on stage was conveyed to the audience through mime. Characterization was scant as most characters, some of whom wore masks, were stock theatrical figures and allegorical figures. Esperanza used signs on various areas of the stage but not to identify characters, as Teatro Campesino had done.³ The group did not evolve plots at this stage and instead often used a *cuento* formula to hold the action together. Song and humour were fundamental to these actos which employed sound effects, stop action and occasionally sloganeering. The language was a blend of Chicano Spanish and English.

¹Jorge Huerta (ed), *El Teatro de La Esperanza: An Anthology of Chicano Drama*, Santa Barbara, El Teatro de la Esperanza Inc., 1973

²Few others have discussed them, eg. Margarita Melville, Charles Tatum and Guadalupe Valdez, Mark Weinberg. Perhaps they have been overshadowed by El Teatro Campesino's *actos*.

³Luis Valdez, 'El Teatro Campesino - Its Beginnings' in Ed Ludwig and James Santibáñez, *The Chicanos: Mexican American Voices*, New York, Penguin, 1971 p.115

Although some *actos* dealt with specific topical events relevant to barrio audiences, for the most part their thematic focus aims to be broader. Rather than advocate participation in particular organizations, as Teatro Campesino had done with the United Farmworkers Union, Esperanza steer clear of direct political support for any group. Importantly, the group regard self-criticism as necessary for Chicanos in the barrio and so while derogatory terms are employed against Anglos, this is not the only sector under attack. This self-criticism is indicative of the group's interest in unravelling the complexity of the Chicano's social position in the United States. They also explore the question of the Chicano's identity, attempting to deal with themes of history, race and culture and to do so for audiences mainly composed of Chicanos.

The first piece in the collection is **Juan's Epitaph** written by Joey García in 1971, shortly before the group became El Teatro de la Esperanza.⁴ While it is not strictly an *acto* in that it has no plot but merely captures one moment in the midst of a conflict, it does reflect the optimism of the group at the time. García, who studied drama at the University of California at Santa Barbara, wrote the piece in direct response to the Chicano Moratorium against the War in Vietnam. Juan, of the title, is shot dead by one of three policemen present at the march in Los Angeles. These are stereotypically presented as only courageous when armed and ironically identified as "peace officers". After the short sketch Juan's epitaph is sung.

The piece was presented solemnly with no trace of the knockabout humour often found in Chicano theatre. Fast, rhythmic drumming broke the silence of the stage, which was divided into two sections for marchers and policemen. The wordless action, in slow motion, gave the piece a dream like quality, and demanded skill from the young actors.⁵ Marchers with fists raised and mouthing "Chicano Power" moved towards the policemen who, after clubbing a Chicana prepare their rifles and shoot a young Chicano who was about to throw a

⁴AN p.7

⁵Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.7

rock. The drumming stops abruptly to signify the shot. As the officers exit, the Chicano falls dying to the ground and his companions flee. The singer steps forward and as he sings, the other Chicanos return and carry their dead companion out. The song ends and the singer follows them.

Although a simple piece **Juan's Epitaph** illustrates the group's concern for the dramatic and emotional quality of their presentation. By allowing an absence of noise to signify the shot, the group releases the audience from the oniric experience to cold reality as the theatrical musical backdrop is torn away. Slow motion and silence against the drums isolate and magnify the murder, which happened very quickly in the midst of noise and turmoil. The dead Chicano is presented not as an anonymous marcher but as an important and loved individual.

At the time, the piece was both a re-enactment of a recent event in the Chicano struggle and a lament for a dead *carnal*, but it was also an expression of great faith in the Chicano Movement. Its focus is into the future when, it was believed, "Viva la Raza" would not be a dream. The marchers are defined as being Chicanos and the unity achieved at the Moratorium is that of "carnalismo," or closeness among barrio youth. Despite the disadvantages the Chicanos face in American society, illustrated in the uneven confrontation of rocks against rifles, activism is presented as strong and undefeatable. Each verse of the song ends with the line "At the moratorium" and acts as a threat of an everlasting moratorium, or struggle:

...we shall meet face to face
Once again
At the moratorium.⁶

This repeated reference to the Moratorium imbues the song with a ritualistic tone, and the Moratorium becomes symbolic of the form of the struggle, that is, unified political action by

⁶AN p.9

people willing to face the challenge despite intimidation. The piece, then, presents an uncomplicated fact - Juan was murdered - and an uncomplicated and confrontational definition of the Chicano identity. Activism is a goal in itself with no greater scheme of political organization alluded to, and the Chicano Movement is presented as one and indivisible.

The theme of police brutality resulting in death is taken up again in **La Trampa Sin Salida**, written by Jaime Verdugo in 1971-2 for Jorge Huerta's Chicano theatre class at UCSB. Huerta and the actors collaborated in its creation. Verdugo wrote this issue-based piece in response to a string of suicides in the Los Angeles County jail which community activists believed to have been murders by police officers.⁷ Set in the East Los Angeles barrio where Verdugo grew up observing the gang activities of *pachucos* and *vatos locos*, it presents twelve characters including *pachuco* gang members, a mother and a Chicana.⁸ Three of the *pachucos* had personal names, unlike Valdez's early actos in which all the characters had names identifying them as types. Nonetheless the characters appear as types given that they all wore identical masks, and all the *pachucos* wore costumes of black shoes, khaki trousers with braces and white T-shirts. Huerta explains that the purpose of this was to suggest that their suffering is equal.⁹

The action involves gang warfare among Chicanos and is little more than a series of conversations presenting a debate on the validity of Chicanos ceasing to fight each other and join the Movement. Jesse, a gang member, is beaten up by a rival gang and as his homeboys¹⁰ go off in search of him the rivals discuss the incident. Jesse's friend Little Ray later discusses with his mother the company he keeps, the police beatings he has had, and

⁷Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Biligual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.160

⁸Ibid. p.162

⁹Ibid. p.162

¹⁰Fellow gang members

the difficulty for the Mexican of finding a job. Later Ray and Jesse talk about how to get out of the barrio and decide to join the Chicano Movement. Although Johnny, Ray and Jesse's rival, also claims to have joined the Chicano Movement, it has not stopped him fighting other Chicanos. Yet when Johnny and Ray hear that Jesse is in jail the two join forces to get him out, convinced that he has not committed any crime, particularly since he had just become active in the Movement. Jesse is interrogated in jail as to the whereabouts of some stolen goods and is beaten up by the police. Ray, not permitted to see Jesse, later discovers from a newspaper report that Jesse allegedly committed suicide in jail. Stolen goods were said to have been found in his car, yet Ray knows that this could not be so as Jesse did not possess a car.

The image of the "trampa sin salida" of the title was achieved through the conceptualization of the barrio as a "one-way street to nowhere." A one-way sign featured on the backdrop and the *pachucos* maintained a constant movement across the stage and around the backdrop in one direction to signify a one-way street. Huerta writes:

This movement, which runs from the audience's right to left, contrasts with the eye's normal pattern of left to right, creating a visual jarring that is intentional. None of the characters can get off this track and their movement against the normal eye pattern intensifies the impact of their trap.¹¹

A concomitant of that trap is gang violence. Esperanza chose not to represent the gang fights on stage and the only graphic scene is the murder of Jesse by the police, yet they met with disapproval because of the language used. The play employs strong language in both English and Spanish to reflect the everyday speech of the *pachucos*. This offended one audience at a local high school and Chicanos and Anglos alike cheered when the principal stopped the performance after only seven minutes. The group learned not to make it easy for audiences to silence them and to take into consideration audience reactions:

¹¹Jorge Huerta, 1982 pp.162-163

If the simple substitution of a few harsh words will keep the people in their seats, it seems to me that they will then be exposed to the real message: social injustice.¹²

The social injustice referred to in **Trampa Sin Salida** is mainly that affecting gang members in the barrio, anxious to find a way to deal with their problems. They agree that a first step is to stop Chicanos from fighting Chicanos. This message of unity is given by Jesse:

(...) since we get screwed up by everybody - even by ourselves - (...) we should at least fight back. But the right enemy not our own gente.¹³

The right enemy is presented as being the Anglos, who are, according to Johnny, "the vatos that fuck up my people and keep us in this trap".¹⁴ The idea of fighting for justice, while a legitimate goal, is, however, poorly handled in the *acto* as there is no clarification of the different usages of the word "fight" to mean a physical confrontation and "fight" where it means a cause, a struggle for justice. When these Pachucos aim to fight for their rights, they do so brandishing knives. Again a directly confrontational and violence based model, coming from some of the more marginalised members of the Chicano community, is offered via the *acto* at a time when clearer and more effective strategies were felt to be lacking.¹⁵

This is not to say that the *pachucos* wish to fight for their rights entirely alone. The *acto* attempts to illustrate that the Chicano Movement is the way forward. The gang members agree that they should form part of the *Movimiento* because:

It's good to know what you are and to fight for what you believe in.¹⁶

¹²AN p.13

¹³AN p.22

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Recent events in Los Angeles suggest that a similar mood of frustration is still prevalent.

¹⁶AN p.22

Yet this is not made clear. Although Chicano organizations such as CASA and the Brown Berets, and the Movement as a whole are referred to, there is almost no consideration of their values. Clearly, Esperanza were wary of direct political comment as, unlike Teatro Campesino, they were not militating for any particular group. Characters vote to join something they regard as unified and coherent, namely the Chicano Movement, and reduce its basis of ideas to one or two simple beliefs. Esperanza exploited one of these beliefs, namely the philosophy of *carnalismo* which can be regarded from two main viewpoints. Firstly it is brotherhood, particularly among the members of a gang. This sort of *carnalismo* makes life very difficult, not to mention dangerous, for barrio communities as gangs of territorially organised rival *carnales* terrorise many neighbourhoods with knives and latterly, guns.¹⁷ Secondly, *carnalismo* is presented as a call to unity for Chicanos early in the Movement, through leaders such as Corky González and the Brown Berets.¹⁸ Their contention was that the violence perpetrated among Chicanos in the name of a neighbourhood *carnalismo* should be channelled by street *carnales* into a national liberation struggle to give these "rebeldes sin causa" a cause.

The group did not suggest that *carnalismo* held all the answers, however. They did not claim that solutions were obvious or simple and the act of joining the Movement was presented as, at best, a part of the answer to oppression. In the words of Jesse "it's a chance".¹⁹ Yet surprisingly, Esperanza expose the impotence of the Chicano Movement in this *acto* which aims to recruit activists. Jesse is arrested shortly after joining the Brown Berets and his homeboys, while logically rejecting the notion of appealing to the system, fail to consider appealing to the Movement for support. This is where the *acto* is at its weakest, as political activity is exposed as useless. This is dramatically and ideologically ineffectual and serves to reinforce the declaration of war with the system using more violent tactics. This *acto* also has a tendency to glorify the figure of the *pachuco* by placing him as central to the struggle and

¹⁷See Terence Sweeney, *Streets of Anger, Streets of Hope*, Glendale, Great Western Publishing, 1980

¹⁸See Chapter 2

¹⁹AN p.22

sympathising with his plight, although at this stage a Chicano group might be expected to identify with these youths. Esperanza do not attempt to explain why gang warfare exists as this was not their focus, but refer to broad social issues as an explanation in general and adopt a position of empathy with the characters portrayed.

The major social issue is conceived of as poverty but more interestingly the point is made that members of an ethnic minority do not themselves feel racially inferior to Anglo-Americans simply because they are regarded as inferior by the dominant society.²⁰ Ray is asked by an aggressively satirized Anglo sociologist if he feels inferior to a white man and he replies that he does not:

The only time I feel down but not inferior is when I can't do anything without money and you fuckers practically throw it away.²¹

Although making a valid point on race, Esperanza here prefer to note that lack of money affects the barrio more than any racist scourge. This is the major problem and Esperanza themselves address the audience as members of the Chicano barrio to tackle this question. They use many techniques to present their *acto* as stemming from the community. Ray opens the play by asking the audience from the stage if they have seen anybody go by, in this way converting them into bystanders on the street. Characters often speak directly to the audience when presenting information that the audience ought to take away and learn from and the audience is at times forced to help think of solutions. An actress from Esperanza, cast as a Chicana, speaks from the audience as two *pachucos* face each other to fight. She represents the concept that the group belong to the people for whom they are performing. Rather than presenting themselves as a group of outsiders telling *pachucos* and Chicanos what course of action to take, Esperanza set themselves up as insiders within the barrio community.

²⁰ Before 1970 there were only three Chicano sociologists in the US and so research into Chicano life was carried out by scientists who held a priori that the troubles besetting ethnic minorities stemmed from racial factors. During the seventies the number of Chicano sociologists grew to forty. They sought to replace these racist theories from their position as "within-group" scientists. See Estevan T. Flores, 'Chicanos and Sociological Research 1970-1980' in Isidro Ortiz (ed), *Chicanos and Social Sciences: A Decade of Research and Development, 1970-1980*, University of California, 1983.

²¹ AN p.18

One of the fundamental ways in which the group seek to identify with the barrio is through the characteristic blend of English and Spanish spoken by Chicanos. Chicano audiences were not accustomed to hearing actors on stage reflect their forms of speech and so Esperanza were more easily accepted by barrio audiences than other troupes. The group point out in the *acto* that the Anglo is linguistically inferior to the Chicano because he only has one language and the Chicano is bilingual. When the *pachuco* is approached by the sociologist he speaks to him in English and makes humorous comments about him in Spanish for the benefit of the Spanish-speaking members of the audience. English-only speakers, like the Anglo sociologist, were forced into linguistic inferiority.

Nonetheless the didactic approach of the group suffers in a number of sections in which a character is intended to be providing the audience with vital information as such information, is often given only in Spanish. Therefore the group, even in an *acto* which is supposedly direct to the point of simplicity, leave non-Spanish speaking members of the audience, many of whom were Chicanos, unenlightened. When Esperanza wish to show that recruiting Chicanos to fight in Vietnam is not a viable way out of the barrio, the crucial economic reason (albeit a simplistic one) underpinning the system's strategy is in Spanish alone:

Sure they'll take us - that's where they want us. In Nam, peleando en las líneas para que no volvamos y para ayudarles a proteger su economía para que ganen más dinero y mandan sus quetes a la luna.²² (sic)

The last line of the play is also inaccessible to non-Spanish speakers, yet it is the fact which proves that the police and the press lie. The final scrap of evidence, namely that Jesse had no car in which to keep stolen goods, is inaccessible to non-Spanish speakers.²³

²²Ibid. p.21

²³Ibid. p.25

In their next *acto* Esperanza depart from the serious themes of their first two works to inject a note of humour in the shape of the short **Pánfila La Curandera**. Following on from the sympathetic portrayal of the pachucos they offer a very positive character in the hope that other groups might follow their example. First written by Antonio López in 1972, the new *acto* was the result of his writing talent and group improvisation around the basic scenario.²⁴ The piece moves away from the conflicts of the Chicano Movement and focuses on Chicano culture. No character is identified as Chicano in this *acto* as it does not deal with activists but with people who regard themselves as Mexican.

The *acto* is set in a beautiful upper middle class household and as the action revolves, quite literally, around a sofa, this is the only indispensable prop. The actors were obliged to convey the luxury of the home through mime. The piece is a farce which draws its humour from the four characters who have stock attitudes to each other. The Mexican characters, Rosita the maid and her Tía Pánfila represent the servile poor in the house of the stereotypical rich Anglos, Mr. and Mrs. Fatcat, - rather like the Chicanos in the United States - the situation being one of mutual mistrust due to the financial, cultural and linguistic differences between them. The story is that the Fatcats' baby is sick and they are in despair as the medical profession cannot cure her. While they are out Rosita invites her aunt round to cure the baby with *yervas*. Before this can occur the Fatcats come home and Pánfila hides behind the couch. Rosita tries to suggest that the Fatcats consult her aunt but while they deliberate she passes the baby behind the couch and cradles the blanket to pretend the child is still in her arms. She is, of course, found out and is saved from the Fatcats' wrath by Pánfila who pops up with a cured baby. The happy Fatcats even take Pánfila to her next call in the barrio.

The main theme of this *acto* is, of course, *curanderismo*, although Esperanza do not focus on the medical and ritual intricacies of this phenomenon, but choose to emphasise the social

²⁴Ibid. p.28

reasons for its existence in the barrios. As it is an economical way of curing people, this interests Mr. Fatcat who is sick of "those money hungry thieves," the doctors. Rosita explains:

we do not have much dinero in the barrio, and that is why we don't have doctors. Las curanderas, they are our own people, they don't charge mucho.²⁵

Huerta points out that Chicanos still believe in *curanderismo* and writes that although the phenomenon is not limited to Chicano culture alone, most Chicanos can relate to and enjoy the *curandera* presented. He believes that the *acto* educates the audience about "a long tradition of medical service in the barrios".²⁶ Yet as the information given is scant and the stage directions call for Pánfila to be dressed "like one would imagine a *curandera* to appear" the group give the impression that they themselves are not entirely sure. Clearly, rather than educate about *curanderismo*, this *acto* is geared more towards instilling some Chicano pride in their own culture as Rosita and Pánfila outdo the Fatcats and show that they are superior in some areas despite their servile status. The moral of the play is given in the last line of the *acto*:

¿Ya ven? And the gavacho thought he knew everything. ¿Pues saben qué? This is only one of the many things the gavacho can learn from us!²⁷

Despite the derogatory terms used for reference to the Anglos, in this successful *acto* a solution, however momentary, is found and a bridge is created in that the Anglos learn to have some respect for the Chicanos through Pánfila. This down to earth and engaging character might be a *curandera*, but she is a stock *vieja* character and as such, is funny. She lacks the mystical shamanistic qualities and the dark and threatening side found in other genres of Chicano literature.²⁸ She does not deal with magic but is just a lady who knows

²⁵Ibid. p.35

²⁶Ibid. p.29

²⁷Ibid. p.37

²⁸For example, in Rudolfo A. Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Berkeley, CA, Tonatiuh International, 1972

about the plants used in traditional folk medicine. Her name, Pánfila, which means stupid in Spanish, and her eccentricity - the *curandera* is not an everyday character even among Chicanos - illustrate that one of the main goals of the *acto* is to make the audience laugh. Of great significance is the fact that Esperanza consciously sought to find aspects of their own culture which they could celebrate and praise and plucked the figure of the *curandera* from a folk culture on the wane in North American barrios, although thriving in Mexico. Pánfila's capability in Spanish and her lack of English indicate a familiarity with Mexican culture. Yet the point being made most forcibly is the poverty of the Chicanos, rather than an advocacy of folk, or Mexican, values.

If the *curandera* practises a marginalised medicine, she does so for a marginalised people. Esperanza use the consciousness of this fact among their audiences to create humorous interchanges. When Mr. Fatcat enquires if Pánfila is a physician Rosita evasively replies that she might be called "an unregistered nurse".²⁹ This is a reference to the fact that Pánfila's residency in the country is not altogether legal. The incongruity of linking such a person, however remotely, to the prestigious American Medical Association is quite ridiculous. The *acto* therefore plays on the bourgeois fear of what is unofficial or unrecognised and the Fatcats' cultural ignorance and prejudice come to the fore. On hearing a description of Pánfila Mrs. Fatcat assumes that she must be a witch doctor or a hippy. She later cries out, "I told you we couldn't trust these Mexicans!"³⁰ Meanwhile the Anglos are portrayed as "locos" to continue to have faith in doctors. As Rosita makes it quite clear that she does not believe in doctors just as the Fatcats do not believe in *curanderas*, the *acto* inverts the dominant social values and implies that to be a *gavacho* is to be ill. This vindicates the contention among Anglos that *curanderas* and other cultural figures are crazy and not to be trusted.³¹

²⁹AN p.33

³⁰Ibid. p.36

³¹Ibid. p.32

As we have seen, the Anglos are the target of much invective, in the mould of Teatro Campesino. They are cast as "ricos," "apretados" and "locos." Chicano theatre often attacks Anglos as stingy and Mr. Fatcat is similar to Campesino's mean *patrón* figure.³² When Pánfila assumes Rosita is well paid, judging by her wealthy employers Rosita retorts:

¡Bien! ¿Cómo que bien? ¿Cómo crees que se hicieron ricos, eh? Son unos apretados los dos.³³

The *acto* emphasises that for the Anglos the Chicanos have no personal identity, and that Chicanos take note of this lack of respect. As in the work of Teatro Campesino, we find the stock Chicano joke of the Anglo's inability to get the Chicano's name right. When Rosita corrects Mrs. Fatcat the reply is:

Yes I know, Rosarita. This is no time to be upsetting me with inessentials.³⁴

When the baby is cured and the Anglos are content with Rosita and Pánfila, they are happy to leave the baby "with Rosie", who is now deserving of a diminutive of affection, albeit an anglicised one.³⁵

Following on from this *acto* in which the products of Chicano culture triumph, Esperanza deal in a more critical manner with their fellow barrio inhabitants. **Brujerías** was written in 1972 by Rodrigo Duarte Clark and is one of the group's best known plays.³⁶ The four characters inhabit a set which is a little more sophisticated than in previous *actos* in that the action shifts from the humble home of Petra and Rafael to the equally shabby home of Tía Olga. Both scenes were on the stage simultaneously and the alternate illumination of each side of the stage illustrated a change of setting. If available, religious figures could be used

³²See *Las Dos Caras del Patroncito* in Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, *Actos* San Juan Bautista, Menyah Productions, 1971 pp.9-19

³³AN p.32

³⁴Ibid. p.33

³⁵Ibid. p.37

³⁶Ibid. p.40

to add atmosphere. The *acto* presents another innovation for the group as the play is divided into four scenes. This suggests that Esperanza considered departing from the simple *acto* - or one piece of action - to give their theatrical product a more traditional artistic coherence. Their narrative skills were also seen to develop with the introduction of a story that required a change of setting on stage.

The story is, nonetheless, straightforward. One night at home Petra rings the Immigration Bureau to report the presence of an elderly illegal alien. She does this as she likes "old Juana's house",³⁷ and reasons that with the old lady deported she might have it. Rafael, her husband, is horrified, as he believes Juana to be a witch and fears her wrath. Petra scoffs at this, yet during the night superstition gets the better of them and they cling to the crucifix for protection from their imaginings. The next day the two consult their Tía Olga about the witch's persecution and, apparently knowledgeable in these affairs, she advises them to give money to the church for the protection of the saints and sprinkle Holy Water around their bed. They agree to do this but spill the water that night and cannot find the crucifix. They drive off in panic to Tía Olga's house and on mentioning the name of the witch Olga discloses that Juana is neither a witch nor an illegal alien but a documented citizen. Petra and Rafael go off squabbling about who believed in *brujas* in the first place.

Clearly, this *acto* does not aim to bolster Chicano pride but to point out the superstitious folly of many Chicanos. While the characters are typical of those found in much Chicano theatre in that they are brash and battling and experts in inspired invective, the *gavachos* of earlier *actos* do not bear the brunt of this barrage of insults - indeed, criticism of the Anglo and American society is slight and indirect. Petra and Rafael goad each other into actions which land them in trouble and they have to battle a way, sometimes in friendship, sometimes in opposition, towards a solution. Their illogical arguments provide humour and they are of course quite ruthless as to the consequences of their actions as far as other people

³⁷Ibid. p.44

are concerned. Tía Olga is less of a negative figure, and is reminiscent of Pánfila, who preceded her. The playwright stresses her age for laughs, "Soy viejita. Si me apuro, se me para el corazón".³⁸ She is confused, as she asks after people long dead, but in the end, she is an authority on something, in this case *brujerías*, rather like Pánfila who, though eccentric, knew all about *yerbas*. In this way Esperanza both maintain respect for the folk traditions of older members of the Chicano community yet at the same time present their own scepticism that an adherence to these traditions might represent a significant development for newer generations of barrio inhabitants.

A new element in the group's work serves to underline the couple's - and ultimately Tía Olga's - folly. This is the allegorical figure of the Espíritu de la Superstición. His role was present in embryo in the previous *acto* when Rosita not only introduced herself to the audience and set the scene but was also a character involved in the action with the others. When **Brujerías** was first produced the audience missed the import of some of the satire and so Esperanza:

added El Espíritu to comment upon what the characters do and say in an effort to point out the social and political motivations for their actions.³⁹

Superstición wears small finger cymbals which he rings when he wants the audience to reflect on a comment just made. When Tía Olga explains to Rafael how to get some holy water she points out that it is obtained from the priest but that:

le tienes que pasar la mordida (SUPERSTICION RINGS FINGER CYMBALS) o no sirve el agua.⁴⁰

That the church charges money for its spiritual services and is not above corruption is emphasised. *La mordida* is the bribe or cut which is endemic at all levels of officialdom in

³⁸Ibid. p.53

³⁹Ibid. p.40

⁴⁰Ibid. p.56

Mexico, the premise being that the people serve the government and not the government the people, or in this case, the people serve the church and not the church the people. It is not regarded as incongruous by Tía Olga that the payment of money should empower the water and she foolishly and superstitiously believes in the water's power despite this.

Superstición is used by Esperanza to deal with various other theatrical obstacles. In his *calavera*, or skeleton costume he is a character from traditional Mexican folk plays who re-emerges in a Chicano context to allay folk superstitions. His appearance in the *acto* points to Teatro Campesino's influence.⁴¹ Yet he refers to the audience as "mi gente" and as such identifies himself as a member of La Raza. He borrows from the folk tale to announce that he is going to tell "el cuento de Don Rafael y Doña Petra" although this cuento device which is used to facilitate the narrative tails off after the first mention.⁴² Similarly he sings the folk style Corrido de la Superstición, although this has little to do with the rest of the *acto* and is sung offstage. While Esperanza consciously exploit traditional oral cultural forms in this *acto*, through them they succeed in delivering their own rational analysis of the irrational behaviour of those in the grip of superstitious, or folk, belief.

Superstición is also responsible for bringing information about the characters to the audience and is a constant presence on stage, watching, even when he does not directly influence, the characters. When they go to Tía Olga's house he is with them, "enjoying their problem".⁴³ He stresses their stupidity - as they fall for all of his tricks - and by keeping up a dialogue with the audience he helps them see the characters as gullible. Theatrically, Superstición is employed imaginatively and this *acto* makes greater use of sound effects than previous ones. Superstición is an excellent sound effects man, ruffling his cloak to sound like a strong wind, and making cat noises. This enhances the humour as the audience witness who is creating the noises as well as the fearful reactions of the characters. Superstición, then,

⁴¹El Teatro Campesino's Banda Calavera employed the skeletal images of the Mexican illustrator José Guadalupe Posada. See Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, introductory illustrations, No. 4

⁴²AN p.44

⁴³Ibid. p.53

serves as a tool by which Esperanza deal with the psychology of the characters. Rather than embody an external force acting upon them he is an externalization of their own inner preoccupations.

Superstitious belief, then, is seen in this *acto* as a hindrance to self realization and freedom from ignorance. Yet not only folk beliefs come under attack. Catholic religious practices are also equated with witchery or *brujerías*. Initially Rafael believes in *brujas* but has no faith in *curas* whereas for Petra, her faith lies with priests but she does not believe in witches. During the course of the *acto* both of them believe in both *brujerías* and the Church, superstition completely taking over their ability to rationalize. The only discernible difference between them is that God and the Santa Virgen represent good against the evil of the Diablo and his *brujas*. Prayers, crucifixes, rosary beads and holy water are the magic aimed at counteracting the *bultos* and the howling wind and other manifestations collected from oral sources. Despite the Christian requirement among Catholics of loving one's neighbour, these Chicanos illustrate that they are more closely bound to the artifacts of Christian culture than to its profound meaning. The envious Petra instead aims to eliminate her neighbour and from a moral and cultural point of view as well as a dramatic one, the most important occurrence of the *acto* is the telephone call to the *migra*. Morally and culturally speaking a Chicano who denounces another to the Immigration Bureau commits the worse kind of treachery. Dramatically it is this lowly act which drives the action, as such a deed in Rafael's view merits a witch's wrath. The characters do not show any remorse for their actions except inasmuch as they got themselves into trouble. They only seek a solution to their present predicament - the haunting of the witch - but do not become aware of their superstitious behaviour or change their attitude towards the church. Yet, due to the presence of Superstición, the audience are encouraged to consider such awareness. The *corrido* advises against irrational beliefs and stresses for the public that "su vida está en su poder" and not affected by spirits.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Ibid. p.44

In **Brujerías**, as in most of Teatro Esperanza's work, a pre-eminent theme is that of poverty. Importantly, they imply that poverty is often accompanied by superstition, religious or otherwise. It is a lack of money which prompts Petra to dream of a nice house. Rafael tells how the last time he went to church, some time previously, rather than put money in the collection box, he took some out for himself, and explains:

Cuando pasaron la canasta, estaba llena y yo estaba pobre, por eso le quité un little bit. Nomás para comer, tú sabes.⁴⁵

It is the poverty of the couple which allows them to assume that Doña Juana will be taken away by the *migra*. As they prefer not to leave their names with the Immigration Bureau, we can assume that they themselves lack documented status. They further assume that the old lady will not have papers as it is most likely that she entered the United States before such requirements existed. Esperanza suggest that Chicanos on lower incomes are more likely to be undocumented residents.

Brujerías rests on an unexplained premise, that if Juana is deported Petra can have her house. We are given no information as to how this might occur and while in a short *acto* making a number of points this can be overlooked, in the next *acto* the audience's credulity is abused to an unreasonable extent by the group. **La Bolsa Negra** written by Frank Ramírez in 1972 was never produced, perhaps for the reasons just stated, although it deals with activism in the Chicano community. Ramírez was a member of the **Brown Berets** and was involved in helping Chicanos with college application procedures. The *acto* reflects his commitment to community solidarity and advancement for all. It was used during the group's summer workshop as a training experience for young Chicanos.⁴⁶ It called for three settings which, in the absence of technical facilities, could be achieved by placing different scenes in distinct areas of the stage. The settings are a street approaching an alley, the alley

⁴⁵Ibid. p.56

⁴⁶Ibid. pp.64-65

and an old shack. As in *Trampa Sin Salida* graffiti on a fence could be added to help create a barrio atmosphere.

The *acto* returns to gang warfare and activism in the barrio and employs the by now formulaic *cuento* structure. A new technique, that of stop action, or the freeze technique is often used to allow one character to comment to the audience unheard by the others who remain motionless. The five members of the Los Topos gang discuss at night a fight with a rival gang at their weekly meeting. They debate the pros and cons of fighting and one of the members, the rather symbolically named Mando, who disapproves of fighting "Raza" gangs believes they should recruit rival Chicano gangs into their own.⁴⁷ He explains:

we should've talked with them, and informed them of what's happening. There's a lot of potential in this barrio, all we have to do is set them straight.⁴⁸

Another member, Prieto, would like to leave the barrio but Mando is aware this is not possible "without money, without education".⁴⁹ They discuss the failure of the American educational system and, typically, go off to steal some beer and call up some women. Later they find a black attaché case full of money in a trash can and Prieto reasons that this could be their way out of the barrio. Mando instead suggests they do something for their "gente" with the money but before they take a decision they take the money to an old shack for safekeeping. Prieto worries that if they share the money they may not escape themselves but Mando retorts:

Pero, what's the use of leaving the barrio when you know all your carnales will be left behind living in those rat infested chantes? ⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid. p.67

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid. p.70

He feels they might be able to improve the barrio working together for the benefit of all and posits the question that the barrio never improves because everybody who makes it out of the barrio never comes back to help the rest. The gang is, however, divided and they draw guns and pull out knives. Then they realise that since they found the money, a "freak," namely the allegorical figure of El Espíritu del Deseoso, has been following them and referring to himself as Greed. They realise he has been responsible for their arguments, beat him up and Santos urges the audience not to let greed take over their hearts. Mando explains that to accomplish anything they must be "unidos" and another member affirms that although many of La Raza will become successful they must come back and help their people. The gang members shout slogans and throw the money into the audience, which instantly represents the barrio community, in a symbolic act of solidarity. If this is not a solution, nor is the recourse to images of violence, again presented when one character says "I've been saving my balas for a pretty long time".⁵¹

As in the previous *acto*, an allegorical figure is employed, although with less skill. The concept of the character of Greed was unclear as was his costume, as he could be "dressed to suit the imagination of the designer".⁵² The more subtle finger symbols of Superstición are replaced by direct explanatory comments made to the audience by Greed, which sound like the words of a social scientist:

They fight to relieve their frustrations. Frustrations created by living in the barrio.⁵³

The *acto* as a whole suffers from this defect. It is often propagandistic and the characters, supposedly in realistic conversation, observe their social status in the words of the group's analysis rather than in their own words. Nonetheless, the basic analysis of the play offers Greed as the causal factor of barrio strife, rather than a more clearly thought out sociological

⁵¹Ibid. p.68

⁵²Ibid. p.64

⁵³Ibid. p.67

analysis. The *acto* therefore exposes a false cause by suggesting that it is Chicano greed or individualism which prevents *carnalismo* and unity. This very clearly is not the case, rather it is the unequal resources allocated to the barrio which are at the root of its inadequacies. A second conclusion is that the decline of the barrio is due to the disinterest of previous residents who leave and never return to help, when the true cause, among other factors, is American enterprise which forced barrioization, and the decline of the barrio, to occur. While the "back to the barrio" drive of this period aimed to request that professionals from the area remain there to practise for the benefit of community members, these people are not to blame for the community's problems.⁵⁴

Although it is primarily financial resources which are seen to divide Chicanos from the lifestyle enjoyed by Anglos, when one character, Santos, contemplates the bag of money, he concludes they will not have to steal any more and shouts " Man, now we can become gavachos".⁵⁵ The others look at him in disbelief and Greed explains this traitorous comment as a touch of momentary madness. The implication of this is that the question of the assimilation of the Chicano into American society does not rest solely on monetary factors. It is still preferable to be poor and Chicano than rich and Anglo because Anglos lack the richness of Chicano *cultura*. Although ill-defined and often erroneously described, even in the actos up to and including **La Bolsa Negra**, the Chicano prefers to cling to his own culture even if all it amounts to is in fact an attitude of cultural prejudice and a few slogans:

¡Que viva LA RAZA!
 ¡Que viva LA CAUSA!
 ¡Que viva LA GENTE POBRE!"⁵⁶

The complexities and implications of these slogans are not dealt with in Ramírez's piece but are investigated in greater depth in the next *acto* entitled **Los Pelados**. Although credited to

⁵⁴This stance was suggested by, among others, Santa Barbara's Chicano artist Manuel Unzueta during talks and Chicano art classes at the University of California Santa Barbara, 1986.

⁵⁵AN p.69

⁵⁶Ibid. p.72

Felipe Castro in 1973, this was the result of a collective effort through improvisation and a "round table" of creativity. It called for a larger cast as it involved eight characters.⁵⁷

This piece is significant as it considers the barrio from the perspective of a Mexican who has crossed the border into the United States and attempts to deal with the subject of the undocumented worker in a way not previously done by Esperanza. At the time of its creation, Chicano organizations were divided on the issue of whether to permit undocumented workers into their struggle as they were often perceived merely as scab labour undermining the effectiveness of their strike action.⁵⁸ In **Los Pelados** Esperanza seek a commonality between Chicanos and undocumented Mexican workers to argue for their involvement in the Chicano Movement. The action figures a poor Mexican who leaves his wife and baby to work in the United States. Don Gancho offers him a job at the border and they cross over, a ten-dollar bill being the only documentation needed to placate the Immigration official. Once in the United States, the Patroncito takes charge of the Mexican and puts him to work squashing beans. When the INS come looking for illegal aliens, the Patroncito denies employing any. The Mexican tires and wants to return home but is abused by the Patroncito and the Mig before running off unpaid. Outside he meets a Chicana urging a boycott of Gancho's Comida Gacha. She accuses him of being a scab, of which the Mexican was unaware, and having spent some time arguing they join together to fight for their rights. The bosses think they will give in when hunger strikes but when the workers announce they have Social Justice, La Unión, the Spirit of Carnalismo and the Orgullo de la Raza on their side they triumph and throw the Patroncito into a vat of beans.

With this symbolic solution go a number of simple techniques applied to the theatrical piece. Although the Mexican is a recent immigrant into the United States, Esperanza make no attempt to achieve linguistic verisimilitude in his speech. He speaks the same Chicano dialect as the other characters. The rather sorry plot is replete with inconsistencies and sloganeering

⁵⁷Ibid. p.74

⁵⁸Ibid. pp.74-75

and the *acto* has to be fleshed out by allegorical characters and many visual devices. For example, signs are used to illustrate different settings such as "El Border," "INSIDE LA FACTORY," and "OUTSIDE LA FACTORY" and the Chicano audience are addressed as the forces of Social Justice, La Unión and Carnalismo. Although El Teatro Campesino used similar characters they were embodied as characters taking part in the action. In this play they exist merely as slogans.

The true import of this *acto* lies in its search for a common factor of unity between Chicanos and Mexicans. This involves three main avenues of discussion. Firstly, it means stepping, figuratively, over the Mexican American political border to seek common roots. Secondly, this search necessitates stepping back into Mexican history to find those roots. Thirdly, the mythical Aztlán is offered as the place of origin of Mexicans and therefore Chicanos, and is regarded as having been set in the American Southwest.

If we examine this *acto* in the light of the slogans:

¡Que viva LA RAZA!
 ¡Que viva LA CAUSA!
 ¡Que viva LA GENTE POBRE!

it becomes clear that Esperanza focus with each *acto* on critical problems of Chicano identity facing them at the time. With the cry of "Viva La Raza" an indigenist explanation of common roots is given. With "Que Viva La Causa" reference is made to the fact that the Chicano Movement represents Chicanos and Mexicans. Finally, "Que Viva La Gente Pobre" calls for an increasingly complex analysis of the question of poverty, or class, as it affects Chicanos. Nonetheless, the question uppermost in this *acto* is that of racial heritage, which ultimately requires a historical search.

The allegorical characters La Historia and La Necesidad, despite their monolithic nature, represent a first real reference in the group's work to the interplay of historical forces in the

shaping of the contemporary circumstances of Chicanos in the Southwest. Once the theme of history enters the group's work it never leaves. Indeed, it displaces the folkloric in the formulaic audience address which opens the play. La Historia promises to tell, not a *cuento* in this case, but "una historia". What is then related is still just a story as before, but this time with direct reference to the history of the people of Aztlán, complete with a large history book which is referred to as the narrative unfolds. Despite the inclusion of and the appeal to La Historia, she does not enter into the action as a character after the initial introduction, and as with previous *actos*, the narrative function of the allegorical figure tails off. History's importance is not quite fully explored at this stage in the group's work, although the group express a consciousness of being present at a great historical moment, that of the Chicano Movement. Esperanza become aware that they must cease to regard the Chicanos' story as pertinent to oral culture and begin to document that story as written history.

