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Mexican-American Theater: Challenging the Marginalization of Mexican-Origin Communities in Education and Immigration

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Mexican-American theater has long been a strong vehicle for representing the Mexican-American and Mexican-origin experiences in the United States and plays a key role in creating awareness for social and political development. Although Mexican-origin communities have been (and continue to be) a highly alienated group, their rich cultural heritage impacts the public spaces that surround them. Mexican-American theater is one element of this culture that has acted as both an educational resource and a therapeutic escape in the face of marginalization. This essay explores the contributions of Mexican-American theater in representing and challenging the marginalization of Mexican-origin communities in education and immigration policy. Discussion regarding the historical perspective of Mexican-American theater is included, but focus is placed on works showcased by Borderlands Theater, a pioneering organization situated in Tucson, Arizona, that has consistently and creatively exhibited the issues/problems affecting Mexican-origin communities. The following analysis focuses on two plays produced within a span of four years (2010-2014)—*Más* by Milta Ortiz and *Arizona, No Roosters in the Desert* by Kara Hartzler—which examine educational experience, and immigration policies and their impacts, respectively. Both plays highlight the enduring political significance of Chicano and Mexican American Theater, as well as the impact of Borderlands Theater on the field as a whole.

Chicano Theater and Mexican-American Theater

To discuss Mexican-American theater, there must first be an explanation of Chicano theater. Chicano theater first emerged in the 1960s to expose and critique the socio-economic and political challenges of Mexican-origin people. It coincided with the rise of the Chicano movement, and supplemented the work of César Chavez and Dolores Huerta and their struggle to increase wages and better working conditions for farm workers.[1] Chicano theater was meant for the Chicano audience. The founding scholar of Chicano theater, Jorge Huerta, in his groundbreaking work *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms,* defines Chicano as being of Mexican descent and being politically conscious. However, when he speaks of Chicano theater and the Chicano population that it represents, he includes Chicanos, U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage, and Mexican nationals who are living in the U.S. When talking about both populations, Huerta combines the terms, fusing both entities together to create the Mechicano (pg. 10).

The links between the Chicano movement, the unionization of the UFW, and the political work of Chicano theater can be clearly traced through the work of dramaturg, director, and producer Luis Valdez. In 1965, he began producing *actos* with the farmworkers that César Chavez and Dolores Huerta were helping to unionize. The *acto*, a brief act or scenario, is considered the first form of expression performed within Chicano theater. Through satire and the use of extreme stereotypes, the *acto* presented

[1] Right before March 31st, César Chavez's nationally celebrated day, sexual allegations were announced in The New York Times depicting numerous accounts of young girls that were sexually abused by this iconic leader, including Dolores Huerta.

real-life problems facing the Chicana/o migrant, farm-working communities. The *acto* presented an alternate solution to a challenge, which would then be played out to conclude with a positive result. For instance, in *Las dos caras del patroncito* by Luis Valdez, the roles of *boss* and *farmworker* are inverted so that the *patroncito* becomes the *farmworker* and the *farmworker* becomes the *patroncito*. Consequently, the *patroncito* discovers that being a *farmworker* is not at all pleasant. Ironically, while the *farmworker* enjoys his time as *el patron,* he realizes that he prefers to leave it all behind. Through this *acto*, the *farmworker* physically removes himself from the fields, thus expressing the action that the farmworkers must do in order to claim their rights as humans in the United States. The resolution provided by this *acto* does not guarantee the farmworkers a claim to their rights as humans, but it did offer, in a comical setting, a vision of choice. Becoming the *patrón* momentarily was inspiring for farmworkers during a time when many began to recognize the demanding conditions and miserable pay that they were receiving for their strenuous labor. The *acto* was a vision that planted the seed to an alternative narrative. The first *actos* were performed in the back of pick-up trucks in the fruit, vegetable, and cotton fields, and were created collectively with the guidance of Luis Valdez. Since the majority of farmworkers did not know how to read, the performances were a way to get the farmworkers actively involved in forming and becoming part of the farmworkers' union. These first performances would quickly spread and soon give birth to Teatro Campesino, the first Chicano theater group.