The *acto* claims that the Chicano and the Mexicano are of a common race and that they share a common origin myth. Therefore they should unite rather than blame each other for their problems. An *indigenista* rhetoric is offered concerning the people of Aztlán. La Historia informs the public:

Aztlán is an Aztec Nahuátl word referring to the "land of the north": the land north of Mexico which originally belonged to the Indio(...) ⁵⁹

Esperanza therefore find the origins of the Chicano in pre-conquest Mexico, - now the American Southwest - before the Mexican indian was tainted with the blood of the Spaniard. The group betray their simplistic view of Mexico as the different tribes are all classed as "indios." They are also insecure as to how to use the term "mestizo", and fail to see that Chicanos are also mestizos. The term Mexicano is used in this *acto* to signify a poor Mexican from across the border, recently arrived in the United States to work, rather than all Mexicans, regardless of their economic status. The *acto* illustrates an insecurity as to which

⁵⁹Ibid. p.77

terms refer to race and which to nationality, particularly in a section in which the audience is addressed to inform them that although different they have a common racial origin:

Eres tú (...)the Mexicano; y ese Chicano; and the India over there; and the Mestizo; and the chola over there.⁶⁰

Since the myth of Aztlán sites the place of origin of the Aztecs and ultimately the Chicanos in the American Southwest, the political border which divides Chicanos from Mexicans is presented as arbitrary rather than fixed. La Raza, that is, Chicanos and Mexicans, one and the same on either side of the border, must not allow:

a geographical distinction imposed upon La Tierra by European minds to divide us, when America es Un Continente y Una Cultura.⁶¹

Therefore, the concept of a Mexican being illegal or undocumented in America is regarded as a nonsense and so the Chicana resolves the problem of the Mexican's illegal status by reference to racial and cultural pride, rather than by resorting to the legal system. When the Mexican feels he has no rights as he is not American, the Chicana assures him he does belong in the US and that he has as many rights as the "gabacho". She explains:

¿Que no eres el hijo del mestizo, a descendent of the Aztec, Toltec and Maya indios?⁶²

She thus shows him his claim to a common racial heritage with the Chicanos who are American citizens. This, in the *acto*, provides the legitimacy by which the Mexican may be welcomed into the struggle for rights alongside the Chicanos.

This conclusion was not arrived at easily by the Chicana and the Mexican in the *acto*. Insults and derogatory terms abound until they realise they have something in common. The

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid. p.75

⁶²Ibid. p.88

Chicana calls the Mexican, "Wetback!" and "¡Indio prieto!" stressing his illegal status and his dark skin and therefore his racial inferiority. The Mexican calls the Chicana "pocha" pointing out the Chicano's culture which in his view is hybrid and adulterated by American elements. He also refers to her dark skin and her denial of indian blood by calling her "Prieta renegada" and adding "Nomás te faltan las plumas". The Chicana corrects him by saying she is not a "renegada" but is proud of her indian heritage. Both admit that "los dos somos indios" although, in real terms, both would be more likely to be *mestizos*. The insistence on denying the fact that Mexicans and Chicanos are descended as much from the Spaniards as from the Aztecs illustrates an anti-Spanish phase in the group's work and a historical selectivity. La Necesidad claims:

I am the hija of all the conquistadores, Anglo and Spanish, who robbed from the original Indio inhabitants of "America". My jefes robbed the Indios of their land, their culture, and their self respect.⁶³

Therefore this acto presents the Chicanos as identifying with the indians of Latin America and presents the true history of the region as one of conquest. Robbed of all they had, the poor Mexicans and the Chicanos are the "pelados" of the title, stripped of everything and poor due to exploitation. That exploitation is shown to be present in the United States where the "pelados," due to necessity, still have to migrate to survive. The exploitation by the Patroncito is presented visually. He ties a rope around the Mexican and gives him some donkey ears and a tail, the latter serving as a target for when the Patroncito has to kick him "in the ass".⁶⁴ The Patroncito, sitting on him, tells the Immigration Officer that he is on a donkey, making the point that to employers the Mexican worker is a mere pack animal in the American economic system, and a stupid one at that. It is made clear that the American economy needs and desires illegal aliens. Having been bribed to permit the Mexican to cross the border, the highly satirized binoculars-toting Mig addresses the audience:

⁶³Ibid. p.77

⁶⁴Ibid. p.81

Corruption? What do you mean corruption? This is capitalism at its subtle best! Everybody does it. What I do is part of the American economic system: FREE ENTERPRISE. I let them wetbacks enter, and I get a prize; a work incentive. That's the American way.⁶⁵

Not only is the Mexican in the *acto* an exploited worker but he unwittingly aids in the exploitation of others as a scab when the bosses bring in scab labour from over the border to undermine strike action. He has to undergo insults from the Chicana who regards him as an accomplice of the bosses against whom she is striking. The *acto* sets out to show how the scab is not to blame for his actions - he is compelled by necessity - but nonetheless, scab labour cannot be tolerated. Nor is it only the Anglo-Americans who oppress the Mexican. Chicanos do so also, by discriminating through rejecting their participation in the Movement and, in this *acto*, through one of the most hated figures in Chicano theatre, that of the *coyote* or *enganchador*. A Chicano, he exploits members of his race for his own, and his Anglo boss's benefit. Don Gancho's function is to deliver Mexicans illegally across the border to work for a pittance, with no rights, in American factories and fields. Like Petra before him, he is a figure who betrays his own people by colluding with Anglos to the detriment of Chicanos and Mexicans. In Petra's case the act was an isolated incident but Don Gancho makes a living out of being a *vendido* or sell-out to his people:

my business to exploit Mexicans (...) humph, I mean, I try to help out carnales in need.⁶⁶

Just as not all Chicanos are supportive of their fellow Chicanos and Mexicans, the Chicana is aware that an appeal to race is not a complete solution, as not all whites are oppressors. She represents an implicit warning against reverse racism.:

You are fighting para vivir como hombre, respecting other's differences, los de los negros, los anglos, los chinos, y nosotros, todos.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibid. p.80

⁶⁶Ibid. p.79

⁶⁷Ibid. p.89

One of the major problems evident in this piece is that despite a mention of "Imperialistic lust" the *acto* explains the wretchedness of the Chicanos by reference to "La Necesidad," represented as a female allegorical character. She is an abstract, undefined and unknown "something" in this *acto*, a way of explaining what the group is not able to grasp fully at this stage. Mexicans, they conclude, migrate due to necessity and conquerors conquer due to necessity. It is naive to suggest that conquest comes about due to an undefined necessity. However, **Los Pelados** illustrates that Esperanza had a greater interest in wrestling with broad questions than in explaining narrow topical issues to a public encouraged to act on the information gained from the play. In this play a sketchy study is made of two bills being passed through Congress at the time, the Kennedy-Rodino and Dixon-Arnett bills.⁶⁸ Esperanza were against their proposals as they were detrimental to undocumented Mexicans and clearly wished to express as much in the *acto*. Yet the specifics of the bills are not referred to and no procedure of rejection or appeal of any sort, however basic, is suggested for the audience to follow. Some consideration of the effects of the laws does, however, occur. The Mig states at one point:

when those laws are finally passed, we can go into the barrios and bust them beaners heads till hell won't have it.⁶⁹

The abuses made possible by the law for the benefit of the employer with respect to undocumented workers are also described:

We'll find another sucker and use the Dixon Arnett Law to send him back to Mexico before he gets a cent from us.⁷⁰

The appeal of the Chicana to native American rights is an attempt to offset symbolically the sweeping powers of the Immigration Bureau. Yet the *acto* invites no involvement in any real and particular dispute to challenge politically the legal system's support of the INS. Rather

⁶⁸See Jorge Huerta, 'From the Temple to the Arena,' in Francisco Jiménez (ed), *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1979 p.108

⁶⁹AN p.82

⁷⁰Ibid. p.86

than being an *acto* addressing specific bills, it is one addressing a general problem of intraracial strife. The eradication of this is a more long term project than finding an answer to whether to support a particular bill or not.

It is important to note, however, that César Chávez had been in support of the two bills, before reconsidering the matter and rejecting them.⁷¹ Meanwhile Esperanza had been surprised to find that they as a Chicano theatre group disagreed with one of the Chicano Movement's most renowned leaders. A section noting this was prepared for **Los Pelados** and was only withdrawn, before being performed, when Chávez changed his mind.⁷² Esperanza, as a group, were clearly developing their own identity, and indeed had already fostered ideas contrary to Chávez's, despite the frequent call to unity. The challenge to Catholicism, a religion practised by Chávez and many Chicanos, had already occurred in **Brujerías**.⁷³ Therefore the last *acto* in the collection, **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** by Jorge Huerta comes as quite a surprise, breaking, as it does with the incipient analytical thrust of **Los Pelados** to take a partial, but clear refuge in the anti-intellectual religious idealism of El Teatro Campesino.⁷⁴ Here the indigenous past is again studied, not to provide rational arguments for political cohesion but to equip the Chicanos with a general and vague philosophy of love culled from the supposed perfection of pre-Columbian societies. **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** nonetheless aims to be a complex piece of work, primarily as its author attempts to create an analogy between the Aztec myth of Huitzilopochtli and the Chicano Movement. Indeed the "renacimiento" of the title refers to the resurgence of indian culture among the Chicanos, the descendants of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, to reprise cultural forms eradicated by the Spanish and later American conquests. The legend of Huitzilopochtli, according to the group, "set the mood for the militaristic attitude of the Aztecs".⁷⁵ The god's birth was violent, "full of wrath, fury

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid. p.74

⁷⁴Valdez's poem *Pensamiento Serpentino* was published in *Chicano Theatre One* in Spring 1973 pp.7-19 but it was written two years before and Huerta refers to this in the production notes.

⁷⁵AN p.99

and hatred for his brothers", as Huerta believes the Chicano Movement's birth to have been. Yet, the analogy between the god's birth and that of the Chicano Movement is not effective, as the "birth" of the Chicano Movement was not in fact the substance of the *acto*. Rather it was the development and coming to maturity which were the impetus for the play, evident from the criticism of the movement, which would have been unthinkable in its early years.

The plot itself is extremely thin. While the goddess Coatlicue is in penance, sweeping incessantly, a ball of feathers falls before her. She puts them in her bosom and later, finding them gone, she realises she is with child. Her daughter and her four hundred sons, understandably conveyed through just a few actors, seek to remedy this dishonour by killing her. As they dress for war one son, Cuahuitlicac, who is a restraining influence on the others, warns his mother and the unborn Huitzilopochtli, who is born just as the brothers arrive. Huitzilopochtli kills the sister and then makes war on the aggressive brothers, and triumphs.⁷⁶ The message intimated in the piece is that the Chicano Movement was born in fury just like Huitzilopochtli, but if it is based instead on love it will be undefeatable.⁷⁷

Huerta maintains that the play was written to illustrate the egoism which is present to some extent in all the Chicanos in the Movement.⁷⁸ However, despite the fact that the god Huitzilopochtli is loosely symbolic of the Chicano Movement, there is almost no other reference to the Movement itself, directly or indirectly. The four main characters all fuse into one great troupe of clowns and they present no reasons or hints to show their relevance to the Chicano Movement. They express no ideas pertinent to it, nor do they embody any characteristics which would render them recognisably involved in it. In short, they deal not with the Movement but with the substance of the legend and the unwanted pregnancy of the

⁷⁶*Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* by Miguel de León Portilla, is the source used by Huerta for his account of the birth of Huitzilopochtli. Huerta was preparing a Ph.D. thesis at the time and so a tendency to document from well known masters appears in the group's work. Esperanza, being a university theatre to begin with, had greater access to academic support from the outset than other groups.

⁷⁷AN p.121

⁷⁸Ibid. p.100

character of the mother and even at that, they betray no real motives for opposing the pregnancy.

Given, then, the almost non-existent analogy between the events of the myth and the Chicano Movement, the author added an explanatory prologue and epilogue, a song and recorded indigenous music to attempt to create just such an analogy. The cast were also dressed in contemporary clothes to give the audience a vision of how Chicanos appear squabbling and destroying each other in the early seventies.⁷⁹ Although the *acto* offered a non-contemporary reference point, the action is always contemporary and always Chicano in style, culture and language. As Huerta points out:

These are not Aztec gods, they are our own people, making asses of themselves while attempting to destroy El Movimiento.⁸⁰

These techniques, as well as the use of an Aztec myth for a plot, prompted Huerta to regard the *acto* as a play. **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli**, however, bears much resemblance to the *actos* preceding it. It is really another cuento in which characters introduce themselves as did the previous allegorical ones, but this time they have long Aztec names. Cozcaquauhtli is the opportunistic vulture, Cipactli is the lazy crocodile, Ozomatli is the imbecile monkey. Coyolxauhqui is the bossy moon, and so the qualities possessed by the four negative characters which damage the Chicano Movement are greed, laziness, stupidity and intolerance; egoism in general. Again, therefore we have the allegorical figures of previous *actos*, who embody certain negative characteristics and who are finally vanquished in the end. The fighting and scrapping found often in the *actos* are repeated here among the gods. They argue in typical Chicano theatre fashion over who shines the brightest until they are chased off stage by a slapstick-wielding sister. Coatlicue goes out into the audience to search their bags claiming they have stolen her feathers and in this way the group maintain a close relationship with their audiences. Coatlicue's pregnancy is also achieved in

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

a typical Chicano theatre manner through the use of a large pillow. Importantly, then, the *acto's* most fundamental contribution to the group's work is its irreverent attitude towards an Aztec myth. Huerta found the myth humorous yet felt he should not exploit its comic potential, as Chicanos in the Movement revered their Aztec ancestors as examples of high culture. Huerta was at that time still under the impression that "the Aztecs could do no wrong".⁸¹ Therefore he attempted to channel the humour into a parody of the people who keep the Chicano Movement "from its true purpose which is unity".⁸² This attempt was not successful, mainly due to the lack of cohesion between the central myth and the added sections, including the production notes. The *acto* remains an exploitation of an Aztec myth for humour, or more accurately, an exploitation of a authoritative literary, sombre and academic piece. The piece of literature which is elevated in tone and register and anachronistic to an untutored public is converted into a *cuento* for the people.

This is clear from the group's use of a new figure in their work, that of a narrator who clearly has a didactic role as he stands at a lectern. He reads the myth from a book which represents an Aztec Codex, illustrating that, as in the case of the history book in *Los Pelados*, Esperanza have begun to develop a documentary style of theatre, in this case using ancient books. The narrator is on the stage for the duration of the play and directs himself both to the cast and to the audience. His lines, which accompany the action all the way through, lend the *acto* a formal consistency which others have lacked, despite the slight sagging of the formal English register which is employed. The narrator is an addition and a development for the group, although he was present in embryo in previous *actos*. In this case, however, he is not an allegorical figure but is the character of the narrator, a nameless authorial voice, perhaps that of Huerta, reiterating ideas prevalent in sections of the Movement at the time. He is also employed as the sound effects man, using drums, whistles, chimes and cymbals to accentuate the physicality of the slapstick, knockabout humour, much of which derives from fights and falls.

⁸¹Ibid. p.99

⁸²Ibid. p.100

The narrator is a foil to the comedy of the piece. The register he uses is, for the most part, ostensibly at least from scriptural documents and his tone is sombre, relating as he does important events and introducing powerful gods. Meanwhile, centre stage, a series of ordinary Chicanos cavort and bungle their way through the play in contrast to the words of the narrator. From his tone the narrator has a serious purpose, that of relating the events of the myth with dignity, yet his efforts are undermined from the start by the miserable bunch of fools who only on occasion manage to attain a semblance of serious intent. They convey the attitude that they may be representing gods but they know that nobody (neither on stage nor off) is fooled. This is due to the fact that the Chicanos on stage present themselves as not readily able to identify with the supposed noble aura of the actor. They perform in such a way as to illustrate their scant respect for plays which call for noble sentiments. They are just having a good time. This is emphasised by references to "the story" or the "cuentecito."

It is evident that Esperanza present in this *acto* their own vision of *rasquachi* theatre. Rather than simply constituting an affront to professional "serious" theatre, in that props are often of a ridiculous sort and the lack of professionalism of the cast threatens to ruin the show, in fact the secret of *rasquachismo* here is that the group present an illusion of unprofessionalism. The narrator's presence is fundamental to this approach. His role is to present the Aztec myth with the dignity which it merits, but his efforts are ruined by the sacrilegious performance of the actors and the laughter of the audience. The narrator is played as the only person in the auditorium aware of the serious nature of the *cuento* being told and the serious activity which theatre is. Meanwhile, the actors present themselves as merely acting out another story as they have done in previous *actos*. When the narrator describes how the gods were strong and well-prepared for war, the god characters appear on stage with a bag of toys, trinkets, and crepe paper streamers and make such a fuss trying them on that the narrator has to ask them if he can continue with the story, and then check to

see where he was before he was interrupted.⁸³ This scene further demythifies the legend by removing its sacred bloom as the characters show that they are no wiser about Aztec culture or clothes than the audience.

In short, Aztec myths sounded anachronistic and comical to the modern Chicano. The narrator's ostensible function was to act as an intermediary between the literary text from which he was reading and the events on the stage to render the myth applicable to contemporary Chicano culture. In fact, the opposite occurs. The narrator's language is seen to be of no use when he has to chastise the actors and he is forced out of his composure to revert to everyday Chicano speech. At times the actors change register for comic effect and the Chicano code-switching dialect is replaced by a more formal, literary English. The narrator intones:

When the four hundred gods of the south
saw that their mother
was pregnant,
they were very angry and said:

COZCA: Who did this to you?
CIPACTLI: Who has made you heavy with child?
OZOMATLI: This insults us, dishonours us.⁸⁴

The feebleness of the characters' attempt to speak in formal English only serves to cause more laughter. Chicano theatre likes anachronism, and this *acto* exploits language for anachronistic effect. Nonetheless, *El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli*, far from rejecting pre-Columbian cultural sources as completely irrelevant, in fact advocates elements of Maya culture for emulation among contemporary Chicanos. A didactic intent is in evidence during the *acto* through the advocacy of a religion of love to unite Chicanos in the struggle for political objectives. The play appeals to a syncretism of Christian love and Indian religion and presents an idea central to Luis Valdez's *Pensamiento Serpentino* that the

⁸³Ibid, p.116

⁸⁴Ibid, p.110

Chicano's "real purpose" is love.⁸⁵ This recourse to "love" acquires in this *acto* the significance which earlier allegorical figures had in previous ones in that it presents the solution to the Chicano's plight as simple and singular.

The piece focuses on the question of racism but, significantly, while it considers Anglo-American racism, it also assumes from the outset that the Chicanos themselves are racist. A shock opening in the form of a rhetorical question presupposes that all Chicanos are racist, and muses over the causes of this, going on to consider it against the nature or nurture argument:

Chicano,
were you born a racist
or was it taught you by the whiteman? ⁸⁶

This racism is then contrasted with the love and science of ancient Mayan civilization. According to the narrator, the Maya "knew how to love" and understood "the nature of things naturally" and should be recognised by the Chicanos as an example.⁸⁷ The *acto* advises that Chicanos ought to learn that hatred turns back on the one who hates, and warns that because of this, a Chicano Movement founded on hatred will be destroyed. The piece then asserts that in fact it is in the nature of man to love, not to practise racism because the Chicanos' ancestors were not racist. Chicanos should not follow the example of white America's racism towards them but should regard this as an unnatural aberration and instead love in the way the Maya did. A Maya concept, that of "In Lak' Ech" or "tú eres mi otro yo," taken from *Pensamiento Serpentino* is presented as a solution to a Chicano Movement fraught with conflict.⁸⁸ Huerta wrote:

⁸⁵Luis Valdez, *Pensamiento Serpentino*, San Juan Bautista, Cucaracha Press, 1971 p.3

⁸⁶AN p.102

⁸⁷Ibid. p.102

⁸⁸Luis Valdez, *op. cit.* p.3

We are confronted daily with people in the movement who are only interested in themselves; who cannot understand the concept of In Lak 'Ech, and who don't want to try.⁸⁹

Therefore, the *acto* argues in favour of the Christian message of loving one's neighbour as oneself, through the Mayan concept of "tú eres mi otro yo, si te hago daño a ti me hago daño a mí".⁹⁰ This philosophy of non-violence is an integral part of Teatro Campesino's work, often represented on stage by Campesino through the figure of Quetzalcóatl/Jesucristo.⁹¹ Like much of Valdez's work **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** may be criticised as anti-intellectual in nature, as Huerta also bases his philosophical arguments on an idealized view of pre-Columbian society and the supposed superiority, in religion, language and science, of the Ancient Maya, perpetuated by the pre-Columbian elites themselves. The *acto* makes no distinctions between the classes and castes of the ancient world and falls into a manicheistic trap of presenting love as the only way to understanding and hatred as the root of the Chicanos' disadvantaged state.

Indeed, it is not at first clear from the *acto* whom it is that the Chicano behaves in a racist fashion towards. The narrator affirms that:

We have learned to
hate and neatly applied it
to our own kind
as well as others who
would help us.⁹²

The narrator uses general terms such as "people" and "others" and all conflict, debate and disagreement on principles or strategies is generalised as hatred. Although this may represent an attempt to dispense with racist and derogatory labels, the narrator goes on to criticise Chicanos who do not identify with the Movement as "vendidos." Huerta himself asks:

⁸⁹AN p.100

⁹⁰Luis Valdez, op. cit. p.2

⁹¹Jorge Huerta, 1982 p.202

⁹²AN p.105

(...) why ignore the existence of a large number of Chicanos who are opposed to the Movement, to their heritage, and who prefer to ignore the social injustices surrounding them? ⁹³

From this we can assume that the *acto* denounces reverse racism and isolationism within the Chicano movement, and that "help" from Anglos and very possibly Blacks in the Movement should be welcome. The *acto* condemns the categorizing of all whites as "gavachos" and affirms that "we" are "CHILDREN OF THE RAINBOW".⁹⁴ Also, Chicanos ought to go beyond blaming others for their problems and deal with the *vendidos* among themselves. Nonetheless, Esperanza do not deny that "the master teachers" (presumably the Anglos) taught the Chicanos hatred by addressing them in a racist manner and preventing them from creating a positive self image. Significantly the Chicano's lack of a positive identity is described as being the result of colonization. As the Chicano was a "colonized slave", he hated in return.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, a way forward is suggested:

Unidos,
con amor
y sin rencor
¡VENCEREMOS! ⁹⁶

A new definition of "Chicano" is also given. "Chicano" we are told, is a "state of mind that anyone with love can attain".⁹⁷ Here the *acto* appears to break away from defining the Chicano via race, but the rest of the *acto* does not bear this out. The piece makes a call to La Raza, which seems rather incongruous in a work denouncing racism, as a "pueblo amado" or chosen people to follow the Biblical commandment of loving one's neighbour. There is also an appeal for support for the Raza Unida party:

Hay la Raza Unida,
Partido conciente;

⁹³Ibid. p.100

⁹⁴Ibid. p.105

⁹⁵Ibid. p.104

⁹⁶Ibid. p.122

⁹⁷Ibid. p.105

Quiere el apoyo
De toda la gente.⁹⁸

This appeal may seem uncharacteristic of Esperanza, who until this point did not advocate support for any particular political group, and it is rather contradictory to find support for this party in an *acto* against racism, given that this party often used a rhetoric which was racist. Nonetheless, the call to support for a party working within the American political system strengthens the case for describing the play as an *acto* rather than as a *mito*. It is clear that the group were aware of the existence of the *mito* and used elements of it. Valdez's *Pensamiento Serpentino* which was the basis for Teatro Campesino's own *mitos* is employed here as a unifying and liberating philosophy of love for contemporary Chicanos to follow. Also, an Aztec myth, with characters who have Aztec names, lies at the core of the play. Yet, ultimately the piece does not present reality from the perspective of a god, either Christian or Indian, as the *mito* sets out to do. The salvation of the Chicano is a political salvation, not to be achieved from a benevolent god who will better his condition, but through the Chicanos' support of the Raza Unida party. For this to be possible, La Raza has to be "unida" in love, and the *acto* appeals to both religions for an ideal of love. Nonetheless, reality, or to be precise, society, is presented as being changeable by activism, as gods are not presented on the stage as saviour figures, as in the work of Teatro Campesino, but Chicanos themselves are portrayed as responsible for their own fates.

El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli is a fascinating blend of mysticism and activism, of eternal and transient values, of "high" and "low" culture. It seeks a dialogue, proper for the Chicano, between all of these value systems with varying degrees of success. Being Chicano is described as a mystical state of mind, a nirvana in keeping with the hippie culture in the United States at the time, but that state is based not in a culture many continents away but in Latin American pre-Columbian societies, given legitimate force through the activism

⁹⁸Ibid. p.123

of the Chicano Movement.⁹⁹ The piece confronts the Chicano's search to understand his condition as a person within a cosmos over which he has no power and as a person in a collective which seeks to have power over changes affecting it. Clearly, in **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** it is important that one focus must not obscure the other. Most successfully dealt with in this play is the question of the Chicano's relationship to a perceived "high" culture of Aztec literature, pre-Columbian Mexico, myth and theatre, and a perceived "low" culture of folk origins, contemporary America, *cuentos* and *actos*. This *acto* seeks to legitimise the "low" culture as being as important and relevant to the Chicanos as the "high" culture is to other groups. The *actos* in this collection, in sum, then, represent a forceful demand for self-expression by Chicanos, which is ultimately more important for and relevant to theatre history than the internal contradictions found in the short plays themselves.

⁹⁹See Ross Speck, *The New Families: Youth Communes and the Politics of Drugs*, Bath, Tavistock Publications, 1972 and the trilogy of works on the teachings of Don Juan by Carlos Castaneda, New York, Penguin, 1968, 1971 and 1972.

CHAPTER SIX: GUADALUPE.

Esperanza, becoming aware of the complexity of issues relating to Chicanos, and indeed the diversity of their people, embarked on a period of consolidation of what they already knew and expansion into other areas. They saw the need for change in their group, partly due to the imminent departure of their founder Jorge Huerta.¹ Attendance at a Latin American theatre festival in San Francisco in 1972 prompted them to consider new ways of creating theatre. They wished to create their plays collectively and approach them through a thorough understanding of Brecht and Marx.² They were also interested in documentary theatre and had a unique opportunity to apply their new ideas after participating in a march in support of a group of people from the small agricultural town of Guadalupe, who were in Santa Barbara County Jail after defying the institutions of their small town.³

After hearing their story Esperanza decided to recreate it as a play, rather than continue with an expansion of **Trampa Sin Salida** as they had been considering. The group began a thorough investigation into the events which had taken place in Guadalupe and had as their main documentary source a 1972 California State Advisory Committee's report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.⁴ The report had investigated allegations that Mexican American children received an inferior education, due to the district's failure to contract bilingual bicultural Mexican American professionals.⁵ Mexican American parents were excluded from school activities and harassed when they complained about unfair treatment. Therefore, a group of parents formed the Comité Consejero de los Padres de Familia to

¹Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre : Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982, p.69

²M. Dolan, recorded interview with Víctor Fuentes, University of California at Santa Barbara, March 19, 1987

³Jorge Huerta, 'El Teatro de la Esperanza: Keeping In Touch With The People,' *The Drama Review* Vol. 21 No. 1, March 1977, p.39

⁴*Las escuelas de Guadalupe: Un legado de opresión educacional*, Un Informe del Comité Estatal Asesor de California Preparado para la Información y Consideración de la Comisión de Derechos Civiles de los Estados Unidos, February 1974.

⁵Ibid. p.24

challenge the educational authorities. Not only this, but the school children threatened to abandon their classrooms.⁶ In a frantic response to this activism, clearly in line with the more militant mood of many people of Mexican background in California, the Parent Teacher Association invited a Mexican American member of the John Birch Society to denounce the Chicano Movement. Some three hundred angry parents and their supporters protested at the meeting, which was held on March 16th 1972, at the invitation of a political speaker to a school hall. Units from the California Highway Patrol stood by as they expected other Chicano movement groups such as the UFWOC, the Brown Berets and MECHA to disrupt the meeting.

This did not materialise, yet a few weeks later nine people, almost all from the Comité or the UFW were arrested by mail and charged with disturbing the peace and disrupting a public meeting. The School Board clearly regarded the Comité as an instrument of the UFW, although they had no official connection, but parents, many of whom were indeed members of both organizations, stressed that their disagreement with the School Board was over education alone and had nothing to do with union activity. Nonetheless, and although the nine were defended by a UFWOC lawyer, all were found guilty of breach of the peace, and seven of disrupting a public meeting, over the period of 14th-18th September. Sentences ranged from probation to fines to suspended sentences of some ninety days. The accused could only conclude that they had been put on trial for their political beliefs, as the prosecutor had described them in terms of their political affiliation rather than in terms of infractions committed at the meeting.⁷

In the light of these and other events the report to the Civil Rights Commission concluded that Mexican American children had not received an adequate education, and had not been encouraged to believe in their own worth as students, or their potential to be successful

⁶Ibid. p.7

⁷Ibid. p.57

Americans, due to prejudice in the community power structure.⁸ On the contrary; those Mexican Americans who were proud of their cultural heritage and tried to preserve it were systematically expelled.⁹ Furthermore, Mexican American children living in Guadalupe invariably ended up in classes for the educable mentally retarded even though national associations of psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists proclaimed racial and ethnic factors to be unrelated to mental retardation. There were no white children in such classes.¹⁰ Physical abuse was also common in the schools and on more than one occasion students required medical treatment for wounds inflicted by teachers for minor offences.¹¹ Despite such abuses, many Mexican Americans had declined over a long period of time to voice their grievances for fear of incurring further reprisals such as arrest, loss of employment and deportation. The report summed up the plight of the Mexican American children by stating that many practices prohibited in state prisons were still in force in Guadalupe's schools and¹² concluded that:

ser un mexicoamericano en Guadalupe es un crimen, y el no ser un ciudadano americano es un crimen mayor aún.¹³

Esperanza supplemented this plentiful documentary evidence with articles from newspapers and court reports. They interviewed members of the Chicano community including members of the Parents' Committee and the United Farmworkers.¹⁴ Their intent was to broaden their scope to give a fuller analysis of the areas they had dealt with in the *actos* - ie. education, the law, the church and employment, and it is clear that the existence of the Guadalupe case was fortuitous for the group, as they were quick to realise that the events surrounding the case encapsulated the kinds of interests they had. Media coverage of the events in Guadalupe had ensured that the public was aware of the story and so the group could exploit its topicality,

⁸Ibid. p.47

⁹Ibid. p.48

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid. p.51

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid. p.56

¹⁴Jorge Huerta, 'El Teatro de la Esperanza: Keeping In Touch With The People,' *The Drama Review*, Vol. 22 No. 1, March 1977, p.38

still an important element of Chicano theatre. Important also was the group's perception that social relations in Guadalupe were not an isolated phenomenon but a generalised state of affairs, and so in portraying Guadalupe's social networks, Esperanza could reach a wide audience of Chicanos from many areas. In *The Drama Review* Jorge Huerta writes that the earlier Isla Vista Riots and the burning of the Bank of America there meant that the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and the area's progressive people, among them Chicanos, shared little affection. Therefore the group were creating against a background of conflict and activism bound to appeal to their audiences.¹⁵ The documentation available also helped ease the group into a documentary style of theatre, despite the contradiction of criticising the system through access to documentation by white professionals, previously targets of ridicule in the *actos*.

Once the initial investigation had been completed, theatrical improvisation and scripting followed, and five months after starting the research, the play premiered on Cinco de Mayo in Santa Barbara.¹⁶ The group later performed the piece in Guadalupe's gymnasium to an eager public, though many people through fear of reprisals chose not to attend. Nonetheless, the people who appeared in the play as characters were there, and although their names had been changed, everyone knew who they were. There was an audience of some three hundred people, including the wary priest who did not stay long enough to see his negative portrayal.¹⁷ Huerta believed that **Guadalupe** was brought to "a greater audience than most theatros can expect in a life time", as during their summer tour the group taped a ninety-minute special for Mexico's national television station. The play was also adapted for a thirty-minute episode of National Educational Television's "Visions" series in 1975.¹⁸

¹⁵Ibid. p.41

¹⁶Ibid. p.39

¹⁷Ibid. p.41

¹⁸Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.142

Guadalupe traces the efforts of a group of field workers, via the formation of a Parents Committee, to oppose the school system which failed their children, as well as the consequences of their actions. Briefly, the events are the following. Scene One, also the Prologue, sees Marcos Cortez, from the John Birch Society, burst into a Guadalupe school hall to address a crowd of parents. His anti-Chicano sentiments inflame the crowd and he is silenced by their chanting. Scene Two, set on a production line, illustrates some of the problems which trap the Chicano, and sets the scene of barrio life. Poverty, education, drugs and a call for organization are touched upon. Scene Three deals with the decision of some *campesinos* working in a packing shed to form a Parents Committee to voice complaints about their children's education. Scene Four is a comic interlude set in a supermarket as two gossips, the Chismosas, piece together a drugs connection in the town. Scene Five sees a drug addict in an alley talking to his younger brother about school and unemployment as he awaits his pusher. Scene Six takes place in a bar and witnesses the grower, Bob, who is also the bar owner, attempt to find out about the Comité from his customers. There is also a fight between a Chicano and a Mexican. Scene Seven offers two simultaneous locations, church and school, and through an ironic juxtaposition of dialogue, the social control of both institutions over Chicanos is made clear. Scene Eight returns to the Chismosas who gossip about the Comité in a garden and one of them signs a petition which is being taken to the Superintendent of Schools. Scene Nine deals with this visit in which Virgie González and Señor Moreno put their accusations before an angry Superintendent who calls an emergency meeting of the School Board. Scene Ten shows the humiliation of a young Chicana by her teacher and Scene Eleven presents the prostitution of a woman by her drug addict husband for a fix. Scene Twelve presents two groups on the stage, the school board and the Comité. The former plot to have Cortez incite the Mexican Americans and give the board an excuse to arrest them, and the latter offer their reactions and plans to keep calm. The initial meeting is re-enacted in a condensed form, followed by the entrance of a policeman who reads out accusations and convictions. The scene ends when Virgie, addressing the public outside the prison in Santa Barbara, gives a speech justifying the actions of the Comité.

Although the events of the play are significant, and they are discussed below, of greater interest and importance is Esperanza's theatrical approach to these real events. Rather than reproduce in a factual and linear form the conflict as it appeared in the documentary evidence, Esperanza accepted that the story was already well-publicised and that their task as a theatre group was not to bring mere facts to the public but to offer to the community of Guadalupe a vision of itself. This in turn would serve as a generalised vision of many barrio communities and help Esperanza develop audiences, of a broad and varied composition, who could nonetheless identify with their presentations. The short *acto* could not successfully bring a wide range of barrio characters together but a full length piece could combine *viejas*, gang members, Mexican immigrants and more. Esperanza went about creating just such a piece.

Jorge Huerta had decided to leave the group and Esperanza were to be bereft of a director who had taught them as much as they knew.¹⁹ In preparation for his absence, Esperanza decided to sharpen their often loosely collective approach to play-writing and creation into a more conscious method of collective creation, rather than appoint a new director. The transition happened gradually via a long trust and unity-forming process in which the members built up their confidence.²⁰ Most members had been working together for four years and knew something of improvisation, given the incomplete state of some of the scripts sent to them from Huerta's playwrighting class. The group members were therefore encouraged by Huerta to come up with ideas themselves and assume responsibility away from the director.²¹ Huerta became no more than an overseer and led discussions and exercises, which, while they were geared towards helping the group move organically, also placed emphasis on the individual's role within the group. In order to help the group create from personal experience, including that of oppression, each member directed a scene from life, dealing with church, education and drugs, etcetera.²² The 1972 Latin American Theatre

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Teatro de los Barrios, *Documentary Theatre*, pp.12-13 n/d Esperanza archives.

²¹Ibid. p.12

²²Ibid. p.13

Festival in San Francisco was influential in this process as it introduced them to Enrique Buenaventura and the Teatro Experimental de Cali. They wrote to the Colombian collective for advice on collective creation and Mexico's Los Mascarones also obliged them by sending them information on their creative method for their highly popular **Máquinas y burgueses**.

Enrique Buenaventura offered to the group a rationale for collectivism. He cited the decline of the traditional 19th century star system in theatre which saw the replacement of one star, the actor, with a new one, namely the director. The latter assumed the role of a unifying agent who achieved artistic unity in a play, with the secondary help of the actors only as the tools enabling him to execute his conception of the text.²³ Improvisationary groups, such as the Teatro Experimental de Cali sought to regain for the actor his role as a creative artist, through two strategies. Either the intermediary between the text and the actor, namely the director, was eliminated, the actors engulfing his function, or the text was ignored altogether thus allowing the actor to create his own.²⁴ Esperanza followed these ideas to democratise the director's role by replacing his function with a collective directorship, and sought to create texts, rather than adhere to existing ones. Indeed, at this time most Chicano theatre groups were obliged to create their own pieces as there were few in existence which were deemed relevant to their audiences.

Armed with plenty of factual material, an evolving methodology and researched themes, Esperanza got down to creating what was to be **Guadalupe**:

What we basically wanted to express existed in the social conflict between growers and campesinos. In Guadalupe the courts, the police, the politician, the priest and drugs all serve the people in power and aid them in the suppression of the campesino. We began improvising around given situations; but at the same time we gave ourselves room to create and to combine these events with our own past experiences. Different members would attempt to improvise the same basic concept and situation. This gave

²³Teatro de los Barrios, *op. cit.* p.12

²⁴*Ibid.* p.12

the group the opportunity to draw from various alternatives to see weaknesses and strengths, to get ideas, in short, to collectively create.²⁵

Having basically "a thesis with an argumentation to it", that the *campesinos* were systematically abused by institutions, scenarios were collectively improvised and scenes were scripted by individual members. These written versions received a staged reading with group criticism, resulting in rescripting, until the scene received collective approval. Further innovations arose throughout the staging period. Therefore, Rodrigo Duarte Clark defines **Guadalupe** as a "semi-documentary play", as at this stage the group still improvised from their own experiences in a play which was based on documented sources. They were mindful of the fact that although they were reproducing a series of factual events for one community which had lived through them, they also had to produce a work relevant to a wider public. In short, as in most of their *actos*, they wished to avoid a narrow agit-prop formula.²⁶

The collective approach to theatrical creation aims to eliminate the concept of hierarchy from within the group of theatre workers. Coherent with this is the conviction that the collective should not adopt a stance of superiority over its audiences in the sense of claiming to deliver wisdom to them from an external position of privilege. Rather, the ends of the political theatre group are best met when they are seen to belong to the community for which they perform. Evidently Esperanza fully supported this approach, often and typically one relevant to community theatre.²⁷ It has been argued by those involved in community theatre that the emphasis of theatre must be on the connections between different sections of society and issues must be articulated so that the tensions behind them become public:

Rather than draw the audience into a private vision of the world which creates its own "reality" (a kind of totalitarianism in itself), the general approach

²⁵Ibid. pp.13-14

²⁶Víctor Guerra, 'An Interview with Rodrigo Duarte of Teatro de la Esperanza, August 13, 1982, New York City,' in *Mexican American Theatre Then and Now*, Special Issue of the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, Year 11 No. 1, 1983 p.113

²⁷Steve Gough, *All Together Now: An Alternative View of Theatre and the Community*, London, Methuen, 1984

taken by community theatre is to take out an interpretation of a broader social reality, often collectively arrived at, the final test of which occurs on "the floor," that midway zone where the interests of actors and audience are addressed equally.²⁸

Esperanza's stage became this zone in **Guadalupe**. They, as part of the Chicano community, refrained from offering their own private and individual vision of the world in favour of discussing the Chicano community's circumstances as a whole with the audience. Significantly Esperanza cease to regard the *barrio* - any *barrio* - as merely that and begin to consider it as a community of people who, while they differ in their opinions, have common interests. In order to present this vision of community Esperanza chose to apply consciously elements of Brechtian and community theatre which they had previously used less directly in the presentational acts. Rather than offer the well-rounded and few characters of traditional professional Western drama, they sought to incorporate many characters representative of a whole community into one play. Although the group only had a cast of eight, their script called for some thirty characters with speaking parts so that the people of the community might be observed at school, at work and at leisure. To cover all of this Esperanza operated as a "pool" of actors who played different kinds of roles within the play. An actor would play a character with a personal name and a clear personality. Then he would have a less personally defined role, perhaps that of an unnamed resident, in different locations such as in a bar or at church. This same actor would then go to be a "type" such as a lowrider or a Chicano. Actors returned to the pool when they were not playing a character and no actor had only one role. The aim was to present the collective fate of the community rather than the individual fates of community members. Therefore, each character's dialogue becomes "an articulation of the common predicament".²⁹ Characters complement each other collectively and it is the sum of their words and deeds which become important. Such characters do not discuss ideas and issues in the agreeable tranquility of the drawing room, but have to:

²⁸Ibid, p.83

²⁹Ibid.

speak the language of people doing two things at once - the language of people shouting over machine noise.³⁰

As Steve Gooch explains:

characterisation has to involve not just the interpretation of individual lines but an identification with the general mood, atmosphere or idiom presented. For it is this **general** interest which will be the central point of identification for the audience; their interest will be in following the fate of the group as a whole and in relating individual characters to that.³¹

In order for Esperanza to continue to grow from presenters of narrow and topical issues - although I have pointed out their loatheness to do this alone - it was incumbent on them to reflect this generality of feeling in the community. Nonetheless Esperanza did not wish to expose themselves to the accusation that they merely wished to illustrate the community in all its diversity in the manner of an exposé of either folk customs or *costumbrismo*. The totality of experience in the Chicano community of Guadalupe was to be presented under rigorous examination and evaluation and it was the strategy of Brechtian acting techniques which saw to this:

instead of presenting the play as characters that we portrayed, we would re-create a character as demonstrators, as members of Esperanza.³²

Rather than the actors presenting an illusion that they had "become" the characters they portrayed, primarily by "getting into character" behind the scenes, they dispensed with this notion and allowed the audience to witness them adopt the various guises and go on to demonstrate the characters. The actors were free to move in and out of character "without explanations or excuses".³³ This acting technique was coherent with the group's overall theatrical approach to the play. Esperanza's move towards a conscious application of Brechtian techniques had begun indirectly. Performance of actos by Teatro Campesino

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid. p.84

³²Teatro de los Barrios, op. cit. p.13

³³Huerta, 1982 p.145

which "to some extent had Brechtian elements" were an introduction but, as Rodrigo Duarte Clark explains:

when we do **Guadalupe** and possibly even before that, there is a conscious application of Brechtian techniques. In fact, in preparing for the piece there were a lot of exercises that were specifically Brechtian. The demonstration technique of acting was applied and Jorge took us to workshops where he applied those very specifically (...) **Guadalupe** is a docudrama but in its script and staging techniques it's very Brechtian.³⁴

Esperanza's fundamental reason for using Brecht was to discourage the audience members from identifying with certain characters and aid them in the process of observing each character's social function. While it was important for the group that the audience should see itself collectively in the Guadalupe characters they were not to cease to think rationally about each character's situation and responses on the basis of a wholly cathartic identification with his or her plight. To this end the play was staged in a Brechtian manner. Its setting comprised a simple muslin backdrop with the name of the teatro written across it, and the otherwise bare stage was framed by two benches which faced each other across the acting area. These held the props used for characterization and packing crates provided the stations for a musician at each end of the stage.³⁵

The action began without dimming the house lights, and so the audience had no time to adopt the attitude of playgoers in a darkened theatre. Although they were indeed in a theatre space no "fourth wall" was established to rupture the communication between the actors and the audience. The conventional theatrical illusion whereby the audience suspends its notion of time to hand itself over uncritically to the theatrical experience was consciously avoided. Indeed, eleven actors were distributed among the audience to "convert" the theatre into the meeting hall of March 16th by exchanging comments with the speaker on stage. In **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** the actors had grown bold in their use of the auditorium by leaving it altogether. Here they grow even more daring by identifying with the

³⁴M. Dolan, interview with Rodrigo Duarte Clark, Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, March 1987

³⁵Huerta, 1982 p.142

audience, by becoming part of it, rather than merely addressing it across the divide. The actors, quite literally, come out of the audience and as such, are not perceived as outsiders by the audience of Chicanos.

Every attempt was made to avoid making the audience into passive spectators. The group attempted to persuade the audience to join them in jeering the speaker on the stage and according to Huerta, the entire audience was caught up in chanting "¡Que viva César Chávez!"³⁶ In this way the group recreated a climactic moment in the community at the very outset and encouraged the audience to follow their presentation of events. They did not leave the stage between scenes but sat on the sidelines, observing what was happening as intensely as the audience did.³⁷

An integral element of the play was the music. This was included, frequently not as an emotive accompaniment to the action, but as a structural part of the play and again, the point was to reduce the possibility of catharsis. One of the most successful Brechtian devices was the use of a *corrido* singer. He deflected audience emotion from himself on to the issues about which he sang. His role was firstly to attract them with his welcome and his music, singing, as he did, well-known melodies from Chicano Mexican popular culture. Yet the lyrics were new, changed by the group to sketch plot elements and stress issues affecting the community. Therefore, while he seemed to offer a focus for audience empathy he did not, but directed the audience's attention to issues rather than characters. He sang not of his own individual sorrows but in his capacity as a representative of the Chicano community, and was a factor of Brechtian alienation in the play. The songs, all of which were sung in Spanish, were conducted in a manner conforming to Brechtian theatre. The demonstrators moved into position for songs, making it clear that they were about to sing, unlike in the musical or opera where no such hiatus occurs and the content of the songs generally was explanatory rather than emotive. This collective act of singing offered a social, rather than a

³⁶Ibid. p.143

³⁷Ibid. pp.144-145

personal, vision. Other songs were used as theme music to introduce certain characters and their expected activities, such as the drug addict and the gossiping Chismosas. Two hymns were sung, the "Kyrie" and its ironic lyric, "Señor, ten piedad de nosotros," and a song in hymn form with lyrics by the group, "Vida de muerte lenta".³⁸ A leitmotif from this hymn re-emerged to remind the audience of its message.

Although the introductory lines of the *corrido* seem to represent a narrative function, generally the play's songs are not primarily narrative. The *corrido*, for example, is sung to illustrate "una red de poder" which envelopes the community but it is not coherent, as its focus shifts haphazardly from issues to particular institutions. The songs pass general comment on the events of the play, rather than adhering to the plot and act as a didactic element, encouraging the Chicanos to organize.

The group utilized two further techniques to produce a didactic play. Firstly, the demonstrators often stepped out of character to deliver, as themselves, in Spanish and then in English, factual information underlining points made dramatically in the scene in progress. Sources included the CSAC report, quotations from the police chief and teachers, (placed for ironic effect) interviews, personal observation of the town's outlay, and newspapers. The delivery was formal, unemotional, untheatrical. Secondly, the group used drum beats and stop action to cut off any character's outpouring of emotion at its highest point, in order to prevent a cathartic response on the part of members of the audience. At times the freeze is accompanied by a quotation and so the didactic intention of the group is fully explored: whereas the past use of finger cymbals permitted an underlining of meaning, it allowed no prevention of empathy, but the freeze achieves both.

³⁸GU p.72

The play in general betrays the group's difficulty in moving from the interpretation of a series of short actos to creating a full-length play which, among other elements, necessitated a plot. The *acto* elements are still clear. The group wrote that:

the research and the interviewing that we did with people ended up being also character studies, because some of the people that we were questioning became characters in the play,³⁹

but characters were lightly sketched, in part due to their numbers and also because of the group's desire to render the whole community the protagonist of the play. Nonetheless few of the antagonists were observed by the group and they are rarely visible to the audience. In the last two scenes in which they appear as the School Board they are "portrayed with translucent plastic masks that give them an air of anonymity or facelessness" representative of an uncaring system, nevertheless made transparent by the group.⁴⁰ Perhaps due to this inability to meet and study, as well as understand, the Anglo characters they are stereotyped and vilified. Possibly a simpler explanation, however, is that Esperanza were not ready to discard the stereotypes of the *acto* as regards characterisation as these could comfortably be blamed for most of the evils afflicting the Chicanos.

While the group do not attempt to deceive the audience by pretending that the play is the whole truth and they acknowledge that the fictive element in their constructed piece is vital:

Escuchen nuestra historia, basada en la verdad,
Presenta muchas cosas que son realidad.⁴¹

If audience members doubted the events portrayed, the *teatro* had available copies of the CSAC report. While the creators were willing to accept the subjective nature of their play, they felt the government documented sources to be reliable and able to act as an objective,

³⁹Guerra, op. cit p.113

⁴⁰Huerta, 1982 p.146

⁴¹GU p.4

factual basis for the play.⁴² Therefore, their piece still relied on external information topical at the time to lend it credibility, as did many *actos*.

Indeed, many techniques often employed in the *actos* are used, such as masks, caricaturing, simultaneous staging and pantomime, and the play has some *acto* humour, such as the priest's heavy lisping Spanish accent. As elaborate costuming would have slowed the pace of the show, the group again used only suggestive props over the basic costumes of jeans and worktops.⁴³

The play takes time to settle into a focus on the Comité as its main plot element, over the United Farmworkers, these being mentioned as a strategy for showing the union's leadership role, rather than as necessary to the plot.⁴⁴ Having introduced many of the problems afflicting the community, the play then tells the story of the Comité, only formed to deal with one of them, namely education. This initial attempt to present the "web of power" in which the Chicano is caught strengthens the play's thematic force but weakens the logicity of its plot. Indeed, after the first Comité meeting the audience is rarely present at subsequent ones. Two Chismosas fill in the details about its progression and present their own attitudes to it with "sabrosidad" and as gossip. Esperanza may have believed that as they were demonstrating a docudrama they could dispense with a traditional plot, or indeed that an episodic structure would best befit their collective creation. In any case, the group were caught between these two modes. The sudden intrusion of a consideration of the individual destiny of the drug addict Jesse, although powerfully done in Scene Eleven, further disrupts the already shaky plot line, not to mention the commitment to a collective protagonist outlined elsewhere. Huerta calls this a subplot and Weinberg notes that this is not tied to the main plot except by the intimation that leaving school is the root of social

⁴²Huerta, 1982 p.146

⁴³Ibid. p.146

⁴⁴Mark Weinberg, *Performance Generation: The History and Evolution of Collective Theatre In America*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1988

evil.⁴⁵ The "subplot", such as it is, is only one man's problems in obtaining drugs, although drugs are also an example of police corruption. The drugs information is disconnected and dispersed and addiction is just one of a myriad of problems faced by characters every day. The drug addict's personal situation is not resolved by the end of the play, and he has no interaction with other characters on the issue of the Comité. His greatest problem in fact occurs with his pusher who is not even an Anglo, and so unlike in the rest of the play where the Anglo/*vendido* characters are clearly directly responsible for the Comité's misfortunes and are on the School Board, the drugs scenes do not enhance this connection.

Aware of the expanse of territory which they wished to cover with this first full length piece Esperanza illustrate their understanding that a unifying agent becomes necessary in a play seeking to present a social vision. Steve Gooch writes of collective theatres:

the unity of their social view may well need to be pulled together through a narrator or some kind of narrative function.⁴⁶

The *corrido* singer served, albeit incompletely, as a unifying agent pulling Esperanza's social view together when early on in the play his song introduced a range of characters and their problems as they worked on a production line. It is clear, however, that while the *corrido* opens with the formulaic "Voy a cantar un corrido", it does not conform to the genre, as it lacks a coherent narrative line, and shifts its informative focus in a haphazard way. Connected with this problem was that of maintaining credible characterisation when each character's actual lines represented only a small percentage of the entire text. Weinberg describes the dialogue of the play as:

frequently overly economic, consisting of skeletal conversations and without color or texture.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Weinberg, op. cit. p.90

⁴⁶Gooch, op. cit. p.82

⁴⁷Weinberg, op. cit. p.90

It is true that each *campesino* had little to say and that what was said was almost always in reference to the common situation shared by the rest of them. It is also clear that the play is the articulation of the common predicament of the Chicanos, by different sectors, in the face of a common threat. It constitutes an alignment of the system against its victims, perpetuating to an extent the *acto* opposition of good and bad characters. Augusto Boal expresses such an opposition as a conflict between the "pueblo" and the "anti-pueblo": on the one hand there are the bosses, teachers, policemen, priests and the *vendidos*, and on the other the *campesinos*, the schoolchildren, the unemployed youth.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, in Guadalupe many characters from the *pueblo* are not easily slotted into this scheme and the Anglos, although unjust figures, are no longer a source of humour. There is still the *patrón* figure, with an important difference; while he remains the Anglo stereotype of the boss, in that he exists to undermine the organizing efforts of the *campesinos*, he is more realistic in the sense that he is not created to draw laughter but to intimidate. This is true of many of the Anglo characters, and so Esperanza did therefore attempt to advance the manner in which they created characters. As many *campesino* figures are differentiated according to their degree of commitment to the Comité, Esperanza's *pueblo* is not monolithic or perfect in nature. Indeed, certain characters such as Mocho the pusher, the gossiping Chismosas, as well as the self-declared Chicano, thwart the organizing attempts of the Comité or prey on their own people. They fail to serve the interests of the collective which others aspire to and choose to follow their own path, exercising a type of pressure from inside. Unfortunately, the reasons for their behaviour are only intimated and not explained fully. Through their opposition and that of the Anglos, however, the Comité is seen in the play to be opposed at first by almost everyone in the town. This only makes their resolve all the more impressive as is the growing admission by others that they are right.

⁴⁸Augusto Boal, 'Sobre Teatro Popular y Teatro Antipopular,' in Gerardo Luzuriaga (ed), *Popular Theatre for Social Change in Latin America*, Latin American Center Publications, University of California at Los Angeles, 1978 pp.24-41

Virgie González and Señor Moreno of the Comité are presented as role models to the audience. They are very positive and embody the virtues of a community spirit which the group is in effect advocating. Some show leadership and this, in Esperanza's work, as we have seen, is advocated through the portrayal of ordinary people taking control of their lives, whether the outcome can be said to be heroic or not. While César Chávez began in this way, neither he nor any other "big" leader of the Chicano Movement descends into the play like a *deus ex machina* to act as a saviour to his people.

The acting roles were allocated so that the same actor played different, though ideologically similar, characters to underline the social connections between them. For example, the disciplinarian Marcos Cortez, the policeman and the teacher were played by the same actor. The only kind of character growth which occurs in the play, of course, is a coming to political awareness and activism. In the course of the action two characters who had not lent their support to the Comité change their minds - Ochoa and Pompis. For Pompis the Comité ceases to be merely a source of gossip:

Además, hay que ponernos a pensar. All the troubles in the schools, the kids walking out and everything. ¿Qué está pasando, comadre?⁴⁹

This is the first time a character in an Esperanza play undergoes serious questioning and character change. Pompis represents the conclusion that social change must be happening at speed when one of the town gossips admits she does not know what is going on. The *Chismosa* characters have a very clear social function as the play deals with "La historia de los pobres" and *chisme* is an alternative way of documenting and narrating events within a community. *Cuentos* and *chisme* appeal to community knowledge especially in places where "...periodico pa' leer no hay". Comic relief and a humorous touch are added with the lyrics:

Si el chisme es muy poco
Pues ahorita le ponemos más
Que al cabo la verdad no importa

⁴⁹GU p.82

Lo que vale es la sabrosidad.⁵⁰

Esperanza, then, did not wish simply to create an *acto* and made a considerable effort to expand their dramatic techniques. New ways of compacting information worked successfully. In the last scene events are joined together which in real time were nine days apart. A fast forward technique economised on time and maintained the play's pace by way of snippets of enacted dialogue (edited out from the prologue) which were isolated and combined with drum beats and freezes to reprise information already given. The simple reference on stage to certain documents sufficed to change the scene of the action to the places of their issue; Virgie only has to announce "...venimos de Guadalupe aquí a la cárcel de Santa Bárbara" to change location and appeal to a different audience, namely, a public waiting outside the jail.

If Esperanza were able to develop their theatrical strategies, they were no less able to modify their appraisal and analysis of the nature of the Chicano community. They diverge from the abstract notions of love as a solution as presented in **El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli** to argue that unity and organization are striven for via principles and debate, and the group themselves wrestle with what those principles and debates should be. Although the play does not set out explicitly to examine or define what or who is Chicano, certain perspectives are discernible from within its action. The establishment term Mexican American is avoided and is only used when quoting from the CSAC report; there are no Mexican American characters. There is one character named the Chicano, but far from being a role model he is represented as a negative character. The term of Chicano is self-designated by this character and through him, through his mistaken understanding of *chicanismo*, Esperanza show their mistrust of such a label. This Chicano is racist in that he despises Mexicans and is all the more condemnable because he is the only character to express openly such outright hatred. He dislikes "wetbacks" because they are *machista* and have no "class" and he offers the most trite and false accusation against these immigrant workers:

⁵⁰Ibid. p.28

They sneak across the border and take away our jobs.⁵¹

He stereotypes Mexicans as lazy and in Scene Two he shows his cruel sense of humour by shouting, in very bad taste, "ahí viene la migra" to scare the illegal Mexicans who live in fear of deportation.⁵² When a Mexican is chagrined to be ordered back across the border he says:

Well, why don't you stay where you belong? Can't you take a hint? ⁵³

This self-proclaimed Chicano conforms to a definition whereby he feels superior to the Mexican due to his American nationality. Being Chicano in his case implies no solidarity with anyone and little social awareness. By presenting him in this play Esperanza obviously wished to distance themselves as a group from the racist overtones implied in the use of the word Chicano found in *El Renacimiento de Huitzilopochtli*. Perhaps simply by leaving him as a type and not an individual character the group underline his lack of true awareness.

On the other hand the group offer the character of Virgie González and other members of the Comité, many of them married women with children, who equate the goals of the Chicano struggle with themselves, but nowhere do they tout slogans. Virgie exists as an example of what it is to be truly a Chicana. When Marcos Cortez makes a reference to the Comité women as "you women in the Chicano Movement" they do not reject the notion but neither do they proclaim themselves to be Chicanas. Via the Comité *Guadalupe* illustrates the fact that the Chicano Movement was not something best known via the national arena but stemmed from a grassroots activism involving hundreds of little organizations as well as the ones which were publicised in the national media. Therefore the group cease to refer to "The

⁵¹Ibid. p.58

⁵²Ibid. p.12

⁵³Ibid. pp.12-13

Chicano Movement" as a single and indivisible creation in existence over and above the people themselves.

A further ideological casualty of **Guadalupe** is the concept of Aztlán. The word is only mentioned once, and in a song at that, as something approaching a literary symbol of unity rather than a call to nationalism. Indeed, Esperanza clearly discover a new philosophy in this play, that of an incipient Marxism. A song at the end of the play tells that "El pobre sigue sufriendo y el rico lo está oprimiendo" and there is a call for an end to "el sistema" (which by this time means capitalist exploitation) as "el trabajo no comienza en el corazón de otro".⁵⁴ The definition of the Chicano as a worker begins to filter through the piece, moving away from the belief that the Chicano is definable in terms of race or nationality. The affirmation that "poco a poco va creciendo la conciencia del obrero" leads to the Marxist line:

Lo que ven en esta obra
Por el mundo está pasando;
Con la lucha de los pobres
Va la fuerza aumentando.⁵⁵

which illustrates that the group saw the need for the Chicano to become involved in class struggle, at least philosophically if not practically, on an international scale. **Guadalupe** is only a play, a construct, but the group are becoming aware that its values of struggle are applicable universally. Nonetheless, Esperanza are more concerned with their own community at this stage, as the question of leadership within the Chicano community is one which receives prominence. The priest, Father Cruz, accuses the community members of having lost faith in their leaders but Esperanza show that the Anglo leading citizens of the town are not their leaders at all. Indeed the Chicanos have found and created leaders who are truly their own such as César Chávez and the Comité. Chávez is vilified by Cortez, who compares him to Hitler and Mussolini - therefore acknowledging his leadership potential,

⁵⁴Ibid. p.72

⁵⁵Ibid. p.72

albeit not in a complimentary fashion.⁵⁶ The name of Chávez strikes fear into the hearts of the Anglos but while the UFW has a peripheral role as a threat and an example of what organization can achieve it is the Comité which is ultimately central to the play. Importantly, Esperanza find in the Comité an organization to which they can lend their complete and unconditional support. For the group its values are the values of the Chicano Movement and, fundamentally, it is made up of Chicanos representing themselves.

Integral, then, to the leadership question is the question of the *vendido*. In **Guadalupe** the *vendido* or *vendida*, although regarded by the Anglos as representing the Chicano minority group's interests does not hold such a reputation among the said minority. This is fairly obvious from the pejorative name given such a person by the Chicanos. When Virgie González and Señor Moreno go to see the Superintendent he suggests:

Miss Treviño is your elected representative. Why doesn't your committee voice your complaints to her? ⁵⁷

Señor Moreno sums up the predicament of the Chicanos and the crux of *vendidismo* when he replies, "She is not representing us. She represents you".⁵⁸ Therefore, it is not that the *vendido* is socially mobile, economically better off and respected by the Anglo establishment, but this pretence of representation which affords the greatest injury to the Chicanos and arms them with the greatest disqualifier. The *vendido* may abandon his culture and contend that any Chicano can be as successful as he, but he does the greatest harm by keeping up this pretence of representation. The arch-*vendido* of the play is Marcos Cortez, the John Birch Society member, who during the play becomes the Policeman and Mr. Bradley the teacher, all of them disciplinarians. Alicia Treviño introduces Cortez to the crowd as an outstanding citizen and an excellent businessman, which amounts to describing him as the epitome of individualism. Cortez, rather than being an allegorical figure

⁵⁶Ibid. p.3

⁵⁷Ibid. p.86

⁵⁸Ibid p.86

embodying a vice, is modelled on a real person, although arguably he is the Spirit of Vendidismo, given his malevolent attitude and power. He professes to tell the audience the truth behind the Chicano Movement, from the outset showing himself to be against it. His subsequent comments illustrate the differences he has with the Chicano community. He calls himself Spanish rather than Mexican American or Chicano, thus betraying a contempt for his true heritage, choosing instead to identify with a fantasy past of *californios* and European refinement. He is ironically named Cortez by Esperanza to emphasize the true nature of his Spanishness - one that is violent and acquisitive. He is an outsider who does not live in Guadalupe and is therefore not able to form part of this particular local insider group of Chicanos and is therefore unwanted, particularly as he evidently maintains an anti-affirmative action stance:

I have always felt that a child should not be shown special favors just because he is a so called minority. In fact, he should be encouraged to work twice as hard as the others in order to prove that he is just as good as the next child.⁵⁹

Despite his claims to Spanishness, his chosen language is English. He opposes bilingual education and he sympathises with the teachers who have to put up with children who "can hardly speak a word of English".⁶⁰ Given that the priest of the piece is described as a *gachupín* - a pejorative word for a Spaniard or a person of Spanish origin - the group appear to have been using a new set of negative characteristics, namely anti-Spanish ones, in the wake of their historical discoveries. Cortez opposes the formation of the Comité and accuses the UFW, MECHA and the Brown Berets of "wilfully deceiving and mis-informing the community".⁶¹ He argues that "self-righteous Americans" (possibly a well intentioned slip of the tongue added by his creators) cannot allow themselves to be deceived by such "self-interest groups." He unfurls Communist, Nazi and UFW flags to warn his audience of the dangers of the latter and if this portrayal of Cortez seems exaggerated, the group have a basis

⁵⁹Ibid. p.2

⁶⁰Ibid. p.3

⁶¹Ibid. p.3

for his radicalism. Such are the onslaughts delivered by members of the John Birch Society, who are indeed "muy conservadores y racistas".⁶² Sworn to rid America of Communism and collectivism since 1958, the John Birch Society provides Americanist speakers to harangue audiences at Parent Teacher Associations, church groups and other local organizations for little or no fee. Its reactionary views on education demand a total emphasis on the "real fundamentals" of reading, handwriting and arithmetic, English and "patriotic history." Education for them resembles brainwashing and members often attack teachers, especially high school social studies teachers, and fight to have objectionable text books replaced by more Americanist ones.⁶³ Conflicts are always defined as "Americanism vs. communism." and members work from a principle of reversal by which the person who least looks like a communist is most likely to be one. Formalities such as rationality and civility are disregarded and there is no desire to convert opponents or resolve issues:

Thus, when a member of the Birch Society launches himself into the stream of conflict - over education, religion, labor unions, government or whatever - the fray is wondrous to behold. And such conflict, no matter what issue may be at stake, is always defined as "Americanism vs. communism".⁶⁴

The group, then, have presented Cortez realistically, except that he professes to be against not communism, but fascism. This appears to be a mere error on the part of Esperanza.

Other Anglo leaders echo these ideas. For example, the priest uses religion, and his elevated position in the Guadalupe community, to counter the aims of the Comité. Two demonstrators quote him as saying "Those who follow César Chávez will go to hell".⁶⁵ In his sermon he uses Christ's words to a doubting Thomas after the Resurrection to illustrate the importance of faith:

⁶²Ibid. p.108

⁶³ J. Allen Broyles, *The John Birch Society: Anatomy of a Protest*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964 p.119

⁶⁴Ibid. p.133

⁶⁵GU p.66

Tú crees en mí porque me has visto, pero bienaventurados son aquéllos que creen en mí sin haberme visto.⁶⁶

The priest affirms that many problems in the community are caused by the lack of faith. He believes this to be the affliction of the Comité in their opposition to the school authorities and says that "Aquí la gente ha perdido su fe en su país y en sus líderes".⁶⁷ He defends the teachers and the growers as "tan buenos" and praises the growers for having done a great deal for both the town and the parish. Esperanza counter these claims as when the Mass ends the parishioners, who are on their knees, turn towards the audience and, still kneeling as the song "Vida de muerte lenta" is sung, they mime picking crops. Huerta writes that this draws an analogy between "spiritual and material enslavement".⁶⁸

With the interaction of Father Cruz, for the first time in an Esperanza play, one of the characters is a priest. Previously priests were referred to but did not intervene in the action. The group, careful not to brand all priests as reprehensible, illustrate their willingness to grasp the social and psychological complexity of the religious issue. In the *actos* priests were regarded as mere money grabbers but here this is seen to afflict only some of them. Nonetheless, the presentation of the disagreeable figure on stage aids in a sustained argument against the Church in which the Chismosas also take part. Pompis and Fruti illustrate the divisions in the clergy itself by each taking a line of argument supporting one of two types of priest; these are the one who in effect espouses the Theology of Liberation and the one who does not. Fruti supports the expense involved in attending the church bazaar as the church needs new accoutrements for the altar but Pompis retaliates by calling the priest a "viejo gachupín" and avows:

ese padrecito debería ser como el curita de Santa María que anda por allá piqueteando con los trabajadores".⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid. p.67

⁶⁷Ibid p.70

⁶⁸Huerta, 1982 p.145

⁶⁹GU p.12

Pompis is presented as a cultural Catholic who only attends church at baptisms, funerals and weddings. Similarly, the Catholics in the *actos* were not devout, but cultural, Catholics. Mexicans and Chicanos have traditionally been cultural Catholics, in that in Mexico, belonging to the Catholic church was automatic as there was no other. Mexicans had little knowledge of other forms of religion and Chicanos until recently have not been open to proselytizing from Protestant churches as they felt this to constitute a negation of their past. This is the kind of Catholicism most of the play's characters espouse, especially Pompis. She believes there is no point in being in church "mitoteando con las estatuas" and uses as evidence of this conviction the fact that her neighbour is never out of church yet both her sons are drug addicts.⁷⁰ Therefore she illustrates the lack of a positive social connection between church and community for the Chicanos: on the contrary, the church is exposed as an institution of social control in the service of what Lawrence Joseph Mosqueda describes as the Anglo's civil religion or religious nationalism by which the American nation becomes the object of adoration.⁷¹

This position encompasses a faith in the American way of life, democracy in its most idealistic version, the American constitution and the belief in free enterprise, in general a belief in the promise of America which is based, not on reason, but on faith. As Mexicans and Chicanos do not hold these truths to be self evident - given their own negative experience - they are neither correctly American nor correctly religious.⁷² In *Guadalupe* the Roman Catholic religious leader seeks to harness the community through their cultural identification with Catholicism in the service of the American civil religion of free enterprise for the benefit of the powerful Anglo leaders. He is of Spanish origin and therefore represents the conquering force over the Mexicans prior to the Anglo-American one. The Comité is called a conspiracy, thus emphasising the notion of an attack on a constitutional

⁷⁰Ibid p.29

⁷¹Lawrence Joseph Mosqueda, *Chicanos, Catholicism and Political Ideology*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1979 p.160

⁷²Ibid. p.160

authority - and the Superintendent recognises "We have to think of the good of our community".⁷³ For the Anglos this amounts to a perpetuation of the exploitative status quo. Yet despite this Anglo perception that their idealistic society must not be sullied, they do realise of the *campesinos* that "Legally they haven't done anything wrong".⁷⁴ Theoretically at least, then, the Chicanos are backed by law and in sufficient numbers working together they can effect change. Ironically, also, it is in the very ideals of the American society outlined above in which the Chicanos of the Comité place their faith, and not in the corrupt version of it adhered to by the growers. Therefore, it is the growers who in fact are not correctly American rather than the *campesinos*.

The root of change is presented as being education. It is the struggle for an improvement in education which is the main thematic element in **Guadalupe**. The consequences and social implications of education, or the lack of it, are examined. The major conclusion drawn by the workers is that their children are intended to finish up in the fields as cheap labour, in the manner of their parents. For the School Board, discipline, equated with physical violence, is the major pedagogical approach. Mr. Bradley reminds his class that:

The most important part of education is discipline. When you go to work, whether you finish school or not, you will have to be on time - even in the fields.⁷⁵

The analogy between education and a life working in the fields is encapsulated in a comment by Superintendent McCarthy. He mentions the walkouts by children in terms of a work stoppage, thus betraying his perception of them as future members of the cheap labour force:

Surely some of these kids were put up to it. They are not at a level to carry out strikes.⁷⁶

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid. p.105

⁷⁵Ibid p.71

⁷⁶Ibid. p.87

Señor Moreno helps to clarify the economic basis of this inadequate education:

Como no tenemos educación nuestro trabajo le sale barato al patrón,⁷⁷

and describes for the benefit of other members of the Comité the kind of education which is appropriate for their children. He argues with other parents who believe that the teachers know best and that corporal punishment is only resorted to when justified because of his contention that this analysis places responsibility for failure on the children themselves rather than at the feet of the educational authorities. When Señor Ochoa approves of the admission of his children into classes "para los niños retrasados mentales" on the basis of their not being able to speak English, Señor Moreno claims:

Deberían de tener profesores bilingües para que les enseñen el inglés.⁷⁸

Esperanza illustrate that the whole thrust of the children's education at that point was based on the teachers' ignorance and cultural prejudice about the people they ostensibly were educating. As regards language, for instance, the teachers were not qualified to teach the children effectively. When a little girl named Guadalupe is requested to present a report on the name of her town she is chastised for wishing to present it in Spanish even though her fellow class mates are very weak in English. The teacher mispronounces her name and is deaf to corrections and furthermore, has a prejudiced view of the town's history as he is ignorant of the fact that his town is named after a Mexican saint. He fails to see that his civic pride is not shared by those he teaches and does not accept that the name of his town suggests different interpretations to people from a different culture with a distinct history. Guadalupe goes on to tell the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, since she was named after the former and not the town. The teacher, ignorant of the history of the region, contends that although the Chicanos believe in the Virgin "she has little to do with the history of this town". He is angered when Guadalupe admits she tried to write about the

⁷⁷Ibid p.22

⁷⁸Ibid. p.23

town but could find nothing nice to say. He accuses her of deceit and humiliates her in front of the class.⁷⁹

Clearly one of the most important emblems in the play is the Virgin of Guadalupe, yet although the name of Guadalupe permeates the play, Esperanza are careful with its exploitation. Her image is not on the stage as they have no interest in exalting religious figures in the manner of El Teatro Campesino. Nonetheless, although the group members themselves are sceptical of religion, they voice, through the little girl, the fact that the Chicanos believe in the Virgin's existence. However, only as much of her story as stresses social factors is told by the little girl in her report. We are reminded that Juan Diego was a poor *indio* and the Virgen was a dark-skinned *morenita* with brown eyes and black hair who promised to "take care of all the sick and the poor".⁸⁰ Therefore Esperanza stress the aspects of the religious figure which they regard as positive - her compassion for the poor and the fact that she was in the image of the Mexicans and therefore the Chicanos - but description of the miraculous element is omitted. Nor does the Virgin appear on a banner on stage or as an icon, even despite her long association in Mexico with social struggle and indigenous pride as a Mexican native symbol, and despite César Chávez's continuation of this tradition. While Jorge Huerta felt that this was due to the fact that the group perceived Chicano audiences to be unready for theatrical symbolism it is more likely to have been because Esperanza did not find the content of cultural symbols to be sufficiently unambiguous for them to offer them to their audiences.⁸¹

Guadalupe received good reviews when it was first performed although Weinberg, speaking of the acclaim accorded it, notes the use of:

⁷⁹Ibid. p.94

⁸⁰Ibid. p.93

⁸¹Jorge Huerta (ed), *El Teatro de la Esperanza: An Anthology of Chicano Drama*, El Teatro de la Esperanza Inc., Santa Barbara, 1973 p.101

cuphemisms for a lack of skill of which direct mention would be inappropriate in a political review full of well deserved praise for the play.⁸²

Chicano audiences did, overwhelmingly, welcome the play, and were moved and excited by it. Undeniably Chicano theatre at the time could bring something totally new to Chicanos in a way that other genres could not. It consciously sought them out and converted them into the privileged public to which the efforts of the writers were addressed. It was Chicano experiences which were legitimized via theatrical expression and not those of an alien dominant population. Assuredly the people in *Guadalupe* felt this even more strongly, as the play was about them specifically, but Esperanza clearly could not content themselves with such a narrow story and such a limited public. Even as they moulded themselves to a model of community theatre for the sake of **Guadalupe** the demands of professionalization were bearing down on them to make of the play a unique experience not to be repeated. At this stage they still had a policy of holding discussions with audiences to discover reactions to their work with a view to making changes according to audience critiques. In eighteen months of touring the play, it continued to be altered as Esperanza contended at the time that the text of a play is rarely definitive but always open to improvement.⁸³ This belief in the reciprocity of the group and their public and this eagerness to accurately reflect the values of their audiences was useful and feasible at the time but later, as we shall see, it became the measure of the gulf between both parties. Theatrically Esperanza did not wish to present work at the level of sophistication of the *actos* and even **Guadalupe** throughout their entire career. The practice of audience critiques later did not occur as Esperanza did not wish to be privy to community criticism when they themselves were becoming ever more sophisticated in theatrical terms. They wished to "move on" and develop as theatre artists, intending as they did to devote their lives to theatre and, importantly, to survive through it. Professionalization therefore awaited them and they had to find a model to suit them. Nonetheless, **Guadalupe** was:

⁸²Weinberg, op. cit. p.93

⁸³Huerta, 1982 p.142

evidence that the group has chosen to be a mirror of the conditions and aspirations of the Chicano people⁸⁴

at a time of crossroads for the Chicano Movement, Chicano theatre had to decide whether to identify with what its practitioners perceived to be in the needs of the people or retreat into a search for idealist individualist solutions in the manner of Teatro Campesino. Esperanza's choice was clear, although the question of the theatrical presentation of solutions to the Chicanos' problems remained. The UFWOC lawyer William Carder stated that the Comité parents had shown that:

no sólo los trabajadores agrícolas, sino también la gente pobre pueden crear una organización que haga impacto.⁸⁵

Indeed, this optimism is echoed in that the production, in the midst of Chicano activism, helped to stimulate calls for change, as educators of Mexican American children in different cities were moved by it to call for better bilingual education.⁸⁶ Nonetheless in **Guadalupe** the play there was no happy ending. There is no solution to the educational problem, nor is aid given to the Comité. Ochoa, the dissenting character who feared losing his job, was in the end dismissed and proven right. There is, of course, Virgie's heroic speech at the end where she indicates that the struggle will be a protracted one but if Teatro Campesino offered spirituality in the face of aggression, Esperanza are not able to offer proof that collective activism begets better results.

Therefore, although **Guadalupe** is described as an *acto* by Nicolás Kanellos, evidently here Esperanza are aware that the *acto* rule of thumb of hinting at a solution to a problem should be, and can only be, taken with a large pinch of salt.⁸⁷ This is especially clear once

⁸⁴Jorge González, *Santa Barbara News and Review*, n/d

⁸⁵*Las escuelas de Guadalupe: Un legado de opresión educacional*, Un Informe del Comité Estatal Asesor de California Preparado para la Información y Consideración de la Comisión de Derechos Civiles de los Estados Unidos, February 1974 p.43

⁸⁶Huerta, 1982 p.148

⁸⁷Kanellos, Nicolás, 'Sexto Festival de los Teatros Chicanos,' *Latin American Theatre Review*, Fall, 1975 p.81

Esperanza are sufficiently mature to tackle a problem from many sides, seeing that a narrow issue is really only one facet of a much wider one. We can conclude, then, that with **Guadalupe** Esperanza finally abandon this major element of the *acto*, namely the facile touting of answers. Even more significant is the fact that Esperanza, with **Guadalupe**, began to glimpse the naivety which lay at the core of the belief in America as "Un continente y una cultura" even before the Quinto Festival de Teatro Chicano in Mexico. As their own art evolved they began to be aware of the evolutionary nature of cultures. Therefore, a definition of the Chicano, or indeed any other group, in terms of unchanging racial, national or cultural characteristics, particularly when these were selective, was seen to be extremely problematic. In **Guadalupe** another category was explored and Chicanos were seen to be workers above all else. This was the vision of the Chicano which Esperanza carried over to their next play and which was strengthened by the Marxist participants of the Quinto Festival. The content of Chicano culture was seen not to derive from an inherent racial source, valid for all time, but from the Chicano's changing response to his oppression within the United States.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LA VÍCTIMA

Between 1974 and 1976 El Teatro de la Esperanza found themselves in a relatively stable position. This allowed them to continue to investigate the themes in which they had shown the greatest interest and experiment more fully with theatrical traditions to engage with the ones best suited to them as a theatre group. While fundamentally this meant a continued commitment to a collective and Brechtian approach to theatre and an ongoing preoccupation with the role of both the *vendido* and the undocumented worker in the Chicano's struggle, Esperanza also included elements of traditional Western "elitist" theatre and carried out on stage a detailed historical analysis as a way of understanding the Chicano's contemporary circumstances.

An idea which continued to have great currency in Esperanza's work was the unwillingness to recognize the divisive authority of the Mexican American border. Their new play, **La Víctima**, takes this "sin fronteras" conviction from **Guadalupe** but develops it in an important way.¹ After the Quinto Festival de Teatro Chicano in Mexico 1974 in which Chicano indigenism was rejected as politically reactionary, not to mention naive, by progressive Mexican theatre groups Esperanza ceased to investigate the Chicano identity from a racial perspective.² Introduced, as they were, to a Marxist analysis of society by Mexican theatre groups, they came to focus on Mexicans in the United States as an immigrant underclass. Rather than cling to the concept that the Chicano has historical rights in the United States due to the fact that the Southwest once belonged to Mexico, they emphasise the Mexicans' rights as immigrant workers historically present in the United States. This is an important distinction, particularly as the group already had a background in the Chicano Movement to support this approach.