From its beginning, the true purpose of Chicano theater had been to stimulate activism in defiance of the sociopolitical subjugation facing Mexican-origin communities residing in the United States. At its core, Chicano theater created the *actos* to educate the community about how to confront the inequalities that they were facing daily. The *actos* did not rely on props, costumes, or lighting to accompany the performance. The Mexican origin *actrices* and *actores* would perform the *actos* with what they had readily available in their environment and their imaginations. With time, Chicano theater developed to include a broader range of artistic expression, including aesthetics, such as music, staging, lighting, use of props, etc.[2]

It was during this transition that Mexican-American theater came to be. Mexican-American theater encompasses both the activism aspect of Chicano theater, as well as narratives and motifs that discuss Mexican origin experience in the United States, including themes such as identity (cultural, gendered, sexual, linguistic), socioeconomic mobility, belonging, and political resistance. As performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña stated: "We want understanding, not publicity. We want to be considered intellectuals, not entertainers; partners, not clients; collaborators, not competitors; holders of a strong spiritual vision, not emerging voices; and, above all, full citizens, not exotic minorities" (Taylor and Morales 26).

[2] Rasquachismo: known as the aesthetics of the first Chicana/o representations. "The Rasquachi aesthetic cannot be 'designed' it just happens" (2)

Although Chicano theater and Mexican-American theater have developed in different forms, one major characteristic for both has always existed, the mythos or *mitos*. The concept and the significance of the *mitos* are described in *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society, and Myth* by Jorge Huerta:

> by definition, means that a group of people, a culture, depends on myths which help them to explain the inexplicable, what some would call the supernatural … A mythos also gives people a place in the cosmos, describing and recalling their ancestors giving them a from the beginning, as it were (15-16).

Both types of theater, Chicano and Mexican American, act as a space where Mexican-origin people are in command of the narrative. Having possession over the narrative is significant because the images that are presented through the art of theater have the potential of materializing in the real world (Anzaldúa 109). Overall, the inclusion of the key elements of myth and ritual within Chicano and Mexican-American theater provides the Mexican-American a place within the cosmos and in US society.

Borderlands Theater

Borderlands Theater of Tucson, Arizona, was created in 1986 by Barclay Goldsmith and, with the aid of local artists, brought Chicano theater to Tucson, acting as an important space for activist theater. The company has worked with influential people and acts, including Cherríe Moraga and her play *Heroes and Saints,* which was produced in 1993 at Borderlands. The 1990s were also significant for Borderlands Theater's

personnel, who were recruited to teach at the new Center for the Performing Arts at Pima Community College. This was a major turning point for the company because this process provided a long-awaited established home for the theater, which meant the production of a full season of plays.

Borderlands Theater work is overtly political in its aim of representing a diversity of experiences and voices. In their description, they share that: "One of the challenges has been for us to understand and guide ourselves and contemporary audiences to understand that the local or "the other" can be universal. This is a particular challenge in this country, today and especially for theaters that are focusing largely on diversity or voices still not seen on American stages" (Goldsmith, "An Unofficial History"). Thus, the main goal of Borderlands Theater, historically and contemporarily,[3] has been to reveal representations of the diverse voices that reside within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands region. The following is the vision statement of the company found in the section "About" of their website:

> Borderlands Theater is a professional theater company recognized nationally and internationally for the development and production of theater and educational programs that reflect the diverse voices of the U.S./ Mexico border region. Although focusing on the Latino/Chicano/Mexicano voice as the core voice to nurture and support, Borderlands works interactively with all voices of the region. The "border,"

[3] Barclay Goldsmith was the artistic director until 2015.

> both as physical and social landscape, is a metaphor for Borderlands' work. The metaphor allows, invites and even demands, both a regional and an international understanding of what it represents. Border people, in the best sense of the word, are citizens of the world."

It is because of this creed that works produced by Borderlands Theater were chosen for analysis. Their vision of the borderlands region reaches beyond the dichotomy of citizen/non-citizen, or Anglo/non-Anglo. The physical location of the theater company has provided the necessary tools to view the border region as one that is limitless instead of restricted, as the word "border" might imply. Therefore, utilizing two plays that were produced between the years 2011 and 2014, the following analysis explores two major challenges that have persisted throughout the history of Chicana/o and Mexican-American communities: education and immigration.

In September 2015, Borderlands Theater held the world premiere of *Más*, a docudrama by playwright Milta Ortiz. *Más* has had popular recognition and has been produced at various theater establishments since that time, Ubuntu Theatre Project in Laney College (2016), Su Teatro in Denver, Colorado (2017), San Diego State University (2018), and has toured at the universities located in Arizona (2016-2017). It was also nominated for best drama under the Steinberg-ATCA Award and for the Arizona Daily Star's best drama Mac award.

Más is a critique of Arizona's HB 2281, which prohibited Mexican American Studies (MAS) within Tucson public schools. In 1998, the Tucson Unified School District

(TUSD) included the MAS program as part of its curriculum with the understanding that this program was based on the "educational model called Critically Compassionate Intellectualism that combines critical pedagogies, authentic caring of students, and a social justice-oriented curriculum" (Nelson 1). This program was viewed by its opponents as a program that nurtured anti-white sentiment.[4] In other words, the MAS program, which had been developed to provide the TUSD students with cultural and historical knowledge of Chicano/a and Mexican-American communities that were so prominent to the Tucson and surrounding area, was viewed as un-American. HB 2281 was strongly supported and promoted by Tom Horne,[5] and signed into law by Governor Jan Brewer in 2010, formally ending the program's existence in Arizona, and banning seven Chicano books from school libraries.

Ortiz's *Más* was produced through a National New Play Network residency and a NALAC individual artist grant. The performance included community members who were involved in the actual events surrounding the eradication of the MAS curriculum from TUSD. The play is composed of thirty-six brief scenes. There are a total of eight primary roles that also double to interpret the secondary roles. In addition, the cast includes four dancers who serve as the Mayan deities, Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtle, Xipe Totec, and Tezcatlipoca.[6]

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[4] HB 2281 prohibits courses that "promote the overthrow of the United States government. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals" (p. 1) (Nelson 1).
[5] Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction (2003-2011) and currently Arizona Attorney General.
[6] The Mayan deities: The Chicano movement gravitated towards the use of both Aztec and Mayan mythology. In this case the deities that are named are of Mayan origin.

To set the mood of the play, the audience is first presented with an ambiance that is ritualistic. The opening scene presents a sweat lodge that is not meant to represent a 'here and now' temporality. Instead, it provides a locale for a stream of past memories. Inside the sweat lodge, the stage resembles a classroom, and at its epicenter is a bookshelf that serves as an altar. The bookshelf/altar contains the seven Chicano books that were banned by the state of Arizona with the passage of HB 2281.[7] The eight central figures enter the platform and are present while the character of Libertad, one of the MAS students, places all seven books in the fire pit.

This opening scene mimics a sacrifice and may be interpreted metaphorically as the burning of knowledge. It carries with it heavy tones from the time of conquest and colonization, when the Spanish conquerors burned Indigenous manuscripts in order to erase their histories and cultures (Galeano). The character Libertad—whose name means freedom--disposes of the books, raising questions of what it means to be free in this scene. Is Libertad being forced to burn the books, or is she burning them out of free will as a sacrifice?

The opening scene, entitled "Invocation", has Libertad and other characters overtly voice the relevance of MAS in their lives. For instance, Libertad states: "I felt there wasn't a place in the world for me" (5). Another character, Poder, claims: "I took no

[7] The seven books that were banned are: *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures* by Elizabeth Martinez, *Critical Race Theory* by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez"* by Rodolfo Gonzales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* by Arturo Rosales, *Rethinking Columbus* by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, *The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* by Arturo Rosales.

interest in my education cauz I never saw myself in the education, or history, or anything" (5). Flor, another student, says: "There's no way I could ever describe the feelings of learning that history" (6). These statements made by MAS students reveal loss, uncertainty, and despair. There is a disconnect and educational disinterest that occurs in Mexican-American youth due to the loss or erasure of knowledge that includes the Mexican-American ancestry. As discussed in both works of literature previously mentioned by Jorge Huerta, *Más* stresses the need for young Mexican-Americans to understand who they are and where they come from in order to recognize their purpose as members of society. The classes provided by the MAS program not only gave students the opportunity to learn about themselves if they were of Mexican heritage, but they also inspired students to improve academically in their other courses. The academic improvement is revealed with the positive increased outcomes in standardized testing and in student graduation rates, as noted in the study "Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics: The Impact of Mexican American Studies Classes" by Nolan L Cabrera (45).