¹Mario García, 'La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican-American Thought,' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Irvine, Vol. 1 No. 2 Summer, University of California Press, 1985 p.215

²Jorge Hucra, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982 p.203

As cultural nationalism was seen to be unable to explain class contradictions among Mexicans in the United States, it was synthesized with working class struggle, particularly in CASA- Hermandad General de Trabajadores the organization led by Bert Corona.³ This was formed in the late 1960s for the protection of the undocumented worker and by the mid 1970s had attracted many young radical activists and intellectuals. In 1976 it began to publish a newspaper, *Sin Fronteras*, rejecting the concept of a border. A "borderless struggle" of the Mexicans regarded as one people on either side of the political border due to their condition of oppressed nation and exploited class was regarded as the only way to defeat American capitalism. In *Sin Fronteras* Chicanos who lacked historical and class consciousness and thus distanced themselves from the undocumented were criticised. Any Mexican was regarded as possessing a historic right to migrate to the Southwest and undocumented workers were seen as necessary in the struggle for liberation as capitalists exploited Chicanos, Mexican Americans and undocumented workers alike.⁴ Esperanza used these ideas in *La Víctima* at a time when an anti-alien scare was raging in the press, even as many Americans were preparing to celebrate the Bicentennial of American independence.⁵ Esperanza asked themselves how relevant this theme of independence was to the Chicano community:

We felt the irony of that celebration of independence in a country where many people live without independence, particularly economic independence.⁶

The process of creating the play to reflect this irony was complex. The eight-member group, four of whom had degrees in drama, voted in the autumn of 1975 to become totally collective and make all decisions as a group.⁷ After *Guadalupe* they became more serious about their work and after performances they would ask:

³García, op. cit. p.215

⁴Ibid. p.219

⁵Celestino Fernández, 'Newspaper Coverage of Undocumented Mexican Immigration During the 1970s: A Qualitative Analysis of Pictures and Headings,' in *History, Culture and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*, Ypsilanti, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1983 p.178

⁶Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *Santa Barbara News and Review*, September 14th, 1978

⁷Huerta, op. cit. pp.69-70

as a group, "how did we do?" and not "how did I do?" as an individual.⁸

The group's evolving methodology and complex organizational structure have been documented by Mark Weinberg. The process of creating *La Víctima* began with the researching of germinal ideas to pinpoint the play's main topic. Debate ensued to create functional characters as pro and antagonists taking into consideration the group's view that they had to introduce new ideas to the audience. A short statement of the play's political thesis was then prepared and three coordinators were named - artistic, playwrighting and political - to deal with direction, scheduling, regularization and bilingualization of the text and possibly translations. Their role was to assure that each scene would fulfil its function according to the play's thesis. The basic scenario was written, and each scene was listed with its dramatic and political structure. The style of the play was chosen through improvisation and research into traditional forms of theatre. Characters were then defined and casting took place without auditions to showcase individual strengths. The dialogue was improvised and scenes were scripted, each having a writer and a director. The director managed the improvisations, the writer recorded them and the actors offered suggestions. The script was read to the collective and revisions and changes were made. The writer could not defend his script until the needs of the scenario had been discussed and the play had to stand up to interrogation from an artistic and thematic perspective before the playwrighting coordinator did a final version to achieve unity of style.⁹ The group stressed that:

There is no notion that the words are sacred, and they may be changed at any time to make someone more comfortable.¹⁰

⁸M. Dolan, interview with Estella Campos, Santa Barbara, February 1987

⁹Mark Weinberg, *Performance Generation: The History and Evolution of Collective Theatre In America*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1988 pp.95-106

¹⁰Hank Tavera quoted in Robert Francis Jenkins, *A Description of Working Principles and Procedures Employed by Selected Peoples' Theatre Groups in the United States*, Ph. D. Dissertation, School of Theatre, Florida State University, 1980 p.44

Each director staged his or her scene. Transitions such as comments, songs, etcetera were created at this point, as were intermediary characters functioning as demonstrators. Refinements still took place after the play premiered in 1976 at the University of California at San Diego on Cinco de Mayo, as it was regarded as a work-in-progress, but it nonetheless went on to be performed in the Southwest, New York and Europe.¹¹

Significantly, then, while Esperanza regarded themselves as a didactic group introducing to their audiences new ideas, evolved by Chicano thinkers, on matters concerning Chicanos, they chose not to spend time attempting to evolve a form of theatre which might be called "Chicano" and confine themselves to it. The oft-cited Chicano *actos* represented for them learning pieces on the path towards theatrically complex and eclectic works. As we will see, other cultures were made to yield what was useful to Esperanza in the expression of ideas scrupulously researched.

For example, to discover how immigration afflicted the Chicano community group members read Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.¹² They also embarked on a study of Chicano history from a Marxist, or class, perspective by subdividing into small groups, each one focusing on a particular period in the history of the Mexicans' immigration into the United States since the Mexican American war. To aid them in this they used their own experiences and those of family and friends as historical data, particularly as the mothers of three cast members had been deported.¹³ They found a correlation between the large scale repatriation of Mexican workers and periods of economic recession in the United States since the 1920s and concluded that these immigrant workers had been blamed for the United States' economic problems. They concluded that:

the mass repatriations were political maneuvers and that a curtain of misrepresentations had made a scapegoat out of the Mexican¹⁴

¹¹Huerta, op. cit. pp.69-70

¹²Huerta, 1982 p.70

¹³Weinberg, op. cit. p.108

¹⁴Huerta, op. cit. p.70

and created a play which would illustrate the vicissitudes affecting an immigrant working class family since its arrival in the United States, over a span of some seventy years. Their aim was to illustrate the particular form of discrimination inherited by the Chicano and to do so they set up a plot replete with ironies around the figure of Sammy Mendoza, a Mexican American Immigration Agent who deports his own mother.¹⁵ The play sees the Madero family come to the United States by train from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. They intend to stay only until the conflict is over but they remain and Amparo their daughter, now grown, marries Julián Villa, a railroad worker from Michoacán. During the Depression the unemployed Julián suggests they return to Mexico to benefit from its land distribution policy. Amparo, who has one son, Sammy, and who is expecting another child, is reluctant but agrees that Julián should go to Durango ahead of her, to set up home and wait for her. When Amparo later attempts to board the train bound for Mexico little Sammy is left behind in the confusion of the train station. Sammy is adopted by another Mexican family and fifteen years later fights in the Korean War. On his return he marries his fiancée Clara and joins the Immigration and Naturalization Service as a Border Patrol Agent. His natural parents, Amparo and Julián, meanwhile are impoverished, subsisting on a little ranch. They refuse to return to the United States with their daughter Antonia and son Meño, because of the loss of their first son, a blow from which Amparo has never fully recovered. Once in the United States, Meño pursues a shiftless lifestyle, sending home progressively less money and for a long time refusing to join his sister in union, and eventually non-union, activity to improve their lot. Julián meanwhile dies and Amparo has no alternative but to be smuggled into the United States by a *coyote* to live with her children. Sammy, now a fairly prosperous Border Patrol agent who has a daughter studying at college, is offered a promotion which involves rounding up illegal aliens in factory raids. Although he considers waiting for a different promotion, Clara is adamant he should accept what is offered. This leads to his carrying out a raid on a factory where Antonia and Meño are on strike with their fellow

¹⁵Ibid.

workers. Amparo happens to be at the workplace when the *migra* strike and is also detained. Sammy interrogates her and although he feels he knows her, it is Amparo who recognises him and destroys his composure by asking "¿Cómo le gustaría ser separado de su madre?". Sammy frantically orders her deportation and later that night wakes up from a nightmare and realises what he has done. Yet Clara succeeds in assuaging his conscience and convinces him that he is mistaken.

The group maintained the Brechtian approach of **Guadalupe**. The actors remained on stage at all times and almost every scene was opened by a song in Spanish or music.¹⁶ Every scene was further preceded by a bilingual quotation and had a bilingual title.¹⁷ These elements were intended to keep the audience's attention on the story and not the characters, and this approach was strengthened by the fact that the main character of the play was an antagonist and the audience was unlikely to feel empathy for him. The music, titles and quotations were also aids to understanding the play as the scope is wide and the pace fast. The action moves from the United States, to the border, and to Mexico and over a period of some seventy years. The actors demonstrated the characters as before; such an approach allowed the child Sammy to be played by an adult actor. Some scenes consisted of a broad comic interlude ending in a shock revelation, though the acting was for the most part naturalistic.¹⁸

The usual barrage of Esperanza techniques is present in **La Víctima**. A great deal of music is employed, and as in **Guadalupe** a narrator/singer uses the melody of a known *corrido*, *El Corrido de Rosita Álvarez*, changing the lyrics to suit the play. Unfortunately, as with previous songs, the focus of the *corrido* is neither constant nor coherent as the songs were written last and possibly hurriedly.¹⁹ Some are redundant, describing occurrences obvious from the action; this, for example, occurs in Scenes 8 and 9, and at times attention is paid to

¹⁶Huerta, op. cit. pp.72-73

¹⁷Ibid. p.71

¹⁸Weinberg, op. cit. p.108

¹⁹The script shows evidence of scribbled compositions.

a simple rhyming sequence to the detriment of the points being made. This occurs in Scene 11, where the effective description of Sammy's character is sacrificed to the rhyme. The musical leitmotif is used again, (the song *Cref*) once to set a romantic mood and later strummed to underline dashed hopes. The group also used well-known songs popular during the eras being recreated. The freeze technique (or stop action) is often used, for example in Scene 2, when two policemen step forward to discuss immigration papers, ostensibly without being overheard by the rest of the characters, and the freezes bracket their dialogue away from the main action of the scene. The group also employed simple devices to situate the play historically for the benefit of the audience. In Scene 2 costumes suggestive of flapper dresses all pointed to the twenties, reminding the audience that "the Mexican has a historical presence in this country".²⁰

While *La Víctima* is not free of the *acto*, Esperanza clearly grow and change with its creation. They attempted to utilize what they regarded as the best of the *acto* in a play which gained much of its theatrical thrust from Greek tragic theatre.²¹ The play's debt to the *acto* lies mainly in the exposition of the issue of hazardous working environments, yet it is free of many other *acto* elements, particularly allegorical characters. Historical forces are not here personified as allegorical characters, but rather, real people are seen, unconsciously, or consciously, to affect the dialectical development of history. Similarly, despite the play's debt to Greek tragedy, the traditional Fate is replaced by history driven by economics.²² Nonetheless, Mark Weinberg stresses the oracular effect of the quotations which precede each scene. These reinforce an element of tragedy as they lay out the idea that "since this is true, how could anything else happen?".²³ The play does evidence an atmosphere of doom from the outset, as the chanted prologue proclaims the play's conclusion: that the Chicano is a victim. The first scene opens in the darkness of a departure at night, suggesting from the

²⁰Huerta, op. cit. p.73

²¹The group were reading *Antigone* at the time.

²²Weinberg, op. cit. p.116

²³Ibid.

beginning that a happy ending is unlikely. The ending, is, indeed, a tragic one as the group felt that dramatically Sammy had to send his mother away, given that:

she represents all that he has attempted to deny throughout his career with the INS.²⁴

Other elements of Greek tragedy and traditional Western theatre are salvaged or abandoned at will. The play refers to Sammy's "ceguera" or fatal flaw, an idea central to Greek tragedy, yet rejects catharsis, also fundamental to the same genre, in favour of Brecht's approach to emotion on stage. Sammy also speaks a short piece which amounts to a modest soliloquy in the Shakespearean tradition. It is not a "breakout" as before but a monologue in which the actor ignores the presence of the audience. This is a development from the *acto* even though Clara jumps out and appears to have been listening all along, therefore taking the place of a listening audience. In **La Víctima** there is also the first lovers element in an Esperanza plot, although this is on a minor scale and is a mere stepping stone to the formation of the family unit. Weinberg also points out that while economic necessity propels all the events of the play the meeting of Sammy and Amparo belongs to melodramatic coincidence.²⁵ Yet in **La Víctima** there is not a timely restoration to former fortunes such as is found in the melodrama and the play avoids such simplifications.

The play ran for ninety minutes without a break though the script marks five acts and fifteen scenes. The group were in proximity to the audience before the start of the performance, thus defining themselves as demonstrators. They set up their props and gathered on stage for the prologue. Three kneeling women chanted this in Spanish as though it were a Rosary and the men echoed them, line by line, from the side, in English. Then the entire company announced "El Teatro de la Esperanza presenta *La Víctima*" before the story unfolds.

²⁴VI p.76

²⁵Weinberg, op. cit. pp.102-3

In this play Esperanza reprise the *migra* theme to underline the organization's true notoriety in the Chicano community. An anonymous phone call reporting the undocumented workers at the Fitzgerald Company recalls the act of supreme betrayal which Petra carried out in **Brujerías** but here the consequences of that betrayal culminate in a *migra* raid and deportation.²⁶ In **La Víctima** too the awful bad taste of the Chicano's joke in **Guadalupe** is recalled, and the cry of "¡Ahí viene la migra!" here results in chaos with no trace of humour.²⁷ Therefore, while this play is an experiment in working with a number of different styles, its real business is a consideration of the life of Sammy Mendoza, Mexican American *migra* and *vendido*. Sammy represents a sort of worst case scenario for the group to study; not only is he a *vendido* but he is the worst kind imaginable, as he actually deports his own people as one of the hated *migra*. Anxious to move beyond the caricatured Marcos Cortez unidimensional figure, however, the group seek to create a fuller and more realistic character and attempt to understand him, not as a pejoratively termed sell-out figure but as a person with a particular response to the pressures to assimilate which abound in American society. The group were trying to move beyond the *acto* notion that human beings are either good or bad. They wished to show they respond to conditions and live in a context.²⁸ Weinberg writes:

Esperanza seek to clarify causes in their plays and to present a picture of people fulfilling, often unwittingly, roles forced upon them by the circumstances of American capitalistic society, not merely of idiosyncratic (although psychologically full) characters.²⁹

The obvious character for this kind of study is the hated *vendido*, particularly as it may be argued that his individual actions have social repercussions for Chicanos. Despite this desire to understand such a figure, however, the group's ultimate stance is condemnatory, partly due to the conflicts of theatrical style in the play, and partly due to their own incomplete analysis of the Mexicans' assimilation into the United States. Frustratingly, we never

²⁶VI p.69

²⁷Ibid. p.89

²⁸Weinberg, op. cit. p.108

²⁹Ibid.

actually come to understand Sammy's motivations as a human being. The allusion, in traditional style, to a fatal flaw - "ciego poco a poco se hacía" - ³⁰ is not explanatory in terms of Sammy's motivations. While certain social causes were well outlined, Sammy's personal motivations were not, and this in a play which turned to traditional theatre for just this purpose. Although the group clearly avoided the creation of a heroic protagonist, it is not clear that they also avoided creating a wicked antagonist. Indeed the play ends with a song which stresses Sammy's irredeemable moral damnation:

aquí se terminó
la historia de un alma que murió.
Hay que mirar la ciega decisión
que mata al ser, la mente, el corazón
y no permite ver lo que es la realidad.³¹ (sic)

La Víctima, then, is a play which purports to explain the *vendido* through psychological depth and social explanation, but which nonetheless fails to answer the central issue of the play: why does Sammy, a Chicano, become a *migra* and deport his mother? Fundamentally the reason for this is that Esperanza became caught up in questions of theatrical correctness which did not permit them to deal with the question they themselves posed. They preferred to outline the social and historical forces which moved Sammy as this approach was more coherent with their commitment to offering their audiences new thought patterns. Unfortunately they overlooked the fact that they had given their audiences, not a vision of a community and a collective protagonist as in **Guadalupe**, but a main protagonist which the audience required to understand, profoundly, as an individual character. Because of this confusion Esperanza offered the audience a true victim, as Sammy, due to his lack of psychological exposition, cannot fail to be seen as the receptacle of social forces greater than himself and upon which he cannot act. This surely was not their intention, particularly when we consider the lengths the group went to in other ways to create a memorable character.

³⁰VI p.62

³¹Ibid. p.99

Despite the fact that the ultimate portrayal of Sammy springs from the group's gut feeling rather than their analytical powers, a number of techniques do take the group into the realm of the psyche for character study. The play, and Scene 15 in particular, mark a change for Esperanza in that they attempt to create complex characters through recourse to dreams, memory and the unconscious mind. After deporting Amparo, a nightmare brings the childhood moment of separation from his mother back to Sammy and he tries to substantiate his feelings with the facts he remembers from the interrogation. The group acknowledge the power of the unconscious mind as it is this which provides Sammy with the truth of what he has done. It is a truth which he nonetheless rejects when Clara, so named because of her lack of self-doubt, rationalizes the incidents and helps Sammy to believe a less painful explanation.

As outlined above, however, what the audience learns about Sammy it learns indirectly from the social circumstances of his life. At the same time the audience is exposed to Esperanza's presentation of the Chicano's lot as being conditioned by two main factors. As the group struggle to find explanations for the Chicano's disadvantaged state, they draw from two sources, namely the theories of internal colonialism and capitalist exploitation. Esperanza were still loathe at this stage to completely discard the notion that Chicanos are the inheritors of internal colonialism to unequivocally embrace a Marxist response to a simple fact of class exploitation. This was due to their lingering uncertainty over the exact nature of the Chicano's exploitation. While they clearly saw that Chicanos, for the most part, were working class and poor, they understood that, historically, they had been discriminated against as an immigrant people, of varying classes and of a different race, located in a particular area of the United States, and this set them apart from the American worker, despite the obvious similarities. The group had not resolved the contradictions inherent in these two modes of thought as is evident from the play's prologue which is vague in the extreme:

THE CHICANO IS A VICTIM

OF A SUBTLE AND COMPLEX
 FORM OF OPPRESSION
 WHICH BECAUSE OF PARTICULAR RACIAL
 AND HISTORICAL FACTORS
 DIFFERS FROM TRADITIONAL FORMS
 YET RESULTS IN THE SAME END:
 THE EXPLOITATION OF ONE GROUP
 FOR THE BENEFIT OF ANOTHER.³²

Yet, given the group's reliance on texts discussing colonialism in the creation of the play and despite the Marxist rhetoric and trade unionism in the body of the piece, this opening statement clearly refers to internal colonialism. This is the "subtle and complex form of oppression" made worse by racism and "historical factors" such as immigration. It differs from "traditional forms" such as classic colonialism and capitalist oppression of labour.

In the case of classic colonialism a colonizer comes from without to a foreign piece of land for economic gain whereas, in the case of internal colonialism, an immigrant group is held in a servile relationship with the dominant group and is subjected to deportation when the economic wellbeing of the dominant group demands it. The characterisation of Sammy also relies on this interpretation of the Chicano's status, and indeed, Sammy was evolved from a number of attributes referred to in Memmi's book which considers in general the participants of a colonial relationship. As in classic colonialism certain members of the internal colony choose to collaborate with colonial forces in the suppression of their race for personal gain. Sammy is one such person. Memmi writes of the colonized as assuming the appearance of the colonizer and Esperanza illustrate this graphically through Sammy's uniform.³³ They offer the image of the Chicano in an American uniform, deporting his own race.

Internal colonialism also differs from "traditional" class exploitation, as undocumented workers can be deported over the international border by the *migra*, some of whom are of Mexican heritage themselves, to undermine the undocumented Mexicans' ability to struggle as socialists in the United States. As the play assumes that all Mexicans have an

³²*ibid.*

³³Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, London, The Orion Press, 1974 p.16

unconditional right to residency in the United States, the *migra* are the obvious oppositors to this ideal and are represented in the play by Sammy.

Sammy starts out as a typical, indeed stereotypical Chicano teenager, who speaks in *caló* of his *raza* and displays loyalty to his ethnic group.³⁴ He is then sent off to fight with American troops in Korea where he learns how to kill "communists" and to defend an ideology which can be applied later with the same rigour in his role as a *migra*. He imbibes a form of group psychology whereby he thinks as part of a large unit thus eliminating the need for personal responsibility or conscience. He is taught in the army that attacking a village is no different from attacking trained soldiers as men, women and children are simply the enemy.³⁵ When Sammy asks if this means they shoot civilians too, his sergeant replies, "We shoot communists, Mendoza, not civilians, communists!"³⁶

Esperanza intimate that this facility for affixing labels to groups of people to the point where they are obliterated as individuals and human beings is a quality Sammy brings with him from the army. Years later when his daughter Janie reminds him in an argument that he is deporting Mexicans, Sammy replies:

I deport illegal aliens. A mí no me importa si son colombianos, salvadoreños o mexicanos.³⁷

When Janie angrily tells him that they themselves are Mexicans, he replies that they are citizens, American citizens. Sammy therefore experiences no sense of solidarity, but only a sense of the otherness of Mexicans from across the border. Esperanza attribute Sammy's career with the *migra* to his indoctrination by a system which educates young men into dehumanising people. Yet, despite Esperanza's concern for psychology in this play, Sammy is not seen to wrestle with his conscience. His decisions are made behind closed doors and

³⁴Ibid. p.28

³⁵Ibid. p.33

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid. p.80

we can only conjecture why he makes the personal decision of joining the INS. Nonetheless it is clear that the army is the cradle of Sammy's assimilative tendencies. He is told by the sergeant to straighten out, as "there are no Pachucos in the army". The army is presented as symbolic of assimilation involving a loss of personal identity and a willingness to serve a force which oppresses "the other". It also defends a system which later gives Sammy a job.

Yet, even as Sammy has a career far removed in economic terms from picking crops for agribusiness, Esperanza show that he is not like other Anglo immigration officials. He suffers what Memmi terms "twofold liability, twofold rejection" as he not wholly acceptable to either the dominant or the minority social group.³⁸ He cannot be like any other Anglo *migra* officer no matter how assimilationist and anti-immigrant he might become because there exists for him a possibility which could not exist for the Anglo. The American social system is constructed in such a way that an Anglo would never have to deport his own mother. Esperanza also hint that Sammy is passed over for the kind of promotion he wanted, as another Anglo officer is shown preference. Therefore Sammy is slighted by Anglos because he is not one of them and hated by Chicanos because he is a *migra* and can never be regarded as a Chicano.

He therefore epitomises Memmi's observation that "A man straddling two cultures is rarely well-seated".³⁹ Sammy, quite literally, is on the border between two nations and two cultures and perhaps two senses of self. Yet, as with the geographical border itself, there is a third cultural area where both sides fuse. Ideally for the group, the product of this fusion should be the Chicano, the product of Mexico and America, but Esperanza's rejection of Sammy illustrates that he does not embody the kind of biculturalism envisioned during the Chicano movement. While it is difficult to discover where the Mexican and the American

³⁸Memmi, *op. cit.* Introduction p.xxii

³⁹*Ibid.* p.124

meet in Sammy, we only know that his blend is not Chicano. This is because "though dupe and victim, he also gets his share".⁴⁰ Memmi tells us:

Those in power offer social and economic rewards to some individuals who are willing to aid in the suppression of their own kind.⁴¹

La Víctima reflects the realities of this quotation in the United States. Sammy interrogates undocumented workers, often angrily, but when they point out the injustices which befall them at the hands of employers and immigration authorities, Sammy defends the employers. During the interrogation of a young Mexican being deported for the third time, despite being able to find employment in the United States, Sammy is asked why Mexicans are employed if they are in fact not wanted. In this way responsibility for the unhappy situation of the Mexicans is placed by Esperanza on employers and it is made clear that, rather than pursuing the undocumented workers, the INS should be pursuing the employers who break the law to employ cheap labour. If Sammy knows the answers to the young man's questions, he refuses to admit so and if he does not, he thinks no more about it.

Esperanza also make it clear that Sammy is suppressing his own kind, as in Scene 11 they illustrate his affinities with the Mexican he is questioning. Sammy speaks Spanish, learned from his real and his adoptive parents. This is a skill exploited by the United States establishment for little more than the cost of employing a few Mexican Americans, as fluency in Spanish has long been a requirement for Border Patrol agents and is essential to any serious enforcement effort in the Southwest.⁴² Furthermore, the fact that Sammy is a Mexican American *migra* is not illogical or particularly unusual when we consider that while the play was still being performed, President Carter appointed a Mexican American as Commissioner of the INS.⁴³ As Sammy prepares to deport the Mexican the scene shifts to

⁴⁰Ibid. p.11

⁴¹VI p.63

⁴²Paul R. Ehrlich, Loy Bilderback and Anne Ehrlich, *The Golden Door: International Migration, Mexico and the United States*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1979 p.187

⁴³Ibid. p.186

his wife and daughter who remind the audience of Sammy's origins in the barrio, and the fact that it was the *migra* who deported his parents during the Depression. His world and that of the illegal Mexican he is questioning are, in fact, very alike.

In the light of Sammy's early experience with the *migra*, Esperanza condemn both his insistence that he is an American and his desire to identify with the American Dream of prosperity. In so doing they reaffirm that to be a Chicano is to be a person who refuses to incur any moral cost to improve his economic status. They go on to affirm that:

The attainment of the American Dream at any cost results in a variety of feelings ranging from shame to self-hate; thus creating a need to justify the actions taken to achieve it.⁴⁴

By using the above quotation Esperanza infer that Sammy must suffer emotional damage as a result of his heartless actions. In the action of the play, however, Sammy, while slightly upset, is not openly distressed, nor does he go to great lengths to justify anything. It appears that, despite the quotation's affirmation, Esperanza did not wish to expose forcibly any inner doubts Sammy may have had, as to do so would engage the audience's sympathy, and as Esperanza ultimately wished to condemn Sammy, they could not allow this to happen. Sammy, therefore, is presented as having only one reason for doing the job he does, and that is to provide for his family. While he dislikes pulling screaming people out of their homes:

All the pushing and the shoving, it's like herding cattle,⁴⁵

he does not express any sense of moral wrong in the carrying out of his work and the only suggestion that Sammy was feeling shame or self-hatred at this point is found in the scene title. Not only is he proud of his job, but his answer to Janie's question of how he can deport his own people is very simple:- "so that we can eat, so we can live".⁴⁶ This is his

⁴⁴Vl p.71

⁴⁵Ibid. p.73

⁴⁶Ibid. p.80

only justification for the job he does, hardly a wholesale identification with the American Dream. Therefore Esperanza, to drive home their point that the Mexican American *migra* is a hateful *vendido*, they turn him into an utterly ruthless character by having him deport his own mother. At the start of Scene 15 the play offers a further definition of the *vendido*:

The individual who chooses to take part in the process of dehumanizing others inevitably begins the process of his own dehumanization.⁴⁷

What follows, one of the most memorable scenes in Chicano theatre, is the reunion of Sammy and his mother Amparo, which is the real business of the play. While Esperanza succeeded in inserting comments about issues such as the raising of the property tax and poisonous chemicals affecting factory workers, which in their early days would have been the subject of *actos*, these do not receive a major focus of attention. They merely serve as an element of the plot to explain and support the strikers' stand and so here the *acto* wedding of plot to issue develops into the wedding of plot to theme. Amparo also begins to take on an important symbolic quality when Sammy, in Scene 14, speaking about Amparo, asks his boss:

You ever get the feeling you've seen someone before, but you can't place them?⁴⁸

She assumes a deep importance in the play because she causes in Sammy a stirring of memory - and conscience - which increases as contact with Amparo continues. Nonetheless, Sammy carries out the ultimate dehumanization, - in a Chicano culture which is, of course, *machista*, and as such deferential, to the mother figure - that of his own mother. When Sammy enters the interrogation room, the audience is keenly aware that these two strangers are mother and son and the fundamental nature of that relationship places upon each character a responsibility to put human values over and above any others. Although Sammy uses a softer tone with Amparo than with other detainees and is respectful, he is nonetheless in

⁴⁷Ibid. p.97

⁴⁸Ibid. p.91

control. The interview develops and Amparo gives him details of her life, even her name. Sammy, clinically ignores her predicament and intends to deport her and her family. The fact that Sammy is seen to violate the value of the mother-son relationship (even though he is not conscious of it) stresses the gravity of the act of dehumanizing any person, as any family separated and abused is just as important as one's own. However, as Amparo pleads her case, Sammy takes greater refuge in officialdom and explains his position:

Yo no estoy para juzgar esos asuntos de familias. Yo hago lo que me dicen y lo que es justo. Usted tiene que entender que los tengo que mandar.⁴⁹

As Amparo volunteers information about her previous deportation, Sammy becomes impatient and tries to assert his authority to silence her. When he argues "Yo no sé nada de eso",⁵⁰ Amparo begins to speak to him directly:

¡No! A pesar de ser tan vivo estabas muy chico para comprender. ¡Déjame recordarte!⁵¹

Clearly, Amparo has recognised her son. The relationship between them is a symbolic one of bonds which can never truly be broken. Amparo therefore assumes a power over Sammy and the situation born of the knowledge that she is his mother, which bestows on her the right to be heard, although she appeals to her age when she says to Sammy, "Oígame esta última vez".⁵² She begins to recount her past, of which he was a part. During Sammy's childhood Amparo had trusted the little boy to understand some of the economic facts of life as, though small, he was bright. Amparo as an old woman realises that, although bright, her little son had in fact been too young to understand. Perhaps if he had understood, he would not be standing before her, ready to deport her. However, Amparo's words and her self-control have already begun to exert authority over him and she treats him, her son, impersonally, regarding him only as one of the hated *migra*. He shouts at her to be silent but

⁴⁹Ibid. p.94

⁵⁰Ibid. p.94

⁵¹Ibid. p.94

⁵²Ibid. p.95

she changes tack and starts to ask him about himself. When she finally wrests his first name from him, confirming her suspicions that he is in fact her son, she attacks him and the INS as a force as "fríos y sin compasión de nadie." Sammy by this stage is almost incoherent and able only to repeat that he is only doing his job. Amparo asks him: "¿Es su trabajo separar a familias?" then deals him a final blow by asking, "¿Cómo le gustaría ser separado de su madre?".

Sammy's nerves can take no more and he thrusts his arm up to command in anguish, "¡Sáquenla!" Both characters freeze to cut off the emotional intensity of one of the most powerful moments in the play and in Chicano theatre. Memmi writes of the man who assimilates:

It is a dramatic moment when he realizes that he has assumed all the accusations and condemnations of the colonizer, that he is becoming accustomed to looking at his own people through the eyes of their procurer.⁵³

Sammy reaches just this point when he orders his mother's deportation and indeed, it is the supreme irony of the play that being separated from his mother is not his fear. What he in fact dreads is the very opposite, that he be reunited with her. It is this which he rejects, as it is not unity, but the lack of it, which he believes in and which allows him to function. He has been separated from his mother, or lost, not merely physically but morally, as he is a *vendido* and a *migra*. Amparo accepts that he has broken their mother-son bond because of allegiance to the law of a repressive state. Yet Sammy is not a truly tragic figure, as he is not seen to suffer for his choices or indeed, change his attitudes. The final scene presents an anagnorisis in which Sammy realises what he has done, or perhaps what he has become, but this awareness is lessened by the rationalizations of his ambitious wife. He does suffer pain and is stricken by the horror of his actions but by choosing to believe Clara's words, Sammy returns to something approaching his own comfortable status quo. Clara, something of a Lady Macbeth figure, serves to reinforce with her own "clarity" the beliefs he holds

⁵³Memmi, op. cit. p.123

dear. Again, as in **Guadalupe** the civil religion takes priority over spiritual ideals and any preoccupation with moral right. Sammy clings blindly to the tenets of this civil religion and its absolute truths so that, ultimately, his moral fall from grace - which is what Esperanza offer - is ultimately irrelevant, as morality was never a concern of his. He has adhered to legal right, and it remains intact. The *vendido* in **La Víctima**, then, is characterised here as having authority over his own people, that authority invested in him by the law to permit him to aid in their oppression. Sammy ultimately represents the irredeemable sell-out whom the group still sought to condemn rather than understand.

Therefore, it would appear that the public they sought to reach was still of a working-class profile rather than a middle-class one. Sammy's portrayal contrasts with that of the *coyote* who figures in rather positive terms.⁵⁴ No criticism is levelled at the pleasant and rather courageous *coyote* who smuggles Mexicans over the border for personal gain; in 1978 to the tune of some three hundred dollars.⁵⁵ The fundamental difference between the *vendido* Sammy and the *coyote* is that while both work for personal gain, Sammy upholds the law against the Mexicans and the *coyote* breaks it for them.⁵⁶ What this contrast - and **La Víctima** as a whole - illustrates is Esperanza's continuing discomfort with assimilation and their condemnation of those individuals who achieve a measure of economic independence via a job in the "system". On the one hand they urge undocumented workers and working-class Chicanos to organize and challenge those who abuse them. On the other they condemn the middle-class Mexican American who is free of daily abuse and penury for taking jobs which have an unsavoury side.

Fortunately for the play the group offer another social model for Chicanos to follow. Through it they overcome their prior antipathy towards the figure of the Chicano and, importantly, acknowledge the gains of the Chicano Movement. Sammy, weak-willed,

⁵⁴VI p.41

⁵⁵Ehrlich, p.125

⁵⁶See Paul Ehrlich et. al., *The Golden Door*, p.124. The term *coyote* derives from a Spanish idiom for a shyster lawyer or illegal broker.

exercising authority only over the undocumented Mexicans, is contrasted with three strong-willed female relatives who represent possible choices. Amparo, his Mexican mother, Clara, his Mexican American wife, and Janie, his Chicana daughter, represent different sets of values. Esperanza offer Janie as the hope for the future but we can understand her better if we study her in relation to Clara and Amparo.

Clara, like Sammy, belongs to the generation of Mexican Americans who, as American citizens consequently had no fear of deportation. She is presented as materialistic in rather a stereotypical way but more importantly, she stresses the irrelevance of the Chicano's past struggles. Like the Anglo teacher in Guadalupe who was ignorant of the Virgin of Guadalupe's role in the town, Clara replies to Janie's point that the immigration department deported Mexicans during the Depression: "That was a long time ago y ya no importa".⁵⁷ She prefers to focus on the economic benefits of Sammy's job to the exclusion of other concerns and strongly disapproves of her daughter's Chicano Studies courses.

Amparo's role and significance in the play are much greater than those of Clara. Her character is lightly sketched at times but it is clear that she is symbolic of Sammy's Mexican culture and heritage even although she lived in the United States and does not romanticize Mexico. When her husband suggests returning to Mexico her response is "¿Qué quieres? ¿Regresarte a aquella miseria?".⁵⁸ If the play has a heroine it is Amparo. Despite recognising her son, she does not reclaim him or plead with him but accepts him as the arm of an unjust system and leaves with her dignity intact. As in melodrama she is a virtuous (though not virginal) woman who is there to represent an ideal. Her name is Amparo, protection or shelter, and so she stands for what is humanitarian. She is Sammy's mother and after he was lost as a child he was "desamparado" without his mother, without Amparo, without protection.⁵⁹ When Sammy awakens from his nightmare as a grown man, he knows

⁵⁷VI p.67

⁵⁸Ibid. p.22

⁵⁹Ibid. p.98

he is "desamparado" again and is a sorry sight, sitting at his wife's feet, just as he had once sat at his mother's. Sammy was physically lost the first time, to be lost again, morally the second time. As a child he was lost involuntarily but as an adult it is through his own actions.

Throughout her life Amparo receives treatment contrary to what she gives. Early in the play she talks to her horse "como si fuera gente" while she is later treated as if she herself were an animal.⁶⁰ In Scene 14 she describes how during the deportation people were thrown on the train, "todos en bola" and how "nos aventaban como si fuéramos animales".⁶¹ Even Sammy complains that his job is like herding cattle, and indeed, this is the strategy of factory raids: individuals are brought in droves to the Immigration Office. In the *actos* this reducing of human beings to the status of animals was humorously dealt with but here it is the tragic nature of this abuse which is stressed.

Amparo is first cast as a realistic character but she develops to take on symbolic qualities and is the first symbol encountered in the group's work. Amparo and Sammy also share a symbolic relationship as well as the natural one of mother and son. Amparo often refers to the concept of family, and it is this dedication to her family that finds her on the picket line when Sammy conducts the raid. She affirms, "yo tengo que estar donde y cuando me necesiten mis hijos".⁶² Ironically, one of her "hijos" is Sammy. Rather than any nationalistic concept of being Mexico or Mexican, then, Amparo symbolizes the family of Mexicans on both sides of the border, as one of her sons is an illegal alien and the other a legal immigration officer, yet they are both her sons and belong to the same family. Amparo accuses Sammy of separating families, but she is not just referring to the breaking up of individual families, but of the family, or brotherhood, of Mexicans. Sammy destroys the solidarity of this family by patrolling a border which divides what should be united. Amparo

⁶⁰Ibid. p.4

⁶¹Ibid.p.95

⁶²Ibid. p.89

illustrates the relationship between the legal and illegal worker, the undocumented Mexican and the documented Mexican or Chicano citizen. Sammy, on the other hand, denies the validity of this and this is why he is a *vendido*. His last words to his mother - she is presented on stage as an image reciting the words of the song she sang to him as a child - are "I hate you". Memmi reminds us that:

Oppression means, first of all, the oppressor's hatred for the oppressed.⁶³

We might consider that Sammy in fact hates the repressed Mexican side of himself. There is, however, some ambiguity, evident in the script. Sammy tells his vision of Amparo that he hates her but turns and says Clara's name, suggesting that he is not altogether sure of whom he really hates. If we regard both women symbolically, as facets of Sammy, when he expresses hatred in both Spanish and English he may be seen to be expressing hatred for his own divided self or plight. Nonetheless, it is Amparo who has awakened this internal conflict.

La Víctima presents a Mexican American middle class view of the Chicano Movement which is seen to be at loggerheads with a Chicano student perspective. These opposing views are exemplified by Clara and her daughter Janie and, importantly, Esperanza resolve, through Janie, their antipathy towards Chicanos evident in previous works. Clara discovers Janie's involvement with the Chicano Movement. She is studying Chicano history at college, has a "Chávez sticker" with the "águila negra" on her car and has also joined a Chicano Power group. Clara is emphatic that she does not want Janie to get involved with "those radicals" and reports her involvement to Sammy who takes the news with equanimity but broaches the subject with his daughter. Janie tells him that she believes what the sticker stands for and that she supports the United Farmworkers. Sammy says that "todo tiene dos caras" and that he has read "some very negative things in the papers about Chávez." Janie replies that she has read them too but has given the issue a lot of thought, and Sammy is

⁶³Memmi, op. cit. Intro. p.xxvii

content to leave the matter there.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Janie is not. She is unhappy with the work her father does, despite the material wellbeing it undoubtedly brings. This is because she sees clearly the conflict between Sammy's daily deportation of Mexicans and his own Mexican heritage, and is acutely aware that Sammy is serving the very agency which separated him from his mother. We might consider, also, Janie's lack of credibility among her peers in the Movement as the daughter of a *migra*.

In rejecting Amparo Sammy also rejects Janie, as both women stress the moral aspect of deportation. Morally on the side of Amparo, Janie is nonetheless born and bred in the United States and has re-encountered her Mexican heritage through a college education. Involved in the Chicano Movement, and despairing of her acculturation to American values, Janie represents the fusion of the two halves of Sammy's cultural heritage. She expresses a back-to-the-barrio attitude and has shifted the focus of her education towards her own people, her own self, rather than passively accepting American society's version of their history. Janie is a positive character in that she implies that it is possible to be successful and middle-class in economic terms, without selling out morally, one of the few characters in Esperanza's work to receive this portrayal. Although dependent on her father's wage for her college education, she represents the possibility that through it she will be able to achieve a measure of independence and stability for herself, as a Chicana and as a woman, and carry forth her present ideals.