Removing this educational program reinforced the circumscription of Mexican-American communities by challenging the Mexican-American identity and "erasing" this part of U.S. history. This play is important because it shows the experience of Mexican-origin youth and the significance of the MAS program in teaching them about their history and, essentially, about themselves and how powerful this knowledge is to students of Mexican origin. It was through the MAS program that these students were able to understand their beginnings and see themselves embedded within

narratives of historical and cultural context. In agreement with Huerta, seeing narratives on stage that portray the Mexican origin experience "brings a sense of agency. It lets the viewer know that it is okay to be who [we are]. To take pride in [our] culture, language, and heritage. [And] Also know that there is a space for [our] community in the predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon community" (4 my emphasis). The books that were banned from the MAS program provided the students with a sense of agency by bringing significant historical characters of the same ethnic background to the scene. In addition, the instructors of the program who were of the same ethnic background as the students helped create a positive environment, which developed into a space of empowerment and a safe zone, where students were able to take pride in their racial-ethnic identity.

Continuing this opening scene, Más describes the purpose of the MAS courses through the character Victor, one of the co-founders and co-directors of the MAS program:

> Our classes are about curriculum as colonizer, and why, and these are the historical examples. We discuss social issues, like current day oppression and how it relates to our 500 plus years of colonization. We carry the students through the American historical experience, and where Xicanos are within those American historical experiences. Cause history's important. Cause we were here before the American historical experiences, during, and here we are now. (9)

In this description of the program, the viewer learns how students of Mexican heritage are marginalized by the education system.

Therefore, the emergence of MAS was a means to include the community that has been made to feel insignificant in society. As articulated by Chad M. Nelson, the construction of the MAS program "in a state that aggressively harasses Chicana/o communities, counterstorytelling in the form of Chicana/o literary activism contains the humanizing rhetorical impetus crucial to challenging and interrupting dominant racial logics in Tucson" (77).

The play is clear in claiming that traditional educational spaces are alienating, while the spaces offered by MAS are nurturing and empowering. Two contrasting moments in the play demonstrate this:

> LIBERTAD. My English teacher reads one of my papers and in front of the whole class says/
>
> ALL. You write the way you people talk.
>
> LIBERTAD. Does she mean because I learned Spanish first? Made me feel dumber than people who only speak English. I'm not worth it, you know.... I shouldn't be in school, or go to college. So I just slack off. (14)

The education system has made the students feel alienated. Here, linguistic difference is translated into intellectual worth, leaving Libertad, and by extension, the other students demoralized. Contrast this to a scene describing a MAS space as Libertad recollects: "June before my senior year my mom gets diagnosed with stage four cancer. In talking circle, I talk about how I feel. Then afterwards people hug me cause that's the kind of community we have. They're my support system" (15). Here, the MAS space is both a

space of intellectual engagement and a support network; it is a space of intellectual community and mutual support.

Ortiz's script is a powerful meditation on representation, and how academic and intellectual representation matters; educating the youth of Mexican origin in their own history is not only fundamental for the students' success academically, but it is also pivotal for them at a deeper and more personal level, addressing their identity and place in the world. But there are also internal complications that are highlighted through the voice of the eldest character, *Abuelita*, who says:

> We always wanted to teach this history and these courses in literature in the public schools but, the political dynamic in the public schools was very focused on achieving bilingual education. We insisted, it had to include the Chicano experience. But Chicano, history, glorifies the Azteca and the working class experience. Some Latinos don't necessarily like that. (pause) Mexicans and Chicanos who are middle class or aspiring to middle class don't want to necessarily be seen like the farm worker, the miner, right? (21)

These observations unpack core disparities within the discussion of education and Mexican-American communities. The first is a commentary on the emphasis that has been made on achieving bilingual education, an idea that seems progressive, yet the reality is quite the opposite.[8]

[8] With the emergence of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the purpose was to provide an easier pathway for non-English speaking immigrant students to learn and acquire English language skills. Two different pathways were set up in order to achieve this. One route slowly eliminates the non-English language so that the student becomes fluent in English. The other route, also known as dual-language

For Mexican-American communities, the retention of Spanish language is critical. By exerting emphasis on the promotion of bilingual education, historical content and literature from these communities were set aside. This speaks to the social class division amongst Mexican-origin communities in the United States. As expressed by Anzaldúa, there are variants in the languages that are spoken amongst the Mexican-origin people, and not all variants include Spanish (35-36). This division is further reflected by the different perspectives of the self as described by the character of Abuelita. These differences are associated with the continuous migration that has come to the United States from Mexico. People of Mexican origin who have been in the United States the longest have had the opportunity to advance economically, though their physicality links them with recently arrived migrants, which has affected their being accepted or recognized as part of the United States American society (Jimenez 5). Furthermore, Chicana/o(s) want to be associated with their "denigrated Mexican origin … [and] … identified with the oppressed" (Gutiérrez 191). Chicanos have laid claim to their ancestral native roots, the Aztecs, who are thought to have descended from North America, from a place called Aztlán. Ortiz's representation of the deities and the fact that they are always present throughout the play remind the spectator of the racial and Indigenous ancestry that Chicana/o(s) and Mexican-Americans have inherited. The continuous presence of the pre-Columbian gods and goddesses conveys to the audience

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education, continues the use of both languages, offering the student the opportunity to become bilingual in both English and the non-English language ("Introduction to Bilingual Education: At Issue.").

that Chicana/o(s) and Mexican-Americans have an ancestral past that links them to the land long before it was Anglo-American.

Produced in 2010, *Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert* by Kara Hartzler, a playwright and immigration attorney for the Florence Immigration and Refugee Rights Project, was developed in collaboration with field work completed by Dr. Anna Ochoa O'Leary from the University of Arizona. *Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert* was also produced at El Círculo Teatral (2010) and in Chicago at PROP THTR (2011). Hartzler's play is based on interviews conducted by Dr. Ochoa O'Leary with women who discuss their experience crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, and includes dialogue regarding U.S border enforcement policies that have made it much more difficult for undocumented immigrants to stay in the U.S. In addition, this piece includes Hartzler's earlier work researching and interviewing Indigenous women from the state of Chiapas, Mexico. *Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert* captures the difficulties presented when going through the arid Sonoran Desert to get to the first city encountered when crossing north from Mexico. In her play, Hartzler not only depicts the physical challenges that the desert exerts upon the human body, but she also explores the emotional trials that are experienced.

Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert has a total of seventeen scenes, and the cast includes four women, Marcela, Guadalupe, Alejandra, and Luisa, who take turns playing the role of the interviewer. The setting of the play transitions back and forth between the desert and what appears to be a detention center, weaving together the pieces of what

was experienced by four women during their attempt to make it safely through the Sonoran Desert. The plot begins with a scene in which border patrol agents have spotted the traveling women. They then become separated from the group that they were traveling with and appear to be lost. The women, alone yet together, find the courage to keep journeying through the desert in search of their new future.

Hartzler's work addresses border enforcement policies, specifically focusing on the passing of 287(g) (1996), which is a program created with the intention of granting local and state officers the authority to enforce immigration but only in the case of "violent crimes, human smuggling, gang/organized crime activity, sexual related offenses, narcotics smuggling and money laundering" (Koulish 134). The program was added under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which gives the Department of Homeland Security permission to enforce its immigration agenda by allowing, under written agreements, local and state enforcement officials to assist in the detainment of undocumented people ("The 287(g) Program: An Overview" 1).

Post 9-11, immigration enforcement was hyperbolized as a result of anti-immigrant sentiment; local and state officers used the provision of 287(g) to target anyone who appeared to be "an immigrant." In the play, we learn from *Marcela*: "That's how they get you – broken taillight, cracked windshield, low tire. Your car has to be perfect. Do an inspection before you get in" (Harztler 29). At a glance, these statements may seem comical with the idea of inspecting every car before getting in, but unfortunately, this is the truth faced by Mexican-origin persons and Latina/o/x migrants

alike. In Lee Bebout's study of the construction and reinforcement of whiteness on the U.S./Mexico border, he observes "people of color have policed their behaviors to avoid the violences of white supremacy—lynching, the police and courts, and social geographies" (8). Hartzler's script explores these tensions and the way that Mexican-origin communities have experienced marginalization and fear because of their perceived racialization.