La Víctima sees the group's analysis begin to stabilise around the words Chicano and Mexican American, the former meaning a person of Mexican ancestry with a social conscience and a commitment to left-wing activism, and the latter, a middle-class person who chooses not to become involved in the struggle. This is a step forward from **Guadalupe**, where the Chicano was presented as no more than a racist hothead viscerally opposed to undocumented workers. The play continues the theme of education, which had

⁶⁴V1 p.77

such priority in the first play, although this time the education is a college one. Esperanza deal with the topic well but they might have acknowledged that Janie's attendance at college is as much a result of generations of struggle by people of Mexican heritage and other groups as it is the result of Sammy's payment of her fees. The Chicano history books and courses mentioned by Janie were no gift from a benevolent state but were fought for and won, as a few years before no such books or courses existed. This is not brought out in the play and may be regarded as an omission.

With **La Víctima** Esperanza began to entangle themselves, theatrically, in a contradiction which would mark their work until **Lotería de Pasiones**. As a theatre group intent on raising the political awareness of their audiences to empower them to make changes in their own lives, the group was faced with a dilemma. This was the question of how to dramatise workers' industrial struggle, fundamentally in the form of strikes. Their problem was how to continue to exhort strike participation while at the same time portraying it as unsuccessful in achieving the objectives targetted. Esperanza could dramatise on stage labour struggle achieving its desired ends and expose themselves to charges of not portraying the Chicano worker's lot realistically. Conversely, they could dramatise those same struggles as failures and have no basis on which to exhort industrial action among audience members.

In short, the example of the United Farmworkers, which raised hopes that organization could lead to industrial change, as it had achieved changes in rural agrobusiness, failed to bear fruit. No other major workers' organization had emerged to crystallise the aspirations of Chicano workers and indeed, the UFW were in a difficult period.⁶⁵ Janie supports the UFW, by this stage little more than a historical example of struggle, but the play's subplot, which deals with Chicano workers affected by chemical fumes at the workplace, illustrates the futility of organization. As in **Guadalupe**, the dissenting voices are proven right, but in **La Víctima** the failure is all the more crushing given that the major focus of the play is to

⁶⁵Vernon Briggs, Walter Fogel and Fred Schmidt, *The Chicano Worker*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1977 pp.89-90

legitimise the participation of Mexican undocumented workers in American industry. A great welcome is prepared for these workers, who will be encouraged to join industrial action which only results in their deportation. A further irony is that much emphasis is placed on the fact that Antonia and Meño organize a wildcat strike. Antonia claims:

El patrón y la unión no te da nada. Si tu quieres algo se lo tienes que sacar a fuerzas,⁶⁶

but despite her unflagging activism, her independent stance and her persuasive leadership, the bid for a safer working environment fails and many workers are deported. The fact is that Esperanza, having begun as a political theatre group broadly in harmony with a social and political movement in a moment of optimism, became in theatrical terms, casualties of this movement's limited success rate. It is not clear from the play whether Esperanza were fully aware of the irony of exhorting participation in a struggle rapidly becoming futile. They were, of course, the Theatre of Hope, but in the context of the Chicano Movement, it was becoming clear that realistically hope could not spring eternal.

Whether Esperanza were cognisant of the irony outlined above, they were certainly capable of consciously and cleverly employing irony throughout the play to illustrate the undesirability and injustice of the Chicano's circumstances. During the interrogation of Amparo, Sammy hears that Amparo's husband has died, without realising that the man being referred to is his own father. When Amparo clarifies that the "muchacho" also detained during the raid is "uno de mis hijos," Sammy is unaware that he is the other one. In speaking of "esos asuntos de familias," Sammy is unaware that he is speaking of his own family.⁶⁷ The audience is in the privileged position of knowing all of this and appreciate the irony. In Scene 6, when the sergeant, speaking of the conflict in Korea, asks Sammy if he would stand and watch while someone beat up his little brother Sammy of course tells him he

⁶⁶VI p.61

⁶⁷Ibid. pp.93-94

would not, but would help him.⁶⁸ Yet, in Scene 13 Sammy watches the immigration officials under his command drag Meño, his brother, away despite his attempts to escape. Therefore he does permit his brother to be beaten up, albeit unknowingly. Finally, the focus on the railroad illustrates the consummate irony of Mexicans being deported on the railroads they built. This point is given visual force in Scene 4, when, with the cry of "Let her rip!" and the shunting of the train as it departs, a whole family is ripped up, leaving one little boy in the United States, despite Amparo's stated goal of not having to "desapartar a la familia".

Esperanza's theatre has by this stage, then, long superceded the *acto's* offering of a course of action leading to a practical solution to a particular problem. What they offer instead is a wider climate of debate in which audiences can be aware of moral choices to be made. Indeed, the whole issue of *vendidismo* is in itself a question of the definition of the problem of choice in society for the Chicano. The major irony at the heart of **La Víctima**, however, is that Esperanza, desirous of unity, urge their audiences to take a moral stance which ultimately they will have to assume as individuals in their own walks of life and for which they will have to accept the consequences alone as there no longer exists an organization or Movement to represent them. The group's own embracing of Marxism and collectivism and the few optimistic slogans touted in the piece have, therefore, a profoundly hollow ring. In this play Esperanza come up against a brick wall as they show themselves to be unable to come to terms with the aspirations and assimilative tendencies of middle-class Chicanos, or sellouts. In their view, such people are victims of capitalism because, although they achieve material gain, they become morally bankrupt. Clearly this analysis is trite, moralistic and, ultimately, theatrically and ideologically, ineffectual. As we will see, in the group's work over the next few years Esperanza continued to be unable to resolve this problem.

⁶⁸Ibid. pp.33-34

CHAPTER EIGHT: THEATRE THROUGH THE VACUUM, 1979-1984.

After **La Víctima** El Teatro de la Esperanza experienced a lengthy period of confusion. Transition to a full time operation and a successful trip to Poland did little to mitigate this loss of direction. By way of explanation Mark Weinberg affirms that the success of **La Víctima** was "the catalyst for the dissolution of the collective that created it".¹ It led to some members leaving the group as they were not willing to make a full time commitment which would imply the loss of the financial security provided by other jobs.

Esperanza therefore were put in the onerous position of having to build a new collective and became overburdened in attempting simultaneously to both employ and teach their creative method to new members.² Although the collective numbered thirteen, including new members Rubén Castro and José Luis Valenzuela,³ the members of the troupe did not know each other sufficiently well to create theatre together.⁴ Not only this but the many years of existing on touring grants was also beginning to take its toll on the group. They were, quite simply, exhausted.

Aside from these practical considerations, Esperanza also had ideological problems. In terms of form, veteran members were loathe to continue to produce documentary plays as they regarded this approach aesthetically limiting.⁵ In discussions for their next play, **Hijos, Once A Family** which focused on the institution of the family in American society, it became clear also that members of the group did not share a common political analysis of capitalism. It was their general conviction that capitalist society levels great stresses on the family. They could not, however, agree on an explanation of how this occurs.⁶

¹Mark Weinberg, *Performance Generation: The History and Evolution of Collective Theatre In America*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1988 p.118

²Weinberg, op. cit. p.119

³Jorge Huerfano, *Tenaz Talks Teatro*, Spring, 1979 p.9

⁴Weinberg, op. cit. p.122

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Although these factors are important in that they reveal the extent to which the group's cohesion had been undermined, of particular relevance for this study is the absence of any reference to the Chicano Movement in **Hijos**. This is clearly due to the fact that, approaching the end of the decade of the 1970s, what had loosely been termed the Chicano Movement had ceased to exert any real influence on events affecting the Chicano minority in the United States.⁷ Given this vacuum in radical, or perhaps more accurately, militant political terms, Esperanza, as a group which had formed when such activism and optimism flourished, struggled to exist theatrically when the political and ideological framework of the Movement began to collapse. Furthermore, this assertion is in no degree undermined by the fact that even when activism did flourish, Esperanza charted their own path through the labyrinth of political and cultural issues. Having worked to define themselves as a political theatre group insofar as they interacted with and corresponded to Chicano activism, - and it must be stressed, more often than not with their own stances on Movement questions - their loss of direction, both political and theatrical - was palpable once the frame of reference of that Movement began to disappear.

This was also felt financially. As the American political system moved right and ceased to tolerate the call of minority groups for self-determination and a voice in policy-making so too was reduced the availability of monies for art projects for minorities. 1978 was a critical year. The Raza Unida party had all but disappeared, Affirmative Action was being dealt a lethal blow in the wake of the Bakke affair and Proposition 13 meant tax exemptions for the wealthy and the subsequent reduction of social services funding for the less well-off. Esperanza chose not to follow the route of Teatro Campesino into commercial theatre at this juncture due to their stance against capitalism and their fear of artistic compromise. However, the inferior productions which issued from the group for some years reflect the financial and ideological difficulties which plagued them.

⁷Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, New York, Harper and Row, 1981 pp.384-5

Hijos, Once a Family premiered in 1979, was the target of many negative criticisms, despite various reworkings and standing ovations from the public. R.G. Davis simply dismissed it as "the first Chicano soap opera".⁸ Carlos Morton and Mario Barrera were less critical of the play's dramatics, describing it as "dramatically powerful yet politically nebulous," but questioned whether it was "merely an exercise in nostalgia", as:

the intimate and extended family that they seem to defend is appropriate only to a very different kind of society - one which is rural, non-industrial, one with very little mobility of any kind.⁹

In their view the play provided no alternative to:

the glorification of a family structure whose time has come and gone, and which can only survive as a vestige in an industrialized world.¹⁰

These comments highlight the play's focus on daily trivia, its melodramatic style and its lack of social analysis.¹¹ The plot outlines and focuses on the moral dissolution of a Chicano family, in what we might regard as Esperanza's logical progression from the moral fall of Sammy in *La Víctima*. Manuel, the head of the household, opens a savings account destined to the realization of his dream of returning, with his family, to a "ranchito" in rural Texas. Unfortunately, his wife Lola, who manages the family budget, is unable to save from her husband's wages and is afraid to tell him so. Meanwhile Manuel teaches his children how to work in the garden in preparation for the day when they will have a farm. He is not, however, so wholly wrapped up in this dream that he does not interact with the issues which affect him as a worker; he challenges his supervisor at work, quite unsuccessfully, about low wages, illegal practices and noxious chemical fumes in the workplace.

⁸Weinberg, op. cit. p.122

⁹ Carlos Morton and Mario Barrera, 'Hijos: Once Upon A Family,' *Revista Literaria El Tecolote*, Vol. 10 No. 9, June 1980 p.6. Review of play in Berkeley, November 9, 1979.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Weinberg, op. cit. p.129

Meanwhile the children grow up. As they do, Lola is forced to overspend on the things they want and they find more interesting ways of spending their time than digging the garden. A crisis occurs when one of the boys is caught smoking marijuana. Manuel decides he ought to take his family away there and then to a rural haven free of the evils of the city, but his wife confronts him with the empty savings book and their lack of options. Soon after, the daughter, Connie, starts seeing the supervisor's son and becomes more and more ashamed of her "cheap" family simply because they cannot easily send her to nursing school. The other son, Junior, is also troublesome as, although he dislikes the idea of working where his father does, he can find no alternative. Moreover, he refuses to hand over his wages every week as he is not in agreement with how his parents spend them. In the midst of all this gloom one bright note is the younger son's graduation from high school.

Manuel meanwhile continues to pressurise his supervisor as workers continue to become sick due to the noxious fumes. He attacks the injustice of workers losing their pensions for being unable to work until they qualify for retirement. The workers decide to strike but Manuel has to count Junior out as he refuses to show solidarity and displays a heartless attitude towards the workers. The threat of being fired as a troublemaker hangs over Manuel, who gets drunk to lament the break up of his family the night before he joins a strike which will not be won.

With **Hijos, Once a Family** Esperanza reach the lowest point in their battle with the issue of assimilation and social mobility for Chicanos in the United States. The play attempts to place the blame for the disintegration of the family on the children's desire for "cosas," and portrays them as thoroughly negative and unidimensional. Their materialism, mysteriously engendered, is set up to be the cause of the family's downfall. Lola, the mother, exculpates the children, saying, "Something made them be this way" and "things have changed", but the audience, like the characters, is left not knowing the reasons why.¹² Although the

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audience is expected to sympathise with Manuel, largely through melodramatic and sentimental moments, much criticism can be levelled at this character. Detrimental to the plot at several tense moments is the tendency of Manuel to present typical *macho* responses rather than reflecting on what he is being told. A reply such as:

Diles que paren con sus mitotes antes de que les rompa sus hocicotes,¹³

may contribute to the humour but it detracts from the seriousness of the events being discussed. Such responses belong to the *acto*, and should appear only when the motivation of the characters is clear from other comments. Despite having managed to put two of the three children through higher education Manuel feels himself to have been a failure, due to his own nostalgia for a different lifestyle in different conditions. In effect Manuel, and not his children, may be regarded as the reason for the family discord for allowing his resolve to return to the country life to slow the assimilation process of his children into the realities of city life. Rather than the play laying the blame at the feet of capitalism, much of the blame lies with Manuel, something which was almost certainly not the group's intention. Fundamentally, then, the play fails because the discussion of the estrangement of the family is not well integrated into the discussion of capitalism. The platitudes given at the end of the play as to why the family fell apart reflect the lack of clarity in the group's objectives at the time.

That Esperanza attempted to create a valid piece of theatre is clear. Three versions were produced, the first of which was "just a story - dealing with an issue through a story".¹⁴ The second version involved the creation of an external story, to achieve a "play within a play" and was also a search for "political clarity." To this end characters in a bar comment on and re-enact the story of Manuel and his family.¹⁵ For Esperanza this form was also:

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Rodrigo Duarte Clark, quoted in Weinberg, *op. cit.* p.122

¹⁵Weinberg, *op. cit.* p.129

an extension of their investigation of Brechtian performance - now it was the character from the external story who was the "demonstrator" but this time a demonstrator with a clearly documented point of view.¹⁶

The third version saw the group's perfection of their technique of "rapid character transformations" in which the actors would revert to the characters of the external story - set in a *cantina*, "even in the midst of an emotional moment" in the internal story.¹⁷ Yet despite the attention paid to the characters, their motivations remained unclear¹⁸ and indeed the scenes of the children growing were predictable and clichéd. Name-calling in the form of accusations of being "gabacho" or "pachuco" slotted the children into Chicano stereotypes of a kind that the group appeared to have progressed away from. The play conformed to the pattern already seen of using simplistic, not to mention tedious, devices for the creation of a polemic around the central issue of whether to stand up to the boss. One worker emphasises the "cons" rather than the "pros" of action. His function is that of presenting the less radical attitude towards industrial action but he appears in every play up until this point and often, as here, he has no other speaking part in the play. Three versions were, therefore, insufficient to correct these flaws. Weinberg argues that the play failed largely due to a lack of the research needed to create a clear thesis, and "lack of time given to discovery in the writing process".¹⁹

The polemic of the strike is linked with the theme of the family, the understanding being that families must unite to effect change in working conditions by striking. Manuel's disillusionment comes when he sees that his own family will not unite with the "family" of workers. Here, then, the group build on their previous concept of the Mexicans as forming a family and now focus on the Mexicans' status as workers. The play argues that recourse to the family - and a vision of that family as one in which the mother stays at home to look after the children - can eradicate industrial abuse. Esperanza clearly play into the hands of the

¹⁶Ibid. p.123

¹⁷Ibid. p.134

¹⁸Ibid. p.127

¹⁹Ibid. p.129

politically right wing in arguing such a thesis. Furthermore, having emphasised the importance of education in previous works, here education is used by the group to illustrate the divisions among social classes. The boss's son, a "rich Mexican from the West Side", or "coconut" attends University but is dismissed as "all Ivy League". He is cast as a negative character whom Connie marries for economic reasons and through him education becomes associated with the epithets which come his way. Clearly, Esperanza were writing at a time when education was reverting to being the sole preserve of the wealthy, despite the Chicano Movement's efforts to democratise it, but they give the impression that education per se is undesirable.

Hijos, then, amounts to an exercise in nostalgia as well as an acknowledgment of the Chicano's inability to share in the American Dream. Manuel suffers the irony of being a man who brings home a savings book for the accumulation of capital in a capitalist society, but who is unable to save money due to the demands made on his children by that consumer society. He takes refuge in an alternative dream, that of the return to the land, symbolized by his small garden plot. However, Manuel, and Esperanza, know the futility both of this posture and of strike action. Just as Manuel decides to strike while knowing this to be an impotent gesture, so too do Esperanza offer **Hijos, Once a Family**. The dream of returning to the land and leading an agrarian lifestyle is as much a dream as the American one - indeed, both may be one and the same - but Esperanza appear to have reasoned that during this period of political impotence, a dream is all the Chicanos have to cling to.

With their next play Esperanza embark, metaphorically speaking, on a journey to Latin America. This play, entitled **El Pulpo** was a departure for them in more than one way.²⁰ Fundamentally it represented a flight from the question of the social mobility of Chicanos in North American society. Aware that the class struggle, hitherto supported in the Chicano Movement, had reached a state of impasse in the Goliath of the north, Esperanza, along with

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many intellectuals, turned their attention to Latin America and the Third World, where the prospect of popular revolution appeared politically viable.²¹ Not having dealt particularly capably with capitalism in *Hijos, Once a Family*, Esperanza saw the need to examine it in depth. *El Pulpo* is, then, an attempt to illustrate, to Chicano audiences, the nature of capitalist exploitation of Latin America and of workers in the United States. Esperanza also chose this moment to develop away from the docudrama and presented a theatre of symbol and allegory. Significantly also, in the wake of the collapse of their ensemble organization, individual playwrights began to surface within the group. *El Pulpo* was written by Rodrigo Duarte Clark, once the thesis of the play was collectively elaborated, and was directed by Jorge Huerta. It was not well received when it opened in November 1980, as a work-in-progress, despite a simple, linear plot.²² A waiter, Johnny, working in a North American restaurant run by a woman with a voracious appetite for food, is nonetheless going hungry. The food itself comes from the Third World, where starving workers revolt against their misery. Johnny is sent to silence them but he becomes aware of their exploitation by his employer's envoy, the Ambassador, and by the army, and defies his boss. Refusing to be co-opted by her, he is condemned to death.

Esperanza posited that the symbolist style of the play was responsible for the failure of Chicano audiences to support it.²³ An allegorical piece, it focused on the decades of the nineteen sixties and seventies and presented the United States as a restaurant, the American labour force as a waiter, multinational companies as the woman called the Octopus and the Third World as a village. Although about economic relationships, the playwright chose to explain these in terms of food, somewhat in the manner of a fairy tale. Likewise, although retaining a Chicano linguistic blend, which ultimately roots it in the United States, the play eschews clear signals of time and place and strongly evokes a Latin American cultural setting. Yet, rather than these experimental aspects of the piece alone, it was in general a

²¹Notably in Nicaragua.

²²Weinberg, op. cit. p.131

²³Ibid.

"feeling of confusion about process" which afflicted the group.²⁴ Decisions had to be made about the audience being sought, the style of theatre suited to them - and to the group members tired of documentary realism - and the political ideology to be disseminated through the piece. Esperanza wished to try something new but to avoid alienating their Chicano working class audiences, who they believed would not be interested in experimental, internationalized works, they decided to make the play fun. The intellectualized politicizing in the play was softened to an extent by a circus atmosphere of pyrotechnics and visual razzmatazz, yet it seems clear that this was not entirely successful.²⁵ The "sense of separateness from the community" ²⁶ experienced by Esperanza at the time, is, in my view manifest through *El Pulpo*'s lack of attention to the circumstances of working-class Chicanos. Creating a new theatrical and visual style was a less arduous option, and the group experienced a sense of theatrical experimentation and growth.²⁷ Nonetheless, having something to say to Chicanos was not easy. Clearly, Esperanza never sought to remain a community theatre group, yet they did not relish the loss of that audience, a prospect in part brought about by years of touring and a life style far removed from that of barrio people. Perhaps symbolism was not pleasing to these barrio residents but it is clear that Esperanza's shift to a Latin American landscape was less so. Despite the obvious connections of Chicanos to Latin America, which Esperanza expertly point out, the political culture of that region differs dramatically from that of North America. While parallels can be drawn - between guerrilla warfare and Chicano rebellion; multinational exploitation of the Third World and American inner cities; dictatorship and faceless government; police brutality and military repression - it is clear that Chicanos no longer responded to a revolutionary rhetoric which evoked changes on a world-wide scale.

It is, however, true to say that important information is disseminated in this piece. The Octopus symbolizes the nature of the multinational company as a devouring beast, rather

²⁴Ibid. p.135

²⁵Ibid. p.133

²⁶Ibid. p.135

²⁷Ibid. p.135

than as a service which is provided for the betterment of the country, as corporate rhetoric would have the nation believe. It is pointed out that workers must meet the needs of commerce, and not vice versa, and when they see the need, companies will take from the workers what is by rights theirs to prolong their own survival. One of the major protagonists exclaims "do you think the Octopus is going to tell you that he ate your food?",²⁸ thus indicting the media for being in the pockets of the multinational companies. A bright note is introduced in the figure of an elderly lady, and exemplary rebel, who represents the historical nature of a culture of resistance and struggle for liberation. She also strikes a blow for her sex when she spurns the attempts of younger men to convert her into a harmless old *beata* whose only function is to pray and make *tortillas*.

Nonetheless, despite this feminist touch, in this play Esperanza's political convictions were not presented in such a way as to connect with their audiences' concerns. Although espousing Marxism and being clear about their ideology, they did not have the formula by which to communicate effectively with Chicano audiences, generally speaking, concerned about finding an economic foothold in American life.

A few years later, with **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** Esperanza did, however, make that connection, dramatically and politically, simply because they presented a piece which acknowledged that the Chicano Movement was dead and gone. Paradoxically, however, the very existence of the play, and its attempt to revive something of the spirit of *chicanismo*, stood as a message of hope that change - however small - might be achieved. **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** uses the analysis of multinational corporations found in the previous play but is a complex and consummately brilliant play and the circumstances of its creation owe a debt to pragmatism as well as to comic genius. Its initial conception, however, grew out of political motivation. The group were approached by the committee organising a commemoration of the Haymarket riots in Chicago to create a play reflecting

²⁸EP

workers' struggle. The project fell through, but the work on *¿No se paga? ¡No se paga!* was already underway.²⁹ The title of the play will strike a chord with those familiar with the work of Italian playwright Dario Fo. This is no accident; a play for hard times, Esperanza's adaptation of Fo's classic farce represents for the group a break with their own tradition of lengthy original creation. Esperanza had decided to develop other methods of creating plays, due to the constant pressure of requiring a new play to tour and the break down of the group's collective methodology. They also needed a more compact play which would incur smaller overheads.³⁰ A farce was the ideal dramatic form in these circumstances. It could be eked out and fully exploited for laughs, yet would only require one setting, four characters (and a multi-character Everyone Else) and the action would take place in one day, rather than on an epic scale. In 1984 the group decided:

We have to develop a method for adapting the piece that will give us quick results, a high level of quality, with the minimal amount of energy. This condition is basically due to a lack of time and human resources. This condition therefore demands that we use a method that depends less on collective collaboration and process and one that taps more on the writing talent presently in the group.³¹

It is highly significant that Esperanza chose to present an adaptation of an existing play. Gone were the days when Chicanos believed themselves and their culture to be unique; Esperanza reflect this by acknowledging the existence of mainstream or well-known works by non-Chicanos which could be made to depict the Chicano's social predicament. Lalo Cervantes, who was responsible for most of the adaptation, claimed Esperanza chose the play because "the characters are so Chicano already".³² He affirmed that people like those in the play are found in every culture and are universal. Chicano theatre, then, had begun to

²⁹M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

³⁰Ibid

³¹El Teatro de la Esperanza, document entitled *Proposed Plan For 'We Can't Pay, We Won't Pay'* group archives, Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

³²M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

stress the similarities between racial and cultural minorities rather than stress the differences.³³

Lalo Cervantes, in the main, wrote the play, availing himself of a variety of sources in the creation of the Chicano version of Fo's work. Cervantes and Evelina Fernández had been investigating plant closures which were afflicting the community around Los Angeles. They interviewed Bert Corona and the United Auto Workers and spent six months learning about labour activity affecting Chicanos.³⁴ In terms of the script, three versions were used to bring Esperanza's adaptation to the stage. One, a British translation set in England, was used as a reader. Two American adaptations were also used, though both were set in Italy. The first was a version in Spanish, by Beatrice Rizk, and the second was in English, a translation made by Joan Holden for the San Francisco Mime Troupe.³⁵ The group went through these choosing the best versions of scenes, studying their "movements and beats". They found what they considered to be the major movements of the play and replaced the critique of the Communist Party with one of sagging unionism and the lack of working class solidarity. This was the most difficult stage, the actual scripting being for the most part a more downhill process. The group intended to work with the original structure as much as possible but much of the Esperanza version is a total rewrite although "some scenes are further away and some scenes are closer".³⁶ Although an elaborate plan, involving a Mesa Redonda, an Artistic Commission and a Writing Team, was devised for the bringing of the play to the stage, in practical terms Cervantes and Duarte Clark carried out the writing with frequent reviews by the whole group which at this stage comprised only five members.³⁷ A structural and ideological analysis of the play and a consideration of its adaptation to the Chicano context preceded the writing. During a second phase written scenes were reviewed

³³Also the case with Luis Valdez's *I Don't Need To Show You No Stinking Badges* and the later film, *La Bamba*.

³⁴M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

before the group and eventually a final draft began to emerge.³⁸ It is crucial, however, to note that although the group envisaged a place for improvisation in the creative process this was not the first creative step. The writing went ahead before the actors took the stage to improvise around what had been written, a reversal of the process traditionally used by Esperanza. The result, a work-in-progress, in which the group felt the message was not clear, was toured in the North East in the spring of 1984 and drawing on "reacciones, críticas y comentarios del público", it was reworked in:

un verano en lucha libre con la obra, porque lo que nos habíamos propuesto era trasladar la situación política fuera de ese departamento de Antonia y Gerardo.³⁹

The new version was performed for six weeks in San Francisco, where the final version was scripted by Cervantes over fifteen days. In their native Santa Barbara the play played to full houses, received critical acclaim and was selected as "The Best Production of the Year" by the Santa Barbara News and Review.⁴⁰ The group had some help in making this possible as they performed in collaboration with Santa Barbara's Ensemble Theatre Project group. They used the ETP's theatre and, as most of the audience members were the ETP's regulars Esperanza got full houses. Esperanza also benefitted from the technical expertise of the venue's crew and indeed drew upon the talents of one of their actresses.⁴¹

These circumstances underline the fact that Chicano groups in the mid-1980s had few options for survival and exemplify the Chicano theatre practitioner's need to work with, and not against, Anglo-American concerns, or in present day jargon, the mainstream. Chicano groups are unfortunately faced with stark choices. They can choose to continue to starve and scrape by in isolation, perpetuating dependency on an ever-waning source of grant aid, or they can begin to develop the financial, managerial and technical expertise of the mainstream

³⁸El Teatro de la Esperanza, information document, group archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

³⁹Angel Pineda in conversation with Anita Mattos, *El Día*, Mexico, 1987 p.9

⁴⁰El Teatro de la Esperanza, information document, group archives, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

⁴¹M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

stage themselves. Theatre, as with everything else in the United States, is a business, and Esperanza were, at this stage, accepting this, however grudgingly. Given this, the irony of Esperanza's Chicano adaptation of a known play being met with its best publicised success before a borrowed audience, in a non-Chicano theatre, is marginally less stark.

With *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* Esperanza return to the barrio, to the United States and to the Chicanos. Leaving behind the generalizations of *El Pulpo*, they return to the smaller picture, that of Chicano families and couples in East Los Angeles. The play is set in "The Present" and the action takes place through the course of a day. The costumes were fairly simple and realistic though not as suggestive as in the group's early days. The women needed big coats to cover their fake bellies and the men dressed as workers in overalls. The National Guardsman wore combat fatigues, the Inspector a raincoat, the trucker a woollen hat and bulky jacket and the mariachi, as might be imagined, a "big hat". The set was very much in line with the mood of the piece, which despite the theme of poverty was quick-moving and bright. It also reflected the low economic status of the characters. On one of the walls, there was a painting of the Last Supper, a nice touch of irony, as this family was in danger of experiencing its last supper every evening. The furniture was rough and painted in gaudy mismatched colours, the focal point being a table centre stage. A sofa was placed stage right and at the back of the stage there were various cupboards, one large enough to hold the Inspector, and an oven which opened to accommodate stolen food. Like the play, the set, although well constructed by César Olguín, gave the impression of being ready to fall apart at any point. An additional piece of scenery was a screen-type wall which was set up near the front of the stage for the cops and robbers chase to run round and which was put into place with all the lights out.⁴²

A brief outline of the plot will reveal its farcical nature. Antonia, a lively Chicana, takes part in an exhilarating riot at Safeway which involves the loss of thousands of dollars worth of

⁴²Observation of performances in Santa Barbara and Mexico City.

groceries. She has to hide her share from her law-abiding shop steward husband Gerardo and hangs the groceries around the neck of her friend Margie, thus creating a false belly under her coat. Gerardo is non-plussed by this sudden pregnancy but as he is worried about labour unrest at the electronics multinational where he works he swallows Antonia's lies. While Antonia is out a National Guardsman searches the house for stolen food. He does not find any but Gerardo, on Antonia's return decides to search again to be sure. Antonia distracts him, as well as an Inspector from the Los Angeles Police Department who arrives after the National Guardsman, by affirming Margie is in labour. Once she is taken off, ostensibly to have a baby transplant designed to save premature babies, her husband Luis returns home. He is angry as Gerardo, his shop steward, has negotiated an hours cut with the management, in the hope of forestalling layoffs. The talk turns to their wives and Luis is horrified to learn that Margie, who in fact cannot have children, is pregnant and in hospital. The men rush off to the hospital but the women arrive home shortly after to remove the stolen food to Antonia's father-in-law's garden shed. To get past the soldiers on the street, she too makes herself a big belly of groceries and they set off. Meanwhile the two men witness a lorry driver sabotage his load in solidarity with people just laid off by Harvey Electronics. Gerardo pontificates on the matter until he opens his wage packet and discovers he too has been dismissed. He and Luis then take one of the microchip processors lying on the road in lieu of wages and leave in a hurry, pursued by a policeman. At this time Antonia and Margie arrive home, their bellies stuffed with greens from the shed. The Inspector bursts in but the women stall for time by spinning him a yarn about the curse of Saint Eulalia. They manage to disable him and while trying to revive him they fill his belly with air from Gerardo's welding gear so that his stomach swells. They hang him up, unconscious, in a cupboard, fearing the consequences of getting "a dead cop pregnant". While the two women are in the bathroom, their husbands arrive home and hide the stolen microchip processor. The women emerge and Antonia, obviously pregnant, appears to have been the recipient of the baby transplant. Arguments ensue until the father-in-law drops by and tells how he saw the women leave the food in his shed. Gerardo is infuriated by her dishonesty but when Antonia stands up for herself and begins to pull out the stolen food from under the sofa, the

microchip processor emerges also. Gerardo's hypocrisy is revealed and he eventually admits that he must stand up to the bosses, who are responsible for their lack of money. A first step is to divide the food up among unemployed women at the church hall. Just before they leave, the "pregnant" inspector comes out of the cupboard and waddles off, inspired by his state of imminent motherhood.

Although the farcical plot is skimpy, it is made more substantial by the addition of other ingredients. It exemplifies the "cumulative effect of incongruity piled on incongruity"⁴³ and its broad acting, code-switched jokes and dialogue, its breakneck pace and re-enactments create an overall effect of mayhem. Underlying all of this, however, is a plot which is tight and neat, something often lacking in the group's previous works. Esperanza saved time in creating this play because, to some extent, the events of the plot were already mapped out in the pre-existing versions, and they were free to create funny dialogue and expert comedy. Coincidences, which Esperanza have always liked and used despite criticism that they were creating melodramatic pieces, are used in this play and find here their appropriate genre. This is also true of invective. **Hijos, Once a Family** was let down by the use of comic invective when serious dialogue was required. In **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** Esperanza's considerable skill in creating effective put-downs, insults, and ridicule in general, comes to the fore.

Importantly, in this play Esperanza address aspects of Anglo-American society and culture through satire. Again they are more successful here than in **Hijos**. Whereas in the former play the criticism of American society was from a perspective of loss, as regards the Chicano's "true" rural culture, in **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** Esperanza recognise the Anglo-American or consumeristic elements which in fact make up part of the Chicano's culture. Rather than seek a false and fictitious alternative Chicano culture which is unattainable, they acknowledge the fact that Chicanos have urban, American lifestyles and

⁴³Moelwyn Merchant, *Comedy*, The Critical Idiom 21, Methuen, 1972 p.16

limit themselves to satirising aspects of these without aspiring to eschew them. Similarly, the play is almost entirely in English to make it accessible to non-Chicanos as well as to Chicanos. Although the group argue that they can vary the linguistic blend according to the make-up of particular audiences, this was done unsuccessfully during a trip to Mexico. Little of the play was translated into Spanish and even obvious code-switching possibilities were ignored.⁴⁴ Anglo critics, for their part, welcomed "occasional Spanish phrases", as these merely meant that non-Chicanos would "miss the occasional turn to a joke". The play's theatrical elements such as mime, story-telling and buffoonery greatly compensated for the smattering of Spanish.⁴⁵ Esperanza also aided English-speaking audiences by often presenting seminal sections bilingually. Ideas expressed in Spanish are repeated in English using a different syntax. Much of the dialogue between Luis and Gerardo utilizes this approach:

L. Speaking of help, tenemos que ir a la iglesia hoy en la noche.
 G. Since when do you go to the church on a Tuesday?
 L. Desde que cerraron Harvey Electronics.
 G. They closed Harvey's? ⁴⁶

Spanish is the language of all affective expressions, such as *la pobrecita*, *chingoncito*, and swear words such as *cabrón*, *retependejo*, etc. The English in which such expressions are embedded and the graphic miming make clear what the swear words mean. In any case many of these basic words are now known to English speakers.⁴⁷ For Chicanos these words have an in-group significance and produce emotive responses, be these of shock at bad language or delight at hearing people on stage speak as they do. Though some may have found the swearing offensive, it clearly also has a comic purpose. Other key words which invariably appear in the vast majority of Chicano theatre production are *frijoles*, *patrón*, *escuincle*, *chingada*. Some combination of these is found in every play the group performs. References to food and meals in *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* often come in Spanish, whereas

⁴⁴Paul Rauber, in conversation with Anita Mattos, *Co-op News*, San Francisco, September 30th, 1985.

⁴⁵Barry Spacks, 'High Marx,' *Santa Barbara News and Review*, November 14, 1985 p.5

⁴⁶NSP

⁴⁷See Ramiro Cristóbal, 'Se habla español,' *Cambio 16*, Madrid, No. 1143, October 18, 1993, p.84

conversations about medical technology and unions tend to be dominated by English. The shift from Spanish to English allows for some comic misunderstandings. Luis, needing to borrow Gerardo's keys tells him "Give me the keys," in his rather heavy Mexican accent. Gerardo is horrified and retorts, "I'm not giving you a kiss!" Luis, in Spanish, clarifies the error by saying, "¡Tus llaves, pendejo!" and giving it force with a thump.

Despite the clear preference for English over Spanish, almost certainly for pragmatic, business reasons, Esperanza wished to "chicanoize" the Fo play. Although **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** is not primarily in Spanish, Esperanza chose not to eliminate it entirely and continued to present the Chicano's code-switching speech. This is one way in which Fo's unilingual piece was "chicanoized." Furthermore, the play presents the Chicanos' points of view on a variety of topics - the Chicano's point of view being that of the majority of the working-class residents of the East Los Angeles barrio - particularly the experience of unemployment in East Los Angeles. Although there are Anglo characters, try as they might, they are not able to impose their views on this group of Chicano neighbours. Indeed, the latter illustrate that the Anglo characters are the aliens in the barrio. Having said this, however, Esperanza's play has a broader focus than the narrowly nationalistic one just outlined. As mentioned above, there is a clear move towards multi-racial characterization which underlines the fact that Esperanza by this play, if not before, no longer regard Chicanos as culturally unique. They do not confuse culture with its artifacts and recognise that, even while they have their own customs and lifestyle, they have much in common with other minority groups in the United States. Similarly, Esperanza have shifted away from a view of dramatic adaptation held earlier in the Chicano theatre movement. It was previously believed that the Chicano's circumstances and culture were too unique for him to find echoes in traditional Western dramatic works.⁴⁸ Therefore it was incumbent on the Chicano to create his own plays. Clearly, with **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** Esperanza acknowledge that

⁴⁸See Alurista, 'Cultural Nationalism and Chicano Literature 1965-1975,' in Juan Bruce-Novoa et. al. (eds), *Missions in Conflict*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, 1986 pp.41-52

the Chicano's culture bears comparison with other cultures and that by carefully selecting pieces, adaptation is feasible.

To outline Esperanza's conception of the Chicano's identity at this point in their history, we might begin by observing that the group are here at pains to illustrate what a Chicano is not. He bears no resemblance to the image which the LAPD Inspector has of him. He is equipped with the kind of Spanish which will certainly not serve him in the barrio. In a bland accent he announces "Yo también conozco el español!" - stressing the wrong syllables and making a fundamental verb confusion often made by English speakers. He turns to Isabel and says "Hola, Isabel, ¿cómo está usted?", a stilted phrase of the kind found in Spanish textbooks. For Chicanos this Spanish is a source of fun, as it bears no relation to the kind of language spoken in the barrio for survival. It smacks of an attitude whereby one Spanish register is correct, or standard, and the other is incorrect or non-standard, and therefore inferior. For Anglos who have begun to learn Spanish this section is a reminder of their own inadequate approach to the understanding of the culture of Spanish speaking peoples. This section constitutes a jab on the part of the group at the authorities, such as the police and welfare officers, who have made inadequate attempts to communicate with the Chicanos in their own language.⁴⁹

¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga! also stresses, however, that millions of Chicanos do not have to be spoken to in Spanish, as they speak English and are bilingual. The play underlines the fact that Chicanos, rather than being foreign, illegal outsiders, are often native, legal residents and citizens of the United States. **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** redefines the Chicano, then, away from the image of the newly arrived Mexican immigrant; there are no threats of deportation in this play and the debates concern the legal citizen. The group's treatment of history is confined to the relatively narrow period of the previous twenty years of the Chicano's struggle for rights in his own country. Esperanza return to

⁴⁹Pastora San Juan Cafferty and William McCreedy, *Hispanics in the United States: A New Social Agenda*, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1985 p.199

their Chicano roots in this play and take stock of the twenty-year-old Chicano Movement and indeed, Chicano theatre. In a crucial scene at the beginning of the second act, the births of the theatre movement and the political one are evoked. The assumption is that both movements were twins and that the Chicano theatre movement was born out of social struggle. Rather than shifting back in time to the sixties, however, techniques are used by the group to bring the sixties picket line into the living room set occupied by Antonia and Margie. Antonia's narrative of the events in Delano in 1965 is much more than rhetoric. She re-enacts the events via mime, voice changes and the use of props already on the stage to represent something else, and shifts back and forth between narrating in the present and acting out all the roles of the Delano past. She tells the story of how her family of strikbreakers eventually supported *la huelga* and simultaneously maintains her role as the friend of Margarita, who listens to her in awe. The audience is able to visualise very sharply the scene on the picket line. Antonia portrays a variety of *acto* characters; Gerardo, whom she first met on the picket line, the grower, her *amá* and *apá* and even herself as a young girl. While the re-enacted *acto* has many of the elements of the classic Delano presentations - the *patrón* is fat and rich and chews on a cigar, and most of the characters are clearly divided into the goodies and the baddies, heroes and villains - it clearly revises the character of the strikebreaker or *esquirol*, and illustrates that he was not intrinsically wicked, as the early Campesino presented him. Antonia tells how her father found himself in the dilemma of whether to support the striking farmworkers or take their place as an *esquirol* in the fields to feed his family. He considered the dilemma as he looked at the police, the strikers and the source of his hoped for income for food, the fields. He made the decision to lead his family away, inspiring others to do the same and as such, support the strikers. Antonia tells how there and then she learned the meaning of solidarity. It is clear from the re-enactment that being a strikebreaker was merely a means of feeding one's family, but that the *esquirols*, like the *huelguistas*, had to learn to give priority to something other than the immediate need of a job. Solidarity with the strikers had to become more important than individual gain, for the good of all.