In a study by Mae M. Ngai, which examines how immigration law has influenced the racial formation of the immigrant, Mexican immigrant, and the Mexican-American, Ngai provides that "illegal" became constitutive of "Mexican," referring not to citizens of Mexico, but to a wholly negative racial category which comprised both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the United States" (91). This is discussed in the beginning of Hartzler's play, when the women are first getting to know each other. In this scene, *Marcela* tells *Guadalupe*, a Guatemalan, "Don't ever say you're Mexican. If you're Mexican you're illegal … Guatemalans are Mexican. Salvadorans are Mexican. If you're illegal, you're Mexican. If you're Mexican, you're illegal … They just think we're all brown" (Harztler 29-30). *Marcela* expresses the racialization that has been created and enforced by immigration law rhetoric, and which denotes that all Mexicans are of immigrant descent. In this scene, she also highlights the rhetoric that all immigrants who are coming from the south of the U.S. border are from Mexico, no matter their true birthplace. While the reader or spectator is exposed to the conversations that take place between the four migrants, the play aims to humanize the undocumented experience,

opposing the idea of the immigrant as criminal. It exposes the physical marginalization that undocumented migrants experience and how this social status is reflected in Mexican-American communities. It highlights the racialization of the immigrant and the negative connotations that have been attached to the term "immigrant," and how these connotations have shaped the experience of the Mexican-American. I include both the immigrant and Mexican-American together because the story of the undocumented immigrant has become intertwined with the story of the Mexican-American, even for those who have family roots in the U.S. that began in the time before the Treaty of Guadalupe.

Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert also touches on the struggle of identity that is commonly experienced in Mexican-American culture, and which can be argued is a byproduct of years of stringent border enforcement policies. Early in the play, the four women discuss what to expect when encountering the *migra* officers, and *Marcela*, who has previous experience crossing the border, shares with the other women:

> MARCELA: But some of them are angry. Usually Chicanos. They don't want to think about how close they came to being us.
>
> GUADALUPE: You'd think they'd remember where they came from. Stop abusing their power.
>
> MARCELA: (Laughing) What power? If they had any power, they wouldn't be out here beating us up" (Harztler 27).

In this dialogue, the audience learns that the sentiment between some Chicanos towards immigrants are that of animosity. Their hostility can be traced back to the

politically driven, negative connotations created through immigration law, and this dialogue illustrates how these negative ideas have affected both the U.S.-born Mexican community and the newly immigrating/immigrated community. It is important to reflect on *Guadalupe's* statement. Her remark is socially and politically significant and shows insight that there are Mexican origin peoples who lack sympathy or are unwelcoming because they have "forgotten where they have come from". Ngai explains that through immigration policy, "casting Mexicans as foreign distanced them both from Anglo Americans culturally and from the Southwest as a region: it stripped Mexicans of the claim of belonging they had had as natives, even as conquered natives" (91).

Hartzler's work shows the depth at which the struggle of identity can be felt within the Latina/o community. In various regions of Latin America, there is still a strong presence of Indigenous communities, which have also migrated to the United States in search of better living opportunities. Beyond that of "American" versus "immigrant" lies a deeper hierarchy of indigeneity. This is highlighted in the play through the character of Luisa. She is presented as an Indigenous woman due to her lack of vocabulary and through the various stories that she tells the other women. Their responses to her stories and dialogue show the distance that exists between the mestizo and Indigenous populations. The stories she narrates are meaningful because they reflect each of her companions' past experiences. It is through these stories that the reader learns of the reasons why these four women are making the journey to *el norte*. Having access to these stories is another means of challenging the marginalization that the migrant

community has been placed in. Although Marcela and Alejandra find this characteristic of Luisa fascinating, Guadalupe is annoyed and dislikes Luisa completely because of it. In a moment of frustration, Guadalupe cries out to Luisa: "stop pretending like you're one of us and go back to the mountains!" (Ortiz 79). Although Guadalupe is troubled that the truth about her past will be revealed, her attitude reflects a sentiment that exists toward Indigenous communities. Just as some Chicanos or Mexican-Americans do not want to have an association with the Mexican migrant, Indigenous communities receive the same rejection from their successors.