Brilliantly performed by the group's talented Anita Mattos, the scene brings the fields of Delano to the audience. Yet Esperanza wisely avoid the presentation of the UFW flag on stage, unlike in **Guadalupe** where it figured prominently. Here the handiest prop does in the telling of the story. Antonia is wearing a red apron and uses it to represent the UFW flag which her mother picked up and waved in Delano. Despite the fact that the apron does not have the black eagle of the UFW on it, the act of waving it converts it not only into a flag, but into a symbol, one of the most basic and lasting of Chicano theatre, and indeed, Chicano literature.⁵⁰ It is still the symbol supreme of the struggle of the Chicano for social and human rights. Accompanied by the cry of "¡Que viva la huelga!" by Antonia's frail mother, the waving of the apron and the seriousness with which the scene is played - the breakneck pace slowed, even to moments of stillness, before a hushed audience - is a great symbolic moment, which invokes the spirit of struggle of Delano, allowing the Chicano to come into close contact again with his *chicanismo*. The scene is undoubtedly nostalgic but its emotional impact infuses the play with something more than just debate to carry it to its conclusion of solidarity and harmony. It is the cornerstone of the play and Antonia, as she enacts it, is reliving a personal moment in her own development, a historical one for Chicano labour, a Chicano movement one, as Delano crystallised the Movement, and a theatrical one, namely the rebirth of theatre for Chicanos. The scene's import is of a symbolic nature; this recourse to the UFW again demonstrates that although it was the shining success of the Chicano Movement, its scope was narrow and in the reigning political climate of the mid-eighties, unlikely to be repeated. Clearly, for Esperanza, at this stage, the UFW was merely an example of what solidarity could achieve. There is no suggestion that it exists as a vehicle for activism in the present. Despite the short period of time which has passed since its formation, it is presented, not only as historical, but legendary. It is, however, poignant that Esperanza, the group which has clung to the pivotal moment of change in labour disputes when a character achieves solidarity with a cause, has to return to the point of origin, the fields of Delano, as the one clear example of a time when striking was effective. Esperanza

⁵⁰Luis Leal, *Aztlán y México*, Binghamton, New York, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1985 p.22

reaffirm their original hope in the fusing of art and politics, although both have progressed, by creating this scene to recall in admiration the genesis of something unrepeatable but able to inspire the present generation. After fifteen years of theatrical experience, and in the light of Teatro Campesino's commercial trivia, they remind the audience of a time when the purpose of Chicano theatre was political as well as theatrical.

Therefore, the Delano scene has a number of functions in the play. It brings a lived experience to Margie, who is much younger than Antonia and only superficially aware of the key slogans and divisions of this period of Chicano history. Despite being unable to give a detailed political analysis Antonia can aid her understanding and communicate the meaning of solidarity. The focus is on coming to awareness on the strength of another person's conviction rather than on their rhetoric. Margie, as a member of the younger generation which did not take part in the Chicano Movement, responds to Antonia, who did. Antonia is cast as a living connection and this was at a time when universities and colleges were emphasising in their courses the discovery of history through interview and oral sources.⁵¹ The objective is to move Margie to take part in acts of solidarity in the present. Antonia tells her, "Margarita, this is your moment in history!" and proceeds to make her a fake belly to get past the soldiers. The audience laughs at the reintroduction of the farce, yet they have just seen Gerardo's fake belly and cigar flaunt the patrón's authority. Antonia invites Margarita to engage in a piece of theatre for social reasons, as occurred in Delano, but it is finally the example of lots of "pregnant" women in the street which sways her. She makes the connection between the role of Antonia's parents twenty years previously and her own role of the present. She hums "Que viva la huelga" as she dons her belly but the chant is sung only as a catchy reminder of the moving story just heard. It is not taken up as a cry for the present, as this would have weakened the scene by introducing a note of anachronism and irrelevance. However, the spirit of the words remains to provide a link from the past to the present, the point being that solidarity is never entirely extinct, but merely dormant.

⁵¹This was the case at the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1987.

The Delano scene is also the wellspring of the thematic element which runs through the play. This is the affirmation that formerly radical Chicanos have become afraid of activism for fear of losing the limited gains achieved. Esperanza express their concern about the lack of activism in the mid-eighties, when many Chicanos and other minority groups declined to voice their aims and settled for the status quo. This lack of a realistic strategy is dealt with through the figure of Gerardo. Antonia's first reference to him early in the play is, "the trouble with Gerardo is that he respects the law".⁵² He is a union leader, authoritarian and pompous due to his position as a shop steward and his past in the Chicano Movement. He relies on his past struggles to present himself as always right and frequently makes illogical statements such as, "I'm not wrong, I'm a shop steward!"⁵³ Although he often becomes befuddled, he delivers confused speeches with the greatest assuredness. A father figure, he was formerly truly a Chicano leader, but has lost the claim to that representativeness. He has forfeited solidarity with the workforce to maintain his position before his bosses and represents warped union leadership. Exercising power - or appearing to do so - has become for him an end in itself rather than the means by which solidarity is achieved and maintained, and from this stem his rigid moral stances.

As mentioned above, this was not always Gerardo's stance. Through Antonia we see him in his most idealistic phase with the UFW at Delano. There he uses theatre as a tool for the dissemination of ideas seminal to the struggle and is courageous, vital and worthy of respect. He embodies the ideals of the Chicano Movement at the time, when he needed a false belly to imitate the *patrón*. This is no longer the case - Gerardo has his own large belly now - the implication being that he is becoming like the *patrón*, not only physically but ideologically. Ironically, Gerardo as the *patrón* in the *acto*, attacks his fellow workers as "lousy no-good-for-nothing comunistas." Later in life Gerardo holds these convictions about workers

⁵²NSP

⁵³Tbid.

himself, referring to them as "good-for-nothing-radicals".⁵⁴ He is outraged when his workers slight his authority and take the initiative in calling for a mass meeting due to a proposed management speed-up on the production line. In response he negotiates cutbacks, ostensibly to save jobs, rather than support his workers' initiative.

As in past plays Esperanza introduce the issue of leadership, without invoking historical leaders on stage. Here, rather than seeking to document the emergence of leaders for the present - which, indeed, might not be feasible - they concentrate on the corruption of Chicanos who have led effectively in the past but who no longer serve the Chicanos' needs. Gerardo equates disruptive action with laziness, calling the radicals "huevones", and has therefore assumed the face of the Anglo boss. In this way Esperanza illustrate that the Chicano movement, or many of those involved in it, has become part of the system against which the group, and Chicanos, have always struggled. This return to the problem of selling out or *vendidismo* is developed further through a conversation which Gerardo has with a former car worker who became a member of the National Guard after he was made redundant. Gerardo thinks the Rambo-style Guardsman is selling out by harassing working people, while the Guardsman regards Gerardo as a "kiss-ass shop steward" selling out on the workers he represents. Both men defend their positions. The guardsman claims to be enforcing the law, "everybody's law," asserting that "you just can't take matters into your own hands".⁵⁵ Gerardo disagrees by saying that people have a right to defend themselves against abuse. He nonetheless rejects the guardsman's exhortation that union leaders should "fight fire with fire" and points out that radical tactics antagonise management and alienate workers and cause people to get hurt.⁵⁶ Both men contradict themselves during the exchange, adhering to the law and breaking it as they see fit. However, it is clear that while both appeal to high-flown moral explanations for their conduct, their actions are in fact based on self-interest. The guardsman took his present job as unemployment humiliated him and he

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

decided to look out for "number one". Gerardo acts as he does in order not to lose the privileged position he has. As the argument escalates the men face each other as follows:

Guardsman: What are you, some kind of a radical?
Gerardo: What are you, some kind of a republican?⁵⁷

Further on, when they have talked themselves into opposite corners and contradicted themselves several times over, they face each other and shout:

Gerardo: What are you, some kind of a radical?
Guardsman: What are you, some kind of a republican?⁵⁸

When the Guardsman leaves, Gerardo, unaware of his own lack of coherence, reflects:

En el mismo breath, he calls me a radical and a republican. People like that are dangerous.⁵⁹

The audience's enthusiastic response to this Cantinflésque scene illustrates that the point the group are making is not lost. Basically both men share similar views but are blinded to each other by the impressions given by the roles they play in society and by political labels. Rather than being quick to condemn one another the Chicanos - and by extension the American public in general - must see that they are working-class and are losing out to multi-national corporations. While the play opens with a wider discussion of the negative aspects of striking than in previous plays, it also emphasises that it is no longer a question of striking to save a few jobs or gain a small pay rise. Rather, activism is presented as utterly necessary to overcome an onslaught of structural unemployment and plant closures afflicting whole communities. In such a context, "selling out" is not quite as condemnable as was previously thought, as individuals are being forced to take any job for the purposes of survival. This is the context which was lacking in *La Víctima* but, as in that play, here in *¿No Se Paga?*

⁵⁷Ibid

⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹Ibid.

¡No Se Paga! the strategy of every man for himself is not right and must be opposed, particularly as the question of leadership is given attention in this play. Therefore, other characters work on Gerardo. The trucker offers unsolicited advice when Gerardo attacks his wrecking of the truck as immoral, illegal and futile:

You're right (...) you're a real good example. A real worker. A real American. A real ass!⁶⁰

Luis supports this appraisal by calling Gerardo "Mr. Citizen de la Clase Media". When Gerardo retorts that he is not a thief, Luis argues that the people who sign their checks are. Gerardo is unimpressed until in the middle of the altercation he opens his pay packet to find he has been made redundant and that the plant is closing. His rigid moral stance loosens and he finally decides to act. He takes the boxes to "hit them where it hurts, in the pocketbook". Thus, when he personally is hit by unemployment, his hypocrisy is revealed and he discards the rhetoric he had applied when faced with other redundant people.

In this climate the law of the country is seen to be biased away from the needs of the citizen and worker. A sustained attack on the idea of the law, the play condemns the fact that while individual theft is opposed by the police, corporate robbery is legal. Scene 9 outlines downright, but legal, thievery at Harvey Electronics. By closing down, laying off workers and withholding paychecks and pensions they can then reopen to a divided union and offer only a minimum wage. The play advocates resistance against this manipulation of the workforce. By the conclusion of the play Gerardo realises that instead of fearing the wrath of the patrones he should draw on the solidarity he has seen in the course of the day and permit no more concessions. He sums up the Chicano Movement when he affirms, perhaps rather optimistically:

we've been fighting for twenty years, huh Antonia? And you know what, we can fight for another twenty years,⁶¹

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

and likens the political struggle, in need of greater militancy, to a boxing championship:

I mean, when they back us into a corner, we come out fighting (...) from now on it's blow for blow, chingazo for chingazo.⁶²

If the gains of the Chicano's political struggle seem few, **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** underlines that this is not the case where Chicano theatre is concerned. The play is a celebration of Chicano theatre and much of the success of the comedy rests on a conscious return to a *rasquachi* theatre, in the style of the early actos. The play seeks to explore the origins of Chicano theatre by presenting the illusion of a *rasquachi* theatre thrown together due to lack of money and ability, and an overabundance of enthusiasm and commitment. Gerardo remarks in an aside to the audience:

This reminds me of a play I once saw - four actors who didn't have enough actors, they got this one guy to play un chingo de roles!⁶³

¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga! implies that the present company is equally strapped for resources. The actor who plays "un chingo de roles" participates in a standing joke which is also found in Fo but is exaggerated in *Esperanza*. Fo's Sergeant, Inspector, Old Man and Undertaker become *Esperanza*'s National Guardsman, Inspector, Trucker, Mariachi and Sucgro.⁶⁴ *Esperanza* exploits the multiple roles in a way Fo does not, to give the impression that the whole play is coming apart. Its workings are under threat of exposure as are the wrongdoings of the protagonists throughout. Although the five *Esperanza* characters have a variety of costumes and are clearly distinguishable, the other characters, especially Gerardo, continue to see the first of these, the Guardsman, in all of them. Gerardo recognises only the changes in his facial hair - the character progresses from having no facial hair, to having a moustache, a goatee, a big moustache and a grey moustache. The joke lies in the fact that

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Dario Fo, *Can't Pay, Won't Pay*, translated from the Italian by Lino Pertile, adapted by Bill Colvill and Robert Walker, Pluto Plays, 1984

although the other characters express surprise at his entrances the actor playing all the roles tries to maintain the illusion of being different characters until the weight of opinion and the demands of his five roles force him to see that his cover is blown. Then he decides to exploit his position in complicity with the audience and is the main strategy employed by the troupe to create an excellent troupe/audience relationship. Of all the characters he has no wrongdoing to hide, as he is not part of the two couples who have been dishonest, so he simply enjoys himself. By his last exit, pregnant and praising Santa Eulalia, he enjoys the hilarity, accepts his ridiculous lines and waddles off leaving the others to conclude the play. Had audience members been in any doubt as to the farcical nature of the play, the Multi-Person Everybody Else would have made it crystal clear. He makes a few wry comments on his position in the play:

Ah, la vida de un Mariachi, llena de momentos tiernos, filled with song, poetry, women and Mexican restaurants. Sometimes life does get too complicated for me, especially when I've a little cold. Especially with all these quick changes.⁶⁵

The Suegro is Gerardo's father and he duly recognises the old man as such, but the rest of the cast comment "He looks just like ..."; Gerardo, however, whispers "Ssh, no digan nada". The cast by this time pretend to be conspiring to finish the play, maintaining the illusion that they know the play is falling apart but that they must finish it. The audience, superbly entertained, knows this is a fiction created by the company. The senile Suegro totters around complaining "Sometimes I don't even know what I'm doing" and confuses the front door with the cupboard which hides the Inspector (one of his avatars). The others cry out in panic and as he seems set to open the door the house falls silent and the old man turns to look devilishly at the audience before shuffling off through the right door to a huge burst of laughter at his bluff. At this point the whole play falls apart and comes together simultaneously. The group show their skill at maintaining a joke throughout the play to the

⁶⁵NSP

point where it achieves a very tense moment followed by a huge release in laughter, when cast and audience accept complicity in the joke, in the illusion.

As the group carried off the play with such consummate skill, they had clearly shed their own previous amateurishness and attained a strong measure of professionalism. They self-mockingly - perhaps the ultimate in criticism - present themselves as *rasquachi* and choose to comment on the nature of Chicano theatre itself. They argue that they have been forced back into *rasquachismo* through financial constraints and in this way they answer those who regard a *rasquachi* piece as constituting unprofessional, community theatre and who refuse to acknowledge the relationship between skilled theatre and cash injections. Many skilled and professional groups suffer because they do not wish to function as a commercial entity. Esperanza do not, of course, advocate a return to unskilled theatre but they do suggest that the generation of Chicanos who were then approaching their forties, themselves included, take a look back over the previous two decades to the origins of *chicanismo* in theatre. More importantly, Esperanza, and Chicano theatre groups, find themselves having to consider their future as Chicano theatre artists through the political vacuum of the 1980s, without a Chicano Movement to sustain them.

It is of great significance that, dramatically and thematically, *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* consciously affirms its links to American popular culture. The group reprise the central concern of *Hijos* - the relationship between consumer capitalism and less affluent citizens - and embrace certain elements while rejecting others. Unlike in the earlier work, they choose to engage critically with popular culture rather than reject it unequivocally as a facet of capitalist exploitation. The group promoted the play as:

a unique blend, somewhere between Molière, *Cantinflas*, *I Love Lucy*, Charlie Chaplin, and the *Honeymooners*, a la Chicano.⁶⁶ (sic)

⁶⁶El Teatro de la Esperanza archives, 'El Teatro de la Esperanza's Midwest Tour,' La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara.

At first glance the play offers a situation comedy of the type found on American television. Indeed, it concerns itself, albeit indirectly, with the American media. Yet the comedic form of the play is much more radical than the average sit-com and indeed subverts the sitcom format. This is because it is ultimately comedy in the tradition of stage and screen, and not that of television, to which it appeals.

David Grote writes that in some thirty years the American sitcom has perfected its form and driven all older forms of comedy off American screens.⁶⁷ He argues that traditionally comedy promised change and was a celebration of sex, of birth out of union, which pointed to the future.⁶⁸ The sitcom, on the other hand, is constructed to eliminate change as the situation - which replaces the plot - cannot be allowed to end, or viewing figures might suffer and profits may be lost. The action is circular in that a new dramatic equilibrium is not achieved; rather it is the one existing at the start which is reaffirmed. In traditional comedy soldiers, doctors, teachers and policemen were ridiculed. In the sitcom, however, this has been inverted and the heroes are the forces of social order, and the fatherly businessman figures who are presented as likeable and trustworthy pillars of society. Many of the comedic weapons of traditional comedy have been surrendered. Paradox, allusion, metaphor, symbol, personification, irony, *reductio ad absurdum* and invective have been lost, as everyone is deemed worthy of respect.⁶⁹ This respect largely stems from the prosperity of characters. Generally, sitcom heroes own their own homes and are comfortably middle class. There are few working-class heroes with the exception of the Camdens in *The Honeymooners* who were:

two people who were just scraping by and who would be in bad trouble if Ralph ever missed a paycheck, a feeling you never get from even the poorest sit-com principals since then.⁷⁰

⁶⁷David Grote, *The End of Comedy: The Sit-Com and the Comedic Tradition*, Connecticut, Archon Books, 1983 p.56

⁶⁸*Ibid.* pp.35-36

⁶⁹*Ibid.* p.101

⁷⁰*Ibid.* pp.93-94

As American television is a business medium where programming, which generates no income, is incidental to the selling of advertising time, self-serving business people have found a creative formula in line with their own ideology. The sitcom sells the way of life portrayed in the accompanying television advertising and is successful because it tells the audience what it wants to hear. In the greatest "democracy" on the planet where a supposed state of happiness has been achieved, change equals death, whereas it used to be the life of the comedy. The sitcom addresses an audience which is encouraged to see itself as middle class, in a world where property is sacred, the family eternal, parents infallible and authority ever victorious.⁷¹ Even unionized men often do not see themselves as working class and the term middle class is held to be synonymous with the majority.⁷²

¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga! rejects this philosophy of humour and this analysis of American society. Instead, it offers an alternative comedic tradition which challenges the facile assumptions of the mainstream. Change is at the heart of **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** and the play relies on a varied barrage of comic techniques to emphasise this. The plot relies on the useful and irrational *deus ex machina* of the *Suegro* to reveal deceit and bring events to a conclusion. The traditional blocking of the union of the lovers, which allows key social problems to come to the fore, is substituted by the union of people in solidarity, not marriage. The righteous father figure of Gerardo, representative of society, is shown to be a hypocrite. There is no marriage or promise of childbirth at the conclusion but this is compensated for by much "pregnancy" in the form of false bellies stuffed with bags of food to sustain striking workers.

When Esperanza do incorporate elements from the sitcom they are drawn from those rare exceptions to the above analysis offered by Grote. The quick-witted Antonia, reminiscent of Lucy of the *I Love Lucy* series, is *Cantinflesque*, as many of her impassioned discourses only convey nonsense. The play's characters fit into the economic bracket of the

⁷¹Ibid. p.169

⁷²Ibid. p.172

Honeymooners, and latterly of *Roseanne*, in that making ends meet is a constant struggle. The forces of social order are ridiculed mercilessly, as they were in the actos. Bosses, business people, *migra*, growers and the LAPD are relentlessly attacked, even though some of them are Chicanos.

The play also makes allusion to some less savoury elements of mass popular culture. The rioting women are stopped by a security guard who "pulls a gun and yells, 'Freeze!'"⁷³ in the style of the television detective thriller. In Scene 6 Gerardo responds to the sounds of approaching soldiers by shouting down to his neighbour, "Abajo, all those soldiers? What are they doing, making a movie?". In the same scene the National Guardsman searches Gerardo's flat making use of a particular move which he boasts he saw in the film, *Rambo*. Through these references the group imply that mass television culture conditions people into accepting police violence, among other kinds. Indeed, José Saucedo notes:

There was a time when you turned on the television and all you saw on regular television was police programmes (...) nothing but wrecks and police (...) and, you know, they're cool police because they're young or they're old police and father and son and they're this kind of police and that kind of police. But always, the police are good (...) no matter what, it was always impounded in your mind that the police are right and they're good.⁷⁴

It is common knowledge that the celebrated series of *Rambo* action thrillers depicted a tough American one-man army defeating foreigners. Through reference to this superhero in the context of the Chicano barrio, Esperanza illustrate that Rambo's techniques are used not only against the "other" in the form of "reds" and "communists" overseas, but also against certain American citizens, who are nonetheless still perceived in terms of their alterity by the dominant society. The group also usurp the sitcom format to define unemployment and poverty as the most widespread forms of violence inflicted on Americans. They illustrate that the images of strength, power and beauty found on television screens present viewers with a fantasy control over their lives, to debilitate them and prevent them from true awareness of

⁷³NSP

⁷⁴M. Dolan, recorded interview with José Saucedo, Santa Barbara, December 12, 1986

the need for real change. Esperanza seek to break this paradox - consciously engineered - by illustrating that those suffering under adverse conditions of life can, and must, redefine the concepts of power and self-worth away from identification with an individualistic consumer society in which "you are what you can afford to buy".

The antidote to this sickness is solidarity and it is particularly clear with regard to the women characters. Antonia, and other women who are mentioned, contrast sharply with those presented on American television. Jane Fonda's aerobic slimness is ridiculed, as is the twirling power of Wonderwoman, as the Chicanas in this play do not wish to conform to these false concepts of womanhood, and false concepts of power. Yet the Chicanas are undoubtedly strong. They praise the "mujeres" who stood up for their rights in Safeway, and support one in particular who was caught shoplifting baby food. Margarita refers to her as "pobrecita," but Antonia does not subscribe to the woman-as-victim theory. Her reply to Margie is succinct: "Pobrecita, pero fuerte la cabrona". The women also address one another as "mujer," which here denotes in-group solidarity. Such solidarity has been seen before among Chicanos and Chicanas. Antonia's frail mother was influential in preventing her family from being strikebreakers to support the UFW. While it is true that Esperanza contrive to include a mention of the family as an ideal in every play and this is achieved here through this short mention, importantly, the woman within the family is regarded as strong and able to contribute to life in a public arena.

Esperanza offer many weapons in the struggle, particularly a barrage of comic techniques from eclectic sources. They succeed in this play in getting virtually all the laughs they set out to get, and indeed when one listens to the recorded play the audience sound like a non-stop laugh track, so successful is the comedy. Often the humour is directed at the entire audience, while some jokes are only for bilingual Chicanos. Often humour is expressed primarily through traditional means such as comic irony, deliberate overacting, horseplay, miming and slapstick. Clearly the group recreated the "looney tune" tone preferred by Dario Fo through the pace of their acting, in which they used corporal movements straight out of cartoons, and

broad physicality of expression.⁷⁵ It is clear that the play aims to create "belly laughs", as much of the humour is a *reductio ad absurdum*. This is especially - and outrageously - clear, for example, when Gerardo associates the *chiles* from the bag around Margie's neck with unborn children. In one or two instances humorous remarks are also used to prevent empathy, just as other techniques were in the past. Antonia delivers an impassioned speech directed at Gerardo, who she accuses of not standing up to abuse. Having created a high emotional note she ends by calling him an ass. The comic tone is fully resumed when Gerardo, realising that many people agree with her, looks at the audience and says: "God, it's unanimous!". He breaks the tension of the moment and the audience are unable to dwell on the emotion as the dramatic moment is cut off by a comic comment.

The mime, like Dario Fo's, has "nothing refined, delicate or quiet" about it.⁷⁶ The rapid pitter-patter sound of the characters' feet is intentionally loud and the first reenactment, of the riot, is of a length and complexity, not to mention cacophony, virtually constituting a flashback to the scene. Antonia underlines the farcical nature of the play by miming the throwing of "ammunition" in the riot - lemons, tomatoes and eggs - and then "the heavy stuff", which involves the more awkward launching of melons and *calabazas*. Antonia also impersonates the store manager who is more of an acto "baddie" than in the Fo version.⁷⁷ He does not give lengthy economic explanations for the high prices but merely insults the women, who respond with similar invective. Like many Chicano plays this one is extremely rich in invective.

The bawdy mime humour culminates in the miming of the baby transplant. Esperanza faithfully render Fo's work, which is "full of crude sounds and coarse gestures".⁷⁸ The inspector "performs" the operation, complete with scalpel, the wrenching sound of the

⁷⁵Ron Jenkins, 'The Roar of the Clown,' *The Drama Review*, Vol. 30 No. 1, (T109), Spring, 1986 p.177

⁷⁶*Ibid.* p.175

⁷⁷Dario Fo, *Can't Pay, Won't Pay*, translated from the Italian by Lino Pertile, adapted by Bill Colvill and Robert Walker, Pluto Plays, 1984

⁷⁸Jenkins, *op. cit.* p.175

opening cut and the dripping mess which is transplanted. He even wipes his hands on a towel after the mime.

At times the mime blends into sight gags. For example Gerardo's long, convoluted and illogical explanations allow for sight gags while he rants on pompously, leaving the audience to catch on to events on the stage long before he does. There are also many ironic moments. It is enough for a character to tell another not to break anything for a loud crack to follow. Gerardo only has to state that it will be "pura intimidation" if the police search his house for there to be an immediate knock on the door. A standing joke throughout is the call to "Act natural!", whereupon characters indulge either in the most stereotypical serenity or in the most ridiculous grotesqueness.

In its bawdiness and crudeness, this kind of humour, which stems from the *rasquachi* spirit of the *carpa*, and the *farándula* and *teatro de género chico* in general, reaffirms the true brutality of the life of workers, away from the bland respectability and bland theatre of the "middle classes". There is a purpose dwelling at the heart of this approach and that purpose is to expose the fact that life for the majority of Americans is still nasty, brutish and short.

By utilizing mass popular culture, and despite the occasional tendency towards nostalgia, Esperanza steer clear of identification with a stereotypical Mexican-Chicano popular tradition, mainly through humour. This is evident in the mariachi scene. Rather than exploit a folkloric element of Mexican and Chicano culture and present the mariachi as one of the more typical characters in Chicano life in Los Angeles, the group chooses to ridicule the stereotype. There are, of course, mariachis in Los Angeles but the Chicano is more likely to work on a car plant or engineering plant than as part of a group of singers. The American media clings to the image of the singing mariachi Latin Lover and blinds itself to the fact that the Chicano is not, and has no desire to be, a quaint sombrero-clad bearer of olde worlde

customs, in a setting no more realistic than that of a Mexican restaurant.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Esperanza's mariachi at first obligingly incarnates the stereotype in that he wears the customary big hat, tight trousers and cummerbund and carries a guitar case. He sings a Julio Iglesias hit - Iglesias being an example of the false dehistoricised Latin culture popular in the American media - and thinks he looks like Pedro Infante. However, Gerardo and Luis make it clear that he is as foreign to them as he is to non-Chicanos. When Gerardo asks him for his guitar case and his hat he assumes: "Ah, so you want to be an instant mariachi for ten minutes", suggesting that all the aspiring Chicano has to do to be this quaint figure is don the correct gear. However, being a mariachi does not in fact interest them; it is the man's guitar case which is deemed important and it is therefore clear to the audience that for these two Chicanos there is nothing useful about the mariachi apart from his guitar case. Soon after, there comes a moment of anti-climax to prevent the audience from romanticizing the Mexican Revolution. Clearly, this is another folkloric trap into which the group do not fall. Gerardo comments:

Durante the Mexican Revolution, how do you think they used to sneak across pistolas and ammunition?⁸⁰

When Luis delightedly assumes they did so in guitar cases, Gerardo offers the deflating comment, "I don't know, but it's worth a try!". Thus Esperanza illustrate that the real problems of the Chicanos now have little to do with mariachis or the Mexican Revolution. They affirm that Chicanos are part of the history of North America and that it is incumbent on that society to cater for them. This practice of adopting the stereotype to make a point is repeated in one of the most satirical and humourous scenes in the play. Although, as mentioned, the group had reconsidered Delano and their roots, they were not interested in respecting the Catholic background of many of those who were involved in the famous strike. Instead, they use the farce form of the play to attack Catholic mysticism.⁸¹

⁷⁹See Jesús Treviño, 'Presencia del Cine Chicano,' *A Través de la Frontera*, Mexico, 1983 p.196

⁸⁰NSP

⁸¹Interestingly, however, at the time of creating *¿No Se Paga ? ¡No Se Paga !* Esperanza were involved in a community theatre piece about the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although a comic *pastorela*, the Virgin was treated

Roman Catholic mythology is presented as sheer nonsense, underlining the fact that Esperanza were still adamant that they would not sanction myths. The *mito* form still stands as a brief flirtation in the past for the group. The most "irreverent" scene, Act 2 Scene 4, is a blend of the Biblical story of Saint Anne who gave birth very late in her life, and the Mexican Catholic myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The story of Saint Eulalia described by Antonia and Margie allows the two women to take refuge in the mysteries of their Mexican Catholic culture to fool the Anglo inspector and present their potentially criminal comings and goings as obscure religious observances. The women use the principle of freedom of religious expression to defend themselves:

There's no law against miracles and nothing that says that you can't carry vegetables in your panza.⁸²

but the scene is played as complete farce, underlining the rejection of religious beliefs, native or otherwise, except perhaps as weapons of resistance to be used in difficult circumstances. The women explain their odd behaviour by exaggeratedly invoking their patron Saint Eulalia. They intone glorias and hallelujas as delaying tactics while they get their story together, and illustrate the nature of their religious processions to the inspector by improvising a lop-sided walk while thumping their bellies, obviously a send-up of the breast thumping *Mea Culpa*. In this way they knowingly and temporarily assume the mantle of "otherness" that the dominant American society is only too ready to attribute to them, and appear primitive, superstitious and decidedly un-American.

The irreverence reaches its culmination in the "prayer" delivered by the women to their Saint. In the Fo version this section is delivered as a simple poem, but in Esperanza's version the

with great respect and in fact the piece was very moving, particularly as it took place in the church of the Presidio in Santa Barbara. With this piece the group clearly sought to reflect and respect the religious beliefs of the community, but in the Fo play any vestiges of respect for religious belief disappear.

⁸²NSP

religious context helps to convert the tone from one of naivety to one of sheer blasphemy.⁸³ The women struggle to come up with a rhyming prayer on the spot but are unable to improvise the necessary solemn register. Therefore, in a Chicano blend of Spanish and English in which Saint Eulalia is described as "de panza santa" - in a section which is all the more funny when we consider that prayers are not usually code-switched - they ask the Saint to deal with the inspector for them:

A este tipo pégale un chingazo,
Que caiga muerto en tus brazos.⁸⁴

The audience knows the women are faking religiosity, as does the inspector. He only becomes convinced of the truth of the tale when an opportune electricity cut allows the women to exploit one of the embellishments of the story, that of the curse of blindness. It is not divine retribution which saves the women, rather it is economic retribution for unpaid bills which comes to their aid, as well as their quick-witted ability to turn bad luck into good. The inspector's conversion to belief in the curse makes him appear extremely foolish and leaves him completely open to ridicule. Meanwhile, the two Chicanas clearly do not identify with Catholicism but merely use what they can scabble together of it to overcome outside aggression.

One of the most interesting features of this scene is that despite the fact that the women use religious references as a refuge, the group consciously does not exploit certain cultural connotations therein. One example already mentioned is the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which has historically, in both Mexico and the United States, been used to bolster racial pride. We find instead that the child born to Saint Eulalia was "un guerito with blue eyes and speaking perfect Chicano". Not only this but black women, mentioned in conversation, are clearly presented as positive role models in the play. Again, therefore, the

⁸³Dario Fo, *Can't Pay, Won't Pay*, translated from the Italian by Lino Pertile, adapted by Bill Colvill and Robert Walker, Pluto Plays, 1984

⁸⁴NSP

group appear consciously to attack another stereotype which holds that all Chicanos and Mexicans are "morenitos". Unlike in the original Fo play, which makes no reference to race, Esperanza, living and working in the United States, have an approach whereby the solidarity of the whole working class is their primary goal and therefore they have to study the race question. In effect, they affirm that although different social groups are discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour, the economic discrimination which faces these groups is one and the same. Therefore an analysis based purely on the racial make-up of the Chicanos is misplaced.

This broad-based approach to politics has a knock-on effect for theatre and for the practice of ensemble organization and casting, in effect rather narrow in scope in Chicano theatre. Often, ensemble groups are limited to plays whose characters fit the actor profile. This was Esperanza's precarious situation here and an accident threatened to undermine their ability to perform this play. The actress who was originally to have played Margarita was involved in an accident and had to pull out. The available replacement was not a Chicana but a very fair-skinned white actress with blonde hair and no Spanish. This would have been unthinkable in previous years, as it would have been similar in intention to the Hollywood tradition of blacking and browning up white actors to play "ethnic" roles. During times of crisis, however, such an approach was unavoidable, although the group wisely avoided any attempt to make the non-Chicana appear Chicana. Esperanza could not let her presence pass without wry comment, however. In the final scene of Fo's play the Old Man comments that Margarita is looking younger and younger. Here in Esperanza's adaptation the Suegro tells Margarita that she is "getting whiter and whiter". With this comment the group acknowledge to the audience that they have cast this woman under duress, although Lois Yaroshevsky is a superb performer and shone in the role of Margarita. They illustrate the difficulties of being a few Chicanos interested in doing theatre and furthermore, doing so in an ever more multi-racial society. If they wish to survive and wish to deal with the American working class as a

whole they may have to undertake multi-racial casting as do other organizations, including commercial ones.⁸⁵

The play differs from Fo's work as in Esperanza's version the vociferous women are so directly because of unemployment. The difficulty of life during periods of mass unemployment and the fight against it appear for the first time as central to an Esperanza play and the group choose to make this an essential element of the situation, although it is not central to the Fo script. Ultimately, the play questions the freedom which is supposedly at the heart of American culture and finds that for the Chicanos to live morally as citizens they must first be free from the limitations of poverty and unemployment. It is not that they are not lacking in values, rather it is the society in which they live which operates unethically. As we have seen in all of the group's plays, righting this inequality is a collective endeavour. Here they emphasise the necessity of a stance of solidarity embracing unity within diversity. It cuts across broad lines to include all working people, Chicanos, blacks and women, and distances itself from **La Víctima** which appealed heavily to *mexicandad*.

Importantly, this play is Esperanza's approach to the concept of "crossover" so lauded in the music press.⁸⁶ They show that minorities must achieve a more effective "crossover" out of political solidarity, based on class unity, rather than through the ephemera and commercial products of a music business run by American capital. It is also their answer to the economic facts of American theatre. Esperanza will seek to cross over to Anglo-American audiences and work with their capital investment, their management techniques and, ultimately, their commercial goals. But Americans will have to work with them lock, stock and barrel, with their beliefs and their allegiances, or not at all. Esperanza will operate with the Anglo's help, but they will make few, if any, concessions in what they put on stage. To this end the play finishes on a high note. The last exit of the cast, ostensibly en route to the Guadalupe Church

⁸⁵The Latino Chicago Theater Company which performed *Prospect* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1993 exemplify this.

⁸⁶Dave Rimmer, 'La Bamba,' *The Face*, September 1987, No. 89 pp.71-73

to distribute the stolen food among the unemployed, is a scene of visual solidarity as they go off in line with a good purpose in mind. The overall plan is not clear, as it occasionally was for Chicanos during the Movement, but the next small step is: they have to make work for them organizations which already exist and to which they already belong. Such small actions may not produce great changes, but, as argued by the truck driver when he wrecked his truck:

it'll sure show that they can't step on working class people and get away with it.⁸⁷

More than this Esperanza cannot promise.

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CHAPTER NINE: THE MOVE TO SAN FRANCISCO AND LOTERIA DE PASIONES

A new era for El Teatro de la Esperanza began on February 20th 1987 at the Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco. The group were hopeful that, after years of touring to find audiences to support them, their move to the city would provide them with a theatre building of their own, the possibility of resident productions and the concomitant stability as a theatre group. After months of residency in the city and a great deal of hard work, they opened with an original play to an audience they regarded as new despite many performances in the city as a touring company. The play was the group's first strike in a battle to establish itself as the city's only professional Chicano Latino theatre company in residence. They made the following commitment:

Through its existing and rapidly growing means El Teatro de la Esperanza will continue to work towards establishing a permanent and self-sufficient Chicano/Latino artistic institution specializing in creating and producing theatre of the highest quality and addressing a new and untapped Hispanic audience.¹

Thus the group acknowledged the need for a wider market for their theatre product and a redefinition of their audience. They had realised by *¿No Se Paga? ¿No Se Paga!* that they as a political group could not continue to employ the theatrical philosophy they had hitherto relied upon. They were aware that Chicano theatre had been the product of political activism and not vice versa, and since concerted Chicano political activism was now extinct, Esperanza sought to elaborate new criteria under which to operate theatrically. One obvious step was to target the Hispanic population in San Francisco; being a much bigger city than Santa Barbara, San Francisco not only offered a larger Spanish-speaking population more capable of sustaining theatre than Santa Barbara had done, but was composed of a greater variety of Latinos. This last point would aid the group towards the adoption of a broad pan-

¹El Teatro de la Esperanza information document, on arrival in San Francisco to take up residence at the Mission Cultural Center.

Latino identity, encompassing North and South America, rather than a narrow and perhaps stifling Chicano one. It was no longer feasible for them to produce works about Chicanos living in the barrio, as the barrio was becoming as culturally diverse in terms of Latinos as was the nation. Therefore, Esperanza reluctantly agreed to exploit the current fashion for Hispanic products while attempting not to misrepresent their people and their culture.

Esperanza expressed optimism as, at the time of the move to San Francisco, the group's annual budget of \$150,000 was to be increased by a Ford Foundation grant to help them build a solid, economically viable company.² The group preferred this strategy to that of commercially mainstreaming their theatre. Nonetheless, they longed for their own theatre building in which to run resident seasons to develop "a permanent relationship with people who will come on a consistent basis". The group was still determined to tour, however, and their goal was eventually to be able to send a touring component on West Coast, Mid-West and East Coast tours while the resident company performed in San Francisco.³ In 1987, however, touring was Esperanza's:

main source of income and the main goal of our company, to take theatre to people who don't have access.⁴

The play the group chose to open with, **Lotería de Pasiones**, was not an entirely new play but had been an ongoing project for the group for some years. It had been performed in 1984 at the Twelfth TENAZ Festival in Santa Barbara, having been written by Lalo Cervantes, and four other group members in 1983.⁵ Cervantes was writing in earnest for the group for the first time but it would seem he was not quite ready for the project, as Esperanza shelved it. They were, however, very attracted to the central motif of the play, namely the Chicano/Latin American board game of *lotería* because of its cultural

²M. Dolan, recorded interview with Juan Pablo Gutiérrez, Dolores Park, San Francisco, June 27 1986

³Robin Hurwitt, *San Francisco Examiner Image Magazine*, February 15, 1987 n.p.

⁴*Call Board*, Vol. 12 No. 3, San Francisco, March 1987 p.11

⁵M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

significance.⁶ Therefore they decided to revise **Lotería de Pasiones** in 1985.⁷ One writer, Rodrigo Duarte Clark, was assigned the writing up process in this new version and commented:

This marks a transition for us into solo playwriting, with input from the group.⁸

This greater individualism in Esperanza's work corresponds to a conscious individualism in their mode of production in accordance with the pragmatic stance of the MCC. Actors were no longer invited to join a collective ensemble but were hired through audition for short projects. Therefore they were not invited to aid in the creation of the play. Rather, under this new arrangement, one member wrote and the others contributed in other ways. In this manner they revised the play and focused on the failures of the original scripted version. Their main areas of concern were character psychology, the weak plot and how to weave fantasy and realism in a play without creating a confused, and confusing, piece.

Lotería is an interesting play in that for the first time in Esperanza, rather than having a political point, the group had a stylistic idea, the colourful *lotería* game with all its staging potential, as the main inspiration for a play. This move is highly significant when studied in relation to the finished play, as **Lotería de Pasiones** exhibits, like no other, the efforts of the group to embrace varied publics. It also underlines their incessant attempts to learn from each play - and its failures - and apply new knowledge wherever possible. Moreover, the contradictions within the play itself point to the effort of Esperanza to come to terms with the shedding of their political theatre image, without descending into the politically reactionary commercial fare of Teatro Campesino. Whereas in *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* the characters took conscious and temporary refuge in a warped version of their culture - presented as a stereotypical and irrelevant one - in **Lotería de Pasiones** Esperanza present

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Call Board*, Vol. 12 No. 3, March 1987 p.11

⁸Ibid. p11

us with a character who takes real refuge in a more challenging vision of Chicano/Latino culture. The *lotería* game also presented Esperanza with the possibility of creating a bright, visually attractive piece which would draw audiences - particularly wealthy patrons with less pressing social needs - and also served as a motif which would appeal culturally to Spanish-speaking people from all over the Americas. Despite prioritizing the set design, however, Esperanza had to redesign the *Lotería* set with budget constraints in mind and avoided the grandiose creation of the earlier version. Lalo Cervantes commented:

Back then we had this grand vision, artistically, that the set should be big. I said, well okay, let's try to build it. We didn't have money but we got donated materials and I started to build this thing, ...two towers, twelve feet high, with an eight by eight centre pipe form and with squares with the *lotería* cards and the figures. And it's beautiful (...) it cost an arm and a leg to build, and the project was definitely over-ambitious for our labour and economic capabilities.⁹

Unfortunately the 1,700-pound set took some seven hours to erect, piece by piece, and so by the 1987 version, following on from the economy of *¿No Se Paga? ¿No Se Paga!* the steel and wood set had been abandoned in favour of something simpler as the group learned to keep within the confines of their resources. However, the new set, though manageable, was not designed to have the *rasquachi* appearance of *¿No Se Paga? ¿No Se Paga!* as this would have been out of tone with the experimental nature of the play and, as mentioned, the group were attempting to attract rather than repel the more affluent theatre-goer. Instead, two very large screens elaborately decorated with backlit panels depicting *lotería* figures stood on either side of the stage, pinpointing two proscenium areas.

The large and unusually shaped stage had been a problem. On arrival in San Francisco the group had to take off their "actors' hats" and don "carpenters' aprons" to prepare it for performances, in much the same way as they had had to do in their very first theatre space.¹⁰ Even so, some reviewers thought the group had not been successful. Having left behind the

⁹M. Dolan, recorded interview with Lalo Cervantes, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, September 1986

¹⁰Calvin Ahlgren, 'El Teatro de la Esperanza: You Can Understand Them In Two Tongues,' *San Francisco Chronicle, Datebook*, February 15 1987 n.p.

directing committees of the past in favour of single guest directors, they had chosen Mexican director Enrique Ballesté. One writer concluded, however, that he:

spreads out the action and places many scenes too far from the audience. The result is that too often the tension is diluted, focus dispersed, acoustics in the bare space become problematic.¹¹

Certainly, the focus was dispersed, as the width and depth of the stage did not allow the audience to pay attention to simultaneous activity happening in more than one area of the stage. This may in part be explained by the fact that Ballesté's arrival in the United States was delayed due to visa problems and this set the rehearsal schedule back for more than a week. Indeed, concern for such problems afflicting theatre artists was paramount in the group's minds; they themselves could identify with such persecution given the move they had just made and the daunting challenges ahead.

Nonetheless, even as the group distanced themselves from their earlier collectivism, the process of mounting the play appears to have been chaotic rather than professionally slick. As the core group was very small, Esperanza hired actors, through auditioning, in the manner of a production company, for the duration of the play, but made no attempt to incorporate them into the collective. This is important, as it marks another step by the group into producing theatre on a more traditional organizational basis. Given the lack of time available to stage *Lotería* and the absence of any truly coherent method, shortcuts had to be taken, and this was one of them. Nonetheless, the calibre of the actors on stage was, in most cases, impressive, and particularly so in the case of Ruby Nelda Pérez and Héctor Correa.

1. From Farce to Folk.

After the brilliant and entertaining farce of *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* Esperanza were not keen to return to social realism. Despite redefining themselves as theatre artists and

¹¹Bernard Weiner, 'Latino Troupe At S.F. Center,' *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25 1987 n.p.

professionals in order to survive, and modifying the touring mode of previous years, they had no plans to perform conventional bourgeois realism. Therefore, they preferred to experiment theatrically to create a newer, more pertinent, theatrical style. Nonetheless, while social realism had, for them, become pedestrian in visual and cultural terms and had ceased to serve them - and their audiences - when the Chicano movement was no longer in progress and political change evaded them, the group still clung to the materialistic basis of all of their previous works. Therefore, and as Esperanza were forced for reasons of survival to project their theatre to an increased Latino audience, in **Lotería de Pasiones** the simplistic clarity and directness of social realism were fused with the lyricism of traditional Latin American folk culture, perhaps in emulation of the convictions of the Bay Area artists who created *teatropoesía*.¹² Employment of the Chicano/Latin American folk game of *lotería* was the route through which Esperanza sought to address an audience made up of people from all over Spanish-speaking North and South America resident in the United States. Furthermore, just as they had sought to satirise elements of American popular media culture in **¿No Se Paga? ¿No Se Paga!** and exploit others, here Esperanza explore popular Latin American and Chicano oral culture and seek to distinguish the authentically appropriate from the inauthentic and inappropriate. Ultimately, elements of oral culture and the concept of orality replace the practice of factual documentation found in their earlier works as an alternative and legitimate basis of knowledge for the play.

Lotería de Pasiones rests on two elements of Chicano Latin American oral culture. The play takes its title from the *lotería* card game which is comparable to bingo except that the caller announces, not numbers, but brightly coloured symbolic images drawn on cards. These have been compared to Tarot cards as they bear images such as La Dama, La Luna, La Muerte, El Sombrero, etc.¹³ It is not normally played for money but the truly unique factor about it is the oral skill involved in playing it:

¹²See Chapter 3.

¹³Robert Hurwitt, 'Lotería de Pasiones: El Teatro de la Esperanza's Local Debut,' *San Francisco Examiner*, February 15, 1987 n.p.

As part of the game the person who reads out the cards makes a sort of poem about the characters.¹⁴

An important part of the proceedings, then, is the poetic talent of the card caller. In accordance with the concept of *buen hablar* valued by Mexicans and Chicanos, the card caller's declamatory powers and verbal virtuosity earn him much respect.¹⁵ Throughout the play the dialogue is enhanced by the use of folk *dichos*. While Esperanza cannot recall who suggested a play based on the game - "Probably someone had a set of *lotería* cards in their hands" - it is clear that the group were interested in achieving a play with a poetic element, rather than verbal *rasquachismo* alone, and regarded the poetic language of Latin American oral tradition as most apt.¹⁶ The second element which was to become a fundamental concept of **Lotería de Pasiones** originated in 1983 when Esperanza toured **Y La Muerte Viene Cantando**. This was "a musical dramatical presentation" featuring dance and the music of the *banda calavera* well known to Teatro Campesino audiences.¹⁷ This collage of songs and poetry telling the stories of the struggles of men and women belonging to the "Chicano/mejicano/American people" combined Mexican *corridos* and others from the South West with the "beautiful lyricism of Latin America".¹⁸ One section was entitled Los Corridos and from here was taken the *Corrido de Anselma Guzmán* to be one of the core themes in **Lotería de Pasiones**. This tells the story of the rape of a young girl by a military captain and his murder of the girl's brother. During the struggle the girl shoots the captain with his own pistol and thus avenges her brother's death. While certain facts are modified the group recreate the rape scene and employ the metaphor of violation in **Lotería**.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Tomás Ybarra Frausto, 'I Can Still Hear The Applause' in Kanellos, (ed). *Hispanic Theatre In The United States*, Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984 p.46

¹⁶Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *The Monthly Theatre News Magazine*, Vol. 12 No. 3, San Francisco, March 1987 p.11

¹⁷Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theater Themes and Forms*, 1982, introductory photographs, No. 4

¹⁸Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, San Antonio, Texas. Programme announcing performance by El Teatro de la Esperanza.

Clearly, given these themes, *Lotería* is a serious work. Indeed, through the creation of complex characters the group illustrate their concern for an audience composed in part of conventional theatre-goers, unlikely to be satisfied with mere polemic. The crux of most of Esperanza's works had always been the moment of awareness when a character decides to become active in labour disputes. Nonetheless, the movement towards this moment in dramatic terms generally was ill prepared, as characters lacked psychological complexity and functioned as simplistic social beings rather than as individuals in a social context replete with contradictions. This was the greatest failing in *La Víctima*. In *Lotería*, however, Esperanza instead place all of their energies, focus and direction into studying what it is that compels a human being to have a social conscience and everything on the *Lotería* stage functions to uncover this. Of great importance is the recognition that it is not only political rhetoric and analysis which inspire people to act altruistically for the common good but rather that there are many other influential factors, not the least of which is one's cultural background.

2. New Play, Old Problems.

Despite, or perhaps due to, this agenda, the plot, unfortunately, is extremely cumbersome, despite its having been extensively reworked for the San Francisco opening. This impression is strengthened by the extensive use of montage on stage which, although expertly carried out, required simpler plot lines to render it more effective. The following is a broad outline of the narrative.

Lupe is an old lady who owns some tenement houses, the miner occupants of which are on strike against Julio, the owner of the mine. Despite her activist son's pleas, Lupe refuses to suspend collection of her rents until the strike has been won and insists on being paid immediately in full, thus causing even greater hardship for the strikers. Uninterested in them, she spends her time playing *lotería* at an old table, just as she has done for thirty years, during which time she has not ventured out. There was a mining strike in progress at

that time also and the young Lupe told Julio, once her sweetheart and a person who she thought she could trust, where a secret meeting of rebels was to be. As a result of Julio's betrayal many men were massacred, Lupe's lover Reymundo among them, and Lupe was raped by a soldier.

Lupe once played *lotería* at the Feria when it was in town at the time of the mining strike and the massacre. She therefore recognises the Merolico or card caller from the Feria when he again comes to her, unchanged after thirty years, to take her to the Feria which has returned. Before she goes, however, Julio comes to ask her to sign an eviction order he has drawn up to help him end the strike in his favour. She makes no decision and goes to the Feria with the Merolico, where La Muerte comes for her, but before she is taken, the Merolico suggests they play one last *lotería*. If Lupe wins she will have her life back.

By the end of the game Lupe needs the Mundo card and La Muerte needs the Luna card (both kept secretly by the Merolico) and they must pursue the cards in the world of the *lotería* cards. Via dramatic stage effects Lupe goes to the *Lotería* world where, as the Vieja card, she becomes caught up in the struggle of the *Lotería* people against the powerful and exploitative Catrín. The Catrín has used his power to cause a drought and plans to profit by monopolising all the village's water and selling it to them at a price.

From then on Lupe/Vieja plays a part in the liberation of the people from the Catrín. Firstly, she does so unwittingly and for the selfish motive of attaining the Mundo for herself so she can win the game and her life. Later, however, she truly joins with the villagers and seeks the Mundo for them. Mundo is a disillusioned *guerrillero* whom the people need to dig new wells as an alternative source of water. Mundo also needs the help of his lover the Chalupa, the Woman in the Canoe who, with her affinity to water, can locate the new sources. Lupe is, of course not keen to lose the game and so throughout her quest she tries to persuade the fickle Luna not to venture out as La Muerte seeks her to win Lupe's life.

The Catrín knows that Lupe is seeking the Mundo, his enemy, and forces her to make a deal with him. She must hand him over after she wins her game against La Muerte. She reluctantly agrees but the Catrín doublecrosses her and bears the Mundo off to his dungeon before Lupe can win the game. Given this turn of events, the villagers, in order not to die of thirst, release the guarded dam with Lupe's help and free the water. As they now control it, the Catrín must return the Mundo to them or die of thirst, as Mundo will never dig for him. A stalemate occurs, as the pueblo have the Chalupa and the Catrín the Mundo. If new wells are to be dug for the future, the Chalupa and the Mundo must work together. The Catrín threatens Lupe that he will persuade the Luna to rise if Lupe does not ensure that the Chalupa is handed over to him. Lupe wavers, but in the end, she doublecrosses him, returns the Mundo to the village, just before the Luna rises and she must forfeit her life. Thus, she is returned to her own house where she is awakened by one of the striking miners. Julio comes once more to ask her to sign the eviction order but she refuses and the Merolico hands her over to La Muerte.

This complex array of events is made all the more so by further structural complexities. The plot draws on the fairy tale concept of the quest, particularly in the second act in which characters seek help from people who have to be "found".¹⁹ The *borracho* secret of the *lotería* world predicts great afflictions unless the *pueblo* can recognise five signs. A "woman from afar" must return from the past to help the people regain their water. A secret must be "desplumado". A lake must be reborn in the centre of the village. A coward must regain his courage, and a fool must accept life's gift. All of these enigmas are uncovered, with some false starts due to the resourceful struggle of Lupe and the villagers to overcome huge odds. Therefore, although *Esperanza* address the concept of destiny, anathema in earlier works, their creations are not helpless before it. As before, the characters still have the power to

¹⁹For an example of the employment of this in Chicano culture see 'El pastor que sabía los idiomas de los animales/The Man Who Knew the Language of the Animals,' in José Griego y Maestas and Rudolfo A. Anaya, *Cuentos: Tales From the Hispanic Southwest*, Santa Fe, the Museum of New Mexico Press, 1980 pp.62-75

create change and the predictions also foretell events which are not natural catastrophes but the result of the intrigues of the *Catrín*.

Esperanza do however, illustrate the fact that struggle is not destined towards victory, that social movements have no guarantee of success. Act Two which takes place in the world of the *lotería* is set in the future, one which has not yet come to pass. The Theatre of Hope has learned, as has a generation of Chicanos, that there are no guarantees of victory, having witnessed the failure of the Chicano Movement to sustain itself long enough to create lasting change. The triumphant victory of the common people over the powerful *Catrín* occurs in a fantasy world at some future time; it acts only as inspiration for Lupe to carry out a small act of resistance in her own world. The distinction is crucial.

Act Two is constructed of moves, such as those of a game and the plot is indebted to the concept of the "game within a game", the ultimate game being that of survival itself. This approach often extends to character motivations, as certain minor characters serve only to advance the game in one group's favour or the other's and the plot creaks along at times under the weight of the resultant contrivances. The denouement of the play is eventually reached, however, after a stalemate occurs between the *Catrín* and the villagers, when each side needs a card to win its struggle, or put more succinctly, the game.

3. The Dream.

The play is often highly dream-like in nature and so *Esperanza* avoid delineating the moves mentioned above into obvious scene breaks. Rather, the constant action on stage, and often on different areas of the stage simultaneously, lends great fluidity. The play often shifts between what appears unreal and what appears to be real and relies a great deal on elaborate staging and technical expertise. When Lupe travels to the world of the *lotería*, the huge backlit stage panels turn to envelop her and the original, live Latin music composed by Enrique Ballesté suggests her transportation to an other-worldly realm.

Great attention was also paid to costuming, which was extravagant and beautiful, in keeping with the zoomorphic characters of *La Rana* and *La Araña*, and the fabulous *La Estrella* and *La Luna*, robed in glittering splendour. With the exception of *La Chalupa*, the *Woman in the Canoe*, the costumes were not suggestive of folk stereotypes. *La Chalupa* was, however, dressed in a simple Mexican dress and wore fruit in her hair in the style of Carmen Miranda. This aesthetic blend was further enhanced by choreographed action on stage, such as in the fight scenes between the *Catrín's* henchmen and the villagers. A dreamlike mime sequence where characters including *Mundo* move the set pieces into place against a background of soft glockenspiel music opens the action and sets the magical tone of the play. Yet, while the music, the costumes and the setting, reminiscent of the cabaret atmosphere of *El Pulpo*, are all designed to produce both recognition and surprise in the audience, in that Latin American culture is blended with non-Latino elements, the play is still rooted in realism. The *Merolico* runs on stage, not from the wings, but from the back of the house as if he has just come off the street, as indeed, have the audience. He begins in a way familiar to *Esperanza* plays by telling the audience that he has a story for them about an old lady, and a game. Given such an entrance, the audience is therefore converted into a *feria* audience, participants in the game, and amidst this fairground atmosphere *lotería* is "played". Soon it is time for the story and the *Merolico* announces:

Memorias, realidades, fantasías, Ladies and Gentlemen, Señoras y Señores,
I present to you *lotería*, ¡*Lotería de Pasiones!*²⁰

Ostensibly, what follows are two separate but analogous stories: that of *Lupe* in the real world and that of the *Vieja* in the fantasy *lotería* world. Yet, the struggle is the same one in each case though the details differ. Previous *Esperanza* plays, such as *Hijos* and *El Pulpo*, employed an external and an internal story with transitions from the one to the other which were made clear through the obvious transformation of the characters. The characters

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of the external story assumed new roles in the internal one; when they later resumed their initial characterizations, they commented on the behaviour of the characters they had just portrayed. In this play, however, the external and internal stories (or real and fantastic stories) are not demarcated by such transitions. Analogous characters are found in both the real world and the *lotería* world but there is no commentary on the similarities. The audience does not observe Julio become the Catrín nor does the actor playing both indulge in any commentary on the analogies of the two. It is the similarity of struggle which connects the two. The people of Lupe's town are struggling to improve conditions in the mine, while the inhabitants of the *Lotería* are struggling to recuperate the dam. The inference is that both struggles are one and the same, as the mines signify the earth and the dam, water. The aim is to create new life.

Esperanza had consciously sought to perfect their abilities as regards a theatre employing symbolic characters. Rodrigo Duarte Clark learned new techniques in a two-week workshop with director Santiago García in Colombia.²¹ A collective staging process at that time involved "a second and removed symbolic staging" which "attempted to draw an analogy" to the first one. This experience gave the group a familiarity with dealing with symbolic texts even though by **Lotería** the creative process lacked an effective methodology.

This, then, is the process at work in **Lotería de Pasiones**. The world of the *lotería* is removed from, but analogous with, the struggles of the miners in Lupe's village, as exploitation exists in both through the figures of the Catrín and Julio. The figures in the *lotería* world, as traditional archetypes, are unidimensional but they are ultimately only projections of Lupe, who is the most complex character ever created by Esperanza. The *lotería* fantasy world exists only in her mind and not independently, and serves, through its folk characters such as El Músico, El Borracho and El Catrín, to stir Lupe in a cultural and

²¹M. Dolan, recorded interview with Rodrigo Duarte Clark, Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco March 1987

political sense. Lupe finds herself drawn into the Mexican game that has sustained her and recognises her people. The game, which is suddenly alive, illustrates the inequality in the *lotería* world under the regime of the *Catrín* and the inequality outside her own door under the ownership of the mine by Julio.

Although, then, the *lotería* characters appear to be symbolic, their import is unclear. Indeed, individually few have any cultural or cosmic significance beyond their unidimensional attributes; collectively however, they, on the *lotería* board, symbolize the eternal struggle of the folk (people of Chicano/Latino and even Latin American background) throughout time against the forces of exploitation.

4. The Character of Lupe.

Lotería de Pasiones, while fluid in an attempt to banish the dogmatism of social realism is, however, shaped in terms of time periods. The action is situated progressively in the past, present and future. Yet these in themselves are not enough to invest the play with narrative coherence. The single overriding element is the mind of the main character, Lupe. Following on from *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!*'s Antonia, and the heroines of **Y La Muerte Viene Cantando**, and continuing in their tradition of presenting strong female characters in lead roles, Esperanza consciously explore Lupe's psyche and the way in which her memories, that is, her social and personal history, affect her social and personal present. They study the emotions which make up part of her psychological baggage. Of fundamental importance is the fact that the assumed "simplicity of reality" and character portrayal, which lacked complex personal memory, as in **La Víctima**, are consciously remedied here. Lupe's plentiful memories are presented in re-enactments on stage, the most important events being the rape and the refusal to sign the eviction order just before her death. The play hinges, therefore, on the moment of loss of innocence, both personal and political, and its later recuperation.

Lupe is a woman who embarks on a journey whose end witnesses her sexual, maternal and political restitution. She undergoes the denouement of her life's story, a story whose plot was suspended in contradictions due to rape. The violation of her body eclipsed her sexual responses; the fact of it being punishment for allegiance to a labour struggle eclipses her social conscience. Her relationship with her son, possibly born of rape, suffers, particularly as he is an activist. The death of Lupe's lover to political activism causes her to fear for her son, and her betrayal by Julio causes her to regard people and struggle as useless and untrustworthy. Lupe preferred to turn inward; taking sides implied risk, so she ceased to do so.

However, the action of the play is concerned with her salvation. The journey towards this is long and fraught with troubles, not the least of which is Lupe's own attempt to cling to her egoism and solitude. Esperanza, however, offer us a highly developed portrait of Lupe. She is composed of three facets which form a coherent integrated character; Lupe the irascible old lady, Lupita the young and passionate girl, and the ultimately altruistic martyr, the Vieja card. She also finds echoes of her younger self in other female *lotería* cards, such as the Chalupa. It is also significant that Lupe undergoes the journey to the world of the *lotería* just before her death. However, this journey may be interpreted - as a dream, a fantasy, or as pre-death hallucinations - the point Esperanza make is that it is never too late for social commitment. The young Lupita was invested with possibilities and choices which the violence done her stripped away. The play illustrates that this was in fact temporary, as, as an old lady, she is still invested with the most important ones and can still fulfill them. Not only this, Lupe required release from the guilt which plagued her and caused her to shut herself away all her life. Having erroneously blamed herself for betraying her lover and father, and for the rape, she receives a second chance to cleanse herself of this guilt. In the *lotería* world she undergoes an experience of baptism when she splashes around with the people who have just re-opened the dam. Having aided them in their liberation, she herself is liberated, as the dam of repressed emotion inside her bursts open and cantankerous old Lupe becomes a happy, excited woman. During the course of the play Lupe's state of mind

evolves and she slowly recuperates a mental balance. She arrives at a clear understanding of why it is necessary to struggle selflessly as only in this way can the world - El Mundo - be saved. From being unpleasant, uncaring and foul mouthed, she learns how to love and channels her anger against those who maltreat her people.

Esperanza leave no stone unturned in their effort to chart Lupe's redemption. Fundamental to their approach is to use a realistic, idiosyncratic character trait which the young Lupe possessed, namely her impulse to win - and to win something! For years after the rape Lupe lost herself in playing a solitary *lotería* to create the illusion of exercising power and to prove she could win. Winning brought her a feeling of superiority which allowed her to feel protected from the insults of others. In the end it is the channelling of this urge by the Merolico card caller which truly brings triumph on an important scale, as, paradoxically, it is when she loses her last, greatest battle; she wins back her life by investing it with meaning. She wins the satisfaction of knowing, not only that she won, but that she fought on the winning side, at least in the *lotería* world.

When Lupe cries out "My battle is with La Muerte", she is wrong as she later discovers. Her battle is with herself as she sorts out her priorities. She dislikes deals as this implies an equal distribution of triumph among the parties involved, or put more clearly, compromise. Lupe develops from the point where she merely likes to win to the point where she makes sure that her side *is* the winning side. In short, she throws in her lot with the collective. Therefore, despite Esperanza's new individualism in operational style, they still seek to address a community of individuals, connected to one another by common links.

Esperanza reveal Lupe's past to the audience in a variety of ways and, importantly, in recreating Lupe's past they illustrate that their character's personal memory is inextricably linked with the collective memory of the village. They choose not to recover the events of the past in a linear fashion but create a complex montage of events on stage. A conflict of interests arises between Lupe and the Merolico, as Lupe only wishes to remember the happy

events, particularly the *feria*, but the Merolico pushes her to remember the tragic rape and massacre also. The mood of this early section constantly shifts, as different memories are re-enacted on the stage, but the tone is very different from Antonia's re-enactments of Delano in *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* Here Lupe's memories are recreated around her and she remains still and seated, a captive of them, suffering as they return to torment her. Lupe's character also differs fundamentally from that of Antonia. Whereas Antonia retells the moment when she knew what solidarity was and shows that she has not lost it, in this play past events return to push Lupe through a process of coming to awareness which is observed throughout the play.

5. El Mero, Mero Merolico.

The Merolico is instrumental in this process. He controls the action, his main role being to call the cards of the *lotería*, accompanying them with poetic, and often humorous, *dichos*. A fate figure, he is not a player in the game but is the card caller. More powerful than death itself, he nonetheless leaves a considerable measure of autonomy of action to Lupe. By dressing him in the splendid garb of a sideshow quack or magician from the *feria*, the group suggest that fate is neither to be trusted, nor is it kind. Indeed, the Merolico engages in trickery, and has a cruel sense of humour. Played by an actor with a deep resonant voice which boomed confidence and power, he was by turns teasing, sarcastic, seductive and provocative, with a facility for laughter and ridicule. Ultimately, he is untouchable. Whereas in *La Víctima* fate was replaced by economics, here fate is embodied in the person of the Merolico. La Vieja asks him:

Everyone is looking for their card in this world, pero tell me, who's shuffling the deck? ²²

²²LP

The Merolico does. He is gradually transformed from being merely the flesh and blood narrator of the *cuento* and the card caller into a more magical, mysterious force. He is clearly not just a *curandero*, operating on people's gullibility and superstition. Evidently, as before, Esperanza do not only not embrace, but completely eschew, *curanderismo* and deem it inauthentic and ultimately irrelevant to Chicano culture. The Merolico tells the audience - now a fairground crowd - that he is there to help them and entertain them, not waste their time selling them love potions and other *cochinadas*. He ridicules the claims of:

tu tía la bruja on 24th street who grinds up old chicken bones y los vende como love potions for four ninety-nine a bag.²³

The Merolico, therefore, is not a *curandero*, but represents real magic. He is the wonder worker or *taumaturgo* of much Latin American literature.²⁴ This is why Lupe is able to have a second chance at life. Whereas previously Lupe shuffled the deck over her game of *lotería*, the Merolico now comes to help her shape the real game of life.

The narration of Act One dealing with The Past is carried out through a shifting and fragmented montage of happy and sad memories and builds strongly on the use of montage found in **Guadalupe** and **Hijos**. Lupe narrates in character, not objectively, and primarily focuses on her emotions, while the Merolico recalls the facts surrounding events, in a more objective tone. The Merolico aids the old woman's memory by calling cards, such as the rose, which represent passion, youth or sweet memories. This is a slight variation on the group's earlier technique of using documentary devices such as title cards and quotations as complementary information in their plays. However, the information proffered here is more open to diverse interpretations and therefore renders the atmosphere of the play less dogmatic.

²³Ibid.

²⁴For example, the character of Mackandal in Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*, Barcelona, Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 1983

Firstly, the Merolico recalls the *feria* at which he was the card-caller and the young Lupita one of the players. Lupe, delighted, dwells on the passions of her youth and her own attractiveness, as short, illustrative enactments fill out her descriptive monologue. Then the Merolico calls the Luna card to summon a short scene in which Lupe and Reymundo are together watching a sad moon. This leads Lupe to remember the town's mining accident and massacre which are acted out in a cacophony on the stage. Here the Merolico abandons his cards and the witty lines accompanying them to join in the narration of the tragic events which afflicted the town and Lupe herself. His powerful voice narrates over the sound of soldiers' tramping boots and extinguish Lupe's attempts to evoke only the happy memories. He recounts the secret meeting while the massacre of its participants by the soldiers is enacted on stage. Lupe's romantic vision is superseded by the scene in which Reymundo stands up to the Captain and is killed.

Lupe, horrified, tries to go to sleep to quell her sorrow but the Merolico refuses to allow this and warns her "Camarón que se duerme, se lo lleva la corriente". If she were to sleep that night, rather than go to the *feria* with the Merolico, she would die without a second chance. Lupe therefore continues the painful process by telling how she unwittingly betrayed her loved ones to Julio and proceeds to describe her rape as this is enacted on stage, with dialogue. The enactment is carried out violently but not graphically. This *dicho* by the Merolico is also directed at the audience: remembrance of one's tradition can never be simply a happy or sad affair but must comprise a blend of pain, nostalgic identification, sorrow and joy. Therefore, the recuperation of Chicano/Latino culture and the elaboration of Chicano/Latino art cannot occur authentically in a folkloric whirl of happy songs but must encompass past struggles also.

Lupe, however, succeeds in turning attention to the *feria*, and music and laughter re-emerge on stage. Nonetheless, the Merolico stresses the wider context, that of the aftermath of the mining accident, and his voice inflexions suffice to control the level of gaiety on the stage.

Harmonica music and voices raised in laughter fall away into silence and sighs as if the people are unsure as to how they might respond to so much shifting joy and sorrow, the suggestion being that this is in fact how the mood of the town manifests itself at the time. Lupe continues to stress the happier aspects of the time and so the noise level momentarily increases, but the Merolico, voicing over the words of the *patrón*, brings the frivolity to a halt. The mood of the whole montage is summed up in Lupe's comment that "The sad clown made us laugh with his silly tune", as the *feria* is the mask of joy over tragedy.²⁵ Importantly, in Act One, the most obviously climactic events such as the death of Reymundo and the rape are not given the emphasis that they might expect to have in more traditional theatrical genres, and it appears that Esperanza were reluctant to run the risk of creating the melodrama which dogged **La Víctima** and **Hijos**. The shifting moods, expertly controlled, illustrate that the village was a blend of the happy and the sad, as the people sought to overcome the disaster through the beauty of the *feria* before the strike.

The Merolico wins the tussle with Lupe. By forcing her to remember the tragic and not simply the joyful events, he acts as a magnet pulling her from seeking refuge in the playing of the game and draws her from the cardboard *lotería* game on the table before her to the real *lotería*, the next intersection of her life. He compels her to participate in the real game of life, rather than die sunk in the imaginary world of the *lotería* which she constructed for herself. Again the call is to the audience not to cling to an imaginary or merely colourful Chicano/Latino culture but to participate in the creation of a vital one. The *feria* has returned and the Merolico invites Lupe to go and meets her rasping excuses with delicately sung lines of the *bolero* that used to be played at the *feria*. Exercising his powers of seduction he sings:

Como un rayito de luna
Entre la selva dormida
Así la luz de tus ojos
Ha iluminado mi pobre vida.²⁶

²⁵LP

²⁶LP: *Rayito de luna* by Los Panchos, CBS Inc.

In the past, this song referred to Reymundo's love for Lupe, but this time it refers to the Merolico's intervention in Lupe's life. He gives her an opportunity not only of reliving the special experience of the *feria* but of casting out the shadows in which she lives. Thirty years previously the *feria* happened to be in town when there was a strike. Such a moment has occurred again and this is Lupe's chance to take hold of a moment which had a tragic outcome the first time round and create a new outcome. The Merolico stresses this return to an important intersection of life by announcing at the start of the ensuing game "El tiempo ha llegado". Time has begun again for Lupe but it is not just time for the game to start but it is time for time to start again.

The importance of the *feria* soon becomes clear. It is the major metaphor for love in the play. Its lights, colours and music bring joy of a very special kind, yet it is also associated with sadness because it cannot stay in the village but must travel far and wide. Such is the nature of love too, fleeting and beautiful. In tandem, Esperanza introduce a second important metaphor. This is the *huelga*, the strike, which represents political commitment, again a special and sporadic occurrence. Both love and struggle are passions, the one bringing individual fulfilment, the other collective fulfilment. These two types of passion fuse with the presence on stage of the villagers, who commit themselves to both, as Lupe eventually does. The montage on stage underlines that it is not possible to see where one begins and the other ends; rather they co-exist and the *huelga* assumes the magical power of the *feria*. Together they form an incredible opportunity for change which only occurs once in many decades. This synthesis clearly follows on from **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** in which early Chicano theatre and politics on the picket line at Delano were evoked to illustrate that they were one and the same at the beginning of the Chicano movement. There is, fortunately, no suggestion, however, in **Lotería de Pasiones**, that this is occurring at present in American society.

For the first time in thirty years, then, Lupe is escorted by a man to the *feria*, where he takes his place at the *lotería* booth to preside over the game. Here it is clear that memories, unlike

documented facts read objectively, are emotionally charged, and indeed Lupe has been moved by the fragment of song. Music, sometimes live and sometimes pre-recorded, continues to be very important in this play and is often, though not always, present for its evocative qualities to help fit the pieces into the jigsaw of Lupe's psyche. Esperanza here acknowledges that it is not only political rhetoric which moves people, and so the pulling power of the Latin American music is employed as an explanation of her coming to awareness of her closeness to her own culture.

Musical evocation, then, is presented in tone with other elements in the play and regarded as a kind of magic. One leitmotif piece is a slow, "magical" tune which sounds as though it is played on a glockenspiel. A second piece is one with lyrics in Spanish which evokes the *feria* and a third is the Lunita's signature tune, a romantic little piece sung in Spanish, at the scene of her boudoir. Finally, there is some quick Latin music which serves the chase scene and the fights. Esperanza here illustrates that Latin American popular culture - in the sense of mass culture - is not always reprehensible but that it must not completely replace other equally authentic cultural forms issuing from the people themselves. Again, this is an important amendment for the group to make after *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* in which consumer culture was ruthlessly ridiculed and condemned.

Against the backdrop of passion and music, the Merolico is aptly cast as, from the outset, he concerns himself with love and sexual attraction, which are metaphors of power in the play. With his rich voice and frequent laughter he is a seductive character. Indeed his first words to the audience come as he bursts into the theatre crying "Excuse me, excuse me - mejor, esqueeze me, amor".

Lupe wins the ensuing *lotería* game which ends on a note of foreboding with two cards, La Calavera, symbolic of death, and El Gallo, "El que le cantó a Saint Peter will never crow again", which symbolizes betrayal. On cue, La Muerte subsequently comes to claim Lupe, but Lupe bargains with her for her life. Two cards are missing, mischievously held by the

Merolico who delights in showing them to the audience while he sings "La vida te da sorpresas...". The opponents must seek their cards in the world of the *lotería*. The Merolico makes it clear, however, that the foretold death and betrayal do not necessarily have to come to pass. After Lupe makes a deal with the Catrín out of egoism, the significance of the Gallo card becomes clear. The Merolico warns her that the betrayer will in turn be betrayed and that she still has a chance to fight on the side of the villagers. Although Lupe is proud of being a survivor, the Merolico asks what she is alive for:

So you can return to your worthless anti-social half-life to wait for death to come once again?²⁷

Yet, his goading words make only a slight impression on Lupe. She only learns to act selflessly in Act Two through her relationships with the *lotería* cards who resemble the people in her own village. The inference is that life IS relationships and that rhetoric can only ever be partly responsible for moving people to act.

6. Other Characters.

Act Two employs different narrative techniques. It is a linear telling of a story which is constructed out of the moves of a game. Therefore the narrative techniques used to tell it are straightforward. The reason for this is quite simple. Although the *lotería* world appears in terms of design to be a fantastic, unreal setting, with its zoomorphic characters and outlandish costumes, somewhat in the manner of the dramatised indigenous folk tales performed by director Balleste's Grupo Zumbón, its function in the play is to lead to clarification for Lupe.²⁸ Lupe's own life was the confused unreal existence - this part of the play is in montage - but she finds a clear path and a meaning through the game of the *lotería* and its logical steps.

²⁷LP

²⁸Grupo Zumbón, 13th Chicano Latino Theatre Festival, Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1986

This is not, however, to suggest that Act Two eschews complexity. For example, the characters Lupe meets there are analogous counterparts of people she - and the audience - knows. This is clearest with respect to the card Lupe is seeking, namely, the Mundo, who is thematically related to Reymundo and the Hijo of Lupe's real life. The same actor plays all three roles. Aside from Mundo's symbolic connotations, as the *rey del mundo* or the one destined to be king of the world, ideologically he is positioned between Reymundo and the Hijo. Reymundo signifies utter selflessness and martyrdom and stands as something of a romantic stereotype. Passionate, serious and with "labios de miel". he stands up to the Captain's threats after the mining accident by refusing to surrender:

Señor Capitán. Su voz poderosa no es la que yo he oído. I only hear the silent cries of the people buried underneath my feet. Yo, a las minas, no entro (...) Aquí nos matan, pero no se rinde nadie.²⁹

He and the other men are killed. Unequivocal with clear motivations, Reymundo remains an idealist unable to achieve his aims; if we suppose his significance to be connected to the United States, clearly the prospect of successful armed struggle there is slight. Although he has all the qualities necessary for a hero, victory does not follow and here Esperanza again emphasise that although heroes and heroines exist and struggle, there are no guarantees of success. While Reymundo is equated with true bravery against abuse by land-owning and industrial elites, and while he figures at the top of a hierarchy of virtues necessary for revolutionary struggle, his name signifies that he is an anachronistic figure for a different kind of social order, and indeed, his name suggests that women have no part to play in liberation. Esperanza undermine his heroism as Lupe is unable to forgive him his folly and only twenty minutes into the action the hero is killed off. Nonetheless, his cause continues to be expounded throughout the rest of the play, but in a more pragmatic manner.

The Mundo is altogether a different kind of activist and, like Reymundo, represents a rejection of the classical hero and the single male protagonist. Mundo is, literally, more

²⁹LP

down to earth than Reymundo. An orphaned, embittered and exhausted *guerrillero* who has spent ten years in the mountains, he feels his people have deserted him and asks "Where were they when I needed them?" He has lost faith in the collective struggle and in the common people, from whom he excludes himself, and exhibits little faith in the ability of others to change. Unlike Reymundo, he has lost every shred of idealism. He is thin and clad only from the waist down, signifying, on a symbolic level, the nakedness and defencelessness of the world. Not only this, but, regarded as chauvinistic and untrustworthy in love by many of the female characters, this rebel illustrates that the world is slow to recognise the worth of women. The fact that he is orphaned underlines the fact that there is no divine will or power controlling the earth, further substantiating Esperanza's traditional materialism.