The reader learns that Marcela has made this trip more than once, and in one of her experiences, she was left behind by her cousins, who were also part of the group. After hearing about her experience, Alejandra and Marcela promise to stay together and not leave each other alone. However, this pact is broken when Alejandra suffers from an accident, which causes her to be unable to walk. It is at this moment that Marcela, along with Guadalupe, separates from Alejandra and Luisa.

> ALEJANDRA. What are you…? You're leaving me? You're leaving me here?
>
> (Pause)
>
> I wasn't going to leave you. I told you I'd never leave you. Don't, please don't. I don't want to die here.
>
> (Pause)
>
> This is what you hated. You hated them for leaving you behind. For the American dream, the Mexican dream, the famous dream where you leave everyone behind. (Harztler 86)

Alejandra cannot believe that Marcela is not going to keep her word and that she is going to leave her in the desert for the American and Mexican dream. The cruel

recognition of Marcela abandoning Alejandra is the ultimate challenge against immigration legislation. The observer is a witness to the experience that no legal or physical restriction will prevent or stop the migration of undocumented people. Marcela's betrayal shows the expense that many undocumented immigrants are willing to pay in order to live in the United States.

Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert is essential to Mexican-American theater because it reveals the actual borderlands landscape physically and metaphorically: the experience of the voyage and the identity struggles that occur are both deeply visible. The spectator is witness to the journey that so many undocumented people have had to take. It is also significant to point out the fact that the audience does not witness the actual crossing of the border wall/or line itself during the play, but observes what happens after that moment in the isolated space that puts to the test the physical and mental endurance of the migrant. It is in this space, the midpoint, where life and death are left to chance. Even though Marcela and Guadalupe abandon Alejandra and Luisa to an unforgiving fate, the end of the play surprises the spectator by revealing that Marcela dies due to a car accident. By not showing the physical crossing of the U.S/Mexico border displays how the challenge towards the American dream only becomes more difficult to attain when one has made it onto U.S. territory. To see these life and death experiences in the Sonoran Desert provides the viewer a new perspective of the area, and acts as a conduit for compassion surrounding migration. Witnessing these events

through theater reveals the reality of immigration and presents it as a truly human experience that is physically demanding and emotionally straining.

The two plays in this study have conserved their didactic purpose of educating the observer in events that are realities of the Mexican and Mexican-American experience. While in its formative years, Chicano theater was performed for Chicano audiences, the productions of Borderlands Theater are of interest because the stories of the Mexican-American are for all in the Tucson community. I believe this change in audience to be significant because it aids in creating dialogue and understanding of cultures. The production of the plays *Más* and *Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert* are among countless experiences where the themes of education and immigration are explored through the perspectives of the Mexican-origin communities in the United States.

Más brings attention to the need for a program dedicated to empowering Mexican-American youth by teaching about Mexican and Mexican-American history and experiences. Building and executing a curriculum like the MAS program in Tucson, Arizona, helped students of Mexican-American heritage find a sense of belonging. In addition, it is significant to express that the theatrical performance included community members who were personally involved in the actual events that led to the demolition of the MAS program. The involvement of the community members who experienced the collapse of MAS shows that the perseverance to continue challenging the marginalization of the Mexican-origin communities still exists. By participating in the production, the community members are making sure that this tragedy for

Mexican-American communities does not go unnoticed or forgotten. They are retaining and educating on the mistreatment that was imposed on Mexican-origin people by policy.

On the other hand, *Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert* illustrates that immigration affects all those who are associated with Mexican-origin communities, including all Latino migrant communities, and U.S. citizens who share the same ancestry. As mentioned before, one essential feature is that the play does not include the physical experience of the women entering U.S. territory. Instead, the plot takes place after that moment. Therefore, the setting is symbolic in that it defies the exclusion that the Mexican-origin communities have experienced. Nonetheless, both plays point out the internal social exclusions that persist within Mexican-origin communities. These social divisions perhaps contain the answer for Mexican American communities to stand against the mistreatment imposed throughout their history.

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