Lupe, as the Vieja card, represents the mother of the world, having lied that she is "la madre de El Mundo". She fights for the survival of her "son" and indeed saves El Mundo. At one point he is chained up in the Catrín's dungeon, enslaved to capitalism, though the serf-like appearance of some of the characters suggests a medieval, pre-enlightenment world where the rights of man and bill of rights have not yet been enshrined in law.

Lupe's real son is a different kind of activist. He is quite literally the Hijo of all the activism which precedes him; this is his inheritance. He is also nameless, as his true paternity is unknown. He has his own ideas on the question of his provenance, "Mama, you were raped. Y yo soy hijo de un soldado". While this is a possibility, he also may be the son of Reymundo. He is young, educated, politically aware and committed to change but not through armed struggle. Like Janie in *La Víctima* he is aware of the need to know his people's history. The Hijo stands as a contemporary example of how to engage in struggle, and is in spirit, if not in fact, the son of Reymundo, but politically educated. He dares to dream of and fight for change, and part of the fight is in learning and understanding the movement of workers for change to strive on a wider scale than at the local level. He and his girlfriend, who also attends meetings, illustrate how a couple, in this case heterosexual, can

work together to create a better society. Here, Esperanza illustrate their belief that individuals make choices despite difficult or unpleasant factors in their background and that actions are not provoked by parents or blood ties or genes, but by seeing the obvious injustices that exist and by struggling to achieve change. In this sense, Esperanza remain true to their earlier contention that ideas issue from material conditions, a facet of which is one's cultural background. Nonetheless, the Hijo has a small role in the play.

Even as Esperanza seek the reasons why certain people act altruistically and engage in labour organization and revolutionary struggle, Reymundo, Mundo and the Hijo are not, even in their different ways, invincible Mexican or Chicano heroes. The concept of heroism undermines the commitment to collectivity and shared responsibility long supported by the group and the Movement. The leading male characters are generally drawn as dependent on support from their people and their human qualities and frailties are stressed. Lupe comes to care for the fallible inhabitants of the *lotería* who resemble the people in her own life. The play therefore emphasises that one or two people cannot make a movement or a Revolution, as struggle requires interdependence in battle and that the leader emerges in the course of the struggle, not vice versa. Therefore, ordinary people must contribute in small ways, rather than await the coming of a great leader. This, in fact, is Lupe's role; she carries out a small, useful act of resistance.

While this is not a new idea in the group's work, this Esperanza play is unique in that it fully acknowledges that sexual attraction and sexual love are causal factors in the make-up of people, in this case socially committed people, and illustrates that sexual and social passion have the same wellspring. The fundamental conclusion is that passion, whether sexual or social, involves human beings in a lottery, as the outcome is always unsure; in neither the battle of love nor the battle for justice are there guarantees of victory. For Lupe, in her youth, passion resulted in violation, in direct contrast to the hoped for outcome. She was raped physically and the land on which she and her loved ones lived was also violated through the mine and the capitalist exploitation of its workers. Yet, neither she nor sexuality

nor activism were to blame. The soldier who raped her was, although his motives are not studied.

Although sex is presented throughout the play as necessary, fundamental and magical, social passion is also deemed necessary. This is lacking in the character of La Luna. Her force of gravity is replaced by a sexual magnetism which can "make those perros howl" and her blonde Hollywood vedette/filmstar image, satirising the beautiful people of California, is primarily employed as a source of humour and sexual innuendo. La Luna also typifies the Hollywood crass concern for dollars which the group moved to San Francisco to avoid. However, the character of La Luna debunks the myths which portray women exclusively as saints or whores and challenges just such stereotypical portrayals in Teatro Campesino.³⁰ When she is told that men will write poetry about her and desire her, but that none will have her, she replies "How sad!" Here Esperanza illustrates that there is no romance in women's enforced state of virginity. Nor is this moon mysterious, distant or ethereal. Other female stereotypes are likewise challenged. La Chalupa's fruit-laden costume suggests fertility, but it is not fertility in traditional patriarchal terms which she signifies. Rather than being capable of bearing many children, she is capable of aiding revolutionary action to "bear fruit". Being the Woman in the Canoe, she has a natural affinity with water and wants to find the Mundo for the purpose of saving the village and not simply for a lovers' reunion. She is a feminist activist and despite her rather anachronistic and folkloric Mexican costume, she greets the Luna as "Hermana" and teaches the history of the village's water to those involved in the releasing of the dam. Her relationship with El Mundo is presented on a realistic and symbolic level. Lovers involved in a social struggle, symbolically they comprise a creative, heterosexual duality of water and soil to create new life and rescue the land from the rape of industrial exploitation.

³⁰See Margarita Melville, 'Female and Male in Chicano Theatre,' *Hispanic Theatre in the United States* Houston, Arte Público Press, 1984 pp.71-79

It is not only female characters who are presented as sexually attractive. Many of the male characters are also enhanced in this way through various theatrical techniques. Lupe describes the young Reynundo and Julio in terms of their attractive qualities and later she is seduced to the *feria* by the Merolico's voice and passionate manner. However, the group's portrayal of the suave Catrín - an extension of Julio - has another dimension. The Catrín is the Black Prince of the play, again a film-star-like businessman dressed in an evening suit and bow tie and gracefully carrying a cane. He is tap dancer, conjurer and evil count all rolled into one, his movements as suave and unhurried as his speech. He exploits his polished charm and seductiveness for business deals but despite his pleasing exterior, he is ruthless and without scruples, particularly as his philosophy is entirely economically based; life, for him, is a business. When the Araña informs him he is depriving the *pueblo* of its water he replies:

We're dealing with a scarce commodity, its distribution must be protected (...) is water somehow beyond the laws of economics? We've got a limited supply and a large demand. So, we put a price on it! ³¹

The villain of the piece, the role of the Catrín serves to elaborate the theme of capitalist economic exploitation and megalomania. The Catrín possesses a veneer of civility, often through a use of euphemisms. Accused of blackmail he muses "Oh, blackmail is such an ugly word", and he prefers to call coercion "choices". His speech is full of cuts and thrusts, moving from poetry to victimising insults. Occasionally he likes to sing a line or two in an extremely suave manner and he clearly enjoys being himself. Even the Vieja concedes: "Cabrón ... ¡pero charming, el desgraciado!".

The Catrín symbolises capitalism's control of the game of life, the game of survival. He represents a mood and socio-political philosophy in force in the United States at the time. This is the selfishness and egocentrism of the Reagan years during which time the American

³¹L.P

administration clung to hardline monetarist policies affecting minorities and the poor.³² The group underline the manner in which wealth and power provide a man, and a system, with a veneer of sophistication, understanding, courtesy and caring, while those at the top of the social hierarchy are in fact cocooned in material luxury from the unsavoury aspects of their own activities. Like capitalism, the *Catrín* appears to offer choice, but on further study he only offers very narrow ones. In short, the *Catrín* embodies the seductiveness associated with the exercise of power.

In the context of truly evil powerful figures, the character of the Diablo in the play, although not fully developed, is dealt with in the traditional manner of Mexican and Chicano theatre. Despite being an archetypal figure in many cultures, the Diablo here is stripped of much of his malevolence. Far from being all powerful or the prime source of all evil, he is instead ridiculous, due to his red shoes and tail and his red nose. He does not cause catastrophes but benefits from them, as a good businessman should. He has no real power. Of God and himself he claims "No nos metemos en los temporal affairs de los hombres." He is the figure of fun found in early religious plays and contemporary Chicano fiction.³³ His appearance here recalls Esperanza's contemporary *pastorela*, which combined traditional folk characters with contemporary ones, albeit with a religious purpose.³⁴

7. Magical Realism - The Hope of Change?

Given such characters, ultimately *Lotería de Pasiones*, in the current political climate in the United States, is a fantasy, in a dual mode, of achieving social change against the power of capitalist exploitation, twenty years after the beginning of the Chicano Movement. When the motivation for social commitment rests in cultural and psychological factors, as it clearly does here, and when it must first issue from within the individual psyche, in that personal

³²See Mike Davis, 'Reaganomics' Magical Mystery Tour,' *New Left Review*, 49, Jan/Feb 1986 pp.45-65

³³See Aristeo Brito, *El diablo en Texas*, Tucson, Editorial Peregrinos, 1976

³⁴See Chapter 4

motivation is the basis for all motivation, solidarity is therefore a rare, contingent and magical occurrence.

Clearly, Esperanza seek to locate a common denominator through which to articulate the identity of all those whose lives have been negatively shaped by the experience of being of Spanish-speaking heritage in the United States. In this play the hitherto political, and politically motivated, definitions of this experience are expanded and given increased relevance for the 1980s by appealing to Chicano/Latino cultural tradition. When political activism is dormant in the wake of failed hopes for change, as was the case in the 1980s, minority groups and others are forced to appeal to other aspects of their tradition, less easily definable as political, to garner strength and motives for continued resistance to oppression. This is true of the Chicanos and is expressed in this play and appears to be a reprise of the cultural nationalism of the 1970s which was expressed in the early Esperanza *actos*. There are some crucial differences, however. Firstly, the complexity of cultural and human relationships is addressed in this play as they were not in the *actos*, and secondly, no racial group is presented as the oppressor. Rather it is class privilege - issuing from whatever source and present in whatever culture - which Esperanza struggle against.

The question of the scale of struggle is also a relevant one, as the fantasy has two channels. In the *lotería* world Lupe is a revolutionary and guerrilla warfare is appropriate action. In her own world, however, Lupe only takes a small step towards change by signing a paper. To accommodate both channels, Esperanza, in this play, consciously offer a magical realist work, rather than a documentary realist work. When rational argument fails to move people to solidarity, and the odds of achieving a share in power are overwhelmingly against it, the existence of a further, non-rational dimension of motivation must be acknowledged even if it cannot be fully understood. This is a magical power which in this play issues from Lupe's identification with her culture. Although not all of the group members shared a common understanding of the term "magical realism", the group chose to use it. Rodrigo Duarte Clark loosely defines a magical realist work as one in which characters find themselves in

situations which are beyond realism but which still have their base in real things. He posits that if one offers García Márquez as the obvious example of the style:

then perhaps that kind of magical realism has been in Chicano theatre for some time, without it ever being called that.³⁵

Duarte Clark regards dreams as "a different way of perceiving reality, very much a Latin American way of experiencing...", and indeed the play evokes a nebulous Latin America.³⁶ Much magical realist writing is imbued with a pre-enlightenment atmosphere and *lotería*, in the staging and costuming, had a very European medieval "feel". A number of scenes took place in cells evoking such an atmosphere. There were no dank walls but El Mundo's half-naked body stretched up as if in chains, kneeling under gloomy lighting, recalled a medieval dungeon and insinuated the torture chamber.

Despite an exploitation of magical elements, in that in the *lotería* world the villagers defeat the Catrín, the group were at pains to underline the realism still important in their style. In the play's programme, the director's note, clearly directed at the *Vieja*, introduces one of the chief elements of magical realism, namely the dream:

It is important to find life's key
in one's dreams,
but to confront life without dreaming
is more important still.³⁷

Therefore, the conclusion of the play, in which one person, namely Lupe, decides to support the strike, is not fantastic, but factual. The magic of **Lotería de Pasiones** consists in the presentation of the illusion that the events witnessed are unreal. This illusion is achieved through the blurring of the boundaries between what is present and what is past, what is a happy event and what is a sad one, and between what is a real event and what is a dreamed

³⁵M. Dolan, recorded interview with Rodrigo Duarte Clark, Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, March 1987

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷El Teatro de la Esperanza theatre programme for *Lotería de Pasiones*.

event. Esperanza, then, rather than attempting to strip away illusion, as in earlier Brechtian pieces, here consciously attempt to create illusion. It is significant that the symbol of La Sirena, suggesting illusion and seductiveness, is one of the cards called in the Merolico's initial *convite* to the audience. Esperanza conclude that part of the business of theatre is illusion and that they as theatre artists must deal with this constructively in order not to alienate audiences.

The group still use some Brechtian techniques, however, although no longer in the formulaic manner of their early works. Although a play *about* emotions, the emotion in **Lotería** is never permitted to reach a cathartic moment. Lupe's behaviour illustrates this. She breaks out of a spell of crying brought on by the memory of Reymundo's death by launching into a stream of coarse invective against the strikers and achieves her former equilibrium. While the play is highly evocative in that music, lighting and poetry create the atmosphere for a tragic love story, the play's action moves too quickly and shifts too often for there to be catharsis on the part of the audience.

Given that the play's brief is to study how emotions affect motive, characters do not in fact occupy territories but inhabit symbolic space, that of dreams and obsessions, and the interior universe of the self is illustrated via spatial coordinates. In this play Lupe has her own private symbol for life, in this case the *lotería* game, but this is artificial and limiting for her when it is merely present in a static and unmoving form in front of her. With the magic of the Merolico Lupe becomes involved in a moving game and her goal becomes "the attainment of full consciousness or real awakening" through action.³⁸ Therefore, the group reiterate that while the main character can move through time via memories and through space to the world of the *lotería*, she does not in fact have to step outside her own self. What appears to be a magical journey is really only a special insight into everyday reality, or a

³⁸Didier Jaén, 'The Master Game Y La Literatura Fantástica de Borges,' in *Otros Mundos, Otros Fuegos: Fantasía y Realismo Mágico en Iberoamérica*, Memoria del XVI Congreso del Instituto Internacional De Literatura Iberoamericana, Latin American Studies Center, Michigan State University 1975 p.20

different recreation of reality. The play, therefore, offers only the illusion of an avoidance of reality. Everyday events are enveloped in such a strange atmosphere that they appear to be magical, but ultimately the Merolico, who interacts with the public, and indeed seems to have come in off the street through the back of the theatre, roots the play in reality. He comes so that the audience might participate in the game too, but we are aware that he is part of life and not part of a dream.

Essentially, however, this is a play without borders. Even the hitherto apparently uncrossable one, namely that existing between the exploiter and the exploited, dissolves through the actions of Lupe. She is a property owner - as many new audience members may be - and as such may be equated with Sammy in *La Víctima*, who was also fairly prosperous, yet she eventually turns against her present class interests to benefit the working-class people she regards as her own, and indeed, her own father was a miner. In this way the play also finally combines two elements of Esperanza's work which seemed irreconcilable. The border between the private and personal aspects of the self and the public and political ones finally comes down. This is possible because the group, unlike with Sammy in *La Víctima*, base Lupe's political behaviour on her personal passions, linked to music and her culture, rather than on rhetoric or propaganda alone.

Also, in this play, which in its programme called for an end to INS visa denials to international artists, Esperanza, regarding themselves as such, claim their right to perform any style of theatre, rooted in any tradition. Therefore, while the play is based on a Latin American motif, the *lotería* game, Duarte Clark questions the notion that it is not culturally legitimate to use non-Latino characters in a Latino play.³⁹ The figure of La Muerte is a case in point. Clad in a skin tight suit patterned with dull patches, reminiscent of a sad Harlequin, she also wore a rough brown blanket and had a pale white face. Although she moved sensuously, her image was often one of poverty, of a medieval beggar or serf in cold streets

³⁹M. Dolan, recorded interview with Rodrigo Duarte Clark, Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, March 1987

and was far from the typical jangling *calavera* of much Chicano theatre. Indeed, *La Muerte* consciously appeared more European than Latin American, particularly as Rodrigo Duarte Clark felt the Chicano *calavera* literally had been "done to death" by Teatro Campesino.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, then, at times Esperanza recall Latin America through the literary style of magical realism which borrows from European settings.⁴¹ In this way he illustrates his contention that it is not only Chicano/Latino cultural products which can represent the essence of Chicano/Latino experience. If that experience is presented as one of struggle against oppressive forces, then many other groups in the United States are involved in a similar process. Thus, the philosophy of cultural unity within cultural diversity is embraced.

This is not to suggest that the group have lost interest in the specifics of their own cultural reference points. The *Merolico* makes fun of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in direct response to the fact that the play's guest director almost did not make it into the United States due to visa denials. The American INS ruled that he did not have enough money or property. Duarte Clark therefore stresses his concern that Chicano and Latin American culture will be misrepresented:

It's especially hard on artists from poor Latin countries (...) all the US is gonna get is Julio Iglesias.⁴²

Just as the use of the dream in a realistic work marks the group's progression from the presentation of unambiguous factual information to information more open to many interpretations, further elements within the play negotiate other previous boundaries. The frontiers between past, present and future, and waking, sleeping, living and dying are blurred as the play substitutes evocation and suggestion for historical statistics. The play is not fixed in time or space and has few clearly assigned reference points, other than the code-

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹For a discussion of this and other aspects of magical realism see Edwin Williamson, 'Coming to Terms With Modernity: Magical Realism and the Historical Process in the Novels of Alejo Carpentier' in John King (ed), *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, London and Boston, Faber and Faber, 1987 pp.78-100

⁴²Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *San Francisco Chronicle* February 15, 1987 n.p.

switched bilingualism typical of Esperanza which contemporizes it. Therefore, the borders dividing Chicanos from Mexicans, and then these groups from Latin Americans, have been removed.

Furthermore, the boundary between the oral and the written is negotiated. The need for the transition of Chicano cultural products from the oral community to the printed page rests in Lupe's restitution to equilibrium in this play. This is, in effect, a recuperation of the self-worth lost - forever - in the oral *corrido*, and may be interpreted as the reinvigoration of La Chingada, the chauvinist symbol of the colonial exploitation of the Latin American continent.⁴³ Esperanza clearly had the work of Campesino in mind with this play. Their *lotería* is Campesino's *corrido*; both these Chicano theatre groups have sought to embrace Chicano culture through the oral and the folk and the rural. There is one crucial difference, however. While Campesino claim "We can't sit there and rewrite *corridos* to please modern liberals",⁴⁴ Esperanza, educated, literate artists of the 1990s, seek to disseminate another view of Chicano folk culture away from the negative image touted by Campesino for the entertainment of the American public. For Esperanza, culture is not its artefacts but its struggles: culture for the Chicanos and other Spanish-speaking groups in the United States is, in their definition, resistance to capitalist exploitation. It is important, then, that Esperanza have embraced the fact that they now write plays in an urban, sophisticated environment; plays which can be studied as complex texts.

Apart from literary and oral influences, one does not have to scratch too far below the surface to discern certain personal concerns of the playwright in this play. The work, while addressing guerrilla warfare in the context of Latin America, also comments through the figure of El Mundo on the dilemmas of the Chicano playwright. Duarte Clark may recognise something of himself and his own predicament as a theatre artist in this character. Having

⁴³See Norma Alarcón, 'Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object,' in Moraga, Anzaldúa, (eds) *This Bridge Called My Back : Writing By Radical Women of Color*, New York, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981 pp.182-190

⁴⁴Mario Orozco, 'Miguel Delgado: This is Entertainment,' *Caminos*, Los Angeles, February 1985, p51

spent his adult life trying to produce material relevant for a Chicano minority which often falls prey to the same conservatism as other American groups, he may feel deserted by his public. Indeed, Esperanza's fear of compromise through success in traditional commercial theatrical terms is made clear through the figure of the Estrella. The aspect of the stellar which is under consideration here is not cosmic but addresses celebrity. For this reason the stardom-minded Estrella who "can't get a pinche audition" is cast as a bird, and through her bird-brained stupidity Duarte Clark illustrates that he associates conventional commercial stardom with stupidity and egoism and a lack of true artistry.

Clearly, however, Esperanza as artists have finally decided to acknowledge that commitment, still the basis of all they do, is never simplistic but is only explicable through reference to a complex blend of social and political knowledge, cultural identification and personal experience. Esperanza, following on from *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* where they debated the art of making plays, and their adherence to the origins of their theatre, here admit that creation and commitment involve difficult choices. The Merolico first introduces the game of *lotería* to the audience, describing it as:

a game of chance, a game of destiny, a game of pleasure, and in this case, a game for a desperate soul.⁴⁵

This is very close to an affirmation that this is what theatre has become for the group in the 1980s. They emphasise, through the *lotería* metaphor, that life is a series of intersections rather than borders and that making choices is always necessary. Though choices may be narrow and consequences severe, a person - and a theatre group - can choose to cling to their fundamental beliefs. Criticism by others is only part of the answer, as is seen by Lupe's defiant assertion that the only person who can find fault with her is she herself. There is the ultimate power of the individual to be considered. Just as El Mundo would never dig the wells for the Catrín, Lupe will never sign the eviction papers for Julio. This reiteration of

⁴⁵LP

"never" and "nunca" is final. Not only this; the outcome is never certain. It is significant that the secret meeting of rebels led by Reymundo is held behind the *lotería* booth, a symbolic setting. The men choose a course of action but without guarantees, as symbolised by the *lotería*. Outcomes are not destined but are contingent events, as is stressed throughout the play in many metaphors of bifurcation and references to the "camino".

Indeed, the play illustrates that Esperanza find themselves intersecting with a new audience in San Francisco and having to make the next move and take their chances in the lottery of creating socially committed theatre at a time when social commitment is conspicuous by its absence. However, the group, true to its name, hope that commitment will return, even if they themselves cannot be part of a new movement and even if their plays, or those of any other group, cannot instigate immediate social action. Thus they have a change of focus. Whereas in previous plays history was more prominent than life, in this play life is in relief before history, reflecting the loss of the optimism which held that change was just around the corner. Also, in order to tap into a broader audience for reasons of survival, and although they use the Mexican game of *lotería*, the group believe they now defer to a concept of universality:

We go back to Mexico but in the context of living here. *Lotería* takes cultural symbols from a game that is very specific to our community and tries to make those symbols universal.⁴⁶

Yet it is clear that rather than this universality being one whereby all people of all classes identify with similar cultural manifestations despite social circumstances, the group actually express in **Lotería de Pasiones** that all Hispanic cultures are fundamentally cultures of resistance to oppression, despite other definitions of culture that middle-class Hispanic audiences might have. The folk characters of the *lotería* are not in fact universal archetypes but exist in an archetypal community of Latinos. Indeed, the folk here replace the family of **Hijos**, although the former may be just as much a fictitious olive branch as the latter was.

⁴⁶ Calvin Ahlgren, *San Francisco Chronicle, Datebook, Theater*, February 15, 1987 n.p.

The play is obviously not set in Mexico. La Muerte claims that during the Mexican Revolution she was stationed there, and so the action of the play is somewhere outside of Mexico. Unlike *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* the location is unspecific and therefore hard to pinpoint - indeed, this was clearly intentional on the part of the group. While the play is in contemporary language and reflects contemporary American personal relationships, the play is without histories or biographies, as data specific to a single or certain groups of immigrants from Latin America might seem irrelevant to others.

Likewise, in this play the question of racial provenance is not addressed. The first cards called by the Merolico refer to the projected theatre audience and are a kind of symbolic *convite* to welcome them to the play. El Sol, which is "la cobija de los pobres", is coupled with La Bota, "el zapato de la chota" and followed by El Corazón, "I left my heart in San Francisco". These refer to the poor and oppressed of the city who might make up the audience, whatever their race. El Músico, "el que toca las cuerdas del corazón con las palabras de su canción", and La Sirena symbolise the happy hours to be spent in the theatre.

As Esperanza cease to define their audience in racial and historical terms, they seek new definitions. In *Lotería* there is only room for two groups - the *pueblo* and the *anti-pueblo*. A tremendously vague term, *pueblo* may be defined as the members of a people or race without access, or struggling for access, to real political power. Obviously, it carries less racial import than La Raza, while still excluding Anglo-Americans, as it is a Spanish word. Also a cultural rather than a political label, the *pueblo* represents a concept of sameness shared by Chicanos, other Hispanics and Latin Americans. For Esperanza, the word *pueblo* can encompass different kinds of Hispanics (Chicano, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Latin American) but again, with the proviso that they be of, or identify with, humble background. Clearly, Esperanza prefer it to *Hispanic*, as this media and business term tends to be limited in its reference to people from the United States and includes people from all social classes, particularly the more affluent. While Esperanza, for practical reasons, have here made some

effort to create an experimental theatre piece which might be attractive to just such a patron of the arts, they still cling to their hope that they can fundamentally perform for the dispossessed and, in short, continue to be a people's theatre creating *teatro popular*. This is clear from the blend in the play of a materialist message couched in folk terms.

A major question, however, which emerges from this stance is whether Esperanza ought to appeal to folk tradition at all. The *lotería* game is presented here as a metaphor for cultural and social struggle but it is a game which, like other Chicano/Latino folk cultural practices, is dying out. The way of life, the customs and the beliefs of a rural, agricultural social organization have given way to the way of life of the urban industrial workforce who indulge in other forms of recreation such as television and cinema, rather than board games. Folk culture will not return in the United States, as the social conditions which produce it no longer exist. It is therefore an error on the part of the group to attempt to give the working-class a vision of itself through such a medium despite other more contemporary elements in the play.

The same conclusions cannot be reached, however, of the tradition of social struggle outlined in *Lotería de Pasiones*. The play's main point is to illustrate that descending into the wellspring of one's culture - a culture of struggle - can spur one to social commitment. Evidently, Esperanza believe that social struggle is still viable because the conditions which can produce it, namely poverty and discrimination, have not changed. The only point of difference is that the group understand that it takes a particularly special amalgam of fortuitous circumstances to produce effective social struggle - and that now is not that time. Nonetheless, Esperanza, by clinging to the central motif of a game which has not been commercialised and which is played by those marginalized from social power, both offer a challenge to Teatro Campesino and other groups who would exploit the folkloric purely for entertainment and state their intention to continue to offer the dispossessed a theatre even as they have to share it with the wealthy. It would appear that for working-class audiences it is a choice between this or nothing at all.

In many ways the advice to Lupe from the Merolico is the group's own advice to itself. Harangued for having lived a "worthless anti-social half-life", Lupe moves from the *anti-pueblo* to the *pueblo*. Although the Catrín refers to the Luna's half-life by poetically calling it "suspended animation", Lupe eventually rejects this and opts, not for suspended animation, but realised animation, or action. In short, she opts for activism and not *vendidismo*, the stasis of her previous years. Esperanza also decide to avoid the *vendidismo* of mainstreaming and continue to exhort and effect what movement they can through a theatre geared towards working-class Chicanos. The question arises as to what Esperanza will have to forfeit for this stance. In all probability, the answer rests with Lupe.

CONCLUSION.

1. Introduction.

Theatre of, and for, the working-class in the United States has emerged during two principal periods in the 20th century; in the early decades of the century and some thirty years later, in the 1960s. In both cases the theatre practitioners who aimed to create and reflect a left-wing political consciousness through dramatic representation were absorbed into the professional theatre mainstream, which was, and is, governed by the aim of providing entertainment and adherence to the profit motive. Working-class theatre, created in the United States during times of revolutionary fervour and mass mobilisation, that is, during the post-Russian revolution period and the American Civil Rights Movement respectively, saw the theatre fail when the socialist politics failed to bear fruit. Chicano theatre, fundamentally and originally a theatre for the working-class, has met the same fate; the original popular audiences are in the process of being abandoned and a thriving movement of community theatre groups has shrunk to single figures. Chicano theatre artists, then, have been forced to make the transition from political, protest and popular theatre, largely community based, to professional theatre able to provide for itself financially, if theatre in Spanish is to endure. Furthermore, as Chicano theatre was a minority theatre which identified with its public on an ethnic basis as well as on a class basis, it has had to make the transition from focusing on a largely immigrant, sometimes rural but primarily urban Mexican/Chicano audience and embrace a socially integrated Chicano/Hispanic audience.

For many reasons most Chicano theatre groups were not able to make these transitions. Since its re-emergence in the 1960s, theatre in Spanish has gone underfunded and largely untrained. Perhaps most importantly also, its practitioners have been ideologically opposed to the prospect of performing theatre for paying customers primarily seeking entertainment. Therefore, most groups folded. The two major exceptions have been El Teatro Campesino and El Teatro de la Esperanza. The former was quick to abandon the original audiences for

whom it was formed to embrace commodity theatre for reasons of survival. The latter has only recently begun to deal with the question of survival in a hostile political climate by modifying, in the face of social reality, their theatrical practice and the ideology accompanying it. While successful to a degree, in that **Lotería de Pasiones** was an amalgam of features geared towards a variety of audiences, they nonetheless cling to a vision of theatre which has in fact lost currency in the late 1980s and early 1990s: their continued assumption that it is possible to operate according to socialist principles in a medium at present categorized by capitalist practice and the consequent assumption that they can locate audiences of Chicanos who will support and emulate them in this stance, is simply naive. This judgement is reinforced by the fact that they themselves, however loathe to do so, have had to integrate into the theatre business in the United States and begin to operate according to commodity criteria. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to overlook their considerable achievements.

2. The Achievements of El Teatro de la Esperanza.

Esperanza's first and most significant achievement is their very survival in the face of huge odds. Tenacious and armed with a strong sense of mission, they have grappled with each new set of problems and sought solutions. Not only this, but they have brought the figure of the Chicano to the stage and created a representative body of works dealing with many of the issues confronting Chicanos. In so doing, Esperanza have aided in the renovation and recuperation of a long historical, theatrical and social tradition and have made visible to the dominant community, through their language and culture, the concerns of the Chicano minority group.

Importantly, this has involved at its core an attempt to refocus social and historical blame away from the Chicanos and towards the oppressive historical practice of Anglo-American domination. This is particularly significant in 1994 when supporters of Proposition 187 are

attempting to deny the historical relationship between the United States and Mexico, and indeed other Spanish-speaking nations, by denying the right of children of illegal Hispanics, born in the USA, to American citizenship and education.¹ Such retrogressive policies only serve to highlight the continuing relevance of plays such as **La Víctima**, which deal with the question of illegal immigration from the point of view of the Mexican immigrant.

Esperanza then, have created a substantial theatrical legacy which most other Chicano theatre groups of the early 1970s, with, of course, the exception of the ever-robust Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, failed to achieve. Their plays have been performed by other groups, in other forums, often with greater technical support. The Los Angeles Theater Center and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, two very different centres, have nonetheless staged plays by Esperanza, thus emphasizing the durable nature of their work. Indeed, among Chicanos themselves, **La Víctima** is regarded with the respect due a classic piece of theatre. In my view, however, **Guadalupe** and **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!**, providing, as they do, testimony to both the beginning and the end of the Chicano movement, while continuing to emphasise the necessity of struggle, best embody the engagement of a work of theatre with its immediate social context. **¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!** was particularly honest because it acknowledged and portrayed the *breach* between community and activism - its breakdown and failure - rather than its creation and success.

3. Tensions and Contradictions.

While Esperanza's plays have successfully engaged with many of the dilemmas facing Chicanos, it must be recognized that the range of themes they have studied is narrow. Esperanza have tended always to question the practice of Anglo-American capitalist exploitation, the nature and role of the Chicano family within that situation, the connection

¹See Elena de la Cruz, 'California: prohibido el paso,' *Cambio* 16, No. 1201, November 28, 1994, pp.50-53

between 'high' and 'low', or popular and literary, culture and the true definition of culture in itself - these are the themes which have been of most interest to Esperanza throughout their twenty-five-year history. Yet, the most enduring, and the least resolved, question is that of the Chicano's acceptance or rejection of integration into the culture of the United States. While the socio-cultural bases for a rejection of integration have changed - moving progressively from racial identity to historical identity to a Marxist analysis of exploitation under capitalism - integration is presented as inherently wrong, even as it is often equated with the simple fact of the Chicano's willingness to accept employment viewed by Esperanza as ideologically unsavoury.

Esperanza are clear that capitalism is destructive of culture and urge their audiences not to support it. This approach was unproblematic during the Civil Rights Movement, when many people shared this view and when, over-optimistically as it has proved, capitalism seemed in line for defeat. Now, however, the fact is that Chicanos have to live under capitalism and the group's unenviable brief is how to urge people to oppose it while living under it and indeed trying to make a success of it. This is the classic paradox of the left and Esperanza are left with a narrow range of choices. One solution is to use their culture - untainted (although politically conscious) and timeless - as a reservoir of strength, vitality and knowledge while living in conditions far removed from those which produced it. Inherent in this approach is the danger of glorifying the Chicano's cultural roots in Mexico and Latin America, but perhaps a greater danger is that of ignoring, or losing the memory, of it. Clearly Esperanza have chosen the lesser of two evils. Therefore, they have clung to their unwillingness to concede that capitalism can sometimes deliver what some Chicanos desire. They have been unwilling to acknowledge that Chicanos in the United States do not want to remain cultural and political outsiders but want to be critical insiders; they want a share in the dream - this is why Mexicans keep on crossing the border - or at least they want it to be clear that when the American dream fails them economically, it is as important to them as it is to Anglo Americans because, like the Anglos, they have nowhere else to go; America is their home. Esperanza have as a group, then, maintained the heavily separatist ideological stance of the

early Chicano movement in which acculturation to America, or Americanization was anathema. Yet, politically the majority of Chicanos have so far failed to seek separatism through the ballot box or other political strategies and, in the light of Proposition 187, it is clear that marginalization within the United States is ultimately more damaging and dangerous than integration.

In this context, Esperanza have become an avant-garde theatre group, although again, ideologically they resist such a notion, given their Marxist contention that the ideas which motor society forward should rightly spring from the working-class and not an elite group, such as themselves, within it. Yet, the impression of Esperanza as a avant-garde theatre group would appear to be substantiated by the fact that, unlike previously, when audience feedback was absorbed and utilized, in San Francisco at the present time Esperanza are under the aegis of the Centro Cultural de Escritores who apportion them feedback and criticism. Furthermore, the figure of the intellectual has crept into their plays as spokesperson for the community.

From this inability to deal with the conservatism of Chicanos - as Teatro Campesino *have* in fact done - stems Esperanza's insistence on the unity of theatrical and political style and content. Rather than represent on stage the individual Chicano living and working in an America which happens to be capitalist they have bound themselves always to the mission of representing on stage the community (or the collective) struggling against capitalism, or nothing at all. However, it is not possible to represent an activist community on stage which does not exist off stage. **Guadalupe** was significant in that it presented a vision of such a Chicano community in the making which was actually happening, at least in embryo, in the California of the early 1970s. Since then Esperanza have wished to reflect this social cohesion time and again but they have only been able to cling to this hope against the odds - and the facts - and look forward to a future time when such social cohesion might occur again. As we have seen in previous chapters, the collective protagonist of **Guadalupe** eventually gives way in *¿No Se Paga? ¿No Se Paga!* to two couples living in an

apartment block. This, in my view, is exactly appropriate, as when sustained political activity is lacking, as it was in the mid-1980s, the attempt to present the community in a wide sense on stage is extremely problematic. Even *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* which did acknowledge some existence of community confined itself to a small sector of the barrio. This approach is also clear in, for example, the work of director Romulus Zamora, who has, among others, staged the successful *Soldier Boy* by Julia and Severo Pérez. A play with few protagonists, it was able nonetheless to portray the dilemmas facing Chicanos realistically, thus illustrating that the presentation of a total collective on stage is not always possible or desirable.

Therefore Esperanza's audience is difficult to define. On the one hand, their 'constituency' is too broad, as Hispanics are too varied in terms of class, race, political stance and custom, etc. to be presented on stage *as a community*. On the other hand, however, simply to represent on stage the few politicised Chicanos (in the image of themselves) renders the portrait of the community too narrow. As avant-garde Chicanos, politically they are ahead of the community and urge the community to emulate them, but Chicanos, in all their variety, have not chosen to do so. So, for whom do El Teatro de la Esperanza perform? Clearly they suffer an ambivalence concerning whether to play for the *pueblo* of poor Latin American immigrants who come from a rural background or for the often socially mobile, urban, consumeristic Chicanos born in the United States. In *Lotería* Esperanza attempted to solve the dilemma by attempting to attract both audiences but the question remains as to whether these publics can be accommodated under one roof. If cultural manifestations are class-bound, as I have argued in the present work, Esperanza, educated, urbanized and bilingual artists, existing in a professional and creative milieu far removed from the lives of the average worker, will certainly not be able to sustain theatre for an immigrant underclass, however numerous, which has to be coaxed into the theatre.

Implicit acknowledgement of this fragmented cultural identity can be found in Esperanza's swing from *¿No Se Paga? ¡No Se Paga!* to *Lotería de Pasiones* and then to the

following play, **Teo's Final Spin**. These plays encompass awkward shifts from the barrio in the present day to the eternal world of folk culture. Indeed, in **Teo's Final Spin** the setting could hardly be more precise and contemporary - the place, the Mission District, the time, now. Yet, clearly, these shifts and turns represent the best Esperanza can do to embrace a variety of publics.

Part of the debate on audience is the ambivalence in the group's work with regard to oral and literary cultures as they attempt to develop a strategy through which to perform for the uneducated and the educated alike. Esperanza are drawn to both, but whether these are reconcilable is doubtful. Reconciliation of these two publics was clearly the aim in **Lotería de Pasiones** and, admittedly, the group were reasonably successful, as they combined the story of yet another strike with poetic and psychological depth. Yet, unless they can draw the less affluent audience which does not consider theatre to be a part of its cultural life into the theatre, or successfully maintain outreach programmes, such combinations will lack rationale.

A further criticism which may be levelled at the group is, paradoxically, given their interest in social issues, the lack of contemporary issues in their work. The response to the question whether Esperanza's plays "look like their streets," whether they engage with the multi-cultural nature of the United States and the barrios, is no. In terms of casting and content they have largely eschewed multi-culturalism, except through very occasional reference, perhaps having seen the difficulties of working with non-Chicano groups after **The Tecolote Visions**. Nor have they, for example, even created plays which look at relationships between different Hispanics, or the relationship between Hispanics and Anglo-Americans. Furthermore, plays expressly dealing with women or homosexuals are conspicuous by their absence, despite the strong feminist and gay populations of San Francisco. Perhaps they have no brief or experience for this, yet as they desire to keep the tradition of struggle, of movement, alive and employ theatre as a reservoir of socialist

activism when it appears to be lacking elsewhere, surely such an exploration could only prove fruitful.

4. Conclusion.

Esperanza's last stand is to keep on trying, even as they know that theatre as a social tool cannot alone create a unified community. They continue to do so because they are political, they are locked into a tradition of struggle and have lived a commitment and cannot relinquish it. Although it is perhaps history which ought to change and not Esperanza, one cannot avoid the fact that now is not the time for them; they are an avant-garde at a time when there is no rear guard to provide them with social muscle.

El Teatro de la Esperanza have made a valiant and sustained attempt to capture a vision of a Chicano community even as it is already evolving given changes in the demographics of Hispanics in America. Given this evolution, it is perhaps erroneous even to employ the term *Chicano* with reference to the activities of the Spanish-speaking minority in the 1990s when we consider that the goals of the Chicano Movement and its cultural and political manifestations are clearly at odds with the present political climate. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties in defining the nomenclature, for Spanish-speaking minority theatre groups clear gains have been made and, importantly, a generation of worker actors was created and many of them are still working. Esperanza have survived long enough and have been seen to be commercially viable enough to merit grant assistance aimed at stability and permanence, and their future as a theatre organization at present seems secure. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen if they can bring the audience for which they have always attempted to play with them. Therefore, for Esperanza and other minority group theatres, the challenges remain constant, the risks enormous and the demands exhausting. Meanwhile, the audiences await.

